



ST. MARY'S
UNIVERSITY

Digital Commons at St. Mary's University

Faculty Articles

School of Law Faculty Scholarship

2020

A Century in Uniform: Military Women in American Films, Introduction

Stacy Fowler

Deborah A. Deacon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.stmarytx.edu/facarticles>



Part of the [Military History Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Introduction

Warfare has been a fundamental aspect of human existence since the beginning of history. Its importance has been heralded and lamented in song, literature, theater, and art for millennia—and in film since its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. Traditionally, warfare has been seen as a gendered activity that affects the men who fight, not the women who have been relegated to the safety of the home front, a situation that has been frequently reinforced in theatrical war films. Yet the reality is quite different—women have served as Red Cross nurses and ambulance drivers on the front, as civilian nurses and volunteers, and as members of the military in most of the wars in which America has been involved. From the earliest days of this nation's history, they have served as unofficial and official members of the military fighting force. And from the earliest days of motion pictures, the contributions of women to the military cause have been depicted in Hollywood films.

A significant amount of scholarship has been devoted to depictions of women in war films. These range from depictions of wives, daughters, and mothers on the home front to military and Red Cross nurses at home and in times of war to non-medical military women, as well as fictional adaptations of the lives of actual women who participated in a wide assortment of military conflicts in one way or another. In most cases, previous scholarship has focused on a few popular films such as *G.I. Jane*, *Courage Under Fire*, and *A Few Good Men*, exploring issues associated with gender, femininity, and/or the social norms affirmed or violated by the women in question. Others have explored the social interactions and social mores exhibited by groups of female nurses in films such as *Cry 'Havoc'*, *So Proudly We Hail*, and *MASH*, noting the women's emphasis on love and romance rather than teamwork and abilities. Few consider women's roles in early war films, and even fewer consider military women's roles in non-war films. This book is the first to explore the ways in which military women of the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy have been depicted in American theatrical and television films beginning with the earliest films from the turn of the twentieth century through contemporary films of the first two decades of the twenty-first century. It includes movies about the American Civil War, World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as films that concern the day-to-day life of military personnel in times of peace.

In order for a film to be included in this book, the film must have at least one military woman with a speaking role as a member of the cast, whether credited for the role or not. The survey includes theatrical releases as well as films released directly to video or initially created for television, but not television series or mini-series. It also does not include military women depicted in science fiction films, fantasy films, or documentaries, nor does it include non-military women such as Red Cross workers, contract and volunteer nurses, and ambulance drivers who were so important during World War I but not official members of the military.

The book explores depictions of military women in a wide range of genres beyond the

typical war film, including comedies, disaster films, dramas, mysteries, romances, thrillers, and action films, comparing these depictions to the realities under which actual women in these positions functioned in society at the time of the conflict or time period depicted. Films often reflect public opinion about social issues, and many of these films mirror America's ambivalence toward, support of, rejection of, and acceptance of a variety of social issues relevant to the status of women in the military. The portrayals of military women in these films cover a wide variety of professions as well, ranging from nurse to lawyer to aviator to spy, and the analysis discusses the realities of the women's position in relation to their experiences in the military, the laws impacting their service, and the social norms to which they have been subjected. It examines the challenges the women faced as they broke through the barriers that prevented their full military service, the tropes used to depict a variety of character types, ways in which depictions of military women varied by film genre, and the ways in which non-traditional female characters were accepted by the viewing public. A complete filmography can be found in Appendix A.

History of Women in the U.S. Military

From the earliest days of western civilization, war has been considered to be the realm of men, and the exploits of military heroes have been lauded in literature and mythology in such works as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the poems of medieval bards and the plays of William Shakespeare, and the stories of comic superheroes like Captain America and Sergeant Fury. In such works, the military hero displays heroism, courage, self-sacrifice, exceptional strength, and endurance, all characteristics generally associated with men. While female warriors are found in Western history and literature, such as the Amazons, Artemisia, Boudicca, the Valkyrie Brunhilde, and Joan of Arc, they are typically portrayed as being motivated by a traditional female goal—the desire to be reunited with or saved by a spouse or lover who has gone off to war.¹ Yet these women are also predecessors of today's military woman, serving as role models for those who have come after them. And some of them have been depicted in film, although they are not necessarily discussed in this book.

In the U.S., hundreds of women have disguised themselves as men to fight for their country in the American Revolution (a film about Deborah Sampson, for example, is discussed in Chapter Four), the War of 1812, and the Civil War (several of the earliest films discussed in Chapter One include cross-dressing women whose exploits occurred during that war), unmasked only when wounded or killed, and many received pensions for their military service.

Official military service did not begin for American women until 1901, when Congress authorized the establishment of the Army Nurse Corps, followed closely by the creation of the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908. Although these units were called the Army and the Navy Nurse Corps, they were considered to be working *with* the military and not actual military personnel; these units were always classified as separate from the “real” Army and Navy.

In 1917, with the impending entrance of the U.S. into World War I, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels came up with an ingenious solution for filling the manpower shortages that he knew were coming—using an accidental loophole in the Navy Act of 1916, Daniels authorized the recruitment of women other than nurses into the Navy. Loretta Walsh became the first woman to be sworn into the Navy in a non-nursing capacity on March 21, 1917. By the time the U.S. officially declared war on Germany three weeks later, more than 200 women had followed suit. Unlike the two Nursing Corps, these women were considered to be actually in the military, and they were given the same “rank, responsibilities and benefits as men, including identical pay of \$28.75 per

month.”² In total, more than 13,000 women served in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard during this time period; most were quickly mustered out following the end of the war.

Through various laws that were passed during the inter-war period in America (1919–1941), military women slowly began to accumulate some rights. Public Law 62-95 awarded women equal benefits when stationed outside the continental United States. Public Law 67-235 gave female nurses equal treatment with regard to housing and subsistence, and Public Law 67-294 granted service pensions to those nurses who had served with the troops during the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Insurrection, and the Boxer Rebellion, even though they were not considered to be military at the time.

When the U.S. declared war on Japan in 1941, men flocked by the thousands to join the military. By 1942, World War II had created such a manpower shortage at home that the Army decided to fill these shortages with women. Hence Congress passed Public Law 77-554, establishing the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). For the first time, Army women were allowed to work in capacities other than nursing, but they still were not considered as part of the official Army. They were barred from combat service, and a limit was set on how many women could enlist. Due to the overwhelming need, however, that limit was raised less than a year later by Executive Order 9274.

Other branches of the service soon followed with women’s units of their own. In 1942, Public Law 77-689 was amended to allow women, nicknamed WAVES, to serve in the Naval Reserve. As was the case during World War I, these women were considered to be actual members of the Navy, rather than an auxiliary unit. As with the WAAC units, however, many restrictions were put in place, including minimum age requirements and severely limited duty assignments. There was also a section stating that female personnel killed in the line of duty would be treated as civil servants for the purposes of benefits rather than receiving the same consideration as male active duty personnel. Also in 1942, Public Law 77-773 was enacted, which established the women’s reserve of the Coast Guard; female personnel were nicknamed SPARS. This law changed gendered language to allow women to enlist, but it specifically restricted where women could serve by stating the reservists “shall not be assigned to duty on board vessels of the Navy or Coast Guard or in combat aircraft and shall be restricted ... within the continental United States only.”

In 1943, just one year after the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps was established, its effectiveness was questioned, so a new law was passed to remove the word “auxiliary” and to equalize treatment somewhat. Women were slowly starting to be able to spread their wings, but in reality, not much changed. It was not until 1948, several years after the end of the war, that the first real step toward gender integration in the regular military became official. Public Law 80-625, known as the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act, finally made the women’s divisions of every service branch fully integrated with the men’s divisions, but the majority of restrictions remained. During the first two years, the number of women who could be in the service was limited to approximately 8100. After the initial integration period, a 2 percent limitation would apply, meaning that not more than 2 percent of total American military personnel could be women.

The codification of Title 10 of the U.S. Code, which covers all federal laws pertaining to the Armed Forces, also included many restrictions on women in the military, explicitly spelling out where and in what occupations women were *not* allowed to serve. According to a 1981 report by the United States Commission on Civil Rights, even as late as 1977, “73 percent of all authorized military slots were closed to women entirely.”³ The military claimed to have maintained those exclusions because women were prohibited from combat, but 30 percent of those jobs were not combat-related. Things had stalled as far as advances for military women were concerned,

but during the 1970s, many changes were coming, several due to lawsuits filed by women in the military.

These lawsuits worked to garner military women greater control over their own lives and military careers. Captain Susan Struck, an Air Force nurse serving in Vietnam, got pregnant and was given honorable discharge orders; she did not want to separate from the military, so she appealed the decision. The case eventually went before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and she lost her appeal.⁴ She was then granted a writ of certiorari at the Supreme Court level, but before the case could be heard, it was rendered moot when the Air Force changed its regulations to allow pregnant women to remain in the service if they wanted to; the other branches soon followed suit, and pregnant women were no longer automatically discharged from the service.

Sharon Frontiero was an Air Force lieutenant whose husband did not automatically receive dependent benefits. Section 1072 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code stated that military men's wives automatically received military benefits, but military women's husbands had to prove financial need before receiving those same benefits. Frontiero believed this to be discriminatory, and she proceeded to file suit. In U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama, the Court found against her, stating that the law was justified because there were many more male servicemembers, and if those men's wives were made to establish need, it would cause the government "a substantial administrative burden." The Court further stated that an affirmative finding would mean "any classification established ... must operate ... without providing any[thing] not equally available to members of all classes." The Court seemed to think that would set an unreasonable precedent, but the wording essentially says that people should be treated the same regardless of who or what they are—which was what Frontiero was suing for in the first place. The case was eventually argued in front of the Supreme Court with Ruth Bader Ginsberg as *amicus curiae*, where the Court ruled eight to one in Frontiero's favor.

Finally, the finding of the 1978 class action lawsuit *Owens v. Brown*, which was filed by several female officers and enlisted women, directed the Navy to "move forward in measured steps" toward gender integration aboard naval vessels not involved in direct combat, which became law with the passing of Public Law 95-485. The same law also caused the Women's Army Corps to cease as a separate entity, stating that assimilating women more fully into the Army structure would be helpful in eliminating feelings of separateness.

The 1970s also saw women become eligible for entrance into the military service academies. In 1975, Public Law 94-106 mandated the "orderly and expeditious admission of women to the academies, consistent with the needs of the services." As a result, 119 women entered West Point the following year, along with 157 into the Air Force Academy, eighty-one into the Naval Academy, and three into the Coast Guard Academy, who were actually appointed before the legislation had passed.

The next twenty-five years were basically spent defining what combat was and why women could not serve in combat units. As late as 2005, Congress was still passing laws on the subject. Those laws primarily dealt with the Army and Marine Corps—the Air Force and Navy had nearly all of their military specialties open to women for many years. One of the last areas to open up to Navy women was submarine duty, which has only been authorized since 2010.

Finally, in 2013, the last stone fell. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced the elimination of the ban on women in combat. Each branch was allowed to request that exceptions be made for particular military specialties, and each was told to submit such requests, along with the justification for the exclusion, by May 2015. Early in 2016, however, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced that no exceptions were to be allowed; if a woman could pass the same training as the men, she would be allowed to serve in any specialty for any branch, including the Army

Rangers and Navy SEALs. With the limitations on women's military service finally eliminated, every servicewoman can now truly be all she can be.

A Short History of War in Film

Film is an international language, and from the medium's earliest days, it has exposed the world to American culture and helped bring world culture and events to America. It can serve as pure entertainment or as a form of propaganda, helping to shape public opinion on a variety of issues, including war. It can humanize or dehumanize concepts of war and those who engage in it by creating grand narratives on the subject.⁵ While director George Stevens asserted that all film is propaganda, film historians John E. O'Connor and Peter C. Rollins have noted that film can provide an interpretation of an historical event, serve as evidence for social or cultural history, or provide evidence of an historical event by using actual footage of an event.⁶ In the case of war films specifically, it is often the way in which many Americans learn about and understand the military. Unfortunately, films are not always accurate in their representations of military culture.

War has been a popular subject of movies since the industry's beginnings; countless films have covered every war, real or fictional, since the dawn of man. The Thomas Edison Company created a number of silent film shorts based on events of the Spanish-American War, for example, including *Love and War* (1899) and *U.S. Troops and Red Cross in the Trenches* (1899), both of which include depictions of Red Cross nurses. D.W. Griffith's controversial epic *Birth of a Nation* (1915) explored the Civil War and the roots of the Ku Klux Klan, but it did not include women as soldiers.

One of the earliest propaganda films that advocated for America's entrance into World War I was Windsor McCay's animated drama *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918), which opens with a live-action sequence before switching to an animated depiction of the ship's sinking.⁷ McCay's was not the first animated film to look at the fighting in Europe—in 1916, comic favorites Mutt and Jeff joined the fighting in the European theater in the animated short *The Outpost*, one year before the U.S. officially entered the war.⁸ Live action films made shortly before and during the war, like *Pro Patria* (1915) and *The Lighthorsemen* (1917), tended to demonize the "evil Hun" in an effort to dehumanize the enemy and laud allied bravery and efforts during the war.

While the majority of the films produced during the nineteen months of U.S. involvement in World War I were not war related, the number of films about World War I made during the 1920s and 1930s increased dramatically and fall into two categories—those that glorified the war, which typically included battle scenes using innovative visuals and editing techniques, and those that advocated for peace and against the horrors of war.⁹ Among the former are the Academy Award winning *Wings* (1927), *The Dawn Patrol* (1930), and *The Eagle and the Hawk* (1933), and while some of these films do feature women in roles as nurses or ambulance drivers, the primary focus of the films is on the flying sequences; the women are merely included as love interests. The world's fascination with flight and the elegant aerial ballet of dogfights glamorized the exploits of these early pilots, and filmmakers were quick to tell their stories. At least twenty-six aviation war films were made between 1927 and 1938.¹⁰

Films that reflected disillusionment include *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), which did not feature any female military characters, and *The Mad Parade* (1925), aka *Forgotten Women*, whose protagonists, female canteen workers and ambulance drivers, experience the horrors of war firsthand. Later films focusing on the horrors of World War I include *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971) and *Regeneration* (1997), both of which focus on the "shell shock" experienced by soldiers, a

continuing problem now better known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While such films realistically portrayed the destruction of the land and the difficulties and sacrifices made by those who fought, no military women were featured in these films. In fact, for the more than 340 films surveyed in this book, only two depict a woman serving in the U.S. military during World War I.¹¹

By the late 1930s and early 1940s, American filmmakers watched as the world again hurtled towards global war and soon began producing films warning of the suffering experienced by Europeans as Hitler expanded his control. Once America entered the war, the American film industry began churning out numerous propaganda films in support of the war effort. In fact, Donald Fishman noted that between 1941 and 1945, “the motion picture industry became the pre-eminent transmitter of wartime policy and a lightning rod for public discourse.”¹² These films gave the people on the home front the opportunity to vicariously experience the hardships encountered by the American fighting man; in many cases, women were excluded from the stories altogether or were included only as love interests, typically in traditional social roles of wife or nurse. In these stories, the hero is the center of the film, standing up and accepting the challenge with pride and a sense of honor when duty calls, serving as a model for others, no matter the consequences. These heroic traits, however, were rarely attributed to women, who were often portrayed as helpless and dependent on others for help. However, as can be seen in Chapter Two, a number of the films included military women—nurses, other medical personnel, or administrative personnel—from all services, roles which often required women to throw off these assumptions and rise to the occasion when confronted with the realities of war. These were new roles for many women and certainly new for many moviegoers. While many women were shown working competently at their appointed jobs and in precarious situations, many were again included as love interests for the films’ protagonists.

Along with live action films, American film studios began producing cartoons, geared up in support of the war effort.¹³ In addition to producing animated shorts like *Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Firing Line* (1942), which encouraged housewives to save cooking grease, and *Cinderella Goes to a Party* (1942), where Cinderella goes to work in a factory, the Walt Disney Company designed characters for military unit insignia and aircraft nose art. Most of the animation shorts that looked specifically at the fighting man included popular animation characters such as Donald Duck, Popeye, and Porky Pig and did not include depictions of military women, with the few exceptions noted in Chapter Two. These cartoons, along with a ten-to twenty-minute newsreel, were shown before the main feature in the local movie theater.

The U.S. military commissioned a number of animated training films designed to educate primarily enlisted men in the do’s and don’ts of military life. The most famous character from these films is Private Snafu,¹⁴ a hapless, immature, narcissistic Army private who served as a negative role model for enlisted men, who were primarily young and white. Military women and minorities were not represented in the films, with one exception—in the episode “The Homefront” (November 1943), viewers are told in a song about how civilians at home are helping the war effort and that Sally Lou, Snafu’s girlfriend, has joined the WACs. She is only onscreen for eighteen seconds of the four-minute episode.

In the years following World War II, a number of films were spoofs of military life. These comedies presented a nostalgic look at the service, the result of audience familiarity with military life. They remained popular during the early years of the Cold War, and film served as a battlefield of ideas, promoting patriotism, heroism, and dedication to the American cause. These comedies, however, did not extend to films about the Korean War, about twenty of which were released during the war years. Many of these films reflect the disillusionment and frustration experienced

by Americans as the result of the failed war. While military nurses served both in Korea and Japan, few are represented in the films about the war; their service, like that of the men who served during America's "forgotten war," was barely noticed.

The angst produced by the lack of resolution of the Korean War rose to new heights as America became involved in the war in Vietnam. Initially, filmmakers began depicting the war in much the same way as they had World War II. Films like *The Green Berets* (1968) offered preachy propaganda in support of the war in a movie supported by the U.S. Army. As objections to the war increased, however, Hollywood began to allude to the war in films like *MASH*, rather than to confront it directly. It wasn't until several years after the war ended that Hollywood began to tell the story of the war. Films like *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and *Platoon* (1986) gave the general public its impression of the war; despite the fact that 11,000 women served in Vietnam, none are depicted in these films.¹⁵ As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the few Vietnam War movies that did include female servicewomen feature only medical personnel, despite the fact that several hundred non-medical military women served in theater during the war.

Films from the late 1980s and 1990s changed their focus and began to explore issues of global terrorism, often using spies and Special Forces personnel rather than the typical soldier as the hero. While a few of these films include women characters, as discussed in Chapter Six, those that did primarily focus on their personal and/or professional isolation, frequently portraying as them victims of sexual violence rather than productive members of a military team.

The focus of war movies shifted again in the wake of 9/11, and Hollywood quickly began portraying stories of individual male heroes in theatrical films like *The Hurt Locker* (2008) and *American Sniper* (2014), most of which do not include military women in combat situations or even in the cast, despite the fact that women have been integrated into military units in both Iraq and Afghanistan since the onset of those wars. In fact, many of the films discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight show that women's role in today's military is actually central to military operations, yet the women are generally not given status as primary figures in these films, and many Americans fail to recognize their contributions to the war efforts.

Military Women in American Films

The idea of women warriors has been part of the culture and literature of the West for millennia. Probably the most famous woman soldier is Joan of Arc, the young French peasant who led French troops to victory over the British in the fifteenth century. The Maid of Orleans has been portrayed in literature and film numerous times, but primarily in European films. She does appear in one film in this survey, *Joan the Woman* (1916), which is discussed in Chapter One.

Women have unofficially served in the U.S. military since the colonial period, often dressing and living as men. Stories about these cross-dressing women, often purported to be written as autobiographical tales in books such as *Female Marine: The Adventures of Miss Lucy Brewer*, were popular during the early nineteenth century, as were cross-dressing women theatrical performers who frequently portrayed boys on stage. This trend continued in films of the early twentieth century, and several of these early films featuring cross-dressing women are discussed in Chapter One.¹⁶ In the decade following World War I, however, attitudes about cross-dressing women in film changed, and they were now seen as threatening socially acceptable concepts of male and female identities. Implementation of the Hays Code of 1934, which prohibited films from depicting

anything that would “lower the moral standards of those who see it,” effectively ended portrayals of nudity, homosexuality and cross-dressing in film.¹⁷

While cross-dressing women have been seen as threatening to social conceptions of “proper” female attitudes, military women in general have also been considered a threat to social norms about femininity, often seen as deviant, controversial, loose—or even traditional. Seen as “the Other,” women are treated as being separate from and unequal to men, even a distraction from their wartime duties. Traditionally, women in war films were shown as being passive, subject to social expectations in terms of their life choices and appearance. Frequently serving as a foil for male characters, they labor in traditional roles such as wife and mother; if a woman joins the military, itself a radical idea that blurs gender lines, she works in a traditional job such as nurse, which still allows her to show her nurturing side and perform an important function. Often portrayed as a “girl” who is just working at a non-traditional job temporarily to help with the war effort, her focus is on the time after the war, when she can return to wearing feminine clothing, find a husband, and have children. Silent, passive, and sensitive, she serves as an inspiration for the fighting man, who often places her on a pedestal (often referred to as “the Madonna,” the embodiment of the maternal) and fights to keep her safe.

The “loose” woman provides temporary satisfaction for a man far from home. She behaves like a man by actively seeking sex and power, and her behavior is often threatening to both men and women. Brandishing her lipstick tube as a weapon of strength and defiance, she typically pays the ultimate price, either voluntarily or not, for her indiscretions and serves as a warning to other women who choose to deviate from social norms.

For many Americans, until very recently, the image of the military woman is that of a manish individual who rejects all aspects of femininity, able to competently act under the pressures of war without giving consideration to her appearance or what people think. She, too, often dies in a war film, usually heroically, recognizing that she has no place in peacetime society. But are these stereotypical portrayals of women actually accurate?

As previously noted, while women have historically participated in war, they have largely been omitted from the historical record, and their relative absence from films about war leads people to think that women have not been involved in any meaningful way. Hollywood films tend to depict war as a man’s job, unsuitable for women, yet women have played a valuable and official role in the military since World War I. While the military woman has been seen as problematic because she “violates traditional norms, exercises autonomy, travels widely, and demonstrates great flexibility in her determination to master her environment,” she also serves as a sign of modernity.¹⁸ Today’s military women work in jobs ranging from the traditional nurse and secretary to those considered to be more “masculine,” such as pilots, jet mechanics, and shipboard engineers. And many of those roles are reflected in films of the twenty-first century.

The military woman also has been depicted as a hero in films. She frequently is a woman living life on her own terms who finds herself in a situation usually encountered by a man, performing well in that situation. While she may deemphasize her femininity, she usually has a healthy relationship with the men around her and with other women as well. She is focused, organized, and capable—and she exists in real life as well as in the movies, as can be seen in the films discussed in this book.

Each chapter of the book addresses a specific decade of film production and reveals the film genres, types of characters, jobs they performed, the rules under which women in the American military operated in the real world at that time, and how they were received by the film viewing public. The first chapter, *The Early Days: 1910–1939*, sets the stage for the rest of the book by examining the earliest war films, those made between 1910 and 1939. Created in black and white

by filmmakers in America, the earliest were silent films that featured women in traditional roles as contract and military nurses or ambulance drivers, caring for the wounded and often falling in love with the hero. For the most part, these women were “good girls” who followed the social norms of the day; those who did not typically died to atone for their transgressions. One interesting trope that began with the earliest of these films was that of women dressing as military men and serving on the front lines. Despite the fact that more than 13,000 women joined the U.S. military during World War I, serving in the Navy as yeomen (F), the Marine Corps as Marines (F) and the Army as Hello Girls, this military service has not been depicted in film at all except for one short film discussed in Chapter Seven.

As the U.S. entered World War II, there quickly became a manpower shortage at home as wave after wave of men joined the military. This provided a great opportunity for American women, allowing them to serve in roles not traditionally available to them at that time. This included military service. Chapter Two, *You Can Do It! The 1940s*, examines the roles of military women during World War II. With the passing of Public Law 77-554 in 1942, Congress established the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (which became the Women’s Army Corps a year later); this act was quickly followed by legislation establishing women’s units for the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard as well. With so much going on, it is not surprising that Hollywood took full advantage and produced a greater quantity of films, many of which depicted women in the military in a much wider variety of roles, especially those that were released post-World War II. During the war years, many films, like *Corregidor* and *Cry ‘Havoc’*, for example, chronicled the experiences of nurses assigned overseas. There were also a number of films centered on basic training, including *Never Wave at a WAC* and *Keep Your Powder Dry*, which were generally vehicles for the decade’s most glamorous screen stars to be able to do their part for the war as well.

As both World War II and the Korean Conflict faded into memory, life in the U.S. began to transition to a somewhat normal state. Chapter Three, *Now What? The 1950s*, looks at the status of military women in the 1950s. Women were expected to just return to being housewives, but that became problematic. Many of these women had gotten their first taste of independence, and many of them did not want to give up that independence so easily. At that time, however, Hollywood generally chose to portray military women in a much more traditional light, with few films of this decade doing much to showcase the ever-increasing role of women in the military and society at large. Some notable exceptions were films that focused on the burgeoning Cold War, such as *Jet Pilot* and *The Iron Petticoat*, both of which featured female Soviet fighter pilots who were considering defecting to the West. Comedies also became much more common during this decade, but many films continued to portray women in the more traditional scenario of military nurse as love interest for her male co-star.

During the 1960s and 1970s, changes occurred throughout all aspects of society, and those changes are explored in Chapter Four, *The Times They Are Changing: The 1960s and 1970s*. By the 1960s, American military leaders recognized that female military members had made significant contributions during World War II and the Korean Conflict, and while the number of military women had been dramatically reduced after those wars, those who remained continued to show that women could make a difference in the military as they worked to open new jobs and opportunities for women in all branches of the service. War films from this time period continued to primarily feature World War II as their settings, but rather than just focusing on dramatic events, many, like *The Horizontal Lieutenant* and *Wake Me When It’s Over*, depicted more humorous aspects of military service, reflecting the ebullient mood of the country at the time. That cheerful mood soon turned dark in both society and film as America’s involvement in the Vietnam War geared up in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While they used the setting of

previous wars, films like *MASH* and *Catch-22* were actually commentaries on the Vietnam War and reflected society's growing desire for peace. At the same time, Cold War films such as *The President's Plane is Missing* and *Warhead* reflected growing fears about terrorism, the Cold War, and the possibility of nuclear war.

As the horrors of the Vietnam War faded from the public's consciousness, Hollywood filmmakers felt the time was right to revisit the war, producing films like *Hamburger Hill*, *Platoon*, and *Apocalypse Now*, which showed the experiences of the men who fought and died during the war. While the majority of these films did not feature military women as part of the story line, several did, including *Full Metal Jacket* and *Purple Hearts*. The end of the military draft meant a shortage of men to fill military manpower requirements, eventually leading to increased positions for women in the military—and to films like *Private Benjamin*, *A Time to Triumph*, and *She's in the Army Now*, which explored the trials and tribulations women experienced as they adapted to military life. Chapter Five, Great Expectations: The 1980s, examines these increased opportunities as well as issues of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, which were increasingly being talked about as more women joined the military. The need for the military to address these issues and adapt to change were addressed on the screen as well, in movies such as *Lethal Woman* and *Opposing Force (Hellcamp)*. Many of these issues would continue to be explored and developed by both the military and filmmakers in subsequent decades.

The 1990s saw increased public interest in the idea of women in the military and of women serving in non-traditional military roles, the result of the ever-shifting front lines that occurred during the conflict in Grenada and during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. As seen in Chapter Six, Wish Fulfillment—Almost: The 1990s, films such as *Courage Under Fire*, *Fire Birds*, and *By Dawn's Early Light* feature women aviators as key figures and as heroes. Other films, such as *A Few Good Men* and *Inflammable*, also show strong military women in a positive light. The decade also saw filmmakers look back to women's roles in previous wars, in such films as *The English Patient*, *In Love and War*, and *Paradise Road*, and to continue to explore important issues of gender discrimination and sexual harassment. The role of women in the military and the bending of gender roles even entered the world of children's films in Disney's *Mulan*. Like the military, commercial filmmakers also began to address the issue of gays in the military in films such as *Serving in Silence*.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, films featuring women in the military have become standard Hollywood fare. While other decades tended to look back, less than one-third of films from the 2000s are about historical conflicts. As seen in Chapter Seven, All That You Can Be: The 2000s, filmmakers now prefer to talk about the present as well as to look ahead to what the military woman has and will become. During this decade, military members themselves began making their own films, reflecting their personal experiences and the issues of importance to themselves and their compatriots.

Since 2010, decisions allowing women to serve on submarines and to serve in combat units have been implemented, and Hollywood has adjusted accordingly. Today's films, which are examined in Chapter Eight, Shattering the Camouflage Ceiling: The 2010s, show servicewomen in a much greater variety of roles. For the more than 120 films in this survey that were released between 2000 and 2018, only eight have a nurse as the primary military female character, and five of those portrayals are about World War II. This contrasts sharply with the forty-seven films made during the 1940s, in which almost half feature nurses as the main female military character(s). Exploring the ever-present topic of PTSD has also become more prevalent, and films such as *Blood Stripe* and *Stand Down Soldier* address all aspects of how combat affects the soldiers of this generation.

While warfare is still considered to be the realm of fighting men and their military exploits

have been the subject of American film since the medium's beginnings, women have also answered the call to defend their country, and their story deserves to be told as well. Women's military service has received recognition in film, but not to the extent of the men's. Their depictions, measured against what was officially authorized at the time of the film's release, are discussed in the following chapters.