From 1936 to 1945, the Women's Field Army, hereafter the WFA, educated women in the US on the early symptoms, prevention, and treatment of reproductive cancers. The WFA was a women-led volunteer organization and a branch of what was then called, the American Society for the Control of Cancer, or ASCC. The WFA, headquartered in New York City, New York, recruited hundreds of thousands of women volunteers across the country. They distributed pamphlets, showed movies, and participated in other grassroots efforts to foster an understanding of reproductive cancers, namely breast and cervical cancer, among other women. The Women's Field Army also aided in reducing the number of cancer-related deaths by spreading cancer prevention awareness and teaching women about their reproductive health and the early detection of cancer, which was one of the first widespread educational resources about reproductive cancers for women.

During the early twentieth century, there was little knowledge about cancer among both medical and nonmedical communities. Cancer is a disease that results from uncontrollable cell division in a specific area of the body and is often fatal, especially if not recognized during early stages. During that time, physicians often prescribed surgical removal of tumors and surrounding tissue, involving the removal of a woman's breasts in cases of breast cancer or a woman's uterus in the case of cervical cancer. Also, author Ellen Leopold, in her book Darker Ribbon: Breast Cancer, Women, and Their Doctors in the 1940s, suggests that there was a taboo associated with the discussion of cancer, because it was considered a death sentence at the time. Because of that taboo, physicians rarely discussed cancer with patients or with each other, so there was little knowledge of early diagnostics or prevention of cancer among the public. If people did receive a cancer diagnosis, then some would not share a cancer diagnosis with friends and family. However, by 1950, when the US government began to collect data on death by cancer, approximately 190 women per 100,000 women died by cancer. That statistic influenced the nonmedical public to take action to lower rates of cancer.

In 1913, ten physicians and five businesswomen formed the American Society for the Control of Cancer, or ASCC, in an effort to increase awareness about cancer and promote early detection. To raise money and support the organization's efforts, the ASCC recruited women volunteers, who educated other women about cancer throughout the 1920s. In 1929, these women volunteers distributed approximately 688,000 pamphlets, titled What Every Woman Should Know About Cancer which included information about symptoms that may be indicative of cancer and how to seek treatment for women, throughout the US. According to researcher William B. Anderson, the success of the What Every Woman Should Know About Cancer campaign helped influence the ASCC to develop the Women's Field Army, or WFA, as a branch of its organization.

In 1936, Marjorie Illig proposed that the women volunteers of the ASCC become the WFA. At that time, Illig was an ASCC Field Representative and chair of a similar organization called the General Federation of Women's Club's Committee on Public Health. The ASCC provided Illig and the women volunteers 100,000 U.S. dollars to establish the WFA, which advertised itself with the slogan "Early Cancer Is Curable; Fight It With Knowledge." The WFA recruited members of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, called commanders, to encourage women to receive physicals that may detect early signs of cancer and ease women's fears about cancer. According to Anderson, the WFA encouraged its volunteers to act like an army and invade women's homes in an effort to save their lives.

The WFA utilized many characteristics of the US military to operate their organization. Many of the pamphlets the WFA distributed used phrases that framed their campaign as a war or battle against cancer. The women volunteers often dressed in khaki uniforms and wore medallions that represented their rank within the organization. Specifically, women could achieve leadership positions within the WFA as captain or lieutenant. Expecting to be a part of a larger army and be able to call the shots, the women volunteers expected to be leaders of the WFA. Also, during the 1930s, the WFA focused on educating women on the early symptoms, treatment, and prevention of breast cancer. Women enrolled in the WFA provided education to women on how to detect early signs of cancer, including abnormal breast lumps and irregular menstrual bleeding. In 1937, the WFA launched their first public education campaign. The volunteers distributed pamphlets that directed women to receive regular physical exams and semiannual breast and pelvic exams, for women over the age of thirty-five. Also, the WFA's pamphlets focused on eradication of fear on cancer, directly targeting the taboo of cancer through their educational efforts. Following the first campaign, public education became an annual event, and the volunteers distributed millions of pamphlets by leafletting and setting up booths and tables at events, subways, train stations, and schools.

Also in 1937, the WFA expanded its political influence. According to researcher Melissa Lundquist, during the early twentieth century, the US government did not prioritize minimizing rates of cancer, arguing that because cancer is not infectious, the threat of the disease was not great. The WFA encouraged its volunteers to write letters to their state's congresspeople, encouraging them to support policies that would address cancer in the US. Lundquist attributes the WFA's political advocacy to the eventual formation of the National Cancer Institute in 1937 after unanimous support in the US Senate. Also, in 1937, Edith Rogers, who served as volunteer for the WFA and US representative from Massachusetts, introduced a bill to the US House of Representatives that would establish April as Cancer Control Month, which then-President Franklin Delano Roosevelt first acknowledged in 1943.

The WFA continued utilizing different means of public outreach to further explain the importance of early detection and awareness of reproductive cancers. By 1939, volunteers often held informal parties, where they invited wealthy, elite women to attend and learn about the WFA. Similarly, volunteers invited women to clubs to view a film, named Instructions for Captains of the Women's Field Army, or WFA, as a branch of its organization.

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