Hall of Fame: Mary Louise Rasmuson “a legend” for Army women

For a woman who stood 5 foot 2, Mary Louise Rasmuson might not have looked like a barrier-busting force to be reckoned with.

But that's exactly who she was.

Col. Mary Louise Milligan Rasmuson this week was posthumously inducted into the Army Women’s Foundation Hall of Fame for her leadership in creating new opportunities for women in the military, particularly women of color, as the fifth director of the Women’s Army Corps. After her 20-year military career, she moved to Alaska and gave back anew to her adopted home including with Rasmuson Foundation.

Her military accomplishments were center stage on Wednesday in Arlington, Virginia. At the ceremony, retired Col. Bill Huber, who serves on the Municipality of Anchorage’s Military & Veterans Commission, described Rasmuson as a trailblazing force.

Mary Louise Milligan had worked as a secretary, teacher and assistant principal before she enlisted in the Army during World War II and rose up the ranks. President Dwight Eisenhower appointed her director of the Women’s Army Corps in 1957 and President John Kennedy reappointed her four years later.

When she retired from the Army in 1962, she was newly married and moved to Anchorage to be with her husband, Elmer Rasmuson. She chaired the effort that created the Anchorage Museum, supported women veterans and, as her obituary in The New York Times described, “helped expand the family’s support of civil rights, education and cultural life in Anchorage and beyond.” She served 45 years on the board of Rasmuson Foundation.

In the Army, she worked to change laws that deprived military women of promotion opportunities and service credits. She expanded the role of women into assignments that had been men-only. For her work integrating African American women into the Corps, she received a
Legion of Merit award. Her flair for publicity ensured word spread about how the Army was changing.

“She is a legend when it comes to women in the Army,” retired Command Sgt. Maj. Cynthia Pritchett of the Army Women’s Foundation board said during the induction ceremony. “She worked to eliminate obstacles that impeded women’s careers.”

Under her leadership, more women were recruited and more re-enlisted. The Women’s Army Corps transformed into part of the regular Army.

Rasmuson was among 16 Army women inducted on Wednesday into the 2020 class of the Army Women’s Hall of Fame. She died in 2012 at age 101.

About the Foundation

Through grantmaking and initiatives, Rasmuson Foundation aims to promote a better life for all Alaskans. Main funding areas are housing, homelessness, education, health care, the arts and organizational and community development. The foundation was created in 1955 by Jenny Rasmuson to honor her late husband, E.A. Rasmuson.