



Colonel Mary A. Hallaren

Colonel Mary Agnes Hallaren was born on May 4, 1907 in Lowell, Massachusetts. She graduated from Boston University and Lowell State Teachers College. She taught junior high school for 15 years in Lexington, Massachusetts, spending her summers traveling throughout the United States, Mexico, Canada, and Europe.

She enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), later to become the Women's Army Corps, (WAC) in 1942. She was commissioned upon graduation from WAAC Officer Candidate School Class #1 at Fort Des Moines, Iowa on August 29, 1942.

Hallaren was appointed executive officer and later commanding officer of the first WAC Separate Battalion — which in July 1943 arrived in Scotland under her command as the first WAC unit in the European Theater of Operations in World War II.

As a Lieutenant Colonel, she commanded the largest contingent of women serving overseas during the Second World War.

From June 20, 1946 to March 4, 1947, she was Deputy Director of the Women's Army Corps and after two months as Acting Director she became the third Director of the WAC on May 7, 1947. Less than five years after joining the Women's Army Corps Hallaren was promoted to colonel—at the time, the highest rank possible for a woman.

Many of her military colleagues favored the peacetime demobilization of women. Army Chief of Staff Dwight D. Eisenhower believed women were necessary to meet post-war personnel needs. Hallaren became the primary exponent and dynamic force advocating

permanent status for military women. In 1948, despite strong opposition, Hallaren was instrumental in seeing that the Women's Armed Services Integration Act was adopted, enabling women to serve as permanent regular members of all of the armed forces, not just in the military in times of war.

Colonel Hallaren served as Director until January 2, 1953, making her the longest serving Director in WAC history.

She then served four years in the Office of Personnel, U.S. European Command, Frankfurt, Germany, and as operations officer in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense from 1957 until her retirement on June 30, 1960.

After retirement she completed a bachelor's degree from George Washington University and took graduate courses at Boston University and Harvard. In 1965, Hallaren became Executive Director of Women in Community Service for the Department of Labor for 13 years, leaving in 1978 at the age of 71. Through its programs, at-risk women were able to secure job training and economic opportunity. Because of Hallaren's vision and inspiration, women who might have failed economically and socially, succeeded.

She was also instrumental in the creation of the "Women in Military Service Memorial," erected at the entrance of Arlington National Cemetery in the nation's capital to honor the contributions and achievements of all military women.

In war and peace, Colonel Mary Hallaren proved herself a true leader of women and was described as "one of the giants among military women." She was on the cover of Newsweek Magazine on May 21, 1951, as the "Boss of the Ladies' Legion" for an article about the ninth birthday of the Women's Army Corps.

Hallaren was elected to the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1996 and featured in Tom Brokaw's book "The Greatest Generation."

Colonel Hallaren's military awards include the Legion of Merit with two Oak-Leaf Clusters, Bronze Star with Oak-Leaf Cluster, Army Commendation with Oak-Leaf Cluster, Women's Army Corps Service Medal, American Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, Army of Occupation Medal WW II and the National Defense Service Medal.

She died on February 13, 2005 and was buried in St. Patrick Cemetery, Lowell, Massachusetts.