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V CORPS' 32ND SIGNAL BATTALION HONORS PROGRESS MADE BY WOMEN IN ARMY

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DARMSTADT, Germany — On June 11, 1970, the Army welcomed the first female to its general officer ranks with the promotion of Brig. Gen. Anna Mae McCabe Hays. Today, the sight of a female commissioned officer or command sergeant major won't even raise an eyebrow. The Army has come a long way.

"Today, we have women engaging the enemy in Afghanistan and Iraq, fighting side by side with male Soldiers to free an oppressed people. Regardless of gender, they are out there performing the mission with honor and courage," said Lt. Col. William S. Schumaker, commander of V Corps' 32nd Signal Battalion, 22nd Signal Brigade, as he addressed Soldiers at the battalion's Women's Equality Day celebration and awards ceremony.

During the ceremony, Soldiers saw the short film, "For Ourselves Alone," which detailed women's heritage of fighting for equality.

"It's vital to understand what you come from," said Staff Sgt. Sheila M. Gordon, the 32nd's Equal Opportunity representative. "Your heritage is the basis of who you are."

"People need to know about [Women's Equality Day]. There are so many women whose efforts shaped the world as it is today," Gordon said. "Without them we wouldn't have the rights and the freedom that we enjoy today. They fought hard, and they deserve the recognition."

"The whole idea is to educate everyone on the culture of diversity," added 22nd Signal Brigade Equal Opportunity representative Sgt. 1st Class Marjorie M. Irby.

Despite the progress made by Army women, there may still be a "glass ceiling" in their career paths. Female officers see their career opportunities diminishing as they become more senior, said Irby.

"There certainly aren't as many female senior officers as there need to be," she added. "But it just makes me want to strive harder," says Gordon, "and to prove that we can do our jobs as well or better than anyone else."

Their efforts certainly haven't been in vain, Schumaker said. "Without women, the Army's average (General Technical scores on armed service entrance aptitude tests) would be lower. We would have less college graduates in our service. Frankly speaking, our Army is better prepared to fight our nation's wars with women in its ranks."

When all was said and done, however, the celebration went far beyond the advancement of a single cause. "This really is more than a celebration of women in

the service and the accomplishments of women," said Schumaker, "This is a celebration of America, our Army, and our way of life."

