

Women's Army Corps

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The **Women's Army Corps (WAC)** was the women's branch of the US Army. It was created as an auxiliary unit, the **Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC)** on 15 May 1942 by Public Law 554,^[1] and converted to full status as the WAC in 1943. Its first director was Oveta Culp Hobby, a prominent society woman in Texas.^{[2][3]}

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WAC Air Controller by Dan V. Smith, 1943.

History

The WAAC organization was designed by numerous Army bureaus coordinated by Lt. Col. Gilman C. Mudgett, the first WAAC Pre-Planner. However, nearly all of his plans were discarded or greatly modified before going into operation because he expected a corps of only 11,000 women.^[4]

The WAAC was modeled after comparable British units, especially the ATS, which caught the attention of Chief of Staff George C. Marshall.^[5] In 1942, the first contingent of 800 members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps began basic training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. The women were fitted for uniforms, interviewed, assigned to companies and barracks and inoculated against disease during the first day.^[6]

A physical training manual was published by the War Department in July 1943, aimed at bringing the women recruits to top physical standards. One section of the manual satirized a notional recruit named "Josephine Jerk" who does not participate wholeheartedly: "Josephine Jerk is a limp number in every outfit who dives into her daily dozen with the crisp vitality of a damp mop."^[7] The manual begins by naming the responsibility of the women: "Your Job: To Replace Men. Be Ready To Take Over."^[7]

About 150,000^[8] American women served in the WAAC and WAC during World War II. They were the first women other than nurses to serve with the Army. While conservative opinion in the leadership of the Army and public opinion generally was initially opposed to women serving in uniform, the shortage of men necessitated a new policy. While most women served stateside, some went to various places around the World, including Europe, North Africa and New Guinea. For example, WACs landed on Normandy Beach just a few weeks after the initial invasion.^[9]

Many men ferociously opposed allowing women in uniform, warning their sisters and friends they would be seen as lesbians or prostitutes. They feared that if women became soldiers they would no longer serve in a masculine preserve and their masculinity would be devalued.^[10] Others feared being sent into combat units if women took over the safe jobs.^[11]

General Douglas MacArthur called the WACs "my best soldiers", adding that they worked harder, complained less, and were better disciplined than men.^[12] Many generals wanted more of them and proposed to draft women but it was realised that this "would provoke considerable public outcry and Congressional opposition" and the War Department declined to take such a drastic step.^[13] Those 150,000 women that did serve released the equivalent of 7 divisions of men for combat. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower said that "their contributions in efficiency, skill, spirit, and determination are immeasurable".^[14]

During the same time period, other branches of the U.S. military had similar women's units, including the Navy WAVES, the SPARS of the Coast Guard and the (civil) Women Airforce Service Pilots. The British Armed Forces also had similar units, including the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

The WAC as a branch was disbanded in 1978. Women serving as WACs at that time converted their branches to whatever Military Occupational Specialty they were working in. Since then, women in the U.S. Army have served in the same units as men, though they have only been allowed in or near combat situations since 1994 when Defense Secretary Les Aspin ordered the removal of "substantial risk of capture" from the list of grounds for excluding women from certain military units.

List of Directors

- Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby (1942–1945)
- Colonel Westray Battle Boyce (1945–1947)
- Colonel Mary A. Hallaren (1947–1953)
- Colonel Irene O. Galloway (1953–1957)
- Colonel Mary Louise Milligan Rasmuson (1957–1962)
- Colonel Emily C. Gorman (1962–1966)
- Brigadier General Elizabeth P. Hoisington (1966–1971)
- Brigadier General Mildred Inez Caroon Bailey (1971–1975)
- Brigadier General Mary E. Clarke (1975–1978)

Louisiana Register of State Lands Ellen Bryan Moore attained the rank of captain in the WACs and once recruited three hundred women at a single appeal to join the force.^[15]

Popular culture

- The 1954 film *Francis Joins the WACS* stars Francis the Talking Mule, who joins the Women's Army Corps.
- The 1945 film *Keep Your Powder Dry* features Lana Turner joining the WACs, starring with Agnes Moorehead while sporting uniforms designed by Hollywood designer Irene and hair styled by Sydney Guilaroff.
- The 1949 film *I Was a Male War Bride* depicts Cary Grant as a French officer who married an

American WAC, played by Ann Sheridan and their escapades as he attempts to emigrate to the United States under the auspices of the 1945 War Brides Act.

- The song "Surrender" by Cheap Trick is about a babyboomer child of a former member of the WAC who served in the Philippines.
- *Mare's War*, a novel by Tanita S. Davis, centers around an African-American girl who joins the WAC.
- On an episode of *The Looney Tunes Show*, Granny tells Daffy Duck a story where she served as a WAC and prevented the theft of the Eiffel Tower and numerous artworks from The Louvre.

See also

- Army Women's Museum
- Women in the Air Force (WAF)
- Air Transport Auxiliary

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- ↑ Moore, Brenda. (1996). *To Serve My Country, To Serve My Race*. New York: New York University Press.
- ↑ Treadwell 1954, pp. 28–30
- ↑ Meyer 1996, pp. 16–18
- ↑ Treadwell, pp. 26–28
- ↑ Bernard A. Cook, *Women and war: a historical encyclopedia from antiquity to the present* (2006) Volume 1 p. 242
- ↑ Treadwell & 1954 ch 3–4
- ↑ ^{*a*} ^{*b*} W. A. C. Field Manual Physical Training" (FM 35-20). War Department, 15 July 1943. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
- ↑ Bellafaire 1972, p. 2
- ↑ Treadwell 1954, pp. 387–388
- ↑ Campbell, ch 1
- ↑ Treadwell 1954, p. 184
- ↑ Treadwell 1954, p. 460
- ↑ Treadwell 1954, pp. 95–96
- ↑ Treadwell 1954, p. 408
- ↑ "Interview with Ellen Bryan Moore, (<http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/williams/abstracts/military/MooreE.htm>) T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, September–October 1995". <http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/williams/abstracts/military/MooreE.htm>.

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WACs assigned to the Eighth Air Force in England operate teletype machines. (DOD photograph)

WACs operate teletype machines during World War II.

Memoirs

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- Moore, Brenda L. (1996). *To Serve My Country, to Serve My Race: The Story of the Only African-American WACs Stationed Overseas during World War II*. New York University Press. ISBN 0814755879.
- Starbird, Ethel A. (2010). *When Women First Wore Army Shoes: A first-person account of service as a member of the Women's Army Corps during WWII*. iUniverse. ISBN 1450208932.

External links

- Women in the U.S. Army (<http://www.army.mil/women/>)
- Women in Army History (<http://www.history.army.mil/html/topics/women/index.html>) at the United States Army Center of Military History
- WAAC/WAC history and WWII women's uniforms in color (<http://www.blitzkriegbaby.de/>) – WWII US women's service organizations (WAC, WAVES, ANC, NNC, USMCWR, PHS, SPARS, ARC and WASP)
- Women Veterans Historical Collection (<http://library.uncg.edu/dp/wv/>) – digitized letters, diaries, photographs, uniforms, and oral histories from WACs
- Papers of Fran Smith Johnson, WAC, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (http://eisenhower.archives.gov/Research/Finding_Aids/J.html)

- The Slander Campaign (<http://www.gutenberg-e.org/pfau/chapter2.html>) book chapter by Ann Elizabeth Pfau
- WWII: Women in the Fight (<http://www.life.com/image/first/in-gallery/23030/wwii-women-in-the-fight>) – slideshow by *Life magazine*
- World War II uniform, Women's Army Air Force, in the Staten Island Historical Society Online Collections Database (<http://stateniland.pastperfect-online.com/00039cgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=89864E64-3BD1-43A2-A375-151340277977;type=101>)
- Oral history interview with Gladys Donovan, a WAC from 1943–1946 (<http://content.library.ccsu.edu/u?/VHP,5545>) from the Veterans History Project at Central Connecticut State University
- *The WAC: The Story of the WAC in the ETO* (http://www.lonesentry.com/gi_stories_booklets/wac/wac.html)

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