

Women in the Military

by Cal Applebee

Continuing our effort to honor all disciplines of service and all eras of military heritage, this Chronicles edition picks up on the topic of women in the military last touched on in 2012.

While women in the military are sometimes portrayed by Hollywood with occasional roles out of WWII, we've seen more recent service portrayed such as in the 1996 "Courage Under Fire" with actress Meg Ryan portraying a chopper pilot killed in action during the Gulf War.

In reality, since 1775, the role of women in the military, particularly combat, has been controversial. Although most in early years only served in support roles such as nursing, laundering and cooking, several hundred women were discovered to have disguised themselves as men and fought in the Civil War.

While most nations participating in WWII used women in uniform, the majority again performed tasks such as nursing and clerical duties only. However, over one thousand civilian women pilots served during WWII in the WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots) ferrying airplanes.

During the Vietnam War, roughly 11,000 women were deployed. While ninety percent served as nurses, eight were in fact killed in action. The Gulf War saw 40,000 women deployed to Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Today, roughly fifteen percent of our military personnel in the United States is made up of women.

Bringing it closer to home, in 2015, Oregon became one of only a handful of states to establish a permanent, full-time women veterans coordinator in the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs, to provide outreach and enhance level of care to the more than 28,000 women Veterans in Oregon, which represents one-tenth of Oregon's Veteran population.

Elizabeth Estabrooks, herself a Veteran of the US Army from 1977 to 1980, joined the ODVA in that capacity in 2016. "I feel fortunate every single day to be able to work with women Veterans and community partners, and facilitate shaping policies and procedures that improve services for women Veterans." Stated Estabrooks who was stationed in Kitzingen, Germany during her Army stint.

You can learn more about her role and mission when she joins us on Saturday, August 25th as one of the two women Veteran speakers at our next Military Heritage Day. She'll also be sharing one of her program products, "I Am Not Invisible", which features twenty Oregon women Veterans from around the state, as well as covering WWII to current service.

WWII Vet H. Jean Wojnowski is one of those featured. She joined the US Navy as a nurse immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Another featured Veteran, Rosy Marcelin-Macias, served in the United States Marine Corps during the end of the Gulf War. She also currently serves on the ODVA Advisory Committee.

Bringing it even closer to home, although not featured in the ODVA program, Capt. Sharon Armstrong, USCGR (Retired) will be our additional speaker on the 25th. She began her career in 1972 under the Coast Guard Reserve's "Direct Petty Officer Program", the only program offered by the military branches which sought women with no prior military experience. During her 31-year career, which included assignments in the Coast Guard's District 5, District 12, and our own District 13, she became the first woman in District 12 to receive a direct commission from the Inactive Duty ranks since WWII.

While you may not see any of these Oregonian's in an upcoming release from Hollywood, you can enjoy more about the careers and experiences of both women, as well as view the ODVA twenty-poster display about other women Vets of Oregon, when you join us at the Florence Municipal Airport on August 25th at 2:00 p.m.

You can learn more about military heritage by visiting the Museum's website at www.oregoncoastmilitarymuseum.com.