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AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 63

Women's History in the Air Force with Major Marissa Kester - Part 1

Host: Major Erin Davis
Guest: Major Marissa Kester

In this episode Maj Davis sits down with Air Force historian Maj Marissa Kester, author of *There From the Beginning*, to discuss Air Force women's history throughout the last century. Maj Davis and Maj Kester discuss the roles played by women throughout the early history of the country and up through the Vietnam War, and take a look at the laws that slowly defined and formed the careers women in the military have today.

Part One

Major Erin Davis:

Hello and welcome back to another episode of The Air Force JAG School Podcast. I'm your host, Major Erin Davis. In this episode, I sat down with Major Marissa Kester, author of, *There from the Beginning*, *A History of Women in the Air Force*, which was published this year [2021] with Air University Press.

The story of women in the military is a long one. Yet, as Major Kester says in her book, it's largely a story of absence. Often the role of women was secretive or considered of such little importance. It didn't make it into official records. Let alone into books or memoirs. Slowly, as we've evolved as a society over time, we've taken a bigger interest in groups that have traditionally been marginalized and authors like Major Kester have done a lot of research to shed light on the hard-working people in the background of recorded history.

Join us today for Part One of Air Force Women's History, where we begin to take a look at the roles women played in the military and at war and at the laws that evolved alongside a changing society.

[Music: Band playing a section of the Air Force song]

Major Marissa Kester:
All right, yeah, my name is Marissa Kester, and I am currently serving in the Air Force Reserve as an I M A. I work for AFRC, the headquarters, and the Historian and Heritage Office. Prior to that, I spent five years on active duty as an intel officer. So that was kind of fun. I mean, you know, everyone has their own unique career path, and mine was also probably not the typical intel.

So, I worked at NASIC and then did some teaching, and so kind of got to focus on the big picture in writing and publication, which is my favorite thing anyway [laughing]. So yeah, and then jumped over to being a historian after I had kids and got into this project. Just doing my own kind of research and trying to understand the historical context of the Air Force so I could do other projects better.

And I just, I kind of noticed, not necessarily one big epiphany, but just like kept not seeing women in the records, but just kind of randomly in the records and like there is no kind of narrative about this and I'm curious about it. And then, you know, once I realized that no one had ever really put one together, I kind of just decided, "*Hey, I can do that.*" [laughing]

Pre-World War Two Role of Women

Maj Davis:
So, okay, I guess we'll sort of start it's hard to say start at the beginning because it feels like women have been kind of sneaking themselves into the military for hundreds of years. And most of them, unless they were caught, it wasn't really documented. But I guess as far as the U.S. goes, just really briefly, like pre-World War Two, what was the role of women at that time? If they even had one in the military?

Maj Kester:
Yeah, there was no official role, certainly not until 1948 when the Women's Integration Act was signed. So, anything previous to that was either, like you said, kind of of sneakily or where women, you know, dressed up as men and went and joined armies or most often it was a case of women who followed their husbands, like the Revolutionary War or other previous wars where the husband, if the husband was at war, there was no source of income or care for the family.

So, they kind of had no choice. So, a lot of times women and their kids would pack up and actually go live in the camp with the army. And the army had allocations for this. So, they kind of did like a trade experience where the women would do the laundry services and the cooking and the probably the nursing and all those type of things in exchange for being able to like stay with the camp and be fed and have somewhere to sleep at night.

So, a lot of it was kind of out of necessity, but there absolutely were women who were also doing it out of probably other more valorous reasons. And then as the years progressed, nursing has always been a huge aspect and nurses weren't even halfway officially considered part of the military until 1901 when they were integrated in the army, kind of [laughing].

But obviously throughout every war you have needed nurses, so nurses have been there and nurses have almost always been women. And so, but some of the other cooler roles were women who were spies or who did just kind of like behind the scenes stuff as civilians, of course. As just a regular every day just helping out their cause which was particularly popular during the Civil War, where women served as spies.

So yeah, kind of a variety of things, but never officially formally recognized as part of the military until World War Two was the first time—well World War One technically was the first time, and that was kind of just like the bare basic. The Navy allowed clerical assistants to be in their service during the wartime, but that didn't last very long for the U.S. participation and then as soon as that was over they were kicked back out.

And so, World War Two was the first time we really saw the government say, "*Okay,*" you know, or the military say, "*We can use you and we'll pay you. You're not, you*

know, officially part of this, like you're not going to get the full rank and benefits and support and all of that. But you know, we could use you [laughing] *and more than or at least the civilian capacity*."

So, it was kind of just this quasi-participation thing up until the Integration Act. And really it was World War Two and the amount of women and just the population in general that had to be involved in that war effort where there was like this tipping point where it was like, okay, well, you know, there is a place for women and they are helpful and we could use them. And it's a great, you know, the whole idea behind the Integration Act was to have almost like a reserve kind of force. Like if we need all of these women, again, we have some that are ready to go that are already, you know, in the regular component on active duty or in the Reserve. And so we can use them if we need to. But it was never really like, "*Yeah, women are great. Let's throw them in. They're equal to man*", you know, the whole thing, that took obviously decades to kind of get up to that point. So yeah, it was a slow evolutionary thing, but it was definitely dictated by the demands of just of wartime needs so that, you know, during peacetime there's always more resistance to having women involved, but during wartime, it was like, "*Come on in, come on over, we could use your help.*"

So, the Army Air Corps, they were the most open to using women and used the most women during World War Two. And a lot of that was because aviation was a new kind of technology. And while obviously it had been militarized to a certain extent, it was still, you know, the 1930s, the interwar period between World War One and World War Two is when aviation really kind of like hit its boom and especially in the civilian sector.

After World War Two, the government sold off a lot of its planes and it just became kind of this like luxury force that was really popular. So, there'd be air shows and barnstormers and it just had this kind of like cultural following. And so, when World War Two started and when Air WAC, well the Army Air Corps, and then they formed the Air WAC, once women were allowed to kind of join as an auxiliary service, as part of the army and then the Air WAC, they were the most open to using women because there had been plenty of civilian women that had just throughout the 1930s, you know, broken all these speed records and just been participating in the aviation scene. And so they were more open, to that idea. Plus, most of the men who were serving in the Army Air Corps, were also, you know, civilian. So, they had been part of the aviation world. So, it just was kind of a different flavor as opposed to the traditional standing army, the WAC, where, you know, women were still definitely way more involved with driving trucks, fixing equipment, like the kind of stuff that during the fifties and sixties and then, you know, part of the seventies they weren't allowed to do. So, they kind of regressed.

So, World War Two was when women were really pretty involved to a great extent, greater extent than ever before in the military as part of the auxiliary service. And then towards the end, as part of actually the Army, but yeah, it just, it regressed over the next few years. And then also, you know, for the civilian women, the Rosie the Riveter, like you mentioned, there was this huge push because obviously the draft took many men away from the home, just as war tends to do, has done anyway. And so, women, you know, had to step in and fill those roles. And a lot of companies at that point knew that they could hire women for particularly administrative and clerical and like factory line type jobs. Who would do a great job and they didn't have to pay them, I mean, anywhere near as much or give them any sort of benefits.

So, from a business perspective, it was also beneficial to bring women in to factories and shipyards and all these places. So, there was, like I mentioned, there's always a push during wartime and especially like a World War Two. I can't imagine that level of effort, or involvement from the population. But as soon as it's over, it's like, [whispering] it didn't happen, [laughing and back to regular voice] you know, it all just disappears and everyone goes home and very few are left kind of waiting in the force who wanted to stay in. And

most women and men after the war just went back to what they were doing previously. So, it was kind of this unique window into like what was possible, but didn't necessarily—whether it was going to stick was up in the air for a little bit.

Pushback

Maj Davis:
So, although it seems like women were actually extremely helpful during this time, it seems like the reception by men and in the military was not necessarily always welcoming. I know in your book you said at one point that they were sometimes considered women in the WAC were sometimes considered uniformed prostitutes and that there was a lot of sabotage with the women's planes and things like that when they went to fly missions. Why do you think that was?

Maj Kester:
Yeah, definitely a lot of pushback. There was even, there is this massive smear campaign kind of during 1943/44. So, once we were well underway with the war and being involved in the war effort and the F B I even got involved because it got so bad, and they found out it was coming from the enlisted men. And so that should tell you right there, like there was a lot of resistance and, and that's kind of the underlying theme I feel like I took away from studying this whole topic was just the cultural change that is required because so much of women being integrated into the military, it's not really a technical or tactical thing. It's so much more of a social, cultural thing. And so, getting past those like belief systems that we have programed into us, you know, about what women can and can't do.

And this is women participating in this too. So, there was a lot of pushback from women as well. It wasn't like women wanted to join and men were against them. Like, no, it was plenty, plenty of women who were also like, "*Women shouldn't be doing this*" and the whole thing.

So yeah, a lot of pushback, particularly against women aviators who, you know, a certain portion of the men felt like, "*Well, hey, they get to go do this job stateside. They're safe, they're protected. I want to go do that. Like I could go do that.*"

So, it just this idea that you see persists through the decades that women are taking jobs away from men. And, you know, that same idea exists now in a different form, right? They're all in different, you know, races and religions and all these different things. So just that kind of like fear of I'm losing my livelihood or my way of life or what I think is right in the world. And it's being overturned against my will. And so, yeah, you see, that played out.

I talked in the book about how the WASP, they had a lot of kind of sabotage incidents, but they really, at the time downplayed it; it sounds like from all the interviews I've heard, because they just didn't, they knew if they, if they made a fuss about it, it would kind of like encourage the stereotype of like, women can't handle it or they shouldn't be here or, you know, it's almost like hazing right? But obviously in a malevolent kind of way. [laughing]

So, they, they put up with it most of the time and really only kind of talked about it later. And again, their biographies and stuff. So yeah, it sounds like it was a problem, and kind of they always had to be aware of it, but, just also, had to kind of persist.

Amazing to think about.

Postwar

Maj Davis:
Yeah, it really is. So, we kind of talked about this a little bit postwar leading up to the Women's Armed Forces Integration Act in 1948. What was going on at that time? You know, culturally the war's over, men are coming back home. I think, you know, we're all kind of familiar with that time, the white picket fence moment of time, right? So, what was going on in that window? You know, women start going home and was their interest in keeping them around?

Maj Kester:
Yeah, that really is such an interesting time. The 1950s were kind of their own special world in and of itself. Like it was this, this in-between moment. So yeah, it was economic boom. Everyone was coming home, baby boom. Of course, yeah. The white picket fence, like you said, it was just its own, like moment in time.

And so, with that, postwar, there always seemed to be this cultural desire to return to normalcy, you know, quote unquote, "normalcy". And so, after each war, you kind of see this like push to get everything back to how it was before. But as we know, once a nation or person or anyone goes through something like that, there is no, there is no going back. You have to kind of readjust.

So that, you know, when the Air Force is born, really, and when women were officially integrated, that era was kind of a just a unique turning point in and of itself for the DoD at large. And so, yeah, there was probably a year or two where the war was done and most of the women had separated from the force. And so, there were a few left and they just kind of let them stay, because the idea of forming not only a new Air Force, but of letting women in the military in a regular, you know, standing capacity was all being argued for years, for two or three years. And so, yeah, like I said, there were a few women that kind of just stayed in the force, did their job, kept going, and then they became by default, the first members, particularly the Air WAC, the former Air WACs. They just segwayed right into the Air Force, like they kind of just became the first members of the Air Force.

When I was doing research, it was like, and I've even gotten this question a few times, people were like, "*Who was the first?*" You know, we know who the first woman to enlist in the Air Force was. But the first officer or the first this or that? And it's really hard to say, because number one no one wrote it down. [laughing] But number two, there was a lot of shifting of players around between the services like when the Integration Act was actually signed and put into place and the Air Force was formed and the Reserve was formed. And so, a lot of women kind of just moved around, like shuffled their position and their service.

So yeah, it was kind of just this like shift, for lack of a better word, into, from the World War Two era and like pre-women to this like new kind of world, where not only are women included, but like for the Air Force specifically, we have this new service and this new reserve force.

And then of course, right after that, you know, two years later, the Korean War kicks off and we start drafting people again. So, it was kind of this scramble. It's a really interesting period where, there was, I'm sure there were many plans made, but I don't know how many of them actually, you know, follow through the way they were intended [laughing] because just things kept happening.

Maj Davis:
It's so funny. I feel like and you probably agree with me, there's something so DoD about the idea that we had like first female officers, kind of, just because bureaucratically we didn't bother to do away with them. [laughter] And I know that comes up later on too. Like maybe we talk about in the seventies and eighties, that maybe the only reason that I'm even sitting here in my uniform today and you put on your uniform is because they just—the paperwork slowed everything down so much that the opinion kept changing before they could pass any of the bills to get rid of it.

Maj Kester:
Totally. And there were so few women and for a long time there were so few women that like, yeah, it was almost like too much effort to get rid of them. But too much effort to like put to do anything about it. So, it was like this really small force for that kind of exact reason, almost like bureaucratic inertia more than anything. [laughing]

Women's Armed Forces Integration Act

Maj Davis:
So funny. So, let's talk a little bit about the Women's Armed Forces Integration Act of 1948. I feel like that was a big step. It's kind of hard, historically. It was definitely culturally a big step. Looking back on it now, it's very of its time. So, let's talk a little bit about what the act was and then what it said, and what it actually outlined as being the role of women.

Maj Kester:
Yes. So, the Act allowed women to be permanent, to have permanent positions in the regular and reserve force as officer, warrant officer and enlisted members. And so that obviously had not previously existed during World War Two, for most of World War Two the women that were involved were part of an auxiliary corps, which meant they were temporary and they did not have the same, pay or benefits or rank structure or any of that.

So, it was really kind of this big move to make women a permanent, permanent structure within the military. And yeah, the caveats [laughing] I guess that, were included with every aspect of, "*Okay, women are allowed to be in, but* ..." you know, basically the force had to be kept really small, you know, the officer corps even smaller. There will be no women supervising men. It was, it was kind of like you can be in, but you're going to be in this bubble. And the Air Force was different and that they were the only service to not have a separate women's corps within the military. And I think a lot of that was just because, like I said, the Air Force was just getting started. And the Air Force is always from the beginning build itself as kind of the smaller, more elite, more technical service. And so, they, from a branding perspective, wanted the best of the best, not necessarily separate corps within the Air Force. We just want to stay small and good at what we do, that kind of mentality.

And so, yeah, no separate women's corps was in the Air Force, but still all these different kind of rules that applied to women being in, which weren't necessarily a problem right away, but they became a problem, as the years went on and like, you know, certain rank, you know, what they called like a bubble or whatever stovepipe would happen. And just women realized how limited they were, particularly the women that had served in World War Two, and just shifted over to the Air Force, who had already had a few years in service. There was just a feeling, certainly a feeling.

And then, you know, certain caveats written in there, like can't do anything combat related, which actually the verbiage is not that specific. But the biggest thing, honestly, about the Integration Act was that the services were given a lot of power to, further define each rule. So, there was this kind of generic set of rules set out. But then the services were allowed to be more specific or, you know, add on whatever rules they felt like they needed, which, you know, makes sense because services were still so separate at that time.

Yeah, I'm trying to look—oh there it is. I'm looking at my book to find the list [laughing], the list of all the, all the restrictions. But yeah, just, even like the generic like any woman for any reason becomes a parent at any time, like, can't serve. A lot of, a lot of restrictions that kind of persisted for a while—longer than you would think they would.

Maj Davis:
Yeah, I feel like that one in particular. I was not terribly surprised that they didn't want pregnant women, women who had like a bunch of small children. But the Act even said you had to get a waiver if you were married. And then if you *acquired* children, even if it was through adoption or having stepchildren. So, it could be two service members, you know, mil to mil and they could get married. And he had children and she didn't, she would be the one to lose her job. But if he had been a single parent up until that point, he would be able to serve normally. Which is just, it sounds right now like today it sounds so archaic. But I mean, culturally, I guess that's just where they were. Like women, that was your

roll. You were a wife and you're a mother and that's *your* duty and that's your role in society. And we need you to go home and do that. We don't need you here.

Maj Kester: 22:17
Yeah, absolutely. And that really was the thinking at the time, again for most men and women was that the primary role of a woman was to, you know, take care of the home and the family. And most women, particularly enlisted women, viewed the military as like a probably like a study abroad is viewed now. Kind of like a gap year or whatever like you go do something cool, something different, something fun, and then you leave that life behind and you go do what you're supposed to do and you get married and you have babies and you stay home with them.

But yeah, I agree I mean, I remember being like, yeah, just any, any dependent under 18 in your life essentially, and you can't serve in the military because the assumption is that you're responsible for them. And then also the lack of spousal benefits. So, there was just not very many—there was just a system that was set up to not encourage women to necessarily stay in.

Like the retention was not a factor. No one was concerned about retaining women necessarily, [laughing] obviously. And so that created a force where not a lot of women did join and stay, which then made it seem like, "*Okay, well, women don't want to stay.*" And it's just, you know, that self-feeding environment where it wasn't beneficial or even realistic, honestly. For most women to make a career of the military without serious maneuvering of their life or goals or whatever.

Korean War

Maj Davis:
Yeah, I feel like it's there's just so much cultural background there because I think too, you said in the book, you know, women even, you didn't even want to do this, right? The resistance was coming just as much from women as it was for men. Obviously, women weren't really encouraged to stick around. The benefits certainly weren't what they are now.

But also culturally, it seems like it wasn't really acceptable for most, at least like middle class women, to even have jobs, let alone something in such a specifically male career field. Then of course, though, we have the Korean War, you know, which looks different than World War Two, but we're kind of back to the draft. We're back to considering women for certain roles in the military. So, what did that look like?

Maj Kester:
Yeah, for sure. And like we had talked about a little earlier, the flavor of the 1950s really didn't, did not support women joining the military. And so yeah, when the draft came back around for the Korean War and women were being recalled, particularly women who had, not fully separated earlier, but just went into the Reserve or joined the Reserve after World War Two but then were recalled, they had a big problem because a lot of women at that point had gotten married or gotten pregnant and so they actually temporarily got rid of the marriage rule or rule or allowance I guess is a better word.

So that marriage was no longer a reason that women could separate, because at that time it was, almost seemed like it was a benefit, you know, that a woman could always join and then whenever she wanted to get married, she could just leave. And so, they got rid of that during the Korean War to help with retention.

But they really just struggled with recruiting at that time. They had this massive DoD recruiting campaign and kind of tried to change the cultural narrative around women's military service. But, you know, those things, they just linger, like certain stereotypes and a lot of it from World War Two—which was, you know, not even a decade ago, was still lingering this idea that women should not be serving, except probably in specific circumstances.

And yeah, particularly, you know, like middle class or educated women. Not only was there better, more, you know, "*appropriate options out there for an educated woman*", if she really wanted to work outside the home. It just wasn't, there was kind of seen as like, there's no need to go do that and be in the military. And so, a lot of these recruiting campaigns are actually aimed toward high school students and parents of high school students to like allow their child or their daughter to go enlist or to commission, because that was a restriction within the Integration Act, was women had to be 21 in order to enlist. And anything under that, they had to have their parents' permission. So, you know, one of those again, kind of archaic, interesting things.

But yeah, so it was a unique, again unique kind of phase where we needed a lot of men quickly and women now that we had access to women. But it was so different from World War Two, not only in the type of conflict, but everyone was just burned out on being at war [laughing] because they had just given up everything and shifted their whole lives for the past few years. And it was like we had finally started getting back to normal. You know, the economy's great. Everyone wants to stay home and just do that, you know, the normal thing, whatever that was. And so yeah, there's a lot of resistance. The 1950s were not great for women in the military, and a large part of it was because of that cultural resistance.

Military Jobs for Women

Maj Davis:
So, when they did take women, I know you talked in the book about how high the recruiting standards were for female service members, especially as compared to the ones for male service members. What were some of the recruiting standards? And then if women did come in, what kinds of jobs were they actually doing?

Maj Kester:
Yeah, at that point during the 1950s, slowly the amount of jobs that women were able to do or were actually doing—primarily always nursing and administrative and that being kind of stayed through the decades, but just the amount of *different* kind of jobs women could do, whether that's air traffic control or certain types of intel jobs, those slowly over the years, particularly after the Korean War ended, went away and just disappeared because they were, you know, not needed, not felt like they were appropriate for women.

And a lot of that is just the bigger picture of during the fifties and sixties we were after the Korean War, we were in this Cold War era, right? Like it was kind of the height of that Cold War feel and that nuclear deterrent strategy. And so, the Air Force was getting a ton of money and a ton of support. And they were kind of the darling service at that time. But in fields that women were not necessarily in. And so, it was kind of almost like this, we are important now, like we need to go focus on the aviation and the combat stuff. And so, women can do the administrative and like stay to the side and get out of our way a little bit.

And you know, of course, no, I don't think any gender type of discrimination. A very few people I think, think they're doing it intentionally or whatever. It's just a reflection of the culture and what was acceptable and what people thought to be true and, and how they were raised and all these things. So, yeah, the availability of jobs decreased over the years and the number of women who necessarily wanted to do them also decreased because they just didn't expect or expect anything different, I guess, for lack of a better phrase.

But of course, there are always women who did want more and who did want different and who did push back, which is awesome because that's how you get change, which we start to feel a lot of in the early 1970s—which started kind of in the sixties, particularly during the Vietnam War.

Judged on Your Appearance

Maj Davis:
One of the other things too that really struck me about this moment in time and again, definitely a reflection of what was going on culturally and that moment.

Women generally were … enlisted women still kind of really weren't wanted, and a lot of the women who were able to apply and be accepted were not only generally already college graduates, but also, their part of like female officer professional development was appearance-based—like a better looking WAF was sort of the catch line, right, where we want the women to be attractive. You know, "*I want my secretary to also be easy on the eyes.*"

And that seems crazy right now, you know, with all of the laws that we have for [laughing], you know, gender equality and things like that. But that's very *Mad Men*, right, that feel so fifties and sixties to say, "*Yeah, you can come work here, you can be my secretary, but I need you to be good looking. I need to look good in your uniform*."

Maj Kester:
Yeah, absolutely. They used to have women submit photographs of themselves when they applied for different jobs. Because obviously, yeah, they're trying to pick the best looking. And so that was, the enlisted WAF was kind of always under the gun, especially for the first few decades where there were plenty of voices who said, "*We don't need enlisted women in the military. We have enlisted men who can do all these jobs. We don't need them. It's fine.*"

Officer women were left alone a little more. Number one, because there were way less of them. Only a few hundred at any one time, like in the whole Air Force. And they were better able to [laughing] stovepipe them, I guess, and use them as number one, supervisors of enlisted women and administrative like secretary type thing.

And so, yeah, they were very into the appearance and keeping everyone fit and trim. And fit, not really, but trim and slim and yeah, the handbook, I put a few pages in there. I found that one at the National Archives in D.C. From 1957 that was this handbook for a WAF and it was just this, you know, probably issued one every year or something. It looked like a fairly common one, but just filled with makeup advice and how to kind of like fancy up your uniform and yeah, that was part of P M E essentially or basic training was not only how to wear a uniform but like how to look good in your uniform and do your makeup correctly in your hair and like be in style and be in regs and just the emphasis on the feminine appearance, which of course, also hurt everyone. Right? Because then it just over emphasized the fact that like, this is what the women are doing and they're so different from the men and that type of behavior or job or whatever is for women, which, you know, is by definition what men shouldn't be doing. Because men should only be doing manly things.

And so just kind of further widen that divide and a lot of that is because while we were in the Cold War kind of panic, it was also relatively a peacetime era. You know, I mean, for the average person, there was no overwhelming imposition to their daily life. And so those type of things, structures and like expectations started to creep in slowly, more and more and more [laughing]. So yeah, by the early 1960s was the lowest retention, the lowest numbers for women in the Air Force and I believe women in all the other services as well.

In part because of those kind of, that kind of divide, right, like it was just this stark difference between men and women in the Air Force and what they were allowed to do and how they were expected to behave. And yeah, women had to go through, they had to be older they generally had to be more educated—have a high school diploma or higher. Most of the women—at this time, you actually didn't have to have a college degree to be an officer or to commission. So, I forget the exact statistics. I think only 46% of officers had college degrees, but of that 46% like 75 or more percent were women who had those degrees. So, they were generally overqualified, overeducated. They had to do, the I think I talked about in the book, the psychological tests too, that sort of thing.

Like there was just all these extra hurdles to jump—that if you were educated and all these other things, then you probably weren't going to do them realistically. You're probably just going to go be a teacher or something else that was more—easier, socially acceptable, and you probably got paid better as well [laughing].

Maj Davis:
It's sort of crazy looking back at all of these restrictions. Like you said, that there were male "experts" deciding what was an appropriate career field for a woman, and it had to be a psychologically, physiologically and sociologically suitable for them.

Maj Kester:
Right. Right.

Maj Davis:
And at one point, someone even said, the WAF will no longer be assigned to jobs where they create resentment or are termed a nuisance. And if you're a woman with a college degree and your goal for going to college was that you wanted to have a job and you know have, I guess, that sort of satisfaction for yourself. I mean, you can't blame them for not want to stick around for this. This is not, this doesn't seem very fulfilling, you know, to go through all of that.

Maj Kester:
Oh, yeah.

Maj Davis:
And getting so educated just to turn around and, you know, be in laundry or to be assigned to, you know, cook, and you know, even administrative work is important, but it's not necessarily what you went to college for. You know, you could be I would imagine at that time you could be get a secretarial job fairly easily because there's so many companies that needed good secretaries.

Maj Kester:
Right. Right. And you were not even necessarily being judged on your quality of work. You're being judged on your appearance. So even if you were a quality secretary, no one really cared if you weren't also great looking [laughing]. You know?

Maj Davis:
Right. And then you also mentioned—this one really through me because I still, I still don't know that I totally understand this one. There were age caps on female service members so that no one who was going through menopause would be wearing a uniform.

Maj Kester:
Yes. Yeah, I found that kind of like buried in one of the WAF reports or somewhere in the archives and I was like, what, and of course I couldn't find anything else necessarily that talked about it except for another memoir I found where she mentioned it as well. And yeah, it was just that perspective at the time, which I would argue still probably exists a little bit buried in our culture today as well, where women were just like assumed to be and expected to be much more emotional, hysterical, that whole thing. And so yeah, they felt that women going through menopause were unstable—emotionally, mentally unstable, and so they didn't want them in the service.

And so, you know, one of the books I'm working on now actually it just came across a study from 2001 where it's called *The Girl Who Cried Pain* and where essentially when women and men are given are put under the same amount of pain, the same level for the same amount of time, men are more likely to be prescribed pain relievers and women are more likely to be prescribed sedatives, because that idea persists that women's emotions are unpredictable and hysterical and that whole thing, and I mean, I could talk about that for hours. That's a whole other episode [laughing].

Maj Davis:
I know, right? I was just going to say the same, like don't get me started.

Maj Kester:
I know, right? So yeah. So, it was just that line of thinking, you know. Yeah, it's really interesting. I really felt like there was a big correlation between what was going on in the bigger picture in the world and how that trickled down and how women were viewed and treated. And like certain things became so important, like whether a woman was thin or pretty. But then during, you know, when conflicts or tensions were tightened and we need a personnel? It was like, "*Oh, you know, whatever, it's fine. She can still do her job*", you know? So, it was like whatever was important shifted depending on the flavor of whatever was perceived to be important. You know, the bigger picture at the time.

Closing

Maj Davis:
Thank you for joining us for part one of Air Force Women's History with Major Marissa Kester. Stay tuned for part two, where we delve more deeply into the role of the 14th Amendment and equal rights and the landmark cases that made seismic changes in the roles women played in the Air Force. You can find Major Kester's book, ***There from the Beginning***, for free on the Air University website. Or if you're at Maxwell, you can swing by the library for a free copy.

Announcer:
Thank you for listening to another episode of The Air Force Judge Advocate General's School Podcast. You can find this and all our available episodes, transcriptions and show notes at **www.jagreporter.af.mil/podcast**. You can also find us on Apple, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you like to listen. Please give us a like, a rating, a follow or a subscription.

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Nothing from this show should be construed as legal advice. Please consult an attorney for any legal issues. Nothing in this show is endorsed by the Federal Government, the United States Air Force, or any of its components. All content and opinions are those of the guests and hosts. Thanks.

[Music: Band playing ending of the Air Force song]

Glossary

- **AFJAGS:** Air Force Judge Advocate General's School
- **AFRC:** Air Force Reserve Command
- **FBI:** Federal Bureau of Investigation
- **IMA:** Individual Mobilization Augmentee
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **NASIC:** National Air and Space Intelligence Center
- **PME:** Professional Military Education
- **WAAC:** Women's Auxiliary Army Corps
- **WAC:** Women's Army Corps
- **WAF:** Women in the Air Force
- **WASP:** Women's Air Force Service Pilots

Websites

- **Air University Press**
- **Rosie the Riveter**
- **There from the Beginning: Women in the US Air Force**
- **Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASP)**
- **Women's Armed Services Integration Act**
- **Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC)**

Layout by Thomasa Huffstutler