



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Women's Army Corps members Freida Williams of West Bloomfield, (seated, from left) and Barbara Becker of Plymouth, and Mary Baker of Northville, (standing, from left) Sandra Inorre of Allen Park and Kay Vartanian of Dearborn, are among the active WAC members who meet monthly at the Southfield VFW.

WAC seeks members as 62nd year nears

BY HARRY McDONOUGH
STAFF WRITER

Just like many other veterans organizations, the Women's Army Corps, or WAC, is now fighting a different kind of war — that of its own survival.

WAC Chapter 15, which meets monthly at the Southfield VFW, has only a handful of active members left. As such, it is reaching out to younger female veterans in all branches of the military to keep the organization going.

"It's an opportunity to be of service to other veterans," said WAC chapter president Lt. Col. Freida Williams of West Bloomfield, a career military officer who is called on regularly to play Taps at military funerals.

Williams said the members work closely with Detroit's V.A. Hospital, raising money for activities and supplies, hosting a spring carnival, making visits with coffee and doughnuts and decorating a Christmas tree each year. Dues are \$18 a year and the group meets the second Saturday of the month for a pollack. The national WAC organization also holds a conference every year, where all the local chapters can get together.

"Whenever a member dies, we make a \$100 donation to the Army Women's Museum in Virginia," Williams said.

The WAC was a division of the army created in 1943, to

which all women were assigned, to provide additional support during World War II. From there, they would be assigned duties in mostly secretarial, clerk and communications jobs.

Unlike its precursor, the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, the WAC afforded women all the same military benefits, pay and protection of male soldiers. Through the WAC, 150,000 women served in World War II, including overseas in the South Pacific and European Theaters. The organization was disbanded when the army was integrated in the 1970s.

"The assimilation of males and females for basic training, I still think it is a stupid idea," said Barbara Becker of Plymouth, a retired Master Sergeant. "A lot of these women come from no rules to a long list of rules and they can't take it. And they don't need the harassment of some of these men."

The WAC insulated female soldiers and protected them from the type of sexual harassment that goes on today, said four members gathered at the VFW on a recent rainy Wednesday to tell war stories over cookies and ice cream. They spoke of days when female soldiers were not allowed to wear pants or jewelry and were required to wear lipstick in public.

Women have always been in combat, they said, just not in

any official capacity until recently. There have been women in combat ever since the Revolutionary War, just not officially, said Williams.

"Every person at this table has been in situations where there has been a lot of danger," said Mary Baker, who served as an army medic. "When I was 18 years old, I wanted to be an army nurse so bad."

In 1943, 1st Sgt. Sandra Inorre worked as a cryptographer, helping decode messages about military operations. Her turn in the war effort was short-lived however, because she had family living in Italy and as such, was considered a possible threat to national security. She was reassigned to the Pentagon and made the army a career, ultimately becoming a recruiter.

The stories could go on forever, but the numbers of those who served in the WAC, or even know what the WAC is, continue to dwindle.

"When you go to the convention, you see it," said Becker. Added fellow soldier Baker: "That's why we need new blood."

The U.S. Women's Army Corps is hosting a 62nd annual birthday buffet lunch at 12 noon on Saturday, May 10 at the Ray Dunham VFW Hall located on Nine Mile, west of Telegraph. An \$8 donation is required to attend and all female Army veterans are invited.

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