



VBA TODAY

V E T E R A N S B E N E F I T S A D M I N I S T R A T I O N

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

Women have always served in the U.S. military, but only recently have they been recognized for their service to their country in a meaningful way. Over the years, history books have given a perfunctory nod to the likes of Molly Pitcher and Clara Barton, but never the recognition women deserved. With approximately 1.8 million women Veterans in the U.S. today, that is finally changing.

Early in our country's history, women were confined to roles that were deemed suitable for women: nursing, cooking, laundering. More adventurous women had to be creative, as the numerous accounts of women disguising themselves as men to join the military attest. In one instance, Elizabeth Newcom enlisted in an infantry unit, and marched 600 miles from Missouri to Pueblo, Colorado before being discovered and discharged. Women in disguise served on both sides during the Civil War, and Cathay Williams, an African-American woman, served with the Buffalo Soldiers under the name of William Cathay from 1866 to 1868, when it was discovered that she was female and subsequently discharged.

The most widely held position by women in the military was that of nurse, though nurses were either volunteers or contract employees of the military. It was not until 1901 that the Army established the Army Nurse Corps, followed by the Navy in 1908.



Later, in 1920, military nurses were granted the status of officer, though the ranks only included second lieutenant to major. Nursing was clearly viewed

as women's work, as is illustrated in the fact that men could not serve as nurses in the Army or Air Force until 1955: the Navy did not allow male nurses until 1965.

The onset of World War I brought with it an expansion of women's roles in the military. Nursing remained the largest field for women in the military, but for the first time women filled clerk positions, freeing

men for duty on the front lines. The big break for women, however, came on the heels of World War II. The Army created the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs) in 1942, only to be replaced with the Women's Army Corps (WACs) in 1943. The Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) was created to assist with stateside missions, and the Navy created the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). The Marine Corps established the Marine Corps Women Reserves in 1942, and even the Coast Guard recruited women for their reserve corps, known as the SPARS, their motto being Semper Paratus – Always Ready. SPARS were restricted to serving in stateside assignments. In all, over 400,000 women served at home and overseas, the majority of which were in non-nursing jobs.

The end of WWII meant the majority of women who joined the workforce to support the war effort found themselves unceremoniously returned to the "traditional" role of homemaker. The women who remained in the military managed to hold on to most

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of their previous gains, but were still restricted to the nursing, clerical and supply fields. The next big break for women in the military would not come until 1976, during the height of the Women's Movement, with the opening of the service academies to female recruits. The military glass ceiling was finally within reach. As women rose within the ranks, assuming positions of leadership previously unavailable to them, greater opportunities in more diverse areas were finally attainable.



Mrs. Nancy Harkness Love, Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron

No longer confined to the roles typically viewed as "women's work," today's female servicemember has career options her predecessors never dreamed possible. Women warriors have stepped up to the plate, serving as pilots, astronauts and aboard ship, and the newest field opened to them in 2010, serving on submarines. They have proven time and time again that they have the wherewithal to serve on equal footing with their male counterparts. They are a force to be reckoned with.

POST WWII WOMEN IN THE MILITARY TIMELINE

Military Branch	Women's Corps	Year
Air Force	Air Force Nurse Corps Established	1949
Army/Air Force	Men accepted into the Army and Air Force Nursing Corps	1955
Navy	Men accepted on the Navy Nursing Corps	1965
Air Force	Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps opens to women	1971
Army/Navy	Reserve Officer Training Corps opens to women	1972
All Branches	Women admitted to service academies	1976
Navy	The law banning women from serving aboard ships is ruled unconstitutional, opening new assignments for women in the Navy.	1978
Army	WAC disestablished, women are integrated into the Regular Army	1978
Air Force	First woman selected for Test Pilot School	1982
Congressional Act	Congress repeals laws banning women from flying in combat.	1991
Congressional Act	Congress repeals the law banning women from duty on combat ships.	1993
Army	First woman service secretary in the history of the armed forces is appointed.	1993
Army National Guard	First woman in history is awarded the Silver Star for combat action.	2005

WOMEN VETERANS TRANSITIONING INTO VA CAREERS

Women Veterans achieved success in the military with opportunities to advance and hold leadership positions. However, transitioning into a successful civilian career may pose difficulty for some women Veterans. Women Veterans are encouraged to assess their military skills and how that experience translates into skill sets sought in the civilian workplace.

Seeking out employers who have experience with the military community is another avenue worth pursuing when transitioning to civilian life. The De-

plined and adaptable; all qualities cultivated in the military environment. And, because the VA's mission is to care for Veterans, having a military background gives women Veterans an edge in understanding the concerns of the Veteran community and how to best address those concerns in a caring and compassionate manner. As more women continue to serve in the military, the need for post-military employment opportunities will increase, and the Department of Veteran Affairs is working to address those needs.



Women Veteran employees of the Benefits Assistance Service (BAS)

partment of Veteran Affairs (VA) provides excellent opportunities for women Veterans in a variety of professional fields. A January 2011 report from the Office of Human Resources indicates Veterans make up 30 percent of VA's female workforce. Women Veterans hold positions at all levels of the Department, from the anonymous entry-level cleric to the Honorable L. Tammy Duckworth, Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs.

Like most employers, VA is looking for potential employees who are creative, innovative, disci-

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TeleBenefits-A Window of Opportunity for Rural Veterans Benefits Counseling

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Denver Regional Office is piloting a TeleBenefits program in cooperation with the Grand Junction VA Medical Center. This program connects rural Veterans with live Veteran Benefit Counselors. TeleBenefits allows rural Veterans served by TeleHealth Clinics in Craig, Montrose, Glenwood Springs, and Grand Junction, Colorado to speak face-to-face with a Veterans Benefits Counselor via a secure video conferencing system. The TeleBenefits system is exactly the same as the one used for providing health care to rural Veterans. Many patients who use the TeleHealth system say that it is like meeting with their provider through a window.

The system uses high-definition cameras so Veterans can speak directly with a Veteran Benefits Counselor in Denver and show any documentation they need to share with VA. If a Veteran is hearing impaired, ear-phones enables him/her to communicate with the counselor. This program allows many Veterans avoid the expense of making a trip to Denver and gives counselors the opportunity to meet with Veterans when clarification on an existing claim is needed. TeleBenefits went live on February 1, 2011. Brianna Brown, Air Force Veteran from Baggs, Wyoming, was the first to experience the TeleBenefits program. As a Veteran patient at the Craig Clinic, she has used the TeleHealth program before, and knows the benefits of being live with a service provider. "I do like the system. It is more personal than a phone call or the Internet. It's nice to put a face to a name."



The most common questions VA representatives are asked include eligibility for VA benefits such as service connected disability claims, pension, survivor's benefits, burial benefits, guaranteed VA home loans, specially adapted housing and automobile grants, vocational rehabilitation and employment programs, and Veterans' education programs.

Currently, there are 42,000 Veterans living on the Western Slope, nearly 12,500 of them are registered for care with the Grand Junction VA Medical Center. Up to 8,000 of the remaining Veterans are eligible for health care and other benefits but have not accessed them.

Veterans interested in participating in the TeleBenefits program can call the participating clinic or medical center to make an appointment.



Clinic	Address	Point of Contact	Phone Number	e-Mail Address
C r a i g	785 Russell St Suite 400 Craig, CO 81625	April Branstetter	970-824-6721	april.branstetter@va.gov
G l e n - w o o d S p r i n g s	2425 S Grand Ave Glenwood Springs, CO 81601	Molli Deines	970-945-1007	molli.deines@va.gov
M o n - t r o s e	4 Hillcrest Plaza Way Montrose, CO 81401	Krista Thompson	970-249-7791	krista.thompson@va.gov
G r a n d J u n c - t i o n	2121 North Avenue Grand Junction CO 81507	Elaine Taylor	970-242-0731 x 2555	mary.taylor5@va.gov

Roanoke Regional Loan Center Ride-Along Program Brings Employees and Veterans Face to Face

Ask any employee in VA what they like most about their job, and the response you'll get is "it's an opportunity to serve those who have served their country." But, as the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) relies more and more on automation to provide benefits as quickly and accurately as possible, VBA employees are finding themselves with fewer opportunities to actually interact with the Veterans they serve. One example is the work done by the Loan Guaranty Division, which has evolved over the years into one of mostly program oversight. This change has resulted in Loan Guaranty employees, except for Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Agents, having less face-to-face contact with Veterans.

However, a new program, developed this past October at the Roanoke Regional Loan Center, is changing that. In an effort to bring more VA employees in direct contact with the Veterans they serve, the Ride-Along Program allows employees the opportunity to ride along with Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Agents when they visit Veterans. Employees are offered the chance to meet Veterans in their environment and see first hand the challenges and unique situations that Veterans live with everyday.

Mark Campbell, a Senior Loan Specialist, rode along with SAH Agent, Kevin Diomedi, on one of his inspections to a Veteran's home. Mark reported, "The visit with the Veteran and his wife was very heart warming and gratifying. It was

great to hear the thanks and appreciation from the Veteran and his family for increasing the quality and comfort of their lives."

Vickie Kibler, a Senior Loan Specialist, rode along with SAH Agent, Brent Johnson to make an inspection of Veteran, Harold B. Mitchell's property. The modifications to the home have made a big difference in this Veteran's life. Mr. Mitchell can now easily access all rooms in his home as well as the yard around the home. The contractor who performed the work even built a sunroom at no additional charge. Vicky summarized her ride along as "...very humbling. The SAH program, along with all the other VA benefits offered to our Veterans, can never repay the cost they paid for our freedom and it made me proud to know that we can really make a difference in the life of a Veteran."

Congress first approved Specially Adapted Housing Grants on June 19, 1948 to allow disabled veterans the opportunity to live independently. The Roanoke Regional Loan Center processed 108

Specially Adapted Housing Grants for a total of \$5,153,420 during fiscal year 2010. More information on the Specially Adapted Housing Program can be found at www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/sah.asp.



Vickie Kibler, Senior Loan Specialist, Brent Johnson, SAH Agent and Harold B. Mitchell at Mr. Mitchell's house.

“WHO’S WHO” PROGRAM RECOGNIZES TOP PERFORMING VBA EMPLOYEES

During fiscal year (FY) 2010, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) launched the national “Who’s Who” Program to recognize outstanding Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs) and Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) nationwide. The program is part of VA’s Claims Transformation Initiative, a series of process, performance, and technology-centered improvements designed to “break the back of the claims backlog” and process veteran claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy by 2015.

Consideration for Who’s Who recognition is given to RVSRs and VSRs who spend at least 80 percent of their time processing veterans’ claims and meet or exceed established performance standards with at least 95 percent accuracy. A maximum of 25 VBA top-performing RVSRs and VSRs in the Veterans Service Centers and five top-performing RVSRs and VSRs at the Pension Management Centers are recognized each quarter. Final selections are those employees who are shown to be the highest, most accurate producers. Supporting data is extracted from VA’s Automated Standardized Performance Elements Nationwide System and confirmed by area and regional offices.

The program began in the third quarter of FY10. Mike Walcoff, the Acting Under Secretary for Benefits, acknowledged the commitment shown by the first group chosen for VBA’s Who’s Who. “We congratulate these Who’s Who winners for their dedication and service to our Nation’s Veterans. The high standards these employees attained are commendable and essential to the transformation of VBA.”

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For FY 2011, in addition to quarterly recognition, VBA will also select annually the RVSRs and VSRs who are the top “Who’s Who” performers for the entire fiscal year in the Eastern, Southern, Central, and Western Areas. The top performing RVSR and VSR from each area, as well as from the Pension Management Centers, will be invited to headquarters in Washington, DC to receive an annual award of \$1,000 each and special recognition from the Under Secretary for Benefits.

VBA Today is an official publication of the Veterans Benefits Administration. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent that of the Veterans Benefits Administration

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