

April 4, 2017 [\[FOR MORE EVANS ARTICLES, CLICK HERE\]](#)

Women trailblazers paved the way

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO



U.S. Army Medical Department Activity – Fort Carson hosted the Fort Carson Women’s History Month observance with a ceremony held at the Elkhorn Conference Center March 30.

The celebratory month has its roots in the socialist and labor movements — the first Women's Day took place on Feb. 28, 1909, in New York City. It honored the one-year anniversary of the garment worker's strikes in New York, when thousands of women marched for economic reforms. Within two years, Women's Day had grown into an international observance that spread through Europe.

In 1981 Congress established National Women’s History Week to be commemorated the second week of March. In 1987, Congress expanded the week to a month at the request of the National Women's History Project.

Colonel Irene Rosen, deputy commander for USAMEDDAC-Fort Carson was the guest speaker at the Fort Carson ceremony honoring Women Warriors: Trailblazers Who Paved the Way.

“When I was first approached about this opportunity I asked myself ‘if we are one team and we are all equal why are we still taking time out to celebrate just a portion of our team and not the whole team,’” Rosen said. “But it wasn’t always this way. There were women who broke ground and paved the way for the rest of us so that I can stand here today and tell you we are in fact one team.”

Her presentation highlighted women who contributed to the military profession. She began with Stephanie Kwolek who in 1965 made an unexpected discovery that led to the creation of synthetic fibers so strong that steel bullets could not penetrate them. This was the birth of Kevlar, which today is used in hundreds of products, including bulletproof vests, spacecraft, helmets, tennis racquets, tires, and protective gloves.

“I can’t even image going to war without Kevlar,” said Rosen. “You can image the vast quantity of lives that were saved by her invention.”

Rosen also talked about women who served in the U.S. military. She began with the “Molly Pitchers” of the Revolutionary War.

"It was a nickname initially given to a woman named Mary Ludwig, but it came to represent all the women who carried water on the battlefield and assisted the men in battle."

The next trailblazer she mentioned was Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, the first and only woman to receive the Medal of Honor. At the start of the Civil War in 1861, Walker offered her services as a doctor to the Union Army but was turned down due to her gender. Instead of working as a paid nurse, she accepted an unpaid volunteer position in a military hospital for two years until she was able to obtain employment as a contract surgeon.

"A big milestone in military women history was the selection of the first general officer," said Rosen. "This happened in 1970 when Brig Gen. Anna Mae Hays became the first female general. She didn't get to enjoy her status as the only female general for very long, because that same afternoon Brig. Gen. Elizabeth Hoisington was also promoted."

Although they may have been the first women to pin on stars, they were not the last. In 1990 Navy Vice Adm. Antonia Novello was appointed as the Surgeon General of the United States. In 2008, Gen. Ann Dunwoody became the first female 4-star general when she took command of the U.S. Army Materiel Command. Last year, Air Force Gen. Lori Robinson became the first female combatant commander with her assumption of command of NORTHCOM.

"As there were advancements in the officer ranks the same thing was happening in the enlisted ranks. CSM Yzetta Nelson had the distinction of being the first command sergeant major in 1968, just five months after President Johnson signed a law removing restrictions on advanced military rank for women."

Thirty-six years later Command Sgt. Maj. Cynthia A. Pritchett became the first female command sergeant major in a combatant command when she served as the senior enlisted advisor at the Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan.

Congress' authorization for the admission of women to the service academies in 1976 is something Rosen admits is near and dear to her heart. She graduated from West Point in 1987.

"The barriers continue to fall as women are graduating from Ranger School and one woman recently graduated from the Marine Infantry Boot Camp," Rosen said. "Not every woman will meet the standard, and not every man will meet the standard either, so we have to take the ones that do meet the standard and give them every opportunity regardless of their gender."

During the ceremony's closing remarks, Brig. Gen. Kenneth Kamper, deputy commander 4th Infantry Division and Fort Carson said, "In this day and age it is not a question of where do we put women, we need the talent of women

in our Army, so I am glad at where we are today where more occupations are constantly being opened to women...we have an obligation to learn from those that paved the way for us, to know of their struggles and triumphs; know that they were able to get through it and know that we have a moral obligation to pave the way for those that come after us."



Col. Irene Rosen, deputy commander for MEDDAC Fort Carson was the guest speaker at the Fort Carson observance honoring Women Warriors: Trailblazers Who Paved the Way. (Photo by Jeff Troth)



Col. Irene Rosen, deputy commander for MEDDAC Fort Carson was the guest speaker at the Fort Carson observance honoring Women Warriors: Trailblazers Who Paved the Way. (Photo by Jeff Troth)



Brig. Gen. Kenneth Kamper presents Col. Irene Rosen with a Certificate of Appreciation for being the guest speaker at the Fort Carson observance honoring Women Warriors: Trailblazers Who Paved the Way. (Photo by Jeff Troth)