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Recruiting a Lady: The Depiction of the Women's Army Corps

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Recruiting a Lady: The Depiction of the Women's Army Corps

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Amanda Rutherford

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Introduction

The Women's Army Corps [WAC] proves to be an interesting topic for reading and analysis for students of the Army in WWII. One can see a good deal of patriotism in the examination of how WAC was formed and how women were recruited. Patriotism greatly fueled all of the propaganda surrounding the Women's Army Corps. Patriotism was also at the root of most of the scholarship on the Women's Army Corps, thus it is at the heart of the Army sanctioned story of the WAC. This Army sanctioned story is cemented most in Mattie E. Treadwell's *The Women's Army Corps*, which was the first book on the WAC, and therefore the most cited book on the WAC. Because of this reliance on Treadwell, the vast majority of scholarship on the Women's Army Corps shows a strong correlation to this Army sanctioned story and a strong reliance on patriotism as the reasons for a Women's Army Corps and the reasons women chose to join the WAC. This thesis will look at the history of the Women's Army Corps, the scholarship on the Women's Army Corps, and lastly, in attempt to show that there is more to the WAC than the propaganda of patriotism, this paper will look at some more recent scholarship on women in the Army that takes a feminist approach to the subject.

The Early History of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps

Just before Japan incited the United States to join World War II change was coming rapidly for the Armed Forces. This change was due in part to the eminence of war; the Armed Forces were coming to the realization that women would play a vital role in providing extra resources. Women, in turn were increasingly demanding a place in the Armed Forces; a place that was outside of the Army Nurse Corps [ANC] would allow for skills other than

nursing to be utilized to help support the war effort. The leader of this movement was Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers. She had served with the Red Cross in Europe during World War I, and saw that the women overseas had little to no protection, nor did they receive any benefits after returning home. Later, in her time on the Veteran's Affairs committee, Congresswoman Rogers saw Congress deny the women from the Army Nurse Corps any sort of benefits. She did not want women to continue to receive second rate treatment in return for the vital services they provided the Army. In addition, Congresswoman Rogers saw a need for more than just nursing support for the Army. Aside from serving as auxiliary nurses, women rarely participated in the Armed Forces before WWI. The Army did not even allow nurses to travel with the troops to provide assistance until WWI. During WWI, small groups of women provided auxiliary support to the war effort in the form of facilitating supply drives and volunteering time at local hospitals and USOs.¹ Therefore, she proposed a Women's Army Corps that would be a part of the Army, allowing women to provide much needed services, while also receiving Army benefits and protection. She took the idea for a Women's Army Corps to General George C. Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the Army.

In response to similar sentiments to those brought up by Congresswoman Rogers, General Marshall wrote, "While the United States is not faced with an acute shortage of manpower such as has forced England to make such an extensive use of its women, it is realized that we must plan for every possible contingency, and certainly must provide some

¹ Michael Rustad, *Women in Khaki: The American Enlisted Woman* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), xix-xxi.

outlet for the patriotic desires of our women.”² He was weary that Roger’s bill would not pass in Congress because the Army had no express need for support in 1941. On May 28, 1941 Congresswoman Rogers introduced “A Bill to Establish a Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps for Service with the Army of the United States.”³ The auxiliary status added to her original idea of a Women’s Army Corps was her way of compromising so that the bill would have a great chance of passing through Congress. She said: “In the beginning, I wanted very much to have these women taken in as a part of the Army.... I wanted then to have the same rate of pension and disability allowance. I ...realized that I could not secured that. The War Department was very unwilling to have these women as part of the Army.”⁴

The bill met a great deal of resistance from all sides. It immediately began to languish about Congressional Committees, most notably, the Bureau of the Budget. During this same time, General Marshall was doing a great deal in the way of supporting the bill. He wrote to Congress on the subject:

I regard the passage of this bill at an early date as of considerable importance. In general, we have secured most of the legislation required for the complete mobilization for the Army so that we can go ahead with its development and definitely plan for the future. However, we lack Congressional authority for the establishment of a Women’s Army Corps, and as a result can make no definite plans. Also, I am under continued pressure from many directions regarding this phase of our preparations.

It is important that as quickly as possible we have a declared national policy in this matter. Women certainly must be employed in the overall effort of this nation... We consider it essential that their status, their relationship to the military authority, should be clearly established.⁵

² Mattie E. Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps, United States Army in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954), 16.

³ *Cong. Rec.* 77th Cong., 1st sess., 1942, 88, pt. 55: 2657.

⁴ Letter, Chief of Staff to Honorable John W. McCormack, 6 February 1942. Marshall Files.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Even with General Marshall's continued endorsement, the bill made very little progress until after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Finally, by January 1942, H.R. 6293 was moving quickly throughout the various Congressional Committees that were required before the bill could be voted upon. It was during this final push to get the bill through committees, and to the floor of both the House and Senate that the pre-planning for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps decisions took place. The first step in the pre-planning of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps [WAAC] was the appointment of the WAAC Director. This would be the most important because she would have a great deal of responsibility in walking the thin line between the Auxiliary and the Army, in addition it was thought that the chosen Director could aid or hinder the bill's passage. Oveta Culp Hobby was the most obvious choice to become the WAAC Director. During the previous year she had begun working for the Secretary of War Henry Stimson to organize and head the new Women's Interest Section of the War Department's Bureau of Public Relations. In addition, it was widely known that "she viewed the women's corps as a temporary entity which should be disbanded when the war was over and whose members should be returned to their families and their primary duties as wives and mothers."⁶

Believing Hobby to be the only viable choice, General Marshall took it upon himself to move Hobby from her post at the Bureau of Public Relations to join the WAAC pre-planners. She was given a good deal of responsibility in the pre-planning, however she had to tread lightly as she knew she could be replaced by the Secretary of War when the bill was finally passed. Though she was making decisions with caution she took it upon herself to become very familiar with the British equivalent of the WAAC, so as to learn from their

⁶ Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 17.

successes and failures. The most important information she learned from the British was on the subject of recruitment. At the outset, the British allowed officers to be taken on the recommendation of high ranking officials (Parliament members or British Army Officers), eventually causing a good deal of strife between women that were publically recruited and those who were selected outside the public recruiting process. American recruitment planners chose to avoid the pitfalls of the British. The WAAC recruitment planners decided to have all recruits fill out the same application. Recruiters submitted all applications to the same selection process; no preference would be shown to those with connections. They wanted to attract qualified women from across the country by enacting a fair and impartial selection process. It was decided from the beginning that all officers, even assistant directors, were to be graduates of the Officer Candidate School and not direct appointees. This would ensure that all officers would be fully and equally qualified to lead the new corps.⁷

H.R. 6293, named the WAAC Bill, came before the House for discussion on March 17, 1942. The day proved to be quite arduous for the bill, many issues were brought forth. On the issue of recruitment the following exchange was heard:

Mr. Van Zandt: "What method of selection had the War Department indicated they may employ in selecting the various people for the various services?"

Mr. Andrews: "They would be selected through a military committee of Army officers in the way most of the reserves are handled."

Mr. Van Zandt: "And there will not be any favoritism?"

Mr. Andrews: "There will not be any favoritism; and my understanding is that letter from Congressmen will not be preferred."⁸

This is one of the first indications that there was a clear recruitment plan in the works for the WAAC. However, it was clear that women had already heard of the impending WAAC and

⁷ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 32-34.

⁸ *Cong. Rec.*, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 1942, 88, pt. 55:2657.

had sent requests to enlist to Congresswoman Rogers. In the same debate Congresswoman Rogers presented the following evidence of the eagerness of women to join:

“There has been a tremendous, spontaneous, widespread approval of this proposal. I have received thousands of letters from women in every State of the Union—women who are anxious and eager to serve, who want to enroll at once. Significantly, almost all of these letters are from women who are not seeking the higher positions in the corps, but who wish to enroll as auxiliaries and prove their worth and ability through their services.”⁹

Despite answering concerns about how women would be recruited and providing evidence that women did indeed want to join the WAAC, there was a great deal of debate around the bill, specifically over the implications of allowing women into an auxiliary of the Army.

The increased involvement in WWII in turn caused an increased demand for US troops. Every branch of the United States Armed Forces felt the effects of the shortage of men. The non-combat positions and departments felt the greatest strain on their human resources, as the dwindling support at the front lines required more and more men to enter combat service. World War II came just at the end of the Great Depression, during which many women had to take jobs to help support their impoverished families. The acceptance of women in the workforce, though admittedly marginal, led to the US Armed Forces accepting women into their ranks in the form of auxiliary corps. This debate was lengthy, and included a good deal of inflammatory language, language that would later be used in a campaign against the WAAC. Despite the lengthy debate and the good deal of time that the bill spent in various committees, the bill passed with a vote of 249-86. It was sent to the Senate. It was in the Senate that the final form of the bill was officially decided, the auxiliary status was officially added to the final bill. It was this final bill to Establish a Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps that passed with a Senate vote of 38-27 on May 14, 1942. It is this day that the WAAC

⁹ Ibid.

celebrated as the day of its founding. However, it was not until the next day, May 15, 1942 the President signed the bill into Public Law 554, An Act to Establish a Women's Army Auxiliary Corps for Service with the Army of the United States.¹⁰

As soon as Public Law 554 was enacted, the press began hounding all involved; the WAAC was a novelty. There were questions of logistics, questions about recruiting, but mostly there was a lot of propaganda, such as inquiries about the undergarments that the WAACs would be required to wear. The press was ultimately one of the biggest factors in the WAAC recruitment strategy; when the press was friendly, there was little the WAAC recruiters needed to do to attract qualified women, but when the press was selling scandal, the recruiters had to work harder to attract qualified women. With this in mind, the initial press conference took place with a careful script to impress upon the public that the WAAC was to be a "sober, hard-working organization, composed of dignified and sensible women."¹¹ Though there was a good deal of emphasis on this first press conference, and the feeling that "this whole thing stands or falls on the next sixty days," it was clear even at the time of the Congressional hearings that there were a good deal of women that were interested in joining, for a diversity of reasons.¹² The following are examples of the letters written to Congresswoman Rogers:

During the World War, I took a man's place as a telegraph operator. After the depression I took up telephone operating, which I am now doing. I feel equal to instructing in either type of work. Your bill is right; fight for it, and let us hope it passes.

And:

I suppose the men think all we want is to get into a uniform. Perhaps they don't know that we realize the seriousness of the situation. They don't

¹⁰ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 45.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 47.

¹² *Ibid*.

need to worry. I have a son, 16 years old in December, and all he talks about is getting in the Navy. I have a nephew on the Burma Road. I have two very dear cousins—handsome boys, over six feet tall—also two other people I love very much, who are in the Army in Florida. So I guess we women realize the situation and only want to help, and we can if we are allowed.”¹³

Letters of this sort were riddled throughout the Congressional hearing on the bill. These types of letters indicate that there were many women who wanted to join from before the official beginning of the WAAC. However, the recruiters soon busied themselves with the women who had not heard of the WAAC before the initial press conference, and those women who would be skeptical at first.

Recruitment of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps

Despite the indication that women had varying reasons for wanting to join the WAAC, recruiters often placed women in one category. They were soon convinced that the WAAC would only be accepted if there was a strong national campaign that hit on one central reason for ALL women to join. Recruitment planners saw a strong national campaign as the route to gaining the coveted acceptance from men that was deemed necessary to attract enough females for the success of the WAAC. The first major campaign launched by the WAAC recruiters was the “Release a Man for Combat!” campaign. The idea was to appeal to the patriotic sensibilities of any American woman, and to tug at her connections to friends and family; to capitalize on her want for loved ones to come home safely from the war. It is interesting, however, to consider the efficacy of this campaign; the hope was to recruit the patriotic women who wanted to “Release a Man for Combat,” when there were already had bags and bags of mail from women who were already writing with such sentiments. The

¹³ Both from *Cong. Rec.*, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 1942, 88, pt. 55:2657.

recruitment planners intended this slogan to evoke patriotic sentiments. They expected it to speak to those with reservations about joining the WAAC, especially those who were concerned about the legitimacy of the Corps.

The women who the recruitment campaign was aimed at were not the same women that were already interested, instead the recruitment campaign needed to be compelling to the unconvinced. The reserved, conservative women needed the most convincing; therefore the recruitment planners targeted these women. The women flooding Oveta Culp Hobby's office with letters were the least of the concerns of the recruitment planners. These women were successfully recruited before the WAAC was even formed. It did not matter if those women had different reasons for joining. Those women who were flooding the offices with letters were all writing before there was talk of simply "Releasing a Man for Combat." Ignoring these women was detrimental because their prior interest provides valuable insight into the initial attraction that the WAAC held for women. Unfortunately, this perspective was soon lost as these same women were categorized with all the rest. They were all subject to the same application process, they had to be convinced to apply and make it on their own merit. The WAAC planners and Congress often discussed the type of women that would be recruited as the bill was shuttled through various House Committees. At the outset the WAAC was to provide women for the non-combat positions, thus it was intended that the WAAC would recruit only those women well suited to work such as college graduates or those who had some sort of technical aptitude; especially in clerking, payroll, telegraphs, and typing. Women from all walks of life applied, many of whom were accepted. The highest

skilled workers became officers, but in the end all varieties women were accepted into the WAAC.¹⁴

The initial response to the WAAC was overwhelming; more than 35,000 women applied to the officer program alone.¹⁵ Women lined up outside the recruiting offices the day they opened to take applications.¹⁶ Unfortunately this positive reaction did not last long, by early 1943 the number of women applying and joining greatly dwindled due to public outcry against women employed in the military. Some criticism was general backlash against women being employed, and some criticism was against women in the military. Soldiers were among the most critical, with a full 84% of the letters that mentioned the WAAC doing so negatively.¹⁷ The backlash, dubbed the "Slander Campaign" led to letters pouring into Oveta Culp Hobby's office filled with all kinds of negative messages.¹⁸ The "Release a Man For Combat" however, was a direct result of the pressure put on the recruiters from the Military Affairs Committee who were of the following opinion:

"Let us not deny to these patriotic women, who will have to bear a major portion of the hardships and sacrifices the war shall entail, the opportunity they seek, to offer their services in a particular field that appeals to them, and will give them the intense satisfaction of knowing they have served the Nation in the highest patriotic way in a period when it has the greatest need of the services of all good citizens."¹⁹

It is this patriotism that is often seen in the literature. There is no denying that there was a real patriotism of the time.

¹⁴ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 58.

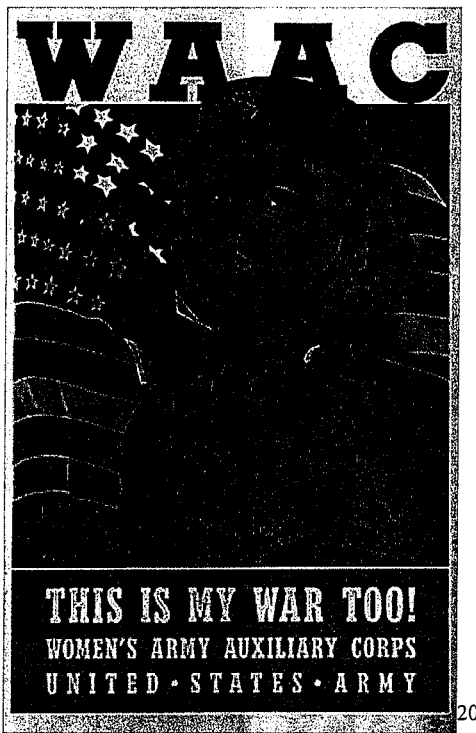
¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 55. "In New York City, 1,400 women stormed the Whitehall Street office on the first day and stood in line from 8:30 to 5:00 o'clock."

¹⁷ Judith A. Bellafaire, *The Women's Army Corps* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993), 16.

¹⁸ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 212-213. These messages included such things as men not wanting their wives and sisters to join, to general sentiments of women being the homemakers.

¹⁹ *Cong. Rec.*, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 1942, 88, pt. 55:2657.



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²⁰ Dan V. Smith, "This is My War Too!," 1943, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.
²¹ "Do Your Part: Join the WAAC," 1942, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.
²² Vic Herman, "Look What I've Got!" *Winnie the WAC* American Art Archives.

Recruitment Posters and Newspaper Coverage

American citizens were inundated with patriotic propaganda on a daily basis. Propaganda was most prevalent in the various war posters that graced every shop window and any other publicly accessed space. These posters were just another way the recruiters planned to recruit the women; the posters often had a very emotionally packed message, as well as very gripping pictures. Many of the posters for the WAAC wanted to make the War very personal for these women; they wanted the women to feel like they had a place in the war. One declared, "This is our war...Join the WAAC," superimposed over a perfectly uniformed WAAC staring determinedly into the distance.²³ This personalization of the war certainly spoke to those women who were writing so eagerly wanting to join. The determination in the eyes of the WAAC would also speak to the legitimacy of the WAAC. Yet another poster gave even more of a personal message saying, "This Is My War Too!" This particular poster also has a stern faced WAAC, however, she is perfectly made-up with incredibly coiffed hair.²⁴ Clearly, the message in this poster is that women in the WAAC are well-made up, coiffed, and are to feel fully in possession of the War. Such messages are truly propaganda, and certainly can be treated as such. Interestingly enough, neither woman in the above mentioned posters is smiling, both are sternly determined. This shows the attitude from the beginning of the war, the determination to gain a stronghold in the war effort. At the point these posters were circulating, there was no guarantee that the U.S. could gain victory.

²³ "This is Our War...Join the WAAC," 1943, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

²⁴ Dan V. Smith, "This is My War Too!," 1943, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

Yet another type of common recruiting poster for the WAAC was one that played on women doing their part for the war effort. One poster in particular stated "Do Your Part Join the WAAC."²⁵ This played on the idea that all women should be doing their part to help in the war effort, there was a sense of pride associated with 'doing your part.' This poster appealed to the largest sense of patriotism possible. In addition, this poster features a WAAC marching just in front of an entire group of WAACs in formation. This would appeal to those women looking to be part of the Army. This picture of so many women in uniform certainly would reinforce the idea that the WAAC truly did train and work like the Army. The effect of multitudes of such posters seen on a daily basis was a very strong patriotic message meant to make the WAAC the most attractive to young women.

If recruitment posters were aiding recruiters, then the newspapers were often doing the opposite. After the initial fascination with the WAAC, the newspapers began to be detrimental to the WAAC, with nearly slanderous content, but most often with off-color comics that essentially made the WAAC into a farce. Unfortunately, the multitude of such cartoons proved to be an incredible negative for recruiters to attempt to combat. The cartoons generally had one of two negative messages; both unwanted by the WAAC recruitment planners, and both images unwanted by most women. The messages were that the women in the WAAC were either 'mannish' or 'bimbos'. The 'mannish' portrayal was undesirable because the WAAC was constantly trying to allow the public to know that they were not trying to make the women into the archetypal soldier, masculine, with a gun in hand. Instead the WAAC was trying to aid the Army by providing women to do 'female appropriate' jobs to help the men become more available for more masculine duties. In fact, recruiters wanted

²⁵ "Do Your Part: Join the WAAC," 1942, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

women to be feminized; even the physical restrictions on the women were put in place to allow the most feminine women to be included in service. The main cartoon that spread the 'bimbo' image was the "Winnie the WAC" cartoon. Winnie was often portrayed as being more concerned about the soldiers as potential mates than serving the WAC. One particular strip reads, "Look What I've Got!"²⁶ The accompanying image is of a WAC whispering to her friend looking in the direction of a soldier. As for the 'bimbo' status, there were many rumors that WAACs were never really trained for any specific duties, instead the women were used to entertain the men, much like the USO women. Many in the general public thought that the women who joined the WAAC had very few wits about them; why else would they allow themselves to be placed in such an unfamiliar situation, in a male dominated profession? The reality of the situation was that the WAAC enlistment requirements precluded 'bimbos' from applying, as women were encouraged to have a college education of a job that would allow for an easy transition to the Corps.

The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps Application Process

Another aspect of how and why women chose to join the WAAC is the actual application process itself. Those interested in joining the WAAC had to go to their local recruitment office and first fill out an application which asked questions about family background, schooling and job history. The application was most important to recruiters because they had a duty to only accept the highest caliber women, others with limited schooling, poor family background, or poor job history could be turned away before even being interviewed. Next the women were interviewed by a recruiter; they were asked more

²⁶ Vic Herman, "Look What I've Got!" *Winnie the WAC* American Art Archives.

in-depth questions along the same line as those on the application. This interview most often was what divided officer candidates from general enlistment candidates. Women could then move forward if their interview was acceptable, or they could be turned away if the interview was unsatisfactory. Unsatisfactory interviews were those in which the candidate was not well spoken or polite, and was not found to be graceful and classy; recruiters wanted women in the WAAC to be the epitome of a lady. Finally after the interview, women would be sent for a full physical in which they were screened for any and all "defects", they also had to pass the basic height and weight requirements.²⁷ This was often a point of contention as some women were too short or tall, or were over the weight limit for their height. The recruiters rarely made exceptions for women who made appeals for being turned away for not meeting height or weight requirements, again they were looking for the epitome of a lady.

These requirements did have an effect on who chose to join and why they chose to join, the most relevant example of this is actually related to the differences in how black women were recruited. Blacks had the most difficult time trying to join the WAAC. They were subject to the same segregation as the Army, meaning only 10% of the entire enlistment could be black women, this was also true for the officers. This was common knowledge among black communities due to the prevalence of this information in black newspapers. Also, the number of black women that were eligible to join the WAAC was much smaller than the number of eligible white women. Many of the black women were at a disadvantage being that they most often had poorer schooling, and thus were less able to pass the mental alertness test required of all women who wanted to join the Corps. Not only were black women at a disadvantage because of poorer schooling, they were at a disadvantage as soon as

²⁷ 5 feet to 6 feet tall, and 100 to 200 pounds. There was a sliding scale, so a woman who was 5 feet tall could weigh no more than 134 pounds.

they walked in the door of a recruitment office. Some recruiters would turn away black applicants the moment they walked in the door. The issue of blacks being turned away, and blacks being less prepared for the mental alertness test also concerned the black community, and made black women more and more disinterested in joining. Also, officers had to be the highest caliber of women, therefore there was a great deal of difficulty in finding black officers. From the groups of black women that did manage to meet the standards for enlistment in the WAAC, very few could meet the standards to become an officer.

As there were fewer and fewer black women qualifying to become black officers, the WAAC, under the direction of Mary McLeod Bethune, decided to recruit black women directly from black colleges.²⁸ Bethune could most definitely be credited with saving the image of the WAAC in the minds of black Americans. She served as a special assistant to the Secretary of War to choose black officer candidates, and she later served as an advisor to Oveta Culp Hobby on the issue of African American WAACs.²⁹ Though Bethune was able to set the WAAC in the right direction in their recruitment of African American women, this did not take away the two biggest detriments to the recruitment for African American women. These detriments were the overbearing segregation once women were in the WAAC, and the still problematic issue of the admissions standards precluding many black women from joining. The WAAC was just as segregated as the Army, meaning there were separate barracks for black women, separate units, and even separate officers. Black officers led black units, and white officers led white units. From the moment black women stepped foot on Fort Des Moines soil for basic training, they were told to go to one side while white women were told to go to the other. This began their segregation in the WAAC. Officers were also

²⁸ Brenda L. Moore, *To Serve My Country, To Serve My Race: The Story of the Only African American WACs Stationed Overseas During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 16.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 17.

segregated, they could not enjoy the privileges of the officers' club because there was only one such club at Fort Des Moines, and they were not welcome. All these aspects of segregation made it into the newspapers, and simply continued the discouragement that African American women felt, and thus many chose simply not to join.³⁰ Because more and more black women were choosing not to join, yet there was still a need for black women in the Corps to meet the 10% quota, the recruitment planners chose to do something drastic to enlist more black women. They chose to lower their admission standards in hopes that with lower standards (specifically on the mental alertness test), they would be able to admit and enlist more black women. This did work for a time, but it was soon realized that this practice was more detrimental to the Corps, especially as they were gearing up to make the transition from the WAAC to the new Women's Army Corps. Thus the standards were soon raised to their original levels.³¹

The Transition to the Women's Army Corps

The WAAC was transitioned in to the Women's Army Corps, or WAC, on September 1, 1943. The transition came about because of the increasing need for WAACs overseas. This need for more WACs overseas caused great concerns about the amount of protection that the Army could actually provide these women as they were put in increasingly more dangerous areas such as the Pacific islands. Thus with the transition to the WAC, the women were afforded Army benefits and protection, but most importantly they ceased being simply an association with the Army and began being an actual part of the Army. This transition created a nightmare for recruiters. Those already in the WAAC were given the option to stay

³⁰ Martha S. Putney, *When the Nation Was In Need: Blacks in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992), 28.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

in the WAC or be honorably released from duty. Many did choose to stay, but the number of women requested and the number of women actually in the WAC were gravely different. Approximately 25% of those women in the WAAC chose to go home for varying reasons, such as husbands that had been sent home, family problems, dissatisfaction with the jobs assigned to them, physical limitations, and even simple impatience with the Army.³² This meant that 75% decided to stay, for reasons such as greater job satisfaction, and an opportunity for leadership positions. Even though so many stayed, the demand was simply much higher than the supply. The crunch was on for recruiters to raise the number of women. This was a tall order. At the time of the transition, the recruiters ran into two very difficult problems, increasing disapproval from soldiers and a slander campaign. Soldiers had a great deal of influence over the opinions of a good many American women; soldiers were also fathers, brothers, sons or lovers. Ergo, of the women that were considering joining the WAC, a good number of them would make their decision while fully aware of the opinion of the soldier that meant the most to them.

Reactions to the Women's Army Corps

For soldiers in the United States, the WAC was a threat to them. An increased number of WACs meant a higher likelihood that some men who had grown accustomed to the stability of their non-combat position risked being sent overseas to the front lines. It is no real surprise that many men in these non-combat roles would not want the WAC to gain more women. The strongest opposition came from men overseas, many of whom had not even seen a WAC or even had contact with a WAC. The Office of Censorship ran a sample tabulation and reported that, of intercepts of soldier mail which mentioned the WAAC or WAC, 84%

³² Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 227.

expressed disfavor, and most advised a woman not to join; some even went so far as to threaten divorce if the woman in question chose to join.³³ One of the many letters that has been reprinted reads as follows: "Honey don't ever worry your poor head about joining the Wacs for we went over all that once before, Ha! (Remember, over my dead body. Ha! Ha!) You are going to stay at home. Another said this: "It's no damn good, Sis, and I for one would be very unhappy if you joined them.... Why can't these Gals just stay home and be their own sweet little self, instead of being patriotic?"³⁴

These letters had a great deal of power, they were often the only link between the men and women they left behind, and they became the one thing that made the time pass and the atrocities of war a little more bearable. The amount on which the men and the women relied on the letters to 'keep them going' was unfathomable. Women were, for the most part, unlikely to go against the wishes of their loved one even if it was clear that they had no real understanding of the WAC. Also, at this time it was most often expected that women would obey the wishes of the "man of the house," this sentiment is even reflected in the letters above. Though the letters had a lot of power, it can be argued that the power was somewhat of a false power for the letters were often based on an unfounded opinion. As stated, most of the men had little to no contact with the WAC, thus they did not have any information about the WAC aside from what they might read in the newspapers or hear from the rumor mill that worked overtime in the camps. Not only did the press have a great deal of influence over the soldiers, the soldiers had a great deal of influence on the press. The press was eager not only to find an audience in the states, but also they wanted to have information from the front lines to report. This most often involved close contact with the men stationed overseas, which did

³³ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 221.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 212.

provide the press with a good deal of accurate information about the atrocities of war to report. However, some of the information was greatly sensationalized to preserve the bravado of the men. When speaking about the WAC, the men were often doling out the most inaccurate of information having never seen a WAC in all of the time they were fighting.

It was just this type of grossly inaccurate information from soldiers that began the slander campaign against the WAC that later proved to be the greatest detriment to the recruitment process. Soldiers that were stationed overseas, most specifically in areas where there were WACs stationed as well, such as North Africa, provided hosts of stories about the promiscuity of the WACs. The most common story that soldiers were feeding the press was that the women stationed there ended up being shipped home after becoming pregnant. In fact, one Major was caught in a restaurant flaunting pregnancy "statistics," saying that "the Army had sent a whole boat-load of them home" and that "it was difficult to keep WACs at any station over there for any length of time without fully two-thirds of them becoming pregnant."³⁵ The idea of women being sexually promiscuous was one of the most scandalous topics of the time, thus it was no surprise that the slander campaign that came to the fore around the time of the transition of the WAAC to the WAC was focused on the sexual promiscuity of the WACs. The slander campaign was most heavily fueled by a columnist for the *New York Daily News*, John O'Donnell. In his column on June 8, 1943, O'Donnell wrote the following: "Contraceptives and prophylactic equipment will be furnished to members of the WAAC, according to a super secret agreement reached by high-ranking officers of the War Department and the WAAC Chieftain, Mrs. William Pettus Hobby."³⁶ Though his column was immediately found to be false, and other journalists wrote to condemn his poor

³⁵ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 211.

³⁶ Doris Weatherford, *American Women in World War II* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1990), 91.

journalistic integrity, much of the damage had been done. There were many copy-cat columns that came out with similar defamatory information about the promiscuity that was being 'touted' about the WAC. By the time the first women were enrolled in the WAC, the job of recruiters was made doubly hard. Thus it was time for a new recruitment campaign: recruiters really felt the pressure to meet the demand for WACs.

Recruiters decided to appeal to the family values of women and go with a plan that supported women joining the WAC to allow family-men the ability to remain with their families.³⁷ Presumably a job filled by a WAC was one less job that a man would have to fill. Unfortunately local draft quota systems doomed this plan. Women did not count for local draft quotas, therefore it was possible that the men that the women were recruited to replace could possibly still be drafted.³⁸ Therefore on a local level the WAC plan was not plausible. This did not deter recruitment planners from publicizing this plan across the country.³⁹ Yet again recruiters assumed that all women wanted to join for the greater patriotic reason of allowing a family-man to stay home.

Recruiting, In the Aftermath

The first viable recruitment campaign to come about after the establishment of the WAC was called the All-States Campaign. The idea was that recruiters in all of the states would work to recruit an entire unit that would be comprised of women from their state. This would allow women to have the camaraderie of being from the same state when they entered camp. With this plan, there was a great deal of pride involved; each state unit would have special arm bands indicating their state, and each unit would carry their state flag in addition

³⁷ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 232-233.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 248-251.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

to the United States flag. The All-States Campaign also received a lot of support from governors and mayors. The governor of Ohio issued the following proclamation:

Whereas the successful prosecution of the war requires the enrollment of adequate manpower. Now therefore, I, John W. Bricker, Governor of the State of Ohio, do hereby call for volunteers for service in the WAC...I do further call upon mayors and other governmental authorities...upon all citizens, newspapers, and radio stations...to the end that the State of Ohio may fully achieve her goal in this great national objective.⁴⁰

The success of the All-States campaign was finally realized in its final month when intake reached 4,425, which was higher than the intake of any other month of the war.⁴¹

The All-States plan, like every other subsequent recruitment plan was the direct result of the newest member of the WAC Headquarters in August of 1943, Major Jesse Rice. She was the head of WAC Recruiting, then was promoted to Deputy Director, just under Colonel Hobby, she had great influence on WAC Policy.⁴² She clearly understood the issue of recruitment, writing the following letter to the recruiters: "We know that there are millions of women who will join us now, if we can touch that spring of inner compulsion that causes people to forget self and fear of the unknown and strike out along the path that leads to their ideals."⁴³ The sentiments in this letter excerpt clearly define the women who they were hoping to recruit to one category: that of an unselfish person willing to give of themselves for the war. Rice also implies women are without ideals if they choose not to join the WAC. It is a powerful message, in a time of great emphasis on values, that the Army would recruit by touching women's want to possess good values. In joining the Army and thus working outside the home women walked the right path according to Rice.

⁴⁰ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 241.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 245.

⁴² *Ibid*, 235.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 237. The original source for this is from the WAC Daily Journal, Vol. II.

Though Rice had a good campaign with the All-States campaign, there was still a long way to go to gain the numbers the WAC leaders were expecting to enlist. It was soon realized that women really wanted to be able to pick their placement. There was a fear in women that they would join and be placed in some undesirable job such as laundress or cook. Thus the WAC adopted the Station-Job Assignment. Basically this was a way to attract more skilled women who previously ignored the WAC for fear of getting placed in the kitchen. A civilian survey revealed that 52 percent of the women questioned, although not planning to join the WAC, said that they might if they could be assured the job of their choice.⁴⁴ The WAC did gain a good number of recruits from this campaign, however the vast majority of their new recruits ended up asking to be placed with the Army Air Services, leaving a large amount of WAC positions unfilled. Therefore, it was a bitter success, and required recruiters to continue coming up with new ideas to recruit more women to the WAC.

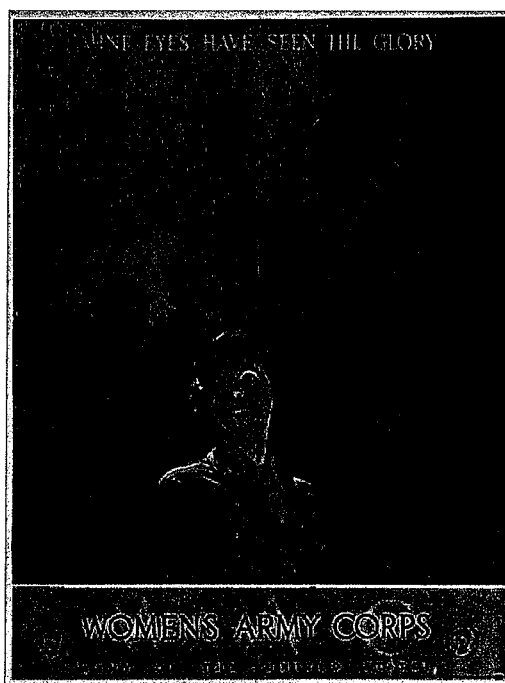
⁴⁴ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 251.



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⁴⁵ Bradshaw Crandell, "Girl With a Star-Spangled Heart," 1943 U.S. Army Women's Museum, Fort Lee, VA.

⁴⁶ "Good Soldier," 1944, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

⁴⁷ Schlaikjer, "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory," 1944, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

WAC Recruitment Posters

Since recruiters had seen success with recruitment posters for the WAAC, WAC posters were soon rolled off the presses. One particularly famous poster asks "Are you a girl with a Star-Spangled heart?"⁴⁸ This one line evokes all of the patriotic emotions that recruiters were hoping and even expecting to find in the women applying for the WAC. In addition it implies that women with a *heart* would join the WAC, this language is used to make women feel that they would be *heartless* if they do not join the WAC. The picture is also a vital part of the recruitment poster. The particular poster introduced here has a picture of a courageous looking WAC in uniform with an American flag billowing in the background. The American flag was everywhere during World War II, it was a symbol of the freedom that the Armed Forces were fighting to maintain, thus the flag itself evoked patriotic feelings. Lastly, the women featured in the poster itself was the epitome of beauty for the time, implying that joining the WAC would allow a woman to be the most beautiful desirable of women, or that the most beautiful, desirable women join the WAC. This is somewhat different from many of the WAAC posters; there is no longer a look of strong, stern determination. The US had fairly well gained the upper-hand in the war, and there was an optimism found in posters that was not seen earlier. Part of this optimism was translated in the form of praise for the support of the troops. This praise of feminine support is seen in one poster that says, "Good Soldier."⁴⁹ This message has both patriotic and patriarchal messages often present in WAC posters and literature. The interesting implication of this poster,

⁴⁸ "Girl With a Star-Spangled Heart," U.S. Army Women's Museum, Fort Lee, VA.

⁴⁹ "Good Soldier," 1944, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

however, seems to be entirely lost on the woman in the picture. She has the bright, shining smile that was often used to show that the WACs were the epitome of womanhood at the time.

Aside from a beautiful face, many WAC recruiting posters played on other desirable attributes of womanhood, such as a never ceasing devotion to the US via devotion to the American soldier. One poster of this theme reads "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory."⁵⁰ This plays on the words of the ever famous "Battle Hymn of the Republic," undoubtedly known for evocations of patriotism in the hearts of many Americans. In addition, it shows an incredibly concerned looking WAC looking up, towards the heavens and toward the images in the background, soldiers and bombs. The concern for the soldiers and their welfare is clear, and is meant to bring forth a need to help protect the lives of American soldiers. This poster is attempting to focus upon the caring instincts of American women. In addition to glancing towards the heavens, this particular WAC is bathed in an almost heavenly glow. This makes her seem almost angelic; as if she is a guardian angel.

This guardian angel mentality would no doubt attract many American women wanting to protect a husband, brother or son, but some women truly wanted to join for themselves. When the WAC was started there was a great recruitment push to allow women some choice when they joined. Recruiters often allowed women some choice in assignment to a certain service (ground, air, or service). Often, women were given some choice in their duties as well. This emphasis on women's choice was relatively limited in recruitment posters, as the idea of a woman choosing the WACs based on occupational choice was a novel idea of the time period. That said, there is one particular poster that played on this idea

⁵⁰ Schlaikjer, "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory," 1944, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

that women might want to join out of choice and might embrace the idea of occupational choice. This poster has two intriguing lines, "Woman's Place in War" and "Women...choose your branch, job, and station in the Army of the United States."⁵¹ This first tag line allows for more than just a feminine ownership in the war, but that there is a true place in the war for them. There seems to be a real acceptance of the general idea that women can have a place in the Army. The second tagline indicates that women may actually choose the Army for other reasons than patriotism. Women, may make a selfish choice that is in her best interest. Such a message, not incredibly bathed in patriotism is a novelty among posters. However, all of the posters did have one goal, to recruit more women into the Women's Army Corps.

This emphasis on constantly trying to recruit more and more women came from the lofty goals the Corps set for itself. They had the go-ahead to recruit up to 150,000 women, and as of September 1, 1943 they had about 50,000 women. They could recruit up to 100,000 more, but when they were only getting 60 women from any given city in 6 months, the recruiters were not getting the results they craved, and were ordered to produce. As the war progressed the recruiters were forced time and time again to try different approaches to recruiting. By the end of the war there began to develop an attitude that 'the War is Won', but in all actuality the recruiters knew that there was no guarantee that the war was coming to a close. The enlistment numbers never did grow towards the end of the war, and by the fall of 1944, recruiting began to drastically decrease. First, recruiters were taken out of all but the big cities. Then, the remaining recruiters were instructed to recruit only women that could qualify as officers. By the close of the war the overall number of women that had been in the

⁵¹ "Woman's Place in War: Women's Army Corps," 1944, Women Veterans Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

WAAC or WAC did total 150,000, but this was never the number for the amount of women at any one time.

Interpretation of the Importance of the WAC

Understanding the recruitment practices of the WAAC and WAC is vital to understanding the larger narrative of the WAC, but it is still only one piece of the puzzle. One piece of the puzzle is the fact that the WAAC was first proposed by a high ranking female, a Congresswoman, but received very little attention until it was endorsed by an even more powerful man, General Marshall. At the time of WWII, it still took a man for female oriented legislation to make it through Congress. This situation shows that women, though they could hold powerful positions, and subsequently use that power to better the lives of women, were still somewhat limited in the actual applications of their power. It still took a man to give credibility to the ideas of these women. She did not have a *group* of women to aid her in her quest, but she did have an *individual* who was more powerful than she. Time and time again in history it is seen that either a group of weaker individuals can band together to effect change, or one very powerful individual can create change. The complexity of the power that it eventually takes to get the bill even to the Congressional floor, let alone passed is incredibly interesting.

The Importance of Mattie E. Treadwell

It is all of these interwoven struggles that make up the story of how and why women were recruited to the WAC, but ultimately this still leaves a great deal to be seen of the entire picture of the Corps. This picture is missing some essential pieces, such as why women chose to join the WAC. Also, there is the issue of how historians have come to know and

write about the WAC, and how it is found in its 'original state.' This project relies heavily on the Army in many ways. One way that the vast literature basis is Mattie E. Treadwell's *The Women's Army Corps* published in 1954. The Army commissioned Mattie Treadwell to write a history of the WAC to be part of the series on WWII entitled *United States Army in World War II*.⁵² The Military Department of the Army commissioned Treadwell because she served as an officer in the WAAC and in the WAC. In addition, she was working as a historian in the Office of the Chief of Military History at the time of commission. Her book was the earliest publication on the WAAC and WAC. It also remained the sole scholarly publication on the WAC until the early 1980's. It is the cornerstone for all WAC scholarship. All other works on the WAC betray a bit of the Army bias found in Treadwell's *The Women's Army Corps*. The Army bias is a distinct problem for the purposes of this paper because the Army bias is the reason that there is not more diversity seen on the issue of why women joined the WAAC and the WAC. Treadwell's work cites mostly Army documents and cites feelings and sentiments that speak well of the Army. One cannot fault Treadwell for her work or her approach as she is firmly ensconced in Army tradition. The most disconcerting thing about the Army bias is that it implies that *all* women joined the WAAC and the WAC for the 'greater good' and for patriotism. Evidence suggests that many joined for individual reasons that were often more important than the patriotism. That is not to discount the patriotism because some of the reasoning really was patriotism, but there still remains the question of all those women sending letters by the bag load to the planners of the WAAC with very personal reasons for joining. Further exploration of these personal reasons, and an analysis of why Treadwell's book simply did not account for the personal aspect of the women that joined the WAAC is necessary.

⁵² Treadwell, Preface to *The Women's Army Corps*, xi-xiv.

Treadwell's book contains several quotations similar to the following: "I was impressed with the common denominator shared by the extremes in types [of women applying]—wanting to do organized effective war work."⁵³ This quote is included as just one of the comments of a reviewer of the application process. It is quite an example of how the women were seen as a collective. There is no mention of the types, just the common denominator. This same sentiment is found in every section of Treadwell's book including all the sections mentioned earlier. The implications of this epidemic of over-reaching patriotism is that all other literature is tainted with the Army bias, and thus there has yet to be a new story as to why women joined the WAAC and WAC.

Treadwell's Influence

There were a few attempts to look at the individuality of women, yet Leslie Rupp's article in *Women of America: A History* makes this attempt.⁵⁴ Rupp discusses the idea of "do your part" from both the negative and the positive sides. The negative message is that "a soldier may die if you don't do your part". She argues that this form of patriotism turned more personal when women joined for their men rather than strictly for their country. Even if this is the case, patriotism still rings loud and true in this message. This patriotism still does not allow for the important individual reasons that women joined the WAC. Her analysis holds a small attempt to imply individuality, but the attempt falls flat behind the guise of personal choice.

⁵³ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 57 .

⁵⁴ Leila J. Rupp, "Woman's Place Is In the War: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the United States and Germany, 1939-1945," in *Women of America: History*, ed. Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), p.357.

The first work written specifically on women in the Armed Forces after Treadwell's book, was Michael Rustad's *Women in Khaki* published in 1982.⁵⁵ *Women in Khaki* is the first work written after the WAC was absorbed into the standing Army in 1978.⁵⁶ The gap in publication dates is important to the story of the loss of individuality. Before 1978 the records for the WAC were incredibly difficult to locate, unless requested by Army personnel. Between the time of Treadwell's book and Rustad's book there was very little reason for Army personnel to access the records for research purposes. In addition, Treadwell's book of WAC history is incredibly detailed and well-written. For Army purposes there was little reason to commission any other scholarship on the WAC. When the WAC was absorbed into the Army more its records were made public. The Army kept very few of the WAAC records, making them even more difficult to locate. It is no surprise Rustad's book, an overview of the American Enlisted Woman, is sparse in information about the WAC. In addition, Rustad is limited by his sources.⁵⁷ Because of his strong use of Treadwell, there is no new bias and the story of recruitment is no different.

D'Ann Campbell is one of the foremost scholars on women in the WAC. She wrote first about the WAC in 1984, publishing *Women at War with America*.⁵⁸ Her book comes just after that of Rustad's *Women in Khaki*. Campbell's work focuses more on the specifics of women in the WAC, but it does not simply reiterate Treadwell's work. She admits in her introduction that she is attempting to write a social history from the perspective of the people

⁵⁵ Michael Rustad, *Women in Khaki: The American Enlisted Woman* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982).

⁵⁶ Ibid. 182.

⁵⁷ The Citations for the chapter on women in WWII are limited to Treadwell, and a few scattered journal articles.

⁵⁸ D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

rather than from the perspective of an institution.⁵⁹ This has not precluded institutional texts such as Treadwell's work from being heavily cited. Treadwell is the most heavily cited in the chapter which focuses primarily on the Armed Forces. One example of this influence is seen when Campbell writes that those who joined the WAC did so for patriotism. The ramifications of Campbell citing Treadwell is the loss of the personalization she attempted to achieve in the Army chapter. In addition much of the individuality that might be expected from Campbell's book is lost as she utilizes statistics for almost all of her arguments. Though there is nothing inherently wrong with statistics, they are often strictly fact, and thus there is no personalization in the analysis.

By the late 1980's and the early 1990's there was new interest in WWII fueled by the fiftieth anniversary of the War. Because of this interest much of the work written on the WAC came in the form of published diaries and letters, as well as commemorative books meant to draw in a wider audience than those who read strictly history. These books most often perpetuated the patriotism in that that was what would sell to a larger audience. An example of such a book is Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*.⁶⁰ Brokaw is not a historian, and his book is simply an anthology of the tales of extraordinary men and women in WWII, but yet it is most often found in the Military History section of libraries and book stores. His book does little more than continue the support for the patriotic story that has yet to be deviated from.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 7.

⁶⁰ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998).

The Importance of Primary Sources

WAC history in general has been lacking which makes it difficult to define a concrete relationship between the recruitment of women to the Corps and the reasons they joined. The lack of scholarship is supplemented by those willing to rely on letters, oral histories, and diaries as sources for WAC sentiments. Such sources have their problems.⁶¹ The only letters and diaries available are from those kind enough to leave such articles to be published or added to the collections of historical societies. Some attempt has been made to look for such sources to determine if the patriotism described so often in the sources mentioned above is also as distinct in the primary sources. The sources provide clear evidence indicating that there were personal reasons that women joined the WAAC and the WAC. The evidence also indicates that patriotism is among the reasons that women gave for joining the WAC.

Historical societies house many oral histories, but many historians are weary of utilizing them. There is a small amount of fear that these histories will not be accurate for a variety of reasons, including fading memory and the changing of attitudes. That said, it is still quite necessary to consult these sources; in many cases these sources are often the only ones available for specific women. One such oral history is that of Betty Jane Keim who enlisted in 1943, her oral history is very personal, and thus reflects individual reasons for joining the WAAC.⁶² In her interview she says that her parents were divorced when she was eighteen and her mother was raising two kids. There were no sons, and both her mother and she were working at a defense plant. Keim states that she knew she had the ability to

⁶¹ These sources can be incomplete and can have very little useful information.

⁶² Betty J. Keim, interview by David Clanin, Ft. Wayne, IN, June 9, 1990. David Clanin has contributed a great number of oral histories to the World War II collection at the Indiana Historical Society. That said his collection is an example of the lack of information on the WAC. There was only one written transcript of his interviews with WACs. In addition of the hundreds of interviews he conducted only about 30 were with women.

perform any task, so she joined. The sentiment here is that she was trying to relieve the burden on her mother. There is not mention of the greater patriotism. She goes on to say that she thought it would be exciting, leading me to believe that she was not attracted to the idea that women were doing non-combat support jobs. It seems as if she saw an opportunity for adventure.⁶³

Published letters are another source for valuable information on the WAC. One volume of published letters is Anne Bosanko Green's *One Woman's War: Letters Home from the Woman's Army Corps*.⁶⁴ Green's letters provide a look into the feelings at the time without the fear that opinions or memories might have been affected by time.⁶⁵ Green admits to a combination of patriotism, idealism, and an urge for adventure as to why she first became interested in the Armed Forces.⁶⁶ Though Green does admit to patriotism, there are clearly other reasons that factored into her choice. The secondary sources have taken this same story and latched onto the patriotism while allowing the other factors to fall by the wayside. In a letter to her friend Carrie, Anne references her ability to go back to school on a government subsidy should she later choose this path.⁶⁷ For the reasons noted above she joined the WAC. It is important to note that the most common recruitment poster in Minneapolis had the following message "There's something about a WAC that makes you want to stand up and cheer!" and "Good soldiers....the WAC".⁶⁸ This message was just

⁶³ Betty J. Keim, interview by David Clanin, Ft. Wayne, IN, June 9, 1990, pg 4 of transcript of interview.

⁶⁴ Anne Bosanko Green, *One Woman's War: Letters Home from the Women's Army Corps* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989).

⁶⁵ There is still a chance that letters may be edited, but this chance is low.

⁶⁶ Green, *One Woman's War*, 6.

⁶⁷ Anne Bosanko to Carrie, Minneapolis, June 19, 1944, in Green, *One Woman's War*, 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 7.

another Army message with nothing but the greater patriotic message, yet still, women like Anne joined the WAC for their own reasons.

The secondary sources on women in the WAC are just as limited as are the primary sources. The lack of sources makes it difficult for historians to examine any topic of WAC history. One topic that is difficult to analyze is the relationship between recruitment and the reasons that women joined the Corps. It is difficult to discuss this relationship because the Army presents the narrative of patriotism. There is no room for individuality of choice, within the narrative of patriotism. The Army story remains the only source for WAC scholarship for about thirty years. Then when things are finally written about the Corps, they are written based upon the Army story. There is no new information to be had in these stories either. To find a truer story one must go back to the archives, but even then the story is disjointed due to the inconsistency of the archives.

That said, there has been more recent work on the issue of women in the Army from a feminist perspective that essentially takes aim at the strong Army narrative and bias found in the scholarship on the Women's Army Corps. The most prominent feminist work on the subject is Leisa D. Meyer's *Creating G.I. Jane*.⁶⁹ Meyer analyses both the feminist movement of the time, and how they saw the WAC, and looks at the WAC in the grand narrative of the feminist movement. She argues that women's groups of the time saw the WAC as a temporary fix, that would disappear as soon as the war was over. They also had a distinct distaste for the term 'female soldier'. This distinction alone kept these women from achieving true military status. They always had to be designated as Women so as not to be confused with the 'real Army'. As for feminists today, Meyer argues that all discussion is

⁶⁹ Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

often hindered by the common assumption that military is not the proper lens through which to examine the place of women as it is ensconced in the patriarchal system that is war. Meyer argues against this stance pointing out that women in the military are a part of the grand social narrative, and thus their place in a feminist discourse cannot be ignored. Meyer also shares a feminist view of the Women's Army Corps in an article entitled "Creating G.I. Jane."⁷⁰ She talks about how the military has had a long tradition of having a prostitution following, and how women associated with the Army would be considered prostitutes. In the converse, she also discusses that there was a fear that women who joined the WAC would be assumed lesbians. This fear was mostly felt by those in charge of the Women's Army Corps. She then writes about the real truth that sexual abuse did occur in the WAC; WAC's being sexually abused when in contact with male soldiers that is. Lastly she talks about how the massive anti-sexualization campaigns that occurred after the "Slander Campaign" started the de-sexualization of women in the military. She says that because of this adverse reaction to WACs, women in the military are perpetually de-sexualized. She sees this as one of the biggest reasons to view the military as anti-feminist today.

Conclusion

The Women's Army Corps poses an intriguing interpretive issue for a student of Army history, especially a student wanting to view the WAC through a feminist lens. The history of the WAC itself brings forth questions of how to integrate women into such a masculine world, and which women to recruit. Throughout the recruitment process there was a good deal of propaganda aimed at recruiting the 'right kind' of woman for the WAC. Based

⁷⁰ Leisa D. Meyer, "Creating G.I. Jane: The Regulation of Sexuality and Sexual Behavior in the Women's Army Corp During World War II," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 3, (Autumn, 1992): 581-601.

upon the posters one must assume this woman is beautiful and truly patriotic. The theme of patriotism runs throughout the recruitment process and throughout the war. Patriotism then extends into the scholarly work on the WAC. The vast majority of the scholarly work on the WAC is based upon the Army commissioned *The Women's Army Corps* by Mattie E.

Treadwell; the Army commission means that Treadwell's work holds the Army interpretation of the WAC. Since Treadwell is the default for WAC scholars, there is a good deal of Army bias found in other works, thus leaving little room for a feminist reading of the material that stretches beyond the proliferation of patriotism being at the heart of the WAC. Recently some work has been done to produce a feminist interpretation of the Women's Army Corps. This work however is sparse, thus one looking to re-interpret the Women's Army Corps and its role in women's history as a whole could very well begin with furthering the feminist discussion of the Women's Army Corps.

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