

## Business and Professional Women's Foundation

### Untapped Talent: Women Veterans

Women have a high rate of success in the military with opportunities to advance and hold high-ranking positions, but many misconceptions negatively influence women veterans' capacity to transition successfully into civilian life. As women comprise a growing portion of the military, they have subsequently become a substantial segment of our veteran population. Unfortunately, women veterans' issues are still largely ignored.

While most veterans face similar problems as they transition from the military to the new world of civilian work, women veterans must deal with a different set of stereotypes and ignorance. The training, skills, discipline, team building and leadership experience cultivated within the military are all valuable to civilian employers, and women veterans can be as great an asset to employers as their male counterparts.

Below are myths debunked by Business and Professional Women's Foundation's research project, *Women Veterans in Transition*, and additional sources. The facts presented here should encourage employers to actively recruit and engage women veterans in their organizations.

#### MYTH

Women are less capable than men of carrying out the physical tasks demanded by military work.

#### FACT

The Defense Women's Health Research Program (DWHRP) demonstrates conclusively that women are equal to men in the physical and cognitive aspects of military readiness, including meeting such physical challenges as the tolerance of gravity forces, the ability to respond to stress and the ability to survive in extremes of heat and cold.”<sup>1</sup>

#### MYTH

Women have a hard time achieving success in the military.

#### FACT

Approximately 95 percent of all jobs in the military are open to women.

- » The percentage of women serving on active duty in the military has more than doubled since 1978.
- » Women account for close to 20 percent of the U.S. Military.
- » Women account for the largest increase in enlistment.<sup>2</sup>

**MYTH** Women compromise the military's efficiency and success because of on-duty days lost due to pregnancy and maternal leave.

**FACT** Statistically, men spend even more time away from active duty. For male soldiers, this is almost exclusively due to behavioral issues such as desertion, drug and alcohol abuse, incarceration or being AWOL.<sup>3</sup>

**MYTH** Most veterans are middle-aged.

**FACT** Thirty percent of female veterans are under the age of 35, compared to only 10 percent of male veterans.<sup>4</sup>

**MYTH** The military is a roadblock to a higher education.

**FACT** Qualified service-members can receive more than \$70,000 in tuition benefits.

- » More than half the enlisted force has some background in higher education.
- » Over 30,000 degrees were earned by service personnel in 1999 alone.
- » The military operates over 300 schools, teaching more than 10,000 courses.

» Many military bases bring in professors from local colleges to teach courses.

» Military personnel can take college courses through the Internet.<sup>5</sup>

» The military offers retired personnel up to \$100 per month reimbursement for tutorial assistance.

» The military provides free training for personnel interested in starting or enhancing a small business.

**MYTH** In general, female veterans tend to be less well-educated than their male counterparts.

**FACT** Eighty-one percent of women veterans who responded to BPW Foundation's survey had completed some college, and 60 percent of them have a college degree.<sup>6</sup>

**MYTH** Military training and jobs have little relation to the civilian world.

**FACT** Eighty-eight percent of military jobs have direct civilian counterparts.

» The military offers thousands of specialized jobs in varied fields.<sup>7</sup>

» Eight-one percent of all jobs in the military are non-combat occupations.

» Veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces are less likely to be unemployed than non-veterans.

continued

**MYTH** After leaving the service, women veterans are not qualified for jobs besides entry-level positions.

**FACT** As civilians, about 235,000 women veterans work in managerial and professional occupations, and an additional 100,000 work as administrators.<sup>8</sup>

**MYTH** Women veterans have an extensive network of military assistance and veteran support to aid in their transition into the civilian workforce.

**FACT** Ninety-three percent of women veterans surveyed by BPW Foundation cited that they did not turn to a women’s network, veterans’ service organization or professional association to help secure a civilian job.<sup>9</sup>

**MYTH** Most veterans can transition into civilian life with relative ease.

**FACT** Forty-four percent of respondents to BPW Foundation’s survey, who had been out of the service an average of seven years, said they still did not feel completely adjusted to participation in the civilian workforce.

» Only 21 percent felt they had successfully transitioned into civilian life by the start of their first post-service job.<sup>10</sup>

» Just over half of women veterans surveyed by BPW Foundation (51.7 percent) did not seek civilian work

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jonathan B. Perlin, M.D., Pd.D., M.S.H.A., F.A.C.P., Susan H. Mather, M.D., M.P.H., and Carole L. Turner, R. N.P., M.S.N., C.N.A.A. (2005). Women in the Military: New Perspectives, New Science. *Journal of Women’s Health* 14, no. 9.
- <sup>2</sup> *Today’s Military*. <http://www.todaysmilitary.com/app/tm/like/myths>
- <sup>3</sup> Peach. (1996). *It’s Our Military, Too!*
- <sup>4</sup> Women’s Bureau, Washington, DC. (1997, June). Outlook on Women Veterans. *Facts on Working Women* 97, no. 5.
- <sup>5</sup> *Today’s Military*.
- <sup>6</sup> BPW Foundation. (2007). Understanding the Complexity of Women Veterans’ Career Transitions.
- <sup>7</sup> *Today’s Military*.
- <sup>8</sup> Women’s Bureau. Outlook on Women Veterans.
- <sup>9</sup> BPW Foundation. (2007). Understanding the Complexity of Women Veterans’ Career Transitions.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2007, November). Vital Mission: Ending Homelessness Among Veterans.

until after leaving the military, but women veterans who began looking for a civilian job prior to their official separation were twice as likely to say that they had secured the type of job they had hoped for, and were also twice as likely to recall that they felt well-prepared for the civilian workforce.<sup>11</sup>

» Female veterans, especially if they have disabilities or are unmarried or separated, are more likely to experience the burden of housing costs and other necessities.<sup>12</sup> SWD

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