

Women's History Month

Military nurses helped ease soldiers' suffering

By Master Sgt. Leon Q. Murray
437 AW Military Equal Opportunity

Female military nurses were the forerunners for today's military women. Women have served as nurses in the military since the Colonial days. Dr. Mary Edwards Walker (1832-1919) was one of these women.

Walker is the only woman of any war to have been awarded the Medal of Honor. She became a nurse during the Civil War because she was denied acceptance as a military physician. She received a commission as an assistant

surgeon and became the first female doctor in the military. As a first lieutenant she was the highest-ranking female during the Civil War.

She was captured on the battlefields of Tennessee, accused of being a spy for the Union Army, and taken prisoner. After her release in a prisoner exchange, she was assigned to a Union facility for Confederate women prisoners. She was dismissed before the war's end when men subordinates complained of taking orders from a woman. President Andrew Johnson awarded Walker the Medal of Honor for her patriotic zeal in caring for the wounded and her hardships as a prisoner of war. The medal was rescinded during a military review of all awards after World War I. Although the stated purpose was to increase prestige, some believed it was because of her involvement as a suffragette. More than 900 men also lost their medals. Dr. Walker refused to return her medal and wore it until her death.



Walker

Proposed budget targets survey concerns

by 1st. Lt. Kristen Skopeck
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WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio (AFPN) — Recruiting and retention shortfalls identified in a recent Air Force survey would substantially decrease because of funds earmarked in the service's proposed \$71 billion fiscal 2001 budget, said Undersecretary of the Air Force Carol DiBattiste.

As key assistant to Secretary of the Air Force F. Whitten Peters and acting secretary in his absence, DiBattiste oversees implementation of the Air Force budget to include the recruiting, training and equipping of more than 710,000 people.

"In a nutshell, my mission is to try to make your lives better," DiBattiste said, speaking to a group of about 60 company grade officers here during a Feb. 16 visit. "Together, we can work on improving our Air Force and making it an organization more attractive to those already in and to those who want to join."

Identifying recruiting and retention issues that Air Force people said they felt strongly about in Chief of Staff Gen. Michael E. Ryan's survey made available to all Air Force people, the undersecretary said the Air Force's senior leadership is taking measures to incorporate Air Force-wide changes.

"Today, our retention numbers are not where they need to be -- we're off the mark in officer retention, pilot retention and enlisted first-term, second-term and career re-enlistments," she said. "We convened a retention summit made up of people from all over the Air Force and came up with approximately 89 initiatives to retain you in the Air Force. However, if we're not keeping people in at the rate we need, that means we need to recruit more."

This year (and last), the Air Force added to its recruiting goals, and for the first time since 1979 missed its recruiting objective, said DiBattiste.

The undersecretary said Air Force leadership is determined to turn the Air Force's recruiting and retention dilemma around. She said the proposed budget for fiscal 2001 — divided into four categories: people, readiness, modernization and infrastructure — will help tremendously.

"People, readiness and modernization will each receive approximately one third of the proposed budget, while we intend to spend about 5 percent on infrastructure," she said. "People are number one, and that's why we're asking to spend most of our money on things like pay, benefits, recruiting and retention."

The undersecretary added that obviously budget expenditures for readiness, modernization and infrastructure ultimately affect the quality of life of Air Force people, also.

In an effort to increase recruiting, DiBattiste and Gen. Lester Lyles, Air Force vice chief of staff, convened a recruiting summit in December. From that forum, the Air Force decided to add more recruiters, offer more enlistment bonuses and create a marketing office at the Pentagon, which will handle Air Force marketing and advertising.

"We have a Web site now at <http://www.rs.af.mil>, so we're hitting a market aimed at computer-literate people, which is very important," said DiBattiste. "Communications and computers are two of our biggest skill areas where we are hurting, in both officer and enlisted positions."

Re-emphasizing that procurement and modernization are issues ultimately affecting people, DiBattiste said proposed budget funding for the F-22, as well as C-17, C-130 and CV-22 upgrades, and the Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle, and other airframes have even broader implications.

"If we don't have programs like the F-22... it is going to affect all of your lives, all of your children's lives and the lives of everybody in our entire country," said the undersecretary.