For Immediate Release
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Listen to Women Veterans Tell their Stories of Service

What better way to celebrate Women’s History Month

COLUMBUS – A panel of women veterans who served during World War II to Operation Desert Storm and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will tell their stories in a panel discussion sponsored by the Ohio Department of Veterans Services in honor of Women’s History Month. The panel will be held Friday, March 10, at noon in the auditorium, of the Ohio History Connection, 800 E. 17th Ave., Columbus.

Women today make up over 15 percent of America’s military. More than 67,542 women veterans of all eras reside in Ohio. They have served with distinction in every war in a variety of capacities, mainly support or medical roles, and became casualties or prisoners of war.

Beginning in the 1980s, military specialties previously closed to women were opened, putting them much closer to direct combat, and their roles expanded during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Today, women serve as pilots and in combat support units that have led to them being directly engaged in the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. This involvement has led recently to the opening of all military occupations and positions to women.

The panelists are veterans of World War II to the current wars. The discussion will center on what motivated them to join the military, their experiences in training and in war, and their views on women in direct combat roles.

Seven distinguished women will serve on the panel:

Ruby Gilliam, a World War II veteran, served in the WAVES during World War II in 1945 and served until 1946. She went to Boot Camp at Hunter College in New York. Ruby was stationed in Washington, D.C., and ran computers for the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery as a Seaman First Class.

Claudia Westover, a Korean War Era veteran, served in the U.S. Air Force attended Boot Camp in Cheyenne, Wyo., for teletype. She was stationed in San Antonio, Texas, from June 1952 – December 1954 as an Airmen Second Class.
Roberta Mershon, a Vietnam veteran, attended Marian College and graduated from St. Vincent’s School of Nursing in Indianapolis in 1968. After her graduation, Bobbi received a commission as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. Her duty stations included the 93rd Evacuation Hospital, Long Binh, Vietnam. During her tour there she worked in Ward 3, a surgical intensive care and burn unit.

Elva Pounders, a Vietnam Era veteran, enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in May 1960 and attended boot camp at Parris Island (S.C.). Her first duty station was Camp Lejeune (N.C.) and she worked in supply. She re-enlisted for Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego and was transferred to Iwakuni, Japan. Ms. Pounders was with the first group of Women Marines to be stationed in Japan from 1967 to 1968 and made two trips into Vietnam to drop off supplies. She transferred back to the states and served in South Carolina, North Carolina, Philadelphia, Georgia and California and retired as a First Sergeant in 1990.

Angela Beltz, a Desert Shield/Desert Storm veteran, enlisted in the North Dakota Army National Guard in 1986, attending basic training at Fort Dix, (N.J.) then went to Fort Lee (Va.) to be trained as a Petroleum Supply Specialist. She was deployed for Desert Shield/Desert Storm from September 1990 until March 1991. Upon returning home from Desert Storm, Angela, as a member of the Spirit Lake Nation (Sioux), was honored by her Tribal Elders as a Warrior (Akicita) and was given two Indian Names. Kowaka-Pi-Sni Wiyan (I Am Not Afraid Woman) and Tasunka-Na-Khan (She Rides Her Horse). She moved to Athens, Ohio, and transferred to the Ohio Army National Guard in August of 1991 and reclassified as a 71L Clerk Typist with the 5694th Engineer Detachment (Firefighters) in Shreve, Ohio. Ms. Beltz served in several Army National Guard units until she retired as a Sergeant First Class with 21 years of service in 2008. She is the current chairwoman of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.

KJ Russ, a veteran of the Global War on Terrorism, served in the U.S. Navy from 2007-2009 and Navy Reserve from 2010-2011. She worked as an Aviation Maintenance Administrator. KJ was assigned to the Naval Helicopter Squadron, HS-2 Golden Falcons in NAS North Island of San Diego. She deployed with the WESPAC 2008 Strike Group onboard the USS Abraham Lincoln Aircraft Carrier. She received honorable discharge from the Navy in 2009.

Tamara Gonzales is the current Senior Master Sergeant with the 121st Air Refueling Wing and a veteran of the Global War on Terrorism. She served in the U.S. Army Reserve as a full-time technician as a Material Control and Accounting Specialist for five years. She transferred to the Ohio Air National Guard. She is the Wing First Sergeant for the 121st Air Refueling Wing, in Columbus. SMSgt Gonzales is responsible for the morale, welfare, and conduct of all the enlisted members in the Air Refueling Wing. She has had numerous deployments throughout her military career, including service in Turkey, Egypt, Qatar and, most recently, Guam.

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