

News story: Service marks 100 years of women's contribution to UK Armed Forces

Today, Friday 7th July, The Royal British Legion led celebrations marking the centenary of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) – the first all-female unit in the UK Armed Forces. The event also recognised the contribution of women to the UK's Armed Forces military capability over the past 100 years.

WAAC was founded on 7 July 1917, enabling the enrolment of women into the British Army for the first time. Women were issued their uniform before taking over from men in roles such as mechanics, drivers, cooks, clerks, drivers, mechanics, telephonists, and telegraphers. A total 58,000 women served in the Corps before it was disbanded in 1921, with 82 women dying in service, and five being awarded the Military Medal.

200 current Servicewomen, from helicopter pilots to weapons engineers, joined veterans at the ceremony which included a traditional Drumhead Service.

Secretary of State for Defence Sir Michael Fallon said:

From the fields of Flanders to the deserts of Afghanistan, women have served in our Armed Forces over the past century with distinction and commitment.

It is essential that roles in our Armed Forces are determined by ability, not gender, and it is therefore very good news that women are joining us in greater numbers and serving in diverse roles including close combat operations.

Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin MP who attended the ceremony said:

I'm delighted to be here today to mark this special anniversary, and also to pay tribute to the thousands of brilliant women in our Armed Forces past and present who serve our country, keeping us safe.