

Women's Army Corps land 60 years ago

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March not only marks "Women's History Month," it also commemorates the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the first Women's Army Corps in Hawaii.

On March 17, 1944 some 286 "girl soldiers" (as they were called back then) wearing steel helmets and khaki uniforms stepped down a gangplank at Honolulu Harbor near the camouflaged Aloha Tower.

Their destination? Hickam Field.

In the lingo of those times, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin reported the "GI Janes" would take over enlisted men's non-combat duties, such as administrative office and motor transport work.

As the newspaper reported, "Arrival of the members of the women's army created considerable stir at their assignment base because many island service men ... never before had seen the female species of Uncle Sam's GI family."

Americans initially had difficulty accepting the idea of women in uniform. The Japanese attack on Oahu Dec. 7, 1941 changed everything.

In May 1942, Congress passed a bill establishing the Women's Army



Courtesy photo

With the camouflaged Honolulu Aloha Tower in the background, Hawaii's first Women's Army Corps' members board buses headed for Hickam Field March 1944.

Auxiliary Corps. Although required to wear military uniforms, WAACs were civilian employees. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill May 15, 1942, America's leaders had in mind a recruitment goal of 25,000 for the first year.

WAAC recruiting passed that goal within seven months, leading Secretary of War Henry Stinson to raise the enrollment ceiling to 150,000 — the number of American women who ultimately served in WWII. In July 1943, the Women's Army Corps was formed, allowing

members of the WAAC to join as regular military members with pay, privileges and protection equal to that given male military personnel.

In August 1943, all women pilots flying for the Army Air Force were consolidated into another new organization — the Women's Airforce Service Pilots.

While more than 25,000 women applied for pilot training under the program, only 1,830 were accepted for training, and 1,074 graduated as pilots.

The AAF assigned WASPs to a wide variety of flight assignments.

Female pilots worked as flight training instructors and glider tow pilots, and towed targets for air-to-air and anti-aircraft gunnery practice. WASPs also flew engineering test aircraft and ferried aircraft.

By the end of the war, WASPs had flown all types of military aircraft, including transports, attack aircraft, bombers, fighters and trainers.

The WASPS program was deactivated Dec. 20, 1944.

America's women pilots flew more than 16 million miles and delivered nearly 13,000 aircraft during the course of the war — just the beginning for women in what would soon become the United States Air Force.