Special Exhibit: A New Generation of Warriors
Honoring America’s Women Warriors

A New Generation of Warriors, and its companion online exhibit honor the servicewomen of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. In 2010, when the exhibit was installed, some 471,000 women were serving in the nation’s Active, Guard and Reserve forces. Nearly half had deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. At any one time, 11 percent of the forces on the ground in support of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom were women. Serving as professionals, side-by-side with men on the battlefield, America’s servicewomen in 2010 and still today are doing whatever they are trained to do, with the courage and pride that has been the hallmark of our military women, beginning with the American Revolution. This exhibit collectively and individually honors this newest generation of American’s women warriors and speaks to their patriotism, bravery, commitment and sacrifice.

A New Generation of Warriors speaks to the wartime experiences of these women through the memorabilia of 101st Airborne Division soldier Cpl. Jessica A. Ellis, who was killed in action on May 11, 2008, in Baghdad, Iraq. Cpl. Ellis, a medic, was on her second tour in Iraq when multiple EFP warheads struck her vehicle and she died of wounds suffered in the attack. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Ellis family for the temporary loan of Jessica’s military service mementos and artifacts. Their generous offer was the inspiration for the exhibit and made this important exhibit possible.

About the Exhibit

Four poster panels with text and images, along with artifacts belonging to Cpl. Ellis, introduce the visitor to the expanding and rapidly evolving roles of military women—made necessary by the ever-changing environment and the needs of an unconventional battlefield and undefined combat zone.

Visitors learn about servicewomen’s duties, the weapons they carry and equipment they use. They see the uniforms they wear and how they spend their leisure time. There are intimate glimpses into emails and correspondence home—and finally, the stark reality that

Images of medals are representative of Cpl. Jessica Ellis’ medals on display at the Women’s Memorial.

Promoted posthumously, Cpl. Jessica Ellis was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart medals. Her Bronze Star citation states it was given for “meritorious service from 17 October 2007 to 11 May 2008”. The citation also reads, “No greater honor can be demonstrated by her ultimate sacrifice and she will be forever remembered for her actions. Corporal Ellis’ duty performance and selfless service are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon herself, the Multi-National Corps-Iraq, and the United States Army.” Her Purple Heart was awarded “for wounds received in action on 11 May 2008”.

Pictures show military women filling critical technical, leadership and warfighting positions. So, when the Global War on Terror was declared, it was not surprising that women were among the first to deploy to the combat zones of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since the first Gulf War in the early 1990s, one after another of the myths and preconceived notions about military women and their place in the combat environment have slipped away. The laws prohibiting women from serving aboard combat aircraft and ships were cleared from the books; and even though the Army and Marine Corps maintain “policy” restrictions on those jobs and assignments identified as direct combat, many women are “first string” players, filling essential combat roles—their training and skill determining promotions and job assignments in most units, not gender.

Today, women serve side-by-side with their fellow servicemembers—men and women—often exposed to combat, taking as well as returning enemy fire. From peacekeeping and humanitarian operations to the combat arena, women have thrived in this fast-paced environment, demonstrating their combat and the enemy know no gender, as particular recognition is given to the fallen heroines of these wars.
technical proficiency, excelling as leaders and securing their place as vital members of the team.

★ Poster Panel 2 ★

**Combat Knows No Gender**

In today's wars, women's roles have rapidly evolved to meet the ever-changing environment, the needs of an unconventional battlefield and an undefined combat zone. By March 2010, 129 women had lost their lives in support of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. Seventy of these deaths were a result of hostile action—more than any previous war. In these wars, combat knows no gender.

Particular recognition is given to the fallen heroines of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom in the Memorial's Hall of Honor—the place where those women who died in service, were prisoners of war or were recipients of our nation's highest awards for service and bravery are specifically honored. Here, all 129 are part of a living memorial, an in-memoriam honor roll that includes their pictures and records of service, guaranteeing their permanent place in American history.

Another special tribute to the fallen heroines of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom can be found in The Register, the very heart of the Memorial. It is here that the records of service of thousands of military women can be found. It seems fitting that the “Fallen Military Women Quilt” with its names is displayed here among comrades, past and present.

Crafted by a group of women quilters in Moro, Ore., who were led by retired Army Staff Sgt. Donna Birtwistle, the quilt features the names of the first 113 women who lost their lives in Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. The quilters’ intent was to pay tribute to the fallen women.

The project soon took on new meaning when on May 11, 2008, Mother’s Day, Cpl. Jessica Ellis, a young woman from just down the road in Bend, Ore., was killed in Iraq.

Poster Panel 2, “Combat Knows No Gender”, features a grid of 56 randomly selected images of fallen servicewomen to represent the 129 women who had lost their lives in support of the Operations, as of May 2010, Women’s Memorial. Women’s Memorial Foundation Photo.
Hitting close to home, her death rallied the quilters and community—businesses and townspeople donated supplies, volunteered to cut fabric, and even funded travel costs for 14 quilters to attend the Sept. 17, 2008, quilt unveiling at the Women’s Memorial.

**Poster Panel 3 ★ One Woman’s Story**

By sharing just a fragment of one young servicewoman’s story, we gain immeasurable insight into the rich, complex, dynamic and inspiring story of all military women.

Cpl. Jessica Ann Ellis deployed to Iraq twice—both times as a combat medic with the Army’s storied “Screaming Eagles”, the elite 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), based out of Ft. Campbell, Ky.

Born in Burley, Idaho, on June 26, 1983, Jessica was the second child of Steve and Linda Ellis, now of Bend, Ore. She was like many high school students, running cross country and participating on her school’s track and field and swim teams. Graduating from Lakeview High School, Lakeview, Ore., in 2002, she went on to get her associate’s degree from Central Oregon Community College, working during her summer breaks in Fremont National Forest as a U.S. Forest Service wildland firefighter.

In September 2004, the same year she graduated from college, Jessica enlisted in the Army and reported to Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo., for nine weeks of basic training. After basic training, she was trained and deployed to Iraq as a combat medic with the storied “Screaming Eagles”, the elite 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), based out of Ft. Campbell, Ky.

In September 2008, just two years after leaving the Army, Jessica was killed in action while providing medical aid to a combat medic who had been wounded in Iraq.

of basic training where she learned the fundamentals of being a soldier. She went on to Advanced Individual Training at Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, where she received combat medic training—learning all aspects of emergency medical treatment and evacuation of casualties, under a variety of battlefield conditions, including enemy fire.

Armed with the skills for her first assignment, now Spc. Ellis reported to Ft. Campbell in 2005, assigned to 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). In short order, Jessica deployed with her unit to Iraq until September 2006.

A year later, Jessica left for her second Iraq tour, again, as a medic in the same battalion she served with during her first tour. Jessica, or “Doc Ellis” as she was known, often worked at Camp Liberty’s Riva Ridge Clinic when not accompanying combat engineer units on hazardous route clearance missions in Baghdad. It was during one such mission on May 11, 2008, that multiple EFP (explosively formed penetrator) warheads struck her vehicle. Jessica died of wounds suffered in the attack. She was 24-years-old.

Route clearance missions are particularly dangerous, and the five to 10 vehicle convoys traveling at 5-10 mph are easy targets. Their missions last between four and 12 hours, and every patrol member participates, even the medic. Often seated in the route clearing vehicle or “Buffalo”, the medic and the other patrol members scan the roadside for anything out of the norm. Anything unusual leads to a halt of the entire convoy to inspect.

Exhibit Artifact: Army Combat Uniform (ACU) and Combat Boots

The nylon and cotton ACU is the Army’s current combat uniform. Its digital camouflage pattern, known as Universal Camouflage Pattern, is designed for desert, woodland and urban environments. The collar is worn up in combat to fit with a body armor vest, and worn down otherwise. While a subdued infrared US flag is authorized, all shoulder sleeve insignia must be subdued. Only pin-on skill badges are authorized for wear on the ACU. Cpl. Ellis’ shoulder insignia is for the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and she earned both the Combat Medic Badge, awarded during her first Iraq tour, and the Combat Action Badge.

Exhibit Artifact: Advanced Combat Helmet (ACH)

The advanced combat helmet (ACH), made of Kevlar, a lighter synthetic material replacing steel, is designed to provide soldiers ballistic and impact protection. Its five basic components include the helmet shell, a pad suspension system (interior cushion pads), a retention system (chinstrap/napestrap), helmet cover and eye strap. A night vision goggle mount is attached to the front of the helmet.

On loan from the Jessica A. Ellis Family. Women's Memorial Foundation Photo.
Cpl. Jessica Ellis, promoted posthumously, was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. She was also the recipient of the Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Combat Medic Badge and Combat Action Badge. Jessica was buried with full military honors in Section 60 at Arlington National Cemetery.

Dear Mom & Dad ...

Letters and V-mail—taking weeks to arrive—and sporadic but coveted phone calls were the means by which military women had stayed close to family and friends during war. But the advent of the Internet, email, improved telephone service, and even video-conferencing ushered in a new era of nearly real-time connection to folks back home. Like so many of today’s deployed military women, Cpl. Ellis, wrote emails to her family during her two tours of duty in Iraq—about her daily life, requests from home, and of her love for her family. The final poster in this exhibit includes excerpts of those cherished emails between this young military woman and her family at home. These excerpts give visitors a sense of how important frequent communication—now made easier through today’s technology—is to both soldiers and families alike.

The online exhibit is available at http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/Exhibits/EllisOnlineExhibit2.html.