

FORGOTTEN SOLDIERS:
MEMORY AND PERSPECTIVES OF AMERICAN WOMEN'S MILITARY CORPS IN
WORLD WAR II

by

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ABSTRACT

After the United States entered World War II in 1941, the country faced shortages of manpower, resulting in the establishment of women's corps for women to take on non-combat jobs. The United States first established the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), later brought into the Army as the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Other branches of the military created their own corps to allow women to serve in various capacities, which included: the Navy's Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES), the Army Air Forces' Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), and the Marine Corps' Women's Reserve Corps. All of the corps appear in the newspaper and magazine articles of the time in some regard. At the end of the war, the units were disbanded and the women sent home. The stories of the women who served have only been more widely remembered in recent years.

This paper addresses the memory and perspective of the World War II women's military corps. I first look at how American newspapers and magazines portrayed the corps. In some cases, the articles showed a patriotic support of the women's service and work. In many other cases, however, the newspapers and magazines used language and descriptions of the women's corps in ways that emphasized their femininity as unsuitable to their work and reassured readers that the women's role was temporary and that they would return to their "pre-war selves."

Early scholarship focused on simply bringing the history of the corps to light. More recent scholarship has been able to focus on more singular topics within the corps and have addresses issues such as race and sexuality. Even so, some patterns still remain: the importance

of the women's sex and the debate on the real impact of the corps on women's equality movements.

However, the scholarly works are geared towards scholars, not the general public. Museums are one of the best ways to get the public to engage with history, but most museums still lack effective representation of the women's corps. Through these three source bases, I strive to find patterns of representation in the women's corps narrative.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Rebecca Hunt

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DEDICATION

In honor of those who have supported me. To those still with me and who have provided support over this past semester:

My grandparents: Dolores and Roger Winter;

My great-aunt Xenia.

And to those who did not get to see me make it this far:

My great-uncle Al, who served our country during World War II. I never had a chance to ask him if he met any WACs in the Pacific theater.

My great-uncle Buck, who would have wanted me to go to Stanford next.

My grandmother Carol Huner. She never got to see me grow into my love of history or even attend middle school. One of her great loves was education, so I know she would be happy to see me continuing to learn.

And finally, in memory of my grandfather, Donald Huner. The last thing I ever got to tell him was that I was accepted into CU Denver and was going to get my Master's Degree. If he was here, I know he would be asking me: "Now when are you going to be getting your PhD?"

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

SPARS: Coast Guard's women's reserve, from "Semper Paratus," Coast Guard motto meaning "Always Ready"

WAAC: "Women's Auxiliary Army Corps"

WAC: "Women's Army Corps"

WASP: "Women's Airforce Service Pilots"

WAVES: "Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services"

WFTD: "Women's Ferrying Transport Division"

WR: "Women's Reserve" (Marine Corps)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) of World War II made national news recently in 2016. This came after the repeal of a 2002 measure that allowed women veterans from World War II to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery. The family of former WASP Elaine Harmon fought to have that decision reversed again and in 2016, the passage of bill H.R. 4336 which allowed the cremated remains of the women veterans to once again be interred at Arlington.¹

Although the fight for Arlington burials is an important step in honoring and remembering the women who served during World War II, the months of increased public awareness of the women represents only a small part of the decades old battle of acknowledging the work of women during World War II.

Women served in three main corps during World War II: the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), the Women's Army Corps (WAC), the Navy's Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services (WAVES), as well as units within the Marine Corps (WR) and the Coast Guard (SPARS). The women who served in these units faced a great deal of hardship and discrimination. After the war, the military disbanded all of the corps, some only for a short while and some permanently. When they were disbanded and the women sent back home, the histories of these units practically disappeared.

Over time, scholars worked to record the histories of the women's corps, first with more general histories and, more recently, deeper analyses on smaller aspects of the corps. The breadth

¹ Erin Blakemore, "Female WWII Pilots Can Now Be Buried in Arlington," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 23, 2016.

of scholarship on the women's corps still remains fairly limited. When it comes to scholarship for a more general public, representation of the women's corps is even more limited.

In this paper, I plan to look at what I call the “memory and perspectives” of the World War II women's corps. For “perspectives,” I looked at newspaper and magazine articles between 1941, when the war first began, to 1947, two years after the end of the war. To limit the breadth of my research, I chose to focus on American publications and only those that would be readily available to the public at the time—i.e. publications like *Life*, the *New York Times*, and local newspapers. Individual military bases would often publish their own camp newspaper written by the soldiers, in fact, the WASPs had the *Fifinella Gazette* that they published at the Sweetwater, Texas base. In order to focus my research, I did not utilize the base newspapers in this project. I was also more curious about how the general public would have thought about the women's units and how those units would have been presented to them.

For “memory,” I chose to look at two different vehicles—books and articles written by historians and museum exhibits. Although historians research and write both, the museum exhibits are geared towards the more general, non-scholarly public.

Due to financial and time constraints, I limited my museum sources to local Colorado museums and those with robust online resources relating to their main exhibits. I also limited my choices of museums to ones with missions relating to World War II, aviation, or women's history. The only exception to this is in the case of the Leadville Heritage Museum. The Leadville Heritage Museum houses artifacts and exhibits relating to the nearby former Camp Hale, which was home to a fairly large unit of WACs during World War II. The WACs stationed at Camp Hale have frequently been forgotten by scholars in favor of the 10th Mountain Division.

I discuss the Camp Hale WACs representation in much further detail in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

Analyzing both the print media perspectives and modern scholarly memory of the women's military corps reveals several patterns. Print media during the war tended to remind readers that the new part of the military was still women, first and foremost. Articles reported on women's corps to reassure readers that traditional ideas about gender still existed, despite the new roles women took on, through reminders of the temporary nature of the corps, defining why women should volunteer, establishing "appropriate" ideas on jobs and relationships, and using feminine terms and descriptions of appearance's to firmly establish that the volunteers were still "women."

Scholars, however, do not utilize these sources as much as they do oral histories, personal documents, and government documents. The field of women's military history is continuing to grow and scholars' works are becoming more detail and are taking on new subfields within the larger vein of women's military participation during World War II. In scholarly works aimed at a more general audience, specifically museums, the scholarship is still catching up. Many of the relevant museums have little representation of the women's military corps, especially on the local level.

This paper will analyze the patterns in representing the women's military corps and how print media during the war and scholarly analysis in modern written works and in museums relate to each other and contribute to the larger narrative in women's history. The newspaper and magazine articles of the 1940s reveal schools of varying support of the corps. Some papers portrayed the women as patriotic Americans, while others believed the programs were a waste of money to train and support incapable girls. A third school, however, supported the corps to an

extent. Articles in this group tended to acknowledge that the women were doing important war work, but made extra efforts to remark on the women's appearance and relate much of their work back to the typically feminine spheres as a way to remind the public that despite the women's role in the war, society expected them to return to their "pre-war" selves after the conflict overseas was over.

As scholars and museums remember the women's corps, they must find a balance of representing the women in the most honest way. As the new field of military history grows—a mix of social and military history—this balance is becoming easier. Throughout this process of remembrance, scholars and museums must ensure that the women's existence is not the only thing that is remembered, but that the women's voices and ideas come through their analyses to give us a more complex and in-depth understanding of World War II.

CHAPTER II

PRINT MEDIA REPORTING DURING THE WAR

Background

In World War II, the Women's Army Corps (WAC) was the first of the American women's corps to be established by the United States government. The Corps was initially established as the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, (WAAC), which meant that they would work "not *in* the Army, but *with* the Army. Women would be placed in unskilled, menial type jobs releasing more men for combat."² When Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers first introduced the bill in Congress, many newspapers quickly analyzed the debate.³

Nona Baldwin, who would later serve in the Navy, published two articles right before and after the WAACs bill was passed. Baldwin's article on March 18, 1942 ran under the headline, "Bill for Women's Auxiliary Corps of 150,000 Passed by the House."⁴ While other newspaper reports about the bill passing in various stages concentrated on presenting the WAACs in a non-threatening manner to the male soldiers and the standard gender roles of the time, Baldwin concentrated more on standard military issues of the debate, especially "the extent to which Army discipline and military law would apply to members of the WAAC."⁵ Baldwin mentioned that an amendment to the bill which would "entitle members of the corps to the same compensation, pensions and disability claims that are extended to soldiers" was not passed by the House.⁶

² Vera S. Williams, *WACs: Women's Army Corps* (Osceola, WI: Motorbooks International Publishers, 1997), 35.

³ H.R. 6293, 77th Cong. (1942) (enacted).

⁴ Nona Baldwin, "Bill for Women's Auxiliary Corps of 150,000 Passed by the House," *New York Times*, March 18, 1942, 1.

⁵ Nona Baldwin, "Bill for Women's Auxiliary Corps of 150,000 Passed by the House," *New York Times*, March 18, 1942, 1.

⁶ Nona Baldwin, "Bill for Women's Auxiliary Corps of 150,000 Passed by the House," *New York Times*, March 18, 1942, 1.

A Waste of the Government's Time and Money?

After the military created the corps, several newspapers and magazines published commentary that outright criticized the programs or covered the protests by military and government officials. War correspondent Nona Baldwin reported on the remarks of several governmental officials after the WAAC bill passed. She wrote that Representative Clare Hoffman of Michigan, “who opposed the measure, asserted that the women of the country, those ‘who sew on the buttons, do the cooking, mend the clothing and do the washing at home’ really wanted to stay in the home.”⁷ The other quotes Baldwin included, all from male senators, were in the same vein as Representative Hoffman.⁸ These arguments reveal a common thread of assumptions about women’s supposed roles in the 1940s. Many people believe that women would not want to take on typically male jobs, much less that they would be capable to perform those jobs.

Some of the main debates on the women’s corps included questions about what the women would be doing in the various corps. When the debate about jobs appeared in newspapers, it was very tightly mixed with ideas about gender roles and what the women’s roles and capabilities were when compared to the men. One such example in the *New York Times* boasted the headline: “Pictures Male Fliers Doing WASPs’ Chores.” The article mainly consists of quotes from House Representative James H. Morrison of Louisiana. The report opened with the statement: “Male fliers, with more than 2,000 hours in the air, may soon be cleaning windshields and servicing planes for ‘glamorous women fliers who only have thirty-five hours

⁷ Nona Baldwin, “Bill for Women’s Auxiliary Corps of 150,000 Passed by the House,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1942, 21.

⁸ Nona Baldwin, “Bill for Women’s Auxiliary Corps of 150,000 Passed by the House,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1942, 21.

of flying time,' the House was told today by Representative Morrison."⁹ The image of the WASP program that Morrison portrayed to the House and to the newspapers was one of mixed-up typical gender roles. The male pilots were subservient to the women and performed menial tasks and chores that would be better suited for the women to do.

It was not just government officials who harshly spoke out against the women in the papers. Inflammatory reporter Drew Pearson's "Washington Merry-Go-Round" column criticized public figures and Washington legislation. The WASP program made it into the August 6, 1944 column, which opened with the statement: "Arnold faces Congress uproar over continued use of the WASPs; Miss Cochran's lady fliers now replace instead of releasing men."¹⁰ Pearson's criticisms on the WASPs were similar to the other criticisms brought up by Representative Morrison. Immediately, Pearson brought up the accusation that women were replacing the male pilots and the men were losing their jobs. That fear implied again in Pearson's commentary with the claim that "more than a thousand discharged pilots are unable to get jobs with the air transport command, but still Jacky [*sic*] Cochran still trains more WASPs."¹¹ In addition to the complaints that men were losing jobs to women, Pearson also criticized that WASPs were less competent than the male pilots. He did this through the implication that "twenty-five WASPs have already been killed ferrying planes" because they were ill-trained; "only eleven WASPs are able to fly twin engine pursuit planes and only three are qualified to pilot four engine bombers," while the planes the WASPs were trained on were "practically eliminated."¹² In Pearson's mind, the WASPs were a waste of everyone's time and money.

⁹ "Pictures Male Fliers Doing WASPs' Chores." *New York Times*. June 20, 1944, 11.

¹⁰ Drew Pearson, "The Merry-Go Round." *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, August 6, 1944, 6.

¹¹ Drew Pearson, "The Merry-Go Round." *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, August 6, 1944, 6.

¹² Drew Pearson, "The Merry-Go Round." *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, August 6, 1944, 6.

The women's corps soon faced a controversy when the question over potential militarization of the WASPs came up. In March 1944, General "Hap" Arnold, who was in charge of the WASP program, requested that the pilots "be incorporated into the Army as an emergency measure."¹³ In response, a flurry of critical newspaper articles followed. One of the early examples from the *New York Times* stated that "no more [WASPs] should be trained, in the face of male flier excess" and that there "had been an 'overwhelming protest' over enlargement of the WASP from Civil Aeronautics Administration pilot-instructors whose program was terminated."¹⁴ The theme of the WASPs taking jobs from male fliers showed up frequently in the newspapers criticizing the expansion of the program.

In addition to defining the roles of men and women as distinctly separate spheres, the newspapers also separated the attitudes and personalities of men and women as very different things. An article in the *Atlanta Daily World* discussed the reenlistment of the WACs with the opening statement: "Members of the Women's Army Corps have September 30 to exercise the feminine prerogative of changing their minds."¹⁵ The unnamed author implied that the women were flightier than men and that their reenlistment depended on their ability to make up their minds. The "patriotic duty" that appeared in many of the articles supporting the women's corps was not reflected in this article. Instead, the assumed qualities of their gender limited women's participation.

Further beyond the women's assumed characteristics, many authors used the women's physical appearance and clothing in ways to disapprove of them. The uniforms of the American women's corps became a main point of contention among critics of the programs. In his criticism

¹³ "Would Halt the Rise of Women Pilots," *New York Times*, June 6, 1944, 10.

¹⁴ "Would Halt the Rise of Women Pilots," *New York Times*, June 6, 1944, 10.

¹⁵ "WACs Must Reenlist by September 30," *Atlanta Daily Word*, August 9, 1943, 2.

of the WASPs, Representative Morrison quoted several exorbitant figures on the cost of the program, that “the air forces plan . . . to spend \$100,000,000 in training of 5,000 members” of the WASPs and that the women’s uniforms “cost over \$500 for each WASP.”¹⁶ Major Al Williams mentioned the same issue in his column on July 10, 1944. Williams also quoted a uniform cost of \$500 for the WASPs and adds that they are “natty, smart uniforms designed by John Fredericks of Fifth Avenue,” and that “starkly contrasting this glamour item, the graduate combat air forces officer is given a check of \$250 for his uniforms.”¹⁷ Both reports of the WASP uniforms portrayed the women as “glamour girls” who were more concerned about their appearance than serving their country.

The reality of the uniform situation, according to the first history of the WACs, written in 1954 by Mattie E. Treadwell for the United States Army, was a different story. The women in all of the corps faced massive uniform shortages and the uniforms they did get were often the wrong size.¹⁸ The WAC uniform did cost more than the men’s uniform—\$177.45 as opposed to \$102.33—but Treadwell notes that women’s clothing cost more in the civilian world as well, so the cost difference was not a new phenomenon.¹⁹ Treadwell also explained that the Quartermaster General and Requisition Division did not stand back and agree to pay the entire \$75 difference. Instead, the women’s winter uniforms were made out of lighter materials and the women would only receive one coat—a heavy wool winter coat—and would not get the waterproof utility coat.²⁰ This made it very cold for the women in the winter and although the Quartermaster General agreed to find the women warmer gear, it took many months and the gear

¹⁶ “Pictures Male Fliers Doing WASPs’ Chores,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1944, 11.

¹⁷ Major Al Williams, “Major Al Williams,” *Lowell Sun*, July 11, 1944, 12.

¹⁸ Mattie E. Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*, (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1953), 149.

¹⁹ Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 149.

²⁰ Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 149-150.

the women received was mismatched and oftentimes poor quality.²¹ The women of the WAC and especially the WASP would often be given men's uniforms that they had to make do with. The WASPs had men's "zoot suits" and leather flying gear for cold-weather flying and working around the base, which they had to roll up the sleeves and pant legs to be able to use.²²

Media reports on the women in the corps would often criticize the programs through oversexualizing the women's appearance. In addition to oversexualizing the women, an issue in the *Saturday Evening Post* also addressed the concerns over relationships and dating in the woman's corps in a more negative view. A sidebar in "Barrack Room Babes" by Donald Hough bemoaned "Soldiers like everything about the Army's new streamlined truck driver—except for the fact that she's usually married to some other soldier."²³ The idea of the WACs "being married to some other soldier" was expanded on later in the article. Hough explained "the unmarried soldiers soon found out the hard way . . . [with] having some PFC tap him on the shoulder and remind him, verbally or otherwise, that he was addressing the PFC's wife."²⁴ The theme of the WACs belonging to other soldiers showed up throughout the *Saturday Evening Post* article. The belonging in the article was not the innocent "our boys" type of sentiment, which was based on a more patriotic and familial feelings. Hough instead had the WACs become objects. The article vividly painted that idea with the section about the dances, where it explained "the medics think the Army nurses are G.I. for the medics, issued to them for them to take out dancing" and later added "wait till the WAC officers get here. Any medic found dancing with a WAC officer will be staked out on a nearby mesa and covered with ants."²⁵ The WACs, even the

²¹ Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 150-153.

²² "WASP WWII Uniforms," *Wings Across America*, http://wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp/gallery/wasp_uniforms.htm.

²³ Donald Hough, "Barrack-Room Babes," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 23, 1943, 19.

²⁴ Donald Hough, "Barrack-Room Babes," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 23, 1943, 91.

²⁵ Donald Hough, "Barrack-Room Babes," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 23, 1943, 91-92.

officers, were literally seen as “belonging” to the Army men. Hough talked about the women as though they were sent to the base purely for the men’s “use.”

The issue of dating, relationships, and the assumption that the women were in the Army for men’s use soon became a bigger problem when the WAAC’s behavior and morality was soon called into more overt question. In 1943, a phenomenon historians call “the WAAC Slander Campaign” began. The impetus of the smear campaign was with *New York Daily Mail* reporter John O’Donnell. In the June 8, 1943 issue of his column “Capital Stuff,” O’Donnell claimed that the WAACs were receiving “contraceptive and prophylactic equipment” from the War Department.²⁶ This accusation immediately turned into rumors that the WAACs were morally corrupt and being used as prostitutes by the Army. Various sources took sides on the matter. A few articles came to the defense of the WAACs. *Time* magazine published three write-ups on the matter. The first article, published on June 21, 1943, called “O’Donnell’s Foul,” denounced the *New York Daily Mail* reporter. The author called O’Donnell the “flashy, pompous New York Daily News Columnist,” and called his column an “unsubstantiated blockbuster” and “rumormongering.”²⁷ O’Donnell’s rumors were dismissed by the *Time* article, which called the rumors “a cruel blow to the WAACs and the war effort” and emphasized that “womanpower is essential to the armed forces in total war.”²⁸ The author also noted that “Tough old War Secretary Henry Stimson was moved to issue a formal statement: ‘I have made a thorough investigation of all these rumors. They are completely false. . . Anything which would interfere with [WAAC] recruiting or destroy the reputation of this corps and, by so doing, interfere with increase in combat strength of our Army, would [aid] the enemy.’”²⁹ Another report in defense

²⁶ John O’Donnell, “Capital Stuff,” *New York Daily Mail*, June 8, 1943.

²⁷ “O’Donnell’s Foul,” *Time*, June 21, 1943, 90.

²⁸ “O’Donnell’s Foul,” *Time*, June 21, 1943, 90.

²⁹ “O’Donnell’s Foul,” *Time*, June 21, 1943, 90.

of the WAACs further quoted Stimson as declaring the rumors as “unpatriotic” and added that the original sponsor of the WAACs, Congresswoman Rogers decried the rumors as unpatriotic with the statement “Loose talk concerning our women in the armed services cannot be less than Nazi inspired.”³⁰

Another *Time* article reported on a press conference given by President Roosevelt in which the President criticized the American reporters for “impeding the war effort and of encouraging the current confusion and bad temper among agencies and high officials of his own administration.”³¹ At the press conference, President Roosevelt specifically referenced the WAAC slander campaign, calling the rumors “deliberate and shameful.”³² Another *Time* article, this time in December 1943, discussed the lull in WAAC recruitment. One reason the author mentioned for the decline was “a skeptical press and public. The mischief-making of the New York Daily News's Columnist John O'Donnell, who spread scandalous gossip of moral conditions among WACs, hurt all the services.”³³

Despite the bad press, the WAACs tried to fight back against the rumors. One issue of the *New York Times* in June 1943 covered the WAACs attempts to defend themselves. In her column, Eleanor Darnton mentioned another part of the rumors “concerned the number of WAACs who had been sent home from North Africa because they were pregnant. One day it was that twenty-six women had been sent home . . . Eventually it reached 500.”³⁴ Darnton was quick to put the rumors to rest. The reporter explained that only three of 292 women were sent home from Africa and the one that was pregnant was married to an American officer and “didn't know

³⁰ “Stimson Condemns Gossip About WAAC,” *New York Times*, June 11, 1943, 6.

³¹ “The President and the Press,” *Time*, July 12, 1943, 70.

³² “The President and the Press,” *Time*, July 12, 1943, 70.

³³ “In This Total War,” *Time*, December 27, 1943, 65.

³⁴ Eleanor Darnton, “WAACs Fight Back,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1943, X9.

she was pregnant until she got to Africa.”³⁵ Darnton then went on to say that “the Army grew in anger in defense of its own” and quoted several high-ranking Army officials who had come forward in defense of the WAACs. One such quote Darnton included was from General Marshall, who called the rumors “the most atrocious, if not subversive, attack being directed against an organization of the Army, one of the finest ever created . . . Some seem to be intent on the suicide of our own war effort, not to mention the defamation of as fine an organization of women I have ever seen assembled.”³⁶ This followed the same pattern as most of the other articles in defense of the WAACs. The reports began by dismissing the rumors with facts and calling them vicious rumormongering, then quoted numerous Army personnel in defense of the WAACs, showing that the Army was united in backing the women.

Supporting the Women’s Patriotic Duty

Although many of the newspapers and magazines published negative stories about the formation of the various programs, some supported the women’s programs. Many of these articles went beyond just defending the women during the slander campaign, they supported the corps on the women’s own merits. An article in the African-American newspaper *The Chicago Defender* published a glowing report of the WAACs in late 1942. The report claimed that the WAACs were “doing a grand job of putting democracy in action. Women are trained together irrespective of race. These women are learning to know and respect each other as fellow Americans fighting in a common cause to preserve the democratic way of life.”³⁷ The article went on to further explain the wide variety of jobs available to the WAACs, the pay, and the

³⁵ Eleanor Darnton, “WAACs Fight Back,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1943, X9.

³⁶ Eleanor Darnton, “WAACs Fight Back,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1943, X9.

³⁷ “Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps Needs Members: Valuable Training Given at Fort,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 2, 1942, 20.

training involved.³⁸ The main purpose of the story was to encourage women to join the WAACs. Overall, the article had an incredibly patriotic tone, with statements about the women's love of their country, their patriotism, and how they are all doing their duty as Americans. In the last few paragraphs, the article's patriotic rhetoric reached its peak and told readers that "Now is the time for every woman to do her part . . . This is a woman's war too, and the responsibility for victory rests upon her shoulders . . . Remember the Axis powers are not only fighting soldiers; they are fighting everyone who calls himself free."³⁹ The author felt proud of the work being undertaken by the WAACs and wanted to see more women join and do their patriotic duty.

Patriotism was a main factor in articles in support of the women's corps. A report in the *New York Times* reported on the praise the WAACs received from Undersecretary of War Robert Patterson. This article followed the same pattern as the *Chicago Defender* article; with praise of the women's undertaking of their patriotic duty, a brief outline of the training the women were given, and details about the wide variety of jobs the women performed. This author in particular told readers about some of the less-reported on skills taken on by the women. These tasks include: convoy driving, ordnance inspection, working as air dispatchers, as auxiliary military police, and storekeepers.⁴⁰

New York Times political correspondent Kathleen McLaughlin wrote the most articles for the paper praising the WAAC/WACs. Her long articles gave readers an in-depth view of what was going on with the corps. Right after the program began, one of her columns covered preparations for the program and statistics on the numbers of women joining. McLaughlin

³⁸ "Women's Auxiliary Army Corps Needs Members: Valuable Training Given at Fort," *The Chicago Defender*, December 2, 1942, 20.

³⁹ "Women's Auxiliary Army Corps Needs Members: Valuable Training Given at Fort," *The Chicago Defender*, December 2, 1942, 20.

⁴⁰ "Patterson Lauds Women's War Job," *New York Times*, August 8, 1943, 28.

opened her article with the statement: “those who question the usefulness of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps may well study the figures released today at Fort Des Moines.”⁴¹ She argued that the Army requested 8,000 WAACs and that more many women were needed to sign up for the corps.⁴² Soon after, McLaughlin published a report on how the Army was processing the WAACs. The article covered the women receiving their uniforms and barracks assignments, their initial training, what they ate for meals, and the various forts which the women would be sent to for further training and assignments.⁴³ McLaughlin even briefly mentioned that there were African-American WAACs, but that there was no mention by Director Hobby as to where those units would be assigned.⁴⁴

McLaughlin also reported on some of the other women’s corps. In an article about the WAVES, SPARS, and the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve, she informed readers about the high praise the women received from Navy command. She quoted Navy Commander in Chief Admiral Ernest King as called the programs a success and that they had “raised the efficiency standard.”⁴⁵ Like her other reports, McLaughlin not only showed her own support of the programs, she also emphasized the backing the women received from important government and military officials.

An early recruiting campaign used the patriotic “free a man to fight” approach. The movement encouraged women to join the corps and undertake a needed home-front position, so that a male worker could be sent to a needed, most likely combat, position overseas. An article about the WACs in the *Norfolk New Guide and Journal* ran with the headline: “These Are

⁴¹ Kathleen McLaughlin, “Army Asks WAAC for 8,000 Women,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1942, 17.

⁴² Kathleen McLaughlin, “Army Asks WAAC for 8,000 Women,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1942, 17.

⁴³ Kathleen McLaughlin, “Processing Swift for Women’s Army,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1942, 21, 26.

⁴⁴ Kathleen McLaughlin, “Processing Swift for Women’s Army,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1942, 26.

⁴⁵ Kathleen McLaughlin, “Navy Praises Women Reserves For Raising Efficiency Standards,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1944, 10.

Representative of the American Women Relieving Soldiers for the Fighting Fronts.”⁴⁶ The report showed pictures of eight of the African-American women who had joined the WACs and outlined the variety of assignments the women had and the varied backgrounds they came from.

Other articles argued that women’s participation in the war was simply a part of their patriotic citizenship, like the previously mentioned article in the *Chicago Defender* in December 1942. In her column, “A Woman’s Viewpoint,” in the *El-Paso Herald Post*, Mrs. Walter Ferguson addressed the idea of women’s wartime participation. Ferguson opened with the statement: “I’m getting a little tired of the surprised note that creeps into all reports about women’s wartime efforts.”⁴⁷ In her column Ferguson briefly traced how women have played an important role in establishing America as a country, so it should not be a surprise to the American people that women want to aid in the war effort. Ferguson argued that in the case of World War II: “the women of the United States do not yield to their Nazi foes. When the demand comes, they rise to the occasion too.”⁴⁸ Like many of the reports that voiced their support of the women in the corps, Ferguson believed that the answer to the question “Why should women want to join the corps,” was obvious. Like the men in the military, the women had a patriotic duty as an American citizen to protect their country and the ideas of democracy. To these articles, gender did not detract one from doing what it took to protect the American democracy and way of life.

One story about the Navy’s WAVES put them in a positive light over their male counterparts. On August 1, 1943, the *New York Times* reported on Commander McAfee’s review of the WAVES in Brooklyn. The write-up opened with the subheading: “3 Sailors Faint in Heat

⁴⁶ “These Are Representative of the American Women Relieving Soldiers for the Fighting Front,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, August 14, 1943, 2.

⁴⁷ Mrs. Walter Ferguson, “A Woman’s Viewpoint,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 16, 1943, 4.

⁴⁸ Mrs. Walter Ferguson, “A Woman’s Viewpoint,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, October 16, 1943, 4.

But Girls Keep Ranks at Floyd Hill Ceremony,” then went on to explain that “three of the sailors, who had been standing in the hot sun with the rest of the detachment, fainted. The one hundred WAVES in line withstood the heat.”⁴⁹ The author implied that the WAVES were tougher than the other Navy personnel, since they did not break formation. It also did not incorporate any of the techniques to make the women’s corps seem non-threatening to readers, like showing the limits to the program and women’s training. Later in the report, it described that the WAVES were “executing their duties alongside of men at the radio controls and switchboards [and] in the hangers . . . grease-smearred WAVES in blue denim cover-alls repair cowling and plane equipment.”⁵⁰ When the article described the duties of the WAVES, it did not describe them as doing typical “women’s work.” But the women were also not described as trying to emulate the men. Instead, they were just doing their jobs next to the men.

Not every newspaper used the uniforms as a point of criticism. More newspapers and magazines actually used the uniforms as “human interest” pieces to gain interest in the story. One of the first articles about the WACs in *Life* magazine included pictures of models wearing the three different uniforms for the women.⁵¹ Whenever a new uniform was designed for one of the corps, several articles came out about them. One lengthy report in the *New York Times* described the WAACs uniforms in detail and stated that the uniform would be a “natty outfit patterned after men’s clothes,” adding that the “trim olive drab outfits, [would be] patterned after the official dress of their brothers in arms but neatly styled for the feminine figure.”⁵² The author presented the uniforms in a similar way to discussing women’s high fashion. The uniforms were described as “natty,” and even though they were based off of the men’s uniform, they were still

⁴⁹ “WAVES Reviewed by Commdr. M’Afee [sic],” *New York Times*, August 1, 1943, 35.

⁵⁰ “WAVES Reviewed by Commdr. M’Afee [sic],” *New York Times*, August 1, 1943, 35.

⁵¹ “WAAC,” *Life*, June 8, 1942, 26.

⁵² “Olive Drab Chosen for WAAC Uniform,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1942, 10.

cut to a “feminine figure.” From this, readers were once again reassured that the women in WAACs are “still women.” They would not be wearing men’s uniforms, so they would not look like the men and would still be fashionable, which the article assumed the women mainly cared about. An article at the end of the war about updated uniforms did the same thing. The reporter described the “styling and design of the women’s uniform in the shade of ‘verde-green’ – in women’s fashion circles that that means a dark shade of green.”⁵³ Meanwhile, the same article stated that the men’s uniform would be “blue” or maybe “dark blue.” Once again, the emphasis was on the women wanting to be fashionable. The men, it was implied, did not care as much about the color of the uniforms, at least, not to the point that it needed a specialized color name.

A lengthy article was published on the WASPs describing their uniforms in the *New York Times*. The November 17, 1943 article ran under the headline, “New WASP Uniforms Give Fliers Swank and Lift Them Nearer Rank of Army Officers.” The uniforms for WASPs were also described as fashionable, with “swank.” The author was very careful to add a qualifying statement to its readers, warning that “the handsome new uniform is not to be considered an incentive to induction, for the WASP have a thousand-long application list, as many waiting as are in the service.”⁵⁴ An issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* also brought up the same assumption. The article looked at the shortages in women volunteering for the corps and offered one explanation: “Relative smartness of uniform is often mentioned, but a January Gallup poll showed that women much prefer the WAVES' to the Marines' uniform, counter to the recruiting trend.”⁵⁵ Once again, the priority for the women was assumed to be the uniform. Many of the

⁵³ “New Blue Uniform Planned By Army,” *New York Times*, August 8, 1946, 20.

⁵⁴ “New WASP Uniforms Give Women Fliers Swank and Lift Them Nearer Rank of Army Officers,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1943, 20.

⁵⁵ J.C. Furnas, “Are Women Doing Their Share in the War?” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 29, 1943, 44.

reports did not see the deeper meaning of the uniform and what it stood for as an incentive for women to join the WASPs.

Sometimes, though not that frequently, the men and women are referred to with even terminology. The male soldiers are “our boys,” while the women are “girls.” One such article ran under the headline “GI Joe, Jane Want to Forget Army Orders on Rest Sector.” The article, written by war correspondent Ruth Cowan, referred to the male and female soldiers in almost equal terms. They were “GI Joe and GI Jane” or “Servicemen and Servicewomen” or “GI/soldiers and WACs.”⁵⁶

Many of the articles in support of the women’s corps put the women on the same playing field as the men. Both jobs were seen as fulfilling a patriotic duty and even using similar terms for both groups in some cases. Even though some of the coverage of the women’s uniforms at times reflected the idea that women were mainly concerned about clothes and fashion, reporting on them creating a human interest piece to draw more public interest in the women’s corps.

Supporting the Women, But With Conditions

Most of the articles on the women’s corps fell in the middle of the groups of supporting and not supporting the corps. For the most part they generally supported the women aiding the war effort. However, this group of articles were quick to remind readers of the women’s gender and the temporary nature of their participation in typically male spheres of work.

On December 31, 1941, the *New York Times* published a report that outlined the WAAC bill for the general public. The author emphasized that the bill would establish a Women’s *Auxiliary* Army Corps and that there would be limits on the women’s service. Readers of the December 31st article were reassured that the women in the corps would have to be “physically

⁵⁶ Ruth Cowan, “GI Joe, Jane Want to Forget Army Orders on Rest Sector,” *Jefferson City Daily Capital News*, February 23, 1945, 4.

and morally fit” for service in “professional capacities, in the air raid warning service, in domestic work for the Army and as chauffeurs and mechanics.”⁵⁷ The bill would also put “a limit of 25,000 on the number of women permitted to serve.”⁵⁸ The author also emphasized that the women would “be under the supervision of the War Department” and “would be subject to Army discipline.”⁵⁹ The phrases reveal that many people needed assurance that the women in the Army Corps would be well-behaved, still performing tasks “appropriate for women,” would be under male direction, and that the whole situation would be temporary.

When the WAAC bill was passed in March 1942, the same pattern of trepidation continued in the newspapers. Marcia Winn of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote an article in the May 13, 1942 issue of the paper under the headline “Women’s Corps in the Army Only Needs FDR Signature.” Winn reported that “A few moot points were made clear in today’s debate: The corps will be under the direction and control of the army, but will not be part of the army. It will be noncombatant . . . Enlistment will be voluntary and not by draft.”⁶⁰ Articles about the passing of the WAACs bill also mention a failed last-minute attempt by several senators to make the WAACs a part of the Army. The reports were quick to point out that there was great opposition in the Senate to that version of the bill. A *New York Times* article on May 9, 1942 pointed out that “Several Senators objected to voting on the . . . measure, which was put before them reportedly . . . without any previous committee consideration.”⁶¹

One of the first reports about the establishment of the WAVES compared the program to the WAACs and broke down the differences between the two for readers. The article subtly

⁵⁷ “New Bill Provides for Women’s Army,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1941, 12.

⁵⁸ “New Bill Provides for Women’s Army,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1941, 12.

⁵⁹ “New Bill Provides for Women’s Army,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1941, 12.

⁶⁰ Marcia Winn, “Women’s Corps in the Army Only Needs FDR Signature,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 1942, 1.

⁶¹ “Senators Approve Women Army Corps,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1942, 8.

implied that the Navy's program was superior to the Army program. The WAVES had higher pay "starting at \$50" a month, needed a college degree, and were "limited to shore duty within continental United States."⁶² The maximum size of the program would "probably not exceed 12,000," compared to the WAACs 150,000.⁶³ The article listed the benefits for both the women and what the general public would feel most reassured about. The WAVES were paid better than the WAACs, which would benefit the women in the WAVES. The college diploma stipulation in the 1940s meant that the women accepted into the program would most likely be of good character. The women's restriction to shore duty meant the recruits would be safe from combat duty, while the small size of the program made it appear less threatening to the general public.

To some articles, however, women's motivations to join the war were not strong enough. A *Saturday Evening Post* issue took an overall look at the various ways women participated in war work and claimed that American women were actually lagging behind the men in their participation. In a sidebar, the magazine quoted "'Women don't have wives,' says one expert. And that's as close as most analysts have come to the reason why some of the ladies are lagging in war work."⁶⁴ The author did not expand on what was meant by that observation, perhaps that war participation required someone to be at home to take care of the family. Ironically, the role of the home played an important role in women's motivations in the rest of the report. Just like the previous examples, the *Saturday Evening Post* article frequently cited the idea of home and family as the key factor for women to be involved in the war. Numerous times, the author mentioned groups of housewives doing their part in the war and three of the four pictures had captions that mentioned the women's marital status: "the farmer's wife has unmistakably been

⁶² "Navy is Preparing to Recruit Women," *New York Times*, July 24, 1942, 12.

⁶³ "Navy is Preparing to Recruit Women," *New York Times*, July 24, 1942, 12.

⁶⁴ J.C. Furnas, "Are Women Doing Their Share in the War?" *Saturday Evening Post*, April 29, 1944, 12.

doing her part,” “Bronx women, calling themselves the United Housewives, organized to fight black markets,” and “Carrie Parker, grandmother, sent husband and son to war, became a shipyard welder.”⁶⁵ No matter what job the women performed, the most important part was that they were connected to the roles of wife and mother. Just like Knight write-up, “Are Women Doing Their Share in the War” brought up the fact that America did not have combat on the home front. The magazine quoted that “‘We haven’t been bombed,’ others say. ‘The war hasn’t been brought home here as it has to the English.’”⁶⁶ Once again, the idea of the home front is central to women’s motivation. Whether women were involved in the war or not, their participation revolved around the home front and family. Women should be involved in the war effort to support their homes, families, and their men serving in combat roles. If they were not involved enough, as the *Saturday Evening Post* article claimed, it was because their homes were not under direct threat.

After the various corps were established, newspapers and magazines examined the tasks women would be expected to complete after joining. Nona Baldwin’s column for the *New York Times* reemphasized the provision that “corps members will be required to serve under full military discipline” and that the jobs the women would serve in would be “in such fields as cooking and clerical work.”⁶⁷ Another correspondent, Marcia Winn, brought up the same duties as mentioned by other reports and added that “Women will not be cooks, except for themselves; cooking, as far as America's male army goes, will continue to be classed as a combat duty.”⁶⁸ Cooking, which many would have considered a “woman’s duty” in the 1940s, was a duty that was done in combat zones, thus classifying it as a combat duty. As such, women would not take

⁶⁵ J.C. Furnas, “Are Women Doing Their Share in the War?” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 29, 1944, 13.

⁶⁶ J.C. Furnas, “Are Women Doing Their Share in the War?” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 29, 1944, 44.

⁶⁷ Nona Baldwin, “House Group Backs Women Army Plan,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1942, 15.

⁶⁸ Marcia Winn, “Women’s Corps in the Army Only Needs FDR Signature,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 1942, 1.

on the typically “female duty” of cooking for the men. While most of the other jobs in the military were “men’s duties” taken on by the women volunteers, cooking was the opposite, with the men doing that duty.

In the July 19, 1943 issue of *Life* magazine, the WASPs were the cover story. The feature was filled with pictures of the pilots and told readers about the pilots’ training and what they did in their free time. Much like the reports on the other women’s corps, the *Life* WASP story employed many of the same techniques to reassure readers of the WASPs’ purpose. Early in the article, it stated that a “new trainee is under Army supervision but remains a civilian.”⁶⁹ Once again, the reader was reminded that the women might be helping the war effort, but they were still very much separate from the Army. The author reinforced that idea a page later, with the statement “they follow a stepped-up version of the nine-month course developed for male aviation cadets, learning everything except gunnery and formation flying.”⁷⁰ The WASPs were taking the same course as the male pilots, but they would not be learning anything to do with combat. The report also directly laid out the pros and cons of the male versus female pilots. *Life* stated that “the girls are faster on instruments than the boys, more smooth and gentle in flying characteristics. But on the male side of the ledger goes credit for less mechanical flying and better memory for details.”⁷¹ The report assured readers that the male pilots were still better at some things, so their jobs should not be endangered by the women.

The *New York Times* article “It’s A Woman’s War Too,” ended with an anecdote about five husbands who attended the American Women’s Association annual dinner for their busy wives. The section of the story, called “Overworked Wives” painted a picture of “five men,

⁶⁹ “Girl Pilots,” *Life*, July 19, 1943, 73.

⁷⁰ “Girl Pilots,” *Life*, July 19, 1943, 75.

⁷¹ “Girl Pilots,” *Life*, July 19, 1943, 73.

bewildered but defiantly sticking together, wandered into the huge spaces of the Hotel Pennsylvania ballroom.”⁷² Once again, the newspapers showed a world of “flipped” gender roles. The women were working as doctors while the men attended the women’s dinner. The men, meanwhile, are portrayed as being lost and confused in the women’s group, but are still determined to help their wives. Although this write-up portrayed the switch in a humorous light, the idea that the war caused changes in gender roles was still there.

Most newspapers and magazines that covered the women’s military corps devoted some space to questions or mentions of the women’s appearance. Frequently, women were described as “young” or “pretty.” One article talked about the various backgrounds women volunteers were from, but concentration on their appearances with the descriptions of “Pvt. Anita Rogers, a girl with a divine figure and a magazine-cover face, who now drives trucks for the 8th Air Force Fighter Command, used to be a Powers model in New York.”⁷³ The director of the WASPs, Jackie Cochran, was especially prone to descriptions like that. The *Life* magazine cover story on the WASP program called her a “smart and pretty woman” and the “glamorous speed flier.”⁷⁴

The rest of the WASPs received the same treatment as Jackie Cochran in the *Life* cover story with mentions of their appearance and references to clothes and cosmetics. One page of photos mentioned the women’s hair in almost every caption. Readers learned that “feminine locks constantly creep into girl fliers’ eyes unless some sort of headgear is worn” and the different pictures compared the methods, from hairnets, to earphones, to pigtails, to “a combination beret ribbon-tied hair knot.”⁷⁵ The author did not talk about other flying gear that both male and female pilots wear, other than the basic uniform to which the article told readers,

⁷² “It’s A Woman’s War Too,” *New York Times*, November 21, 1943, X11.

⁷³ Ernest O. Hauser, “Those Wonderful G.I. Janes,” *Saturday Evening Post*, September 9, 1944, 60.

⁷⁴ “Girl Pilots,” *Life*, July 19, 1943, 73.

⁷⁵ “Girl Pilots,” *Life*, July 19, 1943, 77.

“the suits are not very glamorous.”⁷⁶ The women’s uniform and gear only mattered in the article in order to inform readers how they related to the women’s appearance. What the gear did to protect and aid the pilots was not important to the article.

Magazines and newspapers went further beyond just brief mentions of the girls’ appearances and devoted whole pages to their looks and beauty routines. In the September 27, 1943 issue of *Life*, the magazine ran an entire feature called “WACs’ Feet” that was devoted to how the WACs exercised their feet to keep them “in fine shape” and give them “slimmer ankles.”⁷⁷ The *Saturday Evening Post* had “Right Face,” a lengthy write-up that outlined the WACs’ beauty routine and told readers about how important cosmetics were to women. The article ran with the subheading: “No mere man will ever understand why women can endure all the torture of war except a shiny nose.”⁷⁸ The story was peppered with phrases that told the reader about how women mainly cared about cosmetics, with the two strongest lines: “They can take bombings and bloodshed, they calmly accept shortages of food or clothing, but a feeling of uneasiness grips them the moment their noses acquire the first faint glimmerings of a shine” and “The way women feel about facial maintenance and upkeep is universal. Hitler tried to abolish the use of cosmetics, but even the Gestapo couldn’t make the ban stick.”⁷⁹ Both statements reveal how the press placed great importance on the women’s appearance. Many of these reports assumed that the women also prioritized their appearance over any sort of patriotic duty.

If the newspapers and magazines did not use the women’s appearance to portray them as “glamour girls,” then they used appearance to oversexualize them. The previously-mentioned feature, “Barrack-Room Babes,” in the *Saturday Evening Post* by Donald Hough was one the

⁷⁶ “Girl Pilots,” *Life*, July 19, 1943, 76.

⁷⁷ “WACs’ Feet,” *Life*, September 27, 1943, 83.

⁷⁸ Pete Martin, “Right Face,” *Saturday Evening Post*, March 13, 1943, 21.

⁷⁹ Pete Martin, “Right Face,” *Saturday Evening Post*, March 13, 1943, 46.

strongest examples of the women being over-sexualized. At one point Hough wondered “how they got so many beautiful babes all together in one place is another Army mystery. They are sweet as hell, they dress neatly in slacks, they signal with nicely manicured bands as soon as they have rounded a corner and they have a penchant for ribbons in their hair.”⁸⁰ As mentioned in the section on relationships, the article showed the women truck drivers as belonging to the men on the base. This theme continued with the discussions of appearance. This time, however, the women’s appearance was not invoked to show what the women thought about their own looks. The women’s appearance in the *Saturday Evening Post* feature was purely for the male gaze. The article took that idea even further and advertised the variety of women that were at the base, “blondes, brunettes, redheads and medium-browns,” as though the men could have their choice of who they wanted.⁸¹ The discussion ended with the women at the PX, which the article stated “Good PX officers hire the most attractive girls they can find, to work behind the counters . . . Every girl in the PX was a blonde, and magnificent in every respect. Sales at the PX broke all existing records.”⁸² To the article, the women only mattered because they were attractive; their jobs and how well they performed those jobs were practically irrelevant. The women were simply there as “eye-candy” for the men.

When the women and men were not being compared to each other, the question was then about how relationships would work. The magazines and newspapers wondered if the women would be able to date and what would happen if they dated males who were a lower rank. It was one of the main questions asked at press conferences. When the women’s Marine Reserve was formed, director Major Ruth Cheney Streeter “succeeded in answer a host of questions,” which

⁸⁰ Donald Hough, “Barrack-Room Babes,” *Saturday Evening Post*, October 23, 1943, 19.

⁸¹ Donald Hough, “Barrack-Room Babes,” *Saturday Evening Post*, October 23, 1943, 19.

⁸² Donald Hough, “Barrack-Room Babes,” *Saturday Evening Post*, October 23, 1943, 91.

included questions on “pay, marriage, dates and makeup.”⁸³ In an early report about the WAACs, “Mrs. Hobby Sworn in as WAAC Director,” Nona Baldwin continued with her subtle disapproval of some of the criticisms of how people responded to the establishment of the WAAC program. The article about Oveta Culp Hobby’s appointment as WAAC director and subsequent press conference ended with the statement: “She sidestepped a question as to whether WAAC officers could have ‘dates’ with Army privates.”⁸⁴ Although Baldwin did not provide an answer for that questions, other reporters had their own ideas.

The question of marriage was directly answered in a brief *Time* magazine story with the headline “Marriage Permitted.” The report stated that “The Navy does not bend easily. But now it is up against the women . . . relaxing one of its ironclad rules, WAVES, Coast Guard SPARS and Marine Reserves may marry [within the service] . . . In the Philadelphia Navy Yard a sailor promptly married a WAVE.”⁸⁵ The *Time* author implied that the women volunteers were preoccupied with marriage and forced the Navy’s hand to change to rules. It also implied that women joined the service purely to meet a husband or that nature would take its course.

Articles in other papers also hinted at the idea of the women belonging to the male soldiers. A story in the African-American newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, reported on the lack of African-American WACs stationed overseas. While it could be read as an issue of race, the language utilized by the article hints at a continuing pattern of the women being seen as belongings. The report’s headline was “No Colored WACs: ‘Our Boys’ Irked,” and described that “Colored American doughboys are expressing great disappointment that no colored WACs were included in the contingent of some 500 WACs recently arrived” in Europe and further

⁸³ “Women Marines Scorn Nickname,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1943, 10.

⁸⁴ Nona Baldwin, “Mrs. Hobby Sworn in as WAAC Director,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1942, 32.

⁸⁵ “Marriage Permitted,” *Time*, March 29, 1943, 47.

stated that “several have suggested that they should petition their superior officers to make known their desire and need for colored WACs in the ETO.”⁸⁶ The author implied that the male soldiers should have the women of their choosing with them overseas, as a right or even a reward for their military duty.

The most subtle way that newspapers and magazines tackled the idea of women’s corps was through their use of gender-based terminology. The names the authors used for the women and their corps all contributed to the affirmation of pre-war gender ideas that the print media encouraged. Frequently, the women volunteers were referred to as “girls,” and oftentimes the reporters would use the terms “women” and “girls” interchangeably. The *New York Times* article “It’s A Woman’s War Too” used “women” for most of the article, but one section talked about “teams of girls” in England’s shipyards.⁸⁷ The *Saturday Evening Post* feature, “Are Women Doing Their Share in the War,” did the same. The story, which covered all of the different types of women’s war work, mainly used the term “women,” but the word “girls” was peppered throughout the article. At one point, the author talked about “girls in uniform” on the same page as the discussion of “Red Cross Motor Corps girls” and “girls to dance with servicemen.”⁸⁸ At the same time, the article only used “men” or “male,” when it compared their war contributions.

The WASP cover story in *Life* showed the heaviest use of the word “girl” for the women. The feature was called “Girl Pilots” and used the word “woman/women” three times, compared to the thirty-five times the words “girl/girls” were used.⁸⁹ The infantilization went even further in Donald Hough’s “Barrack-Room Babes” in the *Saturday Evening Post*, which in addition to

⁸⁶ “No Colored WACs: ‘Our Boys’ Irked,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 14, 1943, 9.

⁸⁷ “A Woman’s War Too,” *New York Times*, November 21, 1943, X11.

⁸⁸ J.C. Furnas, “Are Women Doing Their Share in the War?” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 29, 1944, 44.

⁸⁹ “Girl Pilots,” *Life*, July 19, 1943, 73-80.

calling the women “girls,” also referred to them as “babes.”⁹⁰ The infantilization of the women diminished the women’s importance and made them appear as less of a threat to the men. Readers would have subconsciously seen “girls” as less important as “men,” even when the groups were around the same age and performing many of the same jobs.

While not created by the papers, the names of the various women’s corps and their use in the reports revealed more issues of specifying gender-based terminology. For example, the navy corps was known by the acronym: “WAVES,” which stood for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service. The acronym did what many of the articles about women’s service did – it implied the temporary nature of the programs. Women were “volunteers,” thus not military. “Emergency” meant that women’s service was the result of extenuating circumstances and would not last forever. Another service whose name played an important role in this argument was the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve. In a telling article, with the headline, “Women Marines Scorn Nickname,” the *New York Times* reported that there was no “kidding” nickname for the group and they were simply called “marines.”⁹¹ The story mentioned this fact with an air of disapproval. While the director of the women’s reserve, Major Ruth Cheney Streeter responded that the name was because “the marines are awfully proud of their name and the fact that they wanted to share it with us shows that they really wanted us in.”⁹² The author of the story disagreed, citing confusion on which gender people would be talking about when they said “marines.” Most likely, the issue with the nickname stemmed from the fact that it showed the male and female marines as being the same. Without a nickname, the women would not be set

⁹⁰ Donald Hough, “Barrack-Babes,” *Saturday Evening Post*, October 23, 1943, 19, 91-92.

⁹¹ “Women Marines Scorn Nickname,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1943, 10.

⁹² “Women Marines Scorn Nickname,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1943, 10.

apart from the men. As the various print media discourses showed, this was not something the articles wanted to tell their readers.

Minorities in the Corps

One issue that both the men's and women's corps dealt with during the war was race and integrating units. African-American men served in a wider variety of military roles, as well as in overseas combat, in World War II than they had in previous wars.⁹³ On the women's side, the WAC began to recruit African-American women in early 1941. Despite this, African-Americans enlisting in the military still faced segregation and discrimination.

African-American newspapers covered the WACs in some capacity. The Baltimore *Afro-American* paper would publish the names of the African-American women recruited into the program. One such story, published on September 5, 1942, stated that "thirty-six colored women were among the 436 Women's Auxiliary Corps officer candidates graduated here, [at Fort Des Moines, Iowa] after a six weeks' training course."⁹⁴ The article ended with a list of the names and hometowns of all thirty-six of the women. Several months later, the paper published another write-up praising members of the WAAC. This time, it was thirty-one African-American women who had graduated with specialists' ratings, thirty-one with the Motor Transport Division and two in administrative positions. Of the Motor Transport Division, the report outlined the training as not just covering the basic driving of the vehicles, but also "instruction in the principles of motor mechanics . . . convoy driving for moving troops and supplies in non-combat operations. Blackout driving is a part of the training."⁹⁵ Other authors also discussed the training and duties of the WACs. One article in the *Pittsburgh Courier* described the work of ninety-seven African-

⁹³ Brenda L. Moore, *To Serve My Country, To Serve My Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 26.

⁹⁴ "36 WAAC's Receive Their Commissions; Await Assignments," *Afro-American* (Baltimore), September 5, 1941, 1.

⁹⁵ "31 WAACs Earn Specialists' Rating," *Afro-American* (Baltimore), November 21, 1942, 17.

American WACs at Fort Lewis as being “a widely-diversified field of activity, with some performing high specialized tasks. The list includes hematologists, truck drivers, typists and warehouse clerks.”⁹⁶

An early story in the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide* reported low recruitment numbers for African-American women into the corps. The author explained that a WAAC company required 150 women and that because of low numbers there was only one company of African-American WAACs. The report went further on to explain that “the great concern which colored people exhibited when the WAACs were first announced as to whether colored girls were to be admitted had given rise to the assumption that the organization would be flooded with applicants but this has been far from true.”⁹⁷

Perhaps as a way of combatting low recruitment, several newspaper articles were published with the goal of painting the WACs in a positive light specifically for African-American women. A story in the *Philadelphia Tribune* in 1942 ran under the headline: “WAAC Offers Chance to Help Win Victory,” with the subheading: “Colored Women Graded According to Ability.”⁹⁸ In addition to the same benefits explained by other papers—relieving more men for duty and patriotism—the *Philadelphia Tribune* article also pointed out the benefits for African-American women who joined the WAAC. A section of the report had the heading “Race Forgotten” and implied that the women in the WAACs would be judged purely on their skills and knowledge. Other authors continued to focus on the wide variety of jobs available to WACs and the opportunities to be promoted. A later article in the *Philadelphia Tribune* reported on the promotion of Mary Lewis. The story ran with the headline of: “Philadelphia WAAC Promoted to

⁹⁶ “Fort Lewis WACs Are Specialists,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 28, 1945, 6.

⁹⁷ “Enlistment of Girls in WAACs Behind Schedule,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, November 21, 1942, 2.

⁹⁸ “WAAC Offers Chance to Help with Victory,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 7, 1942, 5.

Rank of Second Officer at Fort Des Moines” and followed up with “Mary L. Lewis, Former Home Economics Teacher Wins Rank After 4 Months.”⁹⁹ Lewis was “already distinguished as the first colored mess officer in the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps . . . and [became] one of the first officers in the WAAC to receive a promotion to a higher rank.”¹⁰⁰ The author implied that someone could come from humble beginnings, like a home economics teacher, and earn a higher rank through their own talents and determination.

Another report that treated the African-American WAC companies with pride dealt with WACs being stationed abroad in the later years of the war. The feature covered an inspection tour of the WACs and a subsequent interview with Director Hobby. In the interview, Hobby stated that “four Negro companies of WACs had been requested for foreign service.”¹⁰¹ The author reported on the request with a tone of pride and implied that the request meant that the African-American corps were not only performing the same tasks and roles as the white corps, but that they were also specifically wanted to perform those jobs.

Not every newspaper shared such an optimistic view of the WAC program. One of the few articles to more overtly deal with racial issues in the women’s corps was published in the *Chicago Defender* on July 21, 1945. The report opened with the statement: “The resignation of Col. Oveta Culp Hobby as director of the Women’s Army Corps is considered ‘good riddance’ among Negroes in many quarters here.”¹⁰² The author argued that Hobby did not do enough for integration of the WAC and that she “suavely refused to see segregation of Negro and white WACs as a basis for contention.”¹⁰³ Another write-up followed up on the issue, with a report that

⁹⁹ “Philadelphia WAAC Promoted to Rank of Second Officer at Fort Des Moines,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 9, 1943, 7.

¹⁰⁰ “Philadelphia WAAC Promoted to Rank of Second Officer at Fort Des Moines,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 9, 1943, 7.

¹⁰¹ “WAC Companies Requested Abroad,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 24, 1943, 10.

¹⁰² “Hobby Out; WAC ‘New Deal’ Seen,” *Chicago Defender*, July 21, 1945, 3.

¹⁰³ “Hobby Out; WAC ‘New Deal’ Seen,” *Chicago Defender*, July 21, 1945, 3.

Director Hobby was asked to verify reports of discrimination in the WACs. The author described a complaint from the Chicago NAACP, which stated that although “many of the Negro personnel at Des Moines completed all required training weeks ago, they are kept at Fort Des Moines doing nothing,” while the white WACs were immediately sent out on assignments.¹⁰⁴ The article further argued that “the situation, if it exists, is destructive to the morale of the WACs and will breed confusion and discontent.”¹⁰⁵ Many reports followed Hobby’s meetings with various African-American groups on the discrimination issues. One of the main concerns of the group was total integration of the corps. As such, they were against the idea of creating a separate unit of just the African-American women.¹⁰⁶

The WACs were not the only corps with articles dealing with prejudice. In August 1943, the *New York Amsterdam News* published a story entitled: “WAVES Accept, Then Reject Woman: Navy Making Prejudice Bid.”¹⁰⁷ The author stated that “WAVES Begging for 65,000 Women, But Won’t Accept Negroes,” and later expanded that “the Navy’s propaganda campaign fails to inform Negroes they need not apply because they are not wanted—even if they do qualify.”¹⁰⁸ At the end, the article added that one of the women who was rejected by the WAVES was accepted into the WACs and able to join that corps. Earlier in 1943, various African-American newspapers published conflicting reports about whether the WAVES and SPARS would admit African-American women into their ranks or not. Some early newspapers reported that the Navy was working on plans to admit African-American women.¹⁰⁹ However, more

¹⁰⁴ “WAC Head Asked to Verify Reports,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 24, 1943, 1.

¹⁰⁵ “WAC Head Asked to Verify Reports,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 24, 1943, 1.

¹⁰⁶ See: “WAC Head Quizzed on Negroes’ Roles,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 4, 1943, 11 and Alfred E. Smith, “WAC Head Confers with Women Leaders,” *Chicago Defender*, August 28, 1943, 7.

¹⁰⁷ “WAVES Accept, Then Reject Woman,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 21, 1943, 1.

¹⁰⁸ “WAVES Accept, Then Reject Woman,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 21, 1943, 1.

¹⁰⁹ See: “Knox Gets Plans to Admit Race Women to Navy Units,” *Chicago Defender*, May 15, 1943, 3 and “WAVES, SPARS to Admit Colored Girl Trainees,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 13, 1943, 1.

newspapers reported on the ban on African-American women joining the WAVES and SPARS and of women being turned away from recruiting centers.¹¹⁰ In actuality, African-American women were not admitted to the WAVES and SPARS until late 1944. A feature in the *Chicago Defender* reported on the swearing-in ceremony of the first three African-American WAVES, two officers and one enlisted woman, in November 1944.¹¹¹

African-American newspapers mainly focused on the WACs, WAVES, and SPARS through issues of race. The reports mostly fell into two categories: articles that looked at the corps in a positive light, with the women who joined portrayed as breaking down large barriers in racial issues and articles that reported on issues of discrimination in the corps. With the concentration on racial issues, African-American newspapers had less write-ups that analyzed the women's appearance and sexuality.

African-American women were not the only minority group involved in the various women's corps. Hispanic, Native American, and Japanese American women all served in the military corps in smaller numbers. One of the most reported on group of Hispanic WACs was the "Benito Juarez Squadron" in the Women's Army Air Corps. Several newspaper articles were published when the squadron formed and requested that more Hispanic women join the corps.¹¹² One story in a Hispanic newspaper stated that the squadron had 200 when it formed and, although the article mainly focused on the male Hispanic soldiers fighting overseas, it presented the Benito Juarez Squadron in a very patriotic light, arguing that all of the soldiers were fighting

¹¹⁰ See: "Ban on Negro Girls in WAVES, SPARS Still Stands," *Chicago Defender*, February 13, 1943, 13 and Harry McAlpin, "Navy Closes Its Doors on Race Women," *Chicago Defender*, August 21, 1943, 1.

¹¹¹ "Navy Swears in Three Women as First WAVES," *Chicago Defender*, November 18, 1944, 1.

¹¹² "Benito Juarez Sera El Nombre Que Llevara un Escuadron de WACs Que Esta Organizandose," *La Prensa* (San Antonio), February 20, 1944, 2.

for the freedom of their country and would “march behind the other soldiers and cooperate in victory.”¹¹³

The Army’s weekly magazine, the *Yank*, also published a feature regarding the Benito Juarez Squadron. The story covered the swearing-in ceremony of the second section of the squadron and noted that the ceremony was well-attended and outlined the program of music, dancing, and patriotic presentations that followed.¹¹⁴

The WAC program also had a unit of Japanese-American, mainly Nisei (second-generation), women. In her book on the Nisei servicewomen, Brenda Moore argued that much of the newspaper coverage of the Nisei WACs showed them as “ambassadors for democracy.”¹¹⁵ One such article in the *St. Paul Dispatch* ran with the headline: “Yank WAC, 12 of Nippon Descent to Leave for Japan—Nisei to Be Mannequins of Democracy.”¹¹⁶

Not only were the Nisei women joining the corps for patriotic reasons, many were trying to prove their loyalty or that they were “American.” A feature in the *Dubuque Telegraph Herald* had the headline “Nisei Can Prove Loyalty to U.S.: Have Chance to Enlist in Army or Get War Jobs.”¹¹⁷ The article opened with a patriotic story of the Sakura brothers, whose father told them to be loyal to the United States and, in case of war between the United States and Japan, join the United States’ military.¹¹⁸ At the end, the author added that the WAACs were beginning to conduct surveys to find interested women at the relocation centers and that Grace Sakura would be interested in joining the corps.¹¹⁹ Several other newspapers picked up the story of the Sakura

¹¹³ “Se Necesitan Mujeres Para Un Escuadron,” *La Prensa* (San Antonio), March 8, 1944, 3.

¹¹⁴ “Latin-American WACs Honor Mexican Hero,” *Yank: The Army Weekly*, May 12, 1945, 18.

¹¹⁵ Brenda L. Moore, *Serving Our Country: Japanese American Women in the Military World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 125.

¹¹⁶ Kathy Gorman, “Yank WAC, 12 of Nippon Descent to Leave for Japan—Nisei to be Mannequins of Democracy,” *St. Paul Dispatch*, January 18, 1946, 1.

¹¹⁷ “Nisei Have Chance to Prove Loyalty to U.S.” *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, April 18, 1943, 5.

¹¹⁸ “Nisei Have Chance to Prove Loyalty to U.S.” *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, April 18, 1943, 5.

¹¹⁹ “Nisei Have Chance to Prove Loyalty to U.S.” *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, April 18, 1943, 5.

siblings in early 1943. Whether the story of the Sakura siblings was true or not, the article represented the idea of Nisei having to act extra patriotic as a way to prove their loyalty.

Perhaps as a part of having to “prove their loyalty,” the Nisei women in the WACs faced prejudice and discrimination. One article that clearly illustrated the ideas about race that the women dealt with was “Smart, Well-Fed Nisei Girls Envy of Japanese Women” by Earnest Hoberecht. The article portrayed the Nisei group as an exotic sight and reported a Japanese newspaperman stating “They don’t look like Japanese . . . I didn’t know what they were: I thought perhaps they were Chinese.”¹²⁰ According to the paper, the Nisei women did not look “Japanese” due to their well-fed and well-dressed appearance. Hoberecht further compared how “Americanized” the Nisei were compared to the Japanese women in a section called “Upset Jap Ideas.” In that section, Hoberecht argued that “Japanese women, accustomed to the small amount of food available . . . [and] to taking a second place behind their men, expressed amazement that the girls from Hawaii live in a fine Army hotel here and eat the same food that is served to the Army officers.”¹²¹

The WASP program had the least number of articles about race, primarily because the program did not admit too many minority women. There were two Chinese-American women, Maggie Gee and Hazel Ying Lee, and one Native American woman, Ola Mildred Rexroat. Very little about the women was published in the papers, other than Hazel Ying Lee. An article announcing her marriage to Chinese pilot Lin Cheung Louie was published in the Illinois paper, the *Daily Illi* in October 1943. The brief story mentions that Lee served as a ferry pilot, although it did not mention the WASP program by name.¹²² Unfortunately, Lee’s name became more

¹²⁰ Earnest Hoberecht, “Nisei Girls Envy of Japanese Women,” *Neosho Daily Democratic*, December 13, 1945, 2.

¹²¹ Earnest Hoberecht, “Nisei Girls Envy of Japanese Women,” *Neosho Daily Democratic*, December 13, 1945, 2.

¹²² “Pilots All,” *Daily Illi*, October 17, 1943, 5.

well-known because she was one of the WASPs killed during the war, of which there were thirty-eight total. On November 25, 1944, Hazel Ying Lee died in a plane crash at a base in Montana.¹²³ Her death was reported on in a brief article in the *New York Times*, which stated, incorrectly, that she was the first pilot in her division to be killed on duty.¹²⁴ Lee's family received more bad news a few days later, when her brother, Corporal Victor Ling Lee was killed in Europe during the D-Day invasions.¹²⁵ When modern scholarly works reference WASPs who have been killed during World War II, Hazel Ying Lee's name is one of the first to come up. Perhaps this is due to the fact that she was one of only three minority WASPs in the program. Maggie Gee and Ola Mildred Rexroat do not appear in the mainstream newspaper and magazines articles during the war.

Conclusion

There were numerous newspaper and magazine articles published during World War II that covered the women's military corps. Analyzing these reports reveals quite a bit about the way the media felt about the corps. Much of their coverage relates to standard ideas of gender at the time. The articles emphasized the temporary nature of the corps and that many women would still be undertaking jobs in the feminine sphere. Ideas about men and women played against each other, with the women oftentimes being portrayed as "flighty glamour girls" who were not as capable as their male counterparts. When it came to dating and direct interaction between the sexes, women were often oversexualized and depicted as being "for the men."

A few newspapers and magazines did support the women however. There were reports that defended the corps after slander campaigns threatened the women's characters. Articles in

¹²³ "Girl Pilot in Crash Dies," *Oregonian*, November 27, 1944, 5.

¹²⁴ "Mrs. Lee, Air Force Pilot, Dead," *New York Times*, November 26, 1944, 51.

¹²⁵ William M. Miller, *To Live and Die A WASP: 38 Women Pilots Who Died in WWII* (CreateSpace, 2016), 198.

many of the African-American and Hispanic wrote more favorably about the women in their communities and instead focused on the racial issues faced by the men and women in the military. Other supportive articles mainly focus on the women's undertaking of their patriotic duty.

At the end of the war, however, the corps were all disbanded and many of the women were sent back to their pre-war lives. Their contributions were largely forgotten until those histories finally started to be recorded.

CHAPTER III

SCHOLARLY INTERPRETATIONS

Historians and scholars covered the American women's military corps in varying frequency. The 1990s was a period of influx of scholarship on the various women's corps. The majority of scholarship on women's military corps can be divided into two categories: analysis and history of the units as a whole and biographies and autobiographies of individual members.

Early histories of the women's corps included government-sponsored history reports. In 1953, the United States Army's Center for Military History sponsored a report on the WACs written by former WAC Mattie E. Treadwell. Treadwell served as assistant to the WAC Director, assistant to the Air WAC Officer, and assistant to the Commandant of the School of WAC Personnel Administration and eventually reached the rank of lieutenant colonel. In her preface, Treadwell laid out her motivations behind the project as presenting the lessons learned by the military in how to train and lead women in the military.¹²⁶

Many of the early books published on the women's corps were general histories of each corps. Vera S. Williams published one book each on the WACs and the WASPs. In each of her books, Williams briefly covered the jobs, training, and disbandment of the WACs and WASPs, as well as the criticism and discrimination the women faced. As part of this in her WAC book, Williams covers the WAC smear campaign and argues that the soldiers had as much to do with spreading the smear campaign as the newspapers did.¹²⁷

Most of the early books actually focused on the WASPs' involvement in World War II. The 1990s saw several books published about the WASPs. Marianne Verges wrote *On Silver*

¹²⁶ Mattie E. Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1953), xi-xii.

¹²⁷ Williams, *WACs*, 43-49.

Wings: The Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II, 1942-1944 in which she wove together personal stories of the women with a basic history of the program, from the first women trained as part of the WFTD program to the eventual disbanding of the program. In Molly Merryman's book *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II*, she also covered the history of the program. Her book went further, however, and covered the fight for militarization and veterans' benefits in the post-war era, which was a fight the WASPs finally won in 1979.¹²⁸ The post-war struggles and accomplishments of the WASPs were discussed in-depth in Leslie Haynsworth and David Toomey's book *Amelia Earhart's Daughters: The Wild and Glorious Story of American Women Aviators from World War II to the Dawn of the Space Age*. Not only did Haynsworth and Toomey's book cover the struggles faced by the WASPs during the program, it also informed readers about their struggles for recognition in the post-war years. The book also discusses the not well-known story of thirteen former WASPs' contributions to the Cold War Space Race, where they passed the tests to become astronauts, but were ultimately not accepted into the program.¹²⁹

Few scholarly books were written about the WAVES, SPARS, and Marine Corps Women's Reserve unfortunately. Only one book looked solely at the WAVES, which was *Crossed Currents: Navy Women in a Century of Change* by Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall. Only one section of the book covers the WAVES, the rest of the book looks at women's involvement with the Navy during World War I through the Korean and Vietnam Wars until the

¹²⁸ Molly Merryman, *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) of World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 156.

¹²⁹ Leslie Haynsworth and David Toomey, *Amelia Earhart's Daughters: The Wild and Glorious Story of American Women Aviators from World War II to the Dawn of the Space Age* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1998).

1990s, when the book was published. By setting up the book this way, however, Ebbert and Hall connect the work of the WAVES into the broader history of women's military service in the Navy. Like other books on the women's corps, Ebbert and Hall tell the story of the WAVES from inception to the program's disbandment, with emphasis on the variety of work the women performed, their training, and the discrimination they faced.¹³⁰

As more scholars towards the end of the 20th century analyzed the women's corps, they also started to examine ideas about race as well as gender. In 1983, Bettye Collier-Thomas published an essay called "Recovering the Military History of Black Women" in *Minerva*, the academic journal for women's military history. Collier-Thomas found an underdeveloped area of study and wrote her essay as a way to fill that void. She noted that there were few collections of primary documents relating to black women's military service, but those collections were still available to scholars. Collier-Thomas argued that "If we are to clearly understand and delineate the history of black women in America, we must examine the multi-faceted dimensions of their experiences. Those experiences and that history must be woven into the context of Afro-American, women's and American history."¹³¹ Future scholars took Collier-Thomas's advice and more works on the black women who served in World War II began to be published. The *Minerva* journal published "The Propaganda and the Truth: Black Women and World War II" by Debra Newman in 1986 and Martha S. Putney published two articles in the *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society* in 1991: "Blacks in the Women's Army Corps During World War II: The Experiences of Two Companies" and "Mary McLeod Bethune and the Women's Army Corps During World War II."

¹³⁰ Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women in a Century of Change*, (Washington, DC: Batsford Brassey, 1999).

¹³¹ Bettye Collier-Thomas, "Recovering the Military History of Black Women," *Minerva* 1 (March 1983): 76-80.

Several books on race and the women's corps were also published in this period. Martha S. Putney expanded her articles into a book: *When the Nation was in Need: Blacks in the Women's Army Corps During World War II*, which was published in 1992. Like her articles, Putney's book focused on the complex position of the African-American WACs who were in an army that was segregated by both race and gender.¹³² In her book, Putney looks at training, duties, and the segregation of the African-American WACs. The chapter on segregation also looks in-depth at the discrimination the African-American troops faced, both from within the military and outside. As a part of her source base, Putney utilizes articles from newspapers, many of which were African-American newspapers, such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Baltimore Afro-American*. Putney concludes her book with the argument that African-American WACs faced the "twin problems of racism and sexism, and more than forty-five years later . . . black females . . . still are confronted with the vestiges of racism and sexism."¹³³ This is a pattern which more modern works on the women's corps use, in which the struggles of the women in the corps during World War II is compared with modern day women's struggles.

One of the other major books with analysis about the African-American WACs is *To Serve My Country, To Serve My Race* by Brenda L. Moore, published in 1996. Unlike Putney's book, Moore takes a micro-history approach to African-American WACs. Instead of analyzing the entire section of African-American WACs who served in World War II, Moore chooses to look at the single unit of African-American WACs who served overseas during the war, the 6888th Postal Division. Like other early scholars of the African-American WACs, Moore's motivation in her research is to fill the void of scholarly works on African-American military

¹³² Marthas S. Putney, *When the Nation Was in Need: Blacks in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press Inc, 1992), viii.

¹³³ Putney, *When the Nation was in Need*, 151.

women.¹³⁴ Moore's work represents an important step in the field of women's military history. Not only does her book address a still-underrepresented part of women's military history—the role of race—but it's focus on a more individual aspect of African-American WACs' history represents a growing pattern in women's military history. As more works are published that bring the history of the units as a whole to the public eye, scholars are then able to focus on smaller underrepresented topics, such as the role of race and sexuality, or the works of individual units or people.

While the much of the first wave of scholarly works on the women's corps focused on sharing the stories of the women and the corps to tell previously understudied and forgotten histories, later scholarship concentrated more on smaller aspects within the field to explore. For example, in the *Minerva* journal, Kristin Conrey published an article called "Remembering the Forgotten: A Look at The Women POWS Of World War II." Conrey did start off her article following the pattern of many of the early sources by explaining a basic history of women in the military and how the women of World War II had not been adequately represented in much scholarship. She then followed the new pattern of more deeply exploring smaller parts of the story. In Conrey's case, she analyzed the issue of prisoners of war and the role that played on women's participation in the military. The first American women POWs in World War II were nurses, and Conrey argued that "these women help scholars and military experts better understand how men, women, civilians, service personnel, as well as single sex units and coed camps, dealt with the complexities of imprisonment."¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Brenda L. Moore, *To Serve My Country, To Serve My Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), ix.

¹³⁵ Kristin Conrey, "Remembering the Forgotten: A Look at the Women POWs of World War II," *Minerva* 16, no. 3 (December 1998): 25.

Another article in *Minerva* was “Amazons or Butterflies; The Recruitment of Women Into The Military During World War II” by Melissa Herbert, which also examined military women through a more tightly focused lens. Like most other scholarship on military women, Herbert looked at the obstacles women faced when participating in the military sphere. To accomplish this, Herbert specifically analyzed how the women were recruited into the various corps during World War II, primarily in the WACs. A unique observation that Herbert made in her article is the failure of the “free a man to fight” recruitment campaign. Herbert explained that “Families did not want a woman to enlist if it meant that her brother might then see combat; wives did not want other women taking her husband's garrison job so that he could go overseas. Furthermore, women had little desire to subject themselves to such reactions, nor did they want to feel responsible for the fact that those they had replaced might not return.”¹³⁶ Much of the other scholarship on the women’s corps limited their coverage of the recruitment campaigns to the “free a man to fight,” which was only successful in the early days of World War II. As Herbert pointed out, the campaign had unforeseen consequences and the War Department had to find a different way to recruit women and change the belief that anyone, men or women, “would be willing to do anything less than die for their country.”¹³⁷ Later campaigns instead concentrated on the wide variety of jobs open to women, as well as reassuring the American public about the safety of men’s jobs after the war and the women’s femininity. Herbert noted that “Newspaper articles frequently made reference to the fact that being a WAC did not detract from one's womanliness and, in some instances inferred that it, if anything, could actually serve to enhance this most desirous of traits or at least make one a ‘better’ woman.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Melissa S. Herbert, "Amazons or Butterflies: The Recruitment of Women into the Military During World War II," *Minerva* 9 no. 2 (June 1999): 50.

¹³⁷ Herbert, 50.

¹³⁸ Herbert, 50.

Later scholarship also began to look closer at gender and sexuality in their analysis of the women's corps. One of the early published works in this category was *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, which was an essay collection that focused on looking at women's wartime experiences during the world wars through the still relatively new field of gender history. The essay collection tries to cover a lot of ground and the topics greatly vary in subject and location. Only one of the essays covers women's participation in the military during World War II, although it analyzes the WACs in Britain, not the United States. Despite this, *Behind the Lines* does represent a changing period in the scholarship where more sources change from histories of the corps and their impact on the war to more in-depth ideas of the role of gender in the work of the corps and the war itself.

In that same vein is *Creating G.I. Jane: The Regulation of Sexuality and Sexual Behavior in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* by Leisa Meyer. Meyer focuses on ideas about gender and sexuality in the WACs. The book was published in 1996, so Meyer also spends time on comparing the struggles of the WACs to issues faced by military women in the 1990s. Meyer's book also looks at the struggles faced by the African-American WACs during the war. She looks at the role race played in both the men's and women's corps in World War II and she argues that there was a "more positive reaction of the black press, relative to the white press, to women's entrance into the WAAC."¹³⁹ Press reactions to the WACs are a central part of Meyer's main arguments. Her first two chapters focus on the WAC slander campaign and other negative press reactions to the women: that they would emasculate the Army men and lose their "feminine virtues."¹⁴⁰ Most of the rest of Meyer's analysis focuses on the idea of feminine

¹³⁹ Leisa Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane: The Regulation of Sexuality and Sexual Behavior in the Women's Army Corps During World War II*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 30.

¹⁴⁰ Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane*, 26-50.

sexuality and homosexuality during the war. Meyer argues that there were “fears that the WAC would either attract or produce lesbians” and that that this view was due to the idea that the military equaled power which equaled masculinity.¹⁴¹ This argument meant that the general public believed that any woman who was not “feminine enough” would immediately be thought of as a lesbian.¹⁴² Women’s entry into a traditionally male field and the controversy it created reflects the overall fears and division about gender as a whole. Meyer’s analysis of the controversy women faced when joining the WAC show that the general public saw gender as cut and dry. For women to do something “masculine,” it would mean that they were no longer “feminine.”

In the 1990s and 2000s, more scholarship began to reanalyze the idea of World War II as a turning point for women’s equality. One such article that fit into that category was “Wacky Times: An Analysis of the WAC in World War II and its Effects on Women” by Jennifer Nichol Stewart, which was published in the *International Social Science Review* in 2000. In her article, Stewart broke down both arguments—that women’s work in World War II was a watershed moment for women’s equality, and on the opposite side of the spectrum, that the war changed very little for women in the subsequent wars. Stewart argued that such debates were not as important. Instead, she concluded that “the women of these years made advances, but not because society was willing for them to do so. Women advanced because the people had no other choice, and then were basically punished for it in the years following the war.”¹⁴³ Basically, the WACs and other military corps were products of their time, a time which was an anomaly in itself.

¹⁴¹ Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane*, 43.

¹⁴² Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane*, 42-45.

¹⁴³ Jennifer Nichol Stewart, “Wacky Times: An Analysis of the WAC in World War II and its Effects on Women,” *International Social Science Review* 75 no. 1/2 (2000): 26.

Although most of the books on the women's corps were written during the 1980s and 1990s, scholarly works on the corps are still being published. The most recent books written on the women's corps include several written by Sarah Byrn Rickman. Rickman's research concentrated on the WASP program and she wrote three books on the women pilots. In 2016, Rickman published *WASP of the Ferry Command: Women Pilots, Uncommon Deeds*. *WASP of the Ferry Command* traced each class and ferrying group during the war and examined the history of the program through individual stories and smaller groups. Rickman's book intertwined stories taken from letters and interviews with the WASP and WFTD pilots into her own overall analysis of the program. One book review praised Rickman for her analysis of the Nancy Love and Jackie Cochran conflict, and stated that "Rickman wisely chose to weave these struggles into the day-to-day issues of housing, training, and employing female pilots. As a result, the reader is placed squarely in the time period and situations the women aviators faced, thereby evoking the frustrations, gratifications, challenges, dangers, and emotional turmoil faced by everyone involved."¹⁴⁴ In breaking with the pattern of other general histories of the corps, Rickman focuses less on the variety of jobs the WASPs performed and more on personal stories of the individual pilots—why they joined the program and struggles that they individually went through, whether technical issues, discrimination, or the average stresses of constantly ferrying planes across the country.¹⁴⁵

One of the most unique of the new books on the women's corps is *To Live and Die A WASP: 38 Women Pilots Who Died in World War II* by historian William M. Miller, which was published via Amazon's self-publishing firm "CreateSpace." Even though it was not published

¹⁴⁴ Kevin Bemel, Review of *WASP of the Ferry Command: Women Pilots, Uncommon Deeds* in *Journal of Military History* 81, no. 4 (2017): 1211-1213.

¹⁴⁵ Sarah Byrn Rickman, *WASP of the Ferry Command: Women Pilots, Uncommon Deeds* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2016).

by a university press, Miller's book is very well researched with numerous newspaper articles as well as interviews. Like many of the other books, Miller does go through a general history of the WASP program, however, he accomplishes this through the lens of the thirty-eight WASPs who died during the war. Other books on the WASP program do acknowledge that several WASPs were killed while doing their duty, although few mention the total number of thirty-eight. Usually when the deaths of WASPs are mentioned in books, they tend to just reference Hazel Ying Lee, Cornelia Fort, or Evelyn Sharp, who have had the most research done on them. Instead, Miller examines each of the thirty-eight WASPs individually, going into detail about their lives and why they joined the program, if that information is available.¹⁴⁶ Miller's research not only represents another example of historians focusing on more condensed areas on the women's corps, it also helps to tell the stories of many underrepresented WASPs. In the continuing struggle to get more recognition for the women's corps, *To Live and Die A WASP* tells the more frequently forgotten stories of the WASPs who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Despite the growing breadth of literature, there are still under-studied areas when it comes to the women's military corps. To fill part of this void, Brenda Moore wrote a book on Japanese-American women who served in the WACs: *Serving Our Country*. Very few scholarly works have been written about any of the Asian-American women who served in the women's corps, which makes Moore's book an important piece to the field. Much like her book on the African-American WACs, Moore's book on the Japanese-American WACs looks at the discrimination the women faced due to their race and gender. Moore also examines the unique challenge that the second-generation, Nisei, women faced with traditional Japanese-American

¹⁴⁶ William M. Miller, *To Live and Die A WASP: 38 Women Pilots Who Died in WWII* (CreateSpace, 2016).

ideas about their joining the WACs. At the beginning of her book, Moore argues that “unlike other women, however, the Nisei servicewoman had to complete a loyalty questionnaire. Moreover, at times, she was admonished for choosing to serve in the U.S. military and accused of betraying her race.”¹⁴⁷ This added level of conflict can be further seen in Moore’s source-base, which mainly consists of interviews: half of the women interviewed by Moore give her pseudonyms to use in the book instead of their real names.¹⁴⁸ Moore does an excellent job of weaving together the cultural differences the women faced and how the women dealt with racial and gender discrimination from the Japanese-American and other American communities. She concludes that the Japanese-American women’s involvement with the WACs “helped to lay the foundation for the journey toward full citizenship rights for Japanese American men and women . . . [and] helped to secure the social, political, and economic status enjoyed by Japanese Americans today.”¹⁴⁹ Although Moore’s claim is very broad, she is correct in the important role played by the Japanese-American WACs. Unfortunately, very little scholarship has been done on the Japanese-American WACs or the Asian-American women who served in other units, like the WASPs. As the field continues to grow, more work needs to be done on many of the other women who served their country.

Scholarship on the World War II American women’s military corps has grown and changed since the first articles were written in the post-war years. Early scholarship concentrated on general histories of the units and bringing their stories back to the narrative. As time went on and more social histories became published, the analysis of the women’s corps included more on gender issues and how the corps fit into the larger story of women’s equality. Scholars were also

¹⁴⁷ Brenda L. Moore, *Serving Our Country: Japanese-American Women in the Military During World War II* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 30.

¹⁴⁸ Moore, *Serving Our Country*, xiii.

¹⁴⁹ Moore, *Serving Our Country*, 165.

able to examine more singular topics within the women's corps, such as racial issues, individual stories, and recruitment campaigns.

Despite the growth of scholarly works on the women's corps, there are still some gaps to fill. There is still very little scholarship on the Asian-American and Hispanic women who served in the various corps. Corps like the WAVES, SPARS, and Marine Corps Women's Reserve also do not have many works dedicated just to them. Instead, they are usually just mentioned once or twice in larger works. Further analysis of some of the primary sources, such as the newspaper and magazine articles, could also help in looking at subjects like race and gender ideas in the World War II women's corps. As time goes on, the field of women's military history continues to grow and scholars' analysis continues to become more inclusive and complex. In time, these gaps in the literature will then hopefully be filled.

CHAPTER IV

MUSEUM INTERPRETATION FOR A BROAD AUDIENCE

One of the more accessible ways for the general public to interact with history is through museum exhibits. Much like written scholarship on the women's military corps, exhibits on the corps have been lacking until recently.

Women's History Museums

When it comes to women's history museums, there are few in the United States and many of them do not have physical locations. The *National Women's History Museum* is currently an online museum, with the goal of building a physical museum on the National Mall in Washington DC. Currently, the *National Women's History Museum* does not have any online exhibits on military women. The online exhibits, as of spring 2018, mainly focus on historical topics that directly correlate to current events, for example: exhibits on the Olympics and women in sports, women's roles in politics, immigration, African-American history, and women in STEM.¹⁵⁰ The museum does a much better job of representing the women's corps through their online articles. The articles section on the website mixes articles on historic subjects, modern articles and infographics on women's issues, and more "social media" articles like quizzes. Much like the online exhibits, the museum published articles as they directly related to current events. For example, near election season, the museum published more articles about women. This does make it hard to navigate, since there is no way to sort the articles by time period or subject. In the six pages of articles, four articles are on women in World War II and two cover the military corps: "Honoring Rosie the Riveter and the Women Who Won World War II" by

¹⁵⁰ "Online Exhibits," the *National Women's History Museum*, <https://www.nwhm.org/womens-history/online-exhibits>.

Becky Schergens and Elizabeth L. Maurer; and “Gals in Blue: Finding Each Other” by Elisabeth Auld.

Searching deeper in the *National Women’s History Museum* website reveals more information on the World War II corps. The easiest way for a visitor to access these sources without having to type “WAC” or “World War II” in the search bar is through the “Topics to Explore” section, which has a section on World War II. Through this area, visitors can find a few more articles, biographies, and a small list of sources for further information.

Throughout the articles and online exhibits at the *National Women’s History Museum* one narrative pattern is present. The museum portrays the women as facing and sometimes overcoming discrimination in their roles. One article references the women from minority groups who were part of the corps and how they faced even further discrimination due to their race.¹⁵¹ Other articles looked at how perceptions of gender roles temporarily changed during the war as women took on more masculine jobs.¹⁵² Between the articles on World War II and the other exhibits in the museum, the story visitors learn from the museum is one where women have overcome difficulties and discrimination in order to make a larger impact in the United States.

One of the other women’s history museums in the United States is the *Women’s Museum of California*, located in San Diego. The museum is fairly small-scale, especially when compared to the national museums, and generally has three short-term exhibits and one travelling exhibit. In July and August 2017, the *Women’s Museum of California* has an exhibit on women in the military called “Heroines in Arms: Women of the American Military.” There is not much

¹⁵¹ Kelly A. Spring, “In the Military,” *National Women’s History Museum*, <https://www.nwhm.org/resources/general/military>.

¹⁵² Becky Schergens and Elizabeth L. Maurer, “Honoring Rosie the Riveter and the Women Who Won the War,” *National Women’s History Museum*, <https://www.nwhm.org/articles/honoring-rosie-riveter-and-women-who-won-war>.

available on the website about the exhibit, but a blog post outlines the history of women in the United States' military. The article includes the WACs, WAVES, and WASPs in one of the paragraphs.¹⁵³ In the section on past exhibits, the museum still has a copy of the sponsorship form for the exhibit. Two of the three photos on the form are from World War II: one is from a WAVES recruitment poster and the other is of women from one of the African-American WAC units.¹⁵⁴ As a part of the education programming for the exhibit, the museum held a "Military Historic Clothing Show," with uniforms from World War I to the modern military.¹⁵⁵ In April to June of 2013, the museum also had an exhibit on "Women of the Issei Generation," which included information on the bombing of Pearl Harbor and Japanese-American internment during World War II.¹⁵⁶ Most of the other exhibits offered by the museum focus mainly on art and artists and women's equality movements. Much like the *National Museum of Women's History*, the *Women's Museum of California* has so many other women's history topics they focus on, so while women in World War II military corps are addressed, the coverage is not as in-depth or on permanent exhibit.

One of the best examples of a museum dedicated to women's military history is the *Women in Military Service for America Memorial*, in Arlington, Virginia. The *Women's Memorial* consists of a memorial and education center. Three exhibit cases house permanent exhibits on women in World War II. The first, "Women Go to War: World War II, 1941-1945"

¹⁵³ "Heroines in Arms: Women of the American Military," *Women's Museum of California*, <https://womensmuseum.wordpress.com/2017/07/05/heroines-in-arms-women-of-the-american-military/>.

¹⁵⁴ "Heroines in Arms: Women of the American Military," *Women's Museum of California*, http://womensmuseumca.org/sites/default/files/heroines_in_arms_sponsor.pdf.

¹⁵⁵ "Heroines in Arms: Women of the American Military," *Women's Museum of California*, http://womensmuseumca.org/sites/default/files/heroines_in_arms_sponsor.pdf.

¹⁵⁶ "Women of the Issei Generation," *Women's Museum of California*, "Heroines in Arms: Women of the American Military," http://womensmuseumca.org/sites/default/files/heroines_in_arms_sponsor.pdf.

covers recruiting, training, and the jobs available to military women during the war.¹⁵⁷ The other two exhibit cases are: “Overseas with the Military” and “Serving on the Homefront,” which cover women’s service overseas and at the war’s end and women on the home-front in the Women’s Airforce Service pilots, Civil Defense workers, and the Cadet Nurse Corps, respectively.¹⁵⁸ All three exhibit cases are full of a wide range of relevant artifacts. These artifacts include photos of the women, recruiting posters, and uniforms for the various corps. Smaller artifacts in the museum’s collection also include letters/V-Mail exchanged by the women to and from their family and friends, dog tags, service medals, mess kits, canvas bags, and more. Since the *Women’s Memorial* is dedicated to American women’s military service overall, the exhibits and collections include stories and artifacts from multiple corps, instead of just the WACs, WAVES, and WASPs. The SPARS, Army nurses, Cadet Nurse Corps, Red Cross, Navy nurses, and the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve are all included in some fashion.

The *Women’s Memorial* is one of the most in-depth museums on the women’s corps of World War II. Since the museum’s mission is to honor and tell the stories of “women who have defended America throughout history,” it makes sense that they would strive to represent the corps accurately and in great detail.¹⁵⁹ The wide variety of artifacts utilized in the exhibits also adds to the museum’s interpretation of the corps. In addition to the artifacts that most visually represent the corps to the visitor—objects like uniforms, photographs, and recruitment posters—the smaller personal artifacts like first aid kits, mess kits, and dog tags all help show visitors the more everyday lives of the women who served in the corps. By doing so, the narrative the

¹⁵⁷ “Permanent and Special Exhibits,” *The Women’s Memorial*. Accessed December 30, 2017. <https://www.womensmemorial.org/exhibits/detail/?s=permanent-and-special-exhibits>

¹⁵⁸ “Permanent and Special Exhibits,” *The Women’s Memorial*. Accessed December 30, 2017. <https://www.womensmemorial.org/exhibits/detail/?s=permanent-and-special-exhibits>

¹⁵⁹ “Mission,” *The Women’s Memorial*, <https://www.womensmemorial.org/memorial/mission>.

Women's Memorial presents about the women's corps is that the women's service was not an isolated event—women had aided the war effort in previous wars—not were the women any different from the male soldiers or women not in the corps. The women and men who served in World War II used much of the same personal equipment, mess kits, and even some uniforms, and they both defended their homes and families as a part of a larger patriotic duty.

Virginia hosts another women's military history museum: the *United States Army Women's Museum*. Unlike the *Woman's Memorial*, the *United States Army Women's Museum* focuses only on women's historical involvement with the Army. The museum is located at Fort Lee, Virginia, at the site of a former WAC training center.¹⁶⁰ The museum originally opened in 1955 as the Women's Army Corps (WAC) Museum and was housed at the WAC Headquarters building in McClellan, Alabama.¹⁶¹ The museum changed names and locations in 1999. As of spring 2018, the museum has five permanent exhibits: "Origins of Service," "World Wars," "Permanent Presence," "Be All You Can Be," and "Post 9/11." Each exhibit corresponds with a time period in American history in which women were involved with the Army in some capacity. The website lists two featured exhibits on World War II as part of the "World Wars" section of the museum. The first is on the 6888th Postal Battalion, which was the only one of the African-American WAC units to serve overseas in World War II. The physical exhibit consists of a staged scene with mannequins in WAC uniforms, as well as a television screen showing images of the 6888th.¹⁶² As a part of the online version of the exhibit, there is a brief "label" about the 6888th, which describes the women's assignment and notes that many of the women in the

¹⁶⁰ "History," *The United States Army Women's Museum*, <http://www.awm.lee.army.mil/about/history>.

¹⁶¹ "History," *The United States Army Women's Museum*, <http://www.awm.lee.army.mil/about/history>.

¹⁶² "6888th Postal Battalion," *The United States Army Women's Museum*, <http://www.awm.lee.army.mil/exhibits/world-wars/>.

African-American WAC units would later become leaders in the Civil Rights movement after the war.¹⁶³

The other featured World War II exhibit is on the “Ingenuity of Women.” More specifically, this exhibit focuses on women’s service overseas during World War II. Like many of the other exhibits in the museum, the centerpiece of the exhibit is a scene with mannequins, this one specifically shows two WACs in a tent wearing field uniforms.¹⁶⁴ Other artifacts in this part of the exhibit are items that “demonstrate how the women adapted” to working overseas.¹⁶⁵ These objects include: a fur lined sweater, a wedding nightgown made from a parachute, and bathing suit made out of a man’s Army uniform.¹⁶⁶ These artifacts are very unique; not many museums have that many artifacts made by the women themselves. Exhibits like these have to be careful however, that the exhibit does focus too much on the women’s clothing and appearance and forget to include the women’s voices.

Although not as large as some of the other museums, the *United States Women’s Army Museum* represents a major step in recognizing women’s military accomplishments. The inclusion of an exhibit about the African-American WACs shows that the museum has been able to go beyond just telling visitors that the WACs existed and provide exhibits on more micro-history details. Much like many other museums, the *United States Women’s Army Museum* is undergoing renovation and expansion, meaning that future exhibits will cover each period of women’s Army participation in greater detail.

¹⁶³ “6888th Postal Battalion,” *The United States Army Women’s Museum*, <http://www.awm.lee.army.mil/exhibits/world-wars/>.

¹⁶⁴ “Ingenuity of Women,” *The United States Army Women’s Museum*, <http://www.awm.lee.army.mil/exhibits/world-wars/>.

¹⁶⁵ “Ingenuity of Women,” *The United States Army Women’s Museum*, <http://www.awm.lee.army.mil/exhibits/world-wars/>.

¹⁶⁶ “Ingenuity of Women,” *The United States Army Women’s Museum*, <http://www.awm.lee.army.mil/exhibits/world-wars/>.

Military History Museums

There are several museums that deal with military history and World War II history, but like the women's history museums, they vary in their coverage of the women's corps.

The most well-known of the museums in this category is the *National World War II Museum* in New Orleans, Louisiana. This museum is most likely the largest of the military history and World War II museums, with several buildings located on its campus. Much like other modern American museums, the *National World War II Museum* is devoting more of its exhibits to STEM related topics.

One of the first permanent exhibits listed at the museum is the “Arsenal of Democracy: The Herman and George Brown Salute to the Home Front.” The topics the exhibit covers include: background and causes of the war, propaganda, Japanese-American internment, manufacturing, the Manhattan Project, racial issues on the home front, and reactions to the attack on Pearl Harbor. The “Citizens to Warriors” part of the exhibit also addresses women's military experiences. It is an “immersive gallery” that covers the training and mobilization of citizens including women, African-American, and Japanese-American experiences in segregated units.¹⁶⁷ Women's military participation is also covered later in the home front exhibit in the propaganda section, called “America Responds.” Recruitment posters place a significant role in home front war propaganda and the museum includes ones about the women's corps. One section of the exhibit features a WAC recruitment poster and a regular Navy poster, both very large, on either side of an exhibit case.¹⁶⁸ Women's non-military participation is frequently addressed in other

¹⁶⁷ “Citizens to Warriors,” *National World War II Museum*, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/visit/exhibits/arsenal-democracy/citizens-warriors>.

¹⁶⁸ “America Responds,” *National World War II Museum*, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/visit/exhibits/arsenal-democracy/america-responds>.

parts of the exhibit, especially in the manufacturing and daily home lives portions of the home front exhibit.

It is difficult to tell how much the individual exhibits devote to women's participation in the military based on their website. However, much like the *National Women's History Museum* website, visitors can find more information through articles and photographs pulled up by the embedded search function. As part of the "student resources," the museum has a section on "Women in the War," which includes a brief explanation of women's various roles in the war, a list of secondary sources for further research, and a few photographs.¹⁶⁹ Other sources on women's military participation in the war include recorded lectures and interviews with women who served, scanned photographs, and a few articles about the role of women in the war overall.

Each branch of the military also has its own museum or is in the process of creating a museum. Much like the *National Women's History Museum*, the *National Museum of the United States' Army* is in the process of building a physical museum. The *Museum of the United States' Army* is further along in its construction, with a location chosen in Fort Belvoir, Virginia and a brief exhibit plan and layout uploaded to the website for visitors to view.¹⁷⁰ The layout shows two galleries that the museum will devote to the United States' role in World War II, although there is no great detail on what exact topics and artifacts the exhibit will include. One of the planned entry galleries, however, will include "personal accounts of ordinary men and women from all historic periods and walks of life."¹⁷¹ Another gallery, "Army and Society," will cover the relationship between the Army, citizens, and the American government, which includes

¹⁶⁹ "Research Starters: Women in the War," *National World War II Museum*, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-women-world-war-ii>.

¹⁷⁰ "Museum Design," *National Museum of the United States' Army*, <https://armyhistory.org/museum-design/>.

¹⁷¹ "Museum Design," *National Museum of the United States' Army*, <https://armyhistory.org/museum-design/>.

changing issues in “racial and gender equity.”¹⁷² Given that both of these exhibit plans allude to women’s role in the Army, it is likely that the World War II exhibits will include the role of the WACs during the war.

The *National Museum of the Marine Corps* is currently in its final phase of construction, however, the physical museum opened to the public in 2006. The museum is located in Triangle, Virginia, near Quantico Marine Corps Base. On the museum’s website, under “Events,” there is a section on women’s history month, which covers a brief history of women in the Marine Corps. In addition to the brief history, the page also has a “special topic guide” for download, an infographic on modern women in the corps, and a video on where in the museum visitors can find information on women in the Marine Corps.¹⁷³

According to the Women’s History Month video, the museum has elected to merge the stories of women’s marines in with the exhibits chronologically, rather than in its own section.¹⁷⁴ That means instead of an exhibit on women marines, the museum instead includes World War II marines in the World War II exhibit and so on. Artifacts relating to the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve in World War II include: black and white photographs, recruitment posters, and uniforms.¹⁷⁵ In the “Women in the United States Marine Corps” special topic guide, available as a brochure in the museum and online, one page outlines the history of the Women’s Reserve and informs visitors about where in the museum they can find exhibits on the women in World War II. In addition to generally in the World War II gallery, the pamphlet lists a special exhibit “Free A Man to Fight,” on recruiting the women and the training they went through, as well as an

¹⁷² “Museum Design,” *National Museum of the United States’ Army*, <https://armyhistory.org/museum-design/>.

¹⁷³ “The USMC Celebrates Women’s History Month,” *National Museum of the Marine Corps*, <https://www.usmcmuseum.com/womenshistory.html>.

¹⁷⁴ “Director of the Museum, Liz Ezell, on Women’s History Month,” *National Museum of the Marine Corps*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr7g4Ii1sog>.

¹⁷⁵ “World War II Gallery,” *National Museum of the Marine Corps*.

exhibit in the museum store, “A Few Good Women,” that covers more accomplishments of the Women’s Reserve.¹⁷⁶

In not separating the information on the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve from the men’s experiences in the Marine Corps, the *National Museum of the Marine Corps* offers visitors a narrative based more on historical context rather than gender. Instead of portraying the Women’s Reserve as a separate, and thus different, part of the Marine Corps, the museum shows it as “one of many groups” that made up the Marine Corps in World War II.¹⁷⁷ Although the women faced different issues with discrimination and taking on new roles, at the core they were still members of the Marine Corps. By sharing the women’s experiences with the rest of the Marine Corps, the museum can remind visitors that all of them were Marines and most were serving for the same patriotic reasons.

The Navy’s museum is the oldest of the military museums, which opened to the public in 1963. The *National Museum of the United States’ Navy* is located at the Washington Navy Yard in Washington D.C. Since the museum is on an active military base, visitors must show a valid photo id or fill out a Base Access Pass form to gain access to the museum.

The online information on the *National Museum of the United States’ Navy* is the least comprehensive of the military museum websites, but it does have descriptions of the exhibits with a few artifacts listed, although there are few photos of the exhibits. The section on World War II is divided into three exhibits: the Pacific Theater, the Atlantic Theater, and the home front. The WAVES are discussed in the home front section of the World War II exhibit. Some of the artifacts on the WAVES include recruitment posters and black and white photographs,

¹⁷⁶ “Women in the United States Marines Corps,” *National Museum of the Marine Corps*, https://www.usmcmuseum.com/uploads/6/0/3/6/60364049/nmmc_special_topic-women_marines.pdf.

¹⁷⁷ “Women in the United States Marines Corps,” *National Museum of the Marine Corps*, https://www.usmcmuseum.com/uploads/6/0/3/6/60364049/nmmc_special_topic-women_marines.pdf.

although there are most likely more artifacts not listed online.¹⁷⁸ The website also notes that the museum held an “Artifact Spotlight” on the WAVES during Women’s History Month in March 2017, in which visitors would get to see and learn about artifacts relating to the WAVES.¹⁷⁹ For Women’s History Month in 2018, the museum did a “Sailor in a Box” program, in which visitors would learn about the uniforms and personal items used by the WAVES.¹⁸⁰

Although the United States Air Force did not exist during World War II, the modern air force grew from the United States’ participation in air war during World War I and World War II. As such, the *National Museum of the United States’ Air Force*, includes World War II as part of its story. In fact, the museum is currently advertising the upcoming opening of a new exhibit in May 2018 on the famous Memphis Belle bomber from World War II.¹⁸¹ Like many museums involving aerospace topics, the *National Museum of the United States’ Air Force* devotes a large part of the museum to the aircraft themselves. The museum does not omit the WASPs, though. In the fact sheets section, the museum provides one on the WASPs, with links to further articles at the museum, as well as outside sources for further reading and viewing.¹⁸² Further articles include ones on the WFTD, the jobs performed by the WASPs, and the disbanding of the program.

¹⁷⁸ “In Harm’s Way: The US Navy and World War II: the Home Front,” *National Museum of the United States’ Navy*, <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/exhibits/in-harms-way-us-navy-wwii-home-front.html>.

¹⁷⁹ “Artifact Spotlight: Celebrate Women’s History Month,” *National Museum of the United States’ Navy*, <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/news-and-events/events/artifact-spotlight-womens-history-20170323.html>.

¹⁸⁰ “Sailor in a Box: Women’s History,” *National Museum of the United States’ Navy*, <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/news-and-events/events/sailor-in-a-box-20180314.html>.

¹⁸¹ “The Memphis Belle,” *National Museum of the United States’ Air Force*.

¹⁸² “WASP: Breaking Ground for Today’s Female USAF Pilots,” *National Museum of the United States’ Air Force*, <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/196133/wasp-breaking-ground-for-todays-female-usaf-pilots/>.

The articles correspond to the exhibit panels in the WASP section of the World War II gallery in the museum. Artifacts include: the dress uniform, the flying uniform, numerous black and white photos, and the 2009 WASP Congressional Medal.¹⁸³ There is also a bomber like the ones flown by the WASPs nearby with a mannequin in uniform. As a part of their photos, the museum has one of Hazel Ying Lee, one of the only two Asian-American WASPs in World War II. Like many of the other museums, the *National Museum of the United States' Air Force* has a section with further materials for educators and those wanting to learn more. The section on women's history has suggestions for further reading, recorded lectures, links to the WASP and other relevant exhibits, as well as links to other museums and archives that focus on the WASPs.

Colorado Case Study One: Wings Over the Rockies

One of the Colorado museums to look at the women's corps is the *Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum*, located in Denver, Colorado. The museum is housed at a former military base, the Lowry Air Force Base. The museum was established in 1994 after the United States Air Force left the base and many of the old training aircraft to a group of volunteers.¹⁸⁴ The *Wings* museum's mission is "to educate and inspire people of all ages about aviation and space endeavors of the past, present, and future."¹⁸⁵ As such, the museum is partly a science and technology museum and partly a history museum.

The museum has three types of exhibits: traditional exhibits, flight simulators, and large aircraft. The traditional exhibits have the most connections to World War II and women's participation, primarily the WASP program. In spring 2018, the museum had around a dozen of the more "traditional" exhibits; or exhibits that had multiple panels and/or artifacts about a larger

¹⁸³ "World War II Gallery," *National Museum of the United States' Air Force*, <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Upcoming/Photos/igphoto/2001662263/>.

¹⁸⁴ "Wings Over the Rockies: Our Story," *Wings Over the Rockies Museum*, 12.

¹⁸⁵ "Wings Over the Rockies: Our Story," *Wings Over the Rockies Museum*, 2.

subject. This is different than the third of the museum that is dedicated to “aircraft exhibits;” or exhibits that are made up of one aircraft with a panel or two on that specific aircraft.

Of the traditional exhibits, the *Wings* museum has four that specifically deal with World War II aircraft history. One of the first exhibits visitors can see at the museum is “The Origins and Development of Avionics: 1864 to the Present.” This exhibit covers changing technologies in aircraft, with specific attention paid to radio technology. One exhibit case briefly mentions the WASPs with two labels and a few artifacts. The first label explains who the WASPs were and what they did: “The volunteer women pilots flew non-combat missions, mostly within the U.S. and some across the Atlantic Ocean. They delivered military planes, towed targets for gunnery practice, test flew recently repaired planes, and other wartime assignments.”¹⁸⁶ The second label applies more to the overall focus of the exhibit: avionics. The label informs visitors that “1,100 Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) learned Morse code, Radio communication & navigation used with the Avionics in WWII military airplanes. These included fast P-47 and P-51 fighter planes to huge lumbering B-17 and B-24 bombers. ‘Fifi’ the gremlin was the iconic symbol of the WASPs.”¹⁸⁷ The last sentence of the label refers to one of the artifacts in the case, a picture of the “Fifinella” gremlin drawing used in the newsletters written by the WASPs and on patches on their uniforms. Other artifacts in the case relating to the WASPs are: a black and white photo of WASPs in a plane’s cockpit and a mannequin head with wig, aviator glasses, a WASP cap, and a radio headset. The rest of the case includes other aircraft-related headgear, such as a jet fighter pilot’s helmet, a commercial airline pilot’s radio headset, and a World War II Army Air Corps pilot’s high altitude flying kit. Although the coverage of the WASPs is brief in

¹⁸⁶ Exhibit Case 5, “The Origins and Development of Avionics: 1863 to the Present,” at *Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum*, visited February 11, 2018.

¹⁸⁷ Exhibit Case 5, “The Origins and Development of Avionics: 1863 to the Present,” at *Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum*, visited February 11, 2018.

the avionics exhibit, it does a good job of integrating the WASPs into a more general exhibit. This narrative of the WASPs shows visitors that the group was not an isolated aspect of the war. Male and female pilots used the same equipment to fly and flew the same planes. By presenting the WASPs as part of an exhibit on aerospace technology, the museum brings the women's World War II service back into the main narrative of the war in a way that presents them evenly with the men as part of a larger story of flight technology. This larger story also fits in well with many museums' new concentration on STEM topics, which in turn makes the pilots' work in World War II more relevant to modern visitor's education concerns.

The other three exhibits at the museum that deal with World War II are: "Aviation Uniforms: Clothing the Courageous," "A Short History of Airplane Nose Art," and "Tribute to a Fighter Pilot." The uniform exhibit does not have any uniforms from the WASPs or WACs. In a case with various wings and insignias there were also no WASP pins. Military women were not totally omitted in the exhibit, however. The exhibit included a woman's Air Force uniform from the 1990s and a pair of 1940s Army shoes worn by both "men and women."¹⁸⁸ Most of the other labels in the exhibit also use more gender-neutral terminology, unless the uniform matches to a specific, named pilot. For example, a headset refers to "pilots and copilots," and many of the other artifacts follow this pattern.¹⁸⁹

The exhibit on airplane nose art does not make any reference to the WASPs or WACs. Additionally, the only women represented are the subjects of the pinup nose art. Given the subject matter, however, it makes sense for this World War II exhibit to not include the women's corps.

¹⁸⁸ "Aviation Uniforms: Clothing the Courageous," at *Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum*, visited February 11, 2018.

¹⁸⁹ "Aviation Uniforms: Clothing the Courageous," at *Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum*, visited February 11, 2018.

The final World War II exhibit is the “Tribute to a Fighter Pilot.” This exhibit has no physical artifacts, instead it consists of a wall of panels with biographies of well-known fighter pilots. The introduction panel ends with the statement: “keep in mind these men and women came from all walks of life, socio-economic backgrounds, and ideologies. The one thing they all had in common was an ability to think quickly, react faster, and never give up.”¹⁹⁰ The disclaimer is because the exhibit had biographies of pilots from outside of America, which included Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The American women’s corps in World War II did not participate in combat, so they would not show up in an exhibit on fighter pilots. *Wings Over the Rockies* did not make the exhibit completely male-dominated, however. One of the “ace” pilots the exhibit includes is Senior Lieutenant Lidya Litvyak, who was in the Soviet Air Force during World War II.¹⁹¹ Litvyak, a member of the all-female Soviet 586th Fighter’s Regiment, fits in to the “ace fighter pilot” definition that the exhibit uses, which makes her a logical part of the exhibit. So even though the WASPs or WACs are not represented in this exhibit, women’s military contributions are not totally omitted.

The female Russian pilots can be further connected to the WASPs in the United States, however, and the museum could expand on this in future exhibits. The Russians received many of their planes from the United States during World War II and the WASPs delivered many of the planes through Alaska.¹⁹² These planes included the P-39s that Litvyak flew, as well as the bombers flown by Russia’s other all-female regiment, the 588th Night Bombers Regiment, also known as the “Nachthexen” or “Night Witches” by the Germans. If the *Wings Over the Rockies*

¹⁹⁰ “Tribute to a Fighter Pilot,” at *Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum*, visited February 11, 2018.

¹⁹¹ “Tribute to a Fighter Pilot,” at *Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum*, visited February 11, 2018.

¹⁹² Amy Goodpaster Strebe. *Flying for Her Country: The American and Soviet Military Pilots of World War II*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007).

museum added this narrative to their interpretation, it would further expand the interpretation of World War II with modern STEM topics. The WASP and Soviet women both flew American-made planes, which was one technology that helped the Allies win the war.

Other references to women's military participation in World War II are less overt. One of the flight simulators, located just outside of the avionics exhibit, sports the image of Fifinella, the WASP's mascot on the side. It is not labeled as such, but Fifinella is briefly mentioned in the avionics exhibit. Visitors might be able to recognize the mascot from reading the label in the previous exhibit. One wall has three pencil drawings of Lowry Air Force Base and people who served there. Two of the drawings include women in military dress.

Although not currently on exhibit, several years ago the *Wings Over the Rockies* museum hosted an exhibit on the WASP program called "Fly Girls of World War II." The travelling exhibit opened at the *Wings* museum in early October 2012. Nancy Parrish and her mother, Deanie Parrish, who served as a WASP, designed the exhibit.¹⁹³ The Denver exhibit was located on the second floor of the museum, overlooking the main hanger area. Most of the exhibit consisted of wall panels, complete with a timeline and larger-than-life size images of WASPs in the various uniforms the women wore. The exhibit also had mannequins in each complete uniform as well. The one exhibit case at the Denver exhibit held a mannequin in the WASP blue dress uniform, a doll in matching uniform that was made for Jackie Corcoran, and several class books with the Fifinella character on them.¹⁹⁴ The label on the case states that the uniform was worn and donated by WASP Ola Mildred Rexroat, who was the only Native American woman to

¹⁹³ Nancy Parrish, "Spirit of the WASP," *Wings 1944*, <http://wings1944.blogspot.com/2013/03/spirit-of-wasp-10.html>.

¹⁹⁴ Images of the exhibit in Denver can still be found on the "Wings Across America" Facebook page, located at <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10152201732995473.935140.152401795472&type=1&l=862672d974>.

serve in the WASP.¹⁹⁵ Every WASP who served in the program was represented in some fashion. Over one hundred WASPs' individual pictures, names, and graduating class were on large "filmstrip" posters that lined the exhibit.¹⁹⁶ The end of the exhibit also included a piece of art called "Fly Girls: The Faces of WASP Mosaic," which includes the faces of all 1,102 WASPs as a mosaic of a plane taking off.¹⁹⁷ On a more serious note, the exhibit also had a large canvas with the title "Above and Beyond," which had the names, pictures, and biographies of the thirty-eight WASPs who were killed in accidents while serving in World War II.¹⁹⁸ Although the exhibit is no longer at the *Wings Over the Rockies* museum, those interested can read about the WASP program and planning the exhibit on the blogpost written by Nancy Parrish at the "Wings 1944" blog. Images of the exhibit can also be found at the *Wings Over the Rockies* Facebook page and at the *Wings Across America* website, which has various information and resources on the WASPs.

According to Hetty Carlson, who manages the Teacher Flight program at *Wings Over the Rockies*, the museum has incorporated the WASPs into more of their educational and outreach programs.¹⁹⁹ In 2012, in correlation with the "Fly Girls of World War II" exhibit, the museum hosted its annual "Spreading Our Wings" gala and invited five local former WASPs to the event. One of the pilots in attendance was Lucille Wise, who has been a guest of the museum for several other programs. The museum's "Teacher Flight" program allows local teachers to ride in a 1942 biplane as a way to build educator interest in aviation history. In November 2012, Lucille Wise participated in a flight, which was covered by the *Denver Post*. In the article, the *Denver*

¹⁹⁵ Anne Cassens, "WASP Ola Mildred Rexroat Honored by South Dakota Aviation Association," *Edgemont Herald Tribune*, 2006, <http://www.wingsacrossamerica.us/news/rexroat.html>.

¹⁹⁶ "Fly Girls of World War II," *Wings Across America*, <http://www.wingsacrossamerica.org/flygirls-exhibit.html>.

¹⁹⁷ "Fly Girls of World War II," *Wings Across America*, <http://www.wingsacrossamerica.org/flygirls-exhibit.html>.

¹⁹⁸ "Fly Girls of World War II," *Wings Across America*, <http://www.wingsacrossamerica.org/flygirls-exhibit.html>.

¹⁹⁹ Information from email exchange with Hetty Carlson on April 13, 2018.

Post promoted the “Fly Girls” exhibit and explained to readers the history of the program and how the women fought for recognition of their work decades after the program was disbanded.²⁰⁰ According to Hetty Carlson, Lucille Wise joined the museum for several events, including a “Girls in Aviation” Day with local students.

Overall, the representation of the women’s military corps by *Wings Over the Rockies* is present, but still lacking in some areas. Women’s World War II contributions are included in a few relevant exhibits, like the avionics exhibit. However, other pertinent exhibits, such as one on the Link trainer used by all pilots during training, have no mention of the WASPs or WACs. The travelling WASP exhibit, however, is an excellent example of a well-developed exhibit on the women’s corps. Despite the few instances of the WASPs at the *Wings Over the Rockies* museum, exhibits like the avionics one are good ways of including the corps. In that case, the women’s contributions are on the same level as the men’s and both contribute to a larger story about flight technology.

Colorado Case Study Two: National Museum of World War II Aviation

One of the other large aviation museums that Colorado offers in the *National Museum of World War II Aviation*, located near the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. The mission of the *World War II Aviation* museum is “to provide unique educational experiences that promote a deeper understanding of the historical importance of American aviation in World War II and its role in shaping the world we live in today. It does this to preserve and strengthen the best traditions of the American aviation past and inspire new generations of leaders and

²⁰⁰ Colleen O’Connor, “Arvada WASP Pilot Recaptures Legacy of Fifinella with Biplane Flight,” *Denver Post*, November 9, 2012.

innovators in the future.”²⁰¹ Much like the *Wings Over the Rockies* museum, the *Museum of World War II Aviation* is also putting more emphasis on STEM in its mission.

The *Museum of World War II Aviation* consists of three hangers with planes and two large rooms with traditional exhibits. Additionally, the museum has a unique feature in its partnership with *WestPac Restorations*. *WestPac* is a privately-owned restoration facility that restores many of the museum’s aircraft and restores many of them to flyable condition. Documented tours of the museum include a visit to the *WestPac* facility next-door to see the restorations in progress. Since *WestPac* is such a large part of the facilities, the *National Museum of World War II Aviation* has an even stronger focus on the aircraft themselves, compared to *Wings Over the Rockies*. As such, opportunities for women’s corps to be represented are scarcer.

Just like *Wings Over the Rockies*, the *National Museum of World War II Aviation* has a Link trainer. As part of the tour, one volunteer explains the use of the Link trainer, while another volunteer demonstrates. During my visit, the volunteer demonstrating the Link trainer was a young woman. The volunteer explaining the training mentioned the WASPs in reference to the other volunteer and explained to the visitors who the WASPs were. A label on the Link trainer also utilized gender-neutral terms with the phrase “students earning their wings.”²⁰²

Further into the museum, there is an exhibit case labelled “Striking Back/Homefront – Italy.” The case has artifacts and stories about Lieutenant Robert Dawson, who was a POW during the war. Part of the exhibit is also on Dawson’s wife, Elaine Collins, who served as a Corporal in the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve. Artifacts relating to Collins include a telegram regarding Dawson’s POW status, her uniform, a photo of her, the couple’s wedding photo, and a

²⁰¹ “Frequently Asked Questions: What is the Museum’s Mission,” *National Museum of World War II Aviation*.

²⁰² “Link Trainer,” at *The National Museum of World War II Aviation*, visited February 17, 2018.

newspaper article announcing their wedding.²⁰³ Although the exhibit case is not very large and there are not that many artifacts about Collins, however, it is one of the few to mention women's participation in the Marine Corps during World War II.

Near the exhibit about Dawson and Collins is another case, this one with the title "Major Thomas E. Moore and the 58th BW-B29s in CBI and Tinian." Although this section is not on the women's corps specifically, it does reference them. One longer label has the title "Biggs Field WASP Story." The label told the story of how Major Moore had a supervisor that hated the WASPs and how Moore tried to defend the pilots.²⁰⁴

Other examples of the women's corps are also as subtle. In an exhibit case on mobilizing the home front, there is a recruitment poster for women to join the WACs and WAVES. Another exhibit on home front training includes a page from a magazine with an advertisement for Du Barry cosmetics, which uses a female pilot as the main subject. The advertisement does not specifically mention the WASPs, but it does reference the work the WASPs did by ferrying planes.²⁰⁵ An overhead banner near the entrance of the museum has a black and white photo of four members of the WAFS and includes a quote from WASP Cornelia Fort. Other methods of women's wartime participation are reference sporadically through the museum. Several exhibits have nursing recruiting posters and newspaper articles about military nurses. The exhibit on mobilizing the home front references victory gardens and women performing factory work. One wall of the museum has posters and magazine advertisements that mention women's work at home and in the factories, with the "Rosie the Riveter" poster as the centerpiece.

²⁰³ "Striking Back/Homefront – Italy," at the *National Museum of World War II Aviation*, visited February 17, 2018.

²⁰⁴ "Major Thomas E. Moore and the 58th BW-B29s in CBI and Tinian," at the *National Museum of World War II Aviation*, visited February 17, 2018.

²⁰⁵ "Du Barry Advertisement," in "Homefront Training," at the *National Museum of World War II Aviation*, visited February 17, 2018.

At first glance, the museum seems to be struggling a little with their representation of the women's corps and women's work during the war in general. However, the museum is currently in an expansion period and is developing new exhibits to go into a larger exhibit space. Construction is currently underway and the new building will most likely open in spring 2019. In the current facilities, visitors can see a brief layout and exhibit plan of the new facility as they leave the museum. Already, women's participation is further represented in the plans. Pictures show figures like Jackie Cochran and Lydia Litvyak that will be included. The museum relies heavily on personal stories to connect visitors with the subject. In the layout, the introduction of a new section on "Mobilizing American Airpower" will be the personal story of WASP Mary Helen Gosnell. According to a volunteer I spoke with, the museum is also working on a larger WASP exhibit which will include mannequins in uniform and the fuselage of one of the planes.

From the exhibit plan, it appears that the expansion for *National Museum of World War II Aviation* will not just include more on the women's military corps, those stories and artifacts will most likely be more fully integrated into the larger exhibits. The new section is organized more thematically and chronologically, so

Colorado Case Study Three: Camp Hale

A location in Colorado that relates to the WACs is Camp Hale, located near Leadville, Colorado. The camp was built in 1942 and Coloradans most commonly associated it with the training of the 10th Mountain Division Ski Troops. Less known, however, is that over two hundred WACs were also stationed at the base from 1943 until the camp closed in late 1944. Former Metropolitan State University of Denver professor Dr. Monys Hagen began researching the WACs at Camp Hale and published her work as an online exhibit as a part of the Metropolitan State University's website, located at <https://msudenver.edu/camphale>.

Hagen laid out her main goal in the Camp Hale WACs project as a way of “restoring women to this chapter of World War II and presenting a more inclusive history of Camp Hale.”²⁰⁶ When researching the WACs at Camp Hale, Hagen found that many historians did not know that women had been stationed at the camp or that there was no information available about them.

Most of Hagen’s research relied heavily on interviews with former WACs and newspaper articles written about the camp. As an aid to the reader and researcher, Hagen included transcript of several of the interviews she conducted and links to many of the newspaper articles.

The online exhibit is divided into several main “exhibit” sections. The first section covers the camp itself. Hagen mainly covered the construction of the camp and the problems that came with the camp’s mountain location. As part of her entry on the camp itself, Hagen also includes a section on the prisoners of war housed at the camp. Camp Hale’s role as a camp for German prisoners of war was a somewhat unique aspect of the camp’s history, a story which also tends to take a backseat to the 10th Mountain Division narrative. The German prisoners also played an important part in the history of the WACs at Camp Hale. In March 1944, the camp was involved in a scandal in which an American private, Dale Maple, aided in the escape of two of the German POWs. In the ensuing investigation, authorities discovered that several of the WACs had been exchanging notes with the Germans.²⁰⁷ All of the Americans involved were court-martialed and Dale Maple was sentenced to life in prison.

The second section of Hagen’s online exhibit covers the WACs history overall and at Camp Hale. Hagen made a point in her beginning analysis of the WACs to tie in the work

²⁰⁶ Dr. Monys Hagen, “About the Project,” *Camp Hale at the Metropolitan State University of Denver*.

²⁰⁷ Dr. Monys Hagen, “Prisoners of War,” *Camp Hale at the Metropolitan State University of Denver*.

performed by the nurses in the military.²⁰⁸ Many sources on the WACs and WASPs have neglected to include the role of nurses in the narrative, or have mentioned them only briefly. In doing so, Hagen created a more complex narrative. As Jennifer Nichol Stewart argued in her essay, too many scholars have gotten caught up in the argument of whether the women's military corps represented a large change in women's equality. Hagen avoided that by creating more complicated story that does not just show the women's actions in World War II as occurring in a vacuum.

After setting up the background on the WACs, Hagen then goes into detail about the WACs specifically stationed at Camp Hale. In addition to using this section to give the reader a brief history of the WACs at Camp Hale, Hagen also takes on the issue of remembering the WACs. Hagen argued that "Lack of information was not a reason for the historical neglect . . . Sex-based stereotyping and presumptions about women's abilities and capabilities created a framework for evaluation that cast doubt on the lasting value of women's contributions. Thus, historical neglect and historical denial may have both contributed to the loss of information about the WAC Detachment of Camp Hale."²⁰⁹

Hagen's exhibit also makes a point of telling the post-war story of the WACs and Camp Hale as well. She started by covering the history of Leadville and the camp. Leadville eventually had to turn from mining to tourism as the town's driving economic force and Camp Hale was absorbed into the tourism sphere as a now-popular camping destination.²¹⁰ Hagen also looks at how both the WACs and the 10th Mountain Division have found new lives in the modern era. A

²⁰⁸ Dr. Monys Hagen, "Women in the Military," *Camp Hale* at the *Metropolitan State University of Denver*.

²⁰⁹ Dr. Monys Hagen, "The Women's Army Corps Detachment," *Camp Hale* at the *Metropolitan State University of Denver*.

²¹⁰ Dr. Monys Hagen, "After World War II: 1960 to the Present: Leadville Today," *Camp Hale* at the *Metropolitan State University of Denver*.

new 10th Mountain Division served in Desert Storm in the Middle East and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.²¹¹ The WAC program was reestablished in the 1950s and after 1978, women and men began to serve in integrated non-combat units.²¹²

Colorado Case Study Four: Broomfield Veterans Memorial Museum

In addition to the more science-based museums, Colorado also offers a small museum about veterans of American wars. The *Broomfield Veterans Memorial Museum* is located in Broomfield, Colorado and is currently open Tuesdays and Saturdays. A group of veterans opened the museum, including Paul Murphy, who was a survivor of the sinking of the *USS Indianapolis* during World War II, and originally planned for it to consist of Broomfield World War II veterans. Since opening, the museum now covers veterans from all over Colorado from the Civil War to the current conflict in Iraq.

Since the museum is devoted to telling the stories of local veterans, most of the exhibits consist of brief biographies and photographs of veterans with personal artifacts relating to the war. The museum is divided by war, with several veterans represented for each conflict. Volunteers have been successful in updating the museum with more twenty-first century technology, since each exhibit case includes a tablet with several short video clips for visitors to learn more about the conflict or the veterans represented in the case. Many of the cases also include QR codes for visitors to access additional materials on their phones.

There is one case in the World War II section that is dedicated to women's service in the war. The exhibit includes four uniforms, several photographs, a scrapbook, and a travelling case

²¹¹ Dr. Monys Hagen, "Camp Hale and the Military: History After World War II," *Camp Hale* at the *Metropolitan State University of Denver*.

²¹² Dr. Monys Hagen, "Camp Hale and the Military: History After World War II," *Camp Hale* at the *Metropolitan State University of Denver*.

with various stickers on it.²¹³ This exhibit also represents women from every corps, including nurses, SPARS, and the Marine Corps Women's Reserve. Many museums will only cover one or two corps, primarily the WACs and WASPs, so the Broomfield museum's representation of all the women's corps is an excellent example of the wide variety of work that women participated in during the war. The introduction label on this section states that over 350,000 women "served in uniform" during the war and that "we know the sacrifice our men made during times of conflict, but less is known about the women who supported the troops and helped the United States prevail during WWII."²¹⁴ Throughout the museum, the narrative presented to the visitors is one of American citizens patriotically serving their country, sometimes making the ultimate sacrifice. The women in the World War II exhibit are portrayed in the same way as the soldiers in the rest of the museum—as patriotic heroes.

Like many museums, the *Broomfield Veterans Memorial Museum* is currently undergoing a renovation and expansion. With more room for exhibits, it will be interesting to see what they will be able to add regarding women's service in World War II.

Conclusion

The two main categories of relevant large-scale museums: women's history museums and military history museums, vary in their representation of the women's military corps. Overall, neither have omitted the women's corps from their stories, perhaps due to the large scale of the museums. The museums with the best representation of the women's corps are the women's military history museums. Since the mission of these museums concentrates on women's involvement in the military, it makes sense that they would have the most extensive exhibits. They also have the resources to devote purely on exhibits and research of the women's corps.

²¹³ "Women in the War," at the *Broomfield Veterans Memorial Museum*, visited April 14, 2018.

²¹⁴ "Women in the War," at the *Broomfield Veterans Memorial Museum*, visited April 14, 2018.

Because of this, women's military history museums are able to provide deeper analysis of the units and exhibits that focus on less covered topics, such as racial issues within the corps or smaller units within the corps. They also have access to and exhibit a wider variety of artifacts, such as dog tags, personal items, and V-Mail.

Surprisingly, the large-scale military history museums represent the women's corps on a larger scope. None of the museums have left the women's corps out of the narrative and some offer more than just a brief mention of the women in an exhibit. Most of the military history museums provide supplemental education materials and programs about the women's corps, mainly on conjunction with Women's History Month. The *National Museum of the Marine Corps* has the most extensive coverage of the World War II women's corps, with multiple exhibits and the women's story incorporated into the larger World War II narrative, as well as extra educational materials, including the video and pamphlet, that tell visitors a brief history and where exactly in the museum they can find more information and artifacts. The general women's history museums have so many topics in women's history to cover, so they are not as able to offer as in-depth or as long-term exhibits as the women's military history museums or the national military museums.

When it comes to Colorado museums' coverage of the women's military corps, there is still much to be done. Although they are not as large as the national military museums, women's military participation in World War II does fit into the mission of the Colorado museums outlined here. Both the *Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum* and the *National Museum of World War II Aviation* do not omit the women's participation from their narratives, but their coverage is brief and, in the cases of some exhibits, hard for visitors to find. The online exhibit on the Camp Hale WACs is an excellent example of representing a local unit of WACs,

but it's online only status makes it more difficult for visitors to find without specifically looking for it. The *National Museum of World War II Aviation* is currently undergoing an expansion and remodel, so it looks like the women's military corps could get more representation in Colorado museums.

So, what is the best way for museums to best represent the women's military corps? Is it simply a matter of devoting space in the museum to tell visitors the corps existed? Or does that actually hinder women's inclusion in the larger narrative of American history?

Of the current exhibits on the women's military corps, the most successful tend to fall into two groups. The first group are exhibits that merge the experiences of the women into the larger narrative. These exhibits do not show the women's experiences as outliers or separate from the main World War II narrative. In these exhibits, both male and female soldiers' experiences are represented in the same way and contribute to a larger narrative, which could be about patriotism, technology during the war, or even larger global issues during the war.

The second group of successful exhibits do separate the corps slightly and usually tie them to a larger narrative, usually having to do with women's history and equality movements. This does not mean the corps are isolated; they still contribute to a larger story. Since the artifacts might be in their own area in the exhibit, the objects and labels should be presented in a way that does not isolate the corps, but instead continues to tie in their actions and experiences with the larger story.

Additionally, museums have more success in exhibits that visitors can easily connect back to their own lives and modern-day issues. Currently, many museums achieve this through STEM topics, for example, the technology behind many World War II planes. Museums could also put on exhibits that compare the experiences between modern-day military women and

those who served during World War II or how modern military women have learned about and thought about the women in World War II.

No matter the general narrative that the exhibits on the women's military corps are contributing to, there are several important points museums should consider when designing their exhibits. The first is that the women's corps should be included and not segregated by topic. If the corps is in its own area in the exhibit, it should still strongly contribute to the larger narrative and connect back to the rest of the exhibit. The other important thing for museums to remember is to let the women's voices be heard. This is best accomplished through including a wide variety of artifacts and information from the women themselves, either through interviews, letters, or articles with quotes from the women. The uniforms, photographs, and recruitment posters can show readers how the women might have looked, but they do not give details on the women's experiences. Even the newspaper articles on the corps can only reveal how the media might have thought about the women in the corps and not so much the women's thoughts about their own jobs and experiences.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In the years during and after World War II, women in the various military corps were represented in a variety of ways. During the war, women in military corps were portrayed in ways that emphasized their sex and the typical gender roles of the time. The women's appearance played a vital role in newspaper and magazine coverage. Many of their jobs in the corps still fell into a "feminine" sphere and their new roles were emphasized as temporary assignments. Not every article fit into this pattern however. Some magazines and newspapers published supportive articles about the women early on that praised their patriotism and defended them against detractors. African-American newspapers in particular tended to discuss the women's corps through the lens of racial issues rather than gender-based struggles. A third group of articles dismissed the corps entirely as wastes of the government's time and money to train women for jobs they were not capable of doing. Despite the varying degrees of support, at the end of the war the corps were disbanded and forgotten about for many years.

In historical scholarship, historians still tend to emphasize the role of the women's sex before expanding into the overall role of the women's corps in the broader history of women's equality. Earlier scholarship focused on the corps as a whole, in an attempt to bring them back into the mainstream historical narrative. As more sources and scholarship became available, scholars were able to write more micro-histories of the women's corps. These would focus on individual biographies of those who served or on single issues in the history: training, recruiting, sexuality, and race. In doing so, a new subcategory is being created that combines social/gender history with more traditional military history.

Representation of the women's corps in many museums, however, is severely lacking. Museums focusing on women's military history are the only ones to create more extensive and varied exhibits on the women's corps. Surprisingly, women's history museums and military history museums have a strong absence of the women's military corps. In the best cases, the women's corps are mentioned or given a few brief paragraphs. The *National Women's History Museum* has longer articles on the World War II corps, but they are fairly hidden and visitors have to work to find them. In other cases, the women's corps are almost completely omitted. In the case of Colorado, the two larger museums that have all or part of the museum dedicated to World War II have limited references to the women's corps. The best representation of the women's corps in Colorado is through an online exhibit, but as with the *National Women's History Museum*, visitors have to search to find the online exhibit.

As the field of women's military history continues to grow, I hope to see museums catch up with published scholarly works, not only in representing the women's corps, but in analyzing the corps through multiple lenses. Telling the stories of the women's military corps in both scholarly writing and museums will not only help maintain those program's importance in the larger World War II and women's history historical narratives, it will also keep the stories of those women in the minds of the everyday American public.

The varying ways in which primary sources, modern scholarship, and museums treat the women's corps is a vital part of the newly-growing field of women's military history. As the field grows, there is a greater need to meld gender history with typical military history. The newspaper and magazine primary sources reveal that ideas about women's roles in society played a large part in the narrative, in both the articles that did support the corps and the ones that did not. Authors of the later historical scholarship used these sources to an extent and the

idea about women's role in society continued to play a large part. Even though scholars debate on whether the creation of the women's corps made a larger impact on the women's equality movements after the war, most of them do agree that the corps were a unique aspect of the World War II period. Although museums are needing to represent the women's corps in their exhibits, they must do it in a way that keeps the women's voices at the front. Because one of the main failures of the newspaper and magazine articles of the 1940s was not just how they portrayed the women, it was that the women in the corps' voices and opinions were not given enough attention.

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