

Women's Auxiliary Corps

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Base Group L06



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The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was established in May 1942 to increase the strength of the Army to fight World War II. Within a year the Corps had 60,000 women, the equivalent of approximately three divisions performing jobs in administration, communications, and logistics, training, maintenance, repair and supply. The WAC living conditions had a factor to consider for them to join. Racial segregation of black female soldiers controlled whether they would stay in or serve more time in the Women's Auxiliary Corp. Congress was impressed with the women's contributions in 1943 so the Women's Army Corps received military status.

Women's Strength in the Corp

The Corps reached peak strength of approximately 100,000 officers and enlisted women in April 1944. A few years after World War II, Congress integrated that WAC into the Regular Army of the United States in 1948. Thereafter, women in uniform became almost as familiar a sight at overseas stations and at Army posts throughout the United States as men were in the Army. Though, women in the service greatly reduced in strength after World War II, thousands of patriotic women served in one of the Corps during the Korean War, the Berlin and Cuban Crises.

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During these years the Women's Corps averaged approximately 7,000 enlisted women and 800 officers. Most of the enlisted women served as typists, stenographers, finance clerks, teletype operators, medical specialists, dental technicians, photographers, and supply specialists. WAC officers were assigned to positions in administration, finance, intelligence, signal operations, recruiting, automatic data processing, training, quartermaster, and legal and civil affairs.

Before the Pentagon had any requisitions for Women's Army Corps members to serve in Vietnam in 1966, enlisted women of the Corps were submitting volunteer requests to serve in Vietnam. Though women were not permitted to serve in combat roles, their duties in past wars in communications, supply, and administration had taken them into all theaters of war.

The women's' Auxiliary Corp had a small group in Saigon, Vietnam which included approximately 20 totals. Sergeant Major Tait led these fine young women into Vietnam when the order came out to do so. A study in 1966 (see chart below Table 20 Pg 223) was done and recommended that the WAC services expand between 38 and 73 percent in strength; highest expansion of women movement in the Armed Forces.

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The Army approved the recommendation and directed a 38% increase in WAC strength. The Navy had a 20%; Air Force approved 60% for their services. WAC increase in enlisted strength by 3,282 beginning 1 JUL 67 was their biggest expansion so far in this era.

TABLE 20-Women's Services Projected Increases

(Officers and Enlisted)

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Programmed 1966		Planned	projected strength 1969
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WAC.....	9700		
		3582	13282
WAVES(navy).....	5500	1100	6600
Women Marine.....	1825	900	2725
WAF.....	5750	3250	9000

Living and Training Conditions

The women worked six-and-seven-day weeks but after a six month stint they received rest and recreation leave at safe distances from the Viet Cong. Red dust covered

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everything and the weather was hot, humid, and uncomfortable. Clothing deteriorated quickly.

The women lived four or five to a room in four two-story buildings that could house approximately 130 women. The wood framed buildings were un-insulated, had unfurnished walls, sat on blocks (cement) high enough to allow water and drain pipes to hang above the ceilings. The area was heated by coal furnaces that were fed by shovel twice a day during the winter months.

Army regulations specified that one bathtub for every seventy-five women in addition to their showers had to complement. Training consisted of Administration, supply duties, Mess hall duties and orderly room. For recreation, they had a patio and swimming pool in their area. The pool was donated by the National WAC Veterans Association and installed by Army engineers.

Despite the adverse conditions and long hours, morale of the women assigned in Vietnam remained high because they knew their work was important to the success of the Army in Vietnam. Top strength of Women Auxiliary Corps assigned to Vietnam was reached in January 1970; 20 officers and 139 enlisted women. The Viet Cong frequently lobbed artillery shells into the post, aiming at the ammunition depot. Though the

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women were jarred from their beds and suffered scrapes and bruises from flying debris, none was killed nor seriously injured in these attacks.

Having no combat training, it was stressful for these women, most of them privates first class between the ages of 18 to 25, to be exposed to enemy fire. They became used to the noise and the racket caused by the shelling, and no one asked to be transferred to a safer area.

The original area selected for a training center for the WACs' had been FT. KNOX in 1948. But due to the facilities available, another site was selected. This site was Camp Lee, Virginia. The training center opened on 4 OCT 1948 and their first graduation of Regular Army was on 10 DEC 1948.

MAJ Annie V. Gardner was the Acting Commander for this center in June 1948. The WAC training center was staffed entirely by women in the Conus Army. A replacement would be a WAC Officer or Enlisted but by no way a male officer or enlisted would replace them. The Officer and selected enlisted training plan consisted of 6 week course: First 3 weeks was how to supervise, methods of public speaking, methods of instruction, evaluate training, military history, and how to counsel other female soldiers. The last 3 weeks was for positions as acting NCO or to instruct at the training center.

Racial Segregation of the WAC

President Truman issued Executive Order #9981 ending the racial discrimination and segregation in the Armed forces. It took 2 years after that order to come out with the final report. After WWII, Black WAC strength had a big decline. In June 1948, there were 4 black WAC officers and 121 enlisted women on duty. All other services were included in these numbers. During these times, there were A, B, C, D, and E company and B co specifically was for the black WAC and Enlisted soldiers.

All the other companies had the white officers and enlisted soldiers. In April 1950, whites and black WAC began side by side basic training.

Recognition for service

Many women were decorated for meritorious service while in Vietnam. Some of them also received the Legion of Honor, Bronze Star Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Air Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, or Joint Service Commendation Medal. One soldier in particular was Carolyn H. James, MSG enlisted in 1945. James was one of two women to serve in Korea, when she worked as a stenographer. MSG James became the Army's first female sergeant Major in 1960. Another outstanding soldier was CSM Mildred C. Kelly. She entered in 1950 in the WAC, when black women could find few opportunities in

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American society. She became the first black woman to earn the rank of Command Sergeant Major. The WAC Detachment received two unit service awards for its service in Vietnam. In 1972, the withdrawal of all U.S. forces in Vietnam began. After six long dreadful years in Vietnam, the WAC Detachment was deactivated in September 1972 and most of the women returned to the United States for reassignment. A few officers and enlisted women continued to serve in Saigon until May 1973. A total of approximately 700 officers and enlisted women served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1973.

Disestablishment

The Women's Army Corps was disestablished by Congress in October 1978 and, thereafter, instead of being assigned to WAC branch upon entering the Army, women were assigned to all the other branches of the Army (e.g., Signal, Ordnance, Military Police, Intelligence, etc), except for the combat branches: Infantry, Armor, and Artillery. Since then women have continued to serve in every military action in which the Army has been involved.

In conclusion, the Women Auxiliary Corps who served in World War II and Vietnam and other countries along side with the men of the Armed Forces as one team contributed

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to the exemplary heritage of women in our military service. They are among the proudest and toughest to have served in the Women's Army Corps.

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