Female aviators spread wings in past, present, future

Privates Neta Irene Farrell, Rochester, N.Y., and Genevieve Evers, Woodhaven, N.Y., position a depth charge as they prepare to load and arm it in the bay of a plane during a course at the Station Ordnance School at Quantico, Va. in the early 1940s.
Women’s History Month, celebrated in March, is a time to reflect on the accomplishment of women in the past and encourage advancement in the future.

Women have had a lasting impression on the Marine Corps and its air wings.

Marine Corps aviation was established in 1912. In 1918, women were allowed to join the military and primarily took over clerical jobs such as shopkeeping and administrative work from combat-ready male Marines needed overseas.

The Marine Corps Women’s Reserve was officially established Feb. 13, 1943, during World War II. Approximately 85 percent of enlisted
Marines at headquarters units were women during that time. Congress passed the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act in 1948, which made women a permanent part of the military and opened many jobs to women.

Since then, women have worked alongside their male counterparts in different occupational specialties. Some of the aviation occupational specialties include maintenance, parachute rigging and flight operation scheduling. However, women were unable to become pilots or air crew until after 1975. At the same time, the term “Women Marines” was discontinued which further integrated women in the Marine Corps and helped them better cohere to their combat brothers.


Now, female Marines continue the strong traditions of the women who came before them.

“We’re 50 percent of the populace [in the world],” said 1st Lt. Alisa Sieber, a pilot with Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron (VMGR) 352 and a San Diego native. “We have a story to tell. We are still emerging as leaders in this country. It’s very important to show that we can do anything men can do.”

Now, women can serve in all aviation-related military occupational specialties, and 92 percent of occupations Marine Corps wide. The number of women accounts for roughly 7 percent of the Marine Corps, but the numbers continues to grow.

First Lt. Theresa Nafis, a student weapons and systems officer with Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron (VMFAT) 101 and a Chino, Calif., native, explained that women continue to break boundaries today because of the women who fought for equality previously.

“I feel, as a woman, that it’s our duty and position to uphold [the women who came before us] and be professional and make those women proud.”