

## Commentary

### What A Day It Was!

By Wilma L. Vaught



With the words, "Mr. President, let's dig!" I joined President and Mrs. Clinton, Secretary of Defense William Perry, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman John Shalikashvili and others on 22 June, turning the first shovels of earth at the site of the Women In Military Service Memorial.

What a day it was! More than 5,500 women veterans and supporters joined us at the main entrance to Arlington National Cemetery--the single largest gathering of women veterans and servicewomen in our nation's history.

Among our supporters is Howard E. Haugerud, publisher of *The Stars and Stripes*. When Mr. Haugerud generously offered to mail this issue of the venerable veterans newspaper to our chapter members at his expense, we jumped at the opportunity to share the events of 21-22 June with you now, since the next WIMSA newsletter with the story of the groundbreaking won't be out until August.

So many wonderful memories were shared at the 21 June reunion and the groundbreaking ceremony the next day. New memories to last a lifetime were created. It would be impossible to relate them all. A high-

light of the dinner gala on the evening of 22 June was the presentation of an oversized check from Mr. Dick Lombardi, AT&T government markets president, for \$1 million, our largest contribution to date. AT&T was the major corporate underwriter of the event.

Let me share our future with you:

◆ We must focus on locating and registering more women veterans to meet our goal of at least 500,000 in our data base when the memorial is dedicated.

◆ Fund-raising for the memorial is not over, not by a long shot. To meet the legal requirements for groundbreaking and construction, we obtained a \$2.3 million line of credit. We must raise at least that amount within two years to pay construction costs. Otherwise, the line of credit becomes a loan, with interest.

◆ We must raise the money to furnish and equip the Education Center with its exhibits, films and computer data base.

The most frequently asked question now is, "When will the memorial be dedicated?" Our best guess is late 1997 or the spring of 1998. Shortly, we will issue a request for proposal to construction firms. Optimistically, allowing time for companies to prepare and submit propos-

als followed by our review, we are probably looking at a construction starting date after the first of the year. Construction time is estimated to be 18-24 months.

Our staff and supporters will be working diligently during this time, seeking new sources of revenue and asking for continued support. The U.S. Mint has agreed to let us purchase all unsold Women In Military Service Commemorative Coins when they are taken off the market on 15 July, so we can continue to provide them to our charter members and supporters.

The Defense Commissary Agency will run its third "Salute to Military Women" promotion in military commissaries in August. The annual

Combined Federal Campaign (our agency code is 1025) for military and federal workers will kick off in September. And, for the first time, WIMSA is now a participant in the United Way Campaign of the greater Washington, DC, area.

Groundbreaking is just one more step in our journey to tell the story of women's service through building your memorial, but it is a major one. Our heartfelt thanks to each of you who has helped us reach this important milestone.

If you weren't able to join us for the groundbreaking, I hope you will make attending the dedication a personal priority.

Please enjoy this issue of *The Stars and Stripes!*★

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*Brig. Gen. Wilma L. Vaught (USAF-ret.) is president of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, Inc.*

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# Women Vets Gather To Commemorate Over Two Centuries Of Service

## Ground Broken For Women Veterans Monument

By Stacy VanDerWall  
Stars and Stripes Staff Writer

Thousands of women veterans and their supporters gathered in Washington, DC, late last month to celebrate the nearly two million women who have served—and are serving—in America's armed forces.

Some 2,000 women veterans filled the grand ballroom of the JW Marriott Hotel 21 June and 1,400 attended a festive dinner the next day. Both events were planned by the Women In Military Service for America Foundation (WIMSA).

The main event of the two-day commemoration was a groundbreaking ceremony for a memorial to women veterans scheduled to be built at Arlington National Cemetery. More than 5,500 women veterans and their supporters—including President Clinton—attended.

It was not the first time the women had broken new ground.

"When I served, women didn't have the right to vote," said Anne Pedersen Freeman, a 94-year-old WWI 1st class yeoman.

Freeman credits her decision to join the Navy to a high school graduation gift—a trip to Washington, DC, where she first saw women in uniform.

"That's for me," Freeman said at the time. She signed up on 7 Nov., 1918, four days before the armistice, for "dura-

tion plus six months." She served her tour at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where she "typed and typed and typed and made six copies of everything."

The memorial has been 10 years in the making. Legislation authorizing it was introduced in 1985 by Rep. Mary Rose Oakar (D-OH) and Sen. Frank Murkowski (R-AK), with support from the American Veterans Committee. It was signed into law by former President Reagan 6 Nov., 1986.

WIMSA was established to manage the project, and Brig. Gen. Wilma L. Vaught (USAF-ret.)—one of America's most decorated servicewomen—was elected as its president.

The law required that the \$16 million needed to build the memorial be raised before construction could begin, initiating a long, slow process of gathering support.

Congress helped by authorizing a \$9.5 million grant and issuing a set of 500,000 commemorative coins.

By the time of the groundbreaking, WIMSA still was more than \$2 million short of funds. A line of credit from NationsBank enabled the effort to go forward.

The monument was designed by two New York architects, Marion Gail Weiss and Michael Manfredi, the winners of a national competition.

A fight to preserve the design was only one of Vaught's



More than 5,500 women veterans and their supporters turned out for the groundbreaking ceremony. Photo: Stacy VanDerWall.

battles. The original plans included a series of 10 softly illuminated glass pylons, each 39 feet tall—called "candles" by the architects—which were strongly opposed by the U.S. Park Service, whose job it will be to maintain the memorial's exterior.

When the committees charged with oversight began fiddling with the design, tactician Vaught wisely sought to avoid the kinds of acrimonious compromises that plagued the Vietnam War and Korean War veterans memorials. She asked the original designers to make changes.

The pylons vanished, to be replaced by an elegant arc of glass "pages" inscribed with quotations from women veterans. One critic called the revision "sensitive, internally consistent and subtly poetic."

The two-tier memorial is designed to restore and restructure the crumbling main gate of Arlington National Cemetery.

The glass pages will be on the memorial's upper terrace. A reflecting pool, mirroring the faces of visitors, will be placed in front of the semi-circle-wall of the lower terrace.

Water, an important component in the design, also will flow over the pages, falling through a central apse and into the reflecting pool.

The memorial additionally will feature a 35,000-square foot education center featuring a theater, computer registration center, Hall of Honor, conference center and exhibit gallery.

Central to the project is a computerized database—similar to the one at the Navy Memorial—which will contain photos and stories of 125,000

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Brig. Gen. Wilma L. Vaught (USAF-ret.), flanked by Secretary of Defense William Perry, left, and Gen. John Shalikashvili. Photo: John Harrington.

### 'It's A Wonderful Thing'

For nine years, the effort to build a memorial to women veterans has been spearheaded by one woman.

Brig. Gen. Wilma L. Vaught (USAF-ret.), president of the WIMSA Board of Directors since 1986, has seen the project through to its groundbreaking after navigating it through three government committees and heading a drive to raise more than \$15 million.

She has collected 125,000 stories from women veterans for the memorial's publicly accessible computerized data base. She wants histories of all 1.8 million women who have served in the U.S. military since the Revolutionary War—names and addresses, pictures and other memorabilia—with selected names and quotations to be etched onto the memorial's glass wall.

And, her supporters say, what Gen. Vaught wants, Gen. Vaught gets.

"Anyone who doesn't think women can handle combat hasn't gotten between Wilma Vaught and the memorial," said Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II (D-MA) at the groundbreaking.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. John Shalikashvili lauded Vaught at the WIMSA dinner:

"We are here to build a monument. Why? Because Gen. Vaught told us to do so," Shalikashvili informed an estimated 1,400 women veterans.

"I'm very proud to have the opportunity to work on this project," Vaught said. "It's something that is long overdue. It's a wonderful thing."



Hillary Rodham Clinton greets former U.S. Marine Louise Stringfield Jones.

Photo: John Harrington.

## Women Vets Gather

From 19

women veterans.

One of those stories is that of Prudence Burrell, an African-American WWII nurse who was prohibited from caring for white soldiers where she was stationed.

She also had to wear a special "A" insignia beneath her Red Cross pin.

"They classified us," Burrell said. "They were not going to take us in until Mrs. Roosevelt, African-American educator Mary McLeod Bethune and Mrs. Staupers, a president of a now-defunct African-American nurses association, demanded the surgeon general accept black nurses."

Full integration did not come until 26 July, 1948, when President Truman established the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, Burrell noted. Burrell, who was first stationed in New Guinea, met her husband, 1st Lt. Lowell Burrell, in Manila, where they were wed.

Her wedding dress, which Burrell said came from the army, was designed by a Red Cross worker and fashioned

from a silk parachute by a Filipino. Burrell said she still wears her 50-cent wedding ring engraved with "Philippines 1945."

Anna Mae McCabe Hays was the first woman promoted to brigadier general. Hays, who spoke at the groundbreaking, was chief of the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) during the Vietnam War in 1967.

In her speech, Hays quoted from a letter to *The Stars and Stripes* from Lt. Frances Slanger, the first American Army nurse to die in WWII as a result of enemy action on the Western Front. Slanger wrote the letter 21 Oct., 1944, the day before she died.

"Sure, we rough it, but in comparison to the way our men are taking it we can't complain, nor do we feel that bouquets are due us. But you, the men behind the guns, the men driving our tanks, flying our planes, sailing our ships, building bridges and the men who are left behind—it's to you that we doff our helmets," the letter said.

WWII veteran Helen Maravell-Smith was among the first group of Womens



Singing "God Bless America," from left, are Secretary of Defense William Perry; Brig. Gen. Anna Mae McCabe Hays (USA-ret.); first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton; Brig. Gen. Wilma L. Vaught (USAF-ret.); President Clinton; Staff Sgt. Melissa Crane, USMC; and Gen. John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Photo: John Harrington.

Army Corps (WAC) members attached to the 8th Air Force in England. The only woman assigned to assess combat fighter films, she was interviewed by Edward R. Morrow in London because of her unique position.

Maravell-Smith said she was in the middle of the bombing of London. The Germans' V2 rockets were "scary and frightening," but "after awhile, you get used to it and take it for granted," she said.

"I had fun being in the service," said Helen Graff Eilts of her experience as a 2nd class yeoman SPAR (the Coast Guard women's auxiliary) in WWII. "It was just a good time of life."

Eilts assembled groups of Coast Guardsmen to keep track of landing ships tanks (LSTs) on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers from her base at the St. Louis, MO, Post Office.

Eilts also worked as a recruiter for six months at the post office in Omaha, NE, where her duties included interviewing applicants, chauffeuring recruiting officers and scheduling their appearances. She was in charge of publicity for North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa.

In January 1945 Eilts was transferred to Coast Guard headquarters in Washington, DC. She lived in the Escanaba on Independence Avenue, one of four temporary buildings named after Coast Guard vessels, and worked at the old Coast Guard Dancing Hanks Pavilion, now an historic site, on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Eilts was discharged after a three-month stint in a personnel office where, under the supervision of "a white-haired chief petty officer," she typed, took minutes and arranged meetings related to court-martial proceedings.

Eilts said she was apprehensive at times. "Before the end of the war, there was a concern we weren't going to win."

It was, she said, a "great moment" when she learned that the atomic bomb had been dropped and victory assured.

Saundra L. Clark, a U.S. Navy Vietnam veteran, worked in the emergency dispensary unit at the Naval Training Center in San Diego as a "striker"—on strike to become a corpsman.

At 18, Clark attended an all-male school at Balboa Hospital in California from Au-

gust 1973 to May 1974, not realizing, she said, how traumatic the war would be for her.

The classrooms were no comparison with the hospital ward where, Clark said, "You could see the war right there."

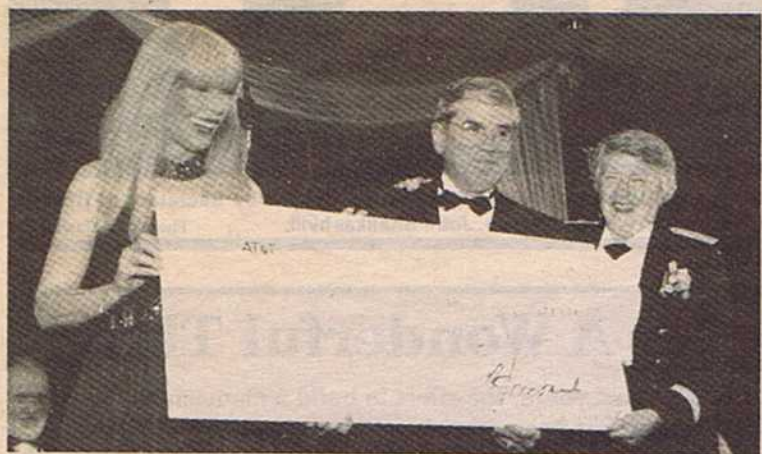
She said the men around her would often tease her—"Are we going to have the door open or shut today, Sandy?" "Are we going to wear a sweater today, Sandy?"—and sometimes the teasing verged on harassment.

WWII nurse Lt. Cathy Ziegler Hoffman said she was "very happy and excited that they're finally recognizing all women."

Hoffman said the 11th Field Hospital in North Africa, where she worked, was the first such hospital overseas.

"We were an experiment. We were the first ones to be organized and sent out of the country," Hoffman said, adding that her unit was the first to use penicillin.

"I think it's about time women get a memorial after 200 years," said former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. Colin Powell. "Women in uniform are an essential part of the military."★



"General Motors, you can match AT&T any time," said Brig. Gen. Wilma L. Vaught (USAF-ret.), right, as she accepted a \$1 million check for WIMSA from actress Loretta Swit and AT&T Government Markets President Richard J. Lombardi.

Photo: Elisa Komins.

## Saluting Women Veterans

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