

# **Timeline of Women in the Military**

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## Analysis of Military Historical Timeline

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After doing extensive research on women's roles in United States military history, I became curious about why women have so frequently been targeted by sexual assault and violence. The current lawsuits filed by women who have served in the military against the Pentagon are recent examples of a long tradition of violence against women service members by men in the military. The current allegations women are making state that the Pentagon has done nothing to ensure that justice is being served to the men that committed these crimes.

To read the lawsuit text visit: [SWAN \(Service Women's Action Network\)](#).

The accounts of sexual assault are only the most recent example of the U.S. military mistreating and abusing women. In the American Civil War, women were recruited not in the interest of serving their country, but rather in servicing the military men. They were hired as nurses, but quickly took on the role of entertainers and prostitutes for the men. Essentially their whole lives and every action they performed belonged to the military and this still remains true today in many ways. Along these lines Cynthia Enloe's book *Maneuvers* helps her readers understand how every part of a woman's life can be militarized. Author Julie Mertus sheds light on how Enloe makes her point and reaches out to a broader audience in a review of *Maneuvers* titled "Feminist Curiosity Unravels Militarism: Why Method Matters."

*"Everyone who reads Maneuvers will come away with an understanding of how [most] things can be militarized. Enloe fosters such a deep understanding of militarism through the technique of suggesting active and personal engagement. She does not begin with her definition of militarization, but instead works toward it,*

*unfolding a series of interesting and provocative examples that encourage readers to think about their own lives. By the time the readers reach the conclusion, they are nodding, Yes, yes, this is so true. I know it from my own lived experiences.*

*Militarization, as Enloe conceptualizes it, “is the step-by-step process by which something becomes controlled by, dependant on, or derives its values from the military as an institution or militaristic criteria” (p.291). A marriage becomes militarized when a woman married to a husband-soldier or veteran-soldier is encouraged to be the support structure and even the cheerleader for military readiness. To take other examples in Maneuvers, child-bearing can be militarized to the extent states envision wombs as breeding grounds and recruiting stations for soldiers (p.248); prostitution is militarized when sex work becomes a form of survival for women in combat zones and militaries view hired sex as an essential part of soldiers’ recreation and preparation for battle (p. 74).”*

One reason that military women have been such frequent victims of sexual violence and abuse by military men may be linked to the long history of women’s secondary and service-oriented relationships to men, not only seen prominently in the military, but also very prevalent in many aspects of American society. All these factors have contributed to a cultural climate that has encouraged and supported the objectification of women in the military, as well as male violence against them.

For more information on sexual violence in the United States and the United States military visit: [National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence](#).

Mertus, Julie. "[Feminist Curiosity Unravels Militarism: Why Method Matters.](#)" *Berkley Women's Law Journal*. 15. (2000): 338-347. Web. 21 Sep. 2011.





## ***Women in the Military Historical Timeline***

### **War of Independence (1775-1783)**

During the wars of independence, women were not permitted to fight, however there were still ways in which women participated. In many cases, when men went off to war, the women and family would follow the troops and help with cooking, laundry, and provide medical and nursing services <sup>(G)</sup>. Women also did work within the military. Some served as spies, other served as couriers, and some women even disguised themselves as males and served on the front lines of the wars <sup>(G)</sup>.

One highly noted woman, Deborah Sampson, disguised herself as a male, named Robert Shurtleff, and served three years during these wars. Of all those years not once was her female identity suspected, many of her comrades questioned why it was she did not have a beard, but just assumed she was a young adolescent boy. She was discovered to be a female after three years by a doctor after coming down with a fever <sup>(F)</sup>.

### **The American Civil War (1861-1865)**

During the American Civil War, women were banned from serving in either the Union or Confederate armies. Some of the duties or jobs that women did for their country during this war were nurses, prostitutes, spies, saboteurs, physicians, cooks, and laundresses <sup>(C)</sup>. Although women were banned from serving in the armies, many women still were able to by secretly taking upon male identities and serving amongst their male comrades. It is estimated that around 400 women served during the American Civil War <sup>(C)</sup>. It is also suspected that the women, who chose to serve in the military, did so because they sought economic privilege, a social opportunity, the opportunity to escape the confines of their sex, or simply that women were equally patriotic as men <sup>(C)</sup>.

In other cases it was family that motivated or caused these women to head off to war. For instance, some women joined or followed their husband, brothers, father or sweetheart to war, or perhaps the exact opposite. Others sought to escape family disapproval of the men they

loved. Some wanted the freedom of being away from home, while others sought to escape prostitution <sup>(C)</sup>. However, economic means was probably the motivation behind a majority of women who chose to serve in this war, because the male identity allowed them an economic privilege they had not previously had. This was due to the better wages that men received in comparison to women. And in fact, because of this economic privilege, many women sought this change in gender identity even before the American Civil War <sup>(C)</sup>. When within the ranks, women, under the identities of men, served as infantry soldiers, cavalry soldiers, and artillery soldiers <sup>(C)</sup>. Once women were able to sneak their way into the ranks, it is highly questionable as to how women were able to keep these identities secret.

During the Civil War, soldiers did not live in barracks, helping to keep their identities hidden. Other factors that allowed women to take upon the male identity were that the armies clothing did not fit snug to the body, and during this time men did not know what a woman would look like in pants <sup>(C)</sup>. When it came to facial hair, high-pitched voices, and bodily functions, these women were simply perceived as modest young boys <sup>(C)</sup>. Finally, disorganization, insubordination, and ignorance within the military also helped women sneak their way into the ranks. For instance, authors Blaton and Cook state, “Despite the U.S. War Department, which dictates that each recruit be stripped and thoroughly checked for signs of illness and disability, physical exams tended to be cursory at best. For the most part, recruiters and surgeons only looked for a reasonable height, at least a partial set of teeth to tear open powder cartridges, and the presence of a trigger finger. All but the obvious deaf, blind and lame were accepted into the service,” <sup>(C)</sup>.

The two post-Civil War perspectives of women who served proved to be polar opposites. In some cases, women who served were viewed as romantic and heroic, where in a majority of cases, women who served were seen as crazy, sexually loose, lesbians, or all of the above <sup>(C)</sup>. “From this point forward, women who insisted on challenging the cultural boundaries of gender were suspected and accused of sexual and mental abnormality, and such accusations became effective means of controlling female behavior perceived as a threat to societal norms,” <sup>(C)</sup>.

## **World War I (1914-1918)**

World War I was the first war that it could be considered that women actually served in the military. Although women were not permitted to serve in the form of combat, women assisted in nursing, medical, and clerical work <sup>(E)</sup>. There was no official legislation that did not allow women from serving, however the branches of the military prevented women from doing anything other than jobs ashore in the United States or in American territories <sup>(E)</sup>. There were many discrepancies about women serving, however, because no such legislation existed. On March 21, 1917 Ms. Loretta Perfectus Walsh became the first women to enlist in the United States Naval Reserve, and was the first female member, besides nurses, to enlist in any branch of the United States armed services <sup>(E)</sup>.

The motives behind these women who wanted to enlist in the military, consisted of patriotism, women caring about men who had been or ever currently serving, and the fact that during World War I women did not yet have the right to vote+ and were therefore looking to gain more rights that could, perhaps, lead to the right to vote <sup>(H)</sup>. In 1919, the Naval Appropriations Act allowed for the Navy to give temporary civilian appointments in the Navy Department to the female Yeomen when they were released from active duty <sup>(E)</sup>.

## **Naval Reserve Act of 1925**

The Naval Reserve Act of 1925 limited the membership of the Naval Reserve only to male citizens of the United States, because of the feeling that women were not always needed in the United States Army, but also because of the fear that this many open the way for women to join other branches of the military <sup>(E)</sup>.

## World War II (1941-1945)

During World War II, all branches of the military had become more open to accepting women. Some of the ways that women participated in World War II were: the Red Cross, the Civil Defense Agency, the women's branch of the Army or the WAC, the women's branch of the Navy also called the WAVES, the women's branch of the Coast Guard also known as SPARS, and the women's branch of the Marines, the MCWR. During World War II, women also took upon the roles and jobs of many males in the manufacturing industry at home in the United States <sup>(G)</sup>.

For those women who were able to serve in the military, some of their duties consisted of clerical work, radar work, medical work, driving ambulances, serving food, entertaining soldiers, selling war bonds, served as test pilots for the United States Air Force, airplane and auto mechanics, phone operators, radio intelligence, photographers, and air traffic control <sup>(H,K)</sup>. Although World War II had, to that date, had the most women who served, approximately 350,000 <sup>(G)</sup> or 3% <sup>(K)</sup>, there were still many restrictions that prevented women from serving to their full potential. For example, women who had children were prohibited from enlisting <sup>(H)</sup>. In 1944, with heavy pressure from Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, black women were welcomed into the military, with separate but equal accommodations <sup>(D)</sup>.

World War II began the questioning and accusations about women in the United States military. There were rumors that women were sexually promiscuous, and women were recruited to improve the morale of the troops <sup>(D)</sup>. It was also presumed that women who willingly went to live among thousands of male soldiers were only after one thing <sup>(D)</sup>. If a woman was ever to die while on duty, her friends would have to raise enough money to have her body sent home to her family, because these women were never given official military status, and instead were seen as volunteers, not soldiers. And on top of this, these women were not eligible to have an American flag over their coffin <sup>(D)</sup>. When World War II was over, most of the women who had served were discharged and sent home without any form of celebration <sup>(B)</sup>.

## 1948

In 1948, the Women's Services Act was implemented, which stated that women had the right to be permanent members of the United States military. However, this act also placed a restriction on the number of women who could serve, and the ranks and types of jobs that women could hold <sup>(B)</sup>. In June of 1948, the Women's Armed Services Integration Act called for the integration of the United States armed services <sup>(K)</sup>.

## The Korean War (1950-1953)

When war broke out in Korea, 22,000 women were on active duty in all branches of the United States military <sup>(1)</sup>. There was no sense of urgency to send women overseas, because there was a feeling that there were a sufficient number of men in the military to get the job done <sup>(1)</sup>. The reasoning or mentality behind not wanting to have women serving, was not only because of the "fragile" nature of women, but also because it was the assumption that women would join for an enlistment or two, get married, and get out to start a family, where men would be seen as more reliable to stay in and a better investment <sup>(1)</sup>.

During the Korean War, the Department of Defense called for the increase of the number of women. The WAC (Army) went from 12,000 to 32,000, the WAF (Air Force) went from 8,200 to 50,000, the WAVES (Navy) went from 6,300 to 11,000, and the WMC (Marines) went from 2,250 to 3,000 <sup>(1)</sup>. Even though the number of women in all branches of the military was increased, the jobs that these women held were in administration, personnel, communications, club management, and protocol, all of which for the most part were at home in the states <sup>(1)</sup>.

## The Vietnam War (1965-1975)

When it came time for American soldiers to go off to Vietnam, it was in question of how women would play a role in this war. Women had not served in the combat theater since World War II, and there were very strong American sentiments that this was not where women belonged <sup>(1)</sup>. None of the branches of the military had any intent to

deploy their women. For women of the Army, WAC, and women of the Air Force, WAF, the closest that they got to Vietnam was Japan and Okinawa, and for other branches Hawaii was the closest they got. In June of 1967, women were starting to be selected to fill positions of men where possible, none of which were on the battlefield or in combat <sup>(1)</sup>. And for the women who did end up serving in Vietnam, 80% of them consisted of nurses and medical specialists <sup>(E)</sup>. When women were allowed to enter Vietnam, it was solely to boost the morale of men. It was noted in several cases that when a male had to go into the medical center for treatment, they would get excited to know it was a female treating them <sup>(1)</sup>.

The Vietnam War treated women's roles as it had in previous wars, because it was expected for women to take over the men's jobs at home, so they could go off to war <sup>(E)</sup>. The Vietnam War was not very inclusive when it came to women, for the women who were able to served, they were all called volunteers, even though they had received orders to serve overseas <sup>(1)</sup>. It is estimated that about 600 WAC (Army) served, 500-600 WAF served (Air Force), by the end of US involvement a mere 36 Marine women had served, and no women from the Navy served <sup>(1)</sup>.

## **1968**

In August of 1968, the Army established a policy that stated the women who were married could not served in Vietnam <sup>(1)</sup>.

## **1972**

In August of 1972, the "Z-Gram" Z-116, was created to change policies that would make better use of women in the military service, especially when the all-volunteer force was planned to take hold <sup>(E)</sup>. This policy stated that women who were enlisted were authorized limited entry to all rankings under a pilot program, a limited number of officers and enlisted women were assigned to the crew of the USS Sanctuary, as noncombatants, women could be assigned as commanders and officers of units ashore.

The NROTC program would be opened to women the fiscal year of 1974, qualified women would be considered for promotions to the

rank of rear admiral, and women could be selected to study at the joint services colleges, the National War College, and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces <sup>(D)</sup>.

### **1973**

1973 marked the end of the all male draft, and began the use of an all volunteer force <sup>(B)</sup>. In the case of *Frontiero v. Richardson*, in May 1973, it was decided that military women were allowed dependency benefits <sup>(J)</sup>.

### **1974**

In April of 1974, the Army, Navy and Air Force released statements against the admission of women in the academies offered, and claimed it was essential that the expensive training be reserved for those that would be asked to serve leadership roles in combat situations <sup>(H)</sup>.

### **1975**

On May 20, 1975, in response to the statements released in April 1974, it was decided that this was sexism, and thus allowed women to take part in the military academies <sup>(H)</sup>. In May of 1975, the Department of Defense decided an end to involuntary discharge of pregnant women <sup>(J)</sup>. 1976 In the case of *Crawford v. Cushman*, a ruling was made that stated that all women who bear children are allowed to remain in the United States military <sup>(A)</sup>.

### **1977**

In February of 1977, the Army approved the integration of basic training <sup>(J)</sup>.

### **1978**

The outcome of *Owens v. Brown* permitted that Navy women were allowed to go to sea <sup>(J)</sup>. During the year of 1978, two combat exclusion

laws were created. The first one (called 10 U.S.C.S. 8545) stated that all female members of the United States Air Force, except nurses and other professional, such as attorneys and physicians, may not be assigned to duty in and aircraft that is engaged in combat missions <sup>(B)</sup>.

The second one (called 10 U.S.C.S. 6015), which was a further amendment of the outcome of *Owens v. Brown*, stated that the secretary of the military may not assign women permanently to combat vessels <sup>(B)</sup>. In 1978, congress amended legislation so the Navy could place women in noncombatant ships and planes, and even temporarily in combatant vehicles under captians conditions. This allowed women to be where the public wanted them and allowed women to be shot at, however not to shoot <sup>(E)</sup>.

## 1981

In June of 1981, the case of *Goldberg v. Rostker*, the male only draft was declared constitutional <sup>(J)</sup>.

## The Persian Gulf War (1990-1991)

The Persian Gulf War, was probably one of the biggest turning points for women who wanted to serve in the military next to the creation of the women's branches of the military. During the gulf War, women were in operational units in a combat zone for the first time, and many of them were exposed to enemy fire <sup>(E)</sup>. Operation Desert Shield was the first US military deployment since Vietnam, and had the largest number of women included in United States history <sup>(I)</sup>. However progressive this may seem, statistically women constituted 11% of active duty military and 13% of the reserves, and this raised questions about women being the weaker sex or if they would be the weak link of the military <sup>(I)</sup>.

The Gulf War was widely seen on American television, and this was the first time that women were seen on television and in photographs, which helped lead the public to realize that women had become an integral and significant part of the new military <sup>(I)</sup>. When it came to participating in the military efforts, women did just about everything on land and at sea except engage in the actual fighting, and in many cases this line was even blurred <sup>(I)</sup>.

Women were directing and launching missiles, driving trucks and heavy equipment, they manned .55 caliber machine guns, guarded from terrorist attacks, ran prisoner of war facilities, repaired M1 tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and other earth-moving equipment. In the Marine Corps, women were concentrated in the support and combat support units that would be positioned at the rear areas where women would keep troops supplied with ammunition, fuel and other essentials.

In the Air Force, women were forbidden from flying on an aircraft that was engaged in any combat mission, they were however seen at the controls and crews of jet tankers that would refuel combat planes in flight during these missions. Navy women served on supply ships, did repairs, and served aboard offshore hospital ships <sup>(1)</sup>.

## **1991**

On May 22, 1991, the House passed a bill that removed the legal barrier against women serving as pilots, navigators, or crew members in the Air Force, Navy, or Marine combat aircraft <sup>(E)</sup>.

## **1992**

March 1, 1992, a zero-tolerance policy was passed toward sexual violence, stating that it could lead to immediate discharge <sup>(E)</sup>.  
September 8–12, 1991, the Tailhook convention took place in Las Vegas, Nevada, was a series of incidents where more than 100 U.S. Navy and United States Marine Corps aviation officers sexually assaulted <sup>(E)</sup>.

## **Iraq & Afghanistan (2001-Present)**

Although women are restricted from the field of combat, many women are assigned positions, and then put in the scene of combat because they help with missions <sup>(J)</sup>. When women are present in many of these missions, where troops have to go through homes and villages, women soldiers help to make Iraqi and Afghani women and children more at ease, especially when they give body searches <sup>(J)</sup>.

In today's military, women in all military services are involved in the war as fighters, bombers, helicopter and transport pilots, physicians, medics, nurses, and crew members. Servicewomen are frequently engaged in firefights with enemy insurgents while guarding convoys, traveling in hostile territory, or performing military police duties and other vital support functions <sup>(A)</sup>.

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