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**WOMEN
IN COMBAT**

CHAPTER 1

WOMEN AND WAR

Major Mary Jennings Hegar flew her helicopter low. Beads of sweat formed on her brow. She was in the Afghan desert. It was over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Three American soldiers had been injured. The chopper was going to pick them up.

Shots rang out. Enemy fire flashed all around. Hegar wondered where it was coming from. Her arm was hit. Blood splattered. Another bullet hit her leg. The helicopter was leaking fuel. They were going down.

A few other U.S. helicopters arrived. They had to clear a space to land safely. Bullets rained down. The enemy soldiers moved back.



The helicopters landed in enemy space. Under heavy fire, U.S. soldiers rushed to move the injured. Hegar limped to one of the other choppers. It rose into the air quickly. With one hand, she grabbed the **skids**. Then the soldier spotted enemy troops coming close. She fired back with her other hand. Major Hegar and others got the injured soldiers to safety.

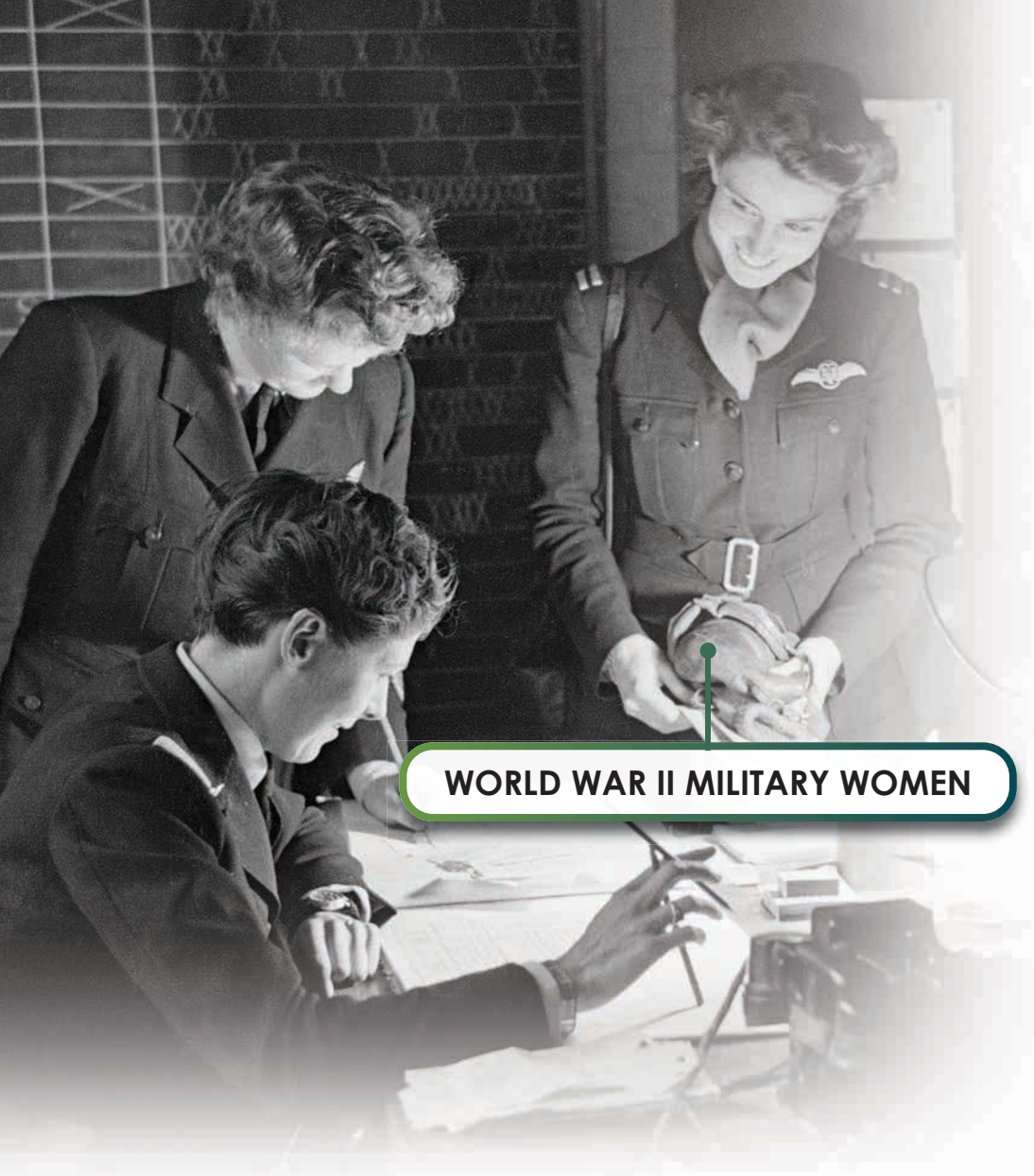


WOMAN IN THE CIVIL WAR, 1862



Women have always supported the U.S. military. They weren't always allowed to fight. At first, only a few jobs were offered. Some cooked for troops. Others made uniforms.

Many wanted to do more. Several women dressed as men during early American wars. This way they could fight. Others were spies. People didn't **suspect** them. Enemies were on the lookout for men.



WORLD WAR II MILITARY WOMEN

During World Wars I and II, women could join the military. They held office jobs. A few flew planes. Female soldiers still couldn't fight directly. By the 1970s, more women were leaders. Some led non-combat groups. Men and women began training together.

Times had changed, but some rules stayed the same. Men remained the only ones allowed to fight. However, the military needed more people. In 2013, Congress changed the laws. All military jobs opened to women three years later. As of 2018, women made up about 15 percent of troops.

WOMEN'S GEAR

In the 1970s, many new jobs opened for women in the military. There was a problem, however. The clothes didn't fit. Often, only men's uniforms were available. Packs were too big and overly heavy as well. Gear had to be adapted. Female troops had to wear their hair up which made helmets fit wrong. This was dangerous.

Small changes started to happen. Uniforms were made in different sizes. Armor was designed to fit women better and protect them correctly. More improvements were made in the 2010s. Packs were made smaller. New technology made them lighter. This helped women on the battlefield.



CHAPTER 2

THE ARMY

Leigh Ann Hester had always wanted to join the Army. In 2001, she started training. Then the soldier served in Iraq.

It was 2005. Sergeant Hester's squad was following a **convoy**. Trucks were attacked. She led a **counterattack**. Enemy soldiers were trying to capture Americans. Hester fought them off. The woman's actions saved many lives.

The military gave Hester a Silver Star. A woman hadn't earned one since World War II. Hester was the first woman to receive it for combat.



LEIGH ANN HESTER

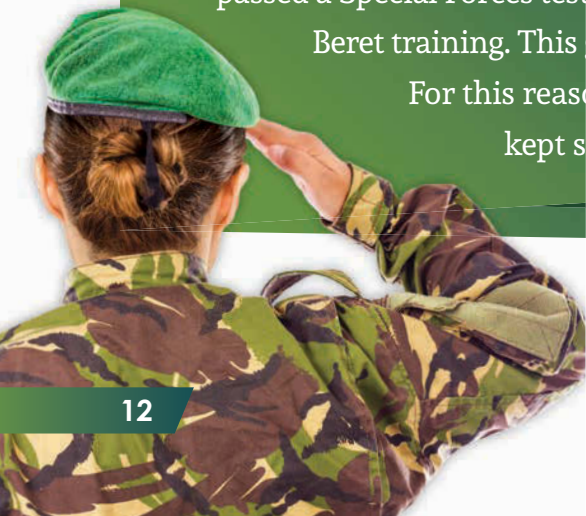
Ashley White worked with athletes. She planned to work in medicine. Joining the Army would help. There, she could get medical training.

White served in Afghanistan. She worked with women and children on a Female Engagement Team (FET). The team helped an **assault** force. They faced danger every day. In 2011, a bomb went off. Lieutenant White was killed. Medals were granted to honor her.

ARMY RANGERS AND GREEN BERETS

Kristen Marie Griest and Shaye Lynne Haver made history. In August 2015, they finished Army Ranger School. No woman had done this before. The program is physically difficult. Training takes two months. Soldiers need a lot of mental power. More than half fail. Captain Griest became the first female Army infantry officer.

In 2018, another record was broken. The first woman passed a Special Forces test. She could attend Green Beret training. This group runs special missions. For this reason, the woman's name was kept secret.



Tammy Duckworth became a U.S. senator in 2017. She was born in Thailand. The Duckworth family moved to many different countries. They settled in Hawaii. Her father was a U.S. Army veteran. He helped refugees.

Senator Duckworth joined the Army too. She trained as a pilot. In 2004, the future congresswoman was in Iraq. A grenade hit the helicopter she was flying. The bomb exploded. But Duckworth's aircraft did not crash. Her copilot was able to land it.

Duckworth's legs were injured. They had to be amputated. In 2011, people put up a statue of her. It was in Illinois. This is the state she represents in Congress. The monument honors female veterans.



TAMMY DUCKWORTH