

WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

Though not officially part of the U.S. military until the mid-20th century, and barred from combat today, women have been involved in the military since the United States began. Follow their path from camp followers to starred generals and admirals.

Grades 8-12

Illinois State Goals: 1A, 1B, 14B, 16A, 16B, 16C, 18B

Vocabulary words: essential, domestic, fictitious, supplementary, evolved, masqueraded, boycotts, realm, precarious, sufficed, donned, persona, motive, espionage, propelling, stereotypes, counsel, vital, undervalued, professionalized, necessitated, strides, unprecedented, stenography, Yeomen, mustered out, prohibited, acclaim, accolades, pivotal

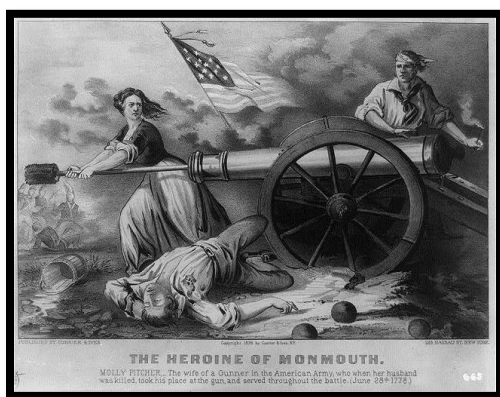


Fig. 1: The Heroine on Monmouth. Molly Pitcher ... June 28, 1778
Library of Congress

Section 1: Women in the military and early America

Important concept to consider:

-As impersonators, camp followers, nurses, and now as combat-ready commanders, women have been, and continue to be, essential to the American military.

The involvement of women in American wars is a long-standing tradition. Created during the American Revolution, the painting above is a romanticized depiction of women who were traditionally referred to as “camp followers.” Many women would follow their men into war, trailing behind the marching soldiers with camp equipment, food, and other essential materials for military life outside of battle. These women fulfilled their domestic duties expected of them by American culture at the time, but in a wartime setting. Yet these women didn’t only nurse and feed the men – in battle they carried pitchers of water to the front lines, keeping cannon barrels from overheating. Sometimes they took over those very guns and engaged the enemy when the men around them were killed or wounded. Such instances inspired this poster of fictitious “Molly Pitcher” loading the artillery gun of her slain husband.

While for the most part women’s involvement in military affairs has been limited to unofficial and supplementary roles, this does not remain true for the entire history of women in the U.S. military. The twentieth century brought two world wars, growing equality between men and women thanks to the feminist movement, and the inclusion of women in all branches of the armed forces expanded drastically. Our focus here will be to not only acknowledge the great contributions of women in American armed conflicts, but also see how their roles within the military have expanded and been reshaped as American society has evolved.

The late eighteenth and the nineteenth century up until the Civil War saw repeated instances in which women masqueraded as men to serve in American wars. This period saw women actively supporting their respective causes through boycotts of British goods during the American Revolution and serving as nurses during the Civil War. However, direct involvement in the armed forces had to come through deception as enlistment was limited to males. While it is difficult to assess exact numbers for nurses and camp followers during these wars, it is even more difficult to figure out precisely how many women served under the guise of men. The first *known* instance of a woman dressing as a man for military service was Deborah Sampson (often misspelled as Sampson), a Massachusetts woman, who enlisted in the Continental Army in 1782 at the age of 21 as Robert Shurtliff. Serving for approximately seventeen months Sampson saw several battles, was wounded twice, and was discovered to be a woman when doctors treated her due to complications following her second wound. She was honorably discharged and received minor acclaim, plus a pension, after her story became popular in the years after the war.



Fig. 2: Deborah Sampson [sic]
Library of Congress



Fig.3: Frances Clalin Clayton was born in Illinois and married Elmer Clayton. They lived in Minnesota, and Elmer Clayton joined the Union Army in the fall of 1861. Frances followed him under the name of Jack Wilson.
Prologue

Throughout the following century the roles of women in American society did not change much beyond the traditional domestic sphere. During the War of 1812, the 1846-48 Mexican War, and the Civil War, women's roles in the military remained in the familiar realm of nursing and maintenance of soldiers. Even in this sense, while many were contracted or hired to do these services by the military, they were not considered official members *in* the military. Once again, only those women who dared to cross gender boundaries by dressing as men were able to fully function as soldiers in battle. This being a precarious and risky task, many women were discovered by doctors upon sickness or injury, subsequently being discharged from service. In the Mexican War, one known female soldier, Elizabeth Newcom, would serve as Bill Newcom until being found out in camp at Pueblo, Colorado. Being a strictly American war on American soil, the Civil War offered many more opportunities for women in the armed services than a foreign war would. For many, traditional roles sufficed, yet many others (estimated in the hundreds) donned a male persona and contributed in various battles of the Civil War. True in both Northern and Southern armies, some were caught, others served full tours of duty, and still others sacrificed their lives on the battlefields, side by side with men.



Fig.4: Frances Clayton. Disguised as a man, Clayton fought bravely alongside her husband in a Missouri regiment until he died at the Battle of Stones River. She fought on, was later wounded, and was discovered at a hospital. After her discharge it is believed she re-enlisted and continued to fight for the Union cause.
Prologue

Wouldn't a woman be noticed?

You'd think it would be obvious to spot a woman soldier. Militaries at this time often enlisted young teenage boys, who could be confused for women. Furthermore, soldiers in this early American period tended to be very religiously conservative and private, making it perfectly natural for them to bathe or change in private. These factors aided women in their deception.

Why would women sneak in?

While *all* of the motivations are hard to figure out, it is clear from the cases we know of that these women's reasons for serving as men were varied. Some wanted to serve with their husbands, others could not manage financially without their husbands and instead enlisted, while still others had patriotism as their main motive.



Fig.5: Mrs. Rose Greenhow
Library of Congress

The struggle between North and South in the Civil War resulted in espionage by both sides, thus propelling the use of women as spies whose traditional feminine, gentle, and flirtatious stereotypes aided them in their ability to obtain and transport military secrets across enemy lines. The most famous woman in this role was a Washington socialite, the widow Rose Greenhow, who created an extensive spy network and held close counsel with various federal officials in Washington. She obtained important intelligence on behalf of her beloved South. Most notably in the Civil War, women's contributions in medical care would lead to breakthroughs like the appointment of the Army's first female physician, Dr. Mary E. Walker (first female Medal of Honor recipient). While again these nurses, doctors, spies, and soldiers were not officially recognized as members of the military, their accomplishments in all of these fields would lead to further breakthroughs for women in the coming century, not to mention prove vital to the war efforts.



Fig.6: Mary Edwards Walker
Library of Congress

Although it took until 1920 for American women to be given the right to vote as full members of society through the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, thousands of women nonetheless offered their services to the military. This took place primarily during the American Revolution and the Civil War. Much of this service was overlooked or undervalued by the male-dominated military that refused to accept women as full members. Given these challenges, think about the motivations behind what these women did and answer the questions below.

1. Think about the American Revolution period. Considering the very traditionalist views of female roles in American society, why do you think so many women would have gone with armies as camp followers? What could have been their motivations or pressures when deciding to do such a thing? Put yourself in their position in their society, and see how many possible motivations you could find for their service.
2. Seeing as how women dressing as men were more prevalent in the Civil War, once again think about the context of that time and think about possible motivations or situations in which women would have felt the need to take such drastic steps.
3. Why do you think that the military was so reluctant to acknowledge the contributions of women in these wars? Was this a reflection of society? How so? Give examples of how society would have been reflected in the affairs of the military.



Fig.7: Into the wild blue yonder

Section 2: Growing opportunities for women in the military

Important concept to consider:

-While women's contributions to the military in the form of medical assistance and other tasks continued to grow in the late nineteenth century and during the two World Wars, their full acceptance and incorporation within the military system lagged far behind.

It would take until about the middle of the twentieth century for women to be considered official military personnel by the American armed forces. However, while their recognition as servicewomen took a long time, their contributions to the military continued to prove more and more vital to the maintenance of a military and the winning of wars. In nursing, a career that was still maturing and being professionalized, women were the most influential. Serving as contracted employees to the military, these nurses became integral to America in the Spanish American war. 1500 contract nurses aided in that war, with successes that resulted in Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee's appointment as the Army's Assistant Surgeon General, the first time a woman had held that title. Women proved their worth, and the military soon formed an Army Nurse Corps (1901) and a Navy Nurse Corps (1908).

As it happened for black Americans, the scale and importance of World War I and World War II also led to more and more opportunities for women in the American military. In both wars, the need for massive amounts of personnel, equipment, and weapons necessitated that women serve and do more tasks in support of the military, though they were not yet considered an official part of it. The interwar period saw the introduction of the Army Reorganization Act in 1920 in which army nurses were given relative rank, though still denying them full inclusion as army personnel. It took even more involvement of women during World War II for them to be fully incorporated as official members of the military. The Army-Navy Nurse Act of 1947 and the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 allowed for the inclusion of women in the military, as full participating members in uniform, serving various different non-combat functions within the armed forces.

With these giant strides made by the middle of the century, the rest of the century is marked with a series of barrier-breaking moments, moments in which women were able to achieve as soldiers in ways they never had the opportunity to do in the past.

World War I saw unprecedented participation of women in war efforts. Over 20,000 nurses would serve both stateside and abroad. Beyond the nursing field however, women were also involved in switchboard operation, clerical work, and stenography. With their skills now being used in positions normally held by military men, those men were free to fight in the war. The Navy enlisted 11,880 women as Yeomen and even the Marines signed up 305 women to do clerical work normally assigned to males. While they would be considered employees of the armed services and not full members in them, this did not deter these women's eagerness to aid the war effort. Even outside of the military structure women such as those involved with the National League For Women's Service provided important assistance for servicemen. These women performed functions such as serving food to enlisted men before they shipped out and driving men to enlistment locations.



Fig.8: Service: fall in!



Fig.9: For your country's sake today, for your own sake tomorrow: go to the nearest recruiting station of the Armed Service of your choice

The outpouring of patriotism that accompanied the United States' entry into World War II led to a flood of enlistments by both men and women across the country. Even more so than in World War I, the number of women willing and eager to serve ballooned. And in the end the country's need to quickly militarize, as well as prepare and deploy its forces, led to the inclusion of women in various branches of the military in areas they had never before been allowed. 60,000 Army nurses served; the Women's Army Corps (WAC) was established with 150,000 enlistees. Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) would fly various domestic missions. 80,000 women joined the Navy's Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), and the Marine Corps Women's Reserve also relied heavily on women so as to "free men to fight." While most of these women were mustered out after the war, their service was invaluable and led to legislation in 1947-48 that was the start of allowing women to serve in the military with equal privileges and rankings in times of peace as well as war. Gone were the days of their service being viewed as contract employment for the military. However, their full integration in combat units remained incomplete.

Today there are nearly two million female military veterans and close to 200,000 in active duty. Women comprise about 14 percent of the U.S. Armed Forces, many of them in conflict areas like Iraq and Afghanistan. Increasingly over the past two decades women have participated in more of the military's operations and have access to positions throughout most of the military, which gradually have become more gender neutral. There are still limitations in some branches of the military, and direct combat missions are prohibited for women. However, this has not stopped thousands of women from serving nobly and bravely in times of war. Those that have had to engage the enemy have done their job as soldiers. In 2008, Lt. Gen. Ann E. Dunwoody became the first female four-star general in the American Armed Forces. Promoted by the Army, Dunwoody, like many other women past and present, continues to prove the value of women in military service. Upon being promoted to her new position, Dunwoody stated, "We must not forget those who have gone before us. But let's also recognize... a legacy earned by our pioneers...; women who knew no fear, and... women who risked everything they had to serve their country."



*Fig.10: Sgt. Dawn Cloukey, a signals systems specialist with the Brigade Troop Battalion, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, tests the functionality of a communication device during a brief stop at Forward Operating Base Normandy, March 27.[2009]
U.S. Army photo*

Research Activity

Instructions:

Select a notable woman who contributed in some way to the American military. This can range from being a camp follower in the Revolution or pilot during World War II. Some have been mentioned in this lesson, but there are many more women of note that you can find information about.

- Once you've selected the military woman you've decided to research, find out what this woman did that won her acclaim and accolades, or what pivotal event or accomplishment this woman is best known for.
- From your research, write a descriptive paragraph about the event, accomplishment, or facts you discovered.
- Try to find a picture or drawing of this woman if you can
- Once you've finalized your paragraph, all students work together by adding each of their pivotal points about their notable female in women's military history to an online interactive timeline that can be created at <http://www.xtimeline.com/index.aspx>
- Once it's complete, the class can post their completed project so others can learn from their research, and each student can go through the timeline, learning what their classmates contributed to it.

Bibliography

Images

- Figure 1: *The Heroine on Monmouth. Molly Pitcher...June 28, 1778*. Lithograph. New York: Currier & Ives, c.1876. From Library of Congress, *Popular Graphic Arts*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b50447> (accessed February 9, 2011).
- Figure 2: *Deborah Sampson* [sic]. Print. 1797. From Library of Congress, *Miscellaneous Items in High Demand*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a01996> (accessed February 9, 2011).
- Figures 3 and 4: Blanton, DeAnne. "Women Soldiers of the Civil War," *Prologue* magazine, Spring 1993, Vol. 25 No.1. <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1993/spring/women-in-the-civil-war-1.html> (accessed February 9, 2011).
- Figure 5: "Mrs. Rose Greenhow." Glass negative. [between 1855 and 1865]. From Library of Congress, *Brady-Handy Collection*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cwpbh.01246> (accessed February 9, 2011)
- Figure 6: "[*Mary Edwards Walker, 1832-1919, full length portrait, standing, facing slightly right; holding umbrella; in top hat and tails. 1st woman Army medical officer (Civil War); suffragette and dress reformer*]" Photograph. c.1912. From Library of Congress, *Miscellaneous Items in High Demand*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b10391> (accessed February 9, 2011)
- Figure 7: *Into the Wild Blue Yonder*, Pritzker Military Library Prints and Posters Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.
- Figure 8: *Service: Fall In!* Pritzker Military Library Prints and Posters Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.
- Figure 9: *For your country's sake today, for your own sake tomorrow: go to the nearest recruiting station of the Armed Service of your choice*, Pritzker Military Library Prints and Posters Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.
- Figure 10: Aranda, Pfc. Jesus J. "Continuing Progression: Female Soldiers," Task Force Lightning Public Affairs. U.S. Army photo. <http://www.army.mil/article/25019/> (accessed February 9, 2011)

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