



Colonel Marie Louise Rasmuson

Source: Anchorage Museum

## Champion for Military Women

### Description

*Mary Louise Rasmuson*

By Jessica Schultz Pleasant

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VA.Gov – Alaska VA Clinic **Col. Mary Louise Rasmuson Campus**

January 5, 2022, marked the day Alaska's VA Healthcare System (AVAHS) facility was renamed to **Colonel Mary Louise Rasmuson Campus**. The focus is to bring attention to VA care of female veterans. VA also holds an annual **Women Veteran's Conference**. This year's event is June 22, 2024 at Settler's Bay Lodge in Wasilla, Alaska, between 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. including lunch. Activities include

guest speakers, door prizes and games.

# Alaska Women Veteran's Conference

*2nd Annual  
Women Veteran's  
Conference*

2nd Annual Women Veteran's Conference at Settlers Bay Lodge,  
Wasilla, Alaska June 22, 2024, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Join us for lunch,  
guest speakers, fun games, and win door prizes!

[1] Alaska Women Veteran's Conference, 2nd Annual Women Veteran's Conference

According to VA.Gov, it was 1992 when the Alaska VA Healthcare System (AVAHS) was founded at the location of 2925 Debarr Road in Anchorage. Today's VA location is the result of a 2010 move to 1201 North Muldoon, Anchorage. This location was close enough to the base to create what is called "The Link". It is a small hallway linking the VA and Joint-Base Elmendorf-Richardson's (JBER) hospital. It is guarded by troops like any access to the base. This was a result of an agreement between the VA clinic and JBER in 1999. A program called Join Venture. As of October 13, 2022, the Alaska VA serves more than 38,000 veterans.

[2] The rich heritage of the VA Alaska Healthcare System

World War II changed the social makeup of America. As young men died by the tens of thousands in battle, women survived by filling the available jobs outside the home. They kept the supply chains moving. They often were used to aid the war effort by manufacturing ammunition and mass production of weapons and vehicles. Still, women were not eligible for military officer position. Col. Rasmusen successfully helped to change rules that kept women from being promoted and gaining service credit.

[3] Unveiling the Challenges: A Closer Look at VA Services for Women Veterans in Alaska



Colonel Marie Louis Rasmuson

Source: Anchorage Museum

## Who was Colonel Mary Louise Rasmuson?

The Alaska Museum calls Rasmuson a “leader and philanthropist.” She became an Alaska darling and influencer. Rasmuson bravely joined the U.S Army’s Women’s Army Corp (WAK) as a private to serve in World War II.

### [4] MARY LOUISE RASMUSON, LEADER AND PHILANTHROPIST

Rasmuson then received a promotion to colonel. She became the director of WAC in 1957, by President Eisenhower appointment. In 1961, Rasmuson was honored by President John F. Kennedy with her continuing appointment. In her position she advocated for the integration of female and black service members.

In 1962, Rasmuson retired from the Army and settled in Anchorage, Alaska. She collaborated with her husband to build the Anchorage community with their philanthropy and care for the public. Before passing away on July 30, 2012, at 101 years old, Col. Rasmuson was head of the **Municipality of Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Commission**, Chair of the **Anchorage Museum Foundation**, and served 45 years on the board of her **Rasmuson Foundation**. Her foundation awarded over \$200 million in grants to local non-profits.



Legion of Merit Medal

Source: Medals of America

## What is the Legion of Merit Medal?

Rasmuson was awarded the **Legion of Merit**, which was established by the **U.S. Congress** in 1942. It is an award given to the U.S. Departments of the Army, Navy, Airforce, and Homeland Security. It is meant to recognize a service member's exceptionally meritorious conduct and outstanding service. It became the first U.S. medal to recognize citizens of other nations for the outstanding service, fidelity, and loyal in combat or non-combat positions.

[5] Legion of Merit Medal Source: Medals of America

The award is often given to service members in key positions that require responsibility and power. Due to the broad use of the medal the award was divided into four tiers. According to Medals of America, these degrees are as follows:

- Chief Commander: Awarded to a head of state or government
- Commander: a person who is the equivalent of a U.S. military chief of staff or higher
- Officer: awarded to those who are at the rank of colonel (for army and air force) or captain for the navy or coast guard
- Legionnaire: any recipient that does not meet the requirements above |



## What are Difficulties Female Veterans Face Within the VA Healthcare System?

Renaming AVAHS continues the influence that Col. Rasmuson brought to the need for better treatment for women within the **VA Health System**. According to AVAHS Women Veterans Program Manager, **Anna Bullerdick**: *Having her name in our atrium is a daily reminder of our duty to continue fighting for women's rights, and as a true Alaskan hero, she demonstrated the strength of our Alaskan veterans.*

The **Women Veterans Program** focuses on gender-specific care for women. This care addresses gynecological needs for preventive care, reproduction, primary and mental health care.

### These difficulties include:

1. Funding for women's healthcare relies on the need for resources and funding. The population of female veterans in the VA healthcare system are a minority group across the nation. With Alaska's population being a fraction of other VA healthcare centers, this severely impacts the funding for the small number of females in Alaska's VA care.
2. Sexual assault recovery is hindered by shame and fear of retaliation. Leaving many assaults unreported. This is a common occurrence throughout the nation. This mentality does not exclude the lack of reporting by male service members. "Alaskan women are tough, and many don't seek the help that they have earned through their service," stated Bullerdick.
3. The **Service Act** signed into law on June 7, 2022, required the VA to provide breast cancer risk assessment for women that were deployed and qualify for the **Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT)** program.

According to Bullerdick, the VA Women Veteran Conferences bring "women veterans together from around the State and increases their camaraderie, while also providing resources and learning about new services available to them at the Alaska VA Healthcare System."

Alaska's VA is supported by volunteers and donations. This requires a background check. Orientation for volunteers is held monthly. Contact the office of the VA's Center For Development and Civic Engagement (CDCE) office. There are opportunities for 14-year-olds and groups to participate.

**I hope to meet others who share my concerns for Alaska veterans there!**

[Donate](#)

References:

[1] Alaska Women Veteran's Conference, 2nd Annual Women Veteran's Conference  
<https://www.va.gov/alaska-health-care/events/66139/>

[4] MARY LOUISE RASMUSON, LEADER AND PHILANTHROPIST  
<https://www.anchoragemuseum.org/exhibits/extra-tough-women-of-the-north/women-of-the-north-profiles/mary-louise-rasmuson-leader-and-philanthropist/>

[5] Legion of Merit: Details and Eligibility, July 12, 2019, Joshua Williams  
<https://www.medalsofamerica.com/blog/legion-of-merit-details-and-eligibility/>



**Jessica Pleasant** is a disabled **US Military Veteran** trained as a Legal Assistant. She first came to Alaska with her son to escape an abusive relationship in Tennessee, where she had obtained a **Long-Term Restraining Order** from that state's courts, against her ex-husband. That same ex followed Jessica to Alaska and again initiated violence against her, casting her into the trenches of **AK Courts**, as she suffered mental and physical crisis. Ultimately, **Superior Court Judge Yvonne Lamoureux** awarded custody of Pleasant to the proven abusive father, but all have failed to break the loving bond between mother/son.

**Read the story here!**

<https://donnliston.co/2023/11/how-alaska-courts-further-damage-children-in-broken-families/>

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