



# I Can Do This

**A memorial to military women highlights their service.**

**By Beth Liechti Johnson**

Women's Army Corps Sgt. Esther M. Blake enlisted in the Air Force as soon as she could: just after the clock struck midnight, on July 8, 1948.

That was almost a year after USAF became an independent service but the first moment women were authorized as regular members of the armed forces.

Blake had originally enlisted to free up a soldier to fight, saying, "If I can do this, my efforts will be worthwhile."

## NUMBERING 2.5 MILLION

The Women in Military Service for America Memorial preserves—and continues to seek out—stories like this.

The memorial is located in the historic hemicycle edifice (built in 1932 and refurbished in the 1990s) at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va.

The Women in Military Service for America nonprofit foundation that manages The Women's Memorial—to use its shorthand name—salutes more than 2.5 million women who have served in the armed forces, going back to the American Revolution.

## FOR THE RECORD

The heart of the memorial is its registry, a computerized database and historical record of women veterans who have recorded their experience in their own words. The registry contains entries for more than 260,000 women.

Over 46,500 of them (almost 18 percent) served in the Total Air Force, according to retired Army Lt. Col. Marilla Cushman, the foundation's director of public relations, and Britta Granrud, curator of collections.

The collection contains 1,100 oral histories.

Granrud especially encourages women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan to tell their stories because they have performed Air Force duties never before undertaken by women. Capturing these experiences adds to the repository documenting women's contributions to US military history.

"What we don't record, we lose," The Women's Memorial officials like to say.

## IN THE ARCHIVE

The archive contains more than 5,800 artifacts, from the American Revolution to the Global War on Terror. Items donated include photographs, documents (journals and diaries), uniforms, personal items, medals, insignia, and unit patches.

Demonstrating the value and significance of this collection, some items are on loan to other museums, including the National Museum of American History, the new National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tenn.

The memorial's staff often receives queries from authors, scholars, artists,

**The Women in Military Service for America Memorial is the only major national memorial of its kind. It also honors women who served in the Merchant Marine, NOAA, the US Public Health Service, and other organizations.**

filmmakers, and the media for information about women in the military.

Families have contacted the staff to confirm a woman veteran's service. In several instances, the staff has been able to confirm eligibility for burial and memorial-service benefits, based on information the veteran provided in her registration, such as service number or discharge papers.

Several AFA members have an active role in The Women's Memorial, including retired Brig. Gen. Wilma L. Vaught, a Donald W. Steele Sr. Memorial Chapter member, who has shepherded the memorial since 1985; the foundation's board chairman, retired Brig. Gen. Eden J. Murrie of the Gen. Dan F. Callahan Chapter; and retired Brig. Gen. Barbara A. Goodwin, foundation secretary and a Gen. Charles A. Gabriel Chapter member.

This year, the Women in Military Service for America memorial will celebrate its 20th anniversary. Its website is at [womensmemorial.org](http://womensmemorial.org). ★

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Retired Col. Beth Liechti Johnson, US Army, is a charter member of The Women's Memorial.