

Hiding in Plain Site:
The Women Veterans of World War II

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Post WWII America settled in the cloud of the Red Scare, and the threat of a Cold War was pressing upon the nation. The Red Scare served to divide the nation by turning citizens against each other in America's fight against Communism and the Soviet Union. The world was drawn into the public sphere of influence of one of these two "superpowers". The women of post-World War II became unforeseen victims of the scare and the containment policies that followed, propelling them back to the private sphere. Anti-communist Congressional committee leaders became suspicious of anyone who was a liberal thinker or of suspected loose morals, someone who bucked the traditional values of the social norms, in other words the women veterans of WWII. Concerns about espionage and communist sympathizers prompted officials to initiate loyalty checks, and what was more loyal than the American housewife?

Post-war Americans saw feminine stay-at-home moms cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children while masculine dads left home early and returned late each weekday, tending to their designated roles as lawnmowers and backyard BBQers on the weekend. They did not see their wives and mothers and daughters continuing as grease monkeys repairing planes or driving jeeps or ambulances in foreign countries. They needed their women to be lavished in soft full skirts and peterpan collars all soft and sweet. In addition, there was concern about women taking soldiers' jobs; worries about the effect on the family and anxiety about the breakdown of social values. War was incredibly liberating for women but represented deep and provocative change in their traditional roles. Conformity became an all-consuming pastime. To stand out was to attract unwanted attention from your family, the neighbors and God forbid the government!

The Home-front!

Years before WWII was even on the radar of the American people the Great Depression had brought widespread challenges to traditional gender roles of men as the breadwinner and women as the homemaker, that is at least to the start of WWII, then all changed again. According to Elaine Tyler-May's, book "Homeward Bound" during the depression families wed later, due to lack of money, more women worked outside the home, because otherwise they could not make ends meet, even though it was frowned upon, and those who were wed, sustained from having kids right away.¹ Post-World War II America saw women staying home, marrying younger, having more children and leaving college to marry. This was a return to peace and prosperity. The home was the environment in which people could feel good about themselves. In this way, domestic containment and its therapeutic ways undermined the potential for political activism and reinforced the chilling effects of anticommunism and the cold war.

After the War is when the real problems reared their ugly heads. Rigid gender roles were once more in place in the homes of post WWII America and on the military compounds throughout the United States. In "More Work for Mother," author Ruth Schwartz Cowan writes "psychiatrists, psychologists, and popular writers of the era critiqued women who wished to pursue a military career, referring to such as "unlovely women" as "lost," "suffering from penis envy," "ridden with guilt complexes," or just plain "man-hating."² The women veterans of WWII were being punished for wanting to continue serving in the military and also for laying claim to their part in the war effort. As a result they became the hidden veterans of World War II.

¹ Tyler May, Elaine. "Homeward Bound: American families in The Cold War Era." New York: P Perseus Book Group, 1999.

² Schwartz Cowan, Ruth, "More Work For Mother: The Ironies Of Household Technology From The Open Hearth To The Microwave." Basic Books: Washington, DC, 1983.

Uncle Sam Wants You Too!

The women veterans of World War II were a diverse assortment who came from a wide variety of socio-economic statuses and skill levels. They took on jobs that previously would have been forbidden to their gender, out of patriotism, romantic nationalism and the desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves. The average age was twenty one. Thrown together with the glamour of a foreign country, freedom from Mom and Dad and minimal military training these women were sent to serve in a battle zone which was the end of many a hardened military man. They endured sexual harassment, questions on their sexuality and often were accused of being prostitutes or women of very loose moral standing.

During WWII women ferried bullet ridden planes in and out of combat zones, nursed men torn apart by Zero's in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on undermanned and overworked hospital ships and drove ambulances in the god-forsaken towns of a crumbling European theater. Victory Day arrived August 14, 1945 and the boys came marching home to parades and fanfare. But what about the women? The women came home to aprons, new appliances and the boys they had left behind, never to speak of the acts they had performed so valiantly alongside the men on the front lines. The men of WWII today are called "The Greatest Generation" and the women are called "Grandmother." Why have the women of WWII hidden their time in service to their country? The answer may lay in the sacrifice they made by enlisting, the sacrifice of their femininity.

The determined recruiters and patriotic posters promised it all. Posters were placed in countless locations across the country, including post offices, libraries, grocery and department stores, screaming out from their glossy pages...”Be an Air WAC,” “Share the deeds of Victory,” “Become his lifeline,” and asked the question, “Are you a girl with a Star-spangled heart?” The women of America unselfishly answered the call and were promised they would share the gratitude of a nation when victory was ours!³⁴⁵

You’re in the Army Now!

The idea of women serving in the military in any role outside of nursing was a new concept for the American public, a concept that was troublesome for many a red-blooded American male to accept. The U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate debated endlessly on how a woman could serve the war effort. The floor rang with the convictions of some and the effrontery of others about the issue of allowing our women to serve in any capacity at all. Congressional debates were not all altruistic in nature; the government could not afford the higher civilian pay rate the war was commanding and the shortage of able bodies to fill the positions needed to keep the war machine plugging along would require enlisting the women of America. The efforts of Congress resulted in the creation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in May 1942. On July 30, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a bill authorizing the Navy, Coast Guard, and Marines to accept women. The public and private sphere had merged into one and women were on their way to serve, to free up their men to fight the good fight and bring victory home.

³ Appendix A Patriotic Posters, U.S. Department of Defense. Office of Public Affairs Last modified November 11, 2003. Accessed November 2, 2013. <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=42931>

⁴ Appendix B ibid

⁵ Appendix C ibid

A grateful nation welcomed the women into all facets of the armed forces but with limitations. The Army would provide all the necessities of living such as food, clothing and shelter. Albeit, all one size, Grace Porter Miller author of “Call of Duty” writes of the all khaki wardrobe she received at her first post including khaki bra’s, underwear, ties, cotton stockings, boots, skirts, shirts and caps! ⁶ The women would receive lower pay than men of the same rank, and would not receive veterans' benefits such as life insurance, medical coverage or death benefits if need be after victory was obtained. In the event of capture by enemy forces, they would not be given the prisoner-of-war protections that men in the regular army were guaranteed. All the more troubling is that this was all contained in a Bill created by a woman, Congresswomen Edith Nourse Rogers and supported by Eleanor Roosevelt herself.⁷ It would seem the genesis of gender bias came from the highest office in the land.

The WASPs!

Ironically the women of the Women’s Army Service Pilots (WASPs) were some of the most vocal proponents of the gender bias that they were subject to during their time in service, according to the oral interviews conducted by the University of Nevada on scores of women who had served during and after WWII.⁸

⁶ Miller, Grace Porter, “Call of Duty: A Montana Girl in World War II.” Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999,”23”

⁷ Poulos, Paula Nassen, ed. *A Woman's War Too: U.S. Women in the Military in World War II*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1996.

⁸ University of Nevada. Women of WWII Oral History. Accessed March 19, 2013. <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/WomenWW.html>

The women of the WASPs who were chosen to lead, who answered the call to duty the same as their male counterparts were the victims of gender bias long before the woman of the 60's and 70's. These patriotic women came to recognize that the rise to power was limited by an invisible but tangible force.

Some historians may say the “glass ceiling” was in effect during the suffrage years, yet it should be noted that Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady-Stanton and Lucy Stone were fighting for rights, not power nor command of the US government. The right to command men was not given to women in any sector of the American Armed forces before or during WWII. This is not to say that women had not been assigned commands. Civilian and military females had commanded nurses (females only) both at home and abroad during WWI, and with valor. The first and most vocal proponents of the ceiling would be Colonel Jackie Cochran of the WASPs. Cochran would find that even though she held the title of Colonel, a male private would be able to deny her orders and have the full backing of the US Army.⁹

At first the WASPs had initial resistance to an increase in this military role for women, but the reality of World War II meant that an expansion of their roles was necessary. The men were needed for the ground forces leaving the women to fly and ferry the planes. Of course, quite a few of the young men in uniform did not object to their presence. According to Amy Nathan author of “Yankee Doodle Gals: Women Pilots of World War II,” “emergency” landings near their training base were not uncommon; one remarkable day brought nearly 40 such landings.”

⁹ Cochran, Jacqueline and Maryann Bucknum Brinley. *Jackie Cochran: The Autobiography of the Greatest Woman Pilot in Aviation History*. New York: Bantam, 1987

The WASPs spent much of their time ferrying planes from one location to another within the United States and at times were denied landing rights due to the sole fact that they were women pilots. Outrageous accusations of theft hounded the women, and jealousy played a huge part according to Molly Merryman in her book “Clipped Wings.”¹⁰ The presumption was the women of the WASPs were not real pilots possibly because they were not issued uniforms. Since the WASP’s were never militarized through Congress their wardrobe consisted of a blue jumpsuit they purchased themselves. Additionally the WASPs were flying the newest and the most powerful planes to come off the factory lines and the men resented every minute the WASPs were in the captain’s seat.

The landing rights refusals required an executive order from the president (FDR) which was accompanied by a laminated card (which the women were required to carry at all times) proclaiming they were indeed officers and envoys of the WASPs, finally allowing them access to the air fields. The women also faced grave danger within the very ranks of the US Army. All told 38 WASPs gave their lives for their country, a couple when towing targets for practice , one from a jealous soldier who had put sugar in a gas tank, some from acting as test pilots on experimental planes and planes that had been in for repair. The majority passed on from engine failure, carbon monoxide poisoning and mid-air collisions that occurred while ferrying planes to their new destinations.¹¹

¹⁰ Merryman, Molly. *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Air force Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

¹¹ University of Nevada. Women of WWII Oral History. Accessed March 19, 2013. <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/WomenWW.html>

Amy Nathan, author of *“Yankee Doodle Gals, Women Pilots of WWII,”* discloses many of the women witnessed horrific accidents of their fellow WASPs, scenes which were acted out again and again. From the airfields of their Sweetwater Texas training camp, to the purple mountains and grassy plains all over the America. Tales of watching fellow pilots spin into the earth or explode in mid-air. WASP Dora Dougherty Strother explains “We dared not allow our emotions run away with us, after all men were dying every day in battles in the war. Our husbands, boyfriends and some of the gals we knew, all dying.”¹² Fear of letting your compassion show was another motivating factor, there was no room for weakness in the WASPs.

Sadly no military burials were allowed, no gold service stars were to be flown, not even a flag to drape the coffin, no benefits to love ones left behind and burial in Arlington National cemetery was denied to them. Funds were not allocated for the burial or for the body to be sent home, the women of the WASPs took care of their own by taking up a collection every time one of their own fell. Even as WASPs are lost today, they are not allowed burial in Arlington National Cemetery with officer’s honors, but rather only as enlisted personnel.¹³

Gender bias reared its ugly head once more in January of 1944. When the US Army closed the school where all their pilots were trained by male instructors (civilians). These men would be out of a job and ordered to enlist for ground forces. Some male pilots and trainees along with the civilian trainers were transferred to the ground forces, where heavy casualties were still expected in the final months of the war.

¹² Nathan, Amy. *Yankee Doodle Gals: Women Pilots of World War II*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2001.57-58

¹³ 106th Congress, Report, 1st Session of the HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 106-70

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY BURIAL ELIGIBILITY ACT, March 18, 1999.--Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union

The men were determined not to be cannon fodder and bombarded Congress with letters claiming it was unfair for these women to take good jobs away from deserving men. The 1940's male hegemony prevailed and the women were out of a job. Merryman argues that, "Performance was irrelevant; no matter how well the WASPs did their job, and the real battle was on the field of cultural values. The WASPs held jobs that men wanted; there was no way they could win in a patriarchal society."¹⁴ The majority of women in the WAC (Women's Army Corps), WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), etc. served in administration, support, and clerical roles that were untraditional mainly because they were performed in military uniform. No one imagined WACs and WAVES on the front lines carrying packs and rifles; they did not present a challenge to the masculinized definition of "soldier." The WASPs, on the other hand, were the first women to hold high status military positions--jobs highly prized by men.

In spring of 1944, Congress considered a bill that would make the WASP program an official part of the Army; the other women's auxiliaries achieved militarization during the war, while the WASPs did not. Were the WASPs singled out? Merryman thinks they were. She stated that "I believed the WASPs were a direct threat to society's assumptions of male supremacy in wartime culture." With supporters such as General of the Armies Hap Arnold, an aviation pioneer himself, many expected the bill to sail through Congress unimpeded.

¹⁴ Merryman, Molly. *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Air force Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Incredibly a small but vocal group spread falsehoods and fears in the media about the WASPs. One even produced a movie (*Ladies Courageous*) that showcased the WASPs as flirty, gossiping young women that many attribute to the bill being defeated.¹⁵

On December 20, 1944, the WASP program ended. The 1,102 members of the WASPs were out and while not considered full-fledged members of the military they had to find their own way home. The women crawled home defeated in their mission, 51 aircraft remained on the field that day in December that they were not allowed to deliver.¹⁶ Some of the women tried to find jobs back home as pilots, but when they “told people you flew military planes, they looked at you as if you were crazy” as told by Gene Fitzpatrick one of the original WASPs.¹⁷ Gene like most of the other WASPs did not brag of her service, they just found their way home and a job in an office, married, had kids and tried to forget that their courage, determination, and lively camaraderie had enabled them to serve their nation when it most needed their help.

Glaringly, the WASP story is a missing chapter in the history of the Air Force, the history of aviation, and the history of the United States of America. In 1977, 33 years after the WASPs were disbanded, Congress finally voted to give the WASPs the veteran status they had earned, but these heroic pilots were not invited to the signing ceremony at the White House, and it was not until 7 years later that their medals were delivered in the mail in plain brown envelopes.¹⁸ Another chink in the chain of why the women of WWII have hidden in plain sight.

¹⁵ Nathan, Amy. *Yankee Doodle Gals: Women Pilots of World War II*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2001.

¹⁶ Nathan, Amy. *Yankee Doodle Gals: Women Pilots of World War II*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2001.79

¹⁷ Taylor, Margaret Phelan. "Female WWII Pilots: The Original Fly Girls." By Susan Stamberg. *NPR US Around the Nation*, March 2010: "9". Accessed January 24, 2013.

¹⁸ Holm, Major General Jeanne M., USAF. "World War II: Women and the War." *Women's Memorial Foundation of Arlington, Virginia*. Vandamere Press. Accessed January 12, 2013.

Will The Real Soldiers Please Stand Up!

This leads to the question of what happens when women take on military and combatant roles. They still receive less recognition from the government, the public and scholars. Regardless of their perceived gains, the structure of gender is unaltered and the women's status relative to men remains unchanged. Furthermore, the post WWII era is associated with conservative and containment policies that sought to reverse economic and social gains made by women during the war.

In fact this also opens another door, where the women who served stateside were not thought of as “true soldiers,” by the women who served in the overseas theaters. This is brought up in numerous books and articles that detail accounts of women in the European theater. In Grace Porter Miller’s book “Call of Duty: A Montana Girl in WWII,” she states “I have no sympathy for the women who joined and stayed in the United States for the duration, as they did not see the KIA lists of 400-1000 men daily and then witness the mass graves, I felt their contribution was trivial to what I had been through.”¹⁹ Miller was unusual in that she spent most of the war in the European theater in some of the worst areas such as Belgium and France and witnesses the German atrocities first hand including a tour of the mass graves and seeing American, French and English bodies piled sky high in hastily dug trenches, the human form now displayed in grotesque shapes, brutally maimed by the Germans.

¹⁹ Miller, Grace Porter, “*Call of Duty: A Montana Girl in World War II.*” Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999

Miller was also present at Dachau Concentration camp in Germany at the end of the period it was operating, a fate her fellow women soldiers would not have to endure in their stateside billets. Her description of the Buzz bombs and the food rationing and the adjustment to army life, left more than just a horrific impression on the mind. Regrettably Miller ended up with lasting effects on her health from the poor quality of the food and water consumed during her time in service to her country.²⁰

The Enemy Within...

An eye opening sequence in Miller's book is the harassment by not just men but also women who joined to prey on the innocent girls who came into the service. Something most of the new recruits had never witnessed before and did not know how to deal with. The women of WWII endured more than just war they endured a threat to their own sexuality from within their own ranks and barracks. Could this then be the reason the women veterans of WWII hid their service? Most of the wives, mothers and sweethearts of America rode out the war on the home front, secure in their cocoon of family and friends, never to be subjected to the trials and tribulations of the women veterans of WWII.

Sandra Gilbert, author of a "Soldiers Heart" a passage in "*Behind the Lines*" by Margaret Higonnet claims that "women could hardly become more powerless than they already were, before, during or after the war."²¹

²⁰ Miller, Grace Porter, "*Call of Duty: A Montana Girl in World War II.*" Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999

²¹ Higonnet, Margaret R. "*Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars.*" Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987

Feeling powerless could surely account for one of the myriad of reasons the woman veterans hid their time in service but a profound feeling of guilt that accompanied many of the woman years after their service ended and continued to infiltrate their life would be more likely. To speak of your years in the war would open up a line of questioning many were not comfortable in discussing. Many of these women never told their families or future husbands of their time in the service or of their accomplishments for fear of ruining their reputation. The women of WWII were subject to overwhelming criticism about the reason for entering service (looking for a husband) and the often misguided notion of being prostitutes in a uniform.

In addition many returned home with not only the same physical scarring but often the even deeper emotional one, as their fellow male soldiers. Silence became a coping mechanism the veterans would invariably utilize. The women of WWII were afraid of being labeled "unfeminine," or "untraditional," and suffered through the unnamed depression that engulfed the women veterans. Life magazine published an article that was quoted in Tom Brokaw in his book "The Greatest Generation."

"The war in general has given women new status, new recognition...Women are 'coming into their own' in this war...Yet it is essential that women avoid arrogance and retain their femininity in the face of their own new status...In her new independence she must not lose her humanness as a woman. She may be the woman of the moment, but she must watch her movements." ²²

²² Brokaw, Tom. "The Greatest Generation." New York: Random House, 1998

Over There!

In contrast the countries of Europe and their women veterans were forefront and present in everyday society. In the Soviet Union during World War II, during absolutely desperate times, women were mobilized into combat units but on a smaller and shorter term basis than American service women. At the peak of this effort, reportedly, some 800,000 soldiers of the total Soviet forces were women. Most were medical workers but a few thousand were combatants. A problem with this case is sorting out how many of the available accounts were actually war propaganda. The devastated society rang with the glorious exploits of women fighters, who symbolized the mobilization of the whole population for the war effort (and shamed men into fighting harder). Overall, the evidence indicates that the women fought about as well as the men both were to some extent just “cannon fodder” in a war of attrition and starvation.

Nonetheless, as soon as circumstances permitted, the women’s units were disbanded, and the Red Army returned to all–male combat units. Even if official estimates do not exaggerate, the women combatants at their peak would have made up less than 1 percent of Soviet combat forces. Yet they never had to hide their time in service although they too were paraded back to the private sphere once the war was over.²³

The British were comfortable with seeing women in uniform as WWI had conditioned them to the fact that women were needed to obtain victory in all kinds of capacities. One prime example of the accomplishments would be Englishwoman Susan Travers who was a socialite living in France when the war broke out. Travers trained as a nurse for the French Red Cross and became an ambulance driver.

²³ Higonet, Margaret R.” *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars.*” Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987

When France fell to the Nazis, she escaped to London and joined the Free French Forces. After the war, Travers applied to become an official member of the French Foreign Legion. Travers was the only woman ever to serve with the Legion as an official member.²⁴

Britain also had an abundant source of brave warrior women who were celebrated during and after the war with medals and recognition. Princess Noor-un-nisa Inayat Khan was a spy trained by Britain's SOE and assumed the most dangerous resistance post in underground Paris. Princess Noor had a particularly distinguished background, her paternal great-great-grandfather was the ruler of Kingdom of Mysore. The Princess held a British passport, and lived in France when Germany invaded. The family was able to escape to England ahead of the Germans, and the Princess joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). The British intelligence agency SOE (Special Operations Executives) recognized her potential and sent her to France in June of 1943. There, she was captured while transmitting Morse code. Khan was arrested in October by the German intelligence agency SD (Sicherheitsdienst) and fought them so fiercely that she was classified as "an extremely dangerous prisoner." A month of interrogation yielded no information about Khan's SOE activities, and she even sent a coded message about her compromised position (which the SOE ignored). Khan escaped briefly, but was caught and then kept in shackles for ten months. In September of 1944, Khan was transferred to Dachau, where she was immediately executed along with three other female SOE agents. Khan was posthumously awarded the British George Cross, the French Croix de Guerre with Gold Star, and was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire.²⁵

²⁴ Holden, Amy, Travers, Susan, *Tomorrow to Be Brave: A Memoir of the Only Woman Ever to Serve in the French Foreign Legion*. New York: The Free Press 1984

²⁵ Basu, Shrabani. 2007. *Spy Princess: The Life of Noor Inayat Khan*. Chelsea: Omega

Despite the fact that England supported their women so heartily they too had their share of veterans hiding in plain sight. Case in point SOE operative Eileen Nearne. Eileen joined the Special Operations Executive in Britain as a radio operator, Churchill's top secret wartime 'spook' organization. At the tender young age of 23 she was dropped by parachute into occupied France to relay messages from the French resistance and to arrange weapons drops. Eventually arrested by the Nazis, tortured, and sent to the Ravensbruck concentration camp. Eileen then transferred to a labor camp and escaped during yet another transfer where she hid in a church until the area was liberated by the Americans.

After the war, Nearne was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French and was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire by King George VI. Due to her repeated escapes and tortuous captures by the Gestapo she suffered psychological problems and lived a quiet life. When Eileen Nearne died in 2010, her body was not discovered for several days, and her wartime exploits were only revealed after a search of her apartment uncovered her war medals. Nearne was then given a hero's funeral.²⁶

The lives of the women under German rule are rarely heard when it comes to the history of WWII. Nevertheless they also served and suffered and hid their time in service to the motherland. Not out of gender oppression but because of humiliation. Many of the women of Nazi Germany were sent to Poland to be part of Hitler's building of the "New East." Reichsgau Wartheland (also called Warthegau) was a Nazi German Reichsgau formed from Polish territory annexed in 1939 and the women's new home for the duration of the war.

²⁶ O'Connor, Bernard." *Agent Rose: The True Spy Story of Eileen Nearne, Britain's Forgotten Wartime Heroine.*" London: Amberley 2013

Elisabeth Harvey, one of the authors of “Home/Front, The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany” reveals that ultimately they too were subject to the “vulgar and harassing ways of their male counterparts.” Harvey details the journey of a group of young women, Frau Fisher, Ullman and Bauer. They were members of the Nazi women’s elite organization... NS –Frauenshaft (Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft). Their mission was to “Germanize” the general population through teaching of the Polish youth.

Like their American counterparts, the women of Germany wanted to see the world, and serve their country, although they saw much more than their young minds could ever forget. Death and destruction was all around them, from the murdering of their students fathers to the expulsion of whole families from farms they had lived on for generations. Although it is true that the women selected furniture and clothing left behind by the families deported from the area, their memories sustain that it was all for the motherland, and that “ the inhumane consequences of the resettlement program, was not of their concern.” The humiliation came when the bombings started and the women were forced to escape to Dresden and more bombings and the final unconditional defeat of Germany. Harvey formulates that the women of the NS hid their time in service out of the overwhelming feelings of humiliation that the surrender brought upon them, consequently reducing their grand mission to the dry gray dust and rubble that was now Nazi Germany.²⁷

²⁷ Hagemann, Karen “Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth Century Germany.” Biddles LTD, London 2002 284-291

America's Hidden Warriors...

In the meanwhile the United States was dealing with the case of Second Lieutenant Reba Z. Whittle. Whittle has the illustrious title of being the only U.S. female soldier to be imprisoned as a POW in the European theater of war. Whittle's position as a flight nurse placed her on a flight from England to France to pick up casualties in September of 1944, her plane went off course and proceeded to be shot down over Aachen, Germany. She was taken prisoner. The Germans did not know what to do with Whittle, as she was their first female military POW at least on the Western Front.

A Swiss legation that negotiated POW transfers, mostly of wounded prisoners, discovered her in custody and began to arrange her release. Whittle was escorted by the German Red Cross away from the camp along with 109 male POWS on January 25th, 1945. Whittle's status as a POW was undocumented by the U.S. military. She was awarded the Air Medal and a Purple Heart, and promoted to lieutenant, but was denied disability or POW retirement benefits. Whittle's story was kept quiet by the Army and barely noticed by the media in the celebrations of the war's end. Her POW status was officially conferred by the military in 1983.²⁸ One more reason the women of WWII are hiding in plain sight.

Then along came Oveta Culp Hobby, the epitome of a high society lady, daughter of state legislator Ike Culp, and wife to the Governor of Texas. When her country called she was ready! The United States entered World War II, she was asked to organize a women's support section for the Army.

²⁸ Frank, Lieutenant Colonel Mary "The Forgotten POW Second Lt. Reba Z. Whittle," U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, February 1990

Through Hobby's efforts, more than 150,000 women served in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WACs) during the war. In January 1945, Hobby was awarded the Army's Distinguished Service Medal for her work. After the war, Colonel Hobby returned to Houston. In 1953 she was asked to serve her country one more time, but in a civilian capacity. President Eisenhower appointed her to lead the newly created Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, where she once again organized an entirely new agency of the federal government. Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby passed in 1995, leaving an inspiring record of civil service. Today, her words about women and the war effort are inscribed on the World War II memorial on the National Mall in Washington.²⁹ The inscription reads...

“Women who stepped up were measured as citizens of the nation, not as women ... This was a people's war, and everyone was in it.”

Hobby was influential in two of the most important programs ever conceived by the government of the United States with the exception of Jackie Cochran of the WASPs. Nevertheless most Americans do not have a clue as to whom the woman is, whose name is inscribed on the memorial. One more veteran hidden in plain sight.

Innocence Lost...

WWI has been quoted as being a “nice war, a real war, a regular war,” by Gertrude Stein in a passage from “*Behind the Lines.*”³⁰ WWII had shown that the women of the world can do anything. Ultimately this accomplishment meant the female population was no longer immune from the brutality of the battlefield, never to know innocence again.

²⁹ National World War II Memorial on the Mall, Washington, D.C. 2013 <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/archives/factsheets/inscriptions.html>

³⁰ Higonnet, Margaret R. “Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars.” Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987, 228

In WWI, No Man's Land helped keep the women of the world safe from harm's way, but in WWII there was no clearly marked "front." Air raids, blackouts, rationing, occupation, effected everyone in the European theater. War waged in large bombers and small fighter jets, in tunnels and mountainsides on remote islands, kept the women serving in the Pacific awake at night. Fear of imprisonment, and the chance of enemy reprisals still rented space in the minds of the women veterans of WWII years after they returned home.

Espionage was the ever present danger. They were warned of "loose lips sink ships" and "the walls have ears!"³¹The enemy was potentially everywhere, therefore the women were not safe in their private sphere, as it has ceased to exist. Furthermore the obliteration of the safe home-front was the ever present force behind the psychological battles many a woman veteran fought years after the war ended. Service hidden or never spoken of became a way countless vets coped and in turn hid in plain sight.

Grace Porter Miller provides passages in her book "*Call of Duty*" concerning the psychological stress forced upon the women of WWII. Most American woman today would jump at the chance for mass proposals from handsome young men. Miller discloses that their desperate begging was heartbreaking, the pleading for them to marry so they would have someone to mourn when they were gone, the boys so certain they were staring death in the face. Smith faced this constantly in the European theater, the sad pleas and proposals ringing in her ears when she read the body counts and familiar names that would be published daily.

³¹ Appendix C Patriotic Posters, *U.S. Department of Defense*. Office of Public Affairs Last modified November 11, 2003. Accessed November 2, 2013. <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=42931>

June 15, 2013 the US Army celebrated its 238th birthday and then helped former WAC Sergeant Joan De Munbrun celebrate her 100th. Joan recounts her service to the people who visit the veteran's home where she resides in Southern California. Her journey started simply enough, the fiancée of one of her friends left shortly after the war started. He was among the first casualties in the first two weeks of the war, two weeks before his wedding. He was followed by more and more boys from her hometown enlisting. Joan reveals "After that, it was one after another. Most of the boys who went in first were casualties," De Munbrun said. "You can imagine what that did to me. I so upset that I just couldn't take it. As soon as I heard that they were going to take women, I signed up."

De Munbrun tells of her arrival at basic training camp in a fake fur coat, hair all done up and wearing a red hat. The instructor took one look at her smiled and said "We will be keeping our femininity, right girls?" Her time in the service was not easy. "The casualty list would come out, not only one or two, but 500 or 1,000 boys," she said. More than 410,000 American service members died in World War II. Joan was sent initially to Eagle Pass Army Airfield in Texas, near the Mexican border. She, unlike the other women, requested to work "in the field," where she served as a photographer there for 18 months. Nine men died every 13 weeks, De Munbrun said,³² "You felt a loss, we had to take the picture of the crashed planes, send the serial number to Washington so they could write the plane off. Then, when the boys were casualties, and there were many, we had taken their picture when they came on the field, and I'd have to go pull the picture, pull the negative, and develop it for their families, can you imagine what that meant?"

³² Poulos, Paula Nassen, Ed. *A Woman's War Too: U.S. Women in the Military in World War II*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1996

“You can only feel so much pain,” she said, her voice sounding shaky. “You can only feel so much sorrow. It was sort of a numbing feeling. It was what was going on. You were there and you didn’t, you couldn’t, feel sad all the time.” De Munbrun kept her service silent for sixty years finally opening up to the pain and pride that she felt during those years.³³ Joan a participant in Project “Spirit of 45 Alive” has encouraged all the veterans of WWII to come forth and share their experience, including the women. One more veteran to add to the count, hiding in plain sight.

Harry Truman is quoted on the day he became president of the United States... “Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices.”³⁴ However they did forget. The women of WWII were swept under the rug, tossed out like yesterday’s news. The Marshall Plan helped rebuild Europe and the containment policy helped bulldoze the women veterans back into the private sphere. Only today with the help of memorials and projects endorsed by the Army, Air Force and Marines are we learning more about these lost stories, lost women, and lost history.

The Tide Turns...

The women of today’s United States military find they are subject to the same problems the women of WWII found themselves dealing with.

³³ Poulos, Paula Nassen, Ed. *A Woman's War Too: U.S. Women in the Military in World War II*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1996.

³⁴ National World War II Memorial on the Mall, Washington, D.C. 2013. Accessed October 14, 2013 <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/archives/factsheets/inscriptions.html>

During a speech at SIUE (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville) in April of 2013, one of the highest ranking female official in the U.S. military, Lt. General Kathleen Gainey stated...

“When looking at women in the military, there is still a “ways to go, we always have to make sure we never, never lessen our standards.”³⁵

Life was very different for military women in 1978, according to Lt. General Gainey, who was the second woman in her company upon graduating from ROTC at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Cat calls and harassment also occurred, according to Gainey, and her first sergeant told her to not even let the men know she heard them. However, he also told her not to ignore it if she can catch who made the remarks. “When you see it, you have to stop it... or it’ll fester and you can’t afford for it to fester.” General Gainey said she is very thankful for her mentors – all of whom were men – for believing in her.³⁶

As opportunities for women expanded, individuals like General Ann Dunwoody have risen to the challenge and excelled. History will no doubt take note of her achievement in breaking through this final “brass ceiling” to pin on a fourth star. But she would rather be known – and remembered – first and foremost, as a U.S. Army soldier. General Dunwoody would reveal that when she was commissioned in 1975, what she joined was the Women’s Army Corps! Most Americans did not even realize that the Army was still divided in 1975.

³⁵ Gainey, LT. General Kathleen. 2013. "Highest Ranking Female Official discusses Women in the Military." By Williams, Kari. *This Week In College of Arts and Sciences*, April 2013

³⁶ *ibid*

The WACs, of World War Two fame, were on the point of being disbanded so women could fully integrate into the Army, which finally came a year later in 1976 with women being admitted to the ranks of West Point.³⁷

Memories...

The sun shone brightly on that October day in 1997 on the crowd who had come, one thousand strong, to pay tribute to all the women who have worn an American military uniform. A Black Tie Gala, a Religious worship and a Candle Light vigil were all part of the three days of festivities at the dedication for the Women's Memorial at the gates of Arlington Cemetery.³⁸

The Memorial's roof glimmers on an arc of glass tablets, inscribed with quotations by and about women who have served in defense of their country. Sunlight passing over these quotes creating changing shadows of the texts on the walls of the gallery below, much like the shadows of memories passing through the minds of the veterans present that day. The service women ranged widely in generation. Veterans from WWII up to those who served during the most recent wars in Iraq, and Afghanistan. Reminder of those who had come before them (from the American Revolution to the present) were everywhere, from the uniforms on display to the video histories collected for just this purpose, to ensure that their service is and will always be honored.

³⁷

Gates, Robert. "Promotion Ceremony for Lieutenant General Ann Dunwoody." *Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)*. U.S. Department of Defense. Last modified November 14, 2008. Accessed November 2, 2013. <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1323>.

³⁸ National World War II Memorial on the Mall, Washington, D.C. 2013. Accessed October 14, 2013 <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/archives/factsheets/inscriptions.html>

The women of WWII spoke at the dedication as to what it meant to serve one's country in time of war, a duty and privilege for which they were never recognized until the memorial came to fruition, the trailblazers for today's servicewomen.

From Whence We Came...

From the women of the Revolution who served as cooks, nurses and water bearers, to the War of 1812 where Mary Allen nurse aboard Commodore Decatur's ship the *United States*, to the Mexican War where Elizabeth Newcom disguised as a man enlisted and fought with Company D of the Missouri Volunteer Infantry (before she is discovered to be a woman and discharged,) the women of America served their country! The women of America provided nursing to Union and Confederate troops at field hospitals and on the Union Hospital Ship *Red Rover* in the Civil War and women soldiers on both sides, driven to serve their country disguise themselves as men in order to serve. During the 1898 Spanish-American War the federal government utilized the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to appointed qualified nurses to serve under contract to the US Army. Twenty nurses die, but the genesis of the Army Nurse Corps (1901) is established, followed in 1908 by the Navy Nurse Corps.³⁹ In World War I during the course of the war, 21,480 Army nurses serve in military hospitals in the United States and overseas, 400 nurses die in the line of duty. The Army Reorganization Act of 1920 granted military nurses the status of officers but not full rights and privileges of such.⁴⁰ Despite the fact, they still served!

³⁹ National Women's History Museum. Partners in Winning the War. Accessed January 10, 2013. <http://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/partners/exhibitentrance.html>.

⁴⁰ *ibid*

In Conclusion...

The American women veterans of WWII like the rest of the country were listening when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt made his famous “A Day That Will Live in Infamy speech” on December 7, 1941. He demanded the “unbounded determination of our people,” and stated “Our country has been attacked by force of arms, and by force of arms we must retaliate. We must now turn every effort to building the greatest and most efficient Army, Navy and Air Force in the world.”⁴¹ They did not hear, the men of the country must build the forces, nor that the men of the country must have unbound determination, they heard FDR ask for the determination and efforts of “our people” and that included the women of America.

A popular WWII poster touted "Women in the War: We Can't Win without Them," and it turns out they were correct!⁴² The women of WWII came, fought, conquered and then they hid. They examined the different roles assigned to them during the war and the roles they had to resume when they returned home, coming to the conclusion that WWII had not changed the traditional gender roles. Women acquired more confidence, and opportunities for leadership, but the additional responsibility came without any decrease in the demands of their “traditional roles” which was re-enforced by the containment policy in Post WWII America. They wanted to live out the postwar dream of a secure world, one of affluence, with a husband, home and babies, and to do this their war service would have to remain in the past. Containment was the key to security and they would conform or be marginalized, stigmatized and just possibly disadvantaged as a result.

⁴¹ National Geographic, Date Which Will Live in Infamy: Roosevelt addresses the Pearl Harbor attack.1941, accessed November 1, 2013, http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/roosevelts-day-infamy-speech/?ar_a=1

⁴² Appendix D, Patriotic Posters, U.S. Department of Defense. Office of Public Affairs Last modified November 11, 2003. Accessed November 2, 2013. <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=42931>

The women of WWII understood what they had given and what they must give up in return. The glory days would remain locked in their hearts and memories, their sacrifices of time, femininity and for some their very life would be scantily recorded in the annals of history. The women veterans of WWII were the victims of the Cold War, and it is said that victims are responsible for their own victimization. But this only strengthens the already deeply engraved identity the women veterans held. The war, their memories, have shown that “there were so many heroes and so much pain.”⁴³

Today finally the woman are opening up and the stories are flying out faster than a P-51 Mustang! Katherine (Kaddy) Landry of the WASPs sums it up best by stating...

“We were all proud of what we did, but I was proud of it all in 1945 too; the only trouble was nobody was proud of me then. Now they’re all proud of me, so I might as well be proud too!”⁴⁴

The women veterans of WWII hidden no more.

⁴³ Miller, Grace Porter, “*Call of Duty: A Montana Girl in World War II.*” Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999, 153

⁴⁴ Merryman, Molly. *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Air force Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II.* New York: New York University Press, 1998.182

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Appendix A

Share the Deeds of Victory



Join the WAVES

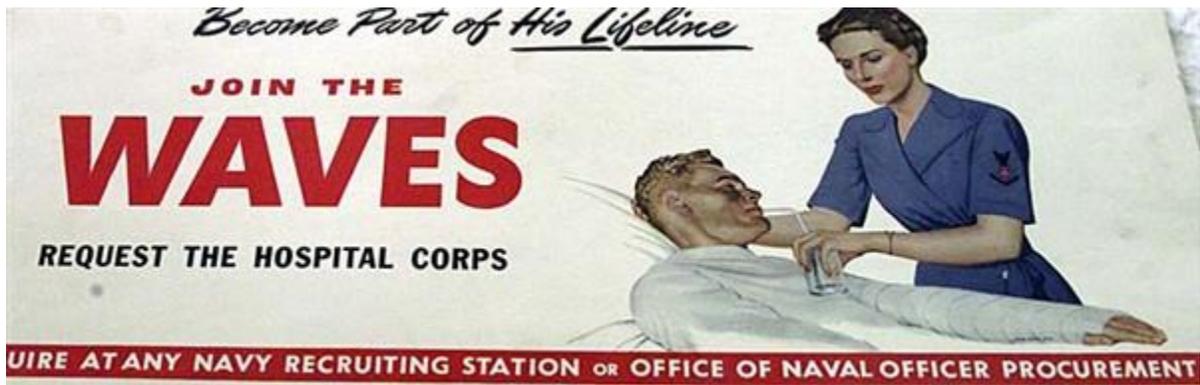
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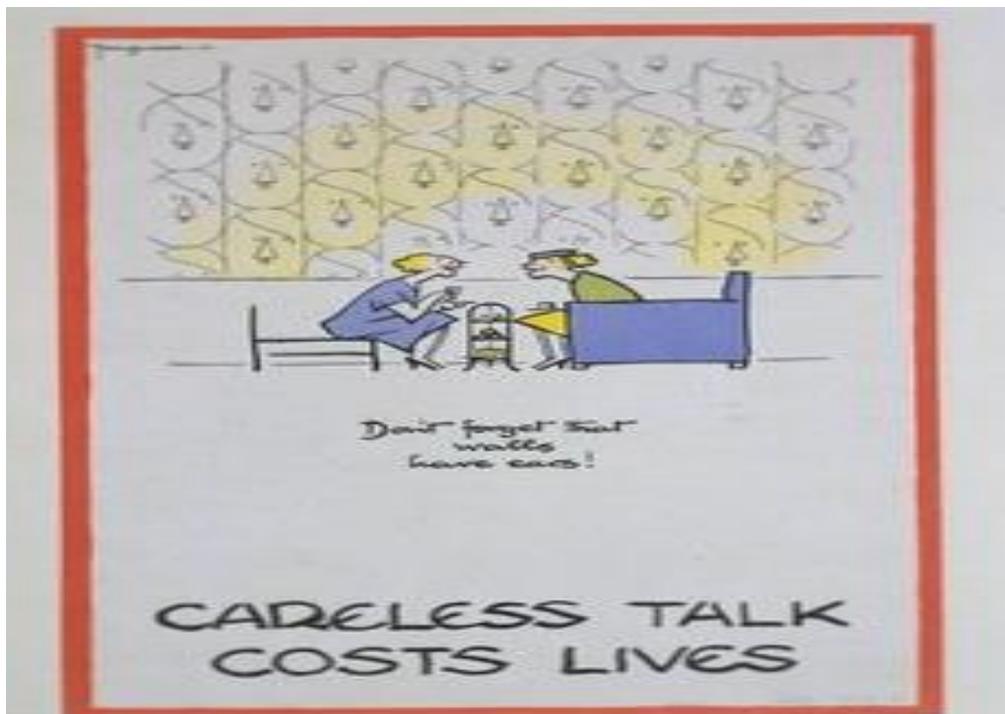
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Now, for the first time in the history of the Women's Army Corps, women enlisting as WACs can be assured of service with the Army Air Forces! There are 86 specific jobs WACs can do -- and are doing -- with the AAF, among them: Link Trainer instructor; fingerprinter; motor vehicle dispatcher; photographer; radio operator; parachute rigger; librarian; bombsight mechanic; stenographer; airplane inspector; blueprinter; cartographer. Uncle Sam's Air Forces needs you! For Details See Your Local WAC Recruiting Office at

Appendix B



Appendix C



Appendix D

