

HISTORICAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF MILITARY WOMEN – PART I

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Abstract: Reports and data provided by North American Treaty Organization (NATO) member States indicate a grave deficit still exists in the participation of women in the military, decision-making functions, military operations, humanitarian and peacekeeping missions for the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU). In a two part comparative series between women in Romania's military and women in the United States (US) military, we will highlight the access and challenges to the military for women and the consolidated efforts to ensure integration, diversity and equal opportunity in the military. Part I: *Historical Accomplishments of Military Women*, provides a historical perspective of women's roles in the military to clearly illustrate how women's past accomplishments opened opportunities regardless of the limitations imposed. Part II***: *Military Women in the 21st Century*, details the progression and challenges of the military educational systems, occupation and mission opportunities available to military women throughout the 21st Century.

Keywords: military women, gender integration, military culture, military organization, law and policy, Romania, United States.

The military represents, for the majority of countries in the world, one of the most important State institutions. It is appreciated and perceived as a trustworthy institution because it is a guardian of high moral qualities and national tradition. The military supports and protects the nation and local communities in case of natural disasters and crisis¹.

Women have answered the call to military service since the beginning of history, sometimes in hiding and sometimes in support roles. They have proven themselves indispensable and have surpassed the imposed

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¹ Dușu, P., *Perspective în evoluția armatelor naționale*, Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, București, 2007, p.5.

limitations. Their skills, abilities, patriotism and accomplishments have created opportunities and paved the road to full integration in all aspects of the military.

Through Time. A Tribute to Women in Uniform

All over the world, deep-seated patriarchal customs prohibit women from endeavors deemed unwomanly. Traditional “masculine” traits such as courage, strength and rationality are given higher value than traditional “feminine” traits such as empathy, communication and compassion, therefore longstanding norms have been hard to change². Studies of wars and conflicts regarding unit cohesion demonstrate that unity is accomplished through confidence in leaders and weaponry, mutual concern, mutual trust and caring, internalizing military values, cooperation and teamwork. When military members socialize within the group, show compassion and empathy and communicate, unit morale and performance improves³. Therefore, those “feminine” traits are just as important in order for a unit to succeed on the battlefield.

Historical accomplishments of Romanian military women

Romanian women have officially participated in the military since Romania’s entrance in WWI. When the government mobilized most civilian men for war, they failed to adequately prepare the economy for the loss of labor. With very limited welfare, the women were left on the home front without help⁴. Women at the time lacked job training and laws made them dependent on men, but regardless, they took jobs to provide social services and jobs in weapons and industrial factories. They helped the war effort by

² Wilén, N., & Heineken, L., *Regendering the South African army: Inclusion, reversal and displacement*, Gender, Work and Organization, 25(6), 2018, pp. 670–686, available at <https://doi-org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/10.1111/gwao.12257>, accessed on 27.08.2021.

³ Griffith, J., *Measurement of group cohesion in US Army units*, Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 9(2), pp. 149–171, 1998, available at https://doi-org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/10.1207/s15324834basp0902_6, accessed on 27.08.2021.

⁴ Bucur, M., *Between the mother of the wounded and the virgin of Jiu: Romanian women and the gender of heroism during the Great War*, Journal of Women’s History, 2000, p. 50.

providing medical and auxiliary services⁵. Women also became primary caretakers at home and managed businesses and production in spite of no government support. Many women, whom are forgotten by history, worked as nurses for the Romanian Red Cross and Orthodox National Society of Romanian Women (SONFER), caring for over 150,000 wounded and sick. Women such as Olga Sturdza and Maria Blaș provided soup kitchens, youth camps and workshops⁶. Malica Mera created orphan children's camps, Suzane Caragiani established a contagious disease hospital and Ecaterina Constantinescu raised money for orphanages and children's camps. Queen Maria was also a contributor to the woman's war efforts, in one of a kind fashion, by visiting hospitals near the front lines to offer care and comfort. She established the Queen Maria Medical Cross, a commendation for nurses and other medical personnel, although the recipients were marginalized⁷. Women's heroism on the home front also went unrecognized. After the war, in 1923, the new Constitution denied women political and civil right despite proclaiming to be a democratic system. Any dissatisfaction with the nationalist agenda was presented as unpatriotic and ignored.

One of the few recognized women was Ecaterina Teodoroiu, the first woman to command troops in combat. Initially wanting to become a teacher, Teodoroiu changed her plans at the eve of WWI in 1913 to join the first Romanian Scout Organization. She volunteered as a nurse for the Allies in 1916 on the Eastern Front and after her brother was killed in action, she requested and was permitted to join the unit as a volunteer. She fought in numerous skirmishes alongside the men, was captured and later escaped to fight again. For her courage in defending the country, she was decorated by royal decree on March 1917, with the Gold Scout Virtue (*Virtutea Cercetășească*), followed by the Military Virtue (*Virtutea Militară*). She was promoted to the rank of Sublocotenent (OF-1/O-1) and was given command of an infantry platoon, which she led in numerous battles. She was ultimately killed in action while leading a counterattack in 1917⁸.

⁵ Țuțuianu, I. S., *Rolurile de gen în procesul de reformă a sistemului național de apărare: Sprijinirea operațiunilor militare internaționale*, *Strategic Monitor*, 16(3/4), 2014, pp.49–56.

⁶ Bucur, M., *Op.cit*, 2000, p.56.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.58.

⁸ Zabecki, D. T., *Romania's heroine*, *Military History*, 34(3), 2017, p.16.

During WWII, Romanian women again played an important role, but once more went largely ignored and forgotten. Most notable, starting in 1940, female pilots participated in medical evacuations and liaison missions part of White Squadron (Escadrila Albă). The all female squadron was formed by Marina Știrbey, a pilot and visionary who insisted that women pilots can fly to pick up wounded from the front lines and deliver medical supplies where they are needed. Their planes were painted white with a red cross, signifying medical transport and they flew missions all over Europe⁹. Some of the first pilots for the squadron were Smaranda Brăescu, Mariana Drăgescu and Nadia Russo-Bossie, Virginia Duțescu, Irina Burnaia, Victoria Pokol, Maria Nicolae, Eliza Vulcu, and Stela Huțan. Ioana Grădinescu served as a flight nurse on numerous medical evacuations¹⁰.

Aviator Smaranda Brăescu was the first woman licensed parachutist in the Romanian military. In 1923 she performed her first flight from the Aviation Training Center in Tecuci, her hometown. On July 1, 1928, she enrolled at the Special Parachuting School "Schroeder" in Berlin and on July 5, 1928 she performed the first jump from 600 m, thus becoming the first woman parachutist in Romania. In 1931 she became the European champion in parachuting and in 1932 World champion, with a record of 7200 m in Sacramento. During World War II, she served as a parachute instructor, training military men and she volunteered with the White Squadron flying medical missions in Stalingrad¹¹.

Mariana Drăgescu obtained her pilot license in 1935 and worked for the Romanian Royal Aero Club. At the beginning of WWII she joined the White Squadron, receiving training in combat flight simulations, timed missions and night flights. She was one of the initial pilots of the squadron and the only one to fly on both the eastern and western fronts. From 1941 to 1945 she flew numerous missions in Bessarabia, Stalingrad, Crimea,

⁹ Țuțuianu, I. S., op. cit, Strategic Monitor, 16(3/4), 2014, pp. 49–56.

¹⁰ Lambru, S., *Escadrila alba*, Radio România Internațional. 2021, available at https://www.rrr.ro/ro_ro/escadrila_alba-2632930, accessed on 25.08.2021.

¹¹ Turturică, S., *Smaranda Brăescu a cucerit America printr-un salt cu parașuta*, Historia, 2021, available at <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/smaranda-braescu-a-cucerit-america-printr-un-salt-cu-parasuta>, accessed on 25.08.2021.

Slovakia and Vienna¹². After WWII, with the communist regime taking over the country, service-members were arrested if caught and military documents were destroyed. The female pilots of the White Squadron had similar fates and in the best cases they were removed from aviation. It was only after the Revolution in 1989 that their deeds were finally recognized¹³.

During the communist regime, 1947-1989, compulsory military service was imposed, although Romania was not involved in any external military conflicts until 2001. College aged women were conscripted starting in the late 60's. They were trained in infantry tactics, communications, topography, engineering, chemistry, railway and civil defense. This opened up many military and national security jobs for women and after 1973 women could become part of the Reserve force after college. In the 70's, women's rights became a political force, increasing the number of women wanting to serve¹⁴. In the 80's female officers could become helicopter pilots, doctors, pharmacists and work in logistics¹⁵.

In the 90's, after the fall of communism and re-drafting of the Constitution, military service was no longer a requirement for women, thus decreasing military opportunities. Women were accepted for non-military positions, but due to biases in laws, women were excluded from intelligence and research and occupations deemed physical¹⁶. Many women chose early retirement due to lack of educational and operational opportunities, limited responsibilities and restricted access to decision-making functions¹⁷. Romanian military women are largely unknown and unmentioned in Romania's history, perhaps due to its 'deep rooted patriarchal culture.

¹² Lambru, S., *Op.cit.*, 2021, available at https://www.rri.ro/ro_ro/escadrila_alba-2632930, accessed on 25.08.2021.

¹³ Focşa, D., *Mariana Drăgescu şi Escadrila Albă* (I), Ziarul Financiar, 2007, available at <https://www.zf.ro/print/3028733>, accessed on 25.08.2021.

¹⁴ Țuțuianu, I. S., *op. cit.*, Strategic Monitor, 16(3/4), 2014, p. 46.

¹⁵ NATO, *Romania-National report. Committee on Women in NATO Forces*, 2004, available at <https://www.nato.int/ims/2004/win/romania.pdf>, accessed on 15.08.2021.

¹⁶ Popa, O. C., *Women in the armed forces The case of Romania*, Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military, 1999, pp.39, available at https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A66239864/AONE?u=nhc_main&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=344f4cd7, accessed on 27.07.2021.

¹⁷ NATO, *Romania-National report, Committee on Women in NATO Forces*, 2004, available at <https://www.nato.int/ims/2004/win/romania.pdf>, accessed on 15.08.2021.

Historical accomplishments of American military women

The US military has a rich tradition of bravery and sacrifice, but those attributes are generally reserved for male service-members, not for a lack of women with ambition but due to systemic exclusion. Regardless, women have always found a way around the imposed restrictions and blazed their own trail. Their early history is largely unstudied and unknown, especially from the Revolutionary and Civil War, because it was illegal for women to serve in the military¹⁸. Like Deborah Sampson in 1778, Cathay Williams in 1844 and Sarah Emma Edmonds in 1861, countless women enlisted in the army by impersonating a man. The three served as an infantry scout, a male nurse/spy and Buffalo soldier, respectively, proving their capabilities as soldiers before being discovered¹⁹.

Other trailblazers like Dr. Mary E. Walker, who in 1861 was among the first female surgeons in the country, begrudgingly received an appointment in the Army to serve as an assistant surgeon. Dr. Walker frequently crossed battle lines to treat the injured and for her service and sacrifice, she was awarded the military's highest honor, the Medal of Honor, in 1865. The award was rescinded in 1917 because she was considered a civilian during her time in the war, but the honor was rightfully restored by President Carter in 1977, making her the first and only woman to receive the Medal of Honor²⁰. (US Army, 2021). In 1898, Dr. Anita McGee was appointed assistant surgeon general and she wrote a bill to establish an Army Nurse Corps and Reserve Corps for women²¹. In 1908, the Navy Nurse Corps was established.

During WWI, 35,000 women served in the military, mostly as nurses but also administrators, secretaries, telephone operators and architects. The National Service School was established in 1916 to train women for war and

¹⁸ Amara, J., *Military women and the force of the future*, Defence & Peace Economics, 31(1), 2000, pp. 1-3, available at <https://doi-org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/10.1080/10242694.2019-1697500>, accessed on 18.08.2021.

¹⁹ US Army, *Women in the Army*, 2021, available at <https://www.army.mil/women/history>, accessed on 18.08.2021.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, accessed on 18.08.2021.

²¹ *Ibidem*, accessed on 18.08.2021.

national disasters²². On the home front, women filled vacancies in shops, factories and offices performing formerly masculine jobs.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the military recognized the importance of women and created the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in 1942. The first director of WAAC was Oveta Culp Hobby, who integrated WAAC into the Army and created standards. She achieved the rank of Colonel (OF-5/O-6) and received the Distinguished Service Medal. Initially, WAAC recruited and trained women as cooks, clerks, drivers, cadre and medical, but expanded to weather forecasters, electricians, plane mechanics, radio mechanics, cryptography, medical and administration²³. Women's Airfare Service Pilots (WASP) was also created, with the purpose of ferrying planes from factories to military bases, testing, performing check flights, towing targets for anti-aircraft gun practice, search and rescue missions and training male pilots. Jacqueline Cochran, a well known aviator, established the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) and served as director of WASP. In 1944 after the war, WASP was disbanded and it was only in 1977 when those 1,500 women received veteran status²⁴.

Also, in 1942, the Navy established Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) part of the Naval Reserves under Lieutenant Commander (OF-3/O-4) Mildred McAfee, who became the first female naval line officer. During WWII, the Navy employed over 11,000 nurses to serve at shore commands, on hospital ships, field hospitals and in planes, and trained WAVES members as clerks, radio operators, finance, chemical warfare, aviation ordinance, parachute riggers, cryptologists, air traffic controllers, doctors, attorneys, engineers, mathematicians and aviators. Grace Murray Hopper served as a computer scientist and pioneer in computer programming and Maude Elsa Gardner was the first female aeronautical engineer²⁵.

In 1947 Congress signed the Army-Navy Nurses Act, establishing permanent Army and Navy Nurse Corps and in 1948 the Women's Armed

²² *Ibidem*, accessed on 18.08.2021..

²³ *Ibidem*, accessed on 18.08.2021.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, accessed on 18.08.2021.

²⁵ Naval History and Heritage Command, *Women in the US Navy*, 2021, available at <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/diversity/women-in-the-navy.html>, accessed on 18.08.2021.

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Services Integration Act was signed, allowing women to serve permanently in the Regular and Reserve Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. During the Korean War of 1950, the Army employed over 25,000 Women's Army Corps (WAC) personnel as cryptographers, supply, intelligence, communications, hospital technicians and 5,000 nurses to serve in Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (MASH), field hospitals, hospital trains and transport ships²⁶.

In 1961, Navy Lieutenant (OF-2/O-3) Charlene Suneson, became the first WAVES officer assigned shipboard duty aboard USS General Mann (AP-112). In 1965, Marine Staff Sergeant (OR-6/E-6) Josephine Gebers served in hostile action in the Dominican Republic and received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal and Combat Action Ribbon. In 1967 Master Sergeant (OR-8/E-8) Barbra Jean Dulinsky became the first female Marine to serve in combat in Vietnam, assigned to the combat operations center in Saigon. Between 1965 and 1973, over 800 WACs served in Vietnam as clerks, secretaries and training Vietnamese women and over 9,000 Army nurses supported fighting and served in combat and in hospitals and clinics throughout Vietnam²⁷.

In 1970 Brigadier Generals (OR-6/O-7) Elizabeth Hoisington and Anna Mae Hays became the first two women to achieve the rank of Brigadier General. Navy Captain (OF-5/O-6) Arlene Duerk served as Chief of Nursing Service, Director of the Navy Nurse Corps and in 1972 became the first female Admiral (OF-9/O-10). In 1972 all military occupations opened to women except combat or hazardous duty. In the mid-70s, the 2% cap on the number of females enlisted was removed, along with the cap on female officers, which previously could not exceed more than 10% of enlisted. Although combat was still officially barred, women could be pilots, aircrew and conduct patrols as military police (Rohall, Ender & Matthews, 2017). In 1974 Lieutenant (OF-2/O-3) Barbara Allen Rainey became first female naval aviator, designated as a jet pilot 9²⁸.

²⁶ US Army, *op.cit.*, 2021, available at <https://www.army.mil/women/history/>, accessed on 18.08.2021.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, accessed on 18.08.2021.

²⁸ Naval History and Heritage Command, *op.cit.*, available at <https://www.history.-navy.mil/browse-by-topic/diversity/women-in-the-navy.html>, accessed on 18.08.2021.

In 1975 the Department of Defense published instructions which prevented involuntary separation of service women based on pregnancy, if they were otherwise qualified for duty. Other military regulations began to equalize, such as integrated training, overseas tours lengths and enlistment age requirements. In 1976, Public Law 94-106 required the service military academies to admit women and by 1978, women's roles in the Navy officially expanded, allowing them to serve on all noncombatant ships. In 1978 WAC was disbanded as a separate corps in the Army.

In 1980, Army Captain (OF-2/O-3) Kate Wilder graduated Army Special Operations Officer selection but wasn't recognized or allowed to participate and later she refused to join an operational detachment. In Grenada in 1983, over 100 women were deployed to the active combat zone and in 1988 a "risk rule" was established to standardize women's assignments to hostile areas. In Panama in 1989, women participated in operations to restore democracy and overthrow Manuel Noriega. Army Captain (OF-2/O-3) Linda Bray, a military police commander, became the first American woman to command men in battle²⁹.

During the Gulf War, over 24,000 female Army soldiers served during combat missions, making the Army realize that excluding the women would have impacted combat readiness, therefore in 1994 the "risk rule" was replaced by the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment, allowing women to serve in all positions except those below brigade level who's mission is direct combat³⁰. This opened positions on combatant ships and combat aircraft. Women could also to train and serve during regional conflicts, humanitarian missions such as in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo.

Conclusions

Many generations of women have served and fought alongside men, from a time when it was illegal, to a time when it was imperative. They have continuously risen past expectations and limitations imposed by the system

²⁹ US Army, *op.cit.*, 2021, available at <https://www.army.mil/women/history/>, accessed on 18.08.2021..

³⁰ *Ibidem*, accessed on 18.08.2021.

to serve in all aspects of the military, whether officially or unofficially. Their service is a reflection of the highest military virtues and indispensable in evolving militaries and wars. Their efforts and achievement have given future generations of women the ability to serve in expanded roles towards full integration and equal opportunities.

Part II: Military Women in the 21st Century, focuses on how modern military women have further broken down existing stereotypes and misconceptions about their abilities in their fight for full integration into all aspects of the military.



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