

## Twenty-five years ago: "Activate your Rolodexes"

This summer, a landmark date is approaching that could slide by with little fanfare if we do not take the time to recognize it. Twenty-five years ago, on July 31, 1991, Congress passed a provision to remove the restrictions on women flying Navy/Marine Corps and Air Force aircraft in combat. The Army did not have these statutory restrictions, only policy. Thanks to some key people who orchestrated the activities in support of this change on Capitol Hill, women have fulfilled roles in military aviation that I never thought would come to pass in my lifetime. In the twenty-five years since that momentous change in women's assignment policy, women have flown all types of combat aircraft, deployed in several major combat operations in the middle east, risen to command a carrier air wing, fighter wings, a carrier battle group, and major combat command.

The 1970's had opened up military aviation to women, and it was an exciting time for women to come of age. The first female naval aviator, Barbara (Allen) Rainey, was designated on February 22, 1974, followed by Army officer Sally Murphy on June 4, 1974, and ten Air Force female pilots on September 2, 1977. The Coast Guard opened all aviation ratings to women January 1, 1976 and the first female aviator, Janna Lambine, was designated in 1977. Vietnam had ended and the Cold War prevailed. 2LT Kathy Cosand received the first Air Medal earned by a woman in May 1977 for C-141 operations in Zaire. Rosemary (Conatser) Mariner broke through the "glass canopy" and qualified in the A-4 Skyhawk in 1975 and the A-7 Corsair in 1976, the first woman to fly Navy tactical jets.

Restriction to non-combat missions, however, relegated the women to second class status in the macho world of military aviation. Women wanted to be able to compete for any job in the fleet, based on performance and ability. First, the women had to organize. Rosemary (Conatser) Mariner, Joellen (Drag) Oslund, Mary Lou (Jorgensen) Griffin and other Navy women formed Society of Women in Military Aviation in the early 1980's. Women Military Pilots, later Women Military Aviators, was formed in 1978 by the WASP, then brought in the Air Force women, led by Barb Garwood, Karen Daneu and Julie Tizard. This Air Force/WASP group then reached out and merged with the Navy group. This formed the first network of WASP, Air Force, Army, Navy and Coast Guard women aviators and their extended families.

In the 1980's, there were some successes. Although Lin (Vaught) Hutton had a short tour in VQ-2 in the late 70's, someone decided that was "combat" and she was reassigned. Now, women were officially assigned to the Fleet Air Reconnaissance (VQ) Squadrons in the Navy, a warfare specialty. Women delivered mail to Navy ships via Carrier onboard Delivery (COD) aircraft and were carrier qualified. Women became test pilots (Colleen Nevius) and test navigators (Trish Beckman), and a few got qualified in air combat maneuvering (ACM). The Navy "strike" training pipeline opened up to women, now in addition to propeller (maritime) aircraft and helicopters. Finally, there was full equality in Naval air training. Women got orders to A-7's and A-6's in Tactical Electronics Warfare (VAQ) Squadrons. Some of those transitioned to F-18's as they retired the older aircraft. Margaret Woodward refueled aircraft with KC-135's in the 1989 invasion of Panama. By the mid-1980's Navy women could qualify in any aircraft in fleet inventory, complete combat training, train men to fly combat, and serve in weapons research, development, test and evaluation (RDT&E) commands. However, Navy women could not be permanently assigned to a "warfare specialty" command such as part of a carrier air wing (CVW) or shore-based maritime patrol (VP) squadron (which

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included anti-submarine warfare (ASW) missions). While Air Force women also served in the RDT&E and frontline communities such as aerial refueling, they were generally restricted by aircraft type (F-15, F-16, etc.) instead of command type.

The 1990's began with 35,000 women going to war, only to come home to the cross-fire of a culture war as to their role in military hostilities. The Gulf War turned out to be the catalyst for change. Operation Desert Shield, largely a logistics build up of troops to defend Saudi Arabia, and Operation Desert Storm, the combat phase to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi invasion, involved military women in virtually all theaters of operations. The 1948 law that prohibited women from serving on combatant ships or aircraft was in effect, but women were ferrying personnel, supplies, medical personnel and prisoners around the war zone, refueling fighters in midair, and flying reconnaissance and search and rescue missions. On February 27, 1991, Iraq captured and held as Prisoner of War (POW) Army flight surgeon Rhonda Cornum after her aircraft was shot down behind enemy lines. Major Marie T. Rossi, 32, was killed March 1, 1991 in Saudi Arabia while flying a CH-47D helicopter when it crashed into an unlit microwave tower in bad weather. Military women had perished in Vietnam at field hospitals and in aircraft mishaps, but this was different because the war was highly televised.

Americans saw that America could not go to war without women. Women were serving courageously just like the men. It was also painfully clear that combat exclusion policies did not protect women from being killed in action or becoming POWs.

Following the liberation of Kuwait, the 102nd Congress held hearings on the Gulf War that opened the door to discussion of women's assignment policy. History shows that Congress is most apt to enact legislative change in a window following the end of a war. History indicated that the window of opportunity was about six to twelve months long because after that, society wants to forget the war and move on.

In April 1991, the House Armed Services Committee Chairman, US Representative Les Aspin, proposed an amendment to the FY92 Defense Authorization Bill to repeal 10 U.S. Code (USC) 8549 and amend the Navy statute, 10 USC 6015, to delete the female combat aviation exclusions. (In 1993, the Navy asked Congress to repeal the remaining portion of 10 USC 6015 that prohibited women's permanent assignment to combatant ships; This passed as part of the FY94 Defense Authorization Bill). Thanks to leadership by Representatives Pat Schroeder and Beverly Byron, it passed unanimously. Then the action turned to the Senate.

The Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) held hearings on the issue of women in combat aviation, and the Service Chiefs testified across the board against changing the law. On July 9, 1991, the SASC rejected the House version, meaning they opposed repeal. Senators William Roth (R-DE) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA) decided to act. They co-sponsored an amendment to the Defense Authorization bill that would repeal the combat exclusion laws. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney opposed repeal. Unless women acted, it would die in the Senate. Women aviators were not going to allow what happened to the WASP in 1944 to happen again.

On July 19th, Heather Wilson, Air Force Academy graduate, Rhodes scholar, and National Security Council (NSC) staffer, was furious. She had read an article in the Washington Times that implied women couldn't hack flying fighters. She put out the word - activate your rolodexes! The call went out across the WMA network: Come to Washington in uniform to tell your story, and if unable, then write letters to your repre-

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sentatives. LCDR Trish Beckman called and asked me to come to Washington DC to educate Senate staffers on my accomplishments. Carolyn Becraft, Army veteran and Women's Research & Education Institute (WREI) advocate, called CDR Rosemary Mariner, the CO of VAQ-34, and said, "you'd better worry about what will happen if you don't come." Retired VADM Bill Lawrence, President of the Association of Naval Aviation, and father of Navy helicopter pilot and astronaut Wendy Lawrence, was tremendously supportive.

The hearings on the Kennedy-Roth amendment were scheduled for July 25th. Due to my airline schedule, I only had a small window in which to help. I put on my summer whites, flew to DC on July 24th, and caught a cab to the Hart Senate Office Building as instructed. I then met Trish and the other military women for a strategy lunch at the American Cafe down the street. Barbara Bell (with her husband), Lori Melling Tanner, Paula Coughlin and others were there in uniform. A large group of women and men, all services, WASP, National Organization for Women (NOW), Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) and other women's professional organizations, were mobilized for that entire week to assist in our efforts. DACOWITS Chairwoman Becky Constantino and Carolyn Becraft coordinated with Heather Wilson on the list of Senate Offices to visit. They gave Heather the most conservative members, and the women's groups (NOW, etc.) the most liberal members. Becky and Carolyn then divided up the rest. Following Heather's and Trish's plans, we divided up into small groups and headed out. My role was to tell my story, that I had flown the A-4 Skyhawk for years in the Navy and was air combat maneuvering qualified, carrier qualified, and had flown C-9's in Operations Desert Shield and Storm. We looked sharp in our summer whites and I regret not taking photos of what turned out to be a historic time for women in the military. Carolyn Becraft and other civilians did the "lobbying", and we military types did our best to educate Senate staffers and dispel myths. Our adversaries were the Eagle Forum and those who opposed the "feminization of the military."

It was crunch time. On July 25th, we were on the Hill by 08:30, and attended a press conference at 09:30 by Senators Kennedy and Roth. I spoke to Reuters reporter Jim Adams and Washington Post's Bart Gellman. I met retired Maj. Gen Jeanne Holm, USAF and BGEN Evelyn Foote, USA, both amazing leaders. WASP Barbara Lagarsky and DACOWITS chair Becky Constantino spoke so eloquently. After these events, I headed out and hoped for the best.

All of this came to a climax on July 31, 1991, when the FY92 Defense Authorization Bill was up for a floor vote. Senator Sam Nunn moved to table the Kennedy-Roth amendment. The Senate then voted 69-30 against tabling the Kennedy-Roth amendment, which then paved the way for a roll call vote where it passed unanimously. This eliminated the aviation restrictions in the Navy, and all of the Air Force restrictions. We could now fly and fight for our country!

The Senate also passed an amendment providing for a 15 member Presidential Commission to study all aspects of women in combat roles, to report by December 1992. Of course, the vote did not end the matter. President George H. W. Bush signed it into law in December 1991, but acrimonious debates ensued, complicated by a presidential election and the unfortunate Tailhook scandal.

In September 1991, the infamous Tailhook Association reunion in Las Vegas became a national scandal when admiral's aide LT Paula Coughlin was groped by fellow aviators

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in the hotel. Emotions were running high about the changes in military aviation for women.

Bill Clinton assumed the presidency in January 1993, and fortunately, Les Aspin became Secretary of Defense. He was intimately familiar with the issue from his leadership in the House of Representatives. The Clinton administration allowed the Navy and Air Force to implement the new policy, which meant, put the best qualified pilots, navigators, and aircrew in the cockpit, regardless of gender. With the change in the statute opening up combatant ships to women, Shannon Workman, Sally Fountain, Kara Hultgreen, Linda (Heid) Maloney, Loree (Draude) Hirschman, and Suzanne Dee were among those detailed to carrier based aircraft, EA-6B's, F-14's and S-3s. Seven female Air Force pilots were selected for fighter/bomber lead-in training: Jeannie Flynn, Martha McSally, Sharon Preszler, Dawn Dunlop, Sara Beyer, Ellen McKinnon, and Dawn Shohfi. In the Army, Charlene Wagner, Angie Norman, Cathy Jarrell and many others were off and running!

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