



Celebrating 50 years of NU Trailblazers!

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Breaking Ice: Norwich Women in Mountain Cold Weather



MCW Company, 1980-1981

Norwich University has a legacy of forging paths and breaking barriers, and the women who stepped into the challenging realm of the Mountain Cold Weather (MCW) Unit are no exception. MillLab Thursdays at Norwich held a distinct significance for a select group of female army cadets who chose MCW as their stomping ground.

Mountain Cold Weather Training Programs, including Norwich's, were founded by WWII veterans of the 10th Mountain Division. **Cathy Hall '79** was the first woman to join the all-male team on a February bivouac. Her experience was cited in a 1976 article in *The Record*. "Carrying a 30-pound pack, she climbed Camel's Hump Mountain, a rocky 4,000-foot ascent, with 50 male cadets and officers. Two days and two nights of constant rain, and winds up to 50 miles per hour, made the bivouac one of the toughest on record." Known as a "gutsy kid" who made challenging exercises appear deceptively easy, Cadet Hall laid the foundation for a lineage of Norwich women embracing the demands of MCW.

Tamasine Wood-Creighton '82 joined MCW as a freshman in 1978 along with classmates **Mary Collins**, **Donna Shaw**, **Amy Griffiths**, and **Joanne McGovern** and **Elaine Nadeau '81**.

For Tamasine, the challenges of MCW were not just physical but also psychological. "Trusting yourself and trusting the rope were pivotal lessons," she recalls, especially in an exercise that required tying a bowline around her waist and hurling herself off a suspended log to prove the equipment's reliability. As one of the smaller cadets, she often had the role of the being the "victim" during rappelling exercises, descending the MCW tower strapped over the shoulder of a fellow cadet.

Tamasine's most significant MCW achievement was making the Rescue Team and becoming the first woman to earn the prestigious Goat Head award for top Rescue Team Member in her senior year.

The camaraderie forged during MCW training became a defining aspect of the experience. Hiking Camel's Hump, skiing on Paine Mountain, and weekend bivouacs with C-ration meals are cherished memories. The leaders of MCW provided positive guidance, shaping these pioneering female cadets for commissioned life and leadership roles. The ethos of MCW was evident: equality among cadets, each pulling their weight without complaint, focused on accomplishing the mission, learning outdoor skills and developing as leaders. Since being allowed to join, women were, and continue to be, an integral part of MCW.



Today, the tradition lives on, as demonstrated on January 20, 2024, when an all-female MCW team rappelled from the Kreitzberg Arena rafters to deliver the game puck for the Women's Hockey Fight Cancer game. The legacy of these resilient women over the past 50 years is etched in the annals of Norwich University's history, proving that breaking ice was just the beginning of their path to becoming women kicking glass.

Left: MCW women rappel from Kreitzberg Arena rafters with game puck for the Women's Hockey Fight Cancer game

Contributions of Norwich alumni to the 10th Mountain Division are highlighted in the documentary [Mission Mt. Mangart](#).

See more information about the [NU MCW Alumni Association](#), whose mission is in part to financially support the Mountain Cold Weather Company Program.

Records documenting women's history and experience at Norwich are available through the University Archives. <https://archives.norwich.edu/>

In 1972, Vermont College merged with Norwich University. 2024 marks the **50th anniversary** of the first women to live on the Northfield campus and the first to join the NU Corps of Cadets—two years prior to the US Service Academies!

Women Kicking Glass is hosting Dressing for Success

An event providing our female students with professional work attire and support to succeed in work and life.

Help fill our clothes racks. We are seeking donations of gently worn and fashionable women's work outfits.

[See more here.](#)