

## **Famous Women in the Military: Biography**

**Introduction:** In this activity, students will think about and discuss the role of women in the military. Then students will research and answer questions about some important women in United States military history, from the Revolutionary War to World War II. Finally, students will write a short biography of a famous woman in the military. For enrichment, students may also create a timeline of the woman's life, write a journal entry from this person's point of view, conduct a mock interview with the woman, or research one of the women-only WWII organizations. At the end of this lesson plan is a list of books and websites that can be used for these activities, and there is also a list of other books about women in the military, though not necessarily specific to this lesson. This is appropriate for Women's History Month, learning about the military, or learning about historically important people in general.

### **Illinois Learning Standards:**

#### **Social Science:**

16.A.2c, 16.A.3a, 16.A.3b, 16.A.4a: Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.

16.B.5b: Understand the development of significant political events.

16.D.2c, 16.D.4b: Understand Illinois, United States, and world social history.

18.B.3a, 18.B.4: Understand the roles and interactions of individuals and groups in society.

#### **English Language Arts:**

1.A.3b: Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend selections.

1.B.3a, 1.B.4c: Apply reading strategies to improve understanding and fluency.

1.C.3d: Comprehend a broad range of reading materials.

3.A.3: Use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization and structure.

3.B.3a: Compose well-organized and coherent writing for specific purposes and audiences.

5.B.3a: Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources.

5.C.3b: Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.

**Materials:** Discussion questions, research questions, books from list (optional), computers with Web access, other school library resources, notebook paper, pen/pencil. For enrichment activities: Timeline: blank paper, colored pencils and markers, rulers. Interview: costumes, list of prepared questions, video/audio equipment for recording. Journal: pen and paper. Further research: computer with internet access, library books.

**Grade Level:** Middle (4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade)

**Time:** About 4-5 class periods (45 minutes per class)

**Activities:** Answer warm-up questions about women in the military and discuss; research one important woman in American military history by reading books or finding information on Internet; answer questions on worksheet; write short biography.

For enrichment: create timeline of woman's life; write journal entry from woman's point of view; conduct mock interview with woman; research WAACs/WACs, WAVES, WASPs, SPARs.

### **Procedure:**

A. As a warm-up, have students jot down answers to these three questions:

1. The history of women in the military is long, but here are a few facts (from [www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/History/historyeras.html](http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/History/historyeras.html)):

- When the United States entered the European War on April 6, 1917, it marked the first time in the history of the country that regular Army and Navy military nurses served overseas—although without rank—and the first time women who were not nurses were allowed to enlist in the Navy and Marine Corps. A handful of women also served in the Coast Guard. The US Army, however, refused to enlist women officially, relying on them as contract employees and civilian volunteers.

- In World War II, women served in the Army and Navy Nurse Corps, Women's Army Corps (WAC), and in the Navy (WAVES), Coast Guard (SPARs) and Marine Corps Women's Reserves. Although not officially members of the armed forces, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) provided critical support for the war effort. Other women worked with the military through service with organizations such as the American Red Cross, the United Service Organizations (USO), and the Civil Air Patrol.

- In May 1942, the House and the Senate approved a bill creating the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and Oveta Culp Hobby, Chief of the Women's Interest Section in the Public Relations Bureau at the War Department and a lobbyist for the WAAC bill, became its first director. Although the women who joined considered themselves *in* the Army, technically they were civilians working *with* the Army. By the spring of 1943, 60,000 women had volunteered and in July 1943, a new congressional bill transformed the WAAC to the Women's Army Corps (WAC), giving Army women military status.

President Harry S Truman had signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, establishing a permanent place for women (other than nurses, who were already permanent) in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.

- Women are now excluded from only 9 percent of Army roles—although that figure represents nearly 30 percent of active-duty positions. Army women cannot be assigned to the following occupational fields: infantry, armor, special forces, cannon field artillery and multiple launch rocket artillery. Also closed to women are: Ranger units at the regiment level and below, ground surveillance radar platoons, combat engineer line companies, and short range defense artillery units. In the Air Force, 99 percent of all occupations are open to women. Navy women are only excluded from submarine crews and SEAL teams, special boat unit crews and support positions with the Marine Corps ground combat units. The Marine Corps has opened 92 percent of its occupational fields to women, however 38 percent of positions are closed to women. Closed occupational fields include infantry, tank and assault amphibian vehicles and artillery. All Coast Guard occupations and positions are open to women.

Here are the questions:

1. Why is there an ongoing debate about women in the military? If they're allowed, what they're allowed to do, what they're not allowed to do?
2. Why study women in the military? Why make it a separate topic to study?
3. Name some famous non-military women in history.

B. Have students choose a woman who was important in American military history, who they will then research. Suggestions are:

1. Sara Emma Evelyn Edmundson (1841 - 1898), Civil War nurse and spy
2. Deborah Sampson Gannett (1760-1827) first known American woman to impersonate a man, to join the army and take part in combat in the Revolutionary War.
3. Grace Murray Hopper (1906-1992), computer scientist and naval officer
4. Harriet Tubman, (1820-1913), rebel, spy, activist
5. Cathy Williams, (1844-1926) Buffalo Soldier in the Civil War
6. Mary Walker, (1832-1919), surgeon, spy, only woman to receive Medal of Honor
7. Clara Barton, (1821-1912), Civil War nurse, organized American Red Cross
8. Helen Fairchild, (1885-1918), World War I nurse
9. Marie Odee Johnson, (1897-2004), one of last surviving women on World War I, served in United States Navy in a non-nursing capacity
10. Marjorie Stinson, (1886-1975), World War I pilot
11. Oveta Culp Hobby, (1905-1995), first woman to receive Army Distinguished Service Medal
12. Ruby Bradley, (1907-2002), most decorated woman in United States military

C. Using the resources from the Pritzker Military Library (available through interlibrary loan), other books available at your school library, encyclopedias, and/or the Internet, students research the woman they've been assigned and answer general questions about her.

**Note:** amount of information on Internet varies by woman. For more depth, stick to first seven women listed.

### **General questions to answer:**

1. What is her name and where and when was she born?
2. What was her childhood like?
3. Did she go to school? What did she study? What was she interested in when she was young?
4. Did her childhood have an effect on her adult life? (For example, she liked animals as a child and then became a veterinarian.)
4. What did she do after she was done with school (if she went)? What was she interested in? What did she become involved in?
5. Did she get married? If so, to whom? Did she have children?
6. What did she do to make her famous? Was it one thing or many things over a long period of time? Give the who, what, when, where, and why.
7. Did she get rewarded, or recognized, for what she did?
8. What did she do for the rest of her life?
9. What do you think is the most interesting thing about her life?
10. Why is she important in history?

D. After finding answers to these questions, students can write a biography of the woman. Paragraphs may be organized chronologically in this way: birth and early life, schooling, adult life and marriage, career, important events and recognition, rest of her life, most interesting thing and importance in history. Students may peer edit before turning in their final drafts, choose two or three important points about the woman they researched and share that information with the class, read their biographies to the class.

### **Enrichment**

1. Students can make a timeline of important events of the woman's life. They should also include other significant events, such as presidential elections, wars, inventions, etc, to put the woman's life in a broader context.
2. Students can write a journal entry from the woman's point of view. What was she thinking and feeling during the time she was doing important work? Was she scared? Why did she do those things?
3. One student can play the role of the woman and another student can interview her. Interviewer can ask questions about woman's childhood, schooling, career choice, her place in history. Students may practice the interview and perform for class. Can be recorded.

4. Have students research one of the following: WAAC (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) later changed to WAC (Women's Auxiliary Corps), WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), WASPs (Women Airforce Service Pilots), or SPARs (US Coast Guard Women's Reserve).

**Resources at the Pritzker Military Library: (also available through interlibrary loan at your school library)**

Graf, Mercedes. *A Woman of Honor: Dr. Mary E. Walker and the Civil War*. Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 2001. Call number: E621 .W24 2001

Joinson, Carla. *Civil War Doctor: the Story of Mary Edwards Walker*. Greensboro, NC: Morgan Reynolds Pub., 2006. Call number: R154 .W18 J65 2006

McGovern, Ann. *The Secret Soldier: the Story of Deborah Sampson*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1975. Call number: E276 .G36 M3 1975

Oates, Stephen B. *A Woman of Valor: Clara Barton and the Civil War*. New York: Free Press, 1994. Call number: E621 .O24 1994

Proctor, Tammy M. *Female intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War*. New York: New York University, 2003. Call number: D639 .S7 P76 2003

Schultz, Jane E. *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Call number: E621 .S35 2004

Tucker, Phillip Thomas. *Cathy Williams: from Slave to Female Buffalo Soldier*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002. Call number: E185.97.W694 T83 2002

Williams, Kathleen Broome. *Grace Hopper: Admiral of the Cyber Sea*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2004. Call number: V63.H66 W55 2004

Young, Alfred Fabian. *Masquerade: the Life and Times of Deborah Sampson, Continental Soldier*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004. Call number E276.G36 Y68 2004.

**Web sites:**

[www.womenshistory.about.com](http://www.womenshistory.about.com)

[www.militarywoman.org](http://www.militarywoman.org)

[www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)

[www.americaslibrary.org](http://www.americaslibrary.org)

[www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)

[www.americanrevolution.com](http://www.americanrevolution.com)

[www.biography-center.com](http://www.biography-center.com)

[www.nationmaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com)  
[www.associatedcontent.com](http://www.associatedcontent.com)  
[www.nyhistory.com](http://www.nyhistory.com)  
[www.incwell.com](http://www.incwell.com)  
[www.harriettubman.com](http://www.harriettubman.com)  
[www.biographybase.com](http://www.biographybase.com)  
[www.buffalosoldier.net](http://www.buffalosoldier.net)  
[www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/History/historyeras.html](http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/History/historyeras.html)  
[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

**Other books about women in the military (available at the Pritzker Military Library and through interlibrary loan):**

Berkin, Carol. *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggles for America's Independence*. New York: Knopf, 2005. Call number: E276 .B47 2005

Callaway, John D. *Women in the US Military [videorecording]: a Changing Role?* Chicago, IL: Pritzker Military Library, 2005. (available on pritzkermilitarylibrary.org and in VHS format)

Carl, Ann. *WASP Among Eagles: a Woman Military Test Pilot in World War II*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999. Call number: D790 .C272 1999

Cassin-Scott, Jack. *Women at War, 1939-45*. London: Osprey Publishing, 1980. Call number: D810 .W7 C37 1980

Ebbert, Jean. *The First, the Few, the Forgotten: Navy and Marine Corps Women in World War I*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute, 2002. Call number: D639 .W7 E23 2002

Eggleston, Larry G. *Women in the Civil War: Extraordinary Stories of Soldiers, Spies, Nurses, Doctors, Crusaders, and Others*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003. Call number: E628 .E375 2003

Gavin, Lettie. *American Women in World War I: They Also Served*. Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2006. Call number: D639 .W7 G38 2006

Goldstein, Joshua S. *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Call number: U21.5 .G65 2003

Hewitt, Linda L. *Women Marines in World War I*. Washington: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1974. Call number: D639 .W7 H45 1974

Holmstedt, Kirsten A. *Band of Sisters: American Women at War in Iraq*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2007. DS79.76 .H652 2007

Keil, Sally Van Wagenen. *Those Wonderful Women in Their Flying Machines: the Unknown Heroines of World War II*. New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, 1979. Call number: D810 .W7 K43 1979

- Leonard, Elizabeth D. *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999. Call number: E628 .L45 1999
- Leuthner, Stuart. *High Honor: Recollections by Men and Women of World War II Aviation*. Leuthner, Stuart. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1989. Call number: D790 .L48 1989
- Litoff, Judy Barrett. *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from the American Women on the Home Front*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995. Call number: D811 .A2 S56 1995
- Lomax, Judy. *Women of the Air*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1987. Call number: TL539 .L55 1987
- Massey, Mary Elizabeth. *Women in the Civil War*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. Call number: E628 .M3 1994
- Norman, Elizabeth M. *Women at War: The Story of Fifty Military Nurses Who Served in Vietnam*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia, 1990. Call number: DS559.8 .W6 N67 1990
- Skaine, Rosemarie. *Women at War: Gender Issues of Americans in Combat*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999. Call number: UB418 .W65 K56 1999
- Soderbergh, Peter A. *Women Marines in the Korean War Era*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994. Call number: DS920.5 .M37 S66 1994
- . *Women Marines: the World War II Era*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992. Call number: D769.369 .S63 1992
- Spratley, Dolores R. *Women Go To War: Answering the First Call in World War II*. Columbus, OH: Hazelnut, 1992. Call number: D811 .S69 1992
- Walker, Keith. *A Piece of My Heart: the Stories of 26 American Women Who Served in Vietnam*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986. Call number: DS559.8 .W6 P54 1986
- Wise, James E. *Women at War: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Conflicts*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006. Call number: U52 .W578 2006