

Legally Speaking



On Women and War

By **Karen L. MacNutt**,
Contributing Editor

I had not been a lawyer very long when a senior member of the law firm assigned me to work on the estate of a retired nurse he represented. I had met the lady once or twice. She was very sweet but suffered from a long term lung problem that prevented her from working. She had been exposed to some kind of chemicals while working in a hospital for the government many years before. An industrial accident, I assumed. Because of the lung problem, she could not get health insurance. She assured me that the government would not help her in any way. She had tried for years without success.

It made no difference now. She had passed on. It was my job to go through her personal belongings and take charge of anything of value before we called in the mov-

ers. She had no local family.

There was not a lot. In one drawer, however, I found what looked like a fancy jewelry box carefully set to one side. "A nice necklace," I thought. I opened the box and was stunned. It contained no mere string of bobbles. The brittle yellow paper neatly folded into the lid of the box told the story, and below the paper was a *Croix de Guerre*, a medal created by France for gallantry during World War I.

My nurse had gone off to the "war to end all wars," World War I. She had treated wounded soldiers near the front. She had been shelled and exposed to poison gas. She served with honor and uncommon courage that was recognized by France. To her own country, however, she was only contract labor not entitled to medical care or veterans' benefits.

Women have served in all our wars, but until recently, they were seldom given veterans' benefits.

During the American Revolution, some women, such as Deborah Sampson, disguised their sex, pretended to be men and fought in the line as male soldiers. After the war, Deborah applied for, and was given, a soldier's pension. Other women were enrolled in the Continental Army to do washing, carry water or ammunition to the soldiers, and to help nurse the sick or wounded. They were exposed to every hardship and sickness suffered by the army. "Stay at home" women "manned" frontier forts when the men were marched off in their militia companies to join the main army. Women defended their homes, carried messages, and

acted as spies. As one British officer lamented to his commander, "Destroy all the men in America and we shall still have all we can do to defeat the women."

The Civil War also saw its share of women, such as Frances Calen, disguise themselves as men to fight. But the Civil War saw a more important development along the road of women's rights. It saw the beginning of the American Red Cross.

When Clara Barton began serving as a volunteer nurse to help the wounded, the army medical department was primitive. Care of the wounded, which began close to the battlefields, was dangerous. Without regard for their own safety, the nurses greatly improved treatment of both the sick and wounded. Through their efforts lives were saved. For the first time, because of Clara Barton's efforts, a centralized system to keep track of the dead and wounded was established.

As strange as it may seem today, the dedication and sacrifice of these women was not appreciated by the army medical department. "No one knows...how much opposition," wrote Georgeanna Woolsey, "how much ill-will, how much unfeeling want of thought these women endured...the army surgeons determined to make their lives so unbearable that they would be forced to leave..." To the sick and wounded, however, the women were angels.

Some 10,000 women volunteered as nurses or doctors during the Civil War including Dr. Mary Walker who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for her service. Walker also became a tireless campaigner for women's suffrage after the war and was arrested several times for "impersonating a man" because she favored more comfortable—and practical—men's

clothing. A striking bronze memorial testifies to the women's heroism in Nurses' Hall at the Massachusetts State House. After the war, the efforts of women nurses on the battlefield became an argument in favor of women's suffrage.

When the Spanish American War broke out, the army medical corps realized its shortcomings. It immediately sought to contract for 1,500 women nurses. 250 of those hired were nuns. The service of female nurses was so critical to the war effort that in 1901 Congress authorized the creation of the Army Nurse Corps.

When World War I began, the



Dr. Mary Walker, a surgeon during the Civil War, is the only woman ever awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. In later years she was an activist in the suffragette movement.

government called for 20,000 women nurses as part of its mobilization. As the war progressed, women from organizations such as the YWCA, Sisters of Charity, Salvation Army, and the American Red Cross served in Europe in addition to the 5,000 members of the Army Nurse Corps that deployed. The Navy recruited another

11,000 women to serve in the United States in clerical positions to free up men for combat. The Marine Corps soon followed. In addition to the nurses, the army also hired more than 220 contract female telephone operators to staff its telephone service in France.

The truth of the matter is, counting civilian relief agencies, there were more American women in France than US Marine Corps rifle-men. A big danger to the women was from "mustard gas." Spread as a cloud, its vapors would soak into a soldier's clothes causing blisters to form on any part of skin it touched. If inhaled, it destroyed lung tissue. It was the job of medical personnel not only to treat, but to decontaminate soldiers under the most primitive of conditions.

About 400 women died in service during World War I. Some 100 were decorated by the French or British, 36 were awarded the Navy Cross, 23 the Distinguished Service Medal, 3 the Distinguished Service Cross.

"Unless we enfranchise women," declared President Wilson after the war, "we shall have fought to safeguard a democracy which, to that extent, we have never bothered to create."

At the outbreak of World War II, 8,700 women were serving in the Army Nurse Corps. When the Philippines fell to Japan, the Army flag did not fall into the hands of the victorious Japanese Army because a woman army nurse being marched to a POW camp draped it over her shoulders. She convinced her captives that the embroidered cloth was a shawl. All 78 female nurses marched into Japanese prison camps not only survived the horrendous conditions which existed in all the camps but continuously treated the sick and injured.

Eventually the government

would commission 72,000 female nurses. The armed services also enlisted thousands of women to take over jobs previously held by men. As the war progressed, the air corps enlisted some 1,100 women pilots to train men and to fly new aircraft into war zones. Even though 38 lost their lives in service to their country, it was many years before they were recognized as veterans. The Navy enlisted 80,000 women to take over administrative and clerical jobs to free men for sea duty. Women would be used as instructors, mechanics,



Clara Barton, also a veteran of the Civil War, founded the American Red Cross and was also a suffragette.

vehicle operators, photographers and radiomen.

All told, about 400,000 women served in World War II. Of those, 460 died in service. Although most women were discharged at war's end, Congress passed the Women's Armed Service Act in 1948, creating small, but permanent, corps for women in each branch of the

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Combat Breathing

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Here's how 4-count combat breathing works:

1) Inhale through your nose, expanding your stomach for a count of 4. 1, 2, 3, 4.

2) Hold that breath in for a count of 4. 1, 2, 3, 4.

3) Slowly exhale through your mouth, contracting your stomach for a count of 4. 1, 2, 3, 4.

4) Hold the empty breath for a count of 4. 1, 2, 3, 4.

Repeat until you regain control.

After being shot, I began combat breathing and visualized the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 in front of me to give me something to focus on. It's important to understand that I was barely able to count to 4 under such physical duress. Focusing on breathing and counting to 4, rather than on the excruciating pain, enabled me to reverse my body's reaction of going into shock and losing consciousness.

The best thing about combat breathing is its multitude of applications. It is used in martial arts to sharpen focus and manage the fear of fighting. It's an integral part of yoga in focusing on Zen breathing instead of the body's contortions. It can be used in sports before an event to remain calm or during the event to finish strongly. You can teach your children to use it in coping with the anxiety that precedes an exam or an important social event. Most importantly, you can use combat breathing on a daily basis while on patrol to regulate your breathing during the adrenaline bursts that come with police work. It's incredible how something as simple as slowing down your breathing has such a profound affect on your ability to manage stress.

You may not experience a life and death situation all the time, but you may often experience stressful situations that build anxiety. This is the perfect time to practice combat breathing to prevent stress build-up, assess your psychological state, and reset your survival mindset. Combat breathing is a mandatory component of survival stress management. Remember, the next time you feel stress building, engage the power of breath and start counting 1, 2, 3, 4.

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armed services.

The Korean War saw widescale employment of the MASH (mobile army surgical hospital) to bring medical care as far forward as possible to the troops. Here, 650 women would serve in these units while another 28,000 women served in the armed forces around the world during the Korean War.

World War I belonged to my grandparents' generation. World War II and Korea belonged to my parents. Vietnam was my generation's war.

Seven thousand, five hundred women served in Vietnam. Most were nurses. Although service women in other branches argued that they should be allowed to go to Vietnam, few were sent. Eight died in service. Vietnam was the last American war fought with conscripted male soldiers. Women, however, had always been volunteers.

With the end of the war in Vietnam, the United States went to an all volunteer army. In 1978, the Women's Army Corps ceased to exist and its members were integrated into the previously all-male

Army. Women in the armed services were then enlisted, trained, and armed the same as men. Although women were not assigned to direct combat slots, they served in combat support units such as combat military police. By the time of the First Gulf War, women were so fully integrated into Army maintenance, transportation, communication, medical, administration, logistics, and other support companies, there was no way the Army could deploy to a war zone without taking female soldiers. Of the 697,000 soldiers deployed in the first Gulf War, 33,300 were women. They were all in danger of missile attack and chemical exposure. Most of them had been trained in the use of small arms and were issued guns.

Since the First Gulf War, women have regularly deployed to war zones. In the long lines of camouflage uniforms boarding busses or aircraft to deploy to war zones, all soldiers look alike. They are all leaving behind their families and loved ones. When the shooting starts, all soldiers, by virtue of their enlistment, have stated their willingness to die, if need be, to keep us safe. Some of these soldiers are women.

We have women soldiers. We have women combat veterans. Some come home from war to loving families, some with medals for valor, many have returned with the scars of war. Others have been brought home, flag draped, carried by honor guards.

As you plan your summer get away, as you lay out that Memorial Day weekend party, do not forget those whose sacrifices have made your freedom and security possible. Don't forget our men in uniform or our women with guns who fight beside them.

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