

Move Over CHARLIE'S ANGELS Here Comes. . .



by
LTC Gloria A.S. Olson

Pamela Mize is an electronics repair "man."

Mrs. Carroll Cornett is a telephone pole climber.

Mrs. Mary Neal operates a communications center.

Nancy Herdon is a computer scientist.

Pamela Sylvester jumps out of airplanes.

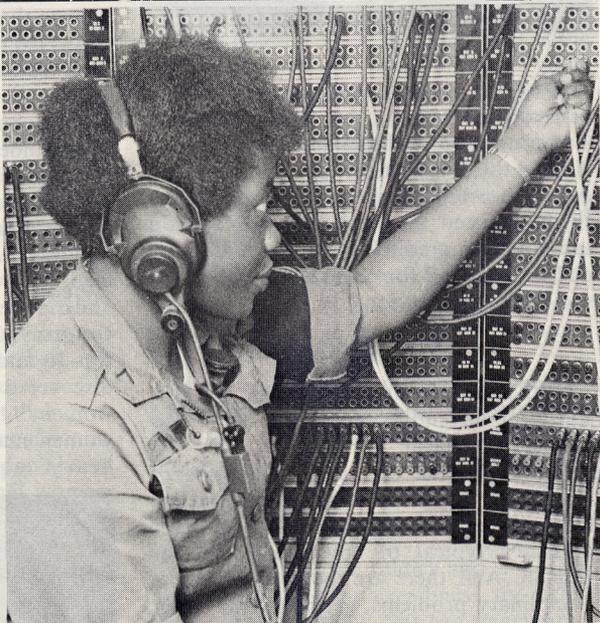
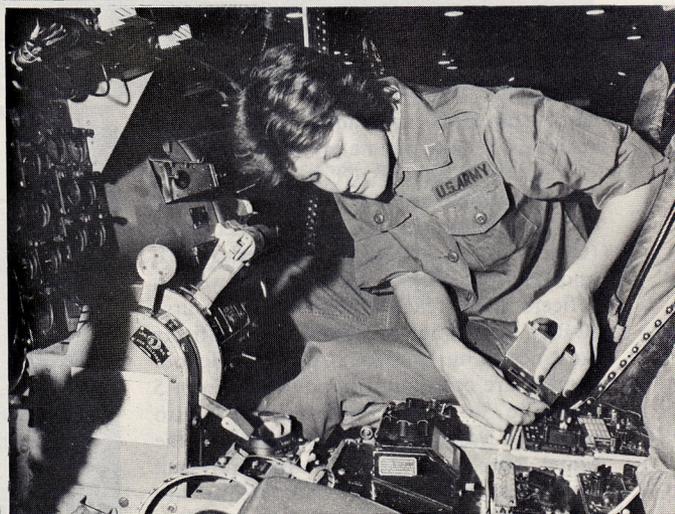
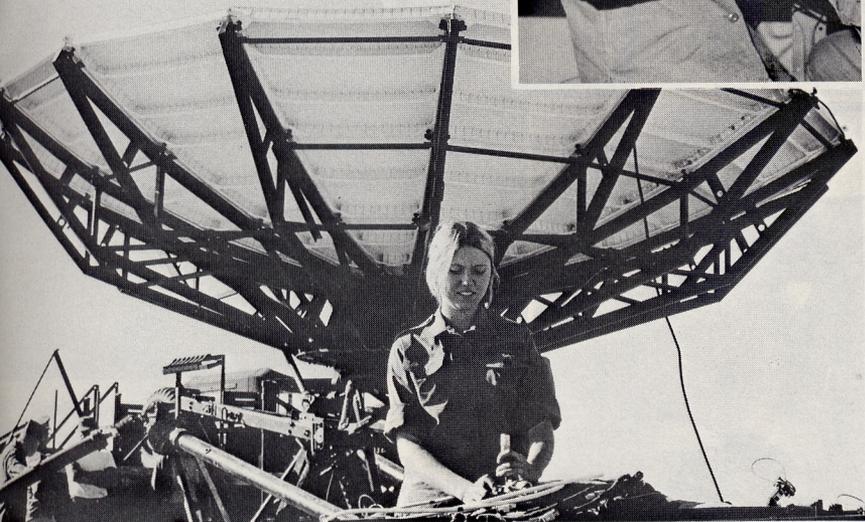
Different jobs, different places. Yet what do these women have in common?

Like "Charlie's Angels" of television fame, they're adventuresome, they're experts, and they're increasing in number as well as in demand. Their boss? The U.S. Army Signal Corps.

Held to the social boundaries of typing, cooking, and nursing, the Army woman's talent, skills, and brainpower remained hidden behind the 37 restricted Military Occupational Specialities (MOS's) for 32 years.

Army women began to realize the rewards of their endeavors when in 1972 the new Volunteer Army pioneered new directions for them. It was then that the Army opened 371 of its 406 MOS's for enlisted women





(EW). (Positions from which women are excluded are those in "Category I" units whose missions may require direct combat.)

The Signal Corps permitted enlisted women to work in 61 communications career fields and today offers the most varied job skills of any Army Branch. By 30 November 1976, the Signal Corps acquired a strength of almost 7,000 enlisted women in all but 6 of the 61 communications specialties.

Women officers were also included in the expanded role of Army women. As of July

1974 women officers were no longer assigned only to the Women's Army Corps Branch. Instead they were integrated in all Army Branches. Assignment to the Branches was, and still is, based on civilian education and experience in particular career fields.

By 30 November 1976, the Signal Corps gained a complement of 220 women officers primarily skilled in one or two of the five officer communications specialties. Some signal women officers add a secondary which is not in communications. Consequently there may be some signal women officers attached to other Branches doing nonsignal jobs.

Since the breakthrough signal women began losing their timidity toward "acting like an executive" or "doing a job no other woman has ever done." They are no longer the "unknown soldiers" behind the scenes.

Now they readily accept titles, supervisory positions, and unusual jobs. Signal women can be found working throughout the world in all signal units not designated Category I. They are the communications platoon leaders, communications center supervisors, team chiefs, equipment repair "men," antenna installers, telephone pole linemen, satellite specialists, and airborne experts.

But signal women just don't suddenly become experts. They're highly trained. To develop skills and brainpower, training for signal women is as intensive as that for men. Women must qualify for entry in any of the communications courses in the same manner as the men. And they must meet the



same standards to graduate and acquire their MOS's and ultimately their jobs.

The Signal School at Fort Gordon, GA, has a continual student load of at least 600 EW attending the 55 specialist courses. (Other courses are taught at Keesler AFB and Lowry AFB.) An average of 20 women officers attend each Officers Basic Course (OBC); an average of 5 attend each Officers Advanced Course (OAC). All Signal School courses are coed and run anywhere from 5 weeks to 36 weeks. Field training is also coed, and women students must perform the same practical exercises and physical training as male students. No "breaks" are offered the signal student because she just "happens" to be a woman.



A CONTINUING PROCESS

When the signal woman graduates, the title "soldier communicator" identifies her as a qualified communications specialist. Yet she maintains her status as a feminine individual, even though fatigue fashions may not highlight her femininity. She prefers it that way!

Of course, not every woman gets through signal training or stays in the communications field. But the academic and administrative "dropout" rate for women is lower than it is for men. Of the total 1976 enrollment of 2,536 enlisted women students at the Signal School, 329 (13%) left the communications field or the Army. Proportionately, the male "dropout" rate was 3,774 out of 20,585 (19%).

As with the signal man, her training doesn't end with the school's MOS courses. Training becomes a continuing process at her job and in her unit after she leaves Fort Gordon. The advent of the Skill Qualification Tests (SQT's) and the Army Readiness Training Evaluation Program (ARTEP) now allow signal women throughout the world to advance their training and compete for promotion, better jobs, and advanced specialties.

Signal women also have the same advantages for off-duty education and signal correspondence courses. Currently, 22,000 students are enrolled in the signal nonresident program, and these include

many signal women. Further, the Signal School has recently been accepted as an accredited school by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and also by the Department of Labor's Federal Apprenticeship Program. This means the signal enlisted graduate can now obtain some college credit for her MOS training and be qualified for civilian employment if she leaves the Service.

IT'S NOT ALL ROSES

With all their training, expertise, and high spirit for adventure, are signal women as perfect as "Charlie's Angels"? NO!

Signal women do have their share of weight problems, emotional adjustments, financial burdens, homesickness, and other pressures typical of any young man or woman. And there are those who become disciplinary problems, get pregnant, "want out," get Article 15's, or are involuntarily discharged. But the numbers, again, are few in proportion to the male population.

Says COL Frank H. Baker, commander, 7th Signal Brigade, Germany, "Recently, a visiting general asked how the women in the 7th Signal Brigade were progressing and what jobs they had. I replied by saying that women were working in nearly every MOS in the brigade. I also said that the women in the brigade are not identified as drug abusers in proportion to the numbers. Further, the reported violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice by women soldiers are fewer

than their proportion to the brigade population." COL Baker added that "the biggest problem related to women is pregnancy, which occasionally causes commanders to unexpectedly lose a soldier sooner than anticipated." COL Baker told DA, "Every job in the brigade can be done by a woman—100% of our MOS's."

Attitudes across the Pacific are similar. CPT John J. Cipriano, former company commander of Company B, 51st Signal Battalion, in Korea, says "My signal company, near the DMZ, had 108 troops of which 30 were women. They were great! I had less disciplinary problems than with the men. My women had that 'can do' attitude and did everything the men did. Of the whole company, 3 to 4 women were always in the top 10 and were selected as team chiefs. I discovered an interesting thing about women," he added. "While some of the women may have been weaker in moving heavy equipment, they'd use their



"One of the best platoon leaders I encountered in the 1st Signal Brigade was a female second lieutenant. One of the best leaders of a microwave radio repair team in my recent experience was a female specialist. . . ."
 —MG Gerd S. Grombacher, commander, U.S. Army Communications Command, Fort Huachuca, AZ.



**SIGNAL CORPS ENLISTED WOMEN
 STRENGTH IN DESIGNATED
 MOS SPACES AS OF 30 NOV 76**

MOS	NO	MOS	NO	MOS	NO	MOS	NO
05B	62	31B	129	32D	53	36C	182
05C	256	31D	0	32E	35	36D	1
05E	319	31E	68	32F	17	36E	1
05F	438	31G	0	32G	65	36G	35
		31J	254	32H	13	36H	49
		31L	13	32J	0	36K	142
26B	10	31M	733				
26C	27	31N	85	35B	13	72C	432
26D	3	31S	62	35D	12	72E	2092
26H	1	31T	24	35E	31	72G	67
26K	43	31V	1	35H	11		
26L	196	31W	0	35K	46	84B	55
26M	2	31Z	1	35L	52	84C	11
26N	4			35M	26	84D	14
26P	48			35N	2	84E	7
26T	2			35P	0	84F	11
26V	162			35R	8	84G	85
26W	0						
26Y	31						

Total Enlisted Women in assigned MOS spaces is approximately 6542 against a total of 8607 authorized spaces. However, figures change on a daily basis due to turnaround time, new graduates and MOS transfers.

**SIGNAL FEMALE OFFICERS
 AS OF 31 OCT 76**

COL	LTC	MAJ	CPT	LT	TOTAL
0	2	5	38	175	220

Figures do not include accessions or officers promoted after 31 Oct 76.

Total figure of 220 is approximately 4% of total strength of the Signal Corps. By the end of June 1977, the total is projected to reach 368.

**FY 77 SIGNAL
 FEMALE OFFICER PROCUREMENT**

ROTC (OTRA)	42
ROTC (RA)	9
OCS	8
WAC	11
Total	184

Total planned input of Women Officers for FY 77 is 328 of which 148 (39%) are scheduled for assignment in the Signal Corps.

intelligence to find ways to lift or move the equipment. The men used their brawn more often than their brains."

"I would have accepted all women in my company," stated CPT Cipriano, "if I knew they wouldn't be evacuated in the event of combat. If my women had been evacuated I'd have lost the key people on my teams."

HOW WOULD YOU TREAT A MAN?

From these statements it would appear that signal women encountered no discrimination or male-peer rejection. But some do! Signal women state that their units or peers don't consciously discriminate against them; "it's just that they don't know how to treat us," say some signal women. "How are you supposed to treat a woman?" a signal first sergeant asked BG Mary Clark, head of the Women's Army Corps, in an open forum she held with commanders and first sergeants at 440th Signal Battalion, Europe. Her answer? "How would you treat a man?"

Some signal instructors and unit commanders admit there is "more expected of signal women than men in job performance." The reason for this is that women are expected to meet male prerequisites to qualify for the jobs and to perform tasks it was once thought only men could do.

Now there is a new attitude toward the signal woman. The consensus of many unit commanders is, "If she can do the job, then

let's not hold her back. Make her part of the team."

But what about signal wives or mothers? Generally, the Army makes every effort to assign married signal women and their husbands to the same locations and, if possible, to the same units. Married couples usually pose no problems, particularly if they are working together. Such is the case of Mr. (SGT) and Mrs. (SP4) Neal in Germany or Mr. (LT) and Mrs. (LT) Simek, at Fort Bragg, and countless other couples who have joined the signal ranks.

However, when a signal woman becomes a mother she does incur problems, especially if she is in a signal unit overseas or a CONUS unit required to be in the field much of the time. Her first priority is as a "soldier communicator," and she must perform her job with her unit wherever necessary. If she has conflict being a soldier and a mother, and it affects the unit's readiness, she is then given several options. She can transfer to a "fixed" unit, change career fields, or leave the Army.

Many signal women with children, particularly in Korea and Germany, find it difficult and a financial burden to be both a mother and communicator. Consequently, they do opt for a transfer or a change of career specialties which would offer them a stabilized job.

Socially, signal women at one time couldn't fit in the "team plan." Separate WAC detachments did not encourage the "one concept" of men and women as

soldiers. Today with the disappearance of the WAC detachment and with the reality of coed training and teamwork, signal women are winning positions of respect on their own merits.

The concept of the signal woman has become a reality. As she is being successfully integrated in the signal arena she is continually proving herself able to do her job equally as well as her male peers. It is just a matter of time before the barriers of the "woman image" will make way for the professional signal woman.

(Data and comments for this article were gathered from DA-MILPERCEN, the Signal School files, signal news publications, and interviews with signal personnel.)

LTC Gloria A.S. Olson is the director, Directorate of Support at the Signal School. Her 20 years in the Army have included assignments as an audiovisual officer, public affairs officer, broadcast officer, AV instructor, and AV consultant in DoD and DA. She is noted for being the most decorated woman in the Army and was included in Who's Who of American Women, 1975-76. She will be the first signal woman to attend the Army War College when she enters the July 1977 class. She holds a B.S. degree in education drama, and an M.S. degree in radio-TV from Syracuse University.