



# The Built Environment of Cold War Era Servicewomen

#05-194

## Background:

Providing full military status to women during WWII had repercussions for the built environment of the country's military installations, especially as the government mandated a gender-segregated military. It required a reconsideration of both the spatial organization and design protocols used in constructing and rehabilitating housing, training, and workspaces of military women throughout the Cold War. By the end of the Cold War, the physical imprint of servicewomen could be seen throughout America's military installations. These aspects of the built environment are potentially eligible as historic properties and cultural resources, reflecting not only the specific subculture of women in American society, but also the physical manifestation of Cold War culture and societal norms as they pertained to the specific subgroup of military women. However, little, if any, attention has been focused on understanding the history or development of these unique resources.



Fort Des Moines, WAC barracks showing privacy fencing, fire escape ladder, and opaque window treatments, WWII (WIMSA, Vertical Photo File, Collection of Kris Morrison).

## Objective:

This study examines the history and evolution of the built environment of Cold War era servicewomen. The objective is to provide an historic context to be used in identifying and evaluating aspects of historic buildings, landscapes, and properties associated with Cold War Era servicewomen that may be eligible as historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), as amended.

## Summary of Approach:

Preparation of this historic context involved conducting a literature review of secondary sources dealing with military women in order to form a general overview and background for the research. Primary documents obtained

through archival research were used to compensate for the lack of secondary sources dealing directly with the built environment of Cold War Era servicewomen. Primary sources included government documents (memoranda, letters, studies, regulations, and reports), military building plans (proposed, tentative, and definitive), historic photographs and plan maps. The authors used all of these sources in a reiterative process of analysis and evaluation to determine not only what was built, how it was built, and where it was built, but why, how, and by whom the relevant decisions were made and the designs were drafted.

## Benefit:

This report augments recent and ongoing projects such as the Navy Cold War context, the Air Force Cold War context, and the Unaccompanied Personnel Housing Cold War context, as it is the only study to focus on gender issues impacting cultural resources. The context will enhance the preservation and management of Cold War resources by facilitating installation compliance with NHPA by providing (1) a valuable tool that can be used DoD-wide therefore reducing individual service compliance efforts, and (2) support for future mitigation efforts, reducing the need for case-by-case research.

## Accomplishments:

The final report concluded Cold War Era servicewomen left a significant signature on the built environment of our country's military installations. The potential for the existence of buildings incorporating modified features to accommodate women is great. Further, this study suggests that barracks complexes more than 30 years old at installations that accommodated female units hold great potential for historic value in terms of their design features.

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