

Authorizing Women in Military Service: Nursing to Combat

Women served alongside men in the U.S. military from the Revolutionary War. During the Civil War and Spanish-American War, the Army recruited women as medical support staff and thousands volunteered. Despite the leadership of Dorothea Dix, Emma Miller and others, Army nurses remained civilians. In 1892, however, they became eligible for pensions and, in 1897, for burial in national cemeteries.

The Army Reorganization Act of 1901 made nurses a military position, as did the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908. But the government only recruited women for duty during national crises. It took another half century for Congress to pass legislation authorizing women to serve in peacetime forces. Permanent status and peacetime service came in 1948 when President Harry S. Truman integrated the military – by race and by gender. However the *Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948* imposed a 2 percent cap on the number of women permitted in each branch of service. And it was not until this restriction was lifted in 1967 with Public Law 90-130 *The Act Related to the Promotion and Tenure of Women Officers* that women were allowed to achieve equal rank and retirement benefits as men.



President Harry S. Truman signing PL 80-625, 62 Stat. 356, June 12, 1948. (army.mil)

Female service members broke through the combat barrier in twenty-first century wars. As of June 2016, approximately 16.4 percent of U.S. active duty forces in all services are women. More women serve our military today than ever before, earning the same burial benefits in their own right as their male counterparts. For more burial and memorial information, visit <https://www.cem.va.gov/>.



Right: Monument honoring the service of women past, present and future at National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona.