

Army nurse praises attitude ‘change’ in opening career doors to female Soldiers during CRDAMC/WTB’s Women’s Equality Day Observance

By Gloria Montgomery, WTB Public Affairs

Seven words are all Lt. Col. Esther King needed to hear to jump-start her Army career: “Women do not belong in the Army.”



Figure 1: At right, Lt. Col. Esther King, who is assigned to WTB’s D Company, chats with Staff Sgt. Gloria Jackson following the combined CRDAMC and WTB’s celebration of Women’s Equality Day. King was guest speaker for the Aug. 23 event. (Photo by Gloria Montgomery, WTB PAO)

After hearing those condescending words, uttered to her by a male chauvinistic soldier during her basic training in 1981, the former medic and now Army nurse made it her mission to prove her doubters wrong.

“I was determined at that point to show them I

was just as good and as capable as they were,” said King, now a Soldier in Transition at the

Warrior Transition Brigade (WTB), and guest speaker for the Carl R. Darnall (CRDAMC) and WTB’s Aug. 23 joint celebration of Women’s Equality Day, which commemorates the Aug. 26, 1920, adoption of the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote.

King credited both the 19th amendment and the women’s liberation movement with giving women the freedom to pursue their dreams.

“Thankfully, those women did not quit fighting after earning the right to vote,” she said, praising their courageous actions, as well as the 1970s women’s movement in gaining ground in the battle for workplace equality.

“Women 30 years ago couldn’t do anything outside traditional women’s roles without a huge struggle,” she said, crediting her career successes with their push for change.

“And boy have there been changes,” she said, referencing the 1973 creation of the All-Volunteer Armed Forces and the 2013 ruling that lifted the ban on women serving in combat. “Before, women in the Army would be discharged if they got married,” adding that even after married female soldiers were allowed to serve, they still had to contend with nasty comments such as ‘what would your husband think.’

“Now, even single parents can be in the Army as long as they have a caretaker transition plan,” she said. “This is very good for women who do not have a spouse.”

The Army Reservist, who came to the WTB from Fort Sill, Okla., where she was a supervisory nurse case manager at the Warrior Transition Unit, said one of the biggest changes she has seen in her two decades of military service is in leadership roles for women.



Figure 2: Staff Sgt. David Castro, WTB, 1st Battalion, D Company, looks over posters that represent the women's suffrage movement and battle of women's rights. Castro said he is glad women have more rights today than before and feels that they should be able to do anything they are capable of doing. (Photo by Gloria Montgomery, WTB PAO)

“Back then, women could not command men,” she said. “And now we see women in commanding positions all through the ranks who have all proven that they are a vital part of the Army today.”

King, who served four years enlisted active-duty before she left the service to attend nursing school, praised the women in today's military, as well as veterans for standing up for their rights, especially in the fight to open more military occupations to women.

“When I joined, military occupation specialties for women were very limited,” she said, adding that female soldiers were assigned only roles that were traditionally associated with women such as clerks and nurses. “Now, thanks to those who stood up for their rights, society noticed. Now, women have been given the right to join in direct combat roles.”

Admittedly, said King, who entered the Army Nurse Corps in 1991, those females who do choose a combat-related field will have difficulties but they must “endure” to make it right. “We still have a long way to go, we still have discrimination issues, but it is far

better today than it was 30 years ago. We have to stand up and address those rights now to benefit tomorrow's women."



Figure 3: WTB commander, Col. John Kolessar, presents a certificate of appreciation to Lt. Col. Esther King, who was the guest speaker for the joint CRDAMC and WTB's celebration of Women's Equality Day, which commemorates the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. Kolessar added to King's remarks by telling the Soldiers that they have been a part of the global push for women's equality either indirectly or directly through their service in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Photo by Gloria Montgomery, WTB PAO)