

The Army Women's Museum Fort Lee, Virginia

Regular Army Status

On 12 June 1948, President Truman signed into law the Women's Armed Services Integration act that permitted women in the Regular Army and the Organized Reserve corps (later the US Army Reserve). Demobilization had by then reduced WAC strength to 611 officers, 41 warrant officers and 4,699 enlisted women. But WAC enlistment and reenlistment reopened promptly that summer, after having been closed in 1945, and, in July 1948, training began again for enlisted women and officers at the WAC Training Center, Fort Lee, Virginia.

The Korean War

As the Korean conflict began in June 1950, WAC strength had increased to approximately 7,300 officers and enlisted women. New WAC units were established in Japan and Okinawa to help provide logistical and administrative support for the men fighting in Korea. Because of the constant movement of combat operations on the small peninsula, a WAC unit was not stationed in Korea during the war but a dozen WAC officers and enlisted women were assigned as individuals to perform stenographic and interpreting tasks in Seoul and Pusan. In July 1953, an armistice was signed ending combat operations in Korea. Women continued to serve in Japan and Okinawa.

An All-New Training Center for the WACs at Fort McClellan

In 1951 Congress appropriated funds to build a permanent home for the Women's Army Corps at Fort McClellan, Alabama. The WAC Center and WAC School complex was dedicated in September 1954 by General Matthew B. Ridgway, Chief of Staff of the Army. The Center and School conducted basic training, clerical, stenography, personnel specialist, leadership and cadre courses for enlisted women and basic and advanced training courses for WAC officers.

The Vietnam War

Soon after the United States became involved in South Vietnam, Lt Col Kathleen I. Wilkes and Master Sergeant Betty L. Adams arrived in Saigon in January 1965 to serve as advisors on training and administrative matters to the Vietnam Women's Armed Forces Corps. The tour of duty for the advisors (as well as all others assigned to Vietnam) was one year and they were replaced annually. In September 1966, a WAC detachment with an average strength of 90 enlisted women was assigned to Headquarters, US Army, Vietnam, stationed first at Tan Son Nhut and then at Long Binh.

All women who served in Vietnam volunteered for duty there; in fact, many more volunteered than could be used. Spaces for fill by women were very limited. Had women been fully integrated into Army units as they were by the time of DESERT STORM in 1991, many more would have served in Vietnam. In October 1972 when other U.S. troops began to be withdrawn, the WAC Detachment closed. In addition to the detachment, many WAC officers and enlisted women served in Saigon with Headquarters, Military Assistance Command, and other commands. Approximately 600 WACs served in Vietnam between 1965 and 1973.

Women Generals

On 8 November 1967, Congress passed a law removing promotion and other career restrictions on women officers, making it possible for women officers in all Services to achieve general officer (or flag) rank. Up to this time, only one WAC officer could hold the rank of colonel—the Director WAC—other officers served as lieutenant colonels and below. The first WAC officer to be promoted to brigadier general on 11 June 1970 was Elizabeth P. Hoisington, then serving as Director WAC. Nine other women (including a black officer) have since been promoted to brigadier general. Mary E. Clarke was promoted to major general and served as commander of a major U.S. Army post before retiring in 1981.

WAC Expansion Begins

A major campaign to increase WAC strength began in 1972 to help the Army maintain its required numbers after the draft law ended on 30 June 1973—this would initiate a truly all-volunteer Army. As a result of an intense recruiting effort and the opening of all Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) to women except those involving combat duty or extraordinary strength, WAC strength increased from 13,269 on 30 June 1972 to 52,996 on 30 September 1978. To accommodate the heavy input of recruits, a WAC basic training brigade was activated at Fort Jackson, SC, on 1 October 1973. Integration was going so well, the Army decided to consolidate basic training for men and women. This began on 1 September 1977 but four years later was judged to be ineffective and separate basic training for men and women was reinstated in 1981.

In December 1977, the Army issued a combat exclusion policy that permitted women to hold certain combat support MOS in some units. In 1981, it assigned a combat probability code to each MOS—the highest probability code excluded women.

Weapons Training

In 1963, weapons training courses for WAC officers and enlisted women were discontinued because the Army switched from a lightweight rifle (carbine) to the heavier M14 rifle. Thereafter, women received only a two or three hour familiarization course on weapons used by combat troops. In 1974 because many

newly opened MOS required patrol, guard duty, and rear area security, the Army again included a defensive weapons course in WAC training programs. Firing the weapons became mandatory in 1975 after women enlisting, reenlisting, or being commissioned in the Regular Army, Reserve, and National Guard were advised that they would be required to take weapons training and fire the weapons.

Discontinuance of the Office of the Director WAC and the Women's Army Corps

As a means of assimilating women more closely into the structure of the Army and to eliminate any feeling of separateness for women, Congress discontinued the office of the Director WAC on 28 April 1978. It later disestablished the Women's Army corps as a separate corps of the Army on 20 October 1978.