

History of Women Warrant Officers in the U. S. Army

Background

Research in this subject is difficult as few records and statistics are not available. However, there is evidence that the first appointments of women as warrant officers occurred during the latter period of World War II. Available records indicate that March 1944 was the date of initial accessions of women into the Warrant Officer Corps. Before then there existed a question as to whether or not women soldiers could be appointed warrant officers if they held positions which, for a man, carried the grade. Legislation concerning the Women's Army Corps (WAC) did not mention the matter, and on this basis The Judge Advocate General ruled that appointment of women was illegal because the law did not specify that it was legal. The question was brought to the War Department's attention by several major commanders who wished to appoint to warrant officer grade the women who were filling warrant officer positions. It was then that The Judge Advocate General was overruled. The Department of the Army G-1 held that such appointment was legal under the general authority to admit women to full army status, and the Chief of Staff upheld this opinion. At the end of World War II, 42 women were in the Warrant Officer Corps. but thereafter appointments virtually ceased. (*Reference: The Women's Army Corps, United States Army in World War II Special Studies, Office of the Chief of Military History, P. 577*)

The Early Years

In 1926, the first two female field clerks became the first female Warrants. They were *Jen Doble*, on duty at IX Area in San Francisco and *Olive Hoskins*, on duty at the VII Corps Area headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska. Both women then had about 20 years service and there were no more female warrants after they retired. Not until WWII did the Army again appoint women as warrants. [Source: "Encyclopedia of US Army Insignia and Uniforms" (Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1996) by Bill Emerson].

In January 1944, the appointment of women as Warrant Officers was authorized.

In March 1944, the first six (or seven) female Warrant Officers were appointed. Several were band leaders, but others were administrative specialists. One was *Nana Rae*, General Eisenhower's secretary. At the conclusion of World War II, there were 42 female Warrant Officers serving on active duty. *Elisabeth C. Smith* (WAC, 1944), was one of the early USAAF/USA Warrant Officers (1948). She retired in 1964 at grade CWO4.

1968-1975

The population of women warrant officers during this period ranged from 23 in 1968 to 46 in 1979. The women warrant officers of 1968 were assigned to the following branches: AG 8; MI: 9; MP: 2; QM: 2; and SC: 2: From 1968 to 1975 the quantity of women warrant officers remained stable throughout this period. These data reflect within the Warrant Officer Corps a symptom of change that is typical both of the Army at large and of society as a whole, i.e., expanding opportunity for employment of women. The following points highlight the experience of that decade:

Sociological Inhibition. About 50 percent of all warrant officer Military Occupational Specialties are of maintenance specialties which, historically, have not been attractive to women. Also, social conditioning frequently discouraged women from entering these specialties. Such conditioning resulted in informal constraints that not only prevented women from entering the "hard skill" enlisted occupations that feed many of the warrant officer specialties. This conditioning also tended to encourage their entry into traditional "soft skill" occupational areas such as administration, supply or personnel. For most of this period only 5 of the 14 warrant officer control branches accounted for the entire female population, predominantly in the following MOS: 711A-Personnel Technician (AG); 971A-Counterintelligence Technician (MI); 951A-Criminal Investigator (MP); 761A-Unit Supply Technician (QM); and 721A-Cryptographic Technician (SC).

Qualification Criteria. During this period, the most important prerequisites for appointment in most warrant officer specialties (other than aviation) were technical competence and supervisory experience. Because of this, the primary target of the warrant officer accession program was the active enlisted base at the noncommissioned officer grade level. Within the enlisted career programs, with "stovepiped" MOS tracks, it is at the SSG or SFC level that individuals first acquire supervisory experience which bridges the several MOS in a career field. Consequently, even if there had been a large female population in the lower grades, they would not have possessed the qualifications needed for a warrant officer appointment. The fact is that throughout this period, the total female enlisted population was small and the quantity of NCO personnel was a small fraction of the total (e.g., of the 26,328 enlisted women on active duty in mid-FY 1974, only 669 were in rank SSG, or 2.5 percent of the total).

Combining this with the fact that not all enlisted MOS are feeders for warrant officer specialties it can be seen that there were very few women in the zones from which warrant officers could be drawn. All these factors served to keep the female warrant officer numbers at a low level.

1975-1978

In August 1972, the Army approved a plan for expanding the role of women. Follow-on actions significantly increased the size of the enlisted base, however, with few exceptions, it still took 6-10 years to grow a qualified warrant officer appointee. Thus, the major benefits to the Warrant Officer Corps of enlisted female expansion were projected to be seen in the FY 78-82 time frame. An indication of these benefits was initially seen in the sharp rise in the population of women warrant officers which began in 1975 and resulted in the number of female warrant officers more than doubling by 1978. This rising population of female warrant officers was the result of three special factors:

Source of increase. Increases in the total number in women warrant officers was primarily attributable to opportunities made available to women in just two specialties, Aviation and Medical Corps. The Aviation Branch accessed 11 female warrant officers and the Medical Corps 8 in branches that previously had no female members. These two branches alone contributed 79 percent of the increase that occurred between 1975 and 1978.

In 1973, Aviation training for women was authorized based on an Army Chief of Staff decision. The women followed the same academic, flight, and physical training programs as the men except that push-ups were substituted for pull-ups required for males. Initially, women did not participate in the survival and POW exercises, but that practice was changed late in 1974. The women pilots were assigned to general support, noncombat units, where they evacuated medical patients and transported routine passengers such as inspection teams. The first female Warrant Officer candidate entered this training program in fiscal year 1974 and the first completed the training and was appointed as a Warrant Officer in fiscal year 1975. The first female warrant officer aviator was *Jennie A. Vallance*.

The Medical Corps increase resulted from an increase in the Physician's Assistant specialty, MOS 911A. This warrant officer specialty was established in FY 72. Appointment in this specialty required completion of a 2-year warrant officer candidate course, so the first output of warrant officers was not seen until FY 74. Because clinical medical experience was a prerequisite for entry into this program, the Army drew warrant officer candidates primarily from enlisted assets. Therefore, the enlisted female expansion did not contribute to the Medical Corps element. Instead, women already in the Army's medical specialties were given access to this previously unavailable career field opportunity for warrant officer appointment.

Expansion of Specialties. The second factor leading to the increase in the rising population of women warrant officers was the expansion of women into specialties previously excluded. Prior to 1975 only 36 percent of the warrant officer specialties (32 of 90) opened to women. With the lifting of many of these exclusions, 80 percent (72 of 90) warrant officer specialties were now open to women. Further evolution resulted with the revision of the warrant officer MOS structure, revised in 1977, which created a warrant officer MOS structure of 59 specialties of which 85 percent (50 of 59) were open to women. A later revision opened up 97 percent (57 of 59) of warrant officer specialties for the appointment of women warrant officers.

Nontraditional Specialties. The third factor leading to the increase in the rising population of women warrant officers was the appointment in nontraditional specialties. With the elimination of MOS exclusions, women received appointments in specialties which previously had zero female membership. Not only were more women applying for warrant officer appointments, but they were able to apply in a wider range of specialties than at any time in the past.

The 1990's and Beyond

In 1992, *Master Warrant Officer (MW4) Donna Foli*, then serving as Chief, Technical Warrant Officer Recruiting for the Army Reserve at the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, was the first female to be promoted to CW5.

In 1995, the woman warrant officer population has continued to attract high quality candidates from the enlisted female population on active duty and in the reserve forces. The female warrant officer population was 616 of the total active duty warrant officer strength of 12338. In the reserve forces the female warrant officer strength is 673 from a reserve forces warrant officer strength of 12857.

In March 2003 Three Female Army Warrant Officers were Featured in the National Media:

- *CW4 Concetta Hassan*, a CH-47 Chinook pilot, "Is very much the 60-year-old grandmother she appears to be, boasting about her family and looking forward to retirement" - see the USA Today story at www.usawoa.org/downloads/FemaleWOinCombat1.pdf. CW4 Hassan was also featured on the NBC Today Show during the week of March 17, 2003.
- *CWO Charisma Henzie*, also a CH-47 Chinook pilot - "Perched on her cot, Charisma Henzie rips open a box sent through military mail and pulls out a white stuffed cat. Press here, reads the instructions on the belly and she does. "Happy 26th Birthday!" croaks a baritone, a recording of her father's voice. "A cat for Kuwait!" - see the Washington Post Story at www.usawoa.org/downloads/FemaleWOinCombat2.pdf.
- *WO1 Laquitta Joseph*, a Maintenance Technician, "The first thing Warrant Officer Laquitta Joseph did the other day was find the private who inadvertently -- and foolishly -- had dirtied up her truck with a broken oil-leaking transmission differential." - see the Wall Street Journal story at www.usawoa.org/downloads/FemaleWOinCombat3.pdf.

On February 1, 2005, the Army Remembered Women Judge Advocate General Corps (JAGC) Pioneers - the ribbon was cut on a JAGC Exhibit at the Army Women's Museum at Fort Lee, VA. The exhibit includes a highlight on the career of *Chief Warrant Officer Five Sharon Swartworth* the first active Army CW5 and the first female Regimental Warrant Officer of the JAGC. She was killed in November 2003 when the Blackhawk helicopter she was riding in was shot down near Tikrit, Iraq.

Unlike both the enlisted and commissioned officer accession programs, which primarily draw from civilian markets, the warrant officer program relies heavily on the active Army enlisted base. Except for the aviation specialty, which is a "hands-on" function, prior military experience is an important requisite to warrant officer appointment and performance. Consequently, there has been little input to the warrant officer ranks directly from the civilian market except for the aviation candidate enlistment option. Therefore, the expansion of the female enlisted force on active duty and in the reserve components continues to provide a strong base from which female warrant officers can be drawn.

This is a living document which is updated as research progresses and events transpire.
Comments and additional historical data may be sent to the Foundation at wo-heritage@verizon.net.

[See Army Women's Museum at www.awm.lee.army.mil](http://www.awm.lee.army.mil).
[See also Related Resources and Websites at www.usawoa.org/WOHERITAGE/site-map.htm](http://www.usawoa.org/WOHERITAGE/site-map.htm).