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Women’s Unsystematic Military: The Different Experiences of Women in the Nurse Corps and Women’s Auxiliary Service Pilots in World War II

Rachel C. Reams
rreams@rollins.edu

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Women’s Unsystematic Military

The different experiences of women in the Nurse Corps and Women’s Auxiliary Service Pilots in World War II

Rachel Reams
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Introduction

When the subject is war, most often the focus is on men. However, countless millions of women throughout history have contributed to the war efforts of their country. Whether single, married, or mothers, women have found various outlets for their patriotism and desire to support the male troops fighting. Despite often caring for children on the home front, women have aided militaries in a variety of ways, including contributing hours to fundraising, making and donating clothing and food, or producing materials for military use in the war.

Globally, women had diverse experiences during WWII. In Germany, the Nazi party that rose to power in the 1930s believed women’s place was in the home. Policies they enacted strictly adhered to this: they even fired female employees as the 1930s progressed. This brought an interesting conflict between women’s ideal roles in society as homemakers and mothers, and the labor demand of the country in World War II.¹ Because of the demand, Germany had to reverse some of its ideals about women working, instead promoting their joining the work force. Women participated both in private industries and in military auxiliaries.² In Great Britain, where women participated previously in the Great War, women contributed to the war effort during WWII in numerous ways. Because of the high demand for labor during WWII, the National Service Act (No. 2) provided for the conscription of British women, nineteen to forty-three years old, who were single, without children. Within the military, women provided valuable clerical and analytical work, while also branching outside of traditional feminine roles to mechanical work, operating anti-aircraft guns and RADAR stations, ferrying aircraft, and deciphering coded German messages.³ Women in the Soviet Union had some of the highest involvement in World War II, as well as equality with men in the jobs they filled. They went to the front lines on the Eastern Front as bomber pilots, tankers, and filled other combat roles. By 1943 close to 8 percent of the Red

Army was composed of women. Many of the roles women filled in the Soviet Union was due to Bolshevism’s radically open stance on the integration of women into all labor fields, in direct contrast with the Nazi party’s traditional view of femininity and the Western world’s comparable middle ground.4

Women had been in the US workforce before the outbreak of WWII. However, during the first half of the twentieth century female labor participation was mostly performed by young, single women. If they were married and employed, they had usually not yet become mothers. Most of these women worked in traditionally feminine fields, such as teaching, nursing, and clerical work.5 The US entry to WWII in 1941 was the event that brought an influx of wives and mothers into the workforce for the duration of the war.6 The mobilization increased the number of employed women across the country. From 28 percent of American women in the US with jobs in 1940, the percentage of women rose to 34 by 1945.7

Several years before the war, many recognized that women would need to join the workforce in higher numbers to meet mobilization demands. By the late 1930s American thought had evolved to incorporate consideration of women’s roles during times of war. Allowances in arguments for the mobilization of war in 1938 and 1939 to prepare for the US entry into WWII acknowledged just this: “victory may depend not so much on the skill of generals of the fighting quality of their troops, as on the loyalty and stamina of the men and women on the home front.”8

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7 Daron Acemoglu, “Women, War, and Wages: The Effect of Female Labor Supply on the Wage Structure at Midcentury,” Journal of Political Economy 112:3 (June 2004): 499. The increase of women workers was not consistent across the country. States with established factories and large cities experienced the highest rate of women joining the labor force, while rural communities and states had a barely discernable increase in women working due to many factors such as exemptions from the draft for farmers, different age ranges and ethnicities of the women, and their previous incorporation into the farming business.
At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Selective Service Act passed by Congress in October 1940 created a mandatory national draft for men aged twenty-one through thirty-five. Even though there were some exemptions to this draft based on familial status and occupation, men from a variety of locations and occupations were conscripted into the military, vacating their civilian positions.\(^9\) The American government, therefore, supported the entrance of women into factories and other labor intensive occupations to fill men’s places for the duration, promoting these jobs by advertising campaigns, such as “Rosie the Riveter.” This propaganda promoted nationalism through labor-intensive jobs and implied the employment of women would result in the United States’ victory.\(^10\) Working women to some extent countered the large labor gap created by the mobilization of close to sixteen million men, 73 percent of whom were deployed overseas. Women temporarily took up more masculine roles in public and at home while their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons served in the military. They began to work as bank tellers, shoe salespeople, and government clerical workers. Women even left their homes to contribute to food production. Although many of them had no experience in agricultural work, they volunteered to perform necessary farm tasks like pick fruit, drive tractors, and shear sheep.\(^11\) While maintaining their civilian status, women filled the newly opened job positions at munitions and airplane factories, and became builders of ships, airplanes, and tanks, as well as munition manufacturing.

Cities across the country experienced a surge in the intensity of their industrial production, an increase in the number of factories contracted with the government, and a rise in women employed in these factories. Industrial cities, such as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, had the greatest increase in working women in wartime occupations. Pittsburgh, being one of the leading cities for the steel industry, attracted many of the companies that already made materials for the military, while other businesses were encouraged and contracted by the government to convert their production to wartime materials.\(^12\) Women comprised a significant portion of the labor these industries employed as the war progressed since more

\(^9\) Ibid., 516.  
\(^12\) Chad Parks, “WWII Opened Doors for Women.”
men were enlisted into the military: an estimated one-third of the labor force in the production of B-29 bombers, for example, was women, usually working as welders.\(^{13}\) Even though women became an integral part of the manufacturing process for these factories by the end of the war, few women rose to positions of leadership within their work. Typically, women filled in the lower positions within a company. They could not and did not rise to leadership roles in charge of men in the workplace, even if they had a higher level of education.\(^ {14}\)

![Men and women working together riveting the fuselages of Boeing B-17s.](http://www.taphilo.com/history/wwii/USAAF/Boeing/B17/index.shtml)

*Figure A: Men and women working together riveting the fuselages of Boeing B-17s.*\(^ {15}\)

The involvement of women in the labor force during WWII changed many people’s minds, both male and female, about the types of work women were able to do. Companies realized women were reliable and worked hard, while women themselves, through their experiences, began to find a life outside of the home that they enjoyed and took a sense of satisfaction from. Eva Lapin, who wrote *Mothers in

\(^ {14}\) Acemoglu, “Women, War, and Wages,” 505.
**Overalls** in 1943 about the women working during the war, referenced this very shift in women’s views of their capabilities:

> Women can now do any job that men can do. But there are undoubtedly some jobs which are not as desirable… It all depends on how severe the manpower situation is in determining what jobs women will be assigned to…. After all, who ever thought of women in this country working near blast furnaces or messing around with ladles of hot molten iron? Yet it has come to pass.\(^\text{16}\)

The inroads women made in the workforce during WWII were quickly counteracted at the cessation of fighting in 1945. As men returned from the front lines and abroad, to take up the jobs they had left, women were pressured to return to their homes, picking up the pieces of their home-concentric roles in society, a lifestyle they maintained into the 1950s.

> The sharp decline in female employment at the war’s end… was transitory, induced by a range of factors including the termination of wartime contracts, a widespread expectation that prewar recessionary conditions would return, and efforts by employers to “give back” jobs to returning veterans.\(^\text{17}\)

Besides the private sector economy, each branch of the military during WWII also allowed women into their ranks, in separate capacities. Although the Army and Navy women’s branches of the military played a key role in the war effort and the advancement of women in the military, two other branches of women’s military organizations were more unique in experience. During their time serving with the military during the 1940s, the Nurse Corps and the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) had different, sometimes opposing, experiences. The more traditional and socially acceptable roles nurses filled enlarged the opportunities open to them, while female pilots, who challenged the masculinity of flying, constantly faced opposition. These different paths nurses and female pilots followed during the war were best seen through the advertisement of their respective branches, the requirements to apply, their training, the types of service open to them, and the opportunities left to the women following the end of World War II.


\(^{17}\) Acemoglu, “Women, War, and Wages,” 520.
Women’s contributions to war efforts throughout history have not been restricted to filling in positions men vacated for the war. Some women were able to more directly involve themselves with the military. Women have had a long history of clandestine involvement with the United States’ military during wars. Rough estimates of the number of women who dressed as men to fight in the Civil War ranged from 400 to 750. Women disguising themselves to join in combat were not immediately, and sometimes never, discovered, as many enlisting men had to be trained upon entry just as the women had to be; men often lacked experience with fighting and firing firearms. The most common way women soldiers were discovered was upon arrival at a hospital for medical attention.

Although these women played a remarkable and ground-breaking role in the Civil War, most women who contributed to the war effort during the 1860s did so in a manner more consistent with the traditional female gender role. Women commonly raised money for troops and supplied them with food, clothing, and medical supplies. Female nursing was pioneered by Florence Nightingale and other women during the Crimean War and the American Civil War. During the 1860s providing medical care to wounded soldiers in field hospitals was still seen as too gruesome a task for women to perform, barring their entrance until the labor demand and the high casualty rate exacerbated the situation in hospitals to such an extent women were able to edge their way in. Once they were allowed to serve in the hospitals, the number of women interacting with, and involved in, the military on a daily basis was estimated to be between 2,000 to 5,000 in total by the end of the Civil War. African American women, even, contributed

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2 Ibid.
by nursing African American men and performing domestic tasks, such as laundering and cooking for the Union army.⁶

Figure B: A female nurse caring for wounded men during the Civil War.⁷

Inroads to the military medical profession women made during the Civil War contributed to the consideration the government and the military gave female nurses during the Spanish-American War in 1898. The military inducted about 1,550 female nurses who had been trained in the women’s nursing schools because of the need for a greater number of medical personnel. These schools opened because of women’s success in the station hospitals in the Civil War and their contribution to the Navy and the Army under civilian contracts.⁸ The role female nurses played the Spanish-American War presented a precedent of women serving with the military leading into the First World War.

⁷ Brooks, “Roles of Women in the Civil War.”
The first women to be admitted into the US military with full status and rank served with the US Navy during World War I, performing clerical work. Given the authority to enlist women, the Army instead decided to hire them under civilian contracts to “serve as telephone operators and clerks with the American Expeditionary Forces in France.” A sizeable number of women served in these military positions: 1,000 women went to France with the Army as translators and telephone operators, while 13,000 filled clerical jobs for the Navy and Marines both in the US and abroad. Even though “the (Navy) women wore uniforms and they received the same pay and privileges as men while on active duty and veterans thereafter,” plans to create an auxiliary corps were continuously shot down by the War Department, preventing women from more permanently and definitively working for the military. The Secretary of War during World War I, Newton D. Baker, commented that regardless of their contribution, “the idea of women in the Army had ‘never been seriously contemplated,’ and was ‘considered unwise and highly undesirable.’” Not only were auxiliary plans rejected, but also “for commissioning women doctors in the Medical Corps.” Following Armistice Day on November 11, 1919, these women were demobilized and the programs were disbanded. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, then, women did not play an official, paid, and recognized role in the military, except in a nursing capacity.

With the entrance of the US into the Second World War came the reemergence of legislative acts from the federal government and the military commanders to incorporate women into the armed forces to enlarge the manpower the US could utilize in the war. Women’s participation would increase steadily throughout WWII to equal about 3 percent of US forces at the peak of fighting.

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12 Yellin, *Our Mother’s War*, 111.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
Even before Pearl Harbor, in April 1941, Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers, with the backing of Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, introduced a bill to establish the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps.\textsuperscript{16} Discussions concerning the establishment of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs) centered on the consideration of the types of functions women would perform during their enlistment in the military. Rogers’s argument stemmed from the understanding that women could contribute to the military by performing clerical functions. Congress was most worried with the seeming threat to male power and the idea of masculinity should women be allowed to become “female soldiers.”\textsuperscript{17} Following Pearl Harbor, interest in allowing women into the WAACs to contribute to the war effort rose rapidly.\textsuperscript{18} Once the distinction had been made between “women” and “soldiers,” and the assertion that the two could not be combined in any capacity, the bill to create the WAACs passed. The official act, “An Act to Establish the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps,” was passed by Congress on May 14, 1942.\textsuperscript{19}

The WAAC was created primarily for white women to contribute to the army. However, some African American women were able to make a contribution. Out of the enlistees composing the first class of WAACs, forty of these women were African American. Nicknamed the “Ten-Percenters,” black women were only allowed to be admitted up to 10 percent of the total WAAC membership. These women performed similar functions to white women while in the army, though they were segregated at every turn: they were trained in separate facilities, living in separate quarters, ate at separate mess halls. Officers, even, lived in segregated barracks even though they were trained in integrated classes. This did not begin to change until 1943 when the military’s technical training schools took the first steps towards integration. In total, 6,520 African American women served with the WAC during World War II.\textsuperscript{20}

Initially, inequality between the white women in the WAAC and men in the Army was marked. Women received less pay than their male equivalents, while having to endure a number of restrictions on

\begin{itemize}
\item Morden, \textit{Women’s Army Corps}, 3.
\item Morden, \textit{Women’s Army Corps}, 3.
\item Ibid., 5.
\item Sheldon, "Brief History of Black Women in the Military."
\end{itemize}
their activities to uphold the image the Army promoted to counteract the idea of “bad” women that was associated with the military. The Army continued to follow their previous venereal disease policies placing blame on women for the transmission of diseases, even while admitting women into the WAACs. These policies were based on the double standard that women were the “source of contagion,” because men’s “heterosexual activity (was) normal and expected.” The military, the Office of Community War Services, the American Social Hygiene Association, and the US Public Health Service collaborated on a national social protection campaign that claimed female promiscuity was the problem for increased rates of venereal disease.  

The women joining the WAACs, however, “created a new category of ‘military woman’ that competed with the archetypal ‘bad’ women, such as prostitutes and camp followers, whom the public associated with a standing army.”

Therefore, in order for the Army to promote the WAACs, it had to form a distinctive line between the “dirty” “Victory Girls” and their virtuous, clean WAACs. As a part of the admission process, women had to submit to pelvic exams designed to identify any possible venereal diseases. Along with this, pregnant women, officially considered a drain on resources, were refused acceptance into the program, and the Army advocated an overall policy of sexual abstinence for all WAACs.

Even though there were strict requirements and some restrictions from the Army, and there was a wider range of opportunities open to women in civilian jobs, the Army offered many benefits that attracted women to the military sector of war work. Women joining the WAACs had the ability to tap into counseling services and financial assistance set up by the Red Cross. Married women benefited from maternity veterans’ programs. Not only this, but Congress extended to women veterans the G. I. Bill.

allowing them to gain low-interest house loans, higher educational benefits, and on-the-job training from their service with the WAACs.\textsuperscript{25}

The unequal pay and benefits the women received in comparison to men was alleviated somewhat in November 1942. At that time, WAACs, while retaining their auxiliary description, began to earn the same pay, allowances, benefits, and privileges as male members of the US Army. The difference between the men and women of equal rank thus became less distinct in benefits, but noticeable still in the rules and regulations to which they had to adhere. Regulations specific to the WAACs had to be created, since the women were not full members of the Army, thus, they were not governed by the Army’s policies, but by regulations set up for the WAACs specifically.\textsuperscript{26} The need to create a separate regulatory system proved to be clunky and cumbersome for the Army. For example, WAACs stationed abroad in 1942 in Algeria at the North African Army headquarters encountered legal problems; as they, being members of an auxiliary group, could not receive overseas pay or government life insurance, and the women were ineligible to receive medical attention in a military hospital if they fell sick or were injured overseas.\textsuperscript{27} To solve this technical problem, the WAACs had their auxiliary status removed in favor of full status in the military as the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in 1943.

Other divisions of the military, such as the Navy, Coast Guard, and the Marines created women’s units in mid-1942 to utilize the labor women could provide, freeing men for combat and service overseas. The Navy created two groups: the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) to work with the Navy and the Coast Guard Reserve’s SPARS (based on the Coast Guard motto: “Semper Paratus—Always Ready”) to collaborate specifically with the Coast Guard.\textsuperscript{28} The Marines took a slightly different approach to their inclusion of women. Rather than spending time thinking of an appropriate acronym that would work to provide these women a good reputation and eliminate opposition women faced from both American society and other servicemen, the Marines directly called the enlistees of the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{25} Ibid., 112.
\bibitem{26} Morden, \textit{Women’s Army Corps}, 5.
\bibitem{27} Ibid., 12.
\bibitem{28} Morden, \textit{Women’s Army Corps}, 5-6.
\end{thebibliography}
Marine Corps Women’s Reserve “Women Marines.” Upon inquiry into the reason the Women Marines did not have an acronym, as all other women’s organizations had one, Marine Commandant Thomas Holcomb explained:

They are Marines. They don’t have a nickname and they don’t need one. They get their basic training in a Marine atmosphere at a Marine post. They inherit the traditions of the Marines. They are Marines.

The Department of the Navy learned from the Army’s experience with the WAACs and outright awarded the Navy women applying to join their three organizations with the “same pay and benefits given regulars, but they were not eligible for disability or retirement pensions. And while generally governed by the same regulations and policies as men, they were restricted to noncombat duties ashore in the Continental United States.” The Navy altered this decision in September 1944: women in the WAVES, SPARS, and Women Marines were able to service in Alaska and Hawaii as well.

African American women were only allowed into the WAVES and SPARS in small percentages, just like with the WAACs. Seventy-two women served as WAVES, an impressive contribution considering they were not even allowed to join the Navy until October 19, 1944. Fewer served in the SPARS, who allowed them to apply starting on October 20, 1944. Usually, however, black women in the navy served under considerably more integrated circumstances than women in the WACs.

The WAACs were first stationed at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, training in a repurposed and transformed former cavalry post. The stables and riding halls were modified to meet the needs of the WAAC and house them. As more women joined the WAACs, other training centers opened in Daytona Beach, Florida; Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia; Fort Devens, Massachusetts; and Camp Ruston, Louisiana.
These training centers remained in service even when the auxiliary status of women in the Army was dropped.

Training camps for the three woman’s branches of the Department of the Navy were set up in a variety of locations. The most gender segregated of these was the WAVES. Because current naval facilities were all filled by men, the WAVES were usually billeted on college campuses. “Officers were sent to Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, and later to nearby Mount Holyoke College as well. Enlisted women went to training camps at University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Indiana-Bloomington, and Oklahoma A&M College in Stillwater.”  

This was only, however, until a larger, more permanent training facility was created in 1943 at Hunter College in New York. The Marines were the second most restrictive organization, allocating just a few of their boot camp locations to include women. Eventually in June 1943 all women Marine training was centered on the east coast at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, making the Marines the first branch to train men and women at the same location, though not integrating them into the same classes.

The SPARS, however, were the most radical in the location they sent women recruits. During training, the Coast Guard made history by stationing women at the US Coast Guard Academy in Connecticut, rather than separating the women from men. This was the first time in American martial history a military institution had been opened to women, and, for the duration of the war, made coed. While on assignment, SPARS, at locations such as Loran, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, were frequently housed in barracks, accommodating twelve women and their gear. These barracks filled all purposes, such as “sleeping quarters, recreation room, office space, operations room, repair shop and storage.”

38 Yellin, *Our Mother’s War*, 146.
Upon graduation from the training programs of each branch, women were usually transferred to another base for their posting. “Unless she remained at the training center to replace a male member of the cadre, the WAAC officer or enlisted person was assigned to a 150-woman table of organization.... Such units had spaces only for clerks, typists, drivers, cooks, and unit cadre.” WACs were assigned to numerous units of the Army for their service.

Colonel Hobby placed few restrictions on the jobs women could hold. WAC regulations allowed a woman to fill, at a fixed location, any authorized military position that she was physically fit to perform... WACs began to put civilian-acquired skills, such as in mathematics and communications, to work for the Army. They received more training and moved into new occupational specialties; they became mechanics, weather observers, radio operators, intelligence analysts, photographers, carpenters, painters, parachute riggers, postal workers, and heavy equipment operators.

Beginning in 1943, women in the SPARS were stationed at Loran, a monitoring station for the continental US. Loran was a classified, scientific base specializing in long range aid to navigation. It used radio signals to aid ships and planes calculate their location while in transit. “It was the first time SPARS were being sent out of the district office and the newness and mystery of the work was a challenge to (them) all.” The decision by the Department of the Navy to station women at Loran indicated an increase in prestige of the SPARS as well as a wartime labor need.

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41 Morden, Women’s Army Corps, 8.
42 Ibid., 19.
43 Dobie and Lang, Her War, 75.
Each branch of the military that women enlisted in eventually allowed women to be sent abroad for service in both the European and Pacific theatres at different times. The WAC began to serve abroad

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while they still had an auxiliary status. Their first assignments in 1942 stationed WACs in North Africa and contributed to the operations of the US headquarters there as clerks, typists, stenographers, and drivers. From those stations in North Africa, WAC assignments abroad expanded to incorporate both the European and the Pacific theatres. The Navy only began to allow all three of its women branches outside the US in 1944. However, even then they could only travel to US territories, extending their range of assignments to Alaska and Hawaii.

Regardless of the branch of the military women entered, kinks had to be worked out regarding the logistics and technicalities of their service. An initial problem in the design and distribution of WAC uniforms was apparent; something the Department of the Navy later took note of when creating their units. The WACs themselves noticed inconsistencies with their regulations depending on location:

45 Morden, Women’s Army Corps, 22.
46 Weatherford, History of Women in America, 80.
different rules and the rigidity of interpretation of these rules differed in each theatre of war. The European theatre, for example, was particularly harsh on matters concerning marriage, requiring immediate transfer of any women who married while serving abroad. In each woman’s branch of the military, one of the prevailing topics of discussion was over forms of address for women. Each organization settled this issue in different ways: “WAC officers were addressed as “Ma’am,” but SPARS used “Sir” even when the officer was female.”

Within the WAC, women rarely were incorporated into all-female units in which to perform their tasks. They normally worked under an overseeing male officer, as otherwise they frequently incited male resentment. This was mostly due to the fact that women joining the Army, and the military, “entered a formerly all-male world of crude sexist jokes, and faced overt sexual harassment such as groping from their male bosses and men on whom they depended to teach them how the machines worked.” One of the WACs serving abroad noted that

They had WAC operators here with G. I.’s supervising. Any one of the girls here knows far more than their superiors about the work for which they have been trained and are giving excellent performances. They have been continually clashing with the men who apparently consider it beneath their dignity to yield to any form of female superiority.

Many women involved in the various women’s branches of the military faced rude, lewd, and sometimes hostile comments from both civilians and military men. Officially, the military leadership did not support these opinions. Marine Commandant Holcomb made this explicit when he first heard reports of open hostility from male Marines.

Officers and men of the Marine Corps treat members of the Women’s Reserve with disrespect… coarse or even obscene remarks are being made without restraint by male Marines in post exchanges… This conduct… indicates a laxity in discipline which will not be tolerated. Commanding officers will be held responsible.

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49 Ibid., 86.
50 Goldstein, *War and Gender*, 391.
51 Dobie and Lang, *Her War*, 85.
52 Yellin, *Our Mother’s War*, 147.
However, comments from men were still prevalent throughout the training, and at times the service, of Women Marines. Considering the lack of acronym for Women Marines, enlisted male Marines took it upon themselves to come up with one for them. The “BAMs,” or “Big-Ass Marines,” became the demeaning way in which many men referred to the women working in the Marines. Lorena Hermance, a member of the WAC, recalled a similarity of relations between men and women in the Marines and those in the Army. She did not receive outright hostile remarks from men, but she made note of the overall air the men had towards the women. “It’s so obvious that the male officers, American and British, are annoyed to see a woman given so much responsibility. Some of them have given me a pretty hard time.”

Military personnel were not the only opponents to the women joining the military branches. A member of the USO (United Service Organization), Peggy Campbell considered becoming a WAC until her father refused to give her permission because “he did not approve of the ‘environment.’”

Furthermore, the USO itself “portrayed female soldiers and sailors as unfeminine counterpoints to its own womanly junior hostesses… In the view of the SDC [Southern Defense Command], servicewomen were not real women.” Even though there was considerable opposition to women serving in the military during the 1940s, the tasks these women performed and the success they achieved within their branches proved they were capable of living under and serving with the military.

Women in the Navy and Army branches of the military ended the Second World War having made considerable strides in the advancement of women in the military as a whole. Before the war, they were not considered for incorporation. Afterwards, in 1945, the government recognized they had provided valuable service to the military, which had enabled the Army and the Navy to send enlisted men overseas to fight, rather than keeping them in a clerical, non-combatant occupation. The Women Marines, WAVES, and WAC became permanent components of the Marines, Navy, and Army following the

53 Yellin, *Our Mother’s War*, 147.
54 Dobie and Lang, *Her War*, 85.
56 Ibid., 60-61.
cessation of the war. However, the SPARS never gained permanency in the military due to the Coast Guard’s administration being transferred to the Department of the Treasury. Throughout World War II, WAC membership reached 10,000 enlisted women; 90,000 women joined the WAVES; 25,000 served with the Women Marines and SPARS. One of the largest women’s military organizations was the Nurse Corps, who were notably different both on the home front and abroad from the WAC, the WAVES, the Women Marines, and the SPARS.

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57 Goldstein, *War and Gender*, 91; Morden, *Women’s Army Corps*, 38.
58 Yellin, *Our Mothers’ War*, 145.
59 Goldstein, *War and Gender*, 91.
Angels of Mercy

The greatest reward nurses seemed to garner in the whole equation was praise. They were often lauded as “angels of mercy” for taking up such a self-sacrificing, nurturing job. Yet of all the American women in uniform, nurses had the least sheltered experience of the war. Often, it was the most brutal.¹

Lena’s service with the Army Nurse Corps was emblematic of this image of a self-sacrificing nurse, who in reality lived through many different experiences during World War II. Lena R. Gelott was born into a large family in West Peabody, Massachusetts on April 8, 1917.² She attended grammar school, high school, and three years of college, eventually receiving her nursing degree from the T. B. Thomas Hospital in Peabody.³ Her small community had a strong sense of patriotism when World War II began, with many rushing to enlist in the military. Lena’s family, for example, had three members join in separate branches: her brother, Frank, signed on with the Navy; her sister, Rachel, joined the SPARS; and Lena enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC). The ANC, however, was not Lena’s first choice for service. She first applied to join the Navy, but was rejected due to the height minimum. Her service in the Army Nurse Corps, starting on August 3, 1942, totaled three years, five months, and twenty days.⁴

Lena joined the ANC as a Second Lieutenant, even though these nurses’ rankings were not equal to those of the male medics. She remembered her entrance salary as a military nurse being significantly lower than the one she had received working in a civilian hospital.⁵ After being inducted following her enlistment at Fort McKinley, Maine, she was assigned a month later to the 48th Station Hospital in San Francisco. It was in San Francisco she received her military training. She and other nurses were taught more than just military procedures; they received instruction on how to operate flamethrowers, among

¹ Emily Yellin, Our Mothers’ War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II (New York: Free, 2004), 182.  
⁴ “Lena R. Gelott.”  
⁵ Ibid.
other tools. Lena, however, quickly learned that aiming a flamethrower was difficult, as she almost set some observing medical staff members on fire during her turn to practice. Following training, Lena was given multiple immunizations, including smallpox, typhoid, tetanus, cholera, and yellow fever, in anticipation of her departure for the Pacific theatre, though she was not told where she would be arriving once abroad.  

From her first assignment to the end of her service with the ANC, Lena was mobile, moving around in the Pacific theatre of war to different station hospitals and assignments. She first shared a tent with two other nurses, working in a hospital tent on the island of New Caledonia, off the coast of Australia. The nurses there used their equipment sometimes creatively: helmets were used as wash bins and stools. From New Caledonia, Lena set sail to Efate Island in the New Hebrides in January 1943, to help start a new hospital, which opened a month later. The nurses on Efate treated soldiers coming in with wounds sustained from fighting, and diseases contracted by both soldiers and the nurses themselves. Cases of malaria among the nurses stationed on Efate became so numerous, those who were not sick often had to work twelve hour shifts just to treat the number of casualties at the hospital. In December of 1943, Lena moved once again to an orthopedic ward at a hospital in New Zealand, eventually continuing on to Guadalcanal in mid-1944, and ending her service in Tinian in 1945.

Nurses contracting diseases and illnesses while abroad were not uncommon. Although she did not get malaria while stationed in the Pacific, Lena discovered later she had a hookworm, and remembered the treatment being a worse experience than the actual hookworm. Upon returning home to the States at the conclusion of World War II, Lena was admitted as a patient during processing for severe arthritis in her ankle. Thus, she ended her service as an ANC nurse with a bandaged ankle and a bandaged eye from a flying cider during a train ride.

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6 “Lena R. Gelott.”
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
Reminiscing on her time serving with the ANC, Lena remembered the welcome and appreciation she and the other nurses received from the doctors they worked under, the soldiers they treated, and the other military personnel they interacted with. Not only were the officers courteous to the nurses, but the corpsmen were as well. These men were assigned to the wards to help out with the tasks associated with medical treatments. Even though some of them arrived with next to no training, Lena always found the men she worked with, and delegated tasks to, helpful both to her and the patients. It was also not uncommon for Lena and her fellow nurses to be asked to dinner by visiting officers. She laughingly stated that when the women had to choose between dining with the Army and dining with the Navy, they always RSVP’d to the Navy, as they had better quality food.\textsuperscript{10}

While working in Guadalcanal, an Army colonel asked Lena, as their nurse, to present the Purple Heart to four of her patients. Lena decided to make the pinning of the medals even more special for them, requesting they stand on the beach as she gave them out.\textsuperscript{11} After the war, Lena was honorably discharged on January 13, 1946, and continued to work as a civilian nurse. She spent time at both J. B. Thomas Hospital and Boston City Hospital after which she worked as a private nurse. The last position she held before her retirement in 1983 was back in Peabody as a public health nurse.\textsuperscript{12}

Female nurses had played an active role in the American military and its overseas battles well before the Second World War. Even preceding WWI, the military created a nurse corps for both the Army and the Navy to act as medical attachments to the general army.\textsuperscript{13} In 1901 the first Army Nurse Corps (ANC) organization was established in the Medical Department of the regular army, closely followed by the Navy Nurse Corps (NNC) in 1908.\textsuperscript{14} In these units, nurses performed the responsibilities and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10]“Lena R. Gelott.”
\item[11]Ibid.
\item[12]“Lena R. Styles, 94.”
\item[14]The Nurse Corps was seen as one large unit used to describe the nurses in the military. However, women applied, trained, and served in either the Navy or the Army branches.
\end{footnotes}
obligations expected of military service, while retaining their civilian status. The military, in order to
utilize their service but keep them out of combat and war zones, contracted them, giving them few
benefits and no military ranking of their own.\(^\text{15}\) “They were the first group of women officially recognized
as a part of the military, even if they were not recognized as being in the military, only as civilians serving
with it.”\(^\text{16}\)

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{A Nurse flying with evacuated wounded.\(^\text{17}\)}
\end{figure}

\(^{15}\) Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 181.
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
\(^{17}\) “EPACHA Foundation’s Special Tribute to Women in the Military,” EPACHA: Environmental Protection
Alliance and Center for Humanitarian Affairs Foundation, http://www.epacha.org/Pages/Memorial_Day_2011.aspx,
Due to the active roles these women played in the First World War and their contribution to the military, the Army Nurse Corps achieved “relative rank” in 1920.\textsuperscript{18} Whereas before they were incorporated into the military under contracts, Army nurses’ new status in the 1920s allowed them to be commissioned, holding the positions of Chief Nurses, Assistant Directors, Directors, and Superintendents. Although these ranks were different to the ones men held, they were comparable to male designations of Second Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, Captain, and Major, allowing the nurses superiority over some enlisted men. Ranked above sergeants and corporals, these females struggled to be acknowledged by men in the military until WWII.\textsuperscript{19} Navy nurses received these relative ranks later, in 1944.\textsuperscript{20} The concession of relative rank was followed by further allowances and steps towards female equality for the nurses in the Army compared to the general male soldiers. During the 1940s nurses gained retirement pensions as well as disability pensions.\textsuperscript{21}

The need for nurses was consistent throughout World War II. Only six months after Pearl Harbor, close to ten thousand women had already enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps.\textsuperscript{22} While many of the enlistees after the attack on Pearl Harbor cited nationalistic reasons for joining the Nurse Corps, other women, like Agnes Shum, knew that there were more reasons than just duty to the country and the war effort. She decided upon the NNC after graduating “from nurses’ training in Rochester, Minnesota… because it offered more security than civilian nursing,” where she remained until the conclusion of the war, eventually becoming a flight nurse.\textsuperscript{23} Following the entrance of the United States into the Second World War, due to the role female nurses played from the outset of the conflict both in Hawaii and at home, new legislative bills passed through Congress concerning their status compared to men’s. On June 16, 1942,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{yellin}Yellin, \textit{Our Mothers’ War}, 182.
\bibitem{morden1}Morden, \textit{Women’s Army Corps}, 4.
\bibitem{yellin1}Yellin, \textit{Our Mothers’ War}, 185.
\end{thebibliography}
Congress entitled nurses to pay adjustments; they began to receive pay and allowances equal to those of male officers of relative ranks.24

As the war continued, and nursing shortages both occurred in civilian as well as military hospitals, Congress passed another bill that promoted the enlistment of women to the Nurse Corps who had no prior experience. Dubbed the Cadet Nurses, these women received free tuition if willing to be trained as nurses; prompting women who could either not afford to pay for medical training, or had not yet enrolled in civilian programs.25 Leading up to D-Day, however, even the influx of women the Cadet Nurses brought in barely offset the anticipated need for medical assistance the Normandy invasion would have. President Franklin Roosevelt and Congress, estimating once again a shortage of nurses, considered drafting women to join the ANC in 1944.26 This proposed amendment to the Selective Service Act to draft women into the Nurse Corps and the Cadet Nurses was defeated by only one vote, based on the argument that it would be “singling out nurses,” from women.27 By the end of the war in 1945, an estimated total of seventy-four thousand nurses, including more than five hundred African American women, served in the American military, either in the ANC or the NNC, 201 of who perished during their service to the ANC.28

The need for medical assistance for the troops fighting both in the Pacific and in Europe forced the military to aggressively advertise for women to join the Nurse Corps and the Nurse Cadets during WWII. Posters were placed in conspicuous places, with a variety of images, themes, and words. Many of the posters created to recruit women had an overtly nationalistic tone. As women were never drafted during WWII, these advertisements were the perceived only way to encourage women to increase their numbers in the military. One such poster depicted a nurse receiving her nursing cap and, therefore,

24 “Army Nurse Corp.”
25 Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 182.
26 Ibid., 185-86.
position in the Corps, by a male officer (Figure A). A neat coiffeur and stylish makeup promoted her femininity, thus counteracting the public resentment to women serving in the military. The poster worked to reinforce the acceptability of nurses as the medium women could contribute to the war effort while serving in the military. Nursing, viewed as a traditional female role, was actively reinforced by both the feminine features of the woman receiving her uniform hat, and her subservience to the unseen male officer. The nurse was both underneath the unseen male figure donning her cap, and looking up to him, indicating she was there to serve, rather than simply work to increase her own career. The image and the words in the advertisement combined to portray the message that women nurses were needed to aid the men in fighting, to serve the country and the war effort, rather than promoting their career goals. “Your Country Needs You,” written at the bottom reminded women nurses that the war effort required all the support it could gain, including their medical knowledge, and the idea of a total war continuously brought itself to the forefront of women’s minds.\(^\text{29}\)

Service to the country, coupled with a sense of duty to the men fighting at the front, further induced young women to join the Nurse Corps. Some posters went so far as to depict the care-giving nature nurses filled while performing their tasks in the military, claiming that through military service, women would remain true to their feminine nature (Figure B).

As opposed to the Nurse Corps, the Nurse Cadets received free education upon enlistment. The marked difference between the Cadets and the Nurse Corps, this distinction was emphasized on the posters for the Cadets, as a promotion to encourage enlistment. Under the Cadet Nurse Corps curriculum, women could learn the nursing profession with no prior medical experience. The Cadet Nurse Corps created advertisements that were themed, depicting the same information, with different women photographed to incorporate all images, and hopefully, communicate the message that everyone could join the war effort, benefitting both themselves and their country during the war. Wearing the official

regulation uniforms, Cadet Nurses were shown in both their dress uniforms, as well as the white uniforms they would wear while on duty in service hospitals. The images of the women were stereotypically glamourized, as the military wanted to avoid criticism from the public concerning the incorporation of female forces into the Army and their militarization during the war. Women had calm, gentle demeanors in the posters, depicting the white, middle class ideal becoming a nurse would allow women to achieve, to prove to the public that the tasks the military was asking for women to perform were ones they were fully capable of accomplishing while remaining feminine. As such, the images of the nurses combined active contribution to the war effort in “a Proud Profession,” with a historic background (Figure C).\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} “Enlist in a Proud Profession.”
Figure A: An Ad for the Nurse Corps.\footnote{“Become a Nurse: Your Country Needs You.”}
Figure B: To join the Nurse Corps was to save lives.\textsuperscript{32}

Figure C: Many posters for the Nurse Corps called nursing a “Proud Profession.”

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Upon application to the ANC, the women enlistees needed to meet multiple, specific requirements before admittance. Volunteers to the Nurse Corps had to be registered nurses with two years of hospital training and experience, a US citizen, unmarried, and at least eighteen years old. The enlistment term was for the duration of the war and six months following the cessation of conflict, to accommodate returning veterans of the war with any injuries they received in the last days of fighting. Originally, applicants were recruited through the Red Cross. However, as the war continued, the War Department itself took over their procurement, effectively eliminating the civilian middle man, to make the system more streamlined and direct. The realization as the war progressed that the military needed a larger nurse force caused the Army to begin admitting married nurses in late 1942. The Navy, however, was more obstinate about refusing entrance of married women, possibly because their nurses were not spread as thinly in both theatres as the ANC nurses. It was not until 1944 that they allowed married women in their ranks. Even so, only women already members of the Navy Nurse Corps could marry; new applicants still faced rejection based on marital status.

Cadet Nurses had different requirements, as they would not be registered nurses before volunteering for service. Instead, they were required to be high school graduates between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five. The lower age requirement of a Cadet Nurse, as opposed to an Army or Navy Nurse, targeted more high school graduates, offering the Cadets covered living costs and stipends upon entry in the program. Their voluntary service lasted for the duration of the war, so the military could receive benefits from paying for the women to learn the nursing occupation. With this training program; the Cadet Nurse Corps, the military received 124,000 women volunteers. The program continued until 1948.

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35 Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 185.
36 Weatherford, History of Women in America, 21.
37 Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 182.
After arriving on base, nurses and Cadet Nurses typically received two weeks’ training on military administration and organization, along with sanitation, and ward and clinic nursing, but this training was extended to four weeks in 1943. Eula M. Awbrey Sforza remembered in an interview her drilling in military matters, such as tent set up, digging foxholes, and latrine protocols. Women accepted into the Nurse Corps with previous nursing credentials rarely received further medical training, as was Edna Haertig’s experience in 1942. Entering as a Second Lieutenant, she was given the necessary officer training, but quickly continued on to Europe and then North Africa relying on her civilian nursing knowledge. As the war continued, and nurses were nearer to combat areas, outdoor training was introduced with more frequency for the women anticipating service overseas. By June 1944 women were put through obstacle courses and taught how to shoot, in case the need arose while in the field. Going through obstacle courses also became a way to test the entering nurses for their fitness and endurance. For the most part, male officers in charge of sending the nurses through the drills expected a significant difference between their times and those of men. Males were expected to complete the courses in twelve minutes while officers “expected no better than thirty minutes,” for women. Charlotte McFall Mallon, assigned to the 828th Medical Air Evacuation Squadron, remembered also having “to qualify on the firing range, learning to use a .45-caliber revolver. (They) were told it was against the Geneva Convention, but the reason was that flight nurses were in the forward areas, sometimes picking up patients within hours of the actual fighting.” Thus, although there was opposition based from the public concerning women becoming soldiers, nurses often worked in unsafe areas, following closely behind the soldiers fighting on the front, a consideration that required their knowledge of combat and self-defense.

41 “Army Nurse Corps.”
42 Dobie and Lang, Her War, 44.
43 Fessler, No Time For Fear, 70-71.
Nurses were stationed in stateside military hospitals until they served abroad. As such, they were placed under the supervision of a male doctor, and forgo the military basic training while filling the general duty tasks within the United States. Time spent at stateside hospitals was occupied by working and training to increase medical knowledge for the Nurse Cadets, and a few previously qualified nurses themselves. The actual number of Army and Navy nurses who stayed in the US throughout the war was over half. They cared for personnel and military dependents, as well as taught male medical corpsmen to assist nurses out in the field. Living quarters varied across the assigned station hospitals. Eula Aubrey Sforza remembered being billeted in both barracks and later tents during her service at the 12th Field Hospital in Brownwood, Texas. Social life for nurses at their assigned hospitals was limited. Most men surrounding them were married, while all the nurses, in the beginning, were single, as per requirement. On top of this, corpsmen and enlisted men were not allowed to date officers. Since registered nurses entering the Army Nurse Corps enlisted as Second Lieutenants, this regulation effectively limited the ability of nurses to socialize with servicemen.

The members of the Nurse Corps carried out diverse assignments. Not only did they function in home hospitals and wards, they were also assigned to overseas military hospitals and combat areas. The Army Nurse Corps allocated its resources to multiple different units, including the general army and the air evacuation squadrons. The Navy Nurses were allowed to serve on military hospital ships. Allowed to go abroad almost immediately after the establishment of the Corps, neither Navy nurses nor Army nurses were limited to stateside stations like many other women’s branches in the military. Nurses were sent to England, France, Italy, North Africa, Australia, India, and the Pacific theatres, as well as service in active combat zones. These different locations were steadily added to the opportunities nurses could have upon enlistment in the Nurse Corps. Assignments in Europe and on the American continent were the first appointments available to nurses, followed by departure for combat zones in North Africa and the Pacific

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44 Yellin, *Our Mothers’ War*, 182.
45 “Eula M. Awbrey Sforza.”
46 “Lena R. Gelott.”
in late 1942. It was not until 1945 that the first class of Navy flight nurses graduated and transferred to the Pacific theater.\textsuperscript{48}

Disregarding the American belief that women were not to be involved in the actual fighting of the war, nor were they to be near combat zones, Army nurses frequently were sent to the front lines in both the European and the Mediterranean fronts to set up station hospitals “in abandoned buildings or schools or even bombed-out, abandoned hospitals.” These station hospitals operated as the first stop for wounded soldiers, who only continued on to general hospitals if they needed further, specialized care. Within hours of disembarking in North Africa, Army nurse, Lieutenant Ruth Haskell, took up duty in a makeshift hospital in an abandoned house, while dodging sniper fire.\textsuperscript{49} Surgeon general, Norman T. Kirk, confirmed in an article for \textit{The American Magazine} in May 1944:

\begin{quote}
“This is the first war in which it has been necessary to take our army nurses… to within 3 to 6 miles of the front. On occasion the nurses have been caught in the actual fighting, where, under shelling and bombing, they have conducted themselves as coolly as the most hardened veterans.”\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

When reflecting on her experience in the army, Grace Peterson noticed a struggle between the US trying to keep nurses away from combat and the reality of wartime needs. “When people (argued) about women being in combat, I think how silly they (were), because we already were. In France we had 88mm artillery shells flying right over our heads.”\textsuperscript{51} Army nurses filled in on hospital trains, while Navy nurses worked on hospital ships, clearly marked as medical vessels to hopefully avoid attacks. Even so, some of the ships with Navy nurses were still bombed during the war.\textsuperscript{52} The nurses who took on the greatest risks served as flight nurses on the airplanes used to evacuate wounded soldiers from the front lines. As opposed to hospital ships, evacuation planes also transported cargo to unload for the soldiers on land, and

\textsuperscript{48} Fessler, \textit{No Time For Fear}, 9.
\textsuperscript{49} Yellin, \textit{Our Mothers’ War}, 193.
\textsuperscript{50} Norman T. Kirk, as quoted in Yellin, \textit{Our Mothers’ War}, 194.
\textsuperscript{51} Fessler, \textit{No Time for Fear}, 169.
\textsuperscript{52} Yellin, \textit{Our Mothers’ War}, 190.
therefore could not display hospital markings, making the nurses and pilots on board susceptible to enemy fire.\textsuperscript{53}

Women assigned to overseas service rarely knew their destinations until arrival. Many Army nurses cited the secrecy with which the Army treated their assignments, even while they were travelling on ships to their station. This occurred for both nurses going to European and the Pacific theatres. Often, nurses travelled between stations hospitals and assignments frequently, so their first assignment overseas was not the one they ended their term of service performing.\textsuperscript{54}

The need for manpower, or womanpower, intensified as the war progressed. To accommodate this, nurses were rushed through domestic training, in order to be sent abroad more quickly to serve in overseas hospitals. Many Army nurses received their immunization shots for international regions while in transit, rather than at home. Mary DeLauder received her first immunization—typhus—onboard the \textit{RMS Scythia}, travelling to France to aid in the D-Day invasion. She later received smallpox and cholera vaccines as her time in Europe increased.\textsuperscript{55} On her way to the Pacific, Captain Ruth Louise Kinzler received immunization shots on board her transport ship.\textsuperscript{56}

Assignments varied depending on the skill level of the nurse and the immediate need in her hospital. Some, like Edna Haertig, travelled frequently to fill slots in new station hospitals, though performed relatively the same tasks at each hospital, while some nurses stayed in place but changed up their duties.\textsuperscript{57} During her service, Edna worked in Algeria, North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany.\textsuperscript{58} Others, like Helen DeKorp, worked in specific wards, such as the orthopedic, officers’, and shock

\textsuperscript{53} Yellin, \textit{Our Mothers’ War}, 190-91.
\textsuperscript{57} “Ruth Louise Kenzeler.”
\textsuperscript{58} “Edna L. Haertig.”
wards. Lena Gelott experienced both numerous, varied tasks and specific wards, graduating from a California surgical nurse, to treating severe injuries, malaria, and dengue fever in New Caledonia, to working in a New Zealand orthopedic ward. Nurses stationed in England received and treated severely injured air crews for the most part, as well as soldiers coming in from fighting on the continent. Mary DeLauder, upon enlistment, had prior experience heading up medical wards from her civilian employment. Partly because of this, when assigned to the European theatre, after filling in on temporary duty to treat the overflow patients from D-Day, she became the Head Nurse of a surgical ward, as well as the block nurse—in charge of five wards—of her station hospital. Assignments in the Pacific or Europe determined the theme of injuries the nurses encountered. Treatments in the Pacific theatre were just as commonly for a disease, like malaria or dengue fever, as injuries sustained from fighting. For every battle casualty in the Pacific, hospitals admitted an estimated five patients for disease.

Nurses stationed in Europe also treated civilian casualties and foreign soldiers. Some stayed on after the end of the war to give aid to victims of the concentration camps. Women like June Wandrey ended their assignments abroad in the European theatre by helping to care “for the ‘corpse-like patients’ who had been liberated from the concentration camp at Dachau.” Many had the opportunity to stay on after the cessation of fighting to help the survivors of the concentration camps, like Helen DeKorp. Other women, like Eula Aubrey Sforza treated German civilian casualties as well as American soldiers.

The Pacific theatre involved more danger than simply threats from fighting. Nurses themselves, while treating diseases of soldiers, contracted them as well. LaVonne Telshaw Camp remembered “we all had bouts of dysentery, a few women had malaria, and I know of one nurse who had been discharged with

60 “Lena R. Gelott.”
62 “Mary A. W. DeLauder.”
63 Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 191.
64 Dobie and Lang, Her War, 62.
65 “Helen I. Hyatt DeKorp.”
66 “Eula M. Aubrey Sforza.”
active tuberculosis.” They stayed on a constant state of alert, and sometimes wild animals prowled around their tents and hospitals while in the Pacific.

Although nurses were trained in many aspects of providing medical assistance to wounded soldiers coming off the war front, they still faced some restrictions on the tasks they performed. For example, women in the Pacific were banned from treating Japanese patients. The Japanese patients Lena Gelott encountered were constantly guarded and restrained, indicating that even wounded, the Army never trusted their aggressors in the Pacific, whom they viewed as barbaric and less than humans. IVs and blood work had to be performed by male doctors as per requirement, but some doctors broke this prohibition, in favor of teaching the women nurses to allow for the station hospital to be more efficient.

Many of the enlisted nurses saw differences between the two branches of the Nurse Corps. Army nurses generally viewed their terms of service as having been more rough and tumble, more make shift, than Navy nurses because of the rugged living quarters in which they could potentially be quartered. Many women, when reminiscing about their service during the war, recalled the marked disparities between the two separate military branches. Audrey Lampier of the ANC recalled being “very envious of the navy nurses who were dressed more formally, wearing skirts and jackets. All they had to carry were their purses,” while she and her fellow nurses carried all their luggage on their own backs. After 1945 and the entrance of Navy flight nurses in the Pacific, women assigned to Medical Air Evacuation Squadrons also cited some jealousy:

(They) had been flying there for a long time, proving that air evacuation was the efficient way to take care of patients; we broke ground in every way for nurses in combat zones. When they [navy flight nurses] came over in early 1945, they had nice-fitting uniforms to fly in, while we wore men’s khakis, and it seemed that they were getting all the glory.

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68 Ibid., 192.  
69 “Lena R. Gelott.”  
70 Ibid.  
71 Fessler, *No Time For Fear*, 35.  
72 Ibid., 72.
The Army nurses were not the only women to notice the differences between the two groups of nurses. Helen Wentz Miller, one of the many Navy nurses during the war, mentioned during her overseas assignment:

I met some army nurses there because I would stay overnight in their barracks, and I found out why they envied us. They were eating off tin plates, with rationed food, while we had nice white tablecloths and fresh food. I remember they couldn’t get things like Kotex, so we would give them a supply.  

Navy nurses encountered a more varied male response to their service abroad than did Army nurses. Rosanna Comes Jones, along with the other nurses sailing with her to Guam to join the Navy Fleet Hospital 103,111, remembered

Some troops on board our ship mutinied because they found out we weren’t headed to the States, but back to the battlefield. Until everything was brought under control, we nurses had to be escorted everywhere on the ship because the mutineers resented us as officers, among their other gripes.

Male soldiers’ receptions to the military nurses were for the most part welcoming. They supported the medical assistance and care-giving the nurses provided and the nurses rarely encountered hostility. Although both branches experienced personal shortages, the general consensus among Navy nurses was that, “this same shortage of women meant that corpsmen on the hospital ships did most of the dull routine, while the nurses were more nearly administrators. In the NNC nurses had the opportunity to ignore the bedpans and be truly professionals.” Army nurses, like Jean Truckey, following advancing American troops liberating French territories after D-Day, cited the nurses’ positive reception: “they all [treated] the nurses with consideration—the officers and soldiers both. And the fighting men are delighted to see us.” Juanita Rednond, stationed in Manila and the Bataan Peninsula, agreed that the men appreciated working with the Army nurses, that the women had been “brave soldiers.”

73 Fessler, No Time For Fear, 148.
74 Ibid., 45.
75 Weatherford, History of Women in America, 11-12.
76 Dobie and Lang, Her War, 60.
77 Ibid., 68.
report for reception of the Army nurses by soldiers was stated succinctly by Kirk; when soldiers saw the nurses in hospitals, there was a
depth glow of pleasure, the sense of security and the feeling of home that comes with the sight of these American women (which was) more important to recovery than any psychological factor in the course of their treatment. (Responsible for saving a majority of wounded soldiers was) the tender and sympathetic and indefatigable attention given these wounded men by the women at the front.\textsuperscript{78}

The distribution of uniforms and equipment nurses received had to be coordinated following their induction into the war effort. Army nurses originally received uniforms left over from WWI, rather than new uniforms. An estimated 50 percent of the army nurses in service during WWII never received the olive-drab general service uniform introduced in 1943, instead making due with the dark blue dress from WWI.\textsuperscript{79} For some nurses, like First Lieutenant Helen Hyatt DeKorp, as the uniform supply struggled to meet their demand, the modern olive-drab uniforms were only received once they had been assigned overseas and reached their destination, causing them to use the older blue uniforms throughout the trip.\textsuperscript{80} Others, like Captain Ruth Louise Kinzeler and Mary DeLawder, received their uniforms piece-by-piece as the parts became available. DeLawder only acquired wool clothing once she had already arrived for duty in late fall in France and served for a couple months wearing a uniform designed for warmer weather.\textsuperscript{81}

In general, however, the standard issue for Army Nurses going on overseas active duty included a

huge amount of uniforms and supplies… to carry:
Blue Uniforms
White Uniforms
Blue Seersucker shirtdress uniforms
Overcoats with zipper linings
Navy blue caps lined with red
Duty caps
Dress uniforms caps
Clothing to wear in case of gas attack, including one-piece underwear, and coveralls with a cap that covered the head and neck.

\textsuperscript{78} Norman T. Kirk, as quoted in Yellin, \textit{Our Mothers’ War}, 195.
\textsuperscript{79} “Army Nurse Corps.”
\textsuperscript{80} “Helen I. Hyatt DeKorp.”
\textsuperscript{81} “Ruth Louise Kinzeler”; “Mary A. W. DeLauder.”
Two musette bags, [knapsacks with shoulder strap, one for clothes and the other to carry cosmetics, toothbrushes, etc.]

Bedroll [piece of canvas that could be used as a ground cover for sleeping, and we rolled up our civilian things in it, carrying it by straps on the outside.]

Two army blankets, rolled tightly.\(^{82}\)

Army Nurses’ uniforms also went through different designs during World War II, so the women had many options of clothing. One nurse remembered she had four different uniforms during that time. Going on the ship we wore blue skirts with a blue blouse and a dark blue jacket. Then we changed to olive drab uniforms. The white uniform we wore on duty was changed to a brown-and-white seersucker wraparound uniform. It was always breezy and we had to hold onto our hats, the skirt, a purse, and anything else we were carrying.\(^{83}\)

Nurses serving in the air evacuation squadrons in the beginning had more utilitarian uniforms for the aircraft. Dorothy Lonergan Jouvenat recalled “wearing makeshift uniforms, because we wore slacks that nothing matched. Several of us had uniforms made out of our overcoats or capes.”\(^{84}\) As the military gained more and more nursing recruits, it became more adept at distributing uniforms across the various assignments for the Army nurses. As women were relieved of duty and new recruits came in to take their places among the air evacuation squadrons, the nurses began to arrive with regulation uniforms, including a pair of wings pin.\(^{85}\) Right before her departure to England and service in Europe, F. Evangeline Blauvelt received the new Army uniforms to replace the WWI blue ones.\(^{86}\)

The housing options for nurses in the military depended on their assignment’s location. Women in North Africa, like Edna Haertig, lived in various situations, including tents and university dorm rooms.\(^{87}\) Helen Hyatt DeKorp lived in a former girls’ school while in French Morocco, but upon transfer to Tunisia shared a tent. However, the tents the nurses in her unit occupied were better than the tiny ‘pup’

\(^{82}\) Fessler, *No Time For Fear*, 131-32.
\(^{83}\) Ibid., 24-25.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 135.
\(^{85}\) Ibid.
\(^{86}\) “F. Evangeline Blauvelt”
\(^{87}\) “Edna L. Haertig.”
tents enlisted men had. Some nurses on the European continent were billeted in buildings, as opposed to tents, though the conditions of the buildings were always an open question. DeKorp, while in Italy, was billeted in buildings with the windows shattered from bombs and covered with cloth. In France nurses had had some of the most varied billeting options, including former barracks, tents, top floors of the hospitals they worked in, and other buildings, while nurses in Germany generally occupied tents. Some nurses stationed in England, like F. Evangeline Blauvelt, lived in structures that were little more than huts, with folding beds and separated baths for the duration of the war. Others, such as Eula Aubrey Sforza lived in comfortable quarters with plumbing installed.

Housing in the Pacific theatre could be just as diverse as that in the European theatre, highly dependent on availability and the destructive reach of the war. Lena Gelott remembered living in wooden buildings in New Caledonia, while Captain Ruth Louise Kinzeler lived in the New Melbourne Hospital Nurses’ Home while it was still under construction. Margaret Richey Raffa, of the 801st Medical Air Evacuation Squadron recalled that during her stay abroad, “there were twenty-four nurses, and millions of mosquitoes, all living in one tent.”

While overseas, nurses were restricted to Army bases to ensure their safety. However, many did travel with what time off they obtained. Nurses stationed in North Africa and Europe toured neighboring cities and countries when allowed. While sightseeing, as Edna Haertig confirmed, the Army dictated how much they could spend and contribute to the war-affected economies. In general, nurses cited the locals and male officers as being opening and inviting towards their presence at the station hospital. Haertig remembered officers would frequently treat the nurses to dinner parties. Local women often “organized teas and dances,” to which military women were invited, “for relief from the tedium of barrack life,” and

88 “Helen I. Hyatt DeKorp.”
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.; “Mary A. W. DeLauder”; “Eula M. Awbrey Sforza.”
91 “F. Evangeline Blauvelt”; “Eula M. Awbrey Sforza.”
92 “Lena R. Gelott”; “Ruth Louise Kinzeler.”
93 Fessler, No Time For Fear, 31.
94 “Edna L. Haertig.”
95 Ibid.
encouraged their travelling the surrounding areas by offering to guide them on tours themselves.\textsuperscript{96} Whether or not these were USO (United Service Organization) events, coordinated by junior hostesses, and created with the goal of preventing them from attending the larger events to which the enlisted men were invited, the nurses and other military women involved were honored at the attention they were given.\textsuperscript{97}

Once off American soil, rules, such as the prohibition against dating enlisted men became more lax. No one reprimanded Dorothy Carter Morris when she began dating a soldier, until the couple wanted to get married. “The chief nurse didn’t like it, and two weeks before the wedding she had (Dorothy) transferred to the Twenty-Second on Maui. That chief nurse [on Maui] was very understanding and cooperative, and (they) were married.”\textsuperscript{98} By the months leading up to the end of the war, the restrictions on dating were no longer in force, allowing for further freedom between the nurses and the soldiers stationed in the same arenas.\textsuperscript{99} However, protocols the couple had to adhere to remained lengthy in nature. Jean Kolczak Sciora and her husband had to first “go through a lot of processing, both by the army and the church. The army made (them) sign an agreement that (they) wouldn’t embarrass the army, because an officer was marrying an enlisted man.”\textsuperscript{100} When nurses did marry, many of them had to hunt for appropriate wedding clothing, or wear their service uniforms. Doris Francis Backinger recalled her “attendant, Nellie Ostenland, and (she) wore [their dress uniforms] for the ceremony.” Many of the nurses who married were transferred or discharged soon after their marriage. Backinger “went back to the mainland to be discharged and have (their) first child” in 1944.\textsuperscript{101} Rosedith Van Hoorebeck Hawkins was immediately transferred overseas upon her marriage. Upon leaving, her chief nurse told her she “was

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\textsuperscript{96} Weatherford, \textit{History of Women in America}, 57. \\
\textsuperscript{98} Fessler, \textit{No Time For Fear}, 25. \\
\textsuperscript{99} “F. Evangeline Blauvelt.” \\
\textsuperscript{100} Fessler, \textit{No Time For Fear}, 227. \\
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 22.
\end{flushleft}
guilty of fraternizing with an enlisted man,” to which she responded: “I never heard of marriage being called fraternizing.”

In comparison to women, male medics in the Army during WWII encountered different experiences both in training and active duty overseas. Men typically underwent a longer training period, as some were even forced out of their infantry unit’s ranks to become the certified medic for their unit. Male medics, as opposed to women, first received military and combat training with the unit they had been assigned to, and then underwent medical training. Included in the medical knowledge they gained were basic facts about anatomy, physiology, hygiene, sanitation, disease prevention, ward procedure, management, emergency medical treatment, first aid, and emergence care. Many of these procedures were also taught to women, indicating a similarity of experience between male medics’ training and women nurses’ training. However, disregarding the Cadet Nurse Corps, the requirement for women to already be certified nurses allowed their training period on these subjects to be significantly shorter, as they knew the majority of the information. The last section of training male medics underwent was experience in a ward, learning its operation and techniques required for them. In general, this time would be spent under the tutelage of a qualified nurse, frequently female, increasing the prominence female nurses gained in the military medical field.

Men trained in first aid care, drafted into the army with no prior medical qualifications, were often to become combat medics. Combat medics, while in the field, were expected to uphold sanitary measures and dental treatment, while providing preventative medical and emergency surgical procedures for the unit they were assigned. They frequently filled in as hospital quarterlies, litter bearers, and ambulance drivers when not in the field. More so than female nurses, male medics performed their

102 Fessler, No Time For Fear, 54.
104 “Eugene J. Glazer.”
duties closer to the line of fire. They filled spots on hospital trains, transporting wounded soldiers out of the war zone, to the station hospitals women would be operating, and worked to dress injuries sustained by soldiers immediately after they received them during battles.  

In total, women served in higher numbers during the war in both the Army and Navy Nurse Corps. Because of the nurses’ continuous and outstanding service to the military and the American war effort, the Nurse Corps was made a full military branch on April 16, 1947. WWII and the contribution female nurses gave to the military made considerable strides towards increasing female nurses’ prestige and opportunities following the war. Female nurses had an entirely new career path opened to them in the form of the military’s medical positions. One other military branch for women requiring previous experience, the Women Airforce Service Pilots, ended the war with comparably fewer benefits than the women in the Nurse Corps.

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107 “Army Nurse Corps.”
108 Weatherford, Women in America, 21.
“Clipped Wings”

Yet the fact remains: women who flew for the military in World War II defied more than just gravity when they took to the skies in military training planes, fighters, and bombers. They defied the prevailing social mind-set that said women were not capable of making their own decisions and taking full responsibility for their own fate. A pilot must do both.¹

Bernice Falk was one of these women who took the initiative to learn how to fly and contribute during WWII as a WASP (Women’s Airforce Service Pilot). She was born in 1921 in Bradley Beach, New Jersey, but grew up in Montclair, New Jersey after her family moved there when she was two. Upon graduation from high school in 1938, the ongoing Great Depression meant that her family could not pay for Bernice to continue her education at a college or university. However, while looking into night school, so she could work a full time job during the day, Bernice signed up for a private pilot’s license program offered by the Newark College of Engineering. This led to a lifetime dedicated to flying numerous types of planes in a variety of situations.

Following her graduation from the pilot’s license program, Bernice continued to seek aviation experience. In the early 1940s, air space in the northern part of New Jersey was reserved for the military, so instead, on her weekends Bernice took Greyhound buses to a private instructor in Pennsylvania to gain more flying hours. It was there that her friends coined her nickname “Bee,” because up in the air, she “looked like a bumblebee.” In 1943 she was still taking flying lessons when she heard about the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots program. Bernice and five other female pilots also flying with her at the airfield had the required thirty-five hours of experience, and so decided to apply to the WASP, interviewing in Newark, New Jersey. All five of the women were accepted and journeyed down together to Sweetwater,

Texas, where the WASP base was located, paying all of their own travelling expenses while on the two days’ journey to the middle of Texas.

Once on the base, Bernice discovered the other WASPs came from all walks of life, including acting, clerical work, teaching, and nursing. They were assigned alphabetically by last name to barracks, living six women to one room, sharing one bathroom among twelve trainees. Since the bathroom for a dozen women was relatively small: there were two commodes, two showers, and two sinks, the WASPs learned quickly how to share close quarters with one another and find alternate times to use the facilities. Bernice remembered she would arise for morning muster at 6 AM, slip clothing on over her pajamas, appear at roll call, go to breakfast, and then return to the barracks to use the facilities.

Training at Avenger Field in Sweetwater had two main components: for half the day, women were occupied with ground schooling, learning about different types of aircraft, mathematics, navigation, and even Morse code. For the rest of the day, they would fly with an aviation instructor. During the time Bernice spent in Sweetwater, there were usually four WASPs assigned to one male instructor. The WASP program began training women pilots on the PT-17 (Stearman), then moving on to the AT-6 with a higher horsepower rating than the Stearman, finishing with the BT-13, in which they conducted instrument training. Bee and her class only attended ground schooling for the first two weeks they were in Sweetwater because the women in the previous class had lost flying hours due to bad weather. The WASPs in the class ahead of Bernice were given priority with the flight instructors so they could finish their instruction and graduate. With the spare time this accorded Bee and her peers, they organized and put on a show about their first impressions of Avenger Field. Calling it the “Eager Beaver Show;” the base liked the performance so much the participants were asked to present it at nearby Camp Bartley (a

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men’s aviation base), then later asked to travel in order to perform at more bases. However, the WASPs collectively rejected this proposal, as it meant they would have to forgo WASP training.\textsuperscript{5}

Bee recalled that one of the last stages of training included the student and instructor switching roles for a flight. When it came time for her turn, Bee decided that in order to properly become the instructor and her teacher to become the student, they needed to trade helmets. Unfortunately, her helmet was too small for her instructor and his too large for her. Up in the air, as Bee was attempting to demonstrate how to do a loop, the helmet fell down in front of her eyes. Nonetheless, she passed the test.

After graduation from training, Bernice hoped to be assigned to the ferrying squadron so that she could pilot a large variety of planes, depending on what type needed to be moved across the country. Instead, she was assigned to an aircraft training facility in Pecos, Texas. In Pecos, she mostly flew UC-78s and AT-17s that had underwent maintenance work and needed to be tested to ensure their engines were operating smoothly.

Following the war and the disbanding of the WASP program, Bernice struggled to keep a job in aviation. First applying to but being rejected to pilot for airlines and aircraft manufacturers, she taught aviation on a freelance basis in New Jersey. Then, Bernice tried her hands at ferrying private planes between airfields, graduating to beginning a plane dealership contracted with the aircraft manufacturer Cessna for a year. She shifted gears once again to partner with eight male pilots and start an aviation school in New Jersey. When their runway had to be shortened because of road developments, Bernice left and went to work with a company representing India in buying plane parts in the United States. Eventually, Bee met Joe Haydu, who used planes to tow advertisement banners (an emerging use for planes), eventually creating a banner towing business with him.

Bernice decreased her involvement with piloting aircraft when she and Joe married in 1951, and had three children in succession. However, she and Joe still participated in aircraft shows, and Bee

\textsuperscript{5} “Bernice “Bee” Haydu.”
continued to involve herself with the WASP, who had continued as an organization called “The Order of Fifinella.” As president of the Order, elected in 1975, Bernice organized and helped unify the dispersed WASPs across the country during the campaign to retroactively give the WASP veteran status for their service in WWII. She had the honor of witnessing President Jimmy Carter sign the WASP veteran’s bill into law on November 23, 1977.

The use of American women to ferry and test planes during World War II followed the precedent set by Great Britain, which allowed women to enlist in the Royal Air Force in their own unit, the

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6 “Bernice “Bee” Haydu”; “Bernice “Bee” Falk Haydu 44-7.”
Women’s Royal Air Force in 1939. Jacqueline Cochran, a pilot herself, having observed and helped to facilitate British women in their flight duties in Great Britain, petitioned the US government and military to incorporate female pilots into the AAF (Army Air Forces) in 1941 to aid in ferrying aircraft and other non-combat duties. The initial proposal required a significant amount of research on the part of Cochran as well as her supporters, surveying the number of women who held pilot’s licenses, the number of women willing to undergo an amount of military training under the direction of the AAF Flying Training Command, and gaining further support for the program. The first results concluded that of the nearly three thousand women across America with pilot’s licenses, only one hundred could be considered prospective applicants and participants because of their flying experience. Due to the additional required military training and the shortage of planes when the use of women pilots was first considered in 1941, rather than incorporate female pilots directly into the AAF, the Army conceived a training program to utilize a larger number of women that would otherwise not qualify for incorporation. The decision to create a training program determined the hiring of female pilots on a civilian basis to ferry planes, as it would enable the Army to militarize male pilots who remained in non-combat roles on the home front.

Even before Pearl Harbor, a recommendation by the Commanding Officer of the Ferry Command proposed the women’s pilot project to higher authorities in early fall of 1941 under the presumption that women would alleviate the need for male pilots to work in continental air traffic tasks. However, this plan was rejected with the arguments that not enough planes were produced at the current time to withstand an influx of female pilots, and male pilots could still easily fill both military and domestic needs. Piloting was seen as a masculine field, and the use of planes in the military was new, meaning the incorporation of women into the AAF created unease among military officials. Because of this, government and military knew the program would be placed under public criticism without an all-encompassing and preemptive

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regulatory system for the women pilots that would ensure that their behavior and habits would complement female nature.10

While considering the initiative brought to the military for the women pilots’ incorporation, the manpower shortage the war brought to the United States finally swayed legislators and commanders of the Army. In the eyes of many influential Americans, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, they were “in a war and [they needed] to fight it with all [their] ability and every weapon possible. Women pilots, in this particular case, [were] a weapon waiting to be used.”11 In order to allow more men to fly in combat overseas, Congress agreed to the incorporation of female aviators to pilot “all types of aircraft within the continental limits of the United States…. Thereby releasing such men for overseas service.”12 Since many qualified, trained, and experienced men were being used as ferryers, rather than the combat pilots the military needed, the use of women in this aspect was seen as a status threat to the men still operating under a civilian status with the AAF who did not want their positions on the home front usurped by an increase in female pilots on their base.13

The training programs set up aimed at answering a number of questions regarding women’s ability to operate planes, and by extension, large machinery. Endemic across the war effort were problems such as fatigue, strain, and flight emergencies that the military did not know if the women would be able to cope with. Along with that, many brought up the question of appropriateness of women operating aircraft when considering factors “in connection with physiology peculiar to their sex.”14 Commanding General of the Army Air Forces Henry Arnold explained the official objectives of the program included:

1. To see if women could serve as military pilots and if so, to form the nucleus of an organization that could be rapidly expanded;
2. To release male pilots for combat;

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11 Eleanor Roosevelt, column, My Day, (Sept. 1, 1942), quoted in Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 151.
12 Andrew J. May, “Providing for the Appointment of Female Pilots and Aviation Cadets of the Army Air Forces,” Mar. 22, 1944.
13 Cochran, “Report.”
14 Ibid.
3. To decrease the Air Forces’ total demands on the cream of the manpower pool.
   The experimental purpose of the program ranked along with but subordinate to the purpose of
   releasing male pilots from routine and non-combat duties for combat service.\footnote{Ibid.}

   The programs for women to join the AAF were initially divided in leadership and organization.
   While Jaqueline Cochran was abroad aiding the British female pilots set up and run their program, Nancy
   Harkness Love was appointed to start the US ferrying program to aid the war effort in 1942. Termed the
   Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) these women, a select few who already had the required
   piloting experience, became the first to fly for the military, ferrying planes across the country after they
   completed a training period.\footnote{Ibid.} The second program, which Cochran headed following her return to the US
   in 1942, targeted experienced women pilots to also do ferry work, though with no training other than a
   transitional month of ground schooling on base to acquaint them with “military aircraft, military
   organization and procedure, routes and related subjects.”\footnote{Ibid.}

   The two separate programs, as they performed similar tasks, merged into one organization, the
   Women Airforces Service Pilots (WASPs) on August 5, 1943. The creation of one unit, the WASPs,
   solved the difficulties found in trying to control assignments between commands, types of flying duties
   selected for women to perform, and centralization of health and welfare programs.\footnote{Ibid.} By the end of the
   war, the WASPs had 1,830 admitted to training at their Sweetwater, Texas base. Of those admitted, 1,074
   women graduated; about 40 percent left the program early. During the war, thirty-eight women pilots died
   in aircraft accidents; twenty-seven died while in active service, eleven while in training. Among the
   graduates, one hundred fifty two resigned early, twenty-seven were discharged for medical reasons, and
   another fourteen for disciplinary reasons.\footnote{Ibid.}

   The recent addition of an air force into the United States’ Army, combined with the entrance of
   women into the military during the Second World War, created difficulties for the WASP’s proponents

when trying to increase their numbers. Men believed they had the first right to becoming new pilots over women, inciting jealousy and discontent towards the female pilots in the program. Because of this, public advertisement was limited, multiplying in quantity much slower and more infrequently than the propaganda for joining other women’s organizations, such as the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) and the Army Nurse Corps (ANF), which were seen as more traditional, clerical and supportive women’s roles in wartime. Initially, publicity for the WASPs was kept to “such a minimum that some people believed the existence of the WASP was a military secret.”\textsuperscript{20} Cochran, at the end of the war, commented that there was a reason to the limited advertisement of the program. “At no time during the operation of the program was any effort necessary to secure prospective trainees, as there were always several hundred applicants on (the) waiting list.”\textsuperscript{21} As more and more women joined and the information about the organization increased, public knowledge concerning the female pilots expanded, leading to their picture in \textit{LIFE} magazine on July 19, 1943 (Figure B). Photos like these were influential for the WASPs, influencing other female pilots, such as Betty Brown, to apply and join.\textsuperscript{22}

Shown sitting on an airplane, in rolled up overalls that served as a WASP’s uniform, with wind tousled hair in braids, rather than a popular hair style, gave the female pilot a more masculine look (as opposed to the retention of feminine, sophisticated qualities of advertisements for the ANF) that was projected to her peers. As opposed to the images the ANF and the WACs used, \textit{LIFE} magazine portrayed the pilots how they really were while performing their duties; the photograph of the pilot revealed her outdoor work through her mussed hair and implied the manual work required of pilots with the rolled up sleeves of the pilot’s overalls. The woman neither smiled nor had visible makeup, increasing the difference between her portrayal and those of women in other military branches.

\textsuperscript{20} Doris Weatherford, \textit{History of Women in America: American Women and World War II}, (New York, Facts on File, 1990), 44.
\textsuperscript{21} Cochran, “Report.”
Application requirements for female pilots changed with time, both in the WAFS and the training program under Cochran. With a continuous waiting list and a rolling application deadline for the program,

the question remained as to the suitability of the female pilot; qualifications included her age, educational background, height, and flying hours. The original ferrying group, the WAFS, had to meet many qualifying standards. The women had to be thirty-five years old or younger, be American citizens with a high school diploma, have a commercial pilot license with two hundred horse power rating, and have logged a minimum of five hundred certified hours of flight experience, including a cross-country flying experience.\textsuperscript{24} The amount and specificity of requirements limited the number of qualified pilots who could join the squadron. Only women that could afford both the initial piloting lessons, and then afford to spend time gaining flight experience could apply to the program. Typically, this meant that women qualifying for the program would be white, middle class citizens, due to the average financial situation these women, compared to working class women would be in leading into the war.

The first women pilot training program under Cochran listed different requirements. These women had to be between ages twenty-one and thirty-five, a minimum height of sixty inches (later increased to sixty-four inches in 1944), with two hundred hours of flight experience, pass a medical exam by an Army flight surgeon, and have a personal interview with a recruiting officer.\textsuperscript{25} With the understanding that the required 200 hours of flight experience was a notable barrier, Cochran and the other officers working to create the pilot’s program reduced the hours of flight experience in stages—first to 100, then 75, and by the end of the war only 35 hours.\textsuperscript{26} The height minimum for women came about due to the “opinion of civilian flying instructors and Army check pilots that a woman, if too slight in stature, usually had difficulty operating aircraft, because of difficulties with foot and manual controls.”\textsuperscript{27}

Thus, by 1944 prospective women pilots had to have obtained thirty-five hours of flying experience, pass a physical, meet both a height and weight minimum, be within a certain age parameter, as well as be able to provide multiple character references.\textsuperscript{28} An interview with a female representative of

\textsuperscript{24} Cochran, “Report.”
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Bernice “Bee” Haydu.”
the Women’s Flying Training followed the submission of application materials. Provided the interview ended satisfactorily, further details would be given to the applicant for continuing to pursue admittance. However, by 1944, this process was considerably shortened with the decision to accept women pilots’ scores on the Aviation Cadet Qualifying Examination, the same exam male pilots took for consideration into the AAF.\textsuperscript{29} Since WASPs were considered civil servants contracted to work with the military, they had to pay their own way to Sweetwater, Texas, where the women’s base was located.\textsuperscript{30} Jean McCreery, one of the early applicants to the WASP program, remembered being motivated to obtain her pilot’s license before the organization was established. She had to cash in a family war bond to pay for the three hundred dollar flight lessons.\textsuperscript{31} Immediately following her certification, Jean applied for admittance to the WASPs, in order that she could do something constructive with her skills.\textsuperscript{32}

Even with the stringent application requirements, women who loved piloting and had already taken the initiative to learn how to fly quickly joined the WASPs. Theresa James, employed as an acrobatics flight instructor, applied to the WASPs and gave up her flying job.\textsuperscript{33} Some women, such as Madge Rutherford postponed milestones in their lives—marriage—to instead go through WASP training.\textsuperscript{34} Others, like Jeannette Goodrun, signed up for flying lessons and obtained their pilots’ certificates for fun while at university, finding unrelated jobs after graduation. Jeannette’s experience in an all-women’s flying class at the University of New Hampshire went relatively unused while she worked as an assistant dean at American University in Washington, DC. The creation of the WASP was Jeannette’s entrance in 1943 into an occupation that complemented a hobby she found she loved.\textsuperscript{35} Women applying to the program came from all types of white-collar occupational backgrounds, including

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\textsuperscript{29} Cochran, “Report.”
\textsuperscript{30} “Bernice “Bee” Haydu.”
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
“salesgirls, college girls, teachers, stenographers. Every type and size but [they all had] this in common—
[their] hearts [were] in flying, so come what may, nothing else [mattered].”

On the base at Sweetwater, Texas, women pilots experienced the same training classes as did the men, minus weapons and combat training. Because they were located on a military base, the scope of the training regimen included military orientation, courtesy and customs, and drill and ceremonies. Ground school phases of flight training, such as “mathematics, physics, maps and charts, navigation, principles of flight, engines and propellers, weather, code, instrument flying, communications, and physical and first aid training,” and flight training from primary through advanced. This allowed WASPs to start operational duties immediately following graduation.

Considering the isolated location of the air base in Sweetwater, the women frequently related there were hardly any social outings available to the trainees. Because they were remote from large urban centers and people unrelated to the air base operators, Jean McCreery commented that there was “no social life.” Perhaps this contributed to the final report on the WASP program at the end of the war concluding that “there were no cases of venereal disease.”

After graduation from Sweetwater, woman pilots performed multiple tasks during their service. They towed targets for antiaircraft gun trainees, piloted pursuit planes, flew searchlight and tracking missions, instructed male pilots-in-training, simulated strafing, and test piloted airplanes that had been repaired or were exhibiting mechanical problems. Initially, women pilots only flew the lighter types of planes, but the aircraft type soon expanded to include many others by 1943, including heavy bombers. It was a group of WASP pilots, in fact, that successfully convinced the AAF the B-29 was flyable. Many

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36 Adeline Blank to her sister Edwina, July 18, 1943, quoted in Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 153.
37 Cochran, “Report.”
38 “Jean McCreery.”
39 Cochran, “Report.”
41 Cochran, “Report.” Cochran reported there were a variety of standard airplanes at Sweetwater that were used to training the WASPs, including PT-17’s, PT-19’s, BT-13’s, BT-15’s, AT-6’s, AT-17’s, UC-78’s, UC-43’s, and UC-81’s.
male pilots were adamant the B-29 would not fly safely because Boeing’s top test pilot had been killed while piloting the plane. “The male flight crews, their egos challenged, approached the B-29 with new enthusiasm and found it to be not a beast, but a smooth, delicately rigged, and responsive ship.”

Women experienced the first instances of male hostility towards their incorporation into the operations at the AAF base during training. When gaining further flight experience with male instructors, many of the women pilots were required to carry not only their own parachutes to and from the exercises,

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42 Fly Girls.
43 Dora Dougherty, quoted in Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 156.
but also those of the teachers, something male trainees were not subjected to. Women who became training personnel often had to deal with surly or derisive males. Dealing with the outspoken and frequently disrespectful nature of the men in the classroom caused tension. Bases created systems of removing women from the equation before addressing the issues brought by the male trainees. Ethel Finley, one of the women who taught male pilots, described the system that developed at her base. After explaining the situation to her supervisors, she realized they were insecure with removing the men from the program under her supervision, as critics would attempt to label the WASPs as a detriment to the success of the AAF. Instead, male students were frequently transferred before they were taken out of the program under the argument they were unable to live up to pilot expectations. Other women, like Betty Jo Reed, stationed in Mississippi to test planes after they were repaired, received enough hostility from the men at the base that she took it upon herself to seek transfer to a new station. Some of the instances of opposition to the women pilots ranged from requesting “that WASPs be sent elsewhere, to teasing, abusive remarks, and even sabotage,” the most common of these instances actually being completely ignored by male AAF and WASP authorities.

We always knew that we had to do a better job of flying with a minimum of mistakes or we would come under scorn from the men. One time… a girl bounced her plane—a little, not badly—when she landed. The men… ridiculed the landing and said girls should not be flying. Right behind her a male student landed his fighter and bounced so badly several times that it appeared that he might crash. The same men said, “Well, it looks as if old Joe is having a bad morning!” Nothing was said about his not being fit to fly.

One of the most serious offenses of abuse directed against WASPs occurred at Camp Davis, North Carolina. Rather than filling the women’s planes’ gas tanks with appropriate fuel, the gas was mixed with sugar. Even though this was a clear sign someone was trying to sabotage the women piloting.

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45 “Betty Jo Reed.”
47 “Betty Jo Reed.”
48 Merryman, Clipped Wings, 22.
49 Florene Miller, quoted in Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 154.
no official investigation occurred.\textsuperscript{50} For the most part, General Arnold, Commander of the AAF, directed disciplinary action against the worst critics of the women within the AAF’s ranks. He believed preventing the men in the AAF from voicing their displeasure over the incorporation of women, as aviation was viewed as a masculine field and was relatively new for the country, would help combat the slander campaign against the WASPs.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{Figure D: WASPs consulting maps.}\textsuperscript{52}

Averaging thirty-three hours of flying a month, WASPs put in the most hours performing tasks for the Training Command and towing antiaircraft targets. Most of these operational duties for the

\textsuperscript{50} Fly Girls.


\textsuperscript{52} “Photos of WASP and WAF Pilots—Page 2.”
Training Command the WASPs performed occurred both day and night, though ferrying work was for the most part kept to daytime.\(^{53}\) Although women pilots constantly faced pressure to catch up on flying classes to fulfill graduation requirements, “the cases of either operational or flying fatigue were outstandingly low.” Cochran and other officers speculated that this occurrence, along with the statistics showing that women’s rate of fatigue was significantly lower than male pilots’, was because “women were so desirous of flying and so determined to show that they were as good as the men that they refused to give in to or report fatigue.” However, Cochran went further than her male counterparts in considering these incidents of fatigue. She believed that the low fatigue rates were “close to accuracy and if they should be discounted at all, it should be only to compensate for the fact that the WASP were not as much a cross-section of women as the cadets were of the men.” In her final report, Cochran summarized a typical female pilot’s attitude towards fatigue: “The fact (was) that women “(could) take it” and, while not as strong as men, (could) stand as much or more strain and discomfort.”\(^{54}\) A medical report definitively concluded women could operate heavy aircraft with minimal difficulty:

> It is no longer a matter of speculation that graduate WASP were adapted physically, mentally, and psychologically to the type of flying assigned. Commanding Officers were almost unanimous in reporting that [WASP] deactivation was keenly felt. Surgeons stated that they stood up well to their job; that the male personnel lost more time due to being grounded.\(^{55}\)

Although tasks delegated to WASPs resembled those of male pilots serving on the home front, women pilots never received permission to serve abroad. Upon initiation of the program in 1943, commanding officers understood that the stipulation that WASP were confined to the US and Canada depended largely on the availability of male pilots to perform in the theaters of operations. However, whenever WASPs, who were generally “ambitious” to broaden their range of service, brought up the idea

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53 Cochran, “Report.”
54 Ibid.
to send them abroad, they were rejected based on their minimal numbers (the WASPs were only 1,000 strong), and the remaining availability of male pilots.\textsuperscript{56}

As opposed to male pilots within the Army Air Forces, the WASPs had no system for promotion or increase in pay. “The oldest WASP in point of service received the same pay as the youngest graduate.”\textsuperscript{57} Of the two hundred fifty dollars per month WASPs received, they had to pay for room and board, clothing, and transportation to and from their base. The items provided by the AAF simply included textbooks, flying clothes, helmets, goggles, and parachutes.\textsuperscript{58} Uniforms were provided after graduation to the WASPs. The uniforms included “utility items such as flying clothing,” coveralls and leather jackets. However, the pilots had to provide for themselves other items included in the uniform, such as “khaki slacks and overseas cap, and white shirt, making it necessary for each individual WASP to put up around one hundred dollars themselves to clothe themselves according to the uniform.”\textsuperscript{59} Once they did, as Theresa James asserted, their clothing was overused; they had too few outfits and keeping them clean was hard when ferrying planes frequently across the country.\textsuperscript{60}

The WASP experiences on military bases varied. As one pilot put it, “the reception at no two fields (was) alike. Sometimes the girls (were) accepted without question into a fraternity that (respected) a good pilot regardless of sex, but often enough the atmosphere (was) considerably more chilly than it (was) upstairs.”\textsuperscript{61} While training in Sweetwater, Texas, six women were assigned to one bedroom, having twelve of them share one bath. Some of the other air fields, however, were not large enough to accommodate for separate living quarters for women, thus restricting the range of bases women pilots could be assigned following their graduation from the training program.\textsuperscript{62} Billets varied considerably across the country. At some bases, the pilots were placed with base nurses or WACs, while other WASPs

\begin{footnotes}
\item[56] Cochran, “Report.”
\item[57] Ibid.
\item[58] Merryman, \textit{Clipped Wings}, 15.
\item[59] Cochran, “Report.”
\item[60] \textit{Fly Girls}.
\item[61] Merryman, \textit{Clipped Wings}, 21-22.
\end{footnotes}
were billeted at local hotels or civilian barracks. For the most part, women did not encounter issues with restrictions on the mess halls they could enter, but some bases tried to bar them from officers’ messes, because they were not accorded relative rank with their fellow male pilots.\textsuperscript{63} The most significant obstacles concerning housing and acceptance on bases occurred while WASPs were ferrying planes across country and needed to stay the night somewhere in transit. Not only did some women encounter difficulties in finding places to spend the night, some base personnel, not recognizing their right to land on military runways, initially refused to allow their planes to even land.\textsuperscript{64} While dating during training was difficult for women considering the lack of men on the base in Sweetwater and their distance from town, it became easier to form social contacts after assignment to a larger base. Jeannette Goodrun even met the man whom she would marry when she arrived for duty as a test pilot at the base in Douglass, Arizona.\textsuperscript{65}

Since WASPs were not officially a part of the AAF, they, as opposed to other women’s organizations in the war effort, did not receive the usual military benefits. “WASP problems were far greater than simple under-rank or under-use…. Nowhere else did all the discriminatory attitudes towards women compact themselves comparably.”\textsuperscript{66} One of the most significant obstacles female pilots working for the AAF faced was their inability to get life or health insurance. Because of this, WASPs were unable to receive hospitalization from the government. The private sector was for the most part closed to them as well. Due to the precarious nature of their work, ferrying planes and testing aircraft that had experienced mechanical malfunctions, insurance companies refused to cover them.\textsuperscript{67} WASP’s safety came under question many times during the war years. The women in the program recognized the lack of safety regulations for the tasks they performed, along with the Army’s inconsiderate and sometimes hostile stance towards the WASPs. Once this realization dawned among the female pilots, they understood to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[64] Ibid.
\item[65] “Jeannette Goodrun.”
\item[66] Weatherford, \textit{History of Women in America}, 83.
\item[67] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
some extent why Cochran, when reporting to the government the progress of the WASPs, seemingly disregarded safety violations. These concerns were only sporadically brought to male authorities in the military for fear of the program being discontinued, an end that many of the women, and particularly Cochran, viewed as worse than the daily concerns the pilots had to handle.\textsuperscript{68}

As the war progressed, women continued to prove on a daily basis their capability to operate the heavy aircraft and their ability to work under strenuous conditions. A constant argument against their flying was that they were less muscular than men. However, WASPs frequently responded by stating that muscular strength was almost never needed, even in the largest of the military’s planes.\textsuperscript{69} Coupled with the prejudice against women’s size was the assumption they would need to take considerable time off from performing flight duties due to their menses. Male commanders overseeing the women frequently found the established rule that they could not fly for several days around their periods unenforceable. “Many women did not cooperate with it, said nothing, and just kept flying.”\textsuperscript{70} By the termination of the war, this supposition, in accordance with medical reports, had “no support… that menstruation… (was) a handicap to flying or dependable performance of duty… on operational duty the loss of time from this cause was reported as negligible and in no degree an interference with the job.”\textsuperscript{71}

Congressional authorization to end the WASP’s quasi-military status in 1944, thus making them, like all other female branches of the military, equal in status and benefits to men, still failed, though by a narrow vote margin because the military and government failed to see the need for the women in such a new part of the military.\textsuperscript{72} Militarization would solve a variety of problems associated with women’s civilian status while working with the AAF; following induction into the AAF, they could be governed, directed, and treated as any member of the AAF, subjecting them to the same rules and regulations as

\textsuperscript{68} Yellin, \textit{Our Mothers’ War}, 158-59.
\textsuperscript{69} Cochran, “Report.”
\textsuperscript{70} Joshua S. Goldstein, \textit{War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89.
\textsuperscript{71} Cochran, “Report.”
\textsuperscript{72} Weatherford, \textit{History of Women in America}, 101.
men, considering they performed the same tasks.\textsuperscript{73} However, rather than allow them in as a way to recognize the work WASPs did during the war, the military decided that since the war was increasingly more winnable, women’s opportunities in the military and in the AAF should decrease, instead of increasing.\textsuperscript{74} The AAF viewed their obligation first and foremost to male civilian pilots losing their jobs due to cutbacks in their pilot training program towards the end of the war.\textsuperscript{75}

The opposition to the WASPs gaining acceptance in their field was more marked than any other women’s organization. The WACs held generally more clerical work in nature than the men in the military did, positions military officers were willing to overlook in favor of higher positions. Nursing had also generally been thought a female occupation, allowing them to drastically gain strides in the medical field. Piloting, however, was relatively new. The technicalities involved and the high level of experience needed made the AAF a lucrative and coveted career for men who resented competing for the limited positions against women.\textsuperscript{76}

Comparison between the WASPs and male pilots was frequent in evaluating the WASP program. Cochran commented, when comparing the numbers of registered applicants to the WASPs and applying male pilot trainees, the rate of elimination from the programs was roughly equal.\textsuperscript{77} She argued the high rate of resignation from the WASPs directly correlated with the lack of status the women experienced versus the obligation the men had to fulfill their terms. In her opinion, the “civilian status of the program thus resulted in decreased efficiency and increased the unit costs through such resignations… There was nothing available for use like the honorable and dishonorable discharge, and discharge neither with nor without honor used in the Army.”\textsuperscript{78} While the training dropout rate of the WASPs and male pilots was almost equal, the fatal accident rates for the WASPs “compared favorably with corresponding rates for

\textsuperscript{73} Cochran, “Report.”
\textsuperscript{74} Weatherford, History of Women in America, 101.
\textsuperscript{75} Cochran, “Report.”
\textsuperscript{76} Weatherford, History of Women in America, 101.
\textsuperscript{77} Cochran, “Report.”
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
Stateside AAF male pilots had a substantially higher fatality rate due to multiple deaths occurring in the same accidents in “very heavy,” “heavy,” and “medium” bombers. These men would be practicing bombing maneuvers, flying with a full plane, while women operating the heavy aircraft were simply transporting them, and thus did not require a full crew on board.¹⁰

Deactivation of the WASPs rooted itself in the mindsets of commanding officers and the US government as developments in the European theatre indicated the war was ending. While soldiers returned from the war front, women who had filled civilian job positions were released from duty to provide jobs to the veterans. With returning veterans, any woman still working in an occupation that had previously been a man’s was seen by the public as unpatriotic, an idea that dramatically affected the ability of women pilots to continue their service with the AAF.¹¹ Adequate notice had to be given not only to the WASPs so they could make plans for their future, but also to the bases using them in large numbers to tow and ferry. Since June 1943 women had been primarily used to ferry planes across the country for the military. The Air Transport Command had previously “planned to keep this group of civilian pilots on pursuit deliveries permanently, thus releasing men for progressive upgrading in order” to meet plane transportation quotas, creating a problem when the decision to terminate the WASPs was made.¹² The Air Transport Command estimated it would take at least a month of training for new male pilots to do the tasks the WASPs had performed in increasing numbers. A confidential memorandum by the Commanding General of the Air Transport Command, Brigadier General Nowland, stated that “the loss of the women pilots… (would) effect a definite hardship upon the operations of the Groups… [because the male pilots replacing them would] not be efficient, due to lack of experience.”¹³ In response to concerns

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⁷⁹ Ibid.
⁸⁰ Cochran, “Report.”
⁸¹ Fly Girls.
⁸² “Secret Memorandum to Commanding General, Air Transport Command,” Nov. 1, 1944.
⁸³ Ibid.
like the one from the Air Transport Command, the order, released on October 3, 1944, gave two months’ notice before the WASP program officially ended on December 20, 1944.84

Women in good standing with the AAF and the WASP received, upon exit, certificates of honorable service, although they never received veteran benefits. Military flying experience of the WASP members was recognized by the Civil Aeronautics Administration, allowing them to pursue a commercial pilots’ license and horsepower ratings. The next of kin of those who had died in service could not receive benefits, nor did they have the right to display the gold star.85 Madge Rutherford Minton recalled “if we got killed in action our friends passed the hat to get enough money to send our personal effects home to the family. We couldn’t have a military internment; we didn’t get a flag for the coffin; and we got no burial expenses.”86 Veteran status was given the WASPs retroactively in November, 1977.87 “When the final vote was taken, (they) had (their) place in history. (They) now had recognition and a burial plot. No GI bill, no insurance, but (they) had the name (they’d) fought for: veteran.”88

The Women’s Airforce Service Pilots operated for a total of three years, yet still managed to fly more than sixty million miles, ferrying over twelve thousand planes across the country between aircraft factories and military bases.89 Although the WASPs played a significant role in the military’s operations during WWII, their contribution to the war effort was only recognized retroactively. The Commanding General of the AAF in December 1944 commented upon the women pilots’ deactivation, recognizing their commitment, while maintaining the understanding their service in the AAF had only ever been temporary:

The WASP became part of the Air Forces because we had to explore the nation’s total manpower resources and in order to release male pilots for other duties. Their very successful record of accomplishment has proved that in any future total effort the nation

84 Cochran, “Report.”
85 Cochran, “Report.”
86 Merryman, Clipped Wings, 8.
88 Yellin, Our Mothers’ War, 161.
89 Ibid.
can count on thousands of its young women to fly any of its aircraft…. The situation is that, if you continue in service, you will be replacing instead of releasing our young men…. I want you to know that I appreciate our war service and that the AAF will miss you.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{90} Commanding General of the AAF, quoted in Cochran, “Report.”
Due to the structure of the Nurse Corps and the WASPs, as well as the tasks they performed, there were striking differences between the two groups in their overall reception in the military, the opportunities afforded them, and their experiences. While the nurses were revered for their service and commitment in World War Two, the WASPs had to fight for their place in the military, both in the eyes of the public and on the bases that they were stationed.

The high casualty rate of WWII created a demand for a continually increasing stream of medical personnel, both on the home front and nearer to the battle fields. Advertisements calling for more young women to join the ranks of the Nurse Corps, whether in the Navy or the Army, proliferated as Congress and President Franklin Roosevelt considered creating a nurses’ draft. The government had different women posing for the photographs taken for Nurse Corps posters, modelling the various uniforms the nurses wore, varying the artwork and the text. The diverse printings of posters calling for women nurse recruits attested to the military investing considerable thought, time, energy, and money in the attempt to gain more nursing recruits. For female pilots, however, it was more common to hear about the WASP program via word of mouth. Acknowledging the opposition to women entering a newly created, masculine field in the military, the WASP program was kept out of the public’s direct view to avoid intense criticism. Considering the stringent application requirements of WASPs, the field of potential applicants was much smaller than that of the Nurse Corps. Therefore, broadcasting the program to the women pilots who could join the WASP was a different task than that of reaching the thousands of women across the country with medical experience that could join the Nurse Corps.

Requirements for applicants, both nurses and pilots, were similar in many respects. The two organizations asked that women have a high school diploma, be at least eighteen years old, and have previous experience in their fields. The need for both nurses and pilots to have this experience indicated the additional stipulation that the women would have paid for their individual educations in nursing or
flying, a need that was less restrictive for men entering the fighting forces, since they could be trained upon enlistment. This hinted at a need both nurses and female pilots to come from relatively wealthy or financially comfortable backgrounds, as training programs and time spent gaining experience would have cost money. However, there was a higher implied cost to the WASP, as they had to pay their own way to Avenger Field, Texas. The only organization for nurses and pilots which did not require a significant amount of civilian experience was the Cadet Nurse Corps, specifically designed to allow women the opportunity to learn about the medical field as a member of the military. Since it was assumed the Cadet Nurses were just exiting high school, the age requirement of eighteen years was lowered to seventeen, though a high school diploma was still needed. Women pilots had more restrictive physical standards than did the nurses. While nurses were judged mainly on their education, training, and age, female pilots also had to meet height and weight standards.

Both the Nurse Corps and the WASPs were required to undergo weeks of training to familiarize themselves with the military structure and their subsequent function in the larger fighting force. Following the similarity between the training women received on the military itself, nurses and pilots had classes focusing on different subjects, teaching different skill sets designed to complement their already established knowledge and aid them in their tasks with the Army, Navy, or AAF. While the new nurses were climbing through obstacle courses and having target practice, women pilots read maps, charted flight patterns, and learned hands-on the mechanics of their aircraft.

The evolution in the training regimen of the nurses and pilots took different paths and followed varied timelines. To succeed in establishing the Women’s Auxiliary Service Pilots, Jacqueline Cochran had to solidify her planning and convince Congress and the military of the efficiency of the program before it would begin. This program was essential to the WASP’s creation due to the disbelief that women would succeed as pilots with the military. Because of this, from the beginning the WASP program had clear criteria of what would be taught to the female pilots before they graduated training and began their
duties with the AAF.\textsuperscript{1} The Nurse Corps, however, initially trained nurses with the same program they had used before World War II. Much of the training these females received before the outbreak of WWII allowed them to more leisurely affiliate themselves with the military’s organization. There was a rather slow pace in “obtaining uniforms, initiating records, and becoming acquainted with the military post, Army hospitals, and nurses' quarters.” The transition to the wartime pace for nurses’ training initially caused confusion. In the rush of to send nurses to their assignments faster, confusion ensued. The military had to amend the training schedule for the nurses to meet the needs of a wartime military.\textsuperscript{2}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1}
\caption{Nurses climbing ladders during training.}
\end{figure}

Women in the Nurse Corps and WASPs experienced different levels of equality with enlisted men performing the same tasks. Some of the discrepancy in equality between the women nurses and female pilots stemmed from the government legislation that created each group. Legislative acts passed during the war years placed nurses on an equal footing in both rank and pay grade with men in the military. Incorporated into this was the opportunity for women to receive advancements in pay raises. Thus, Chief Nurses would receive a higher salary than a nurse coming into the Corps with the designated rank of Second Lieutenant. However, the same rank and benefits as men, as well as a system for promotion, was not provided for women pilots. Each member of the WASP earned the same two hundred fifty dollars per month her female comrades did, despite her length of service compared to the others.

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Since the legislation passed for the Nurse Corps made them equal with male medics both in status and salary, it became a simpler task to compare the nurses with the men involved in the medical branch of the military. Equality of ranks allowed for further analysis of the equality between male medics and female nurses in regards to the opportunities open to them and the tasks they performed during WWII. As such, women nurses had an easier time of gaining acceptance and recognition from males. WASPs, however, continuously fought to gain the recognition that was accorded to them for their duties with the AAF.

The benefits and opportunities awarded to female nurses were markedly different than those open to female pilots. After the official incorporation of the Nurse Corps into the military, nurses were able to hold commissioned ranks, giving them superiority over some male officers in the Army and Navy, as well as receive both retirement and disability pensions.\(^5\) WASPs, however, although a bill was introduced in Congress to incorporate them as full members of the AAF, never received these same benefits. As contracted employees of the AAF, the WASPs were not awarded pensions, nor were their families allowed to display the gold star, as any other family with a member in the military, in the event they were in a fatal aircraft accident or died of other causes while serving with the military.

The living conditions of nurses varied, depending on their assignment’s location. Some women lived in tents, others in buildings with modern plumbing. Women pilots, however, always lived in barracks or rooms designated for them by the AAF or the WASP program; they were never billeted in cabins or tents. While WASPs did receive a more consistent quality of housing while working with the AAF, at times their presence was challenged by local commanding officers. Many air field commanders were opposed to their staying overnight, sometimes restricting them from dining halls and only allowing them admittance to the canteen, while nurses were always welcomed at their base or hospital.

The government provided the female nurses with uniforms and regulation supplies. Nurses were allotted many different sets of clothing, including dresses, dress uniforms, shirts, shoes, bags, and

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blankets. While these elements of the nursing uniform could arrive sporadically and uniforms might arrive in incomplete sets, most nurses by the end of their enlistment, had received all the standard pieces of the military nurse’s uniform. Women pilots, however, had a much smaller wardrobe than did nurses. While they did receive some elements of clothing from the AAF or the WASPs, the majority of their clothing, their shoes, and their supplies were purchased on an individual basis, using their own money.

The limitations placed on women pilots restricting them to duty only within the continental United States prevented them from experiencing and serving in foreign areas and war zones that the female nurses experienced. While nurses went to both the Pacific and the European theatres, WASPs remained stationed at the stateside AAF bases. Although they could not travel as much as the women in the Nurse Corps, WASPs did travel a lot in carrying out their duties. Ferrying planes sometimes meant a woman pilot flew across the continental US, from one base to another, stopping overnight along the way. Nurses overseas were also quite mobile during their enlistment. Many of them were reassigned from one medical facility to another within a theatre of operation as need dictated.

Throughout their service with the military and in the years following the war, nurses were revered for their commitment to the war effort and the time they spent helping wounded soldiers. Many of the men they treated told the nurses they appreciated their hard work and the care they gave all of their patients. Although officially respected for the time they spent flying planes, WASPs had to break through both personal and societal stereotypes to gain recognition for their contributions. Male pilots thought of themselves as superior to women aviators, and treated the women flyers in a disparaging manner, an attitude that WASPs had to compete against in order to receive gratitude for their service. The recognition the women in the Nurse Corps received for their service by becoming veterans was only

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retroactively given to the WASPs, as indicated by their late incorporation into the military in 1977, as opposed to their inclusion, like the Nurse Corps, during WWII.

There were differences, and similarities, not just between the women in the Nurse Corps and the women in the WASP, but also between those two organizations and other military women, such as the WAVES and WACs. Like the ANF, the WAVES and the WACs utilized numerous forms of advertisement to encourage more women to enlist. The advertisements promoted a sense of nationalism and duty in American women to encourage them to enlist. They also continued to affirm an idea of femininity to contradict the societal belief that women working with the military were “dirty” women.
Like the advertisements for the Army Nurse Corps, the WAC depicted in Figure C portrayed a young woman, proud in her appearance, her uniform, and her service to the country. Many of the recruitment posters played off the idea that women joining the military aided soldiers in fighting America’s enemies, by taking on tasks that freed more men for combat. A popular advertisement for the Women Marines included the slogan “Be a Marine, Free a Marine to Fight.” A slogan common in the WAVES’s posters urged “Bring Him Home Sooner… Join the WAVES.” The stereotypical female image was more overt in the WAVES, WACs, and Women Marines posters than those of the Nurse Corps. While nursing was regarded by American society as a credible and honorable profession for women, the other women’s units of the military preferred to promote a sense of temporary service in the military. The assumption was that enlisted military women, like the WASPs, would return to the home when soldiers came back at the end of the war. Nurses however, could more easily continue their jobs on a civilian basis throughout the country than other military women, and the posters reflected this with their emphasis on nursing being a dignified profession.

The enlistment requirements for both the Nurse Corps and the WASPs were more stringent than other women’s military organizations due to the higher level of experience and training the women needed in order to fulfill the job description. This made it easier for untrained women from both working and middle class backgrounds to join the ranks of the WAVES, Women Marines, or WACs, than the Nurse Corps or the WASPs, which was reflected in the enlistment numbers for the respective military branches. At its peak the WACs had close to 100,000 women serving, the WAVES had 90,000, and the

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Marines 25,000, vastly outnumbering the number of WASPs while placing the membership number of the Nurse Corps in the middle with 74,000 active nurses.\textsuperscript{12}

Each branch of the military that women could join during WWII incorporated into the enlistee’s training classes on military practices, regulations, and procedures. Like the nurses and women pilots, other women joining the military received in-class training and practiced simulated tasks they would perform at their station or base. Each branch created their own training facilities for the women, usually separating them entirely from the drafted men. Assignments following graduation from training programs for members of the WACs were more sedentary in nature, on average, than those of both the nurses and the WASPs. While countless nurses served in station hospitals abroad and followed soldiers fighting on the front, and women pilots flew countless planes across large distances, WACs were frequently assigned to office work on the home front and clerical work overseas.

Women in the other branches of the military received less equality with their male counterparts than did nurses, though they enjoyed more respect than the WASPs. While they were officially incorporated into the military, specific legislation was created to limit the control women had over male officers and soldiers; women were not allowed to command men unless given special authorization.\textsuperscript{13} This was certainly less stature than nurses enjoyed, as due to their position nurses had higher status than some men in the medical units, and the nurses were able to garner respect and even command men to perform specific tasks. Even though the WACs could not command men they shared equal rank with enlisted men and they, therefore, enjoyed more equality than WASPs who were both subjected to the orders of male officers, and could have their movements on military bases restricted by the commanding officers.


\textsuperscript{13} Morden, \textit{The Women’s Army Corps}, 14.
As the WACs, WAVES, and Women Marines had military status during their terms of service, they enjoyed all benefits the military gave to its soldiers. Women in the Army and the Coast Guard received pay based on their rank. They could receive disability or retirement pensions, and later could take advantage of the G. I. Bill to receive higher education and home loans.\textsuperscript{14} The benefits open to these women placed them on the same footing as nurses with the opportunity they had to receive assistance from the military. However, women in the WACs were unable to file for dependency benefits. In the Army’s eyes, service women, if they needed extra financial assistance for children, had a husband whose salary would cover these expenses. Women, therefore, received salaries to support themselves or gain extra spending money.\textsuperscript{15}

The job titles and assignments these other women filled throughout their service in the military were more varied than both the number of jobs the Nurse Corps and the WASPs could assign. WACs were used in a variety of job functions including clerical and maintenance work on the home front. Nurses, however, only provided medical care to soldiers, caring for their instruments, supplies, and facilities. Women pilots, also, did not perform a wide range of duties, simply restricting themselves to operating aircraft, though performing different flight assignments.

Like the WASPs, women joining the military’s other female branches had to fight for initial acceptance. However, they did not have to continue to prove their worth to both the military and the male soldiers. The main line of opposition to women joining the ranks of the Army, Navy, and Marines was the opposition to their being classified as soldiers. If they were soldiers, they could be assigned to combat duties. Once this question was solved, women were largely accepted into their respective organizations, since their taking a non-combat job freed a male soldier to fight. Female pilots also experienced opposition to the creation of the WASPs, an opposition they had to fight continuously, as prejudices among the male AAF pilots and officers were abundant. Nurses, as it was known they would not join the

\textsuperscript{14} Morden, \textit{Women’s Army Corps}, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 14-15.
soldiers on the front wielding artillery and weapons, did not face this form of opposition: their entry into the Army and Navy had already been cleared and the traditional nature of their work made it easier for them to join the military.

In comparison to the other women’s military organizations such as the WACs, WAVES, and Women Marines, military nurses enjoyed the most equality with men in comparable occupations. Nurses, WACs, WAVES, and Women Marines were all depicted with a feminine image in their recruitment advertisements, while WASPs had few advertisements directed to them. All units underwent the same training to familiarize themselves with military structure, as well as further training in the task fields they were expected to perform. In large part, the nurses and WASPs were more mobile than other women in the military who filled numerous clerical and office positions. With these considerations, both the Nurse Corps and WASPs were still outnumbered by the military’s other women’s branches.
Conclusion

The roles American women have played in wartime have varied, expanding as precedents were established and American societal norms shifted to allow for more involvement of women. Leading into the Second World War, women had edged their way both into the military medical branch and had gained experience serving in the Navy. This, combined with the manpower requirement of the country upon their entrance in 1941 to a total war, created a need for more women to join the military in newer organizations created for them. Each branch of the US military created their own programs for women to join, making the experiences of these enlisted women diverse depending on the branch they chose to enter.

These differences were most overt in the Nurse Corps and the WASP. The nurses joining the Army and the Navy were given respect from both citizens and male soldiers, as their chosen vocation in the military had been seen as a proper feminine role since the Civil War. However, the WASP faced constant opposition as piloting, being a newer, previously only male, occupation in the military was more dangerous. This influenced both the advancements the women were able to make while serving in their branches, and the experiences that stemmed from their time in the military.

Through the evolution of all the women’s service branches, the military slowly began to come around to the idea of a more regular and consistent involvement of women in the military. Permanent militarization of each of the groups was presented to Congress so that women who had enlisted during the war would not have to immediately return to home-centered lives following the end of hostilities. “The postwar introduction of women into the Regular Army stemmed from” the recognition they were given from both President Dwight Eisenhower and General George Marshall. 1 While some branches were eliminated, such as the SPARS and the WASPs, others were given the authority to continue, such as the WACs, WAVES, Women Marines, and the Nurse Corps.

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The WASP did not receive incorporation into the military at the same time as the WAC, Women Marines, and WAVES. Even with petitioning, they did not receive official military recognition or status as members of the military and the Air Force until 1977. This was in part due to the AAF being a new branch of the military itself; by the outbreak of WWII in 1940, the Army Air Corps had officially existed for two years, and was still developing its forces. Because of the novelty of the AAF, American society and male pilots believed the WASPs were trying to infringe on the masculine field of aircraft piloting.\(^3\) The proposed militarization of women pilots in 1944 was soundly rejected based on the perceived danger of flight and the consideration of reserving jobs for male pilots:

Jacqueline Cochran’s WASPS are getting a priority of a very special kind. There is a bill before congress to commission women pilots, and some have already completed their


first weeks of schooling. General Arnold told Congressmen the women pilots will be needed for combat. That’s a strange statement to make when thousands of men pilots are now out of jobs, or soon will be.4

When first proposed to Congress in 1944, the WASPs and the AAF underestimated the intensity of debate that would center on gender and the ability for women to perform their jobs. Rather than counter the attacks made on the female pilots during the discussion over the militarization bill, the women in the WASP were asked not to testify or provide personal statements that could be used as part of the argument for militarization because the War Department’s official policy was to keep the WASP from the media’s attention. This changed during the debate to re-admit women into the Air Force in 1977. The lack of testimony during the debate to militarize the WASPs in 1944 was acknowledged as one of the weaknesses of the first argument, and was thus remedied in 1977.5 Finally, a little over thirty years after the incorporation of the Nurse Corps, WACs, WAVES, and Women Marines, women pilots became part of the US military.

The rationale behind continuing the other war-created women’s branches of the military centered on the realization that women were beneficial to the military. They could perform more tasks than was thought pre-war, as they had proved time and time again during the war. WWII opened the way toward equality between military men and women of the same rank. For each branch, except the WASP, Congress proposed and passed bills for the same pay and benefits to be given women as were given men of the same rank. Although the branches did not achieve these at the same time, by the end of the war, women across the board could claim a right to the same benefits. They received the same salary, care in military hospital, and their families were allowed to display the gold star if they died while serving. The branches created specifically for women continued until 1978, when the military and Congress decided to disband each one of them,

4 James Morrison, as quoted in Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 91.
5 Merryman, *Clipped Wings*, 144-156.
allowing women to enlist in any of the regular military branches and serve in all but combat appointments.⁶

Not all changes of the regulations of the women’s branches focused on equality with servicemen. While each branch tried to restrict the marriage of enlisted women—since they would consider leaving to start their new families—many regulations by the end of the war had relaxed. Women could date enlisted men, yet were still transferred upon marriage. Pregnant applicants were rejected, but by the end of the war, women already in the armed services were allowed to receive medical care from military hospitals while pregnant beginning in 1944.⁷ However, following the decisions it had made regarding providing women with dependency stipends, the military decided to also decline maternity care to any new mothers within its ranks, unless the woman’s husband was also enlisted in the military.⁸ However, the military did take steps towards child care, creating centers accommodating close to 130,000 children, although this “did not begin to meet the need.”⁹

While the majority of military women returned home after the war, either voluntarily, or because their jobs were given to returning male veterans, some women did stay in the military. Since the Second World War, further concessions have been given to women in the military, placing them more and more on an equal footing with men of comparable rank in the opportunities open to them. The recognition women received for their service in WWII played a large part in the strides they made following the war. Experiences between the branches of the women’s programs in the military differed during the war, due to the military’s view of restrictions on the tasks women could perform, and what assignments each branch delegated to the women enlisting. The Nurse Corps, while combatting the restrictions the Army and society placed on acceptable women’s roles, achieved increased status by the end of the war, something the WASPs struggled obtaining. Female nurses tended to gain increased status and equality

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⁷ Morden, Women’s Army Corps, 16.
⁸ Ibid., 16.
with men of equal rank in the military faster than female pilots in the WASP, and thus, their experiences during WWII differed in both restriction and opportunity.

Figure 2: Some of the first women in the WAAC salute.¹⁰

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¹⁰“Women in WWII.”
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