



# **BACKGROUND** **DOCUMENTATION**

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## **Fact Sheet: Women's Progress in the Canadian Military<sup>1</sup>**

**1885** Women serve as nurses for the first time in Canadian military history during the Northwest Rebellion.

**1901** A permanent Canadian Nursing Service is created.

**1898-1902** Nurses once again support the Canadian military with the Yukon Field Force in 1898 and the three Canadian contingents in the Boer War in South Africa.

During the South African (Boer) War, they become a permanent part of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps.

**1906** Nurses are admitted to the Regular Force.

**1914-1918** More than 2800 women serve with the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps between 1914 and 1918, with the majority serving overseas in hospitals, on board hospital ships, in several theatres of war and in combat zones with field ambulance units.

World War I also sees the first organization of women in a military capacity other than nursing. Canadian women form paramilitary groups, outfit themselves in military-style uniforms, and undertake training in small arms, drill, first aid and vehicle maintenance in case they are needed as home guards.

**1939-1945** Approximately 5000 nurses serve in the Army, Navy and Air Force Medical Corps during the Second World War. They serve overseas in hospitals, casualty stations near combat zones, mobile field hospitals and in many theatres of war. However, they are not permitted to serve in warships, combat aircraft or combat arms units.

**1941** The Canadian government decides to enrol more than 45,000 women volunteers for full-time military service other than nursing. All three services establish women's

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<sup>1</sup> This backgrounder contains a non-exhaustive list of milestones and is not a definitive compendium of all the historical achievements or accomplishments of Canadian Forces female members.

divisions and the range of duties broadens during the war from traditional trades—clerks, cooks, drivers and telephone operators—to mechanics, parachute riggers and heavy mobile equipment drivers.

- 1950-1953** Women are once again recruited for military service when military personnel are committed to the Korean War. More than 5,000 women are serving by 1955.
- 1965** A government decision is made to continue to employ women in the Canadian military. A fixed ceiling of 1500, to include women in all three services, is established. The limit represents roughly 1.5% of the total force of the day.
- 1970** The Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommends changes necessary to provide a climate of equal opportunity for women in Canada, with six recommendations aimed specifically at the Canadian Forces:
- standardization of enrolment criteria;
  - equal pension benefits for women and men;
  - opportunity for women to attend Canadian military colleges;
  - opening of all trades and officer classifications to women; and,
  - termination of regulations prohibiting enrolment of married women and requiring release of servicewomen upon the birth of a child.
- 1974** Major Wendy Clay, a doctor, qualifies for her pilot's wings six years before the pilot classification is opened to all women.
- 1978** Corporal Gail Toupin becomes the first female member of the SkyHawks, the Army's skydiving demonstration team.
- 1979-1985** Trials take place as part of the Servicewomen in Non-Traditional Environments and Roles (SWINTER) project.
- 1979** Military colleges open their doors to women.
- 1981** Second Lieutenant Inge Plug becomes the first female helicopter pilot.
- Lieutenant Karen McCrimmon becomes the Canadian Forces' first female air navigator.
- 1982** The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is signed. It prohibits discrimination based on race, national/ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age and mental/physical disability.

- 1987** Combat Related Employment of Women (CREW) trials are announced for selected Army units and naval vessels. The Air Force announces that no further trials are required and all areas of Air Force employment, including fighter pilot, are open to women.
- 1986-1988** Following a discrimination complaint, Canadian Human Rights Tribunal orders the Canadian Forces to:
- Continue the CREW trials as preparation for the full integration of women in all occupations of the CF rather than as a trials program;
  - Fully integrate women into Regular and Reserve Forces (with the exception of submarines);
  - Remove all employment restrictions and implement new occupational personnel selection standards; and
  - Devise a plan to steadily, regularly and consistently achieve complete integration within ten years.
- 1988** Colonel Sheila A. Hellstrom is the first female graduate of National Defence College. She becomes the first Regular Force woman to be promoted to the rank of Brigadier-General.
- First female gunners in the Regular Force graduate from qualification 3 training and are posted to 5e Régiment d'artillerie légère (5 RALC) in Valcartier, Quebec as part of the CREW trials.
- Private Shannon Wills wins the Queens Medal for Champion Shot of the Reserve Forces at Connaught Ranges in Ottawa.
- 1989** Private Heather R. Erxleben becomes Canada's first female Regular Force infantry soldier.
- Major Dee Brasseur became the first woman fighter pilot of a CF-18 Hornet.
- 1990** The Minister's Advisory Board on Women in the Canadian Forces is established by the Minister of National Defence to monitor the progress of gender integration and employment equity in the Canadian Forces.
- 1991** HMCS NIPIGON becomes the first Canadian mixed-gender warship to participate in exercises with NATO's Standing Naval Forces Atlantic.
- Lieutenant Anne Reiffenstein (nee Proctor), Lieutenant Holly Brown and Captain Linda Shrum graduate from artillery training as the first female officers in the combat arms.

- 1992** Corporal Marlene Shillingford becomes the first woman selected to join the Snowbirds team. She takes part in the 1993-94 show season as a technician. The Snowbirds are the Air Force's aerobatic demonstration flying team.
- 1993** Lieutenant(N) Leanne Crowe is the first woman to qualify as a clearance diving officer and is subsequently the first woman to become Officer Commanding of the Experimental Diving Unit.
- 1994** Major-General Wendy Clay becomes the first woman promoted to that rank.
- 1995** Chief Warrant Officer Linda Smith is the first woman to be named Wing Chief Warrant Officer in the Canadian Forces at 17 Wing Winnipeg.
- 1997** Colonel Marcia Quinn assumes command of 41 Canadian Brigade Group.
- Colonel Patricia Samson is appointed Canadian Forces Provost Marshall; she is later promoted Brigadier-General.
- 1998** Lieutenant-Colonel Karen McCrimmon is appointed Commander of 429 Transport Squadron in Trenton, Ontario.
- Chief Petty Officer, 2nd Class Holly Kisbee becomes the first woman Combat Chief of a major warship.
- 2000** The Chief of the Maritime Staff announces that women can serve in submarines.
- Major Micky Colton becomes the first female pilot to complete 10,000 flying hours in a Hercules aircraft.
- Lieutenant Ruth-Ann Shamuhn of 5 Combat Engineer Regiment becomes the first female combat diver.
- 2001** Captain Maryse Carmichael is the first female Snowbird pilot. The Snowbirds are the Air Force's aerobatic demonstration flying team.
- 2002** Chief Warrant Officer Camille Tkacz is the first woman appointed to a Command Chief position as Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources - Military) Chief Warrant Officer.
- 2003** Major Anne Reiffenstein is the first female to command a combat arms sub-unit. She is currently a Battery Commander at 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment Royal Canadian Horse Artillery at CFB Shilo.

Lieutenant-Commander Marta Mulkins is the first woman to serve as a captain of a Canadian warship.

Major Jennie Carignan of 5 Combat Engineer Regiment (5 CER) becomes the first female Deputy Commanding Officer of a combat arms unit.

Leading Seaman Hayley John and Leading Seaman Marketa Semik are the first female clearance divers

Master Seaman Colleen Beattie is the first woman qualified as a submariner, followed shortly by Master Seaman Carey Ann Stewart.

The first and only all female CF team to complete the Nijmegen March in Holland carrying the same weight as male teams. They are: team leader Lieutenant Debbie Scott, second-in-command Captain Lucie Mauger, Lieutenant Jody Weathered, Corporal Elizabeth Mutch, Warrant Officer Nathalie Mercer, Warrant Officer Jackie Revell, Master Corporal Denise Robert, Corporal Melissa Cedilot, Corporal Danette Frasz, Lieutenant-Colonel Teresa McNutt, Lieutenant Donna Rogers and Corporal Anne MacDonald.

**2004**

Chief Petty Officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Class Jan Davis is appointed Coxswain of HMCS REGINA and is the first woman Coxswain of a major warship.