

Women in the US Military

On 18 August 1920, the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified, guaranteeing all American women the right to vote. Beginning in the 1800s, women organized, petitioned, and picketed to win the right to vote, but it took decades to accomplish their purpose. The amendment was first introduced in Congress in 1878. This event led me to do some research on Women in the US Military. Here are a few highlights. Deborah Sampson served for over a year in General Washington's army disguised as a man. She was wounded, discovered as a woman and honorably discharged. She also received a military pension from the Continental Congress. Mary Marshall and Mary Allen served as nurses about the USS United States during the War of 1812. During the American Civil War, Dr. Mary Walker working in military hospitals received the Medal of Honor. About 1500 civilian women served in Army hospitals as nurses during the Spanish-American War. However, it wasn't until WWI that women were allowed to join the military. Over 30,000 women served as nurses and support staff officially in the military and more than 400 nurses died in the line of duty. All of this before women had the right to vote. It reminds me of the lyrics of the Barry McGuire song, Eve of Destruction "You're old enough to kill but not for voting". During WWII, more than 400,000 women served as mechanics, ambulance drivers, pilots, administrators, nurses and other non-combat roles. Eighty eight women were captured and held as POWs. In 1948, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act granting women permanent status in the military subject to military authority and regulations and entitled to veterans benefits. The Korean War saw more than 500 Army nurses serving in combat zones with many Navy nurses on hospital ships. During Vietnam, over 7,000 women served, mostly as nurses. Following the end of Vietnam, the draft ended and an all-volunteer military opening opportunities for women to join. In 1976, the first women were admitted to the US service academies. During the Persian Gulf War, two women were taken captive. In 1991, Congress authorized women to fly in combat and two years later authorized women to serve on combat ships. In 2000, Captain Kathleen McGrath became the first woman to command a US Navy warship. Colonel Linda McTague was the first woman to command a fighter squadron in the Air Force in 2004. In 2005, Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester became the first woman to be awarded the Silver Star for combat action. These are all milestones and should be celebrated.

The Key Ceremony for Master Sergeant Eric Marts was held on Saturday with over 100 people attending. Many people spoke but the most moving words were from Eric himself as he talked about owing a debt to the United States for being a citizen and hoped that he could pay it off in his lifetime. What a statement from a man who lost his eyesight serving our country.