

The Women In Military Service For America Memorial Register

The Women In Military Service For America Memorial honors those women who have served in and with the Armed Forces of the United States starting with the American Revolution through the present day. The newly opened Memorial stands at the ceremonial entrance to Arlington National Cemetery. Inside, visitors can tour the exhibit gallery and view documentary films on the history of women in the U.S. military. Because we want to recognize each individual woman's service, we have placed women's names into a Computer Register. Visitors can use the Computer Register to access the names of some of the over 250,000 servicewomen who have registered with the Memorial Foundation to date.

The Computer Register is often referred to as the "heart" of the Women's Memorial. Since 1987, active duty and reserve servicewomen, veterans, and the family members of these women have been registering at the Women In Military Service For America Memorial Foundation. A registration form, available from the Foundation (1-800-222-2294 or <wimsa@aol.com>) asks for information describing an individual's military service. Included are dates of military service, branch of service, highest rank achieved, birth and death dates, home town, medals and awards attained, and a narrative detailing "Memorable Military Experiences." Completed registration forms are entered into the database; print-outs of individual registrations are available at the Memorial for a minimal fee.

The Foundation estimates that more than 1.8 million women have served in or with the military

in defense of the nation. The service records of women who served during the American Revolution, the Mexican-American War, the Civil War, and the Spanish-American War are currently being researched; although women did not serve in the military in these wars, they did work with the armed forces. When documentation of an individual's service is located, her name is entered into the database. Modern-era servicewomen are registered individually or by their families.

Women veterans and their families are thrilled that women's military service is finally being recognized. While women's service was sometimes fairly routine, it nonetheless frequently involved significant sacrifice. Women gave up comfortable lives in the home and/or better paying jobs in the civilian sector for the strict regimentation of military life. Women served without many of the military benefits taken for granted by men. Women served overseas, under fire, and in dangerous conditions. Many women were killed or died while in service to their country. The women veterans and their families who visit the Memorial feel overwhelmingly that "it's about time" women's military service is recognized by the nation they proudly served. And this history is made even more real through the power of the Memorial's Computer Register which is quickly becoming an emotional draw for many visitors seeking to learn more about their comrades and loved ones.

Judith Bellafaire is Curator of The Women In Military Service For America Memorial.

NPS works to preserve sites and objects associated with the nation's military history. An exhibit of museum objects from the Gettysburg National Historic Battlefield is featured at the NPS Web site (related article on p. 14). "Camp Life" Web site designed by Mark Oviatt.

