

## **History of Women in the Military**

Each year the month of March is dedicated to women who served in the US Military. According to a 2016 Department of Defense report women comprise about 16% of our military. However, stories of women serving go back to the beginning of our nation. During the Revolutionary War, Mary Ludwig Hayes, also known as Molly Pitcher joined her husband when he enlisted as a gunner in the Continental Army. When her husband collapsed from the heat, Molly took over his role aiming and firing the cannon. Deborah Sampson enlisted in the Massachusetts Regiment as a man and served during the War. She fought The Iroquois League in New York where she was wounded and treated herself rather than having her gender discovered by doctors. After she died, her husband petitioned and receive a pension as survivor of a wounded Veteran. Anna Marie Lane, another woman who served during the Revolutionary War was granted an annual pension from the Virginia Assembly of \$100 for performing extraordinary military services and received a severe wound at the Battle of Germantown.

During the Civil War, a 19-year-old Irish immigrant named Albert Cashier enlisted in the Illinois Infantry in 1862 and served until 1865. Cashier took part in more than 40 skirmishes and battles. Following the War, Cashier was identified as Jennie Hodges and spent the final years of her life in the Soldiers Home in Illinois, still appearing to be a man. When her gender was discovered, she was moved to an insane asylum and forced to wear women's clothing. She, however, was buried in her Civil War uniform. Sarah Wakerman enlisted as Lyons Wakerman and served for two years until she died in 1864 and was buried as Pvt Lyons Wakerman. There are many other stories of women enlisting as men during our military history.

Officially the first woman to serve in the Marine Corps was Opha May Johnson who enlisted in August 1918, a couple years before women were allowed to vote. She served in a clerical role until the end of WWI. She died at the Mount Alto Veterans Hospital in D.C. in 1955. Loretta Perfectus Walsh became the first official enlisted woman in the Navy when she joined in 1917. She served in the Naval Reserve obtaining the rank of chief petty officer. Myrtle Hazard became the first woman to serve in the Coast Guard as an electrician in 1918. The Army Air Corps, which later became the Air Force had its first woman to serve in Esther McGowin Blake in 1944 because her two sons were serving in WWII. Her service continued until 1954.

In 1942 the country was in dire need of pilots, so the Woman Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program was started. In late 1942, 28 women became the first female squadron whose duties were to ferry aircraft, tow gunnery targets and flight-test aircraft following repairs. The WASP program was finally granted military status in 1977 under a law signed by President Carter.