

American Women in World War II

This article is provided courtesy of History.com



history.com

During World War II, some 350,000 women served in the U.S. Armed Forces, both at home and abroad. They included the Women's Airforce Service Pilots, who on March 10, 2010, were awarded the prestigious Congressional Gold Medal. Meanwhile, widespread male enlistment left gaping holes in the industrial labor force. Between 1940 and 1945, the female percentage of the U.S. workforce increased from 27 percent to nearly 37 percent, and by 1945 nearly one out of every four married women worked outside the home.

WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES

In addition to factory work and other home front jobs, some 350,000 women joined the Armed Services, serving at home and abroad. At the urging of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and women's groups, and impressed by the British use of women in service, General George Marshall supported the idea of introducing a women's service branch into the Army. In May 1942, Congress instituted the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, later upgraded to the Women's Army Corps, which had full military status. Its members, known as WACs, worked in more than 200 non-combatant jobs stateside and in every theater of the war. By 1945, there were more than 100,000 WACs and 6,000 female officers. In the Navy, members of Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) held the same status as naval reservists and provided support stateside. The Coast Guard and Marine Corps soon followed suit, though in smaller numbers.

Did You Know? On March 10, 2010, nearly 70 years after they were disbanded, the Women Airforce Service Pilots received the Congressional Gold Medal.

One of the lesser-known roles women played in the war effort was provided by the Women's Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs. These women, each of whom had already obtained their pilot's license prior to service, became the first women to fly American military aircraft. They ferried planes from factories to bases, transporting cargo and participating in simulation strafing and target missions, accumulating more than 60 million miles in flight distances and freeing thousands of male U.S. pilots

for active duty in World War II. More than 1,000 WASPs served, and 38 of them lost their lives during the war. Considered civil service employees and without official military status, these fallen WASPs were granted no military honors or benefits, and it wasn't until 1977 that the WASPs received full military status. On March 10, 2010, at a ceremony in the Capitol, the WASPs received the Congressional Gold Medal, one of the highest civilian honors. More than 200 former pilots attended the event, many wearing their World War II-era uniforms.

"ROSIE THE RIVETER"

While women worked in a variety of positions previously closed to them, the aviation industry saw the greatest increase in female workers. More than 310,000 women worked in the U.S. aircraft industry in 1943, representing 65 percent of the industry's total workforce (compared to just 1 percent in the pre-war years). The munitions industry also heavily recruited women workers, as represented by the U.S. government's "Rosie the Riveter" propaganda campaign. Based in small part on a real-life munitions worker, but primarily a fictitious character, the strong, bandanna-clad Rosie became one of the most successful recruitment tools in American history, and the most iconic image of working women during World War II.

In movies, newspapers, posters, photographs, articles and even a Norman Rockwell-painted Saturday Evening Post cover, the Rosie the Riveter campaign stressed the patriotic need for women to enter the work force-and they did, in huge numbers. Though women were crucial to the war effort, their pay continued to lag far behind their male counterparts: Female workers rarely earned more than 50 percent of male wages.

campaign

 cam · paign

Definition

noun

1. a set of planned actions carried out in order to make something happen.

Radio and television are part of this advertising campaign.

The candidate gave many speeches during his campaign for office.

verb

1. to follow a plan of action in order to achieve something in politics.

The candidate is campaigning for mayor.

Advanced Definition

noun

1. a military operation organized to achieve specific objectives.

He led a successful military campaign against the invaders.

Napoleon's campaign into Russia was a failure.

2. a systematic, concerted set of activities undertaken for a particular purpose.

We're launching a new advertising campaign for this product.

They're on a campaign to raise money for the Red Cross.

3. a political competition for elective public office.

Her campaign for governor was a great success.

intransitive verb

1. to be actively involved in a campaign.

Bill Clinton campaigned for president in 1996.

Spanish cognate

campaña: The Spanish word *campaña* means campaign.

These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. The rally launched a worldwide **campaign** called "Make Poverty History." The goal is to challenge world leaders to end poverty.
2. Thanks to a global vaccination **campaign**, smallpox was eradicated in 1979. It's the only disease ever to be wiped out by humans.
3. In addition, a mobile system was built to operate on a Navy ship that would accompany General MacArthur's **campaign** across the Pacific Ocean, which military strategists had envisioned as the only way to beat Japan until the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945.
4. Anytime's marketing **campaign** had worked-they were a household name before they'd even made a single sale. When the reveal came, that day at noon, it was considerably less exciting than the rumors that had swirled around the company.

industry in · dus · try

Definition

noun

1. a number of companies that make a particular product.

The automobile industry employs thousands of people.

Advanced Definition

noun

1. the activity or process of turning raw materials into finished goods, or a particular business that does this.

The state has little industry in the rural western areas.

Many new industries have been established in this region in recent years.

2. the group of companies, regarded collectively, that produce a similar product or service.

The automobile industry employs thousands of workers.

They invested heavily in the steel industry.

The cosmetics industry has shown high profits this year.

3. the tendency to work hard.

The volunteers were rewarded for their industry.

Spanish cognate

industria: The Spanish word *industria* means industry.

These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. America's economy was exploding, and the country would need more than barely educated laborers to fill new managerial roles and become leaders in business and **industry**. In 1910, 9 percent of Americans had graduated high school.
2. Kyle had never really pictured himself as an entrepreneur-his father was in the financial **industry**, and he thought he would follow in his footsteps and work at a financial firm one day. But his passion for the campsite grew each day, and he knew he would regret it if he didn't give it a chance.
3. HUAC's investigation led to the development of extensive entertainment **industry** "blacklists," which made it difficult or impossible for those suspected of leftist sympathies to find work. These blacklists persisted into the early 1960s.
4. And now, preparation landed her a challenging job at a startup that was on the verge of revolutionizing the payments **industry**. Her mother still didn't understand exactly what a "startup" was.

recruit re · cruit

Advanced Definition

noun

1. a soldier recently drafted or enlisted into the armed forces.
2. a new member of a group or organization.

transitive verb

1. to enlist (persons) in a group or organization.

Churches try to recruit faithful followers.

2. to enlist (persons) in the armed forces.
3. to create (an organization or armed force) by finding members.

intransitive verb

1. to enroll young men and women in the armed forces.

Spanish cognate

recluta: The Spanish word *recluta* means recruit.

These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. In November 1811, while Tecumseh was in the South attempting to **recruit** the Creeks into his confederacy, U.S. forces marched against Prophetstown.
2. He encouraged education, and even counseled Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, **recruiting** northern blacks for the Union army. By the time the Civil War began, Douglass had become one of the most famous black men in America.
3. They are looking for new **recruits**. Military personnel set up tables stacked with brochures and videos about the armed forces.
4. Among the **recruits** were two of his sons, who took part in the bloody Union assault on Fort Wagner in South Carolina in July 1863, which resulted in more than 1,500 Northern casualties-but which proved black troops' heroism in battle. Douglass never wavered in his commitment to equal rights.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. How many women served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II?

2. Aside from joining the Armed Forces, how did many women support the war effort during World War II?

Support your answer with evidence from the text.

3. What is the main idea of this text?

4. Although women served in the war and joined the workforce, they were not always considered to be on the same level as men during World War II.

Support this conclusion with evidence from the text.
