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## BACKGROUND PAPER

ON

### AIR FORCE ENLISTED WOMEN

1. You've come a long way baby! Although this is a timeworn phrase from the 1960s, it's an apt description of the evolution of the Air Force enlisted women. From the enactment of Public Law 625 (P.L. 625) in 1948 to the present, the course of the enlisted women has overcome many obstacles. This paper will discuss the first twenty-five years of the enlisted women in the Air Force.

2. When President Truman signed Public Law 625 in June 1948, the United States Air Force was only nine months old. P.L. 625, the Women's Integration Act, provided for many things as pertains to women in the military. Among the provisions of this act was that women in the military were given permanent status. It also provided that the numbers of women in the military would be increased so that they made up two percent of the total force. Another stipulation of P.L. 625 was that women could claim their spouse or child as a dependent only if it could be proven that they relied solely on the female as their chief form of support. But, perhaps the most important provision of P.L. 625 was the establishment of the Women in the Air Force (WAF). (8:119-120)

3. By the time the Women's Integration Act was signed, there were approximately 1433 enlisted women in the new Air Force. Females had to overcome many obstacles before being admitted into the Air Force. Requirements included a minimum age requirement of eighteen (with parental consent being required if under the age of twenty-one), and they had to undergo a series of psychological tests. Men were required to be seventeen (parental consent if under eighteen) and were not required to pass the strict mental exams that women were subject to. (8:120)

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4. Once the women was recruited, it was on to Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. While at Lackland, women were assigned to their own basic training squadron. For the most part, they were trained on the same things as their male counterparts. Some areas, such as physical fitness - bodybuilding for men - were not allowed for the women. Women were also entitled to spend less time at basic training. This was partially due to the extensive mental and emotional exams they were subjected to during the recruiting process. Also, the women didn't have to undergo as much training as men were.

5. From basic training, the enlisted women then went to technical training school to learn her trade while serving her country. Of the 43 career fields established by the new Air Force, only 13 were designated as suitable for women. However, it was the departure from technical training school that produced a major problem for the new enlisted WAFs. There was much discussion on whether or not women should be separated organizationally when assigned to a base. By 1949, it was decided that females would be assigned to their duty organization but would be attached to a WAF squadron for off-duty supervision. The WAF squadron commander was responsible for the enlisted WAFs emotional needs. She was also responsible for non-judicial and UCMJ punishment of the assigned women.

6. By 1950, there was only 3,800 enlisted women on active duty (a far cry from the two percent legal ceiling allowed by P.L. 625). During the Korean War, a DOD-wide program to recruit women into the military went into full swing. The WAF optimistically predicted a substantial increase in new recruits, approximately 600 percent. However, their prediction to increase the monthly enlisted quota from 400 to 1200 was severely overestimated—approximately 500 new

women per month were recruited. One reason given for the low numbers was the fact that the average American did not see the military as a career for "a nice young girl." Many women were able to get better jobs in the early 1950s in the labor market rather than in the military.

7. By the end of the Korean War, the enlisted women strength fell drastically. By 30 July 1954, the total number of enlisted WAF was down to 9,728, a decline of approximately 17 percent.

(1:703-710). The recruiting of women had also dropped significantly. During this time, the majority of women were assigned to medical, administrative, and personnel jobs. There was still only a few career fields that the enlisted female could enter.

8. The 1960s was a time of major changes for the enlisted women. The enlisted WAF strength, by May 1966, was 5,102 (less than one percent of the total Air Force). (9:7) The majority of these women were employed in the administrative and medical career fields. However, it was estimated that the Air Force was planning to open additional career fields to women (increasing the number of available fields from 15 to 27). There were relatively few (less than 10) women employed in fields that were recently opened to women. These included: intelligence, safety, communications-electronics systems, printing, and information. In her remarks to the Professional Personnel

Management Course, Colonel Jeanne M. Holm, Director, WAF, stated: (7:14)

The situation for WAF airmen is far more restrictive...the policy on limiting the career fields in which they may be utilized stems from a decision about five years ago to use them in jobs where they perform 'better than' men. We are currently reexamining that concept to see if it has any validity today. Another reason for limiting WAF airman utilization was to reduce training costs. Since a large percentage do not stay with us long, we cannot justify sending first-termers through training courses of extended duration.

By December, 1966, it was decided that seven more career fields would be open to women.

Women could now be employed in the following additional career fields: photo interpretation,

intelligence operations, electronic warfare countermeasures, supply services, investigative specialist, legal specialist, and data processing operator. (3:1-3)

9. The recruiting and basic training processes, as well as base assignments, for women also underwent some changes during the mid-1960s. Women were beginning to be recruited on the basis of physical appearance. In a memo from the Air Force Chief of Staff, the Recruiting Service was requested to "pretty up" the Air Force. Women were now required to pose for photos as part of the recruiting process. In addition, basic training became somewhat similar to a "finishing school." Women were required to attend classes to enhance their physical features and be more ladylike. (8:181) It was also suggested at this time that women not be assigned to bases where they would "interfere" with functioning of the unit. This referred to the unit's geographical location and/or deployable status. At this time, enlisted women could only be assigned to the 28 bases that offered adequate WAF "bachelor" quarters. However, a change to AFR 35-20 in October, 1966, permitted career enlisted WAF to be reassigned to any U.S. base their male counterpart could be assigned to. WAF were now to be assigned to a base on the basis of their grade and specialty code. Finally, when there were 25 or fewer women assigned to a base, there would no longer be a requirement for a squadron section. WAF would be assigned to their duty organization and a WAF officer designated as a WAF Advisor as an additional duty. The WAF advisor would be responsible for the off-duty care of the females assigned to the base. She also was responsible for decisions on non-judicial punishment, including Article 15 authority, for WAFs. And, effective 1 January 1967, the sex code reported on the unit manning document (UMD) would be deleted.

10. More jobs were open to women in 1967. Among these were more "women type" fields, such as cook, dietitian, communications center, and general accounting. Women were also allowed to enter such fields as air passenger/transportation, budget, auditing, air operations, aircraft control

and warning, and photomapping. By March, 1967, there were 5,175 WAF airman assigned (of which 80 percent were first-term airmen). Even with the new technical jobs that women could now enter, the predominant career fields continued to be administrative, medical, and personnel.

11. Other changes that occurred in 1967 which affected the employment of women included a plan to increase WAF airman to 8,000 by FY 1969. This plan would increase the WAF enlisted strength to the legal limit of two percent allowed by Public Law 625. Also, more career fields were now authorized for enlisted women. Women could now enter 47 of the 128 available career fields. (11:1) However, a significant event for military women occurred on 8 November 1967. On this day, the President of the U.S. signed into law removing grade limitations on military women. By 31 December 1967, the total enlisted WAF strength was 5,631, to include five Chief Master Sergeants. (4:1)

12. While enlisted women were going through these many changes, the males were being sent to Vietnam. By the end of 1967, enlisted women were also given the opportunity to volunteer for duty in the Southeast Asian theater. The enlisted women were restricted to three areas in the theater. These were: Saigon, South Vietnam [U.S. Military Assistance Command - Vietnam (USMACV)]; Bangkok, Thailand (USMAC-Thailand); and Don Muang, Bangkok, Thailand (PACAF). The first five enlisted women to volunteer were: A1C Eva Nordstrom, A1C Rita Pitcock, SSgt Barbara Snavely, A1C Carol Honrick, and A1C Shirley Brown. These women were assigned to administrative duties in HQ MACV. (4:3) It was eventually suggested, after the Tet Offensive, that the southeast Asian theater was not a place for women, especially enlisted women. Fortunately, there were plenty of letters disputing this fact. These letters stated that the women were performing admirably and should be allowed to stay. The women stationed near the combat areas also wrote of their wish to stay and complete the job they were trained to do. By the time of

the Vietnamization of the war, less than 300 women had been assigned to bases in the Southeast Asia theater. (8:235-237)

13. By the close of 1969, a decision had been made to open up a wider spectrum of jobs to women. At the same time, an increasing number of enlisted WAF were entering the more technical, hard-core fields, such as air control tower operator and weather. It is also interesting to note that during this same period, supply replaced personnel as the third major career field in which women were employed. (6:5-6). Also, by this time, the concept of the All Volunteer Force was on its way to becoming history - the selective draft was ending. All military services were encouraged to begin recruiting women to fill the myriad of jobs that were now opening up.

14. By 1 January 1973, 86 additional AFSCs were opened to enlisted women. These openings were primarily in the mechanical and electronic aptitude fields. This action now allowed women access to all available career fields in the Air Force, with the exception of five. These five were considered hostile/combat fields and included defensive fire control systems operator, inflight refueling specialist, flight engineer, aircraft loadmaster, and pararescue recovery specialist. After twenty-five years, it appears that the enlisted women were well on their way to an almost equal partnership with their male counterparts.

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