



*Remarks by Major General Phillip R. Anderson,
Commander, Mississippi Valley Division,
at the Womens History Month Kickoff Program,
Vicksburg District , 13 March 2000*

Lt. Governor Tuck, Col. Crear, Mayor Walker,
Mr. George, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning. It is a pleasure to have the
opportunity to speak to you today and to reaffirm
women's contributions to our nation and their
integral role in our history.

I will speak specifically to women in the
military. There are wonderful stories to be told
-- success stories that are very much a part of
American history.

The strength of our nation rests with those who defend it -- who keep and protect it for the generations to come.

There is one group, who until the recent past, have gone unnoticed. Our failure to recognize them properly is a grave oversight, for their quiet, selfless service has been crucial to our nation.

When the nation called, they were there. And when no longer needed, they returned quietly to traditional roles. This month, lest we forget, **we must first remember.** We must recognize the deeds of women throughout history.

From the American Revolution to the present, the women in our military have a proud heritage -- one that predates our democracy.

I want to mention just a few examples:

-- Molly Pitcher, whose real name was Mary Hayes McCauly, earned her nickname by carrying water and grog to her husband and other American artillerymen of the Revolution. She earned her fame, however, at New Jersey's Battle of Monmouth on June 28, 1778. When her husband collapsed in battle, she immediately took his place, firing the cannon until the battle was over.

Sarah Edmonds, who initially served as a nurse in the Civil War. She later became a spy in the secret service of the Union. Edmonds was a master of disguise. Able to pass as a man or woman -- black or white -- she infiltrated Confederate lines 11 times in 1862 and 1863.

During World War I, women were allowed to enlist, for the first time, in the U.S. military. Over 12,000 women served stateside thereby, and I quote, "freeing a man to fight." End quote.

During World War II, approximately 400,000 American military women served stateside and overseas. They served in every theater of the war and in many nontraditional roles.

Many joined against the wishes of their families and communities -- as well as the wishes of many of their male counterparts.

And, even though the military asked for their service, women did not find it easy to sign up. Black women faced the biggest barriers. Because of racial discrimination, they weren't even allowed into the post offices to pick up applications for service. But in spite of the obstacles, they managed to join and serve with honor.

During World War II, 87 female military members were held prisoners of war. Six Army nurses lost their lives during the invasion at Anzio beachhead.

More than 180 WACs died during World War II, many as a result of being in combat areas. But still, many people are not aware of their service -- often not even their fellow veterans.

As Lieutenant Colonel Charity Adams Early, former World War Two WAC and battalion commander of the first all-black women's battalion in France, recounts, "When I mentioned once that I was in France during those years, one veteran asked me what I was doing visiting Paris during the war. I told him, 'I wasn't visiting -- I was helping you win the war!'"

The list goes on: Close to 540 women served in Korea; nearly 11,000 served in Vietnam.

Yet, through all this history, the sacrifice and service of women were not always accepted, were not always recognized, and were not always rewarded.

Those are just a few examples of the proud heritage of women in the military. I salute all the women who have played -- and will play -- such a key role in making America's military forces the world's finest.

As for the future, I see women's roles in the military, as well as in the civilian arena, continuing to expand and grow. I see the Vicksburg District as well as the Mississippi Valley Division served by female commanders.

In addition, I believe the day is not too far off when a woman will be elected to serve as the governor of Mississippi, as well as Vice President and President of the United States. For years, women have been proving they're up to and equal to any challenge.

In closing, I urge you to learn more about the great achievements of women, past and present, and their contributions to our nation. And what better time than now, during Women's History Month.

I also challenge all the men and women in the audience to help the next generation of young women by volunteering to be mentors. Your knowledge and experience are invaluable.

I've enjoyed being with you today and look forward to hearing the other presentations. I also encourage you to participate in the other events throughout the month celebrating Women's History.

Thank you.