

# Diversity

## Women's Roles in the 21st Century United States Military

Many demographers predict we are rapidly approaching a manpower crisis stemming from an aging workforce followed by a smaller generation. More and more companies are looking to new sources of talent, especially for positions requiring a technical education and background.

Undoubtedly one potential pool for this talent is our female population. While the past 50 years have seen more women enter the workforce, technical fields like engineering are still only seeing 20-25% of their college graduates coming from the female population. Many universities and colleges are trying to raise their female enrollment into these technical programs and this will certainly help. But a fact that is surprising to most people is that the US Military is another great pool to find educated and talented female candidates.

There have been over 2 million women who have served in the Armed Forces. Margaret Corbin was the first woman awarded a disability pension by Congress for her efforts during the American Revolution. There are recorded stories of women disguising as men and fighting on the front lines during the Civil War, not to mention roles they filled as spies and nurses. In the early 1900's the Army and Navy Nurse Corps were established and have been an integral part of the military every since. In WWII over 400 American military women were killed and close to 100 were held prisoners. Seven women have their names on the Vietnam Memorial for their ultimate sacrifices during that conflict. Over 40,000 women served in the first Gulf War, and almost 10% of our current forces in Afghanistan and Iraq are women.

Females make up 15% of the Army and Navy, while the Air Force has females occupying 20% of their total numbers. Even the US Marine Corps has close to 10% of its force filled by women. In total, there are over a quarter of a million females in the US Armed Forces. The United States Service Academies play a large roll in producing some of the military's finest female talent with over 10% of their graduating classes comprised of women.

While the numbers and history are probably larger than most would have surmised, the roles they serve in today's military are even more of an eye-opener. Women serve an ever-increasing role in the military, and as of the early 1990's there aren't many roles in the military that women are not currently filling. The number of occupations within each branch of the Armed Forces that are open to women clearly illustrates this fact:

- 99% of the US Air Force occupations.
- 94% of the US Navy.
- 92% of the US Marine Corps
- 91% of the US Army

No longer is Health Care the only place you'll find women in the military. 35% of Active Duty women are in the health care field. But many of the other 65% find themselves in operational fields such as Engineering and Maintenance (11%), Supply and Logistics (11%) and Tactical operations (10%). In these fields they work in such environments as:

- Shipboard (nuclear and non-nuclear) engineering officers
- Warehousing and transportation
- Mechanical, electrical, and aerospace engineering
- Civil Engineering and construction
- Aviators
- Aviation, heavy equipment, electronics, and facility maintenance
- Information Technology and telecommunications
- Personnel and finance

The US Military has always been a place where women made large contributions. However, since the opening of more educational institutions and career fields to women, today's military has become an excellent training bed and talent resource for both our future military and civilian workplaces.