

U.S. SERVICEWOMEN IN THE VIETNAM WAR

PART 1 OF 3



The first five enlisted Women in the Air Force (WAF) and the fourth WAF officer to be assigned to Vietnam arrive at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam. Left to right: two unidentified U.S. Air Force personnel, Lieutenant Colonel June H. Hilton, Airman First Class Carol J. Hornick, Airman First Class Rita M. Pitcock, Staff Sergeant Barbara J. Snaveley, Airman First Class Shirley J. Brown, and Airman First Class Eva M. Nordstrom. June 1967, U.S. Air Force photo, National Archives.

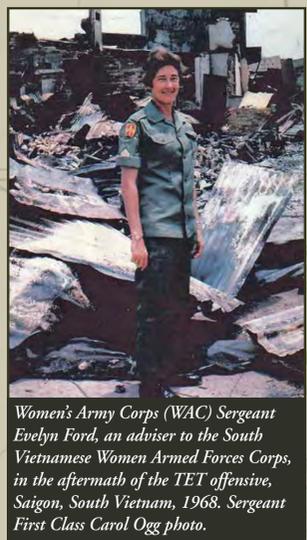


Women's Army Corps (WAC) Staff Sergeant Carol A. Ogg, a member of the U.S. Army 509th Radio Research Group, and Specialist Fifth Class Jo Wilson in front of the Medford Bachelor Enlisted Quarters, Saigon, South Vietnam, 1970. Sergeant First Class Carol Ogg photo.



Women in the Air Force (WAF) First Lieutenant Camilla L. Wagner, a member of the 377th Supply Squadron and the only WAF supply officer in Vietnam, operates the UNIVAC 1050-II computer, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam, February 1968. U.S. Air Force photo, National Archives.

Women in the United States military during the Vietnam War held diverse and important roles supporting the war mission. Many servicewomen stationed in the combat zone served with distinction.



Women's Army Corps (WAC) Sergeant Evelyn Ford, an adviser to the South Vietnamese Women Armed Forces Corps, in the aftermath of the TET offensive, Saigon, South Vietnam, 1968. Sergeant First Class Carol Ogg photo.

Women line officers, staff officers, and enlisted personnel performed a range of military occupational specialties in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. All of the women who served in Vietnam volunteered for military service. More volunteered to serve in Vietnam than there were available positions. Military leaders, senior women line officers included, were reluctant to send women to Vietnam.

Military women were not permitted or trained to carry weapons at the time, though they were regularly under threat of enemy attack while carrying out their duties. On bases they endured hardships like their male counterparts, and were often

under fire from rockets and mortars. Women served in headquarters, staff assignments, operations groups, and information offices. They performed in a variety of clerical, intelligence, medical specialist, and personnel positions. With their sister servicewomen in the continental United States (CONUS), Hawaii, Japan, Korea, Okinawa, Thailand, and the Philippines, they demonstrated extraordinary professionalism and belief in the importance of service during wartime.

In March 1962, Major Anne Marie Doering, a Women's Army Corps (WAC) plans officer, became the first woman staff officer assigned to Vietnam as a member of the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group in Saigon. Major Doering had been born in Vietnam and spoke Vietnamese and French fluently. In January 1965, Major Kathleen I. Wilkes and Sergeant First Class Betty L. Adams became the first two U.S. WAC advisers to the newly formed Republic of Vietnam Women's Armed Forces Corps (WAFC). With their leadership and command experience they assisted the WAFC Director and staff in

developing systems for recruiting, training, and assigning enlisted South Vietnamese WAFC personnel and officer candidates.

From 1965 on, WAC officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted women served in a variety of capacities at Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) headquarters, support commands, and United States Army, Vietnam (USARV) headquarters. Their roles included administration, finance, intelligence, logistics, plans and training, and legal and civil affairs occupation specialties. In September 1966, the WAC Detachment, Vietnam, led by Captain Peggy E. Ready and First Sergeant Marion C. Crawford was established at USARV headquarters, Saigon. The unit had an average strength of 90 enlisted women, mostly clerk typists and stenographers. It relocated with the command to Long Binh Post in 1967. Approximately 700 WAC personnel served in Vietnam during the war.



Aerial view of Tan Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam. This air base was utilized by Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps units throughout the Vietnam War. October 1972, U.S. Air Force photo, National Archives.

In June 1967, Lieutenant Colonel June H. Hilton and the first contingent of Air Force women arrived in Saigon for duty at MACV headquarters. They were followed shortly by Air Force servicewomen of the 7th Air Force headquarters, assigned to Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, and Cam Ranh Air Bases and several air bases in Thailand. Examples of Air Force servicewomen assignments in Vietnam, as described by

Major General Jeanne M. Holm: "Women officers served primarily in noncombat fields such as supply, aircraft maintenance, public affairs, personnel, intelligence, photo interpretation, meteorology, and administration. Enlisted Air Force women served primarily in administrative, clerical, personnel, data processing, and supply occupations."

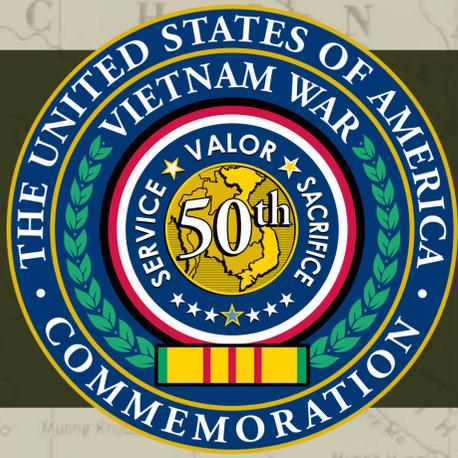
Air Force women throughout CONUS and the Far East were essential to air operations in the Vietnam War. Women served in Strategic Air Command supporting bomber units. They served in Military Airlift Command preparing personnel, supplies, ammunition, and equipment for airlift to Vietnam. Others served in the Air Force Communications Service that provided global communication links critical during every phase of the war. An estimated 144 line officers and 95 enlisted women of the U.S. Air Force served in Vietnam.



Women in the Air Force (WAF) Captain Mary Marsh advises her Vietnamese counterparts, Lieutenant Do Thi Dong-Thao (foreground), Staff Sergeant Ly Thi Oanh (top) and Staff Sergeant Luc Thi Huc, June 1968. Captain Marsh is the first WAF assigned to the Air Force Advisory Group and functions in a dual role—personnel adviser to the Vietnamese Air Force and adviser to the Vietnamese Women's Armed Forces Corps. U.S. Air Force photo, National Archives.

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PART 2 OF 3



Captain Nancy J. Jurgevich assumes command of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) Detachment, Vietnam, Long Binh, South Vietnam, October 16, 1968. Left to right: an unidentified WAC servicewoman, First Sergeant Katherine Herney receiving the WAC Detachment guidon, Captain Joanne P. Murphy, Commanding Officer (outgoing) and Captain Jurgevich. Lieutenant Colonel Nancy Jurgevich photo.



Commander Elizabeth Barrett was the highest-ranking woman naval line officer to serve in South Vietnam, and the first woman naval line officer to hold a command in a combat zone, serving as Commanding Officer of the Naval Advisory Group's 450 enlisted men at Saigon from November 1972 to March 1973. U.S. Navy photo.



Woman Marine Staff Sergeant Ermelinda Salazar was nominated for the 1970 Unsung Heroine Award presented annually by the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Staff Sergeant Ermelinda Salazar, determined to help the children of the St. Vincent de Paul Orphanage in Saigon, South Vietnam, in her off-duty hours, holds two of the youngsters, June 1970. U.S. Marine Corps photo, National Archives.

Women line officers, staff officers, and enlisted personnel performed a range of military occupational specialties in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. All of the women who served in Vietnam volunteered for military service.

Lieutenant Elizabeth G. Wylie was the first female line officer in the Navy selected to serve in Vietnam. In June 1967, she arrived in Saigon and was assigned to the Command Information Center, Naval Forces Command. She was responsible for reports, including briefings to visiting elected officials, dignitaries, and journalists. Seven additional Navy women line officers were assigned to Vietnam between 1968 and 1973. Five officers were assigned to the Naval Forces Command staff in Saigon and two served at the Naval Support Activity in Cam Ranh Bay.



Women's Army Corps (WAC) Detachment, Vietnam, cadre at Bien Hoa Airport on the occasion of the first commanding officer's departure from South Vietnam, October 1967. Front row, left to right, Private First Class Patricia C. Pewitt and Specialist Fourth Class Rhynell M. Stoabs. Back row, left to right, Staff Sergeant Edith L. Efferson, Sergeant First Class Betty J. Benson, Captain Joanne P. Murphy, (second Commanding Officer WAC Detachment, Vietnam, 1967-1968), Captain Peggy E. Ready (first Commanding Officer WAC Detachment, Vietnam, 1966-1967), and First Sergeant Marion C. Crawford. Vietnam Women Veterans, Incorporated photo.



Master Sergeant Barbara J. Dulinsky, who volunteered for duty in South Vietnam, became the first Woman Marine ordered to a combat zone when she reported to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) in Saigon on March 18, 1967. Women's Memorial Foundation Collection.

Another important step for women in the U.S. Navy occurred during the Vietnam War era outside the theater of operations. In September 1972, two women line officers and 32 enlisted women were selected for a yearlong pilot program serving aboard the hospital ship USS *Sanctuary* as members of its crew. Lieutenant Junior Grade Ann Kerr served as an administrative assistant, and Ensign Rosemary Nelson was assigned as a supply officer. Their service qualified them to be Officers of the Deck. The enlisted women performed their duties exceptionally in deck, administration, operations, and supply departments. Additional enlisted women were assigned to the ship's hospital staff.

Commander Elizabeth Barrett was the highest ranking female naval line officer to serve in Vietnam. Arriving in Saigon in January 1972, she became the Navy's first woman officer to hold a command in a combat zone. She commanded the Naval Advisory Group from November 1972 to March 1973, supervising several hundred personnel.

The first Woman Marine assigned to Vietnam was Master Sergeant Barbara J. Dulinsky. She arrived in March 1967 and was stationed at MACV combat operations center in Saigon. Between 1967 and 1973, eight officers and 28 enlisted Women Marines served in Vietnam. They were assigned to administrative billets within MACV headquarters

in Saigon. Many worked with the Marine Corps Personnel Section on the staff of the Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam. The section provided administrative support to Marines stationed throughout the combat zone. Other Women Marines, such as Lieutenant Colonels Ruth J. O'Holleran and Ruth F. Reinholz, and Staff Sergeant Ermelinda Salazar, served with the Military History Branch, Secretary, Joint Staff, MACV.

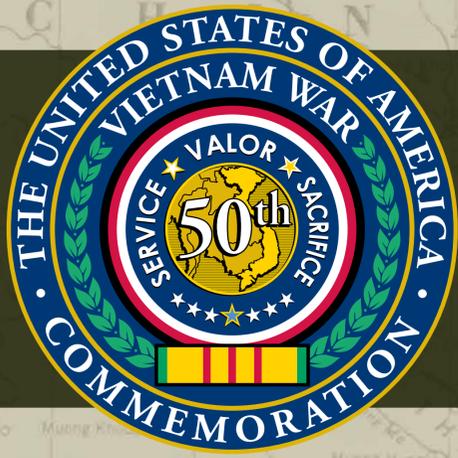
There are numerous instances of military servicewomen volunteering during their off-duty time to help the local South Vietnamese civilian population. An excellent example is Woman Marine Staff Sergeant Ermelinda Salazar. In 1970 she was recognized for her leadership and tireless work on behalf of Vietnamese orphans at the St. Vincent dePaul orphanage in Saigon. On her days off, she volunteered at the orphanage, facilitated quality care by initiating a donation drive, and motivated other Marines to volunteer at the facility. She was nominated for the 1970 Unsung Heroine Award sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary. In the same year she was awarded the Vietnamese Service Medal by the Republic of Vietnam for her philanthropic work. Staff Sergeant Salazar was also awarded the Joint Service Commendation Medal for performance of her duties while serving with the Military History Branch.



Women's Army Corps (WAC) Specialist Fifth Class Marlene A. Bowen, of the U.S. Army 1st Aviation Brigade, comforts a young child at the Tan Mai Orphanage, Long Binh, South Vietnam, November 1971. Master Sergeant Marlene A. Bowen-Grissett photo. Vietnam Women Veterans, Incorporated.

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PART 3 OF 3



Women's Army Corps (WAC) Director Colonel Elizabeth P. Hoisington meets cadre members of the WAC Detachment, Long Binh, South Vietnam, October 1967. Left to right, Specialist Fourth Class Rhynell M. Stroabs, Sergeant First Class Betty J. Benson (Acting First Sergeant), Colonel Hoisington, Captain Peggy E. Ready, Staff Sergeant Edith L. Efferson, and Private First Class Patricia C. Pewitt. U.S. Army photo.



First Sergeant Marion C. Crawford, Women's Army Corps (WAC) Detachment, Vietnam, stands retreat with the WAC Drill Team, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon, South Vietnam, January 1967. U.S. Army photo.



Carmen P. Marshall is promoted to Lieutenant, U.S. Navy Medical Service Corps, while serving as a laboratory officer aboard the USS Repose on the South China Sea, off the coast of South Vietnam, January 1968. Left to right, Captain James M. Campbell, U.S. Navy, Commander, USS Repose, Lieutenant Marshall, and Captain Herbert Markowitz, U.S. Navy Medical Corps, Commander, Naval Hospital, USS Repose. Carmen P. (Marshall) Adams photo.

Many servicewomen were given meritorious service awards, wartime citations, and decorations for their work during the Vietnam War.

At least four servicewomen were awarded the Purple Heart for injuries sustained while serving in Vietnam: Air Force Captains Mariana Grant and Camilla Wagner, Army First Lieutenant Sharon Lane, who died from shrapnel wounds, and Army Specialist Fifth Class Sheron Green. In 1970, Army Specialist Fifth Class Karen Offutt rescued Vietnamese adults and children from a fire near her Tan Son Nhut quarters at the risk of her own life. A recommendation for the Soldier's Medal was downgraded to a Certificate of Achievement; reexamination of the circumstances in 2001 resulted in the belated award of the Soldier's Medal. Chief Warrant Officer Three Doris "Lucki" Allen, who served three tours in Vietnam from 1967 to 1970, served first as a Specialist Seventh Class senior intelligence analyst, Army Operations Center, Long Binh, South Vietnam. In a report 50,000 Chinese, she informed her supervisors about a large number of Chinese troops amassing 30 days before the January 1968 Tet Offensive. "Unfortunately," she stated, "the report fell on deaf ears." In her second tour, she held the position of Supervisor, Security Division, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, Security, Plans, and Operations, Headquarters, 1st Logistical Command, South Vietnam. In 1970, Specialist Seventh Class Allen was appointed to Warrant Officer and assigned as the Officer in Charge of the Translation Branch, Combined Document Exploitation Center, Saigon, South Vietnam. Her extraordinary contributions, leadership, and selfless service in each Vietnam assignment earned her the Bronze Star with 2 Oak Leaf clusters. In 2009, Chief Warrant Officer Three Allen was inducted into the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame.



Women's Army Corps (WAC) Specialist Seventh Class Doris "Lucki" Allen served as a senior intelligence analyst in Long Binh and Saigon, South Vietnam, from 1967 to 1970. Women's Memorial Foundation Collection.

The courage and ability American servicewomen demonstrated before and during the Vietnam War helped convince U.S. leaders to improve women's standing in the military. Prior to the war, women had limited opportunities for advancement to higher ranks. In November 1967, Congress passed Public Law 90-130, which eliminated rank ceilings for women and lifted the two percent restriction on the number of women



Woman Marine Sergeant Doris L. Denton receives the Joint Service Commendation Medal from Major General Richard F. Shaffer, Assistant Chief of Staff, Strategic Plans and Policy, Saigon, South Vietnam, March 5, 1969. First Sergeant Doris Denton photo.

line officers and enlisted personnel who could serve. Elizabeth P. Hoisington, Women's Army Corps (WAC) Director, was promoted to brigadier general on June 11, 1970.* On July 16, 1971, Jeanne M. Holm was promoted to brigadier general, the first Air Force woman to achieve that rank. She became the first woman in the U.S. Armed Forces to attain the rank of major general on June 1, 1973. After the Vietnam War, Fran McKee became the first Navy woman line officer to be promoted to the rank of rear admiral (lower half) on June 1, 1976. Nearly two years later, on May 11, 1978, the Marine Corps appointed Margaret A. Brewer to brigadier general.

As a result of personnel shortages, the important contributions of military women during the Vietnam War, and the transition to an all-volunteer force, more career fields and educational and leadership opportunities became available to servicewomen. Women began serving in previously restricted combat-related areas aboard surface warfare ships and in aircraft as pilots and navigators. Military accession and personnel policies regarding women also changed which opened the door for future educational and leadership opportunities. Women obtained the right to join reserve officer training programs and receive appointments to the service academies. They were also allowed to remain in the military after becoming pregnant.



Flowers and mementos left at the Vietnam Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C. on Veterans Day, 2010. Photograph by Fred W. Baker III, Department of Defense.

Dedicated in 1993, the Vietnam Women's Memorial, located on the National Mall, Washington, D.C., serves as a lasting tribute to the servicewomen of the Vietnam War. A short distance across the Potomac River stands the Women In Military Service For America Memorial. Dedicated in 1997 at the gateway to Arlington National Cemetery, this memorial highlights the service, sacrifice, and valor of American military women who served not only during the Vietnam War, but throughout American history.



Retired Air Force Brigadier General Wilma L. Vaught, Vietnam War veteran and president of the Women's Memorial Foundation, presents remarks at the Women In Military Service For America Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery, May 22, 2013. Photograph by Corporal Christopher P. Baines, U.S. Marine Corps.

References can be found on The United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration website <http://www.vietnamwar50th.com/education/>.

*Military nurses were promoted to general/flag rank in the early 1970's.

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