



The Enlisted Perspective

By CMSAF Rodney J. McKinley

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Women's History Month

Women have had a long and proud heritage of military service to our nation. Their distinguished lineage in the Air Force extends from the members who served in the Army Air Corps during World War II to today's Airmen who perform with distinction across our great Air Force

The Women in the Air Force—WAF—was established by President Harry S. Truman in 1948, shortly after our Air Force became a separate service. WAF were the first to serve as active duty Airmen and worked in a variety of career fields, but most were concentrated in the clerical and medical specialties. The first WAF was Staff Sergeant Esther Blake. She had already served with distinction since 1944, and on July 8, 1948, became the first female to enlist in the regular Air Force. She remained on active-duty until 1954.

When I enlisted in 1974, WAF Airmen were still in service. They lived in separate facilities, but worked alongside men just like any other Airmen. As all Airmen do, their innovativeness and devotion to duty served to make our Air Force stronger. I was pleased when, in 1976, women were recruited into the military using the same standards as men.

Today, women make up nearly 20% of our Air Force, and are integral to every facet of operations. These Airmen are performing valiantly in military operations around the globe. They are leading convoys through the IED-infested roads of Iraq and Afghanistan, and flying tactical aerial airlift as well as combat attack missions, to name but a few of their critical roles. They serve in key leadership positions at every level – civilian, officer, and enlisted. These Airmen perform with steadfast dedication in every task set before them, and bring a dimension to our Air Force that we could not function without.

I am proud of all our Airmen, and I am especially thankful we have set this time aside to recognize and honor the contributions of the women who serve our Air Force. Their service and sacrifice over the years have been a great example to the military and the American public. I am grateful that our Air Force is a service where all Airmen stand shoulder-to-shoulder as they accomplish our important mission.



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