

FASHIONING FEMININITY FOR WAR: MATERIAL CULTURE AND GENDER  
PERFORMANCE IN THE WAC AND WAVES DURING WORLD WAR II

by

AMANDA MAE WILLEY

B.A., New Mexico State University, 2003  
M.A., Kansas State University, 2006

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History  
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2015

## **Abstract**

In 1942, the U.S. Army and Navy announced the creation of their respective women's military services: the WAAC/WAC and the WAVES.<sup>1</sup> Although American women had served alongside the military in past conflicts, the creation of women's military corps caused uproar in American society. Placing women directly into the armed services called into question cultural expectations about "masculinity" and "femininity." Thus, the women's corps had to be justified to the public in accordance with American cultural assumptions regarding proper gender roles.

"Fashioning Femininity for War: Material Culture and Gender Performance in the WAC and WAVES during World War II" focuses on the role of material culture in communicating a feminine image of the WAC and WAVES to the American public as well as the ways in which servicewomen engaged material culture to fashion and perform a feminine identity compatible with contemporary understandings of "femininity." Material culture served as a mechanism to resolve public concerns regarding both the femininity and the function of women in the military. WAC and WAVES material culture linked their wearers with stereotyped characteristics specifically related to contemporary meanings of "femininity" celebrated by American society, while at the same time associating them with military organizations doing vital war work. Ultimately, the WAVES were more successful in their manipulations of material culture than the WAC, communicating both femininity and function in a way that was complementary to the established gender hierarchy. Therefore, the WAVES enjoyed a prestigious position in the mind of the American public.

---

<sup>1</sup> The WAAC (The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) existed from May 1942 to September 1943 when it was replaced by the WAC (Women's Army Corps); WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services)

This dissertation also contributes to the ongoing historiographical debate regarding World War II as a turning point for women's liberation, arguing that while the seeds of women's liberation were sown in women's wartime activities, those same wartime women were firmly convinced that their rightful place was in the private rather than the public sphere. The war created an opportunity to reevaluate gender roles but it would take some time before those reevaluations bore fruit.

FASHIONING FEMININITY FOR WAR: MATERIAL CULTURE AND GENDER  
PERFORMANCE IN THE WAC AND WAVES DURING WORLD WAR II

by

AMANDA MAE WILLEY

B.A., New Mexico State University, 2003

M.A., Kansas State University, 2006

A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History  
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2015

Approved by:

Major Professor  
Sue Zschoche

# **Copyright**

AMANDA MAE WILLEY

2015

## Abstract

In 1942, the U.S. Army and Navy announced the creation of their respective women's military services: the WAAC/WAC and the WAVES.<sup>2</sup> Although American women had served alongside the military in past conflicts, the creation of women's military corps caused uproar in American society. Placing women directly into the armed services called into question cultural expectations about "masculinity" and "femininity." Thus, the women's corps had to be justified to the public in accordance with American cultural assumptions regarding proper gender roles.

"Fashioning Femininity for War: Material Culture and Gender Performance in the WAC and WAVES during World War II" focuses on the role of material culture in communicating a feminine image of the WAC and WAVES to the American public as well as the ways in which servicewomen engaged material culture to fashion and perform a feminine identity compatible with contemporary understandings of "femininity." Material culture served as a mechanism to resolve public concerns regarding both the femininity and the function of women in the military. WAC and WAVES material culture linked their wearers with stereotyped characteristics specifically related to contemporary meanings of "femininity" celebrated by American society, while at the same time associating them with military organizations doing vital war work. Ultimately, the WAVES were more successful in their manipulations of material culture than the WAC, communicating both femininity and function in a way that was complementary to the established gender hierarchy. Therefore, the WAVES enjoyed a prestigious position in the mind of the American public.

---

<sup>2</sup> The WAAC (The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) existed from May 1942 to September 1943 when it was replaced by the WAC (Women's Army Corps); WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services)

This dissertation also contributes to the ongoing historiographical debate regarding World War II as a turning point for women's liberation, arguing that while the seeds of women's liberation were sown in women's wartime activities, those same wartime women were firmly convinced that their rightful place was in the private rather than the public sphere. The war created an opportunity to reevaluate gender roles but it would take some time before those reevaluations bore fruit.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	x
Dedication .....	xi
Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1 - The Little Colonel's Soldiers and Miss Mac's College Girls: Public Image and the WAC and WAVES Training Grounds .....	44
Chapter 2 - "Now it Looks More Homey:" Femininity in the Barracks .....	93
Chapter 3 - "The Two Best Styles of the Year:" WAC and WAVES Uniforms .....	136
Chapter 4 - "Keep Your Beauty on Duty": Cosmetics in the Military .....	171
Chapter 5 - "We Want to Be Feminine Once More:" Back to Civilian Life .....	205
Epilogue .....	246
Bibliography .....	254
Appendix A .....	262

## List of Figures

Figure 1. WAC Barracks.....	262
Figure 2. Waves at Hunter College.....	263
Figure 3. WAAC Enlisted Uniforms .....	264
Figure 4. Wacs in Basic Training .....	265
Figure 5. WAVES Dress Blue Uniform .....	266
Figure 6. WAVES Summer Dress White Uniform.....	267
Figure 7. WAC Recruitment Poster.....	268
Figure 8. WAVES Recruitment Poster .....	269

## Acknowledgements

Although it is only my name on the title page of this dissertation, it took a village to get not only this study but also my entire Ph.D. program done. So, to the following members of my village:

Dr. Sue Zschoche, who has been a wonderful advisor, counselor, and friend;

Dr. Mark Parillo, who has been one of my most engaging professors, most trusted confessors, and most favorite people;

Dr. Louise Breen, who sat patiently for hours in Eisenhower 201 getting the technology up and running that would allow me to take classes from a distance and still agreed to serve on my committee;

Dr. Brent Maner, who was kind enough to join my committee at the last minute and offer valuable commentary on my final project;

Dr. Michele Janette, who walked me through the forest of feminist theory and told me in the nicest ways possible, “No, that’s really not what the author is saying....”

Dr. Lou Williams, who has encouraged me and cheered me on both in and out of the classroom since I was a master’s student;

Dr. Joe Bailey, who has been a wonderful friend and excellent study-buddy since day one of my doctoral program;

Ms. Shelly Reeves, who served as my eyes, ears, hands, and feet when I was not on campus to get paperwork delivered--and sometimes even when I was;

The Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project for all your assistance throughout both my master’s and doctoral programs;

and, finally, to Dr. Jason Martin, who has been my fellow grad student, my friend, my sounding board, my husband, and my companion in this path that we have chosen;

Thank you.

## **Dedication**

To the Wacs and Waves of World War II, thank you for your trailblazing service. You were magnificent.

## Introduction

In three different letters written to her parents in 1944, WAC Constance Cline made several remarks about her hair. In one, she stated that she got cited for not having her hair up properly, in a second, she noted that she had a hair appointment for the next afternoon, and in a third, she mentioned that she had learned how to “rat up” her hair that day. In previous missives to her family, Phillips detailed her rather demanding schedule, which included, among other things, rising at 5:00 A.M., classes for roughly the next eight hours with a few meals squeezed in between, and then falling into bed around 10:45 P.M.<sup>3</sup> At first glance, Phillips’s statements about her sometimes troublesome tresses might cause one to wonder when she found the time to worry about her hair but hardly seem worthy of rigorous historical analysis. Yet, upon further examination of her letters, as well as those of other servicewomen, it becomes increasingly clear that many servicewomen were rather obsessive about their hair and their appearance in general. Numerous women echoed Phillips’s sentiments and even the Women’s Army Corps Director, Oveta Culp Hobby, was so concerned with hairstyle that she pioneered the official “Wac Pompadour,” a hairstyle her subordinates could readily copy at any Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon.

The recurrence of servicewomen’s comments on their hairstyles and other aspects of their appearance in their letters and diaries as well as the WAC’s endorsement of an official hairdo beg the question of why there was so much fuss over appearance. Part of the answer lay in the fact that World War II was the first time that American women were allowed to enlist in the U.S. military. American women have a long history of participation in the United States military.

---

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, University Libraries, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter Phillips Collection.

From the Revolution through World War I, women served in noncombatant civilian positions and occasionally disguised themselves as men to serve as combatants. It was not until World War II, however, that women's service was formally recognized by the military and women were allowed to serve as official, rather than as civilian, members of the military. This recognition caused uproar in American society as the formation of the various women's corps gave rise to public fears that the mobilization of women for war would undermine the established gender system and both men's and women's places within it. Leisa D. Meyer, author of *Creating G.I. Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps during World War II*, has suggested that:

Public fears of the consequences of establishing a women's army were rooted in a cultural inability to reconcile the categories of "woman" and "soldier." This oppositional division is based on both constructions of military service as a critical measure of cultural "masculinity," and the asymmetrically gendered relationship between the male "protector" and the female "protected."<sup>4</sup>

Placing women directly into the armed services called into question American cultural expectations about "masculinity" and "femininity." Thus, the women's corps—including the WAAC/WAC (Women's Army Corps),<sup>5</sup> WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services, Navy), SPAR (Semper Paratus Always Ready, Coast Guard) and Women Marines (no acronym)—had to be justified to the government, the military, and the public in accordance with American cultural assumptions regarding proper gender roles.

---

<sup>4</sup> Leisa D. Meyers, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>5</sup> The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) existed from May 1942 to September 1943 when it was replaced by the Women's Army Corp (WAC). Throughout this paper I will use the acronym "WAC" to refer to the organization and "Wac" to refer to the members to avoid confusion unless the source material demands otherwise. The term "Wave" is used to refer to members of the WAVES.

Most of the existing scholarship on the creation of the American women's military corps has been preoccupied with the various corps success, or lack thereof, in gaining public acceptance as legitimate and necessary military institutions. This acceptance seems to have hinged on the corps's ability to construct an image of servicewomen that would both alleviate the opposition's fears that women's admission into the military would upset traditional gender roles or masculinize women as well as convince the public at large that women's military participation was crucial to American victory in World War II. Scholars have examined the various ways in which military leaders, male and female alike, communicated this message of servicewomen's femininity and functionality to the public but have failed to account for the role of material culture in manipulating the public's perceptions of the women's corps as well as the servicewomen's efforts to construct their own feminine identity. This dissertation takes as its central issue the ways in which the WAC and the WAVES as well as their servicewomen fashioned this image of femininity and functionality through an examination of material culture and gender performance. Moreover, it argues that the WAVES more successfully manipulated material culture than the WAC to produce a feminine image that was compatible with contemporary American understandings of femininity and, therefore, enjoyed greater prestige in the eyes of the public.

Material objects such as dress and housing can provide cultural meaning for societies. Such things act as mediums through which cultural ideals are expressed and communicate the values, beliefs and ideas that societies hold dear. Working from these premises, this dissertation asserts that material culture served as a mechanism to resolve public concerns regarding both the femininity and the function of women in the military. Additionally, this dissertation interprets the material culture of the WAC and WAVES as representative of and contributing to debates

and anxieties regarding gender within the larger American culture, not simply as concerns within the military. The material culture of the WAC and WAVES linked their servicewomen to stereotyped characteristics specifically related to contemporary meanings of “femininity.” A major theoretical point underpinning this study is the assertion that gender is a social construct rather than an essential state. This idea will be more thoroughly examined in the “Theoretical Framework” section, but it should be noted here that World War II American society largely constructed ideal femininity as white and middle-class. Ideal femininity also embodied housewifery, motherhood, and domesticity. There were, of course, competing varieties of femininity, but it was this particular blend that the larger American culture celebrated. Consequently, the WAC and WAVES embraced a material culture that communicated these particular feminine qualities to the public at large in their efforts to legitimize women’s military service. In short, since servicewomen were doing work considered “masculine” by the larger society, it became even more important that the women look “feminine.” Uniform was the most visible and tangible aspect of material culture available to the public and, consequently, played an important role in relaying these messages to the public. However, cosmetics and hairstyles, housing and training facilities and even the reconversion of women to civilians and civilian clothing played an important role in publicizing these messages as well.

This dissertation will also explore the ways in which women attempted to fashion and perform a feminine identity while serving in a traditionally masculine institution. It is tempting to interpret these World War II servicewomen as feminists pioneering a path for future women to achieve equality with men. Indeed, some World War II contemporaries scathingly labeled the women’s corps as “feminist” and some historians have contended that women’s World War II activities – military and otherwise – led directly to the women’s liberation movement of the

1960s. Yet, most servicewomen did not see themselves as feminists and some even made a point of directly rejecting such “accusations.” Instead, they actively participated in the construction of their own feminine identities even as they became soldiers and sailors. For instance, some women elected to join the WAVES over the WAC because they thought the WAVES uniform was more feminine and becoming. Many Wacs and Waves defied Army and Navy regulations by allowing their hair to grow past their collars. Others decorated their barracks and tents with colorful drapes and flowers in an effort to make their living spaces more domestic. Still more wore civilian lingerie beneath their military uniforms or stole a few moments to stroll in the park in pink dresses as they held hands with their boyfriends and fiancés and dreamed of postwar married life. Through their own employment of material culture, servicewomen affirmed their commitment to the WAC, WAVES, and general American understandings of femininity and demonstrated their compliance in maintaining rather than undoing traditional gender norms.

Most servicewomen absorbed the dominant social and cultural ideology that placed women firmly within the home. However, the Second World War created a tension between that ideology and the women’s experiences that allowed for an ongoing reevaluation of gender roles. Servicewomen were bombarded with language and propaganda that encouraged them to continue to think of themselves as inherently different from men and most went back to their traditional roles in the post-war period. But there can be no doubt that those women, and society with them, were changed by their wartime experiences.

### **Creation of the WAC and WAVES**

On May 14, 1942, Congress passed legislation for the creation of the United States Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). The WAAC was an all-women’s, quasi-civilian

organization that was designed to provide the Army with female personnel who would take over noncombatant jobs, which would release more men for combat assignments. The Army originally intended to employ women primarily in clerical and communications work, but one of the major purposes for the creation of the WAAC was to make “available to the national defense the knowledge, skill, and special training of the women of the nation.”<sup>6</sup> Many of the approximately 100,000 women who eventually joined the corps during the course of World War II had skills that extended beyond the clerical. By the end of the war, women occupied more than 250 noncombatant positions, including drivers, mechanics, laboratory workers, hospital workers, supply officers, public relations officers, meteorologists, cooks, bakers, dieticians, textile and fabric workers, and welders, among many others jobs.<sup>7</sup>

The WAAC legislation authorized the Army to enroll 150,000 officers and enlisted women between the ages of 21 and 45 for noncombat service. The Army organized the women in units separate from the men and the Waacs were housed and trained at Army posts, with Fort Des Moines, Iowa and Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, serving as the primary WAAC bases. Officers and enlisted women held grades different from the men, and in the early months of the corps, they received less pay than their male counterparts. But by November 1942, they began to draw the same pay as members in the Regular Army serving in corresponding grades. The auxiliary system was complicated, however, because the WAAC was not an integral part of the Army and could not be governed by regular Army regulations. It required a separate set of WAAC regulations and policies, which left women vulnerable to legal problems. Among the most vulnerable were the women who served overseas near combat zones, such as the Waacs stationed

---

<sup>6</sup> Mattie Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1954), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Army of the United States – Women's Army Corps, *Facts You Want to Know About the WAC*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 11.

in Algeria at General Dwight D. Eisenhower's North African Theater headquarters. If these Waacs became sick or wounded, they did not receive veterans' hospitalization. If they were killed, their parents would not receive a death gratuity. They also had no protection under international agreements covering prisoners of war if they were captured. The auxiliary status was dropped in July 1943 after Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers (R, MA) and Oveta Culp Hobby, the first WAAC director, drafted a bill to give Army servicewomen full military status.

The new law establishing the Women's Army Corps (WAC) stated that women were still to be utilized only in noncombatant jobs. However, the law removed the 150,000 personnel limitation, changed the age restrictions from 21 through 45 to 20 through 49, and lowered its original educational requirements to allow women without a high school diploma to enlist and even become officers. It also replaced the distinctive grade titles with the same ranks used by the Army. The WAC Director could not be promoted above colonel and other female officers above lieutenant colonel, although enlisted women could be promoted to the highest enlisted grade, master sergeant. Members of the WAC also received the same pay, allowances, and benefits as men and were subject to the same disciplinary code.<sup>8</sup>

The new WAC law was inspired, in part, by the establishment of the women's naval corps, popularly known as the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). The basic motivation for establishing the WAVES was identical to that of the WAC: employ women in non-combatant jobs, which would then free more men for combat duty. As with the WAC, there was ample debate about the necessity of women in the Navy. Both the Navy and the Senate seemed to accept the idea early on, but bitter debate continued over whether the Navy's women would have auxiliary status like the WAAC or regular status like the Navy men.

---

<sup>8</sup> For more details about the WAAC and WAC, see Betty J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990), 5.

Proponents of the latter argument won out, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill establishing the Naval Women's Reserve into law on July 30, 1942.

The new bill allowed for 75,000 women to join the WAVES, as long as they were between twenty and forty-nine years of age. A total of 104,339 women served in the WAVES over the course of World War II. Enlisted women were expected to have a high school or business school diploma while officers needed a college degree or two years of college and two years of professional work experience. Mildred McAfee headed the corps and ran the organization more along the lines of the women's college where she was president, Wellesley, than a traditional military organization. Waves trained at various college campuses across the country, with Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts serving as the officers' training center and Iowa State Teacher's College at Cedar Falls, Oklahoma A&M at Stillwater, Indiana University at Bloomington, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison serving enlisted women. The Navy eventually decided to centralize its enlisted women's basic training program and took over Hunter College, located in the Bronx, New York, for the duration of the war.<sup>9</sup>

Like the Army, the Navy placed limitations on the ranks women could occupy. The highest rank available to women was Lieutenant Commander and only the Director of the WAVES was permitted this grade. Only thirty-five women were allowed to be lieutenants, while the maximum number of lieutenant junior grades could not exceed thirty-five percent of the total number of officers. The Navy changed these restrictions later in 1943 to permit one captain, the Director, and eliminate the cap on the number of lower ranking officers altogether. The highest enlisted rank available to women was chief petty officer. The majority of Waves served in

---

<sup>9</sup> Kathleen Ryan, "When Flags Flew High": Propaganda, Memory, and Oral History for World War II Female Veterans," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon,) 31 and Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the U.S. Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 119.

clerical and communications positions, but women also worked as language specialists, radiomen, engineers, and even air navigation instructors. Unlike the WAC, they were not allowed to serve overseas, although the Navy allowed WAVES to be posted in Alaska and Hawaii in 1944. Waves received the same pay, allowances, and benefits as their male counterparts and were subordinate to the same disciplinary code. WAVES authority was limited to the Women's Naval Reserve, however, and Waves could not command Navy men, even at training schools.<sup>10</sup>

### **THE SLANDER CAMPAIGN**

There was much public controversy over the creation of the women's military corps, with most of the negative attention aimed at the WAAC since it was the first of the women's organizations. Journalists in particular seemed to have difficulty taking the women's corps seriously and related numerous comical stories about women trying to adjust to military life. For their part, cartoonists drew much attention to the potentially humorous consequences of inducting women into the armed services. A much more vicious form of opposition formed within the Army ranks, which eventually resulted in what came to be known in the War Department and the women's corps as the "slander campaign."<sup>11</sup>

The slander campaign was a series of rumors that portrayed servicewomen as promiscuous women and prostitutes recruited for the purposes of raising male soldiers' morale,

---

<sup>10</sup> Regina T. Akers, "Doing Their Part: The WAVES in World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2000), 44 & Godson, *Serving Proudly*, 123. Until November 1943, Waves did not receive full military benefits. Unlike their male counterparts, they received no death gratuity or retirement pay. After some WAVES began to leave the service on account of these disparities, Congress modified legislation and granted women military benefits. Husbands of Waves could not be considered dependents, and children became dependents only if the Wave proved the father was dead or she was their primary supporter.

<sup>11</sup> Mattie Treadwell, *United States Army in World War II. Special Studies: The Women's Army Corps* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1953), 193.

mannish women who enjoyed bossing around men, or lesbians looking for lovers. This campaign originated at the private level, with rumors being spread via personal letters and word of mouth. However, by 1943, the media had joined the individual gossip mongers, thus introducing the slander campaign to the public. The slander campaign became so vitriolic that in June 1943 the Army's Military Intelligence Service launched an investigation into the sources of the slander campaign. Investigators stated that jealous wives of soldiers and civilian women who resented having the Waacs around and "deplore the extra competition" were partially responsible for the rumors. Additionally, investigators blamed "fanatics" who believed that the only proper place for women was in the home. Officials also singled out disgruntled or discharged Waacs who were seeking revenge on the corps. However, the primary instigators of the rumors were "Army officers and men who resent[ed] members of the WAAC" for various reasons. Some men disliked those Waacs who had obtained equal or higher rank. Others feared that they would be replaced by Waacs or simply did not want women "in their military." Additionally, "soldiers who had never dated Waacs . . . [or] had trouble getting dates" encouraged the rumors.<sup>12</sup>

At Hobby's first press conference, many reporters asked the director questions about whether female soldiers would be able to wear make-up and nail polish or if they would be allowed to date male soldiers, rather than pose serious questions about how the Army intended to utilize women to contribute to the war effort. Titles such as "WAAC Officers Will Bulge Only in the Right Places" headed popular news magazines' articles about the WAAC, and news stories focused on the color of WAAC undergarments.<sup>13</sup> Other headlines included "Petticoat Army" and "Doughgirl Generalissimo," while phrases such as "Wackies," "Powder-magazines," and

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>13</sup> "WAAC Officers Will Bulge Only in the Right Places," in *Manhattan (NY) Republic*, June 18, 1942.

(concerning girdles), “It wouldn’t do to let the fighting lassies get out of shape,” appeared in newspaper articles and editorials.<sup>14</sup> The media’s use of highly gendered language gave the WAAC an overly sexualized, rather than a serious, public image.

The conviction that women, because of their femininity, would make poor soldiers and flounder in the military environment was also evident in much of the media’s coverage. Several editorials and articles concentrated on the potential humorous consequences of taking women into the Army. For instance, one *Newsweek* article poked fun at servicewomen learning to salute, noting that it was a source of “chief amusement” for the men stationed with them. The same article also reported that even Colonel Hobby, the WAAC director, had trouble with saluting and highlighted her dismay at, following Army protocol, having to rise at the crack of dawn.<sup>15</sup> A *Time* magazine article claimed that male officers became frustrated with the women’s “staccato questions and treble chattering” as they waited in line at a recruiting station. “Cried a lieutenant in Manhattan: ‘Ladies, please, for gosh sake, shut up a minute.’” Another officer was cited in the same article as asking, “They’re just as tough to handle in this recruiting office as they are in civilian life – see what I mean?” in reference to the women’s excited talking.<sup>16</sup> Another *Newsweek* article reported that women would be subject to military discipline: “That means, among other things, that she can’t duck out for a permanent or a cocktail without a pass.”<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> “Petticoat Army” in *Fargo (ND) Morning Forum*, May 17, 1942; “Doughgirl Generalissimo” in *Star (MI)*, May 20, 1942; and “Wackies” in *Arkansas (AR) Democrat*, May 1942, cited in Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 26.

<sup>16</sup> “WAAC’s First Muster,” *Time*, June 8, 1942, 71.

<sup>17</sup> “Wacks and Warns in Prospect for Petticoat Army and Navy,” *Newsweek*, March 30, 1942, 33.

The WAAC also provided much inspiration for cartoonists, several of whom enjoyed drawing humorous strips of women trying to adjust to military life. Cartoonists often caricatured the physical and mental characteristics associated with “femininity” by depicting Waacs as attractive, young women with exaggerated hourglass figures who exhibited a lack of intelligence and an inability to perform the simplest tasks or to endure hardships. “Winnie the Wac,” one of the most well-known World War II WAC cartoons, illustrates these characteristics. Winnie, created by Corporal Vic Herman, is drawn as a white, attractive, and curvy young woman who finds herself in many comical situations that accentuate her supposed feminine attributes during her time in the WAC. For instance, in one episode, Winnie is depicted sitting at a typewriter and staring at her paperwork with a look of great concern on her face as two male soldiers look on with shock. The caption below states “Goodness, I’ve put the 12<sup>th</sup> armored division on the wrong continent!” In another episode, a large, old, and masculine female sergeant is standing over Winnie with her hands on her hips and an irate expression on her face. Winnie, who is on KP duty, surrounded by broken dishes and looking quite dejected, asks the sergeant, “Do you mean to tell me I’m not fired?”<sup>18</sup>

The female sergeant depicted alongside Winnie in this latter cartoon is an example of the other Wac stereotype the media portrayed, the mannish Wac. As a counterpart to the sexualized Wac, the mannish Wac was usually depicted as a woman in a position of authority. Women with power were, by definition, “unfeminine,” and thus it was not difficult for the public to imagine a female officer or non-com in the Army, which was itself a masculine institution, as possessing masculine qualities. Cartoonist Dave Breger captured the image of the mannish Wac in his series, *Private Breger Abroad*. In one cartoon, a small GI wearing glasses is seen sitting behind

---

<sup>18</sup> Vic Hermann, *Winnie the WAC: The Return of a World War II Favorite*. (Encinitas, CA: KNI, 2002), np.

a typewriter as a large, muscular Waac strides out of the room. Another male soldier admonishes the small GI, “Stop Griping! SOMEBODY had to be chosen to release her for combat!”<sup>19</sup>

The media attention on GI brassieres and featherbrained or mannish women presented a superficial image of the WAAC to the American public that, to some degree, discredited the corps. But the WAAC image that developed within the Army rank and file was far more destructive to the corps’ reputation. From the inception of the WAAC, some opponents raised questions about what military purpose women could serve other than to boost male morale. Such questions implied that women would don uniforms only to offer themselves to servicemen as escorts for social events and personal dates or to perform sexual favors. In short, servicewomen would be nothing more than glorified prostitutes. At the other end of the sexual spectrum, opponents feared that the military, being such a traditionally masculine institution, would attract lesbians. One columnist for the *Miami News* expressed these fears when he compared the Waacs to “the naked Amazons . . . and the queer damozels of the Isle of Lesbos.”<sup>20</sup> An anonymous citizen stated that Fort Oglethorpe, GA -- a WAAC training post -- was “full of homosexuals and sex maniacs.”<sup>21</sup> Whether WAAC opponents viewed servicewomen as prostitutes or as lesbians, they called into question the women’s morality and character.

Women’s sexual behavior was closely linked to their overall character. During World War II, society held a sexual double standard for men and women. Premarital sexual activity was permissible for men, but female sexual activity was acceptable only within marriage. Unmarried women who engaged in sex acts were labeled “bad girls.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, one way to slander a woman’s character was to question her sexual morality. WAAC opponents used this technique

---

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> “Miami Story,” (Miami, FL) *Miami News*, May 20, 1942.

<sup>21</sup> A 1944 letter written to the WAC director, cited in Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 625.

<sup>22</sup> Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 34.

to besmirch the WAAC reputation. This campaign began quietly in late 1942 and early 1943 through private letters and word of mouth. Rumors flourished around Army posts where Waacs were stationed. Among the more vicious rumors were that large numbers of Waacs stationed in North Africa had become pregnant and were being returned to the States, that 90 percent of Waacs had been prostitutes, and that Army physicians examining WAAC applicants rejected all virgins. These rumors became much more public with the appearance of an article by *New York Daily News* writer John O'Donnell in which he claimed that the Army intended to provide Waacs with contraceptives.<sup>23</sup> O'Donnell's article was damaging to the WAAC reputation and, subsequently, to the Waacs themselves.

O'Donnell's article offered "proof" that the Army planned to violate prevailing sexual norms by providing unmarried women with contraceptives, which would allow women greater sexual freedom and encourage heterosexual activity. The article also lent credence to the rumors regarding the WAAC as nothing more than a mobile brothel, for much of the public interpreted the distribution of contraceptives to women as evidence that the Army wished to prostitute Waacs for the sexual pleasures of male soldiers.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the article launched what had been a private "whispering campaign" into a public slander campaign circulated in the media. Prominent public figures, such as WAAC Director Hobby, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and even President Franklin D. Roosevelt publicly defended the WAAC.<sup>25</sup> Hobby stated that there was "absolutely no foundation of truth in the statement" regarding contraceptives, while Stimson argued that the "[s]inister rumors aimed at destroying the reputation of the Waacs are absolutely and completely false. . . . The repetition of any

---

<sup>23</sup> Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 201.

<sup>24</sup> Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*, 203.

unfounded rumor . . . is actually an aid to the enemy.”<sup>26</sup> President Roosevelt told the press that O’Donnell’s article was a “deliberate newspaper job” and that the reporter had merely taken orders “from the top.” Arguing that the rumors about WAAC pregnancies in North Africa were Nazi propaganda, Eleanor Roosevelt admonished “Americans [who] fall for Axis-inspired propaganda like children.”<sup>27</sup>

In its own effort to combat the negative stereotypes of Waacs/Wacs, the corps’s administration worked hard to present a respectable and feminine portrayal of women to the public. Propaganda posters usually depicted female soldiers as young and attractive. In a 1943 WAC handbook, the military warned women to maintain their femininity by avoiding “mannish hairstyles,” which were considered “taboo.”<sup>28</sup> These depictions and such advice were meant to comfort those who believed only immoral or masculine women joined the corps. But these representations could easily be manipulated by those who encouraged the negative stereotypes of the Waacs/Wacs. No matter how the administrations approached the problem, they could not win. The respectful, attractive young soldier readily translated into the oversexed prostitute in uniform. However, if the administration put forth a less feminine image of the Waacs/Wacs, the women could be labeled “mannish.” Despite the WAAC/WAC administrations’ attempts to counter the slander campaign, the negative stereotypes and the vicious rumors surrounding both the WAAC and WAC plagued the corps throughout the war.

The WAVES never suffered as much from the slander campaign as the WAAC/WAC. They were not immune to rumors, but the WAVES administration had the benefit of coming

---

<sup>26</sup> “Waac Rumors” *Newsweek*. June 21, 1943, 46; *Washington Post*, June 11 and 16, 1943.

<sup>27</sup> *Washington Post*, June 30, 1943; *Washington Daily News*, June 9, 1943, cited in Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*.

<sup>28</sup> “Handbook for the Women’s Army Corps”  
<[http://mscd.edu/history/camphale/wim\\_003\\_basic\\_training\\_handbook.html](http://mscd.edu/history/camphale/wim_003_basic_training_handbook.html).>

after the WAC and, therefore, learning from WAC experiences. For instance, when Mildred McAfee gave her first press conference, she, like Hobby, was bombarded with frivolous questions such as what kind of undergarments women would wear beneath their uniforms. Unlike Hobby, who gave a detailed description of Army-issued panties and brassieres that provided fodder for the slander campaign in the form of salacious headlines, TIME magazine reported that “Miss Mac set her teeth; the Navy did not care what the WAVES wore under their uniform. The reporter finally gave up. There was no story on WAVE[S] underwear.” The WAVES insisted that they be incorporated directly, rather than as an auxiliary corps, into the Navy and managed to deftly sidestep the obstacles the WAC experienced as they transitioned from auxiliary to full membership. The Navy sought to avoid the negative publicity that the Army was experiencing with its “Wackies” and began by creating an acronym that could not easily be altered to convey derogatory meaning. They developed the nautical-sounding acronym “WAVES” first and then built explanatory words around it. It stood for “Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service,” which underscored the temporary, rather than permanent, nature of women’s naval service and undoubtedly alleviated the fears of at least a few Doubting Thomases. Once women were accepted for service they were trained on college campuses.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, all WAVES had access to some form of cleaning service. Enlisted personnel were responsible for cleaning their own rooms, but “Negro cleaning women ... attend to the recreation rooms and for a small fee provide 24 hours laundry service.... Also, WAVES officers have their own maid service.”<sup>30</sup> Members of the WAC, on the other hand, trained at Army forts, were expected to clean their own quarters, and included African-American women as a part of the corps. Perhaps most importantly, the WAVES also established enlistment standards that were

---

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Meyers, *Creating GI Jane*, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 66

appreciably higher than those for the WAC. The WAC required applicants to be twenty years old and of good health and character, but all Waves were expected to possess:

a college degree, or two years of college world plus at least two years' professional or business experience applicable to naval jobs. . . . Especially wanted: women who majored in engineering, astronomy, meteorology, electronics, physics, mathematics, metallurgy, business statistics and modern foreign languages<sup>31</sup>

The WAVES deliberately marketed themselves as an elitist group that required women with professional experience. There was to be no question that the professional services these women provided were of a business rather than sexual nature.

Such stark differences between the two corps made the WAVES a lesser target than the WAC for the slander campaign. The fact remains, however, that the slander campaign influenced the development of WAVES propaganda. For in attempting to deflect criticism, the WAVES fashioned an image of their corps meant to convey both feminine respectability and professionalism. Material culture was crucial to this process.

### **Historiography**

The number of histories on the WAVES and especially the WAAC/WAC during World War II has grown in recent years. General surveys of women in World War II that discuss women's military service include Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II*; D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era*; Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*; and Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*. General surveys of women in the U.S. military

---

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II*, 32.

include Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*; and M. C. Devilbliss, *Women and the Military Service: A History, Analysis, and Overview*. Holm also edited *In Defense of a Nation: Servicewomen in World War II* with Judith Bellafaire, a useful study for looking at the differences between the women's services, while Susan H. Godson's *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the U.S. Navy* offers an excellent overview of women's naval service from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. Each of these works has been helpful in providing a context for analyzing women's World War II military service.

Two major institutional studies exist of the WAC, both of which provide historical narratives of the corps during World War II: Mattie Treadwell's *The Women's Army Corps* and Bettie J. Morden's *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978*. Both of these are valuable resources that provide detailed fact-driven histories of the WAAC/WAC's organization but are limited in their analyses of female soldiers as gendered constructions. Michaela Hampf has also included a detailed organizational history of the WAC in her book, *Release a Man for Combat: The Women's Army Corps during World War II*. Unlike Treadwell and Morden, however, Hampf is especially interested in the gendered construction of what she calls the "woman I soldier." In this well-written and meticulously researched study, Hampf analyzes the relationship between race, gender, sexuality, and class that contributed to the gendered power structure within the WAAC/WAC. She also discusses the competing discourses about the WAAC/WAC that developed out of press coverage, propaganda campaigns, and even the songs and camp newsletters produced by servicewomen. Finally, Hampf analyzes the WAC's attempt to regulate women's sexuality and especially homosexuality. Hampf concludes that the Army recognized the need for and value of female soldiers during World War II, which made the category of "woman I soldier," a category which made room for women within the military, socially viable.

However, Hampf writes, “The new category emerged in a space structured by relations of power and knowledge” with the ultimate purpose of this space being to “prevent women from gaining authority over military masculinity.”<sup>32</sup>

The Navy’s official history of the WAVES is an unpublished and unindexed administrative history.<sup>33</sup> A few Ph.D. candidates have written dissertations on the WAVES in recent years that help to provide a more structured narrative history of the WAVES. Regina T. Akers’ “Doing their Part: The WAVES in World War II” is especially useful for this purpose. Akers is more interested, however, in analyzing the ways in which women were integrated into the Navy and the relationship between Navy men and women, which started off as hostile but eventually became one of mutual respect. She also documents the plight of African-American women who were excluded from the WAVES until 1944. Kathleen M. Ryan offers a comparative study of the WAVES and SPARS in her dissertation, “When Flags Flew High: Propaganda, Memory, and Oral History for World War II Female Veterans.” Ryan’s work is more a study of memory than an analysis of gender. She concludes that the WAVES postwar wartime propaganda campaign encouraged their servicewomen to think of and thus remember themselves as being superior to the other women’s corps, especially in relationship to the SPARS. Their propaganda campaign tended to emphasize the fun women experiences as part of the SPARS rather than on the work they would do.<sup>34</sup> These works have been invaluable in piecing together the WAVES’ narrative history as well as understanding the elite reputation the

---

<sup>32</sup> M. Michaela Hampf, *Release a Man for Combat: The Women's Army Corps during World War II* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag Köln, 2010), 6 & 38.

<sup>33</sup> *The WAVES: Records of the Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Women*, 20 reels with printed guide, 35mm microfilm (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1991). Hereafter cited as *WAVES Records*.

<sup>34</sup> Ryan is in the process of turning her dissertation into a documentary titled “Homefront Heroines: The WAVES of World War II.

WAVES developed during the war. However, they offer only a limited examination of women's experiences during their time in the corps and ignore material culture.

Kristie Bilger and Shoshana Resnikoff have written their master's theses on the subject of World War II WAC and WAVES' material culture but have focused exclusively on uniforms. In "The Women's Army Corps and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service: A Fashioning of American Womanhood and Citizenship," Bilger focuses on "how women's relationships to fashion transformed the evaluation of women's roles and status during World War II and what clothing and adornment meant concerning women in the armed forces." Although she discusses the WAC and WAVES' efforts to create a feminine uniform, her major focus is on popular understandings of American womanhood and the ways in which these changed to encompass military service. Resnikoff focuses exclusively on the WAVES uniform in her thesis, "Sailors in Skirts: Mainbocher and the Making of the Navy WAVES," concluding that the uniform "worked" for their designer, the WAVES, and women who wore them in several ways:

They re-patriated an American designer who had become foreign in the eyes of an increasingly patriotic American public. They acted as a recruitment tool for a women's service trying to attract the "right" kind of women. Finally, they made women feel like members of the military even while they highlighted all the ways in which that membership was qualified and temporary. For garments made of wool and cotton, they were remarkably active agents in their own existence.<sup>35</sup>

Hampf, too, offers an analysis of WAC uniform in *Release a Man for Combat*, drawing similar conclusions to Resnikoff regarding the function of uniform as symbols of women's limited military identities. Ryan also analyzes WAVES and SPARS' uniforms in her dissertation, arguing that the WAVES uniform in particular was meant to facilitate a feminine and

---

<sup>35</sup> Shoshana M. Resnikoff, *Sailors in Skirts: Mainbocher and the Making of the Navy WAVES* (Master's thesis, University of Delaware, 2012), 114.

sophisticated identity among servicewomen. These latter three works in particular have been instrumental in my own comparison of WAC and WAVES uniforms as well as providing contexts in which to think about the function of other WAC and WAVES material culture.

A handful of servicewomen published accounts of their experiences in the WAC or WAVES during World War II, with still more publishing their wartime letter collections or donating them to archives in the aftermath of World War II. These books and letter collections have been invaluable to this dissertation. It must be recognized that these books were often meant as propaganda pieces aimed at securing public approval for women's service and that letters are not always a reliable indicator of what the writer was actually thinking since they were often written for a specific audience. It is not likely that servicewomen would question, much less reveal contempt for, cultural mores and norms in missives to their mothers and fathers. However, they still offer an intimate look into women's wartime experiences unfiltered by the haze of memory. Moreover, they serve as signal examples of the ways in which servicewomen performed hegemonic norms of the period. Many more servicewomen published memoirs after the war, with the majority of them coming on the heels of Tom Brokaw's national bestseller, *The Greatest Generation*. While such works certainly have use for historians, I have avoided including them in my own analysis as memory becomes tainted by time and reshaped as social, cultural, and political values change over time.

Leisa D. Meyer's *Creating G.I. Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps during World War II* and Melissa McEuan's *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945* have been instrumental to the construction of this dissertation. *Creating G.I. Jane* is a detailed study of the WAC during World War II that examines the political, gender, and sexual assumptions that shaped the creation and

administration of the WAC and highlights the numerous public fears regarding the creation of a women's corps. Meyer argues that most of these fears were rooted in the inability of the public to reconcile the words "woman" and "soldier" because society at large perceived military service to be a man's duty. During the 1930s and 1940s, traditional gender norms were shaped by the historical subordination of women and a division of labor according to sex. This sexual division of labor assigned women the responsibility for the maintenance of the family and men with the primary responsibility for the family's economic support. Women were seen above all as wives and mothers whose primary concerns and interests lay with their families. Furthermore, because men were viewed as the "protectors" and women the "protected," the entrance of women into the armed forces had the potential to challenge these notions of proper gender roles.<sup>36</sup>

Meyer contends that public fears about this confusion of traditional gender roles manifested in several ways. WAAC opponents argued that women were much more attached than men to their individual identities and were thus incapable of getting along and cooperating with other women. Those who questioned the formation of a women's corps believed that women would be unable to shed their individuality in order to become an anonymous face and cooperative part of a military unit. They also asserted that women would be incapable of adjusting to the rigid discipline of military life. Others debated whether the overtly masculine environment of the military would rob women of their femininity and send "mannish" women home at the war's end. However, the public "slander campaign," as it came to be known first by the War Department and WAAC/WAC officials and later by the general public, was the most destructive aspect of public fear about women's entrance into the armed forces. Consequently,

---

<sup>36</sup> Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

the WAAC/WAC spent the majority of World War II battling the slander campaign and promoting their institution as a sanctuary for traditional womanhood in a world at war.<sup>37</sup>

Melissa McEuan focuses more generally on American women during World War II, arguing, in *Making War, Making Women*, that femininity was women's highest patriotic duty. McEuan is particularly interested in the relationship between advertising and women during World War II. Although war propaganda encouraged women to don coveralls and rivet planes, it also admonished them to maintain their femininity by using the right makeup and bath soaps as well as through the cultivation of shapely legs and cheerful attitudes. The female body was politicized during the war, and women were led to believe that their efforts in creating a perfectly made-up face were as crucial to American victory as their efforts in building a functional aircraft. McEuan also explores issues of race and demonstrates that African-American women were excluded from the nation's romanticized image of femininity. In short, McEuan argues, advertising attempted to lure women into war work and, at the same time, create a homogenized femininity that idealized the female citizen as white and middle-class.

The WAC and WAVES promoted this idealized femininity within their respective ranks. Much like national advertising, the women's corps sought to serve the cause of American victory by enticing women into the service and making use of their labors. Moreover, like national advertising, the corps wanted women to maintain their femininity and encouraged them to do so by wearing the right clothes, cosmetics, and hairstyles. They required women to put their femininity on display via a visual material culture that proclaimed them loudly as "women" even as they performed the work of "men." McEuan's assessment that femininity became a duty for

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

women during World War II is certainly true for those women who served in the WAC and WAVES.

However, when viewed in light of Meyer's analysis of the slander campaign that plagued the women's corps in general and the WAC in particular, it becomes clear that femininity was more than just a patriotic duty. It was a defense. Both the women's corps and servicewomen combated the slander campaign through the employment of material culture that fashioned a femininity that was respectable in the eyes of wartime America. The corps invested their material culture with traditional feminine values such as domesticity and motherhood while servicewomen demonstrated their commitment to said values through their willing adoption of that material culture.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The basic theoretical foundation for this dissertation is feminist in perspective and rests on the assertion that "gender" is a socially constructed category that individuals perform through a series of movements, gestures, and discourses. Of central concern are the issue of gender identity, how that identity is constructed by the larger culture, and how individuals fashion this identity for themselves, primarily through the use of material culture. I have been influenced by the works of a wide variety of scholars and theorists, whose backgrounds are in history and sociology, feminist theory and cultural studies. Although none of these individuals have written specifically on American servicewomen during the Second World War, their ideas provide useful models for understanding how the WAC and WAVES, as well as the women who served in them, defined, constructed, and performed femininity.

When considering the issue of gender identity and the ways in which both societies and individuals construct it, the theories of Stephen Greenblatt have been particularly useful. "My

subject is *self-fashioning* from More to Shakespeare,” Greenblatt states in the opening of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, “[and] my starting point is quite simply that in sixteenth-century England there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned.”<sup>38</sup> This is a deceptively simple description of a most complex and provocative book, in which Greenblatt proposes a new methodology for examining the relationship between culture and selfhood. Greenblatt calls this methodology a “poetics of culture” and argues that literature (or art in general) serves as a crucial component to the cultural creation of “identity.” He challenges scholars no longer to separate the biographical study of various authors from their respective literary works, but instead to investigate both the author and their work in tandem. This is to say, that individual texts should be investigated as extensions of their respective authors “selves” as opposed to autonomous works. Furthermore, Greenblatt contends, literary texts should also be analyzed as a means through which the author has attempted to fashion his selfhood.

Crucial to Greenblatt’s argument is his assumption that both human beings and literature are “cultural artifacts.” Greenblatt asserts that human nature is not independent of culture, by which he means “a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions ...—for the governing of behavior.” He then goes on to argue that “self-fashioning is in effect the Renaissance version of these control mechanisms, the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment.”<sup>39</sup> Literature operates within this system as a “manifestation of the concrete

---

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes.”<sup>40</sup>

Although Greenblatt is concerned with the political stylings of Renaissance writers, his theory of self-fashioning and cultural poetics prove useful to gender identity among servicewomen in the Second World War in at least three important ways. First is his assertion that individuals are aware of both the “self” and that the “self” can be fashioned. Greenblatt’s chosen historical actors seem to have been quite conscious of this idea and, as such, deliberately used their writings to create the identity for themselves they wanted to present to the world. Servicewomen in the WAC and WAVES never directly articulated their intent to produce a particular “self,” but evidence indicates that servicewomen had a sense of “self” that they understood as both “soldier/sailor” and “woman.” Moreover, they took great pains to fashion their “selves” in accordance with these two aspects of their identities. Their personal writings are full of references in which the women distinguish their “military” selves from their “civilian” selves and even their civilian friends and families. Yet, this new identity as “soldier/sailor” directly challenged servicewomen’s identities as “woman.” “Soldiering” had always been the province of men and, as discussed previously, women’s service caused uproar within American society. Servicewomen were well aware of the controversial nature of their military service and sensitive to the aspersions that proponents of the slander campaign cast upon them. A few women addressed the campaign directly in their writings and spoke specifically to the ways in which they attempted to undermine it by maintaining their femininity. Most never even alluded to the slander campaign, yet still felt compelled to make mention of the various ways in which they embraced their femininity. It appears that, again, women turned to their personal writings

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4.

as a tool for self-fashioning. Only in this case, they fashioned, or perhaps reaffirmed, their identity as women in the wake of acting like men.

But women employed more than just their personal writings to fashion both their military and feminine selves; they employed uniforms and lacy lingerie, barracks and home décor, insignia and makeup. This underscores the second point of Greenblatt's model that proves useful to this dissertation. As Greenblatt notes, literature – or art in general – should be viewed as an extension of its creator's identity and crucial to the fashioning of that identity. This insight is a useful analytical tool for examining servicewomen's material culture. Although servicewomen's material possessions are not exactly works of art, they can and should be understood as communicating values that were important to their owner's identity and thus tools their owner used for fashioning that identity.

Here, Greenblatt's ideas are complemented by those of Quinton Colville. Material culture was crucial not only to the fashioning of servicewomen's gender identity, but also to the communication of that gender identity. Material objects, such as dress and home décor, provide meaning for societies. These objects serve as vehicles through which social categories are created, such as gender, and through which cultural values are expressed, such as gender relations. Material items become invested with and therefore perpetuate socio-cultural norms. Colville has made just such an argument in "The Role of Material Culture in Constructing Class-Related Identities among Male Royal Naval Personnel, 1930-1960," a study of British naval material culture. Colville argues that the naval and civilian spheres were linked and informed one another. The British Navy constituted a rich socio-cultural environment where civilian notions of class and gender identity were being continually performed and ingrained by and for naval personnel. He asserts that material culture was crucial in realizing these socio-cultural

structures. Colville is particularly interested in how the Navy employed material culture to recreate social class within their ranks, with the officer corps reflecting the upper class and the enlisted grades a recreation of the working class. He also suggests that different masculinities accompanied the recreated social classes. Officers embraced their status as gentlemen who exhibited “authority, leadership, and self-control,” while enlisted men celebrated the “muscular toughness of working class masculinity.”<sup>41</sup> Colville concludes that the Admiralty deliberately used material culture to perpetuate and normalize within the Navy differences between the social classes maintained in civilian society. Moreover, the Admiralty used this material culture to stimulate a variety of attitudes and characteristics within their personnel, while at the same time suppressing others, which their personnel then internalized for their own reasons.

Colville’s work has been especially influential to this dissertation, for the WAC and WAVES administration employed material culture to accomplish very similar goals as the British Admiralty: the creation and perpetuation of a specific identity among their service personnel. WAC and WAVES leaders deliberately deployed a material culture that embodied both military and civilian culture. On the one hand, the women wore military uniforms and lived in Army and Navy environments. Their clothes and their living spaces spoke to their military identities. On the other hand, WAC and WAVES administrators attempted to make those uniforms fashionable according to civilian standards and encouraged women to domesticate their living spaces with such “homey” touches as drapes and flowers. These gestures signaled traditional femininity and were meant to alleviate public fears that military service would erode femininity and, with it, the gender hierarchy.

---

<sup>41</sup> Quinton Colville, *The Role of Material Culture in Constructing Class-Related Identities among Male Royal Naval Personnel, 1930-1969* (Ph.D. dissertation, Royal College of Art/Victoria & Albert Museum, 2004), 5 & 6.

This, then, leads to the third and final component of Greenblatt's model that serves as a useful lens for analyzing the relationship between gender identity, material culture, and society at large. Greenblatt argues that self-fashioning is limited by the larger social and cultural norms that the individual has absorbed—consciously or otherwise—into his or her ways of thinking. Greenblatt has successfully demonstrated that each of his chosen subjects fashioned themselves in submission to a higher authority, be it Church, State, or some combination thereof. My research indicates that female soldiers did the same. Most interestingly, these women seem to have constructed their identities as “soldier” in relationship to what their society said was the appropriate identity for “woman.” Rather than bucking the system and attempting to fashion themselves in opposition to the gender norms of their day, these women seemed to embrace those norms and to make efforts to demonstrate—visibly—the ways in which soldiering was compatible with conventional social understandings of “womanhood.”

Diana Fuss's musings on the nature of gender provide a helpful context for understanding why servicewomen, who were engaged in a masculine act, kept insisting that they were still feminine. In *Essentially Speaking*, Fuss argues against the idea that women exhibit gender-specific behaviors because of their biological makeup. This is to say, women do not behave differently from men because they have different reproductive organs. There is no relationship between women's bodies and women's consciousness. Gender is not essential; it is a social construction. She goes on to suggest, however, that in certain situations it can be useful for women to operate as if gender is essential. Women serving in the military during World War II were in just such a situation. Throughout World War II, one of the ways in which the women's corps attempted to perpetuate women's traditional positions and maintain the prewar gender hierarchy was to ensure that women still looked like “women” even as they executed men's

work. Their “look,” rather than their “work,” became invested with the norms of their society. Consequently, how servicewomen looked, as opposed to what they were doing, came to characterize their femininity. Servicewomen also seemed to understand the importance between their “look” and their femininity. I do not suggest that World War II servicewomen deliberately behaved like women because they thought it politic. On the contrary, their own words seem to indicate that servicewomen did see themselves as essentially different from men. However, women seemed at pains to adopt “feminine” rhetoric and behaviors that emphasized their personal conviction in the differences between men and women. By doing so, servicewomen staved off – to a degree – the social criticisms and potentially negative consequences that joining the military could bring. In short, acting like women provided them with an avenue for working like men.<sup>42</sup>

But it was not enough for women to just “act” like women. They also needed to “look” like them. Partha Chatterjee, a cultural studies theorist, explored just such a phenomenon in India during the British colonization of the late nineteenth century. In his essay, “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question,” Chatterjee asserts that as India outwardly embraced Western materialism and science, nationalists became fearful that traditional Indian culture would be lost. They sought to preserve the essence of the national culture by promoting a middle-class domestic ideology of womanhood that drew heavily upon Hindu spirituality and placed women inside the domestic sphere where they would be protected from Westernization. Women became bearers of traditional nationalism. So long as they could rely on women to maintain the inner, spiritual, component of Indian culture, then the country, and its men, could adapt outwardly, materially, to Western culture. Yet women still needed to move within the

---

<sup>42</sup> Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, & Difference* (London: Routledge, 1989).

outside world. Consequently, women had to master the visible qualities of femininity—such as the proper dress and language—before they could operate safely in the outside world. Chatterjee goes on to outline ways in which this proved problematic for Indian women. Of particular significance is his observation that cultural transitions became gendered in such a way that worked against the advancement of women’s position in society. In short, men modernized and women traditionalized; men moved forward to gain more individual freedoms, while women remained stuck in a past that eclipsed their own freedoms.<sup>43</sup>

Chatterjee’s contention that India faced a cultural crisis as a result of British colonialism and sought to protect traditional femininity by insisting that women master the outward markers of femininity before entering in a masculine space parallels the plight of both America and servicewoman during World War II. Although Americans were not experiencing colonization during World War II, they were experiencing enormous upheaval in their daily lives that threatened traditional values, particularly those associated with womanhood. This was especially true in regard to the creation of women’s service branches. On the one hand, women could provide invaluable services to military victory. But on the other hand, their presence in the military might corrupt their femininity. In the face of this crisis, WAC and WAVES officials encouraged their women to make conscious efforts to master the visible signs of femininity—such as proper dress and behavior—as a means of operating within a formerly all-masculine institution while at the same time maintaining traditional gender norms.

Yet Chatterjee’s contention that mastering the visible markers of femininity restricts women’s advancement does not necessarily apply to World War II-era servicewomen.

---

<sup>43</sup> Partha Chatterjee. “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question,” in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. KumKum Sagari and Sudesh Vaid, (New Brunswick New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999): 233-253.

“Looking” like women neither kept women strictly in the domestic sphere during the war nor ensured the stability of the gender hierarchy in the aftermath. In fact, “looking” like women allowed servicewomen to subvert the gender hierarchy by “acting” like men. Even as the WAC and WAVES administration used the visible markers of femininity as a mechanism for mitigating social change, servicewomen employed them to encourage that change.

Servicewomen embraced a visibly traditional femininity so they could challenge traditional femininity by joining the military and even learning a “masculine” skill that they could then use to secure a “masculine” job in the post-war world. Whether it was conscious or not, servicewomen deliberately played on the distinction between how they looked and what they were doing because looking feminine gave servicewomen the freedom to act in masculine ways—albeit to a limited extent.

This is not to say that servicewomen behaved like women only because they wanted to subvert the gender system. On the contrary, servicewomen embraced stereotypical feminine behaviors largely because they believed in them. It is important to keep in mind Greenblatt’s assertion that there are limits to self-fashioning. Servicewomen were part of a society that celebrated women’s looks as an indicator of femininity and it is not surprising that women defined their own femininity in part by how they looked. As Laura Mulvey has famously reminded us, looks matter to femininity. In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey asserts that onscreen “women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote “to-be-looked-at-ness,” which serves to create their femininity.<sup>44</sup> Mulvey’s assertion that “to-be-looked-at-ness” constitutes femininity offers insight into the importance both the women’s corps administrators

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 4.

and servicewomen gave their appearance. To be “woman” meant to be “looked at.” A woman who attended to her looks in an effort to be looked at was also a woman who attended her femininity. Moreover, “to-be-looked-at-ness” allowed women to locate their femininity in their *looks* rather than their *actions*. This would serve as an important way for women to “prove” their femininity and “cover” their more masculine wartime activities.

However, “being looked at,” especially by men who found them sexually attractive, did more than just constitute femininity, as Mulvey contends. It affirmed it in a way that nothing else could. A woman could dress in attractive clothing, arrange her hair stylishly, and carefully apply cosmetics in an effort to establish her femininity. However, her femininity was not complete until another person, especially a male person, *looked* at her attractive clothing, her stylishly arranged hair, and her carefully made-up face and concluded, “That is a feminine woman.” Although WAC and WAVES officials had to walk a fine line of representing women as both sexually alluring yet sexually chaste, images of World War II servicewomen often emphasized the women’s physical attractiveness. Such representations demonstrate that the male gaze was crucial to affirming women’s femininity. In the women’s corps case, the male gaze was meant to see that military service destroyed neither women’s physical beauty nor their desirability as sexual objects. Servicewomen, too, catered to the male gaze, taking note when men commented on hairstyles or clothing as particularly attractive.

WAC and WAVES officials understood that male approval in general—not just their femininity-affirming gaze—was crucial to the success of their respective corps. A serviceman even advised his WAVES friend that:

Your best bet in selling the service to the girls is to sell the men first, I believe. You probably know – or do you – that there’s a lot of anti-woman-in-uniform sentiment among service men [sic], which I think has deterred a lot of girls from joining up. I could

go into the reason for this attitude but you probably know them. That, I feel, is where your recruiters should attack the problem.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the war, WAC and WAVES officials sought to win over men by recreating traditional gender roles within the women's services, thus alleviating fears that women's military service would emasculate men. Comments made by various congresspersons during a House of Representatives debate about the WAC speak to both the fears and assurances of those on either side of the WAAC question. Congressman Carl Hoffman's (R, MI) question, "Take women into the armed service . . . who then will maintain the home fires; who will do the cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble, homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself . . . ?" articulated what he believed to be the proper jobs for women. Andrew Somers (D, NY) highlighted the potential emasculation of men with his query, "What has become of the manhood of America, that we have to call on our women to do what has ever been the duty of men?"<sup>46</sup> In response, WAAC advocates argued that female soldiers would not perform the masculine duty of fighting; they would perform the feminine duty of helping. "We do not want your jobs," Congresswoman Frances Payne Bolton (R, OH) argued. "We want to make your jobs easier, and we want to make them fit in better to the present day, which is a fighting world for you and an assisting one for us."<sup>47</sup> Within Bolton's argument was an appeal to the traditional notion of the female "helpmate" to the male. Bolton, and other WAAC proponents, argued that women did not wish to dominate men or to assume men's "natural" roles as protectors; women instead aspired to fulfill their own natural roles by helping men to win the war. Such appeals to traditional gender roles helped to secure the passage of the bill.

---

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Don Delaney to Lillian M. Pimlott, August 20, 1944, Lillian M. Pimlott Collection, Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA, hereafter UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane*, 13, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 21.

WAC and WAVES leaders used similar arguments to secure public approval as well. They sought to legitimize their respective corps in the public eye by building a reputation of preserving, and even epitomizing, “femininity.” Crucial to their definition of femininity was women’s position within the home. WAC and WAVES publicity assured the American public that servicewomen were not renouncing their responsibilities within the home; they were defending them. “The American family is the kernel of democracy,” a writer for the *Ladies Home Journal* observed, “and that’s why U.S. women are entering the armed forces, sacrifice to save the family and democracy.”<sup>48</sup> Alma Lutz, a former suffragist, contended that military service would “not wipe out women’s inherent love of home and the making of a home. If anything it will make them value home more.”<sup>49</sup> Following this logic, civilians could understand military service not as redefining women’s traditional sphere, but rather as accommodating and, more importantly, protecting their sphere. The women’s corps were characterized in such a way that reinforced the value of the home and women’s place within it and justified women’s military service as a way of protecting, not destroying, the family.

The WAC and WAVES communicated this message to the public via their material culture. In writing about the purpose of uniform, sociologists Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex have observed, “Because of its identification with a group the uniform assumes the properties of a totemic emblem and embodies the attributes of the group.”<sup>50</sup> Their conclusion can be extended beyond just the WAC and WAVES uniforms, however, to include the material culture of these corps as a whole. In espousing their commitment to women’s position in the home, the WAC

---

<sup>48</sup>“Our Girls in Uniform,” *Ladies Home Journal* 60 (January 1943), 63.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex, “The Uniform: A Sociological Perspective” in *The American Journal of Sociology*, 77 No. 4 (1972), 720.

and WAVES invested their material culture with these traditional gender values, and the public came to read this material culture for proof of femininity.

Material culture also allowed servicewomen to provide proof of femininity by assisting them in performing it. Servicewomen were well aware of the controversy surrounding the creation of the women's corps, and it took courage on their part to enlist in spite of that controversy. However, this did not prevent them from being sensitive to the general criticism that plagued the women's corps. Like the WAC and WAVES administration, they were especially sensitive to men's attitudes toward the women's service and sought to win their approval. Occasionally, women would ask the various men in their lives, be they fathers, brothers, lovers, or friends, how the women's corps could improve their overall image. More often than not, however, the women seemed to be asking for men's approval of them. Women would make comments on compliments men gave them for both their service and their personal appearance and even, from time to time, express their desire to return to more traditional gender norms such as wearing civilian clothing and cooking for their families. Servicewomen understood that their military enlistment threatened men's authority and felt compelled to apologize for their gender transgressions through overt performances of their feminine identities. The psychologist Joan Riviere has labeled this behavior as "masquerade." Riviere was interested in women who had succeeded in the masculine world of business and thus, in a sense, usurped male power. She argued, in "Womanliness as Masquerade," that these women attempted to atone for their usurpation of masculine authority by overemphasizing their femininity. A material culture that marked women as visibly feminine thus provided women with a defense against the slander campaign. Such visible performances of femininity allowed

them actively to fashion a feminine identity that refuted the vicious accusations of the slander campaign and atone for their potential usurpation of masculinity.

It must be noted, however, that servicewomen were a part of, rather than apart from, the same society that questioned the use, motives, and very gender identity of those who enlisted in the women's corps. As a part of this society, women had absorbed the larger cultural values that celebrated women as wives and mothers and placed them firmly within the domestic sphere. Indeed, when Ernest O. Houser, a journalist for the *Saturday Evening Post*, asked Wacs what they intended to do after the war, he reported that the majority of them replied, "Have a home and babies."<sup>51</sup> Servicewomen certainly used material culture to perform a feminine identity that met with the approval of the larger culture, but this material culture should also be interpreted as an extension of the creator's identity. Being "feminine" was important to servicewomen. They relished their identities as soldiers and sailors, adopting military slang and speaking with pride about their contributions in their letters home to families and friends. However, it was important that their identities as feminine – as women – not be lost as result of their actions. Consequently, servicewomen embraced a material culture that allowed them to perform their gender and fashion an identity that was firmly feminine as much for themselves as for the larger culture. They demanded the right to wear cosmetics and lounge around their barracks in the evenings in frilly nightgowns. They decorated their living spaces with lace doilies and made wedding plans even as they marched down Main Street America clad in the khaki and blue uniforms of the Army and Navy. In short, such a material culture reminded both the public and themselves that servicewomen were still respectable women.

### **Methodology**

---

<sup>51</sup> "Those Wonderful G.I. Janes," *Saturday Evening Post* 217 (September 9, 1944): 26-28, 60, 63.

Although World War II saw the creation of other women's military corps, as well as numerous civilian women's organizations, the WAC and WAVES were chosen for this study because the American public responded to these institutions in two very different ways. In a 1944 Gallup Poll women were asked the question, "If you were going to enlist which service would you choose?" Seventy percent of the respondents listed the WAVES, with higher standards, better treatment, better pay, better reputation, and better uniforms being their reasons. The WAC was the least favored of the women's corps.<sup>52</sup> This dissertation argues that the public responded favorably to the WAVES and negatively to the WAC because WAVES leaders constructed an image of their servicewomen that was more in line with traditional femininity, and therefore more acceptable to the American public, than the image produced by the WAC administration. Of equal importance is that the WAVES promoted their organization as the most elite of the women's corps. The WAVES were able to manipulate public opinion by using a material culture, which has the power to convey socio-cultural information, to construct a feminine identity that made their women's military service compatible with American cultural assumptions about women and their proper place within society.

Each of the five chapters in this dissertation is dedicated to one aspect of WAC and WAVES material culture. Each chapter includes an introduction to the topic and a brief history regarding the social and cultural meanings embedded in the items under examination. This is then followed by an analysis of the ways WAC and WAVES administration used material culture, with varying degrees of success, to create and present a feminine image of their respective corps to the American public. Sources consulted include, but are not limited to, propaganda posters and literature, civilian advisory committee reports and meeting minutes,

---

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 66.

newspaper and magazine articles, political cartoons, public relations campaigns and recruitment recommendations, surveys of public and male soldiers' opinions about the women's corps, photographs, uniforms, and the professional and private correspondence of various male and female military officials.

The second half of each chapter examines the ways in which servicewomen employed material culture to construct, communicate, and perform their gender identity. In order to explore this issue, this dissertation draws on diaries, published and private letter collections, and contemporary memoirs of women who served in the WAAC/WAC and WAVES during World War II.<sup>53</sup> These women cannot speak for all of the women who joined the WAAC/WAC or WAVES, but they serve as case studies and provide valuable insights into the thoughts and experiences women had while in the service. Many of these collections span the women's experiences from their entrance to their exit from the corps. Some of these more complete collections also include correspondence from friends and family, both civilian and military. Other collections are made up of only a few letters documenting the women's time in the service, and at least one collection includes only correspondence from an Army nurse stationed overseas

---

8. Published letter and contemporary autobiographical collections include Joan Angel, *Angel of the Navy: The Story of a Wave* (New York, Hastings House, 1943); Betty Bandel, *An Officer and a Lady: The World War II Letters of Lt. Col. Betty Bandel, Women's Army Corps*, ed. Sylvia J. Bugbee (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2004); Anne Bosanko Green, *One Woman's War: Letters Home from the Women's Army Corps, 1944-1946* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989); Aileen Kilgore Henderson, *Stateside Soldier: Life in the Women's Army Corps, 1944-1945* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); and Yellin, *Our Mother's War*. Archival collections at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Jackson Library, include the Jaenn Coz Bailey, Ruth Bonin, Marie Cody Marcelle Fischer, Rose Elaine Male, Josephine Martin Flynn, Arline E. Furstman, Carol Goddard, Margaret Winston Henry, Catherine Katopes, Janet Muriel Mead, Bernice Moran Miller, Mary Ellen Mullan, Nan M. Nabors, Constance Cline Phillips, Charlotte Lavone Schuck, Eleanor Elizabeth House Selzo, Blanche Sheaffer, Shirley M. Tillson, Katherine W. Toll, Mary Ellen West, and Florence Weil collections.

to a WAVES friend in the States. These sources chronicle the women's overall adjustment to Army life and reveal the tensions they experienced as they sought to reconcile their new military identities with their feminine selves.

The women selected for this study also fit the demographic profile of the typical Waac/Wac and Wave, who was young, single, white, and middle class. While the WAAC/WAC permitted African-American women to serve in segregated units, the WAVES refused enlistment to African Americans until 1944 when President Roosevelt finally gave his approval. Both organizations allowed women of other minorities to join, including Mexican-American and Japanese-American women among others. The majority of both Wacs and Waves had college training, with many officers in both corps holding one or more college degrees. Most women had been employed in civilian life.<sup>54</sup> The women selected for this study generally fall into these broad categories. Thus, their collections provide insight into the World War II military experience of the average Waac/Wac and Wave. Some of the women joined at the beginning of the war while others enrolled toward the end. All of the women who joined the WAAC stayed on when the corps made the transition to the WAC. One of the women was married, no one was divorced, and none had children. Their ages ranged from roughly 20 to 44 years and most had work experiences prior to entering the corps. It is difficult to determine the social backgrounds

---

<sup>54</sup> In 1942, 90 percent of the Waacs had college training and some had several degrees, and 99 percent had been employed in civilian life. Most women were between the ages of 25 to 39, although 16 percent were under the age of 25 and 10 percent were 40 and over. Approximately 20 percent of the Waacs were married, while the rest were single, widowed, or divorced.<sup>54</sup> The demographics did not change much when the WAAC became the WAC. In 1943, 70 percent of the Wacs were single, 15 percent were married, and 15 percent were widowed, divorced, or separated. Of the enlisted women, 42 percent had a high school diploma and 20 percent had some college or more. Approximately 95 percent of the Wacs had held civilian jobs prior to their enlistment.<sup>54</sup>

of all the women, but brief references to some of their parents' or siblings' occupations suggest that most came from middle-class backgrounds.

These women had various reasons for joining the corps, as well as different attitudes about their work, yet most had similar experiences while in the Army and Navy. They adjusted well to military life, learning to drill and parade, among numerous other skills, and almost all adopted the use of military slang in their letters or books. The more damaging rumors, however, had a lasting impact on these women and their military careers. Some expressed their self-consciousness about working with men while maintaining their femininity. A few women spoke openly about men who resented working with women, while still others talked about encounters with servicemen who believed the servicewomen were doing a fine job. Nevertheless, most women took care to explain to their family members that they had not abandoned their commitment to traditional morals. Others cautioned their friends who were contemplating joining the corps to maintain their femininity, with the majority of them recounting their personal efforts to do the same. The personal observations of these women in particular reveal that the slander campaign, as well as other public debates, played an important role in the women's construction of a military identity that was compatible with respectable femininity.

A final theme running throughout this dissertation is that the American public preferred the WAVES over the WAC because the former organization was able to communicate femininity more effectively than the latter. In fairness, it should be noted that the WAC was the first of the women's corps and therefore subjected to greater public scrutiny than any of the corps that followed. This also enabled the other women's corps to learn from WAC experiences. For instance, even as the public picked apart the WAC's poorly designed uniform, the WAVES enlisted a couturier to make theirs. This helped the WAVES not only to create an attractive

uniform, but also to link their organization with the world of feminine fashion. Material culture served as a crucial site for both constructing and judging the femininity of America's servicewomen.

Chapter One, "The Little Colonel and Miss Mac," takes an in-depth look at the first directors of the WAC and WAVES, Oveta Culp Hobby and Mildred McAfee. This chapter is largely about how these two women, along with other WAC and WAVES administrators, attempted to create both a military and feminine identity for their respective corps vis-à-vis training grounds, with very different results. Chapter Two, "Now It Looks More Homey," examines how servicewomen negotiated these competing identities within their personal living spaces. Chapter Three, "The Two Best Styles of the Year," analyzes the role of uniform in balancing the feminine with the martial. Because it was the most visible piece of material culture, the uniform was arguably the most important medium of communicating both the femininity and the function of servicewomen to the public. Chapter Four, "Keep Your Beauty on Duty," explores the role of cosmetics and hairstyles in fashioning and communicating femininity. World War II Americans considered makeup crucial to femininity and the WAC and WAVES understood the importance of cosmetics as a weapon against the damaging rumors of the slander campaign. Women also employed cosmetics as a tool for preserving, protecting, and performing this aspect of their feminine identities, sometimes deliberately disobeying military regulations in the process. The final chapter, "We Want to be Feminine Once More," deals with servicewomen's transition back to civilian life. It is here that the tension between the wartime feminine ideal and women's wartime experiences becomes most visible, along with the potential consequences of changing gender norms in the postwar world. Even as fashion experts encouraged servicewomen to abandon military-inspired fashions in favor of frothy lace and vivid

colors that boldly proclaimed the wearer as “woman,” others chastised employers for refusing to hire ex-servicewomen for jobs once considered suitable only for men.

In a world where women were acting increasingly like men, women’s appearance, more so than their actions, came to define their femininity. In *Making War, Making Women*, Melissa McEuan states, “Home fronts usually become sites of rapid social and economic transformation; in efforts to slow down or halt such change, people find solace in managing gender and sex along traditional lines.” This was certainly the case for Americans on the home front during World War II. The exigencies of war put women, both on the home front and abroad, in positions that challenged traditions and overturned stereotypes. This was nowhere more evident than in placing women in the military. It was difficult for Americans to manage servicewomen’s unconventional activities along traditional lines considering women engaged in unorthodox doings as a part of the war effort. Consequently, they attempted to rein in any long lasting social changes by insisting that servicewomen still, at the very least, look like women. Yet even as women continued to dress the part, they acted in such a way to challenge conventional gender norms. Those actions created an opportunity to reevaluate women’s position in the postwar world. The words most of the women who served during World War II left behind suggest that they never intended to foster a gender revolution when they joined the military. That America experienced social changes in the aftermath of World War II goes without saying, but the letters, diaries, and memoirs of servicewomen indicate that their identity as women, and the prewar values and characteristics connected with that identity, were quite important to them. Throughout the war, they took measures to protect and promote femininity not only for the larger society, but also for themselves. What follows is but a small part of that story.

## **Chapter 1 - The Little Colonel's Soldiers and Miss Mac's College Girls: Public Image and the WAC and WAVES Training Grounds**

In its March 15, 1943, issue, *LIFE* magazine published a photo essay titled “Waacs & Waves.” Published less than a year after the official formation of the two corps, the essay was ostensibly designed to introduce the American public to the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service. “By last week,” the essay began, “the Waves and Waacs were no longer military experiments. They were military realities, having appeared for duty with startling effects at Army and Navy posts all over the country. . .,” adding that “[u]ndoubtedly [the women] were doing good work, but old-time officers and enlisted men could not get used to them.”<sup>55</sup>

The woman soldier and sailor were strange creatures indeed to the “old-time officers and enlisted men,” but they were equally strange to the rest of the country. Consequently, both the WAC and WAVES administration, with the help of the media, were obliged to educate the public on the purpose of their corps, how women could expect to live and work in a military environment, and how the military would accommodate femininity. “Waacs & Waves” was one of many such attempts to achieve these goals. The photo-essay captured servicewomen in various undertakings and included brief captions explaining their activities. It also included a full-length article offering details into the daily lives of servicewomen as well as the work they performed while in the military.

Presumably intended to soften the images of women in uniform, *LIFE* had hired Martin Munkàcsi (whom *LIFE* editors called “the world’s greatest photographer of women”) to capture

---

<sup>55</sup> “WAACS and WAVES,” *LIFE*, 15 March 1943, 72.

images of Waacs and Waves going about the business of training for their military duties. But the essay most certainly did not grant equal time to the two corps. *LIFE* assigned the WAAC only two pages of the eight-page photo-essay and included only five photographs of the women and five very short captions describing WAAC activities. The remainder of the of the eight page photo-essay, along with fifteen photographs, thirteen written captions, and a full length article describing enlistment requirements, enlisted and officer training, job assignments and even recreational activities was given to the WAVES. Moreover, it was the fresh young faces of Waves that graced the cover page of this *LIFE* issue. Nary a Waac is in sight. If *LIFE* was trying to help the American public to “get used to” the Waacs and WAVES and convey that they were just women and not some sort of strange creatures, the editors evidently found the WAVES an easier sell.

As it happens, this differential attention accorded these two women’s corps in early 1943 was predictive of the kind of attention that each would receive for the duration of the war. From their inception, each corps had a very different public image and it was invariably the WAVES that most impressed the public with both their femininity and professionalism. As this chapter will show, the differentials in public perception were rooted in, not only the somewhat different origins of the two corps, but in decisions regarding public relations made by their respective directors. And, in both cases, the material culture of living arrangements for service women profoundly reflected those differing choices and amplified the public perception of the two corps.

### **Hobby vs. McAfee**

In 1942, *The Christian Science Monitor* introduced Oveta Culp Hobby, the first Director of the WAAC, to the American public. After describing her as “a trim pretty woman, with a soft

Southern drawl” and concluding that “Mrs. Hobby will never be the kind of militarized woman cartoonists like to make fun of,” the article outlined Hobby’s academic and professional credentials that made her an excellent choice for leading the first woman’s army corps.

Hobby seemed to be an ideal candidate to lead the Army’s first female soldiers. Aside from being “a trim pretty woman” whom cartoonists would find difficult to mock, Hobby’s personal and professional background testified to her leadership qualities. She was born in Killeen, Texas and learned about public service at her parents’ knees. Her mother, Emma Elizabeth Hoover, was an active member of various social welfare committees, and her father, Isaac “Ike” William Culp, was a lawyer and elected official in the Texas House of Representatives. Hobby herself became interested in politics and, after attending Mary Hardin Baylor College and the University of Texas (albeit without graduating from either), became a parliamentarian in the Texas House of Representatives between the years of 1925 and 1931. She ran unsuccessfully for the state legislature as the representative of Houston in 1930 but kept busy working on local and regional political campaigns and was eventually appointed assistant to the city attorney of Houston. She also worked as a legal clerk for the Texas State Banking Commission and authored a handbook on parliamentary law for Texas public schools in 1937.

In 1931, Oveta Culp married William Pettus Hobby, president of the *Houston Post-Dispatch* and a former governor of Texas. She became heavily involved in the newspaper business after her marriage, serving as a research editor, assistant editor, and eventually as the executive vice-president of the *Houston Post-Dispatch*. She and her husband bought the newspaper in 1939 and expanded their media holdings to include radio and television broadcasts. Hobby never gave up on politics, however, serving as the president of the Texas League of Women Voters. In fact, she was in Washington, D.C. in early 1941, working on a problem with

the Federal Communications Commission when Maj. Gen. Alexander D. Surles, head of the Army's Bureau of Public Relations, contacted her. The Army had received thousands of letters from the concerned wives, mothers, and girlfriends outlining the complaints of soldiers about the general conditions in the Army and demanding something be done to address these complaints. Worried that they might have a large number of soldiers desert, Surles asked Hobby to visit the War Department and help them deal with the letters and sort out this potential public relations crisis. Hobby was reluctant at first but eventually accepted an offer to head the Women's Interest Section of the War Department Bureau of Public Relations.<sup>56</sup>

Surles, and the War Department, were convinced Hobby's experience in the newspaper business would make her the perfect person to address the public's concerns. It did. Throughout the summer and fall of 1941, Hobby and her associates put together leaflets addressing many of the questions posed in letters and anticipating other concerns women might have about their beloved soldiers. She also understood that people enjoyed reading stories about members of their communities and used this approach to address the questions women asked the War Department. Being a member of the press, she also knew how to handle them. She deftly fielded difficult questions posed by reporters at press conferences. For example, after she was asked about the state of food in the Army, Hobby gave the satisfying but still non-committal response of, "It's getting better all the time."<sup>57</sup>

General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, was particularly impressed with the way in which Hobby approached their public relations problems and developed solutions.

---

<sup>56</sup> Melanie Gustafson, "Oveta Culp Hobby," in *Notable American: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century Women*, ed. Susan Ware, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 303-305.

<sup>57</sup> Robert T. Pando, *Oveta Culp Hobby: A Study of Power and Control* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, 2008), 79.

Marshall was in the throes of guiding WAAC legislation through Congress when he asked Hobby to help secure its passage. Here, her years as a parliamentarian served her well. She threw herself into the project and gained such an intimate knowledge of the bill that Marshall named her a representative of the War Department in negotiations with both the Bureau of Budget and the Congressional hearings on the WAAC. She also studied the British and Canadian women's corps and created a list of Army jobs women could perform as she developed a plan for a woman's army corps in the United States. When the legislation finally passed and the WAAC needed a director, Marshall wholeheartedly supported Oveta Culp Hobby's candidacy.<sup>58</sup>

Edith Nourse Rogers, the congresswoman responsible for introducing the WAAC legislation, also supported Hobby as a potential director for the new military corps. In fact, Hobby's name was the only one she submitted for consideration. Like Marshall, Rogers was impressed by Hobby's professional background, her deft handling of public relations, and the energy she committed to pushing the WAAC legislation through Congress. But Rogers was also impressed with something else: Hobby's beauty. Rogers had apparently watched a film in which a woman in uniform appeared. The uniform fit the actress quite poorly, according to Rogers, which made the actress "bulge in all the wrong places." After listening to the audience mock the idea of women in uniform, Rogers worried that her own women's corps might prompt a similar reaction. Rogers understood that how women looked would factor into society's judgment of women's performance in the military. She also believed that how the Director looked would

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid..

matter in particular, since she was to be the public face of the WAAC. Hobby fit Roger's criteria of the WAAC director having both "beauty and brains."<sup>59</sup>

Marshall and Rogers eventually got their way, and Hobby was appointed as the first director of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1942, where she became affectionately known as "The Little Colonel." Hobby's personal and professional background as well as her pretty and petite features made her an emblem of respectable femininity and a seemingly ideal individual to serve as a public face of the WAC, and one which the American public could admire.<sup>60</sup>

\*\*\*

In an October 1942 article, *Vogue* formally presented Mildred McAfee to the American public. The unnamed author informs the reader that despite McAfee's ten academic degrees and her position as president of the prestigious Wellesley College, she is "no feminist, no hard-shelled crier for women's rights...." Anxious to convince Americans that women's military service was unrelated to women's rights and that any woman laboring under this impression who joined would soon be disappointed, the author assured readers, "Miss McAfee, who is Missouri-born and Yankee-voiced, is wise to women, expert at handling them in bulk."<sup>61</sup>

McAfee was born to Reverend Cleland Boyd McAfee and Harriet Brown McAfee in Parkville, Missouri. Her mother was a housewife, and her father taught philosophy at Park College in addition to serving as the moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. McAfee attended Francis W. Parker School in Chicago before enrolling in Vassar College from which she graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1920. She taught English, French,

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 84

<sup>60</sup> Regina T. Akers, "Oveta Culp Hobby," in *Notable American: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century Women*, ed. Susan Ware, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 311-313.

<sup>61</sup> *Vogue*, "The Waves," October 1942, 68-69.

economics, and sociology at various colleges across the country before becoming dean of women and professor of sociology at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky in 1927. While there, McAfee also earned her MA from the University of Chicago in 1928. She continued taking graduate courses at Columbia University and, in 1934, was appointed dean of women at Oberlin College. In 1936, McAfee took the position of president of Wellesley College. McAfee was only 36 years old and came to be known as “Miss Mac” by her students, a name that would follow her into the WAVES.

Whereas the WAAC hoped their women would embody “beauty,” the WAVES seemed more intent on recruiting women with “brains.” Long before McAfee was even considered as a potential Director of the WAVES, the Navy had already established a relationship with women’s college professionals. Elizabeth Reynard and Virginia Gildersleeve, both of Barnard College, were crucial to this process. Months before Congress had passed legislation for the creation of the various women’s corps, Reynard, an English professor, took a leave of absence so she could serve as Special Assistant to the Chief of Naval Personnel. Shortly thereafter, Dean Gildersleeve, who had given an address speaking specifically to the ways in which women could be useful in the military, joined her. Together, these two women established the Advisory Education Council, which was to serve as an unofficial advisory board to the Navy and act as a kind of liaison between the public and the Navy. The council included other women connected to colleges and universities, such as Meta Glass of Sweetbriar University and the American Association of University Women and Ada Comstock of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study and Harvard University. Emma Barton Brewster Gates, the wife of University of

Pennsylvania president Thomas Gates, and Ethyl Gladys Graham, wife of UCLA political science professor Malbourne Graham, were also invited to join.<sup>62</sup>

The Advisory Education Council's selection of McAfee as Director was, as Kathleen Ryan has noted in her study on WAVES and SPARS, "a case of the 'old-girls' network' at work. A small, elite group of highly-educated women, many of whom had connections to the 'Seven Sisters' colleges, were helping to influence the future course for Navy recruits."<sup>63</sup> Gildersleeve first approached the board of Wellesley College, where McAfee was President, in 1942 in the hope of persuading the trustees to loan McAfee to the Navy for the duration of the war. Although the board was initially unenthusiastic about the prospect, they agreed to give McAfee a one-year leave of absence. This eventually turned into three years.

McAfee, however, had a slightly different understanding of her appointment. In her oral history, McAfee recalled:

The theory was that in appointing anybody to be the head of this, they wanted to assure the parents and boy friends [sic] of girls that they would be looked after in the Navy. That this was not going to be a wild show, but it would be respectable, and the president of a woman's college – the reason they chose that category to begin with, was the thought that somebody who had been accustomed to dealing with girls and was in a position which had respect attached to it would enhance getting the right kind of person into the service.<sup>64</sup>

She understood that the Navy wanted to convey a message of "respectability" and interpreted her appointment as the first director of the WAVES in such terms. McAfee, as it turns out, was

---

<sup>62</sup> Meta Glass (Sweetbriar College/American Association of University Women), Ada Comstock (Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University), Emma Barton Brewster Gates (wife of University of Pennsylvania president Thomas Gates), Dean Harriet Wiseman Elliott (University of North Carolina, later replaced by Alice Baldwin of Duke University), Alice Lloyd (University of Michigan), and Ethel Gladys Graham (wife of UCLA political science professor Malbone Graham).

<sup>63</sup> Kathleen Ryan, "Homefront Heroines," 133.

<sup>64</sup> "Recollections of Captain Mildred McAfee, USNR (Ret.) (Mrs. Douglas Horton)" in *The Reminiscences of The WAVES Volume I*, (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute), 6.

right, for in appointing her as director of this new female naval reserve—a 36 year old woman who held ten academic degrees, was president of a prestigious women’s college, and was “expert at handling [women] in bulk”—the WAVES only served to strengthen their relationship with women’s colleges, thus ensuring a respectable public image for their women’s corps.

\*\*\*

Both Hobby and McAfee were well qualified to lead their respective corps, and both women were determined to cultivate a respectable image for the WAAC and WAVES. They believed that the public needed to understand the serious nature of women’s military service if society were ever fully to accept the women’s military corps. At her first press conference, Hobby even asked photographers to refrain from taking pictures of her smiling, believing that a serious expression would convey the serious, and therefore respectable, work of the WAC. McAfee, too, recalled that “respectability” was the byword for her corps’ image, stating that she believed her appointment as director of the WAVES stemmed from the fact that she held “a position of respect” in civilian life.<sup>65</sup> The initial military status of the corps they were appointed to direct, however, led Hobby and McAfee down different paths toward respectability.

The women’s army reserve was initially established as an auxiliary corps whereas the women’s naval reserve was created with full military status. This meant that, in effect, the WAAC served *with* the Army while the WAVES served *in* the Navy. This was an important distinction, for it meant that unlike Waves, members of the WAAC did not receive the same rank, pay, or benefits as their male counterparts. Hobby and other WAAC proponents had wanted their corps to be fully integrated into the Army but met such fierce resistance to the idea in Congress that they acquiesced, believing they could revisit the issue later, and allowed the

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid..

WAAC to be established as an auxiliary to the Army. The WAVES appear to have avoided this issue altogether by realizing that it was just a matter of time before the WAAC lost their auxiliary status. Consequently, their legislation, which was introduced to and passed by Congress after the WAAC bill, gave the WAVES full military status.

The distinction between the WAAC's auxiliary status and the WAVES regular status serves to explain the two Directors' different approaches to their corps' respective public images. Hobby, anxious to drop the auxiliary status and move her corps directly into the Army, portrayed her women as soldiers in part to support her position. Hobby eventually got what she wanted and the WAAC was incorporated fully into the Army as the WAC. However, her plan had unforeseen consequences. In promoting her women as soldiers—a masculine identity—she unintentionally undermined their femininity and identities as women. This left Hobby scrambling to find alternative means of portraying her soldiers as “still feminine” to a disapproving American public. McAfee, whose corps was securely in the Navy from its inception, was free to fashion her Waves' public image in a manner more befitting American femininity and on a model with which she, as well as the Advisory Education Council, was very familiar: college girls. While it should be noted that the WAVES were established after the WAC and, as such, learned from the many mistakes the WAC made during its infancy, it should also be recognized that the WAVES deliberately established themselves as the most sophisticated and educated of the women's corps. They promoted their institution as one where women would do work important to the war effort without compromising their femininity. It was a tricky and sometimes contradictory message. Mildred McAfee often warned the public that “glamor girls” would not be welcome in her corps, but the WAVES material culture often

indicated that they would.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the material culture of both the WAC and WAVES, and their training grounds in particular, reflected the public relations goals of their respective directors. It also prompted very different reactions from an American public anxious about the socio-cultural consequences of women's military service.

### **A Homemaker in the Army**

In her opening remarks at the 1944 conference of the WAC's National Civilian Advisory Committee, Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby informed her audience "that the whole trend in all phases of the WAC program has been integration into the Army. Only in matters related to the well-being of women as women, have distinctive procedures been adopted."<sup>67</sup> This had been, and would remain, Hobby's motto throughout the war. Hobby promoted this motto at the beginning of the WAAC's creation as she fought to have the auxiliary status dropped. But she also wanted American society to see her women as soldiers. She believed that the public would better accept female soldiers if they understood that servicewomen would perform vital military duties that would help secure American victory. With few exceptions, Hobby wanted Army women to share the same experiences as Army men, and she proudly informed the public that her skirted soldiers did not shy away from living in muddy tents and bathing out of helmets.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, however, Hobby wanted neither American society nor the Army to forget that her soldiers were women. If they were to remain so, the Army needed to make certain

---

<sup>66</sup> See "Miss Mac," TIME, March 12, 1945, 20-24 and "Recollections of Captain Mildred McAfee, USNR (Ret.) (Mrs. Douglas Horton)" in *The Reminiscences of The WAVES Volume I*, (Annapolis, MY: U.S. Naval Institute).

<sup>67</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Conference, Conference Minutes, 9/27-8/44, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, Record Group 319; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Hereafter RG 319; NACP.

<sup>68</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Conference, Conference Minutes, 9/27-8/44, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

accommodations that nurtured rather than inhibited her soldiers' femininity. Consequently, the WAC worked to fashion an image for their servicewomen that reflected both their military and feminine identities. The Army posts where women trained were crucial sites for both the WAC's creation and society's judgment of these two sides of the WAC's image.

"In the beginning we considered using a girls' school or a college," Hobby informed the WAC Civilian Advisory Committee regarding the choice to train women on Army posts, "but the decision was made to use an Army installation. This accustoms our personnel, in training, to an Army installation of the type of which they will probably be assigned."<sup>69</sup> The WAC's first training post was Fort Des Moines in Iowa. It was at this location that women were introduced to Army life and learned to think of themselves as soldiers.<sup>70</sup>

As Hobby indicated, Fort Des Moines did habituate women to life in the Army. The very walls and floors, classrooms and mess halls, barracks and parade grounds shaped the women's experiences in the Army, and their identities as soldiers, too. Fort Des Moines was not the Army's first choice as the home of the WAC. Initially, WAC and Army administrators wanted a location closer to Washington, D.C., where the WAC headquarters were located. They were in the process of negotiating for a site in Maryland and had even determined to call the WAC post the "Molly Pitcher School," but Congress debated too long and the Navy acquired the land for their own purposes. This led WAC and Army administrators to consider the old cavalry post of Fort Des Moines in Iowa. The post met much of the WAC administration's criteria for a women's training post. It was a military installation complete with barracks, mess halls, post exchanges, quartermasters' buildings, parade and drill fields, and even a fire department.

---

<sup>69</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Conference, Conference Minutes, 9/27-8/44, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>70</sup> The WAAC eventually had 2 official training posts, to include Fort Oglethorpe in addition to Fort Des Moines.

Officer's Row provided the married male officers appointed to train the first WAC recruits with housing while unmarried officers lodged in the Bachelors' Officer Quarters. Enlisted men, meanwhile, made do with tents situated in the forest to the northeast of the post. Fort Des Moines was also located in a fairly racially-neutral part of the country. This was an important requirement considering the WAC intended to fill ten percent of their ranks with African-American troops. Training them in the racially hostile environment of the South, then, was out of the question.<sup>71</sup>

Fort Des Moines was not perfect and required more than a few adjustments to billet women soldiers satisfactorily. For example, barracks bathrooms had to be stripped of urinals and replaced with toilets. The Army added new living quarters and a mess hall for officers as well as new nurses' quarters near the hospital. They even built a new chapel, theater, library and two service clubs for women. More importantly, however, the Army needed to construct new barracks to house the potentially 5,000 recruits who would train at Fort Des Moines at any given time throughout the war. Fortunately, the post had nine large cavalry stables that the Army quickly converted to barracks for enlisted personnel.

The first contingency of Wacs arrived at Fort Des Moines on July 20, 1942. The post was far from ready for these new recruits. Many roads were still unpaved, and the enlisted barracks, newly transformed from horse stables, permitted hot humid air to infiltrate the rooms in the summer while, later, icy cold drafts chilled the occupants to their bones in the winter. The Wacs also complained of a lingering equine odor and came to call themselves "Hobby's Horses." Construction of some 172 new buildings continued throughout the first year of the WAC's

---

<sup>71</sup> Penelope Blake, *My Mother's Fort: A Photographic Tribute to Fort Des Moines, The First Home of the Women's Army Corps* (Book Surge, LLC, 2005), 29-32.

existence after Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson approved an increase in enrollment from 25,000 to 150,000 women in November of 1942. America's women responded to the WAC's call, with roughly 80,000 would-be Wacs applying for admission to the corps during the first year.<sup>72</sup> As the Army struggled to make Fort Des Moines fit for female habitation, the denizens of the post dubbed the area of new construction "Boomtown" in reference to the "boom" of construction and as a tribute to the Army's efforts.

In spite of the problems and continued alterations on the post, Fort Des Moines was, indeed, an Army installation and contributed to the development of the newly inducted Wacs' military identities. During training, Wacs shared their living space with other servicewomen, sometimes a hundred or more of them. They rose in the morning between 5:30 and 6:00 to the sound of reveille, made their beds with hospital corners, and arranged their footlockers according to Army regulation. They learned how to wear their uniforms correctly and keep them as well as their barracks clean. They stood inspection regularly. They learned to salute and to close order drill. They learned the Army's history and organization as well as how to identify the aircraft of both friend and enemy. They marched to their classes, to their mess halls, and to their barracks. They stood Retreat as the day drew to a close and listened as Taps, late in the evening, wafted across the Parade Ground. By the end of their six weeks of boot camp, the women had learned to think, speak, act, and live like soldiers in the Army of the United States.

The training posts were crucial to the development of a military identity among both Wacs and the public they served. They were visual clues that communicated how women would live and work while in the service. Official WAC photographs often feature the Army posts

---

<sup>72</sup> Judith Bellafaire, *The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of WWII Service* (CMH Publication, 72-15) <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/wac/wac.htm> Retrieved 13 October 2014.

prominently in the background while women engage in military activities. For instance, one photograph shows a platoon of Wacs marching uniformly past row upon row of barracks. Hobby noted at the 1944 National Civilian Advisory Committee:

At training centers and at Army posts in this country, Wacs live in standard barracks approximately the same in design as those used for men, except for those adjustments made necessary by the fact that they are women. In many cases, already existing facilities have been used with only minor alterations.... The barracks is Spartan in its simplicity and rigid in its neatness.<sup>73</sup>

Official WAC photographs support Hobby's description of WAC barracks, with pictures showing wood-paneled walls devoid of decoration and row upon row of camp beds spaced evenly throughout a single, and cavernous, room. She also stated proudly that, "There is ... satisfaction that the women feel in showing, by the way their barracks looks, that they are willing to live as the men of their Army live...."<sup>74</sup> [Figure 1]

Hobby and other WAC administrators deliberately employed the material culture of the Army post to craft and communicate the Wacs' military identity to the American public. Hobby believed that the public would be more willing to accept women in the Army if they understood that her Wacs were living, training, and working just like their male counterparts. But Hobby also understood that her advocacy required a delicate balancing act since it was also important, to relay the message that this military identity would not override the feminine identity of her soldiers. Indeed, shortly after describing the simplicity of WAC living quarters, Hobby was quick to point out, "Not all is Spartan around the Wac barracks area.... The dayroom is in an

---

<sup>73</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Conference, Conference Minutes, 9/27-8/44, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid..

adjoining building and this is equipped with books, records, easy chairs, radio—and usually bright curtains and other colorful reminders of home.”<sup>75</sup>

This seemingly incongruous blend of statements – that Wacs lived in spartan military quarters but enjoyed homelike dayrooms – was Hobby’s way of negotiating the contradiction between “woman” and “soldier.” WAC leaders understood that one of the public’s greatest anxieties regarding female soldiers was that military service would upset traditional gender norms and cause women to abandon their “proper” place in the domestic sphere. It would be easy for the court of American public opinion to try and convict the WAC, with its requirements that women live, train, and work like soldiers, of fomenting just such a gender revolution. Consequently, Hobby and other WAC administrators took care to describe the various ways in which servicewomen had made a “home” for themselves within the barracks and, equally important, how the Army was only too pleased to accommodate the domestic impulses of their feminine soldiers.

Female soldiers could not have a real home during their time in the service, complete with their own husbands and Hoovers, but the WAC permitted women to recreate elements of a domesticated environment within the Army through the incorporation of home decor and knickknacks in their living quarters. In describing the Wacs’ quarters, Hobby drew a connection between the Wacs’ dayroom and the home. She stated that, “In their leisure hours after work, the dayroom is the place they may lounge in bright slacks and playshoes [sic] or meet their dates for the evening. It is their Army livingroom [sic].”<sup>76</sup> She also noted, in response to a question about how the WAC dealt with male and female G.I. housing, that, “Housing is and always has been in

---

<sup>75</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Conference, Conference Minutes, 9/27-8/44, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid..

a separate area –generally with a separate mess in which women have put up curtains, have flower boxes, and other things dear to a woman’s heart.”<sup>77</sup> She made it clear that although the women were soldiers, the Army would accommodate, rather than smother, the more domestic expressions of their femininity. Hobby also informed the Civilian Advisory Committee that Wacs overseas, who often lived in muddy tents and bathed out of helmets, were allowed to spruce their living spaces with knickknacks:

Because there is usually a very small group living in each room or each hut or each tent overseas, there is not the insistence on Spartan uniformity which there is in the larger barracks in this country. They may fill their rooms with flowers and bits of pottery and old silver, provided only that their roommates [sic] are willing and that their clothes and equipment and quarters are clean and orderly.<sup>78</sup>

Official WAC photographs even offered proof that servicewomen had not left their love of domesticity stateside, capturing images of vases full of flowers and perfume bottles decorating the inside of WAC tents and huts. Françoise B. Bonnell and Ronald K. Bullis note in *Capturing the Women’s Army Corps*, a photographic history of the WAC, that while Captain Charlotte T. McGraw, the official WAC photographer, was in the Pacific, her “assignment required [her] to ... photograph the ‘homelike’ qualities of the women’s accommodations in foreign countries.”<sup>79</sup> But, Hobby perhaps best articulated the duality of Wacs’ military and feminine identities to the American public when she stated:

I have been on a good many posts in the past few months. I wish I could picture for you the intangible things that happen daily to show at no place now do the other soldiers regard the Wacs as women “playing soldier”. In the past two and a half years, by carrying their share, by making a home on the post, by making those homes more attractive than anyone ever believed a barracks could be, by making their mess halls and recreation halls attractive and opening them to their friends, they have won the respect

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid..

<sup>78</sup> Ibid..

<sup>79</sup> Françoise Barnes Bonnell and Ronald Kevin Bullis, *Capturing the Women’s Army Corps: The World War II Photographs of Captain Charlotte T. McGraw* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 15.

and comradeship of the soldiers who know them, that the real American man always gives the real American woman.<sup>80</sup>

Hobby informed the public that even as women lived in the Army's barracks and ate in its mess halls, they made for themselves a "home" of which any proper housewife—and her family—could be proud. More importantly, perhaps, Hobby emphasized that these "curtains" and "flower boxes" were manifestations born out of "a woman's heart." American society expected the ideal woman to be a real homemaker—that is to say, a maker of homes. This meant that a woman should not only cook and clean for her husband and children, but also create a pleasant living environment with modern furnishings and matching accessories. Moreover, the home was the woman's domain and thus should reflect her innate feminine compulsions for being surrounded by beautiful things. In highlighting the many ways in which servicewomen brought the home's domestic beauty into their barracks, Hobby communicated the message that military service and Army living would never erode women's inherent femininity. On the contrary, wherever Wacs went, they left their personal stamp of femininity on the Army.

The problem was, however, that the public believed the Army would leave its permanent stamp on femininity. Photographs of Wacs placing flowers in their tents could not override the fact that those tents belonged to the Army and were pitched in a war zone. Hearing about Wacs hanging colorful curtains to cheer up their dayrooms could not compete with visualizations of Wacs slogging through basic training. And it was these latter imaginings that counted most with the American public. In 1943, the advertising agency Young & Rubicon conducted surveys to better understand why eligible women would not join the WAC. The public opinion statistician George Gallup discovered that while the reasons were legion, one of the most important was that

---

<sup>80</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Conference, Conference Minutes, 9/27-8/44, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

women were fearful of the Army and felt incapable of adjusting to what they perceived as a harsh and highly disciplined life.<sup>81</sup> Part of the blame lay with Hobby, who insisted that recruitment information portray life in the WAC as realistically as possible. Even after Young & Rubicon pointed out that glamorous propaganda helped WAVES, SPARS, and Women Marines meet recruitment quotas, Hobby remained unconvinced. It was only much later in the war that Hobby finally relented and agreed. Unfortunately, this change of heart came too late and the early propaganda led the public to believe that Wacs spent their days in drudgery, cleaning toilets, and peeling potatoes. The Wave Joan Angel even recounted just such a comparison in her autobiography, *Angel of the Navy*. While musing on the joys of policing quarters, Angel recounted, “It’s a bit difficult to get used to at first, but every time I started to feel sorry for myself, Miggs would read me excerpts from a letter one of her WAAC friends sent her –enticing little bits like:

‘Was assigned to the WAACS museum today. That means lathering down the latrine, in case you delicate little WAVES have never heard the term.’

or

‘Say, don’t you finishing school sailor-girls ever get KP? Wondered about that as I scraped the khaki uniforms off some spuds today.’

Then I’d sigh with relief that I had joined the Navy—and redouble my efforts on the washbasin bright work.”<sup>82</sup> It appears that in spite of Hobby’s insistence that the Army accommodated femininity, it was her depiction of Wacs as soldiers that stuck in the American imagination—to the WAC’s detriment.

### **A College Girl in the Navy**

---

<sup>81</sup> Hampf, *Release a Man for Combat*, 112.

<sup>82</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 50.

The WAVES, almost from its inception, held the most prestigious position among the various women's corps in the mind of the American public, especially when the public compared the WAVES to the WAC. To facilitate its reputation as the elite women's corps, the creators of the WAVES sought to fashion a public image of their institution as comparable to that of a women's college. There is significant irony in this choice. At the beginning of the twentieth century, most Americans were opposed to the idea of a college-educated woman. Many considered a college-educated woman not only a waste of time and effort but also a threat to society. Critics worried that the educated woman would avoid her feminine duties to marry and rear children. Statistics showed that women with baccalaureate degrees were more likely to pursue a professional career and less likely to marry and have children than their uneducated counterparts. Opponents of women's higher education pointed to this fact as proof that college unsexed women and caused them to avoid their true profession as wives and mothers.<sup>83</sup> Women's colleges, especially the elite Seven Sisters,<sup>84</sup> earned even more public criticism than their coeducational counterparts after a 1915 nine-college census revealed that only 60% of Seven Sisters graduates married and had children in comparison to 80% of women who graduated from co-educational institutions. Such unfavorable reports contributed to an especially troublesome public portrayal of the Seven Sisters as "spinster factories" that churned out brainy and homely women who cared more for debating men than dating them. Some of the nastier critics even accused the Seven Sisters of producing something far worse than ugly and

---

<sup>83</sup> Barbara Sicherman, "College and Careers: Historical Perspectives on the Lives and Work Patters of Women College Graduates," in *Women in Higher Education in American History: Essays from the Mount Holyoke College Sesquicentennial Symposia*, ed. John Mack Faragher and Florence Howe, (New York: WW Norton & Co., 1988), 140-141.

<sup>84</sup> The "Seven Sisters" included: Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College, Mount Holyoke College, Radcliffe College, Smith College, Vassar College, and Wellesley College.

childless spinsters: lesbians. Whereas coeds were at least able to interact with men both in and out of the classroom, women on the campuses of “Adamless Edens” were forced to turn to one another for stimulation – intellectual and otherwise.<sup>85</sup>

Advocates of women’s education were gradually able to garner public support by crafting a feminine image of their students. At graduation speeches and in published articles, the champions of women’s education defended their students’ feminine charms and social lives. LeBaron Russell Briggs, president of Radcliffe College, went so far as to state that the goal of the woman’s college was to turn their student into “more of a woman,” while Elizabeth Agassiz, another Radcliffe president, argued “The time is past when any reasonable being can complain that Radcliffe girls have no college life. Some of them, indeed, have so much college life that I cannot see how they can do their work.”<sup>86</sup> By the 1930s, women’s colleges had improved their own reputations by boasting a graduate marriage rate equal to the number of coeducational institution graduates.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, women’s colleges had also largely overcome the negative stereotypes of ugly spinsters that plagued their campuses by actively aligning themselves with the fashion industry and young women’s magazines. The bespectacled spinster with stringy hair and dowdy duds that had for so long characterized the typical women’s college student was replaced by the fresh-faced debutante with well-curled tresses and a tailored suit striking a pose in *Mademoiselle* magazine. The nation was formally introduced to the new all-women’s college student: a beauty with brains.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Deirdre Clemente, “Prettier Than They Used To Be: Femininity, Fashion, and the Recasting of Radcliffe’s Reputation, 1900-1950,” *New England Quarterly* 82, no. 4, (December 2009), 644.

<sup>86</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 647 & 642.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 643.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 651.

By the time World War II broke out, the American public had come to understand that womanliness and prettiness were not exclusive of intellectualism and professionalism. This understanding would serve the WAVES very well. As noted previously, naval officials enlisted high-ranking female administrators and faculty at women's universities to help them create a respectable space for women in their service that would communicate both femininity and function to the public at large. These women took measures to ensure that only "young women of good quality" would join the WAVES, such as establishing higher educational standards and age requirements for their corps than any of the other women's corps. An underling to McAfee suggested that high educational standards factored into the sophisticated image of the WAVES:

The Navy emphasized that a requirement for serving in the WAVES was an education – a college degree for officers and a high school diploma for enlisted personnel – and a reputation as an individual of integrity and high moral character.<sup>89</sup>

Elizabeth Reynard went on to note that they were looking for the best women the nation's colleges had to offer, especially for their officer corps. "We had to have the best to set the tone."<sup>90</sup>

If the Navy's inclusion of women's educational professionals in the creation of their women's corps and their intention of accepting only well-educated women was not enough to ensure that the public associated the WAVES with women's schools, then the Navy's decision to train women on college campuses surely helped Americans to formulate this link. The Navy had an established relationship with various colleges across the country, using university facilities as bases for specialized training programs for men. It made good fiscal sense to train women at

---

<sup>89</sup> Cited in Ryan, "Homefront Heroines," 202.

<sup>90</sup> "Miss Mac," TIME, March 12, 1945, 20.

these campuses, especially as the men left them to ship off to war. However, it also made good public image sense:

It was decided that the campus of a large women's college would be the most suitable training center for women officers because of the dignity and prestige of an academic atmosphere. This was in line with the Navy's practice of establishing training centers for male officers at leading men's colleges and universities.

Shortly after the creation of the WAVES, the Navy struck a deal with Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts to train WAVES officers on their campus.<sup>91</sup>

Smith College, renamed the *USS Northampton*, was an ideal choice for both training the future female officers of the women's naval reserve and maintaining the appearance of the WAVES as the equivalent of a respectable women's college. First and foremost, Smith was a respectable women's college. It claimed membership in the elite Seven Sisters and even boasted scads of civilian students who lived alongside WAVES officer candidates throughout World War II. Second, Smith College had the physical space to accommodate both students and Waves and a president who was willing to sacrifice said space in the name of patriotic duty. Roughly 800 Waves, stacked in double-decker bunk beds, occupied Northrop, Gillette, and Capen Houses on the campus, while others billeted in the Northampton Hotel nearby. They attended classes in student lecture halls and exercised on the physical education areas. They dined at the campus cafeteria and Wiggins Tavern in the hotel. This is not to suggest that Smith and the WAVES did not experience any problems. Smith College was expecting the largest incoming freshman class in its history, 600 students, and the Navy failed to have housing facilities fully prepared when the

---

<sup>91</sup> The WAVES also established officer and specialized training schools on other college campus, such as Mt. Holyoke and Harvard, but Smith was the primary location for officer candidate school.

first group of Waves arrived in August of 1942. Indeed, the officer candidates had to forgo the luxury of blankets and pillows their first few evenings and practiced drill while still clad in civilian clothes because the Navy had not yet issued them uniforms.<sup>92</sup> Smith College also proved too small a campus for the ever-swelling ranks of the WAVES. Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts eventually opened its doors to accommodate the overflow of WAVES officers.

The Navy made similar arrangements with Oklahoma A&M College in Stillwater, Indiana University in Bloomington, the University of Madison Wisconsin, and Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls for training enlisted women. This arrangement worked well while the Navy intended to recruit only ten thousand women to fill the three jobs, or ratings, open to them: yeoman (secretarial), storekeeping (accounting/bookkeeping), and radio work. However, it proved unsatisfactory after the Navy expanded job assignments for women beyond the initial three categories and raised their enlistment quota to seventy-five thousand recruits. The WAVES also realized it would be better to separate basic and ratings training. Initially, the WAVES put women through both basic and ratings training at the same institution. Later, however, they decided to send recruits through a common “boot” training first and then assign them a rating based on their aptitude and interest. Having come to this decision, the WAVES sought to take over for the duration a college campus that was capable of feeding, housing, and training approximately six thousand “boots” (Wave trainees) at any given time. They came to an agreement with Hunter College, a commuter school located in the Bronx, New York, in 1943.

---

<sup>92</sup> Akers, *Doing Their Part*, 86.

Shortly thereafter, the Navy commissioned the school as an official ship in the U.S. Navy, rechristened it the *USS Hunter*, and shipped in the first class of trainees on February 16, 1943.<sup>93</sup>

The *USS Hunter* boasted a campus of twenty-four acres and four main buildings, some of which were converted to barracks. The new barracks could house only 1,000 recruits, however, so the WAVES commandeered nearby apartment buildings. Each room was furnished sparsely with “double decker bunk beds, a wooden table, four chairs, a fluorescent lamp, and four lockers.”<sup>94</sup> Recruits stored their belongings in their kitchens and ate at buildings on campus or were given vouchers to patron in nearby restaurants. They drilled and exercised on the campus grounds as well as the nearby Eighth Regimental Armory. They took classes in campus buildings and borrowed Walton High School’s auditorium to put on WAVES programs.

Women’s basic training experiences at Hunter, Smith, and the other colleges were curious combinations of the military and the civilian. These women were told to “ACT NAVY, THINK NAVY, AND BE NAVY,” and whether they were stationed at the *USS Northampton* or the *USS Hunter*, their days were spent learning to do so.<sup>95</sup> Women began their transition from civilians to sailors as soon as they stepped out of the trains, cars, and subways that brought them to their destination. WAVES officers organized the recruits into lines and marched them to the campuses that would serve as their basic training grounds. After being given tours of the campus facilities, they queued up to receive portions of their uniforms, such as their seaman’s hats and havelocks, rigorous physical examinations, inoculations, and pages upon pages of informational literature.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Ryan, “Homefront Heroines,” 253.

<sup>94</sup> Akers, “Doing Their Part,” 111.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

Officer candidates and enlisted women alike generally began their days between 0530 and 0615 with reveille and ended them around 2200 with taps. They got dressed, ate breakfast, and tidied their rooms over the course of the first hour. In between their lunch and dinner hours, they spent most of the day attending classes, studying, exercising, and drilling. They learned about naval history, organization, and advancement procedures in addition to the proper identification of ships and aircrafts. WAVES faculty also trained recruits in physical fitness, proper drilling techniques, and knot-tying. By the end of boot training, recruits were also well versed in naval etiquette, customs, and vocabulary. They recognized naval insignia, knew who their superiors were, and when and how to salute them. They became well-versed in the navy's language, learning to refer to windows and "portals" and bathrooms and "heads." Of course the women had free-time to write letters, launder their clothes, attend religious services, or take in a movie showing on the campus among other leisure activities, but, as Elizabeth Anne Butler recalled of her time spent at the *U.S.S. Hunter*, the WAVES never let recruits forget they were truly in the Navy:

One night we were in our quarters and the alarm bell sounded and we went to the air raid drill shelter for a city black out raid. For almost an hour we lay on the deck of the shelter with coats, shoes and blankets until the all clear signal was given. Everyone was so dead – some were snoring in just a few minutes. To make it realistic Navy planes kept zooming over the buildings.<sup>97</sup>

After six weeks of basic training, both officers and enlisted women had been thoroughly indoctrinated in the Navy and were official members of the U.S. military.

Still, women completed their naval indoctrination on college campuses, and this worked to soften the military image of Waves – at least in the public's eye. To be sure, these women were in the Navy. Yet, at Hunter, Smith, and the other schools, the women marched across

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 113

grounds on college campuses as opposed to parade grounds on naval bases. They completed coursework in university lecture halls in place of navy classrooms. They slept in dorm rooms, apartments, or hotel rooms in lieu of bedding down in barracks once belonging to men. They took their meals at campus cafeterias or civilian restaurants instead of frequenting messes. Many of the WAVES official photographs reinforced the “college” façade of their organization [Figures 3 and 4]. For instance, one photograph shows two young Waves cheerfully pouncing on an over-packed suitcase as they attempt to close it. Two other pictures showcase the women’s dorm-like living. In the first, two Waves are on their shared bunk beds. The woman on the bottom is reading *LIFE* magazine while her bunkmate hangs upside down to look over her shoulder. In the second, three Waves relax in their room. One lies on a top bunk writing a letter, while another sits on a chair reading. The third Wave rests on a twin bed as she pilfers through a care package. Other photos feature the women playing water polo or attending dances, just as so many college girls had done before them. Even when Waves were captured in more military moments, the college campuses at which they trained featured prominently, such as the photos of Waves marching across the campuses of Iowa State Teacher’s College and the University of Madison-Wisconsin.

Through their choice of administrators, educational standards, and training facilities, the WAVES were able to present their organization to the public as a women’s school rather than a women’s military corps, which earned them the approval of the American public. By constructing this “college” image for their corps, the WAVES assured the public that American women and womanhood would come through naval service unscathed. This “college” image also made the WAVES look like the safest outlet for women’s wartime impulses, especially when compared to the WAC, which trained and housed their women on army bases. Unlike the

WAC, which endangered femininity by housing and training their women in masculine Army environments, the WAVES respected femininity by utilizing a feminine space outside of the Navy. Or, at least, that is image the WAVES projected and the one the public internalized.

Since the WAVES opted to use an already feminized space to train their sailors, McAfee did not have to spend the same amount of time explaining to the public the ways in which the Navy would accommodate femininity as Hobby did on behalf of the Army. Like Hobby, McAfee ensured WAVES barracks included lounges where Waves could entertain dates. She also made sure to provide her servicewomen with some semblance of privacy in their barracks. However, rather than touting said spaces as outlets for women's domestic impulses, McAfee justified them as necessary for professional productivity, thus further contributing to the elite image of her corps. "There are certain niceties it would be lovely for men to have too,' Miss Mac said. "But if women don't have them their efficiency is jeopardized."<sup>98</sup>

In general, the college campuses on which Waves trained communicated femininity, simply and efficiently, for McAfee. Neither explanation nor justification was needed, which meant that the WAVES were able to convey a more professional image of their corps to the public than the WAC. While Hobby waxed poetic about the flowers, drapes, and the "things dear to a woman's heart" her Wacs displayed in their barracks, McAfee recounted the vital war work her Waves performed as part of their military duties. In her Christmas address to the fighting men, McAfee highlighted the various jobs Waves performed all over the nation:

More than 47,000 Navy women are on duty in all types of shore activities. Some are at air stations, directing the flow of air traffic on an off the fields, teaching future pilots to fly by instruments, packing parachutes, and repairing some of our training planes and patrol bombers. At supply depots, at operating bases, and in Navy Yards, Waves keep many of the records so necessary to assure the prompt delivery of equipment to the Fleet. As radio operators they speed vital messages to their destination. In Naval hospitals they

---

<sup>98</sup> Miss Mac," *TIME*, March 12, 1945, 23

work in the wards, the laboratories and the offices. In each case, however, they are actively associated with war work which brings them the knowledge that they contribute to victory which you, our fighting men, are winning for us. You may be assured that at home there are women ready to serve in any job which will bring closer the end of the war.<sup>99</sup>

It was McAfee's address at the WAVES second anniversary celebrations that perhaps best speaks to the public image the organization was attempting to convey. After acknowledging the novelty of women in uniform, McAfee alluded to the professional nature of her corps by musing that future generations of Americans, which would no doubt include many women active in the business world, would very likely "look back upon us the way we look back upon the cloistered women of the Middle Ages and they will feel sorry for us 'poor benighted protected women.'" In spite of their "protected" status, she went on to state that Waves took great satisfaction in a job well done, "for who knows? The man who might have been where any WAVE now is may be the man whose courageous daring turned the tide of battle somewhere overseas." Finally, she noted:

So far as I can see there is no logical reason why so many busy officers of the United States Navy, members of Congress of the United States, public-spirited citizens of this and other lands should take time to congratulate a group of able-bodied American women for doing a job which needs to be done in wartime.<sup>100</sup>

McAfee's modesty, humor, and down-to-business statements seem to capture perfectly the kind of message the WAVES wanted the public hear about its women: Waves were merely all-American women doing a job in support of all-American men.

Mildred McAfee occupied an enviable position in comparison to that of Oveta Culp Hobby. From the beginning, Hobby was in a difficult situation. In her desire to see the

---

<sup>99</sup> "Christmas Message from Captain Mildred H. McAfee, Address by Captain Mildred H. McAfee, Women's Reserve, U.N.S.R. to the Armed Forces. December 24, 1943. Reel 14. WAVES Records.

<sup>100</sup> Address by Captain Mildred H. McAfee, U.N.S.R. Director, Women's Reserve, U.S. Naval Reserve at the Second Anniversary Rally, Washington, D.C. July 30, 1944. Reel 14. WAVES Records.

“auxiliary” dropped from the WAAC and, Hobby attempted to prove that her women truly belonged in the military by constructing an image of the corps members as soldiers. This played directly into the slander campaign’s argument that military service would masculinize women. Realizing her mistake, Hobby attempted to soften this militarized image of her corps by touting the homemaking qualities of her women. Unfortunately, this, too, played into the slander campaign by undermining the seriousness of WAC work. McAfee never had to fight this kind of battle because the WAVES were integrated fully into the Navy when she took her position as director. Moreover, the WAVES administration had already decided to promote their institution as the equivalent of a women’s college, which served to feminize their women’s military service and pandered to their image as the most elite of the women’s corps. This enabled McAfee to highlight the important work Waves were doing on behalf of the war effort as opposed to the important ways they remained feminine in spite of being in the military. It is with little wonder, then, that the American public viewed the WAVES as a more prestigious organization than the WAC.

### **Public Reaction to the “Soldiering Homemaker and “The College Girl”**

At a 1944 WAC National Civilian Advisory Committee Conference, Dr. Randolph gave voice to the general American public’s perception of the WAC and WAVES when he stated, “I think perhaps the WAVES have been more attractive to many women because it seems to represent the intelligensia [sic]. Wrongly perhaps, the WACs have been considered to embrace the hoi polloi.”<sup>101</sup> It was a brutal but accurate assessment of the American public’s opinion of the WAC and WAVES.

---

<sup>101</sup> Headquarters Third Service Command Transcript First Meeting of Civilian Advisory Committee, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

The choices to train Wacs on Army posts and Waves on college campuses certainly contributed to this public perception of the two women's corps. The American public responded more favorably to the WAVES than the WAC because the WAVES more effectively communicated a message of feminine professionalism through the material culture of their training grounds that was compatible with contemporary understandings of femininity. Waves trained on a women's college campus, whereas Wacs trained on formerly all-male Army posts. Waves lived in dorm rooms and apartment buildings, while Wacs bedded down in barracks. The WAVES sent the message that, while they were a military organization, their recruits could expect to be treated like college students. The WAC, however, informed the American public that in joining the Army, women should expect to share the same hardships as men.

Both Americans and recruits received these messages loud and clear. Mabel Lee, a member of the WAC's National Civilian Advisory Committee, made just such a comparison of the WAC and WAVES in a post-war letter to Mrs. Oswald Lord, chairman of the same committee:

Personally, I am surprised that so few Wacs seem to be availing themselves of the opportunity to go to college.... [V]ery few Wacs are in our colleges. Here at Nebraska we have quite a number of ex-Waves and only a few ex-Wacs. The relative comparative percentage would be rather staggering inlight [sic] of the fact that there are so many more Wacs than Waves throughout the country. Could one answer to this question lie in the fact that the Wac as a whole attracted a class of girls that would not be interested in going to college, while the Waves attracted the girl who would go to college. This difference between the two groups has constantly been brought up all through the war, but I have always discounted it. I wonder now if there might be something in the statement.<sup>102</sup>

After asking her brother what he thought of the WAVES, Ensign Katherine K. Toll received the following response:

---

<sup>102</sup> Mable Lee to Mrs. Oswald Lord, June 5, 1946, Personal Mary P. Lord, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

You know they're amazing. You look around and everybody is in uniform, and you think you're in an officers' club, and start listening for the dirty jokes. Close your eyes and it sounds like a room full of college girls.<sup>103</sup>

Wave Joan Angel confirmed the relationship between the WAVES and the college experience in the public mind when she confessed in her memoir that after hearing the announcement of both the WAAC and the WAVES, "I don't know why, but the WAVES attracted me more. Perhaps part of it was the college locale of the basic training—I had been yearning to get a touch of campus life again."<sup>104</sup>

Throughout the war, both what WAC and WAVES propaganda communicated verbally and what their material cultures expressed visually were often in contradiction. It was a case of saying one thing and doing another. WAC propaganda said the Army made accommodations for women on account of their femininity, but their material culture indicated women were treated like men. WAVES propaganda said the Navy gave women equal status with men, but their material culture indicated women were treated like ladies. These were contradictory messages indeed, but they were contradictions that worked against the WAC and for the WAVES.

There were many other differences between the WAC and WAVES that embodied these contradictory messages as well as the public's contradictory perceptions of these two corps. Take, for instance, the very names of the two corps. "WAAC/WAC" may have been an appropriate acronym for "Women's Army Auxiliary Corps/Women's Army Corps," but it made excellent fodder for the slander campaign and those who maligned the women as "Khaki Wackies." The WAVES put quite a bit of time and effort into the development of their name,

---

<sup>103</sup> Katherine Toll. Unpublished Manuscript. Box 13. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Toll Collection.

<sup>104</sup> Joan Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 5.

with the explicit purpose that it be nautical but not lend itself to easy mockery. However, “Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service” also underscored the fact that, at least initially, naval servicewomen were to be a temporary part of the Navy and would disappear once the “emergency” of war had passed. “WAC” made no such promises. The WAC initially required women personally to visit the same recruiting stations as men, which were often in rather seedy locations, in order to submit their applications. This resulted in some rather undignified moments for the WAC, especially when the media showed up to interview some of the sillier candidates. The WAVES, learning from the WAC’s experience, expected women to write for an application that they would then mail back to WAVES recruiters. This allowed the WAVES to weed out any obviously problematic applicants and select only qualified candidates for a personal interview, which usually took place at recruiting stations located in the nicer parts of cities and which were separate from men’s recruiting stations.<sup>105</sup> The WAC also enlisted women who were only 18 years old and allowed women with children over the age of 14 to join, while no woman under 20 or with minor children could join the WAVES. Wacs were allowed to serve overseas, which resulted in several Wacs coming under fire in spite of their noncombatant classification. An early contingent of Wacs on their way to England had to be rescued at sea after a German submarine torpedoed their ship. Waves remained safely stateside and were only permitted to travel to Alaska and Hawaii in 1944. Even the WAC and WAVES directors and civilian advisory bodies begged for comparisons that favored the WAVES over the WAC. The WAVES were headed by the president of a prestigious woman’s college and advised by an equally impressive group of college associated women. The WAC, which was led by a Texas

---

<sup>105</sup> Ryan, “Homefront Heroines,” 199.

socialite and listened to a Civilian Advisory Committee that lacked the educational credentials boasted by the WAVES Educational Advisory Council, simply could not compete.<sup>106</sup>

Most important, however, were the differences in the basic educational requirements to join the WAC or the WAVES. As Colonel Goodwin observed at the WAC'S Civilian Advisory Committee meeting, "The WAVES have always had a certain kind of prestige because their publicity has been slanted on high educational requirements."<sup>107</sup> The WAC permitted recruits without high school diplomas to enlist and even become officers. All Waves, however, were expected to have graduated high school. Only women holding a four-year college degree or two years of college and two years of professional experience became officers. A college education, even for women, indicated intelligence, perseverance, and capability in the recipient. By insisting that their women be well educated and train on a college campus, even if that training was for a military job, the WAVES successfully communicated to the public that their recruits were intelligent young women who intended to bring the same attitude of professionalism and seriousness to their work in the Navy as they would in a civilian career.

These educational standards linked the WAC and WAVES directly to the working and middle classes, respectively, as did the fact that the WAC took African-American women into their corps while the WAVES hired them to clean their officers' barracks. McAfee worked hard to overcome the Navy's resistance to enlist black women and eventually succeeded in raising the racial barrier in 1944. But even this could not diminish the WAVES' reputation, for with rather remarkable marketing legerdemain the WAVES proudly announced that, unlike the black Wacs who were segregated into their own units, black Waves could expect to serve alongside their

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>107</sup> Report of WAC Civilian Advisory Committee Activities in the Fourth Service Command, Lamar Jeter to Mrs. Paul C. Hamilton, 13 February 1945, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

white counterparts. “The station in The Bronx ... had taken in Negro recruits,” *Time Magazine* reported, “put them side by side with whites without ruffling any tempers.” Such was the progressivism and professionalism of the WAVES that one Southern WAVES officer was quoted as saying, “We took it as a challenge and just made up our minds that we would meet it.”<sup>108</sup>

This professionalism extended to the types of jobs Waves performed as well. WAVES propaganda frequently emphasized the highly skilled jobs Waves performed. In the opening pages of “The Story of You in Navy Blue,” a 1944 informational pamphlet, potential recruits are informed that women are needed as test pilots, X-ray technicians, photographers, weathermen, aviation instructors, and parachute riggers. In reality, most Waves held less skilled jobs while in the service. They served as secretaries and telephone operators, bakers and payroll officers. However, by underscoring the technical jobs available to women and maintaining high educational standards for recruits, WAVES propaganda lent credence to their corps’s image as the most well-educated and professional of the women’s military organizations.<sup>109</sup>

WAC propaganda initially went in the opposite direction as that of the WAVES to highlight the “pink collar” work their women performed. For instance, in a 1943 WAAC informational pamphlet, potential enlistees were told they could “apply their intelligence, their dexterity, their patriotism to many specialties, occupations and professions” to take over noncombatant jobs such as “clerks, machine operators, cooks, bakers, stewardesses” and

---

<sup>108</sup> Miss Mac,” *TIME*, March 12, 1945, 23, 21

<sup>109</sup> “The Story of You in Navy Blue,” (Recruitment Pamphlet, U.S. Navy, 1944) in Virgilia Williams Collection. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Williams Collection.

“telephone operators, telegraph operators, hostesses, librarians,” among other occupations.<sup>110</sup>

Many women considered such positions ordinary and boring. It begged the question of why a woman would choose to live in a harsh military environment so she could do a job that was already open to her in a more comfortable civilian setting.

Hobby is largely responsible for the unglamorous portrayal of WAC work. Throughout the war, Hobby wholeheartedly believed that the themes of self-sacrifice and guilt would appeal to women and encourage enlistment. Moreover, the WAC administration in general sought to downplay the threat of military service to femininity by focusing on the traditionally feminine jobs women performed in the Army, such as clerical work, rather than the more masculine ones, such as mechanical work. In spite of the advice she received from Young & Rubicon, the advertising agency hired to help the WAC improve their public image, Hobby refused to portray life in the WAC as a glamorous affair. Instead, she wanted to emphasize the rough and ready reality of a soldier’s existence. At a conference with Young & Rubicon, Hobby mused:

I wonder if a different slant, telling this woman how hard, how drab, how routine it is (and 95% of the jobs are) send something of a challenge to her. [...] Has she the courage to do the commonplace as against the courage of the spectacular?<sup>111</sup>

Evidence against this approached stacked up, however, and it was hard for Hobby to argue with reports such as:

[T]he impression has been subtly spread not only among women undergraduates in colleges but among women generally that the WAVE organization is composed of higher type women; that cooks, KPs, scrub-women laundresses, etc., are not needed and that

---

<sup>110</sup> “Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps,” (Recruitment Pamphlet, Recruiting Publicity Bureau, U.S. Army, May 13, 1942), 2 in Women Veterans General Printed Materials and Video Recordings Collection, 1864, 1918-2013. Series 1. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG General Printed Collection.

<sup>111</sup> Haumpf, *Release a Man for Combat*, 135

drudgery is unknown. [T]he pouring on of glamour seems to work satisfactorily. It was applied successfully by the Marines to obtain recruits and also by the Navy.<sup>112</sup>

Over the course of the war, Hobby reconciled herself to Young & Rubicon's position that propaganda geared toward glamor and self-interest would increase enlistment. They were able to achieve a compromise that embodied both patriotism and self-interest, as reflected in the 1943 poster featuring a smiling Waac and the caption, "I joined to serve my country ... and I'm having the time of my life."

Unfortunately for the WAC, the press, too, perpetuated the unskilled façade of the WAC and the professional pretense of the WAVES. For instance, a newspaper article noted that:

The [Women's Army Auxiliary] Corp is designed to do hard, unromantic work all over the world, with telephone switchboards and typewriters, with adding machines and pencils, with washing machines and frying pans, women will relieve the men now doing these jobs – and release them for active fighting service.<sup>113</sup>

Shortly after the Navy announced the formation of the WAVES, however, *Newsweek* reported that women with backgrounds in engineering, astronomy, metallurgy, statistics, and physics were "especially desired."<sup>114</sup>

Even Hollywood was not immune to the dullness of the WAC and the allure of the WAVES. *Keep Your Powder Dry* and *Here Come the WAVES*, two propaganda films designed to educate the public on the WAC and WAVES as well as encourage women's enlistment, also make for a revealing comparison of the media's representation of these two women's corps. *Keep Your Powder Dry* follows the story of three young women who join the WAC for very

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>113</sup> Cited in Jennifer Nichols Stewart, "Wacky Times: An Analysis of the WAC in World War II and its Effects on Women," *International Social Science Review* 75 (March 22, 2000), 27.

<sup>114</sup> Cited in Kathleen Broom Williams, "Women Ashore: The Contribution of WAVES to US Naval Science and Technology in World War II," *The Northern Mariner* 8 (1998), 1-20, [http://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern\\_mariner/vol08/nm\\_8\\_2\\_1-20.pdf](http://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern_mariner/vol08/nm_8_2_1-20.pdf), accessed October 13, 2014.

different reasons. Ann Darrison, played by Susan Peters, is a young soldier's wife determined to enlist and bring her husband home sooner. Laraine Day portrays Leigh Rand, a general's daughter who wants to serve her country and make her Army father proud. Lana Turner is Valerie Parks, a spoiled socialite who enlists in the corps only to secure the large inheritance her grandfather left her on the condition that she prove herself to be a responsible and respectable young woman.

In *Here Come the WAVES*, Betty Hutton portrays twin sisters, Rosemary and Susie Allison, who give up their glamorous jobs as nightclub singers to join the Women's Naval Reserve. Much like the characters in *Keep Your Powder Dry*, the women have very different motivations. Rosemary feels guilty for not doing more on behalf of the war effort and decides military service is the best course of action. Susie joins only because she does not know what to do without her sister. Bing Crosby and Sonny Tufts also feature strongly in this film as the sisters' love interests.

Both films touch on similar themes. The female leads start off as civilians and eventually join a women's corps for patriotic, personal, or even selfish reasons, but all of them come to see the real military value of their work by the end of the film. The women must overcome various obstacles as they go through basic training and officer candidate school, on to their work assignments, and attempt to negotiate their military lives with their personal lives. The basic underlying message of both films is identical: Women are needed to serve in the military and can do so without compromising the feminine characteristics that make them women.

Major differences emerge between the films, however, when the viewer is given a glimpse into what daily life would be like in either of the women's corps. Indeed, Hobby's vision of the "soldiering Wac" and McAfee's concept of the "college girl" Wave are quite

visible. In *Keep Your Powder Dry*, the three women are housed in what looks like a large warehouse at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia containing hundreds of cots lined up in compact rows, while *Here Come the WAVES* shows the twin sisters lounging around a Hunter College dorm with two sets of bunk beds on either side of the spacious room. During basic training, the Wacs run, crawl, and jump their way through a muddy obstacle course, while the Waves perform uniform calisthenics in a grass covered field. Once the women have been assigned to their jobs, the three Wacs get grease on their noses and enjoy a bit of gossip as they tinker under the hoods of trucks and jeeps. The two Waves, however, remain clean as they focus on their jobs instructing pilots and managing incoming and outgoing planes in an air traffic control tower. The twin Waves also spend time developing a musical about their corps meant to increase their enlistment. While on leave, one of the Wacs, eager to escape the constant companionship of her fellows, opts to spend her time alone in a hotel room, while the two Waves enjoy their free time by having dinner and going dancing with their sailor boyfriends. After watching the two films, the viewer is left with the impression that life in the WAC was much harsher than life in the WAVES.

Film critics reacted very differently to the two films. In her review of *Keep your Powder Dry*, *The Sun*'s Eileen Creelman concluded, "It has made the characters so petty, the episodes so trivial, the atmosphere so filled with bickering that, although audiences may well have a good time, WAC recruiting is not likely to be helped..." while Howard Barnes, of the *Tribune*, wrote, "The WACs can scarcely be too pleased with the silly salute they receive in 'Keep Your Powder Dry.'" Critics were filled with praise for *Here Come the WAVES*, however, with Lee Mortimer, of the *Daily Mirror*, proclaiming, "You've got to hold on to your seats for this one!" and Irene Thirer, of the *New York Post*, writing, "Mark Sandrich has given the picture the kind of swift

direction which nets one guffaw after another....” But perhaps the most salient analysis of the two films came from Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times*. Of *Keep Your Powder Dry*, he wrote:

If they do anything to people for maligning the Women’s Army Corps they will certainly do whatever it is to Metro for ‘Keep Your Powder Dry.’ For this manifest little indignity, which came to Loew’s Criterion on Saturday, makes distaff members of our Army look like cats in a Hollywood boarding school.

He was much more pleased with *Here Come the WAVES*, noting, “There are several scenes in the picture of Waves in training which are atmospherically good, and the settings contrived for the Wave show are well above regulation grade.” He concluded, “Paramount, in short, has been generous to the service in every respect.”

Both Hobby and McAfee had a vested interest in the films portraying their respective corps. It was free publicity, but it was a kind publicity that could easily give the women’s corps a bad name. Accordingly, Hobby and McAfee insisted that their organizations approve the storylines before production began and Hobby even succeeded in having a real Wac on set to supervise filming and ensure WAC life was depicted accurately. In spite of these efforts, neither Hobby nor McAfee were particularly pleased with either of the films. At the Washington, D.C. premiere of *Keep Your Powder Dry*, Hobby was scheduled to give a recruitment speech, speak over the radio, and then host a cocktail party. Yet, because of Hobby’s “feelings in the matter,” her cooperation was “cut to a minimum” and her participation reduced to sitting in the president’s box and waving. No one elaborated on what those “feelings” were, exactly, but Mattie Treadwell, who was an assistant to Hobby during the war and wrote the official WAC history for the Army Green Series, lambasted the film as “an embarrassment to WACs

everywhere.” It is possible that Hobby shared her sentiments. McAfee did not see *Here Come the WAVES* as an embarrassment so much as a glamorous misrepresentation of the WAVES, noting that the film promised more excitement than the actual WAVES experience.<sup>115</sup>

In spite of Hobby’s and McAfee’s displeasure with the films, MGM and Paramount were simply following the public images the two women had crafted for their corps. To be sure, the plotlines were a fair representation of neither the life nor the servicewomen in the WAC or the WAVES. However, both films follow the public relations formulas Hobby and McAfee laid out for their respective corps: “the soldiering Wac” and “the college girl Wave,” respectively.

*Keep Your Powder Dry* deviated from the early WAAC propaganda that emphasized the “pink collar” work women would do while in the service by portraying its three leading ladies as mechanics. Over the course of the war, Hobby reconciled herself to Young & Rubicon’s position that propaganda geared toward glamor and self-interest would increase enlistment. It is possible that the film reflected Hobby’s shifting position. However, the film perpetuated Hobby’s desire to evoke women’s “pioneer spirit” and willingness to sacrifice on behalf of others’ needs as motivations for women’s enlistment. Rand, the general’s daughter, eventually sets aside her pride and learns to follow as well as to lead. The rich playgirl Parks opts to stay in the WAAC despite having received her millions of inherited dollars. And Darrison makes the greatest sacrifice of them all. She soldiers on even after learning that her husband has been killed in combat. The final scene of the film shows all three women decked out in overseas uniforms as they march off a ship into the warzone. Most importantly, the film remained true to

---

<sup>115</sup> Brandon Moblo, “Keep Your Powder Dry: Motion Picture Production and the Portrayal of Women Soldiers during World War II,” *The University of Vermont History Review* XXIII (2012-2013): 67-80, <https://www.uvm.edu/~history/documents/2012-2013HistoryReviewXXIII-WebRelease5.22.13.pdf>, ccessed October 12, 2014 and “Recollections of Captain Mildred McAfee, USNR (Ret.) (Mrs. Douglas Horton)” in *The Reminiscences of The WAVES Volume I*, (Annapolis, MY: U.S. Naval Institute).

Hobby's assertion that Wacs were in the Army. The women live in barracks, train in the mud, and work under harsh conditions – just like their brothers in arms.

McAfee may have found *Here Come the WAVES* too glamorous, but the WAVES administration in general had always billed their corps with a touch of glamor. As has already been noted, the WAVES made good advertising use of the college locale on which their women trained, which were indeed much more glamorous quarters than the Army posts to which Wacs were assigned. WAVES propaganda also emphasized the fact that women would find satisfying work as highly trained professionals. This perception was certainly perpetuated by *Here Come the WAVES*, in which the Hunter and Smith College campuses feature prominently, as does the paraphernalia that accompanies life on college campuses: dorm rooms and classrooms, studying and dating. The women's jobs as pilot instructors and air traffic controllers also emit an aura of professionalism. So even though McAfee was put off by the film's overly-glamorous depiction of her women, she could be satisfied that it captured perfectly her vision of Waves as college girls and professionals.

The American public surely could not but help to pick up on the strikingly different portrayals of the WAC and WAVES—be they in official military propaganda, newspaper and magazine articles, or Hollywood film productions –to draw their own conclusions about which corps was more suitable for women. The WAC trained their women on Army posts and treated them like soldiers, while the WAVES placed their recruits on university campuses to be educated like college girls. The WAC allowed women without high school degrees to enlist and attend Officer Candidate School, while the WAVES insisted that all of their recruits hold at least a high school diploma and, preferably, have some college training. Only women with a four-year degree or those who had at least two years of college and two years of work experience became

WAVES officers. The WAC allowed African-American women to enlist in their corps, while the WAVES was reserved for white women. The WAVES propaganda highlighted the highly technical and skilled jobs their women performed, which gave their service branch a touch of glamor when compared with that of the WAC and underscored the latter's mundane jobs. It mattered not, in reality, that the average Wave spent her days clicking away at a typewriter just as did the common Wac. WAVES propaganda led the public to believe the Wave's job was more useful and exciting than the Wac's, and the public's perception of the Wave's work was more important than the reality of that work.

*LIFE* magazine's issue of March 15, 1943 perhaps offers the starkest contrast between the media's portrayal and the public's perception of the "soldierly" WAC and the "professional" WAVES. The photographer Munkàcsi captures Waacs and Waves in very different situations. He shows Waacs learning how to use their duffel bags as flotation devices in a swimming pool and Waves sitting in a classroom as they listen attentively to a lecture. Waacs run exuberantly through the ocean surf, while Waves sit quietly on watch duty. But the most glaring distinction between the corps is presented in the two photographs showing the women marching. Waacs are captured as they march uniformly down a beach like so many of their male counterparts had done before them. Waves are photographed parading on the grounds of Smith College, a thing that no man—civilian or otherwise—had ever done.

The copy, too, emphasized the difference between the militarized and mundane existence of a Waac and the collegiate and professional experiences of a Wave. A picture of five members' of the WAAC's lifesaving corps rolling a boat onto the beach is accompanied by a brief caption that informs the reader that after learning "military customs, sanitation, communication, map reading and details of keeping track of property," Waacs can expect to

“become experts in cooking, administration, communications, truck-driving or other specialized jobs.” The article-length text next to a photo of three enlisted Waves sitting “primly” outside of their dormitory lets potential recruits know that after they are “given physical examinations and injections..., uniformed, taught how to sit and march and [start] on their naval indoctrination courses,” they will find jobs in “aviation mechanics, meteorology, parachute rigging, supplies and accounts....” Other captions accompanying WAAC photos highlight the servicewomen’s ability to march uniformly after only a week of training and the way in which they “smartly” force air into their barracks bags as they jump into a pool of water, thus filling them with enough air “to keep a girl afloat.” Waves, too, are shown in military activities, but the captions and article attached to such photos emphasize a merger of the military and the collegiate. Under a photo of drilling Waves is the caption, “On the drill field at Smith College, Navy Waves parade the U.S. flag and the flag of their school....” Next to this photo is another of WAVES officers taking refreshment at the “Officers’ Coffee Mess ... in Smith Alumnae House.” The most militaristic depiction of the WAVES comes from a photograph of a platoon of marching Waves. Lest readers forget these sailors are at a women’s college, however, the captions reminds them that “a platoon of Waves marches from classroom on the campus to drill fields, which they share with the college. Once arrived at the field, the girls will drop their books, go through a rigorous two-hour session of drill....”

A cursory glance at the photo essay might lead one to interpret the WAAC as the more exciting of the two women’s corps and, therefore, more appealing to potential recruits. Waacs are, after all, shown in more lively activities than Waves and the copy informs the reader that of all the women’s services only Waacs are allowed to go overseas. However, American society was not interested in the “excitement” military service offered women as much as the

“respectability” it conferred upon them. The Waacs were shown engaging in more masculine, and therefore, by definition, less respectable, activities than the Waves. Americans were more comfortable seeing images of Waves sitting in Smith College classrooms than of Wacs clinging to duffle bags as they floated around a pool. The serious faces of Waves conducting a mock court-martial inspired greater confidence in the professionalism of the Women’s Naval Reserve for Americans than the laughing expressions of the Waacs splashing about in the ocean did in the Women’s Army Corps. But perhaps the greatest testament to the public’s enchantment with the WAVES was wide difference in coverage. As noted above, roughly three-fourths of the coverage of the article was given to the WAVES.

## CONCLUSION

It is both ironic and noteworthy that the *Christian Science Monitor* article that first introduced Oveta Culp Hobby to America in 1942 chose to emphasize the physical attractiveness of the WAC’s first director, while the fashion-focused *Vogue* honed in on McAfee’s academic background. Other newspapers and magazines would follow a similar pattern. Headlines announcing her appointment included phrases such as “Personality, Brains, Beauty Mark Oveta Culp Hobby” and “Feminine Chapeau Pops Among Army Brass,” while article text incorporated statements such as her “slender” figure and height, which was roughly the same as “movie directors favor for their feminine stars.”<sup>116</sup> It would be easy to pass these two themes off as the simple observation that Hobby was pretty while McAfee was plain. There was something deeper at work in the WAC and WAVES, however, and the public’s perception of them, which belies such a superficial explanation.

---

<sup>116</sup> Malvina Stephenson, “Personality, Brains, Beauty Mark Oveta Culp Hobby Who Will Lead New Women’s Army,” *Hammond (IN) Times*; May 20, 1942; Eleanor Ragsdale, “Feminine Chapeau Pops Among Army ‘Brass Hats,”” *Iowa City Press*, September 11, 1941; Ruth Cowan, “Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps Has a Lively Lady for Its First Director,” *Wide World*, May 15, 1942; and Henny, “New Chieftain,” *Washington Post*, Ca. May 1953 cited in Robert Pando, “Oveta Culp Hobby,” 85-86.

The depiction of the WAC's first director as a beauty and the WAVES' first director as a brain is a reflection of the public images both the WAC and the WAVES attempted to fashion for themselves as well as the public's interpretation of those images. The media's decision to give almost equal attention to Hobby's pretty countenance as it did to what she would actually do as director of the WAC was a foreshadowing of the WAC's own ambiguous public image. Hobby wanted her corps to be taken seriously and for the Army to drop its auxiliary status, which is one of the reasons she initially advocated a militarized depiction of her women. However, this image backfired and left Hobby scrambling to defend her women's femininity. In 1944, Hobby publicly stated that "the principle aim of advertising should be that Wacs are just as feminine as they were before they enlisted." This mixed message suggested to the American public that the Army did not know how to incorporate women into their organization without compromising femininity, which meant that servicewomen had to salvage femininity on their own time and perhaps at the expense of the jobs they were supposed to be doing while in the Army. Wacs were neither good soldiers nor ladies.

This is not to suggest that McAfee was not concerned with her Waves' femininity. In 1945, *Time* Magazine noted that McAfee had always insisted that women's military service did not diminish their femininity.<sup>117</sup> She, too, wanted her women to be seen as attractive. Like Hobby, she understood that the maintenance of servicewomen's femininity was crucial to gaining public approval of women's military service. McAfee was simply more effective than Hobby at depicting her women as beauties with brains. Unlike the WAC, the WAVES public image was never ambiguous. To be sure, their propaganda sent conflicting messages at times, but these contradictions worked in tandem to bolster the WAVES ultimate message that they

---

<sup>117</sup> "Miss Mac," *TIME*, March 12, 1945, 23.

were an elite organization that took only the best and the brightest of America's college girls who would assist the Navy's men on their path to victory. Waves worked like sailors but lived like ladies.

The WAC portrayed their women as soldiers who served alongside their brethren, while the WAVES depicted their recruits as college girls who worked with the Navy's men. WAC and WAVES propaganda cultivated these messages via promotional literature, the media spread them in newspaper and magazine articles, and Hollywood immortalized them on the silver screen. These messages are nowhere more evident, however, than in the material culture of the WAC and WAVES training facilities. These training facilities were the physical embodiment of the messages WAC and WAVES propaganda verbalized and set the tone for how the American public would imagine the WAC and WAVES throughout the war.

The material culture of the WAVES living and training quarters conveyed a more socially acceptable balance of "military" and "feminine" identities for their recruits than that of the WAC. Again, the "college" image the WAVES projected contributed to their success. Both the WAC and the WAVES wanted the public and their recruits to understand that they were military organizations. Consequently, both educated their women on how to salute and drill, recognize military insignia, wear their uniforms, make their beds, speak the language, and, in general, observe proper military etiquette. The WAC and WAVES were certainly proud of their military status and the female soldiers and sailors embraced the military aspects of their new lives. However, the WAVES' relationship with Hunter College and Smith College worked to soften their military connections. Though Waves marched in Navy uniforms, their feet hit the ground of a women's college. WAVES literature might have preached that their women were *in* the Navy, but the material culture of their training grounds said something different. It

communicated the message that Waves were *with* the Navy, and that, ultimately, the women were outside of and above it.

The WAC took their military identity too far for the public's comfort. Hobby stated again and again that women could expect to experience many of the same hardships as men. Wacs lived and trained on Army posts, sometimes separated from men only by a fence. The Army offered overseas service to those Wacs who wanted it and required them to live in tents and bathe out of their helmets. Moreover, WAC propaganda and formal statements indicated that their women enjoyed their military experiences. One poster featuring a smiling Wac decked out in an overseas uniform boldly stated, "I'd rather be with them—than waiting." This was not exactly a comforting thought to those Americans who believed it unnatural for women to have the same experiences as men, let alone to like those experiences. Although the WAC tried to feminize the female soldier's experience by making certain allowances, such as letting women domesticate their living spaces, these small gestures did not overcome the largely militarized identity of the WAC. Ultimately, the WAC confirmed in the public's mind that their women were in, fully and completely, the Army. This did not bode well for the expected return to post-war gender roles.

How Oveta Culp Hobby and Mildred H. McAfee first imagined their respective corps characterized the WAC and WAVES, for better or worse, throughout the war. Hobby continued to promote her Wacs as soldiers with the self-sacrificing hearts of American women in an effort to strike a balance between the military purpose and traditional femininity of her organization's women. McAfee did not need to work as hard as Hobby to find a happy medium between her women's military and feminine identities. She fashioned her organization as a replica of the respectable women's college of which she was president, thereby bestowing upon her women the

dual reputations of all-American college girls and the respectable women's college graduates. The WAC and WAVES continued to invest the remainder of their material culture, such as uniforms and propaganda paraphernalia, with these respective images of their women's corps, and the American public continued to read said material culture for confirmation of what Hobby and McAfee had taught them to understand. The images of the WAC's woman soldier and the WAVES' college girl remained consistent throughout World War II, as did the public curses and blessings that accompanied them.

## Chapter 2 - “Now it Looks More Homey:” Femininity in the Barracks

In 1944, *Saturday Evening Post* journalist Ernest O. Houser praised Wacs in England for their extraordinary military service and contributions to the American military mission. He recounted the Wacs’ various responsibilities—from filing papers and taking dictation to driving generals around London and fixing jeep engines—and lauded them for fulfilling these duties as well as, and in some cases better than, their male counterparts. At the same time, however, he reassured his readers that “soldiering hasn’t transformed these Wacs into Amazons – far from it. They have retained their femininity, and if you ask them what they want to do after the war, the majority will reply ‘Have a home and babies.’”<sup>118</sup>

On the surface, Houser’s article seems rather mundane. It is simply another piece informing the American public of what their servicewomen are up to, praising said servicewomen for their selfless contributions to the war effort, and reiterating the idea that once the war is over, life, as Americans understood it, would get back to normal. “Homes and babies” would abound. Yet, his words are rather striking. Houser’s article encapsulates the great dilemma of the women’s corps. How could the corps convince American society that women’s service was necessary to military victory while at the same time assuring the public that servicewomen would retain their femininity even as they lived and worked in a masculine environment? In emphasizing the first point, servicewomen appeared as mannish creatures ready to sling guns over their shoulders and fight toe to toe with American men. In dwelling on the latter, servicewomen looked as though they cared little for duty and existed purely as

---

<sup>118</sup> “Those Wonderful G.I. Janes,” *Saturday Evening Post* 217 (September 9, 1944): 26-28, 60, 63.

ornamentation. Both representations provided fodder for the slander campaign. However, Houser—following a pattern established by the women’ corps—negotiated this slippery slope by discussing women’s military service within the context of their femininity. He recognized that women’s military service was an anomaly, but he softened the perversity of the situation by drawing on the familiar theme of womanly sacrifice. More importantly, his tone suggested that women, too, recognized their service as an anomaly and one they ultimately wanted to eradicate. Women would perform the duties their nation requested of them, but they refused to accept the loss of their femininity as a consequence. Once the war was over, they wanted “a home and babies.”

“A home and babies” was crucial to Americans’ understanding of femininity, and it is not surprising that Houser chose to emphasize this particular aspect of womanhood. Although American women moved and worked in the public sphere prior to World War II, women’s place in the home as wife and mother was given a privileged position within American society as the feminine ideal. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the WAC and the WAVES incorporated this ideal into their own interpretation and presentation of their servicewomen’s femininity. At the same time, however, both the WAC and WAVES sought to inform the public of women’s burgeoning military identities and real military value. It was a public image balancing act that played out again and again in both official military propaganda and the popular media. Houser’s article was simply yet another manifestation of that public image. Servicewomen, too, had to learn to balance that public image. Yet, for these women, it was more than a matter of public image; it was a matter of personal identity.

This chapter explores the ways in which women negotiated the development of their new military identities with their feminine selves through an examination of women’s writings as

well as the material culture they employed to decorate their living spaces. Stephen Greenblatt, a cultural theorist, has suggested that the “self” is something that can be fashioned and that an individual’s personal writings can serve as mechanisms by which the author attempts to devise his or her selfhood. If one accepts this principle, then it becomes irrefutably clear that the servicewomen of the WAC and WAVES began to identify as soldiers and sailors and construct this identity for themselves via their letters to friends and family. Written evidence demonstrates that Wacs and Waves were proud of their service and eager to embrace military culture. Wacs referred to mealtimes as “chow” in their letters home, while Waves informed their families that they had to fight with other women for “head” as opposed to “bathroom” time. Women also took great pride in their work and in mastering military maneuvers, such as the proper way to salute and drill. Even so, they remained conscious of their identities as women and often made fun of themselves—in songs, plays, and contemporary memoirs—for their ignorance of the military way of life, which they usually attributed to their femininity.

However, servicewomen also insisted that they hold on to this femininity, and the second part of this chapter will examine the material culture women employed within their living spaces that conveyed a distinctively feminine style. Greenblatt has also argued that self-fashioning is limited by the larger social and cultural norms that the individual has absorbed—consciously or otherwise—into his or her ways of thinking. Servicewomen seem to have been constructing their identities as soldiers in relationship to what their society said was an appropriate identity for a woman, which included being “homemakers.” After offering a brief history of homemaking from 1900 to 1945 and its significance to American notions of femininity, this chapter will then examine the ways in which women created a “home” for themselves within the military. Evidence demonstrates that servicewomen became excited when they received new furniture and

knickknacks for their rooms. They shared flowers they received from boyfriends or husbands with their roommates. They tossed stuffed animals onto their beds and hung drapes in their common areas. They insisted the corps offer them interior decorating and homemaking classes in addition to courses on typing and mechanical repair. They enjoyed making their military quarters a “home” and even considered it a natural expression of their femininity. Rather than bucking the system and attempting to fashion themselves in opposition to the gender norms of their day, these women seemed to embrace those norms and make efforts to demonstrate—visibly—the ways in which soldiering was compatible with conventional social understandings of “womanhood.”

### **Scuttlebutt and Chow Lines: Wacs and Waves’ Military Identities**

If the WAC and WAVES administrations worked hard to foster both military and feminine identities among their recruits, the women who served in these organizations were quite receptive to their efforts. Like their respective organizational administrations, Wacs and Waves displayed a rather ambivalent attitude toward their newly acquired military identities. Sometimes, women embraced this identity. Katherine K. Toll noted that servicewomen were especially proud to see their service stars, because they “gave them an official standing like that of the men as no other attention could....” However, even the most dedicated Wac or Wave was usually reluctant to forgo her femininity in the name of military duty. For instance, Toll went on to describe the service star of Jay Jay, whose civilian co-workers had put “lace frill around it” and displayed it in her old office.<sup>119</sup> Jay Jay’s lace-fringed service star serves as an exemplary symbol of servicewomen’s dual wartime identities.

---

<sup>119</sup> Katherine Toll. Unpublished Manuscript. Box 13. UNCG Toll Collection.

Women's first foray into their new status as soldiers and sailors usually occurred the first time they donned their uniforms, which will be discussed with great detail in Chapter Three. But adjusting to their new military schedules and routines also proved to be a factor in the development of their military identities as well as a major source of pride – at least early into their basic training days. The majority of the women under study talked about their adjustment to rising between the hours of 5:00 and 6:00 a.m. “Get up at 6,” was a typical comment trainees made when explaining their schedules to those at home.<sup>120</sup> Some, like Wave Janet Muriel Mead, took pleasure in their early morning schedules:

It's been a wonderful day—and it isn't even ended! We started out bright and early by attiring ourselves in our new uniforms, and finishing our rooms for Captain's Inspection. At 6:15, we came to company position in front of our building and then was [sic] inspected-ties, shoe shines, stocking seams, hair, etc.”<sup>121</sup>

Florence Weil wrote to her parents with great sarcasm about how her bed was situated in the far corner of the barracks, which enabled her to sleep until 5:16, or “one minute longer” than her roommates. In another missive, Weil told her parents that “I ‘fall in’ and ‘fall out’ from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. -- and I'm happy when 9:30 p.m. brings lights out so I can ‘fall down’ . . . into bed.”<sup>122</sup> Later, she joyfully jotted down a quick note to her family to let them know the “Good news –

---

<sup>120</sup> Letter from Marcelle Fischer to Mother. December 21, 1942. Box 2. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Fischer Collection. See also, letter from Florence Weil to Parents. October 21, 1942. Box 1. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Weil Collection; Betty Bandel, *An Officer and a Lady: The World War II Letters of Lt. Col. Betty Bandel, Women's Army Corps*, ed. Sylvia J. Bugbee (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2004), 10; and Green, *One Woman's War*, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Mother. August 26, 1944. Box 1. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Mead Collection.

<sup>122</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. October 21, 1942. Box 1. UNCG Weil Collection.

reveille has been put ahead to 6:15 for the winter months,” which allowed for an extra 15 minutes of sleep.<sup>123</sup>

“Busy” quickly became the word most often used in letters home to friends and families. “We surely keep busy!” Wac Carol Goddard wrote to her husband. “I just wish you could see us through one day. Basic training is really rugged! Not an idle moment.”<sup>124</sup> Eleanor House Selzo made a similar observation about fast-paced life in the WAVES, writing, “You know I don’t think I’ll realize that I’m in the Navy, until I get back in to [sic] civilian life again. They really don’t give you time to realize that the change is taking place & then before you know it civilian life is in the past.” Goddard and Selzo were not exaggerating. Whether they were Wacs or Waves, enlisted or officers, women usually arose each day between 5:30 and 6:00 a.m. to stand reveille, then to have breakfast, make beds (which, as Florence Weil noted, was a “military maneuver” in the Army) and clean their bunks; they then attended several different classes—social and personal hygiene, first aid, company administration, military customs and courtesy, and indoctrination among many others.<sup>125</sup> After reading about an average day in the life of his

---

<sup>123</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Mother. October 18, 1942, and letter from Florence Weil to Parents October 1942. Box 1. UNCG Weil Collection. See also letters from Florence Weil to Parents. October 19 and 21, 1942. Box 1. UNCG Weil Collection.

<sup>124</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertin Goddard. November 11, 1944; UNCG Goddard Collection; Digital Project. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Goddard Collection.

<sup>125</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. October 19, 1942. Box 1. UNCG Weil Collection. Letter from Marcelle Fischer to Mother. Box 1. Fischer Collection and letter from Carol Goddard to Bertin Goddard. November 11, 1944; UNCG Goddard Collection.

Wave sister, Charlotte Schuck's brother commented, "I don't see how you have found the time to write so much...."<sup>126</sup>

Women also spoke frequently of practicing military etiquette and exercises. They were often quite pleased with themselves for mastering military maneuvers, such as the proper way to salute, and wrote to their friends and families of their new martial prowess with a sense of pride. Wac Constance Cline hoped that her parents would be able to visit her soon so they could see her snappy salute. "You'd get a kick out of it," she noted with a measure of both modesty and conceit.<sup>127</sup> A few women even looked for opportunities to test out their new skills. While on her first leave in New York City, Wave Joan Angel commented that "I was busy looking up and down Broadway for someone to salute. Although most officers are willing to waive the salutation courtesy in New York to save their arms, new service women usually won't let them."

<sup>128</sup>

Learning to drill, a recurrent topic among the women, could also be a traumatic, exhilarating, or entertaining experience, depending on the participant's point of view. For instance, Anne Bosanko, a young enlisted Wac from Minnesota, wrote, after her first experience with drilling, that "We've started close-order drill and I'm scared to death of all my Sergeants. They all scream at the tops of their lungs and I can't understand a word they say. Ergo, I do

---

<sup>126</sup> Letter from "Bud" to Charlotte Lavone Schuck. April 2, 1943. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>127</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. Undated. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>128</sup> Joan Angel, *Angel of the Navy: The Story of a Wave* (New York, Hastings House, 1943), 101.

everything wrong and get glared at. Very humiliating.”<sup>129</sup> Wave Eleanor House Selzo viewed close order drill in a different light. After a particularly satisfying day of drill, she wrote her sister:

I'ts [sic] so much fun marching in ranks It's [sic] no effort hardly. The cadence seems to make you go and you don't know it. Rather difficult to explain but it feels so good. I hope I get stationed at a base where I can still do that or I will be disappointed.<sup>130</sup>

Janet Muriel Mead took great pride in her drilling experiences. After standing inspection, she informed her mother, “Then we went to mess—our section carrying the Navy E. Was I proud to hup them—Yi! Yi!” Wac Carol Goddard took a similar view, informing her husband “When you march down the street or on the grounds, with flags flying and the band playing you fairly want to strut.”<sup>131</sup>

Women often described their new schedules and routines as “rugged” or even intimidating. However, they usually followed this up with reassurances that they enjoyed – or could at least tolerate – their basic training experiences. The shouting, discipline, and constant cleaning and drilling became, in a word often used by the women under study, “routine.”

Numerous were the complaints about such routine tasks as K.P duty, drilling, and inspections, but most of these women came to love their work. A litany of dissatisfaction usually ended in such upbeat phrases as “but I really love it” or “but I don't wish I were home,” thus reassuring their loved ones that they believed they had made the right decision in joining the WAC or

---

<sup>129</sup> Anne Bosanko Green, *One Woman's War: Letters Home from the Women's Army Corps, 1944-1946* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989), 16.

<sup>130</sup> Letter from Eleanor Elizabeth House Selzo to Jean. Undated. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>131</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrim Goddard. November 25, 1944. UNCG Goddard Collection.

WAVES.<sup>132</sup> Wave Janet Muriel Mead exclaimed, “Mother, I wouldn’t turn back for the world! Some of its bound to be hard, but its [sic] different, thrilling, & quite the life for now,” while Anne Bosanko, who was “scared to death of all [her] Sergeants,” began to relax and enjoy the army. “This is really fun and I love everything,” Bosanko wrote, “once I got over thinking the bawlings-out were aimed straight at *me*.”<sup>133</sup> Even Marcelle Fischer, a Wac who was normally very happy with her work and superiors, became so frustrated that she complained to her mother, “This darn war and army is getting under my skin, almost wish I were a civilian.”<sup>134</sup> But such feelings of irritation and depression usually passed, and the women soon expressed, once again, their happiness with being Wacs. Shortly after wishing for a return to civilian life, Fischer corrected herself and told her mother, “I guess every one [sic] gets despondent at some time. I really don’t think I would be a civilian now if I could. . . .”<sup>135</sup> As might be expected, the majority of these women went through periods of happiness, excitement, frustration, and anger, but overall the tone of their letters remained light and happy, which suggests that they truly were adjusting well to the military.

Servicewomen seemed to enjoy peppering their letters home with military jargon. One of the Waves’ favorite naval expressions was “scuttlebutt,” meaning “rumor,” and this one featured regularly in their own musings, both personal and published.<sup>136</sup> Janet Muriel Mead, Charlotte

---

<sup>132</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. October 1943. Box 2. UNCG Weil Collection; Bandel, *An Officer and a Lady*, 10. See also letters from Florence Weil to Parents. October 19 and 21, 1942 and November 1, 1942. Box 1. UNCG Weil Collection. See also letter from Constance Cline Phillips to Parents. April 17, 1945. Box 1. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>133</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Mother. August 9, 1945. UNCG Mead Collection. Green, *One Woman’s War*, 16, 18.

<sup>134</sup> Letter from Marcelle Fischer to Mother. February 6, 1945. Box 3. UNCG Fischer Collection.

<sup>135</sup> Letter from Marcelle Fischer to Mother. March 9, 1945. Box 3. UNCG Fischer Collection.

<sup>136</sup> A few Wacs, such as Katherine Katopes, were fond of “Latrine Rumor.”

Schuck, and Eleanor House Selzo reported the latest “scuttlebutt” to their families while a play about WAVES even included a character named “Sally Scuttlebutt.”<sup>137</sup> Wave Joan Angel demonstrated her command of naval jargon to her sister after walking into a restaurant and telling the waiter that, ““We’ll sit topside, near the porthole,”” I said, motioning to the little balcony. Beebe again looked at me, completely impressed.”<sup>138</sup> Wacs, too, enjoyed asserting their new identities as members of the armed forces by using military jargon. Constance Cline wrote about the “latrine rumors” she heard, while Catherine Katopes lamented the numerous “gigs” she received for being ill-prepared. Despite these complaints, Katopes’s adoption of military slang – “gigs” as opposed to demerits – is worthy of notice, because it indicates that this woman, like so many of their sisters in arms, was beginning to identify with military culture.

Servicewomen even came up with their own “slanguage,” as a writer for *Collier’s* put it in an article titled “Wac Talk.” The author, identified only as J.A.B., wrote:

Like other Army and Navy personnel the members of the Women’s Army Corps have coined their own slanguage. If you hear a Wac say, “I’m off on an orchid hunt, kids—and no PFC. My night maneuvers are gonna be with a varsity crewman,” you’ll know what she means after you’ve studied this glossary:

The article then gave a long list of vocabulary that allowed to reader to interpret the Wac’s statement as:

I’m off on furlough (orchid hunt), kids – and no Pray For a Corporal (PFC). My dates (night maneuvers) are gonna be with a naval officer (varsity crewman).<sup>139</sup>

Some women also seemed to enjoy using language as a means of pointing out the differences between their military selves and their civilian friends and families. Waves Eleanor House Selzo

---

<sup>137</sup> See letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Family. September 1944. UNCG Mead Collection; letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. February 4, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection; letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. Undated Letter. UNCG Selzo Collection; and letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Jean. Undated Letter. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>138</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 101.

<sup>139</sup> “Wac Talk,” *Collier’s*. April 8, 1944: 61.

wrote her mother that “We had to stencil our names all over our “gear” (junk to you)” while Shirley Tillson noted, “We were let out of school at 1430 today (2:30 to you). . . .”<sup>140</sup> Wac Carol Goddard time-stamped a letter to her husband as “21:00” and then proceeded to ask him if he could make heads or tails of “Army time.” Just in case he could not, she informed him it was 9:00 pm.<sup>141</sup>

Contrary to popular public predictions about featherbrained women in military service, the majority of the women in this study took their work in the corps quite seriously. Many viewed their time in basic training as a rite of passage through which they had to pass in order to become real U.S. soldiers. For instance, Betty Bandel, who worked as an aide to Colonel Hobby, the first director of the WAAC, never referred to Hobby as “Colonel” when discussing her in letters. Bandel revealed that, although she admired Hobby, she did not view Hobby as a soldier in the same way she did those who had come up through the ranks, because Hobby never went through basic training.<sup>142</sup> However, Bandel’s views are indicative of more than just the idea of basic training as a rite of passage. She did not see Hobby as a soldier, and this is an insight that suggests that Bandel had begun to view herself in a different light. Other Wacs in this study seemed to have shared Bandel’s views regarding Hobby, if to a somewhat more hostile degree. After a day of difficult manual labor, Marcelle Fischer wrote her family:

It really makes me mad when I think of them giving Hobby a Legion of Merit Award while we slave – then to top it off – they had a meeting of WAC commanders, and she told them that the girls could not bowl in public, or no boys basket ball [sic] rules but we

---

<sup>140</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. Undated. UNCG Selzo Collection and letter from Shirley Tillson to Family. January 25, 1945. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Tillson Collection.

<sup>141</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrin Goddard. Undated. UNCG Goddard Collection.

<sup>142</sup> Bandel, *An Officer and a Lady*, 193.

are strong enough to tend fires for three barracks and mess hall & officers quarters – which is a dam heavy job [sic].<sup>143</sup>

Florence Weil was also expressed irritation with Hobby, if in a somewhat more sarcastic manner. She kept referring to Hobby as “Her Dignity” in a letter home describing the extra work and general pandemonium she had to deal with as she prepared for Hobby to review her troops.

Florence Weil made numerous references to herself as a soldier in many letters to her family, culminating in one exuberant statement, “At this late stage in my life, I have found myself.”<sup>144</sup> Weil’s letters are also sprinkled with comments such as “I think I’m going to like this army” and “It’s the military life for me!,” thus demonstrating her commitment to and love for her new life.<sup>145</sup> Weil was not alone in her feelings of commitment. Bandel noted in several letters that she was proud to be in the service of her country, as did her fellow Wac, Carol Goddard. Indeed, despite her husband’s complaints about missing her terribly and his occasional request that she leave the WAC as soon as possible, Goddard never once mentioned a desire to leave the corps before the war was over. She frequently told her husband how much she missed him, but her morale remained high, and she enthusiastically reported on the fascinating classes she attended, the wonderful new friends she had met, and the pride she felt in “doing my part.”<sup>146</sup>

However, it is Wave Shirley Tillson and Wac Catherine Katopes who perhaps serve as the best examples of how well women adjusted to military life and identified as soldiers and

---

<sup>143</sup> Fischer to Parents 020, FEB 25, 1945:

<sup>144</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. October 1942. Box 1. UNCG Weil Collection.

<sup>145</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. October 18, 1942. Box 1. UNCG Weil Collection.

<sup>146</sup> Bandel, *An Officer and a Lady*, 9, 10, 11; letter from Florence Weil to Parents. October 19, 1942. Box 1. UNCG Weil Collection; letter from Florence Weil to Parents. October 1942. Box 1. UNCG Weil Collection; letter from Catherine Katopes to November 20, 1943. UNCG Katopes Collection; Digital Project; letter from Carol Goddard to Bertin Goddard. Undated. UNCG Goddard Collection; Digital Project.

sailors. Tillson, who must have considered herself a veteran sailor, felt compelled to give her civilian parents advice on how to treat her brother who was soon to come home on leave:

I don't think civilians quite realize how much we expect of them once we've returned home. They don't realize it, but really, people at home expect us to be right back into a normal everyday life, take suggestions, orders, etc. as we used to & not resent having people take us for granted. ... [W]hat I'm getting at is this, if & when Ken comes home ... please, please don't suggest or plan anything for him, nor discourage anything he wants to do or check up in any way on what he does – we've been away a long while & had to answer to no one as long as we kept within the Navy requirements of which there are many we know by heart. To have someone (fairly?) standing over you to guide each step after being responsible in both large and small things all thru the Navy is very bewildering & aggravating.<sup>147</sup>

Katopes became so comfortable in her role as a soldier that she began to offer her brother, who was also enlisted in the Army, advice on how to handle the difficulties of military life. “I don't know how you go about your work but here are pieces of advice that I have learned from observing WACs at work,” Katopes explained to her brother.

[Wacs] are just the same as soldiers and their minds work the same way.... One is that a little griping is only natural to a soldier. In your griping, however, never make fun of anyone or belittle them.... Do whatever job you have with willingness and immediately. Be alert about it. You may not think so but it is all noticed.<sup>148</sup>

Both Tillson and Katopes clearly identified as military personnel and understood, or believed that they understood, the politics of military life.

Once servicewomen finished training and got to work, they spoke regularly about their jobs with pride. Wave Shirley Tillson noted with pleasurable anticipation:

We are destined to start school on Monday; hope that is correct for this hanging around doing all the dirty work on the base is getting monotonous. Suppose I should be glad we have more free time than anyone else but I like to be busy at something I like & I do believe I'll like this work. I'll no doubt be here for the duration, so I'd better!!!!<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> Letter from Shirley Tillson to Parents. January 17, 1945. UNCG Tillson Collection.

<sup>148</sup> Letter from Catherine Katopes to Family. November 20, 1943. UNCG Katopes Collection; Digital Project.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from Shirley Tillson to Family. January 3, 1945. UNCG Tillson Collection.

Wave Marie Cody included a long and detailed explanation for why she put in for a transfer to Alaska or Hawaii:

I've been awfully contented in my work and feel that both the Navy and I have gained a lot in the past two years. I've given my job all I've got and, in return, have received that peculiar thrill of self-satisfaction in seeing a job rise from infancy to a well-working, efficient system under your hard work. That job is now set-up, becoming routine - so the "grass looks greener" over in Hawaii, or my first preference - Alaska. The same kind of work - on a smaller scale - is at both places, waiting for someone to do it.<sup>150</sup>

Wave Eleanor House Selzo also expressed satisfaction in a new job that she found particularly gratifying:

This week I've been taking one of the girls' [sic] jobs who is on leave. I wish it were mine it's really swell. Handle the fellows with questions concerning special pay & allotments. I hate to think of going back to doing nothing when she returns.... It's the kind of job I've been wanting.... Maybe someday I'll get another crack at it, I hope.<sup>151</sup>

Wacs Anne Bosanko, Constance Cline, and Florence Weil also wrote regularly about their work. Bosanko enjoyed her work at the Beaumont Hospital in Texas, where she worked as a surgical technician and assisted doctors and nurses in the operating room. She took particular pride in perfecting her injection technique, which she practiced upon a patient who was "most noble and doesn't complain."<sup>152</sup> Cline, who also worked at a hospital, wrote frequently of the new medical procedures and techniques she learned to her family. She even included a drawing of how properly to X-ray a skull in a letter to her mother. Florence Weil also enjoyed her work at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia where she acted as a platoon commander. "I'm busier than ever ... but I

---

<sup>150</sup> Letter from Marie Cody to Don. March 14, 1945. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Cody Collection.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother and Jean. August 29, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>152</sup> Green, *One Woman's War*, xviii.

love it,” she cheerfully informed her parents. “[W]e got thrown right into the thick of it.... But it’s so gratifying to mold green civilians into soldiers.”<sup>153</sup>

Other women found their work stressful or they simply disliked it. Wave Charlotte Schuck did both. When she had to count men’s service points, Schuck worried that if she miscalculated, some of the men would not be allowed to go home as soon as they should. She also expressed dissatisfaction with her other job as a court reporter.<sup>154</sup> She was not alone in complaining about her work assignments. From time to time, women would express their irritation and discontent with doing work they considered useless. Wave Katherine K. Toll must have written to a friend about just such a sense of frustration, for in a return letter he wrote, “I understand that you are not overenthusiastic with your military duties which seem to be somewhat monotonous. ... Tollo,” he went on to assure her, “that is the fate of most soldiers. There is much monotony in every army. I can assure you of that.” Virgilia Williams also considered her work as a storeroom clerk monotonous and rather useless, especially after having served on a hospital ward, which, she lamented, “... was the only time I’ve felt the least bit worthwhile in the Navy & did learn something every day [sic].” Toward the end of the war, Wac Anne Bosanko was transferred from her beloved job as an operating technician at Beaumont Hospital in El Paso, Texas, to a new position as an occupational therapy technician at Halloran General Hospital in New York. Bosanko was quite disappointed by this transfer and vented her anger in a letter home. “I told you, didn’t I, that Wacs aren’t allowed to scrub anymore? I’m mad in a way, but mostly I just don’t give a damn. I have become a shameless GB

---

<sup>153</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. January 29, 1943. Box 2, and Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. January 31, 1943. Box 2. UNCG Weil Collection.

<sup>154</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. October 10, 1945. UNCG Schuck Collection.

(Goldbrick).<sup>155</sup> Wave Janet Muriel Mead wrote, “I dislike my new job intensely,” while Wave Nan Nabors engaged in the soldier’s and sailor’s age-old right to complain about work, telling a friend that, “[t]his is a lovely day! [...] But I am tired. It is Saturday – I am not used to working on Saturdays.... And tomorrow I stand duty all day in WAVE barracks. Mean I work 13 consecutive days from 8 until 5:30. But,” she concluded stoically, “I am rugged, and I can take it.” When the war ended, Nabors said,

I am grateful that the war is won – and I shall be glad to be a civilian again – but I have never ... been sorry to have joined the service. Not even when the going was most rugged. I have had the opportunities given service men and women – and I have met interesting and lovely people.<sup>156</sup>

Nabors spoke for so many of her compatriots as she conveyed a sense of comfort in her new military life, gratitude at the experiences made possible by military service, and even pride in her identity as a sailor.

More so than any other factor, women expressed pride and pleasure in the praise of men. After marching in public for the first time, Wave Janet Muriel Mead told her mother, “Today 2 sailors said, when our section marched by – ‘They sure are okay, aren’t they!’ When you hear a sailor make a comment like that, it does more good than hearing the Captain say – ‘ship shape.’”<sup>157</sup> Upon her arrival in Hawaii, Lillian Pimlott reported:

I cannot begin to relay to you what it means to me to be here among so much activity, to see and know so much more of what is going on, to meet the fellows and to appreciate

---

<sup>155</sup> Green, *One Woman’s War*, xix.

<sup>156</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Family. June 17, 1945. UNCG Mead Collection; letter from Nan Nabors to Pauline. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Nabors Collection. Letter from Nan Nabors to Pauline Walker. August 16, 1945. UNCG Nabors Collection.

<sup>157</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Mother. August 26, 1944. UNCG Mead Collection.

their feelings, their attitudes, and their ambitions, and to be a part of the Pacific ocean area myself.<sup>158</sup>

In another missive, Pimlott also commented with some pleasure after a male superior officer “reassure[d] me of the reputation I’ve earned on the station. Coming from him, as blunt and frank, as he is, it’s doubly complimentary. Needless to say, I’m thrilled!”<sup>159</sup> Catherine Katopes had stated at one point that when she first arrived at her Tennessee post, “there was a feeling of not being wanted” from the men with whom she worked. However, as more men got ready to be shipped overseas, “the Wacs have been in great demand.” Katopes wrote with amusement, “They really began to sit up and take notice of them because they wanted Wacs to fill some of the places and there weren’t enough to go around.”<sup>160</sup>

Women also took pleasure in the more playful, but no less positive, gestures men made toward women in the service. Wac Dorothy Coughlin, a friend of Catherine Katopes, reported, with pleasure, that the men at Fort Lewis, Washington were quite receptive to women in uniform. “It sure is funny to see fellows standing outside waited [sic] for us to come. It sure is a lot different than Oglethorpe,” Coughlin wrote, “The fellows here act as if they are glad we are here. That makes us feel swell.”<sup>161</sup> Giving her mother a recounting of a WAVES program celebrating their third anniversary, Lillian Pimlott gushed:

One entirely spontaneous and unplanned attraction was the serenading of the WAVE audience with “Happy Birthday” by a sizable gathering of male Marines restrained by the

---

<sup>158</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. May 21, 1945. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>159</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. January 21, 1944. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>160</sup> Letter from Catherine Katopes to Virginia ? March 21, 1944. UNCG Katopes collection; Digital Project.

<sup>161</sup> Letter from Dorothy Coughlin to Catherine Katopes. February 19, 1944. UNCG Katopes Collection; Digital Project.

high fence which holds them off from the enlisted quarters and who had spent the evening enjoying the program at bay!<sup>162</sup>

Eleanor House Selzo also shared a colorful anecdote with her mother regarding a pilot practicing maneuvers near the WAVES camp. “Yesterday there was another Navy plane sweeping down over our roof. Caused everyone to run for they thought he’d land on the roof!” The pilot returned later while the women were mustering and “tipped his wings to us, greeting us. Wasn’t that nice?”<sup>163</sup>

Servicewomen understood that some men felt threatened by their presence in the military, which helps to explain why women experienced such pleasure at hearing men’s positive comments. They also enjoyed knowing that their presence simulated men’s sexual attraction toward them, thus indicating that their femininity had not been diminished and that servicemen still viewed them as desirable women. Charlotte Schuck noted with delight that a male officer collecting information on life in the WAVES told her, “[Ensign Montgomery, his guide] was good looking and he was kiddin’ her a little, I guess. Ha! It’s just like those fellows,” while Eleanor House Selzo gleefully reported, “Just thousands of boots [men] just marched by & they waved to us. The kids are at the windows laughing. It’s very amusing. They haven’t seen girls in quite a while!”<sup>164</sup> After moving to a new post in Loury Field, Colorado, Wac Bernice Moran told a friend, with good-natured exasperation, “I believe every man on the Field came around to look us over.” Whenever the women were marched to and from meals, male non-coms ordered

---

<sup>162</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. August 8, 1945. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>163</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. Saturday 04:15, [1943]. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>164</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. January 29, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection; and letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. February 27, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

their men, standing in formation, “eyes right” or “eyes left,” which gave the men another opportunity to ogle Moran and her fellow soldiers.<sup>165</sup>

Female service personnel were particularly welcome overseas, where the men rarely saw American women. A WAC friend of Catherine Katopes stayed several days on the island of Biak as she made her way to the Philippines and noted, “The boys were so glad to have us around, they treated us like queens. Jeep rides, steak fries [sic], swimming, movies, dancing—they’d come to the gate of the compound in droves. No matter what you wanted to do, there was someone there with the facilities.”<sup>166</sup> Mildred Estabrook, who was stationed in France, noted, “It sure is a problem for girls to get their rest here, they sure have more dates than they can handle.”<sup>167</sup> Even in Hawaii, soldiers and sailors welcomed servicewomen. Violet, a friend and fellow Wave of Mary Ellen West, noted, “Right now we are quite the attraction the fellows all stare at us & ask where we are from.”<sup>168</sup>

Relationships with servicemen were not, however, always so lighthearted. Occasionally, women’s military service put a damper on romantic relations between men and women. Looking forward to overseas duty in Hawaii, Marie Cody complained, “There is a very strong possibility that we will not leave here until June 15<sup>th</sup>, instead of May 15<sup>th</sup>, as originally planned. Some Admiral out there in the Pacific is still putting up a strong argument as to why American

---

<sup>165</sup> Letter from Bernice Moran Miller to Herbert Miller. February 1943. Women Veterans Historical Collection; Digital Project; Jackson Library; The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. <<http://library.uncg.edu/depts/archives/veterans/MillerBltr1.html>> (retrieved August 9, 2005). Hereafter UNCG Miller Collection.

<sup>166</sup> Letter from Catherine Katopes to Georgie ?. June 24, 1945. UNCG Katopes Collection.

<sup>167</sup> Mildred Estabrook to Marcelle Fisher. May 27, 1945. Box 3. UNCG Fischer Collection.

<sup>168</sup> Letter from Violet ? to Mary Ellen West. January 29, 1944. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG West Collection.

womanhood should not invade the Islands – darn clown!” She then proceeded to ask her soon-to-be fiancé, Don, “You don’t agree with him, or do you?” Apparently Don did, for Cody later wrote:

Among you, some dear friends of mine here in D.C., and my mother (not to mention an ensign in the Pacific) and my friends (?) in the office, I withdrew my application for overseas duty. Surprised? I’m not exactly happy over my reversal but it made too many unhappy.<sup>169</sup>

Cody checked her own professional desires rather than suffer the loss of her fiancé’s approval, but other women were not so yielding. After a fellow Wave never heard from a boyfriend again, Katherine K. Toll posited, “There is the possibility that he realized what the WAVES were and decided that he didn’t like the matter and finis.... It rather looks as tho’ he was among the ones who had no use for WAACs and WAVES if they were his friends.”<sup>170</sup> Wacs occasionally experienced similar problems, as evidenced by a friend of Anne Bosanko. Her husband divorced her after she joined the WAC.

Servicewomen also commented intermittently on the disagreeable confrontations they had with disgruntled male service personnel while at work. Wac Catherine Katopes noted that at first “there was a feeling of not being wanted,” while a letter from Florence Weil to her parents shows the awkwardness some women felt about having to deal with men on a professional level. Weil stated that it was embarrassing to have men salute her, though she was convinced that “the quicker [Wacs] get on our real job, the faster [the men’s] sentiments will turn.”<sup>171</sup> Katherine K. Toll revealed that Waves, too, experienced problems regarding “... that persistent old burr-like question, saluting ... to men who are obviously avoiding your eye,-- the list of complications is

---

<sup>169</sup> Letter from Marie Cody to Don ?. April 20, 1945. UNCG Cody Collection; and letter from Marie Cody to Don ?. May 3, 1945. UNCG Cody Collection.

<sup>170</sup> Letter from Louise ? to Katherine Toll. February 7, 1943. Box 1. UNCG Toll Collection.

<sup>171</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. February 10, 1943. Box 2. UNCG Weil Collection, and letter from Catherine Katopes to Virginia ? March 21, 1944. UNCG Katopes Collection; Digital Project.

always endless....”<sup>172</sup> Shirley Tillson relayed a more humorous story about the conflict between Navy women and men in a letter to her family:

A funny thing happened one night to one of the girls. She was in a restaurant & a sailor came up to her as she was leaning on the table & said “You know, you’re full of s- - - to have joined the Navy!” Of course, she instantly became angry; without really thinking she took her left fist & hit him straight in the face with it, knocked him over a table nearby & out cold! She said it happened so quickly she hardly realized what occurred & felt rather silly with everyone staring at her.<sup>173</sup>

Wave Lillian Pimlott seemed to have particular difficulties with a few of the men in her office. She wrote to her mother on more than one occasion about her war with the opposite sex. In a letter dated January 21, 1944, Pimlott wrote about confronting a fellow serviceman:

I told him off caring little about his ... stripes at that point, and I’ve made life easier for every girl in that office.... Anyway, Charlie has certainly gone out of his way to be polite since, so everybody is happy. It’s the only way – have it out and over with. The dickens with beating around the bush! And I’ll not be pushed around by any of them!

Pimlott let her mother know that not all men posed problems, stating, “[Charlie] isn’t liked by most of the men – one of those aggressive insurance salesmen” and “both Bill R. and Sully backed me up. Bill, incidentally, thinks I am entitled to the greatest of consideration & respect and won’t let anybody disregard this right....”<sup>174</sup> Still, she continued to experience difficulties in the office and objected after she did not receive a promotion that would put her as head of administration:

Well, I am not to head administration. What next! I was quite against it. Sully thinks I can handle the situation and Bill says he’ll see me through if it means doing WAVE work in his apt. till 2 o’clock in the morning. Can you imagine it! Well, I told him they can’t push me around as they’re doing with Peg. I’m in to do a job – there’s a job to be done and if I can’t do it here I’ll ask to go somewhere else.<sup>175</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Katherine Toll. Unpublished Manuscript. Box 13. UNCG Toll Collection.

<sup>173</sup> Letter from Shirley Tillson to Family. January 3, 1945. UNCG Tillson Collection.

<sup>174</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. January 21, 1944. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>175</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. February 5, 1944. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

Shortly thereafter, Pimlott followed through on her threat and was relocated to Hawaii. Nan Nabors, yet another Wave, perhaps best summed up the tensions between male and female service personnel when she wrote unhappily:

I am thinking of taking leave now – provided I manage to get to stay in the Navy for a few more months. I would not hesitate to ask for retention if I liked my job better. It isn't my job but the difficulty I have getting along with the men who are over me. It's the age old struggle for women to be treated fairly as careers. In the Navy the fight can be pretty hard – for it is a man's Navy – and some men are jealous of Waves.

Nabors went on to record that, “And my bosses – little squirts – I do believe – are jealous of my degrees.”<sup>176</sup>

Although some servicewomen were able to overlook the “age old struggle” to which Nan Nabors referred, others seemed rather uncomfortable with and even embarrassed at their position within the military. Servicewomen were aware that many civilians, in addition to servicemen, regarded women's military service as peculiar at best and perverse at worst. American society coded military service as masculine, and these women, through their military service, were engaging in a major gender transgression. The press hounded both Fort Des Moines and Hunter College as the first contingencies of Wacs and Waves arrived, reporting on every step and misstep the women took. But rather than allowing these mistakes to be aired out in the public like so much dirty laundry, servicewomen often called attention to them on their own and chalked their errors up to their feminine ineptitude. Take for example, Betty Bandel's first experience with the salute. As she was walking about the post with a couple of her friends, “four officers passed us & saluted!” Neither Bandel nor her friends had been instructed in the salute yet and did not know what to do so they simply ignored the officers. Bandel acknowledged that

---

<sup>176</sup> Letter from Nan Nabors to Pauline Walker. November 18, 1945. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

this was a gross breach of military etiquette, but “[The officers] seemed to think it was funny, & could not resist smiling.”<sup>177</sup>

Servicewomen employed laughter as a coping mechanism to reduce or stave off social criticism and they pointed specifically to their femininity as the culprit behind their, and others’, military missteps. Betty Bandel, a WAC officer, was amused by her initial experiences with male enlisted soldiers. She recalled the enlisted men as being very cheerful, if somewhat perplexed, about how to communicate with female officer candidates. “The place is filled with grinning sergeants, corporals, and privates, who are more or less in charge of us,” Bandel wrote to her mother upon her arrival at Fort Des Moines. “I asked one sergeant about my bags, and he said ‘Yes sir, ma’am, I’ll check up on that.’”<sup>178</sup> Amy Rirch, a civilian friend to WAAC

Marcelle Fischer, related a “corker of a WAAC story” to Fischer:

Well it seemed that a hard boiled Army [sic] Sergeant had the WAAC’S out drilling them and after a rest period said “ATTENTION\* INSPECTION – STRIP TO THE WAIST’, now of course one of the modest ladies . . . stepped out and said she was complaining to the Lieut. She did, said the Lieut. “What the HELL’S the matter with that Sergeant.” Yes I said INSPECTION but I told him to INSPECT YOUR KITS”.<sup>179</sup>

Humor was one way of showing support to the servicewomen, and Fischer, who was constantly making jokes of her own regarding the female soldiers and the women’s corps, no doubt found some comfort in her friend’s jests.<sup>180</sup>

Laughing at women’s military service, and especially the blunders they made on account of their femininity, reduced the threat women’s military service posed to the established gender

---

<sup>177</sup> Bandel, *An Officer and a Lady*, 9

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>179</sup> Letter from Amy Rirsh to Fischer August 14, 1942. Box 1. UNCG Fischer Collection.

<sup>180</sup> For example in a February 4, 1943 letter to Miss Herzog, Fischer teased, “The girls range from the old sea-hags to young battle axes who have all joined the army to hook some poor unsuspecting, crosseyed [sic], buck-toothed, chubby, cross-kneed soldier.”

hierarchy. Moreover, by calling attention to their martial mistakes in a humorous manner, servicewomen acknowledged, personally, the curiousness of their presence in the military while at the same time assuring society at large that military service would not hinder their femininity. On the contrary, their femininity just might hinder their military service. Joan Riviere has suggested in “Womanliness as Masquerade” that women who participate in masculine activities will sometimes adopt overly feminine gestures as a means of compensating for their gender offenses. “Womanliness” or “femininity” becomes a mask women assume to avoid social criticism for their masculine behavior. Wac Betty Bandel adopted just such a mask of femininity in recounting her incompetence at drilling, noting, “The company got so mixed up that a young lieutenant, unable to swear in our presence, reached down & pulled up handfuls of grass.” In leading up to the actual drill event, Bandel recounted how hurried she felt all morning, especially as she attempted to get dressed. Reveille was called at 6:00 A.M., just as she was “getting [her] hair brushed out at its wildest...” A friend then hurriedly pinned it up “in one horrible mess” so she could rush down to fall in for Reveille. Bandel also noted that they had not yet received their uniforms, so all of the women’s military maneuvers were taking place in civilian dress. As she described the women’s failed attempts to engage in the masculine activity of drill, Bandel was drawing attention to the fact that the women’s femininity inhibited their adjustment to military order. Equally important, she informed the reader that the drill sergeant, also ever-mindful of the women’s femininity, was unable to treat these women in the same manner as he would men and thus resorted to throwing fistfuls of grass rather than shouting obscenities. The reader is indeed more inclined to laugh at the image of high-heeled girls “playing soldier” while the real thing tore at the ground in frustration, than to be outraged that these women would dare to march as men.

This masquerade of femininity is even more evident in a play written by and for Waves. The play recounts four fictional recruits' experiences during their boot training at Hunter College, marking the transition of these civilians into sailors. However, it is not an easy transition, as these four women often find their femininity getting in the way of navy life. The first scene sets the stage for the rest of the play. A random group of nine new recruits are attempting to drill for the first time—and making more mistakes than not. For instance, after hearing the Bosun shout, “Pull up the dress quickly,” one woman, “with a puzzled but obedient face, doubles over her skirt at the waist band. There is a fleeting glimpse of red woolies.” The other women fare no better.

This sort of comedy is carried over to the next scene, where the audience finally meets the four major characters, each of whom hails from a different region of the country and brings her own brand of feminine ignorance. Sarah Camille (Sugar) is a debutante out of Georgia who has packed nine bags, including a new ruffled bedspread and a pair of lovebirds. Prudence Pennyworth, a New Englander, is well educated, snobbish, and has filled her bags with books. Peg Gordon is a glamorous New Yorker who has joined the WAVES out of boredom and intends to have “two ensigns at every port by Christmas....” Augusta Wind is an innocent who hails from Texas and has brought along a saddle to remind her of her family and “the cows” while she is off in the big city. The rest of the play follows the women through basic training and recounts the numerous mistakes they make on account of their femininity. By the end of the play, however, the four Waves receive their permanent assignments, and the audience is reminded of just how important these women are to the war effort.

This play captures perfectly the rather uncertain relationship women had with their military identity. Our heroines exhibit patriotism, discipline, intelligence, and dedication—all of

which were qualities the country needed in its time of crisis. By the end of the play, the women have emerged as sailors on a mission to bring the war to an end. The message reminded the audience that women were both capable of and needed in military service. However, the audience never forgets that their heroines are women. Throughout the play, the women are placed into situations that accentuate their femininity, often in a comedic manner. For instance, while awaiting a Captain's inspection, a girl comes wandering by in a bathrobe and red shower cap. Her singing can be heard as the inspection proceeds. In another scene, the women have only a few moments before it is "lights out," and Peg desperately tries to finish pin curling her hair. She fails and must complete the job in the dark, pretending to snore when the M.D. comes in for bed check. Sugar desperately tries to cram her beauty creams and makeup into her pockets during a fire drill, while Augusta, more often than not, appears as a lost little girl in constant need of motherly advice. All of them express dismay when Sally Scuttlebutt passes along the rumor that Waves must now wear only Tangee lipstick—an announcement that would upset only a woman. It is as if the Wave authors felt compelled to apologize for their participation in this most masculine occupation and emphasized their femininity in order to hide their gender indiscretions.

Riviere's interpretation of womanliness as masquerade goes only so far to explain satisfactorily why servicewomen continued to perform femininity even as they lived and worked in a masculine environment. One of the major problems with Riviere's theory is that she fails to account for the possible pleasure women took in their feminine masquerade. Riviere's women exist purely for the pleasure of male spectators and become passive victims of a patriarchal society that denies them any agency. Indeed, feminist theorist Mary Ann Doane has pointed out that Riviere's womanly masquerade is not "a joyful or affirmative play but ... an anxiety-ridden

compensatory gesture, ... a position which is potentially disturbing, uncomfortable, and inconsistent, as well as psychically painful for the woman.”<sup>181</sup> Evidence suggests that servicewomen did take pleasure in acting like “women.” Many of them embraced their femininity and insisted that the military make room for it. This is particularly evident in the various ways in which servicewomen created a “home” for themselves within the barracks.

### **A Brief History of Homemaking from the Late 1800s to the Mid-1940s**

“Make every room a cheerful room to live in with these crisp, lovely, Sheernet curtains,” reads a Harmony House advertisement in a 1940s Sears catalog. The ad goes on to explain that the curtain’s “organdy-crisp finish” will last even after multiple washings and that the material requires very little ironing. “Think what a saving of time and energy for the busy homemaker,” the advertisement declares. There is nothing particularly special or unique about this advertisement. In fact, it is likely that thousands of World War II era women viewed many other curtain advertisements very similar in imagery and text to this one. However, this advertisement is an important piece of evidence that speaks to American society’s expectations regarding the proper career for women throughout World War II: the homemaker.

The terms “house” and “home” are often used interchangeably, but there is an important difference between a “house” and a “home.” A “house” is a physical structure with four sides and a roof that provides shelter to the occupants from the natural elements. A “home,” however, represents the emotional relationship between an individual and a family with the space that they share. Anyone can have a house, but a real home must be made. To be sure, a sexual division of labor that assigned women responsibility for domestic tasks has a long history, dating back to the

---

<sup>181</sup> Mary Ann Doane, “Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator,” *Discourse* 11 (Fall-Winter 1988-89): 47.

colonial period in North American and long before within European culture. But by the antebellum period, the idea that domestic tasks were inherently feminine had been amplified: “women’s work” was not merely what had been assigned to them by tradition, but instead, it was thought to be central to woman’s identity itself. Women did not *do* domestic tasks; they were, *by nature*, domestic. The historian Barbara Welter defined this social phenomenon as “the cult of domesticity” in her enormously influential essay of the same name. She went on to argue that Victorian Americans believed women’s attentions to their homes and families were not only an important social function but also a means by which women could fulfill their natural feminine desires.

Though the cult of domesticity emerged during the antebellum period, the idea of domesticity as naturally feminine still held sway over the American consciousness as World War II approached. Although first wave feminism had swept the country and many women pushed their way out of the domestic sphere and into the public, but most Americans still viewed homemaking as the ideal occupation for women. In her book, *Housework and Housewives: Married to the Mop*, cultural historian Jessamyn Neuhaus has examined the depiction of housework and various products for completing housework in American advertising from the late nineteenth century to the present. She concludes that these advertisements successfully gendered housework as feminine within the American cultural consciousness and amplified the idea that housework was crucial to the housewife’s process of homemaking. Neuhaus also demonstrates that while the reality of American homemakers’ appearances and experiences obviously varied within and throughout this timeframe, the cultural ideal of the homemaker was limited to that of a white, middle-class, slender, and attractive wife and mother who spent her

day creating a clean and comfortable environment for her family.<sup>182</sup> This description is certainly true for the period of the early to mid-1940s. For instance, an ad for Armstrong's Linogloss Wax showcases the smiling white face of middle-class woman who changed her "occupation from 'Secretary' to 'Housewife'" and used the product to make her floors look "spick-and-span." A Johnson's Wax advertisement showed a well-coiffed and smartly aproned white woman grinning as she polished her stair banister and waxed her wood floors. In each advertisement, attractive white women are depicted as happily making a lovely middle-class home for their families through their housework. Such portrayals reaffirmed in the American cultural consciousness the relationship between "women" and "home" as well as linking "homemaking" with women's love and care for their families.

However, these pretty, ivory-complexioned homemakers did more than just clean their suburban dwellings as an expression of devotion to their families; they also decorated them. Cultural historian Marilyn Ferris Motz has noted that women have often used home decorations as a medium for displaying the family's middle- to upper-class social status as well as the woman's knowledge of what is currently fashionable and her skills at incorporating these fashions into her home. "Home decoration may thus serve a practical function in providing a display of the family's wealth and its ability to follow current design trends," Motz states.<sup>183</sup> Home decoration also allowed women to create an aesthetically pleasing environment where their families could find a sanctuary from the anxieties of the outside world. For this, too, was a vital duty of the homemaker, including the 1940s homemaker. *Ladies Home Journal* dedicated a

---

<sup>182</sup> Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Housework and Housewives in American Advertising: Married to the Mop* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) ?.

<sup>183</sup> Marilyn Ferris Motz, introduction to *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women & Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1949*, ed. Marilyn Ferris Motz & Pat Browne (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 4.

portion of their magazine to interior design and featured regular articles that offered advice on how women could spruce up their homes. Henrietta Murdock, interior decorator editor of the journal, encouraged women who had “a treasure in china or porcelain which might provide a decorative scheme for a room in your home” to use them:

An old sugar bowl with a spray of morning-glories was the inspiration for one of the most charming dining rooms I have ever seen. Another grew out of a sixty-year-old platter with a border of graceful ivy leaves. If you are not lucky enough to have inherited a ceramic treasure, you can still have such a room by buying one of the delightful and inexpensive reproductions to be found in almost any store, and borrowing its colors.

Murdock then offered a detailed narrative of how a Della Robbia plate inspired the decorative scheme for her dining room.<sup>184</sup> Advertisements, too, linked décor with domestic duty. Pequotes encouraged *Ladies Home Journal* readers to “Stock up your shelves now, with crisp, smooth, snowy Pequotes. Spread your beds with sheets that will fill your heart with housewifely pride ...,” while a Cannon towel advertisement told women, “If your bedrooms are feminine in feeling, give the bath a Victorian flower-touch with this Cannon matched set of bath towel, face towel, wash cloth, bath mat.” Interestingly, the ad features only a small illustration in the upper left-corner showing off a bathroom with matching Cannon merchandise. A little girl taking a bath is the major focal point, however, and the copy opens with, “When this little water-flower steps from the tub, she’ll walk straight into the big warm welcome of a Cannon towel ... a towel almost as pretty as she is!” The ad links a woman’s responsibility to decorate her home with her responsibility to care for her child and give both an equal footing. Occasionally, companies’

---

<sup>184</sup> Henrietta Murdock, “Why Not Have a Della Robbia Dining Room?,” *Ladies Home Journal*, February 1939 edition, 29.

combined a housewife's duty to clean and decorate her home. Johnson's Wax informed women that a coating of their product left floors "beautiful always – free from scuff marks and wear" and that a little wax on their marble surfaces made "for easy cleaning."<sup>185</sup> Each of these advertisements and stories encouraged women are encouraged to buy specific products that will make a "house" feel like a "home." Moreover, these advertisements and stories suggest that these "domestic impulses" are a natural expression of femininity, thus confirming what the public had already concluded regarding women's proper position in American society. The real American woman, by virtue of her femininity, belonged in a house that only she could make into a home.

### **Domestic Material Culture**

While in training, neither Wacs nor Waves were allowed to venture too far from military regulation in terms of décor, and they occasionally voiced their discontent. Wave Joan Angel described her room at Iowa State Teacher's College:

The room was bare as a cell. Two unmade double-deckers, their springs showing, were up against the blank walls. There was one dresser with mirror, two wooden chairs, two closets, a medicine-cabinet, and a GI wastebasket. The windows had no curtains—just shades. The floor had no rug—just boards. ... So this was home! My heart sank."<sup>186</sup>

Wac Florence Weil called her barracks "beautiful ... if it doesn't rain or snow," while her fellow Wac Constance Cline took her barren barracks in stride and simply counted herself lucky that she had a single bed along with "a closet cupboard and a rack for my clothes."<sup>187</sup> As Carol

---

<sup>185</sup> Pequot's Advertisement, *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1939, 33; Cannon Towel Ad, *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1939, 40.

<sup>186</sup> Angel, *Angle of the Navy*, 35-36.

<sup>187</sup> Letter from Constance Cline Phillips to Parents. Undated letter. UNCG Phillips Collection.

Goddard became more accustomed to Army life, she wrote, “Our barracks is beginning to seem like home now, though it is a far cry from my cozy little home on College Hill, of course.”<sup>188</sup>

However, once the women were assigned to their permanent posts, they had more freedom to decorate their living spaces as they desired. Many enlisted women continued to share their living spaces with large groups of other women but still found ways to domesticate their quarters even under these circumstances. For example, enlisted Wave Eleanor House Selzo compared her barracks, which included 96 bunks for her roommates, to a “barn,” but noted:

The boys all say that the Navy will never be the same again. I visited the Johnson’s last week & the sailor who boards with them made that comment. He had to take inventory in the Waves barracks & saw all the dolls, dogs, & rabbits [sic] on the bunks. It amused him! Charles gave me a darling gray puppy dog & he joins the others up on my bunk.<sup>189</sup>

She also expressed her delight when the WAVES finally put up dividers in her barracks. “The partitions were up when I got back,” Selzo wrote her mother. “It looks different. They don’t touch the floor & extend to almost 3 or 4 feet from the ceiling. At least our place resembles a room now. I believe they will let us have drapes now too.”<sup>190</sup> A few weeks later, the WAVES also replaced the women’s footlockers with chests of drawers. She told her mother, “We have new dresser drawers now & our room looks much nicer. I bought yellow oilcloth for the tables & it looks real cheerful.”<sup>191</sup> In a later missive to her mother, Selzo elaborated on the domestic changes wrought by the new décor, stating:

You should see the mess we have in our cubicle today. Up to this time we had boot lockers for our clothes & now they brought in chests of drawers. We spent the afternoon moving all our gear! Now we have our things straightened out & it looks much nicer. Those lockers were so high they blocked out all the light.

---

<sup>188</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrin Goddard. November 25, 1944. UNCG Goddard Collection.

<sup>189</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. February 27, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>190</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. Undated. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>191</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. Undated. UNCG Selzo Collection.

Although Selzo complained of the extra work brought on by the shift from boot lockers to dressers, she ultimately conveyed her pleasure with her new living environment, claiming, “Now it looks more homey.”<sup>192</sup>

Selzo’s choice of words regarding the yellow oilcloths she purchased for her tables as “cheerful” and the overall effect of adding dressers and drapes to her barracks as “homey” is worthy of further consideration. They indicate that Selzo had absorbed the larger cultural assumption that homemaking – the process of making a house “more homey” with “cheerful” accessories—was the ideal profession for women. However, it is also worth noting that Selzo seemed to obtain pleasure in the act of homemaking and even considered it a natural expression of her femininity. In another letter to her mother, Selzo stated wistfully that she wished she could get a coil burner for her personal use. “Some have them here & prepare lots of their own food,” she wrote. “It’s really fun. It’s strange how one feels like cooking. Girls always seem to make a place more domestic. I guess its [sic] just natural!”<sup>193</sup>

Selzo was not the only Wave who took pleasure in domesticating her living space. Even the smallest creature comfort could offset what could feel like, for some women, the general unpleasantness of the military regimentation of their living spaces. For instance, Joan Angel was dismayed after she saw her barren barracks at Bethesda but perked up when she saw that her bunk included a bedside lamp. She became particularly excited when she was moved into a hotel, which was “furnished in attractive hotel style.”<sup>194</sup> Official WAVES photographs also attest to the small, homey touches women added to their otherwise uniform living spaces; bed skirts, artwork, bookshelves, drapes, flowers, and vases, among other items, appear regularly.

---

<sup>192</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. Easter Sunday, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>193</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. February 27, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>194</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 116 & 133

Janet Murial Mead was so excited when she was allowed to rent an apartment, which she shared with several other Waves, rather than live in barracks that she drew a floorplan of her new home in a letter to her mother and described it in great detail:

It was pretty dirty so Jimmie and I got busy and scrubbed it down. We are all just thrilled with it as it is cool, sunny, and pleasantly large.... Over the radiator I have board and on it I have Bud's big picture, Judy's, Rog's, and yours and Daddy's. We have metal venetian blinds and we are going to make drapes – possibly rose or blue as our room is in pink. There are rugs on the floor, a cute little quaint desk lamp, and we are going to put what-nots on book shelves in the corners. We have 2 big mirrors – one on closet door and one above chest of drawers which we keep flowers in front of. The bunks have drawers beneath them so we each have 3 big drawers, 1 small one, ½ closet, and a desk. Mom, it's just wonderful and it's much more encouraging to do things in your own room.<sup>195</sup>

Lillian Pimlott also wrote to her mother about the room she rented from a woman after she got out of boot training. She was especially excited about the new furniture her landlady procured for her room. “She just took out the dark chest – bought a maple one like the one I thought I was getting for Dickie – just plain and a nautical matching mirror. My room is really cute now.”<sup>196</sup>

Pimlott eventually requested duty overseas in Honolulu and was unsure of what to expect in regard to her new living situation. However, she assured her mother, “Once we are settled and our room arranged in ‘homey’ fashion, everything will be ‘tops.’”<sup>197</sup> Violet, a friend of Pimlott, was also fortunate enough to receive overseas duty in Honolulu. Like Pimlott, she did not have high expectations regarding the WAVES housing but was pleasantly surprised upon arrival. She told her friend and fellow Wave, Mary Ellen West, “Our living quarters are much nicer than we

---

<sup>195</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Mother. May 15, 1945. UNCG Mead Collection.

<sup>196</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. January 18, 1945. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>197</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. May 1, 1945. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

expected. The Huts were occupied by CBs who did them over for us with such changes as – yellow-pink-blue walls – flowers outside the doors.”<sup>198</sup>

Wacs, too, engaged in homemaking activities once they were out of boot camp. As noted in the previous chapter, women’s barracks were rather spartan in their décor. Few Wacs in this study made comments regarding barracks décor, instead focusing on dayrooms and offices, which could be decorated with flowers, drapes, couches, and radios, among other items. Sprucing up dayrooms proved to be a more difficult task than either the WAC or the women anticipated in the early days of the corps. Mattie Treadwell, the official WAC historian, wrote:

Women had particular difficulty in adapting Army dayrooms to the needs of a permanent unit. The Army-issued furniture was heavy and depressing and could seldom be made homelike by any feats of ingenuity. While many men apparently did not seem to mind the bleakness, WAC company officers pointed out that for a woman the dayroom was a substitute home....<sup>199</sup>

Carol Goddard suffered from the lack of desks in her Fort Des Moines dayroom, lamenting to her husband, “My letters aren’t written very nicely as they’re written on suitcases, or while sitting on my upper deck, or squatting on the floor in the day room, using a magazine or notebook as a desk.”<sup>200</sup> Servicewomen were sometimes able to overcome this obstacle by purchasing furnishings with their own money, asking their families to send items from home, and reaching out to local organizations. For instance, the chamber of commerce in Daytona Beach, Florida posted a newspaper article informing the public that “many of the army-provided recreation rooms are quite bare of equipment” and requesting “donations of phonographs, radios,

---

<sup>198</sup> Letter from Violet ? to Mary Ellen West. January 29, 1944. UNCG West Collection.

<sup>199</sup> Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 520.

<sup>200</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrin Goddard. November 7, 1944. UNCG Goddard Collection.

books and magazines for use in WAAC dayrooms here.”<sup>201</sup> Thus, Treadwell concluded, “It was seldom that a WAC unit in the field any length of time did not somehow contrive a cheerful dayroom and a date room.”<sup>202</sup>

Wacs appreciated such efforts. Both Constance Cline and Katherine Katopes enjoyed listening to music or other radio programs as they wrote letters.<sup>203</sup> Cline was particularly pleased with the dayroom in Louisville, Kentucky. She noted, “Really this is a beautifully fixed-up place. We have a large dayroom which is where I am now. Modern, very nice designed maple stuff. Walls green—everything.” She even took the time to draw a diagram of a “cute piece of ... furniture” and noted that the surroundings in general were “swell.”<sup>204</sup> She also enjoyed having Christmas dinner at a Captain’s residence where “Their apartment is more like home than any place I’ve that seen since I’ve been in the Army.”<sup>205</sup> Florence Weil was charged with decorating the WAC day room, while Marcelle Fischer liked the drapes in her dayroom so much that she took them home with her after her discharge, fully intending to use them as drapes in her own home or to make them into a bedspread.<sup>206</sup>

Wacs also appreciated the décor of other spaces, such as the mess hall or their offices. Florence Weil invited her parents to dine with her in the officer’s mess when they visited, proudly informing them that “we’ve just gotten drapes and tablecloths .... to say nothing of cups

---

<sup>201</sup> “Gifts for WAAC Day-Rooms Sought by Committee,” Daytona Beach Morning Journal, (Daytona, FL) April 1, 1943.  
<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1873&dat=19430401&id=EZgpAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=9cYEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=6673,1745153&hl=en>. Retrieved October 16, 2015.

<sup>202</sup> Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 521.

<sup>203</sup> Letter from Constance Cline Phillips to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>204</sup> Letter from Constance Cline Phillips to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>205</sup> Letter from Constance Cline Phillips to Parents. December 23, 1945. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>206</sup> Letter from Marcelle Fischer to Parents. September 12, 1945. Box 3. UNCG Fischer Collection.

and saucers.”<sup>207</sup> Carol Goddard lamented the general lack of décor in her mess hall, noting, “We are served cafeteria style, & on trays with compartments instead of plates. That’s the part that is least inviting.”<sup>208</sup> After providing a cursory overview of her new barracks, a Wac friend to Katopes provided a slightly more detailed accounting of the mess hall including a description of the serving dishes that enabled them to “pass the food around just like home.”<sup>209</sup> Katopes and her friend Georgie both commented on their offices and the various ways in which they made them homier. Katopes noted, “We have flowers in the office almost steadily. Each class that graduates buys either [a] plant or flowers for our Commanding Officer. This week she received two beautiful plants. One plant was poinsettas[sic] and the other were pink azaleas,” while her friend told her, “The office I’m in is very cozy. A G.I. and I work in here alone and have put up pictures and taken off the screening from the windows, which have been up for the last five years....”<sup>210</sup> Katopes also commented on classrooms in “the upstairs living room which is furnished very lovely.”<sup>211</sup>

Some WAC officers were allowed to have private rooms, which they could decorate according to their own tastes. Catherine Katopes wrote at some length regarding the “luxurious quarters” she received:

It smacks entirely of a college dorm and I have had nurses refer to it as “over in your dormitory[.]” It’s all new and clean, hardwood floors which we have waxed. We have little scatter rugs in our room and chairs with a leather seat. We are permitted to decorate the room as we wish. Last Saturday or Friday I believe it was, I bought some lovely cretonne to make a bedspread and to cover my footlocker. I cut it out and basted quite a

---

<sup>207</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. April 14, 1943. UNCG Weil Collection.

<sup>208</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrin Goddard. November 3, 1944.

<sup>209</sup> Letter from ? to Catherine Katopes. February 19, 1944. UNCG Katopes Collection.

<sup>210</sup> Letter from Catherine Katopes to Dean and Jimmie ?. Undated. UNCG Katopes Collection. Letter from Georgie ? to Lee. February 27, 1944. UNCG Katopes Collection.;

<sup>211</sup> Letter from Catherine Katopes to Virgie ?. March 21, 1944. UNCG Katopes Collection.

bit of it together. Now I need a sewing machine and I guess they have one in the “Y” in town so I’ll have to take it to town to stitch it together. Shall get some frilly curtains to put up and my room will be all set. Guess I’ll get some curtains for the bathroom too. Sound like a civilian, don’t I?”

After Florence Weil made lieutenant, she requested her parents send her an elegant Victrola for the new room she was to share with a friend and noted that the “quarters are crude –but we’ve fired them up a bit with those cardboard closets, printed spreads & drapes, etc.” She also planned to “complete the furnishings when our assignments are down in black & white.”<sup>212</sup> In another missive to her parents, she elaborated on those completed furnishings: “So yesterday afternoon and part of today were devoted to furniture painting—2 large packing cases to act as desk & table, 1 small one to serve as desk chair.”<sup>213</sup> Photographs of Rosie and Carrie LeFew’s rooms also reveal a penchant for civilian decorations.<sup>214</sup> Rosie’s room features Egyptian art, while a picture of Carrie LeFew’s room features a variety of civilian knick-knacks. Indeed, LeFew’s residence, with its drapes, vase, flowers, framed mirror, and perfume bottle, appears more as a private civilian living room than the quarters of a soldier stationed at Fort Des Moines.<sup>215</sup>

Wacs stationed overseas were given even more freedom to decorate their barracks in a homey manner. Colonel Hobby informed members of the National Civilian Advisory Committee:

Because there is usually a very small group living in each room or each hut or each tent overseas, there is not the insistence on Spartan uniformity which there is in the larger barracks in this country. They may fill their rooms with flowers and bits of pottery and

---

<sup>212</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. February 18, 1943. UNCG Weil Collection.

<sup>213</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. September 6, 1943. UNCG Weil Collection.

<sup>214</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. Undated. UNCG Weil Collection.

<sup>215</sup> Penelope Blake, *My Mother’s Fort: A Photographic Tribute to Fort Des Moines, The First Home of the Women’s Army Corps* (Book Surge, LLC, 2005), 88-89.

old silver, provided only that their roommates [sic] are willing and that their clothes and equipment and quarters are clean and orderly.<sup>216</sup>

Sometimes it was difficult to take advantage of these lenient overseas standards, as Wac Lee found out upon arriving in Manila. “Our permanent quarters aren’t built as yet and we’re living in tents with the grass for a floor. There’s just no place to hang anything. Therefore, our clothes always look a mess. I have not yet mastered the art of pressing my HBTs and skirts by sleeping on them.”<sup>217</sup> Another Wac also lamented her quarters in Paris, telling her stateside Wac friend Katherine Katopes, “The WACS are all housed in hotels in Paris. We have small home-made beds or cots. Most of us have no sheets. Until recently we had no heat and very little hot water.”<sup>218</sup> Another friend stationed overseas took the lack of domestic accommodations in stride, but noted, “We have a rest home here for the WACs and from what the girls say, it is grand... They do not have a thing to do, can sleep as long as they want and wear whatever clothes they want, have their meals served, flowers on the table and the best food.”<sup>219</sup>

Other Wacs took Hobby at her word and embraced the relaxed living standards. Official photographs of overseas Wacs show the women posing inside of their tents or makeshift quarters and surrounded by flowers or other feminine knickknacks. There were even some grumblings among servicemen that the Army spent more money on Wacs’ overseas living quarters than men’s, since the women’s quarters included more creature comforts. Such allegations were false. Servicewomen had simply scavenged various goods from the areas, often exchanging labor for practical and decorative items from the local populations. American Army men also

---

<sup>216</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Conference, Conference Minutes, 9/27-8/44, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>217</sup> Letter from Lee ? to Catherine Katopes and Georgie ?. June 24, 1945. UNCG Katopes Collection.

<sup>218</sup> Letter from Lee ? to Georgie ?. February 27, 1945. UNCG Katopes Collection.

<sup>219</sup> Letter from Celia ? to Catherine Katopes . February 25, 1945. UNCG Katopes Collection.

proved to be a plentiful source of material goods. When picking the women up for dates, men often arrived with home goods in lieu of flowers. Mattie Treadwell, the official WAC historian, noted that a group of Wacs stationed in Leyte managed to cover the dirt floors of their tents with planks of wood—one date at a time. She also commented that “[a] far more useful source than either Army men or natives was the Navy, particularly the Seabees, who were no less willing to assist and far better supplied with the wherewithal.” Wacs fortunate enough to be stationed near such troops were

likely to have a landscaped camp site, graveled paths, floors in the tents, dressing tables, and, overhead, forming a heat-resisting space below the iron or canvas roof, the billowing nylon of a discarded parachute. Recreation halls were likewise decorated with native thatch, palms, trophies, and bright colored supply parachutes.

Wac Mildred Estabrook confirmed that Navy men were more than willing to cater to Army women. While stationed in France, she told her friend:

The girls here go out quite a bit with the sailors as they can get anything they want out of them. Two of the girls in my tent were out with them the other night and came back with four bedspreads, flashlights, chocolates, pillows, sheets and pillow-cases. . . . They had a date with the navy to-night, am wondering what they brought back to-night.<sup>220</sup>

A memorandum to the press on Wacs’ overseas activities lauded a group of women stationed in New Guinea for directing their feminine charm at both Army engineers and Navy Seabees and getting an “attractive new camp-site” for their efforts. The Army engineers had constructed tent floors, pyramidal tents, and even the framework for the WAC recreation hall before they were called away. The women had difficulties procuring the building materials needed to finish their project, but then “a wily WAC dropped a hint to a visiting Sea Bee,” and the camp-site was once again abuzz with activity. The Seabees poured a concrete floor, hammered new walls in place,

---

<sup>220</sup> Letter from Mildred Estesbrook to Marcelle Fischer. May 27, 1945. Box 3. UNCG Fischer Collection.

wired the building for electricity, and even installed a bandstand with make-shift spotlights.

Shortly thereafter,

... the Wacs undertook an intensive beautifying campaign of their camp-site. Every minute they were free from their desks at the Chief Regulating Office, was spent putting in paths and walks, landscaping company areas with transplanted jungle ferns and flowers, and each tent after acquiring some form of home-make furniture took on a distinctively feminine atmosphere. As a result of all this Wac-tivity on the hilltop, the soldiers and sailors were curious to know, if G.I. Jane had succeeded in making her camp more habitable than their own. A special “WAC Open House” did the trick. On a certain Sunday afternoon, all Army and Navy personnel within walking, riding and sailing distance were invited to visit, “The City Beautiful.” Up the hill they came, G.I.’s, sailors, Seabees, Admirals and Generals of all ranks afoot, in jeeps, trucks, ambulances, carry-alls and even duwks [sic]. As the visitors left after sampling cookies, sipping punch and enjoying community singing in the company of American women, one G.I. was overheard to sum-up the spirit of the occasion and the women in uniform, – “Gee whiz – and them Wacs did all that fixin’ up after work hours!”<sup>221</sup>

Not everyone appreciated the attention the press paid to WAC décor, as evidenced by a friend to Marcelle Fischer. Frustrated with WAC reports regarding the living and working conditions of overseas Wacs, Fischer’s friend Pat lambasted the WAC officers who would “flit hither and yon, ride around in staff cars, enjoy the comparative luxury of the officer’s clubs, see only what other WAC officers want them to see, and send back chatty reports on what a superlative job the WACs are doing, how [t]hey’ve transformed their camps with miracles of needlework and ingenuity, and are enjoying a heaven-sent experience.”<sup>222</sup> In spite of such criticism, it appears that even in the Pacific jungles of the Philippines, Wacs had succeeded in making for themselves—and to a limited degree, the men with whom they shared their base—a “home” reminiscent of those they left behind. It is difficult to say whether the women felt obligated to undertake such ventures or engaged in these activities for their personal satisfaction. There is, undoubtedly, a measure of truth to both understandings. Whether a Wac bedded down in a

---

<sup>221</sup> Interesting Items Concerning WACS Overseas, Miscellaneous RE Conference, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>222</sup> Letter from Marcelle Fischer to Pat ?. July 24, 1944. Box 2. UNCG Fischer Collection.

muddy tent or a Wave rested her head in a barracks, they both took the time to make their militarized living spaces more “homey.”<sup>223</sup>

### Conclusion

In a letter to her husband, Wac Carry LeFew proudly proclaimed, “Well, Wally, this has been quite a week. I finished my basic and was assigned to Cadre, my first choice, and am I ever tickled! ... They now call me ‘Sgt.’ but I am still a private, but I hope I am on my way up.”<sup>224</sup>

LeFew was on her way up indeed. She took her military service seriously and, shortly after writing this letter, Jones was accepted to Officer Candidate School and eventually made the rank of captain before she left the WAC. In March of 1944, Jones took up residence in Fort Des Moines’ Quarters 400 with 17 other WAC officers who were considered the “Post Complement” – that is, officers who ran permanent, rather than temporary, post services, such as the Post Exchange, Hospital, or Motor Pool among others. One of the perks of living in Quarters 400 was that LeFew, along with her compatriots, was given a room of her own to decorate in any manner she found pleasing. A photograph of LeFew’s room shows her sitting with a book.

Interestingly, LeFew is not the focal point in the photograph; it is a vase of flowers situated in front of a window framed by long feminine curtains that commands the viewer’s eye.<sup>225</sup>

It is very likely that for LeFew, and so many other servicewomen like her, frilly drapes and a vase full of colorful flowers created an atmosphere of homey comfort within an otherwise unfamiliar, and sometimes hostile, space. But is also possible that such decorations served as a reminder for what LeFew, and so many other servicewomen, longed for: domesticity.

Servicewomen may have found satisfaction in their identities as soldiers and sailors, but they

---

<sup>223</sup> Ibid..

<sup>224</sup> Blake, *My Mother’s Fort*, 67

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 89.

were loath to sacrifice their femininity, and all that femininity entailed, on account of those new identities. LeFew's own words serve as a testament to such an interpretation. After a satisfactory drilling experience, she told her husband, "Darling, stood Retreat out on Parade Field.... Wish you could see our flag, but you will again, so until then I'll stand Reveille and Retreat for you and when you get back I'll go back to just being your wife. Mmmm, won't that be nice...."<sup>226</sup>

Over the course of their wartime experiences, numerous Wacs and Waves came to identify as soldiers and sailors in the U.S. Army and Navy, respectively. Their letters to friends and families testify to the sense of satisfaction, commitment, pride, and accomplishment that women experienced when they mastered the salute, guided pilots through successful landings, or simply stood Reveille at the end of the day. However, these women came into their new military selves within the socially acceptable boundaries of femininity. They were byproducts of a society that nurtured the belief in woman's essential domesticity and celebrated her ability to create a "home" for her family as the ultimate expression of womanhood. Consequently, whether they lived in a college dorm in New York, an Army barracks in Iowa, or a mud hut in the Philippines, Waves and Wacs alike insisted that the military make room for their femininity, which, in many cases, manifested in stuffed animals and flowing drapes. The military, which understood that the maintenance of femininity was crucial to the success of the women's corps, conceded. Army barracks repainted a soft moss green and footlockers wrapped in chintz skirts seemed a reasonable exchange for the valuable skills women brought to the U.S. Army, Navy, and war effort.

---

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 52.

## Chapter 3 - “The Two Best Styles of the Year:” WAC and WAVES

### Uniforms

“The Two Best Styles of the Year!” reads the headline across a Fashion Frocks advertisement depicting a Wac and Wave in full uniform. The placard attempts to seduce women into either service by first touting the fashion virtues of these two uniforms: “These styles are the smartest in the world. You can wear either one, from now until the war is won, with pride in your eyes and happiness in your heart.” It then goes on to give a brief explanation behind the purpose of wearing a uniform: “Your WAC or WAVE uniform tells people you are in the Army or Navy....” Finally, the ad informs women of why they should join the service: “The Army and Navy need you – urgently. You perform vital work and help to end this war sooner. The experience and training you will get pave the way for better opportunities in the postwar days.”<sup>227</sup>

Although this advertisement was first published in 1944, it is indicative of the long-standing love affair Americans had with the uniforms of the WAC and WAVES. From the moment the military announced the creation of the women’s corps, the American public took immediate interest in them, with a particular attentiveness to uniform. The significant number of articles published at the beginning of the war focusing on women’s uniforms, as well as the continued interest in design changes of the uniform throughout the war, indicate that the uniform served as the most visible clue in answering the question of whether the women’s corps would upset the traditional gender roles. Indeed, the implication that women’s presence had the potential to masculinize women or emasculate men is implicit in some of the early article titles

---

<sup>227</sup> “The Two Best Styles of the Year,” Fashion Frocks Advertisement, 1944. Author’s Personal Collection.

about the WAC and WAVES: “Petticoat Army and Navy” and “WAAC Officers Will Bulge Only in the Right Places.”<sup>228</sup> In light of such concerns, women’s military uniforms could—and did—operate as a device that quieted cultural anxieties regarding both the femininity and the function of women in the military.

Once again, the American public responded to the WAC and WAVES in two very different ways. In a 1944 Gallup Poll, women were asked the question, “If you were going to enlist which service would you choose?” Seventy percent of the respondents listed the WAVES, with higher standards, better treatment, better pay, better reputation, and better uniforms cited as their reasons. The WAC, and their uniforms, was the least favored of the women’s corps.<sup>229</sup> This chapter investigates the ways in which the WAC and WAVES used uniform to fashion a feminine identity for their corps. Of particular significance are the problems the women’s corps faced as a result of putting women in military uniforms, which have historically been part of men’s dress and thus invested with masculine qualities. Evidence suggests that both the WAC and WAVES attempted to negotiate this problem by linking their uniforms to the feminine world of fashion. For a variety of reasons, which will be analyzed in detail, the WAVES proved more successful at creating this link than the WAC. The American public responded accordingly, as did the servicewomen who were certainly proud of the military status their uniforms conferred

---

<sup>228</sup> Cited in Mattie Treadwell, *United States Army in World War II. Special Studies: The Women’s Army Corps* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1953), 49 & “Wacks and Warns in Prospect for Petticoat Army and Navy,” *Newsweek*, March 30, 1942, 33; “WAAC Officers Will Bulge Only in the Right Places,” in *Manhattan (NY) Republic*, June 18, 1942. See also Ann Allen, “The News Media and the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps: Protagonists for a Cause” in *Military Affairs* Vol.50 No. 2 (1986), 77-83. See also “Major Hobby’s Waacs,” *Time*, May 25, 1942, 72; “Wacks War Bonnets,” *Newsweek*, June 1, 1942, 31; P. Frankau, “Women in Uniform,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 21, 1943, 61; and “Decking a Wave,” *Business Week*, October 3, 1932, 90. Many of these stories were particularly preoccupied with women’s underwear with the *Nation* reporting that “each issue included three brassieres, two girdles, cotton and flannelette pajamas ... wool panties, three slips...” while the *Current History* noted that WAAC slips were of a “new attractive shade the color of Boston coffee.” Cited in Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 48.

<sup>229</sup> Cited in Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 66.

upon them, but who were also eager to maintain their identity as “woman.” Uniform, with its power to convey socio-cultural information, was crucial to the construction of an identity that would be perceived as both feminine and military.

### **Men’s and Women’s Dress Codes**

It is necessary to look briefly at the gender codes that have been embedded in Western men’s and women’s civilian dress since the eighteenth century in order to understand the significance of coding women’s uniforms in such a way that would be acceptable to the American public. Historians of Western fashion and costume have noted that men and women’s dress began to take on radically different styles after the eighteenth century, usually citing the decline of the European aristocracy and the parallel rise of the bourgeoisie as having some impact on this change. In short, Europe experienced a social transformation that saw the rising bourgeoisie embrace the Protestant-oriented values of hard work, economy, sobriety and personal economic advancement.

The sociologist Fred Davis has suggested that the bourgeoisie used their dress to reflect these moral attitudes, which is what accounts, in part, for men and women coming to dress so distinctively. The sexes did not have equal access to work outside the home, so it fell to the middle-class man to become the public and visible embodiment of the new ethos, and his dress became the primary medium for rejecting the “corrupt” aristocratic claims to opulence and leisure that had been encoded into pre-nineteenth century dress. “Men’s dress,” Davis writes, “became more simple, coarse, unchangeable, and somber, sartorial tendencies that in many respects survive to the present.” Women’s dress, too, became simpler, but the changes were not as radical as that of men’s, largely because their social roles remained relatively unchanged.<sup>230</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38.

Men were ultimately assigned a highly restricted dress code, whereas women were allowed, and even encouraged, to embrace a more elaborate dress code. Men's dress was closely linked with work, occupational success, and their role as the family breadwinner. Women's dress was associated with the domestic domain and their status as dependents. More importantly, perhaps, women's dress essentially became the vehicle through which men could express their own status as breadwinner. The more elaborate a woman's dress, the more successful was her husband as breadwinner. Men's clothing needed to reflect the serious, work-oriented activity of business. Their clothing was devoid of frills and took on a "no-nonsense" quality. Women's clothing, on the other hand, necessitated frills and nonsense as a reflection of their non-work activities. Fashion, when presented for public display, catered to this particular function of women's dress and became closely associated with middle-class femininity. Thus, Davis states, these differences in male and female dress evident in the modern era work together to "comprise a coherent sign system, which seeks to ratify and legitimate at the deepest, most taken-for-granted levels of everyday life the culturally endorsed gender division of labor in society."<sup>231</sup>

Military service was, until World War II, exclusively the labor of men and uniform was invested with the masculine qualities of leadership and patriotism. Indeed, cultural historian Quintin Colville has noted that military uniform was defined in strict opposition to femininity.<sup>232</sup> However, the uniform of the WAC and WAVES had the potential to highlight, rather than negate, women's femininity, for when women put on a WAC or WAVES uniform, they communicated publicly their commitment to femininity as defined by that women's corps.

---

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>232</sup> Quintin Colville, "Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer: The Role of Uniform in Shaping the Class-and Gender-Related Identities of British Naval Personnel, 1930-1939: The Alexander Prize Lecture" in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 No. 6 (2003), 105-129.

“Because of its identification with a group,” sociologists Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex have observed, “the uniform assumes the properties of a totemic emblem and embodies the attributes of the group.”<sup>233</sup> Human ecologists Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab have also argued that dress acts as “media through which cultural ideas flow... [and] helps to substantiate the manner in which we order our world of cultural categories such as ... gender ... and express cultural principles such as the values, beliefs and ideas which we hold regarding our world.”<sup>234</sup> Dress can also express the outlook of the wearer and therefore reflect “the aesthetic, moral and nationalistic ideals of those who wear them.”<sup>235</sup> This function of dress is particularly important to the uniform. Uniform identifies the wearer with a particular group and signifies that the wearer is willing to conform to the goals and abide by the boundaries set forth by that group.<sup>236</sup>

The WAC and WAVES uniforms were invested with the values that their respective institutions espoused, which included upholding traditional femininity. WAC, WAVES, and military officials emphasized that women’s participation was of vital importance to the war effort. Women were needed to fill positions, and only those positions, that would free more men for combat. Their role was crucial but restricted. By donning the uniforms of the WAC and the WAVES, servicewomen affirmed their commitment to the WAC, WAVES, and general American understandings of femininity and demonstrated their compliance in working toward the restricted goals prescribed for them by their superiors. Uniform was the most visible and tangible aspect of material culture available to the public and thus played an important role in

---

<sup>233</sup> Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex, “The Uniform: A Sociological Perspective” in *The American Journal of Sociology*, 77 No. 4 (1972), 720.

<sup>234</sup> Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab, “Understanding Dress and Popular Culture” in *Dress and Popular Culture*, ed. Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab. (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>236</sup> Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex, “The Uniform: A Sociological Perspective,” 719.

relaying these messages to the public. However, women's uniform was not understood strictly as uniform; it was also read for proof of femininity. The peculiar problem of the World War II women's corps, then, was not necessarily allowing women to work with the military, but allowing them to don a uniform that was endowed with the masculine qualities of breadwinner, protector, patriot, and leader. The key to successful incorporation of women into the military was to code their uniforms in such a way that men and women, both in military service and as part of the civilian public, would read them as "feminine" as well as "functional."

### **Developing the WAC Uniform**

The history of the WAC uniform's development unfolds like a comedy of errors. Unfortunately for the WAC, however, it ended as a tragedy. The WAC was unable to develop a uniform that satisfied either the military's or the public's expectation of how a proper woman's uniform should look. The most pressing problem of the WAC uniform was that it was gender-coded improperly. It looked too similar to the men's uniform. Western society has allowed women to borrow some items from men's dress. For instance, throughout the World War II years, American women's civilian dress took on a more masculine and militaristic flavor, with braiding and epaulettes.<sup>237</sup> However, Western society also demands that dress confirm the wearer's gender identity unmistakably as either male or female. The braiding and epaulettes were usually accompanied by flowered corsages and bright red lipstick. Fred Davis asserts that "Western dress codes operate to blunt any too blatant appropriation of the opposite gender's identity."<sup>238</sup> The WAC uniform was never able to meet this demand satisfactorily and suffered for it.

---

<sup>237</sup> Anne Tyrrell, *Changing Trends in Fashion: Patterns of the Twentieth Century, 1900-1970* (London: B.T. Batesford, 1986), 142.

<sup>238</sup> Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, 42.

\*\*\*

The WAC service uniform consisted of two versions: one for winter and one for summer. The winter uniform included a single-breasted, four-button jacket and a six-gored and flared skirt made of dark or light olive drab covert cloth for officers and olive drab or light olive drab for enlisted Wacs. The summer uniform for both officer and enlisted personnel included a jacket and skirt similar in style to the winter uniform but made of cotton twill or gabardine in regulation Army khaki. These uniforms also included a cap, known as the "Hobby Hat," made of the same covert cloth as the uniform and with a semi-stiff crown, visor, and chin strap.

The WAC also had distinctive insignia, which included an image of Athena, the Greek goddess of war and wisdom. To separate officers from the enlisted Wacs, the officers' uniform included shoulder loops and tabs on coats, jackets, and shirts and braid, which was placed four inches above the jacket or overcoat cuff in quarter inch wide stripes. Officers also wore the cut-out profile image of Pallas Athene on their lapels and the left side of their shirtwaist collars. Enlisted Wacs wore the standard Army "U.S." gold clutch-back disc on the right collar of the uniform blouse and waist and a gold disc with the profile image of Pallas Athene on the left collar. The Hobby Hat also sported the officers' insignia of a metallic gold eagle or the enlisted Wacs' insignia of an eagle superimposed on a metallic disk.<sup>239</sup>

In addition to their standard uniforms and insignia, both officers and enlisted Wacs were issued khaki neckties, hosiery, shoes, gloves, and a general use bag as well as exercise uniforms, pajamas, slippers, and panties. Finally, they were given supplemental garments that included a heavy, double-breasted top-coat developed by the American designer Philip Mangone that was

---

<sup>239</sup> Jill Halcomb Smith, *Dressed for Duty: America's Women in Uniform, 1898-1972* Vol. 2 (San Jose, CA: R. James Bender Publishing, 2004), 315-316; 332 & 340. See also Kristie Bilger "The Women's Army Corps and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service", chapter 4. *Ibid.*, 332 & 340.

very similar to men's topcoats as well as light utility coats designed by Maria Krum, which resembled hooded raincoats. These uniforms came under the criticism of both the military and public, who deemed the uniforms as "mannish" and "unattractive."<sup>240</sup> [Figures 5 & 6]

The most probable excuse for the poor design of the WAC uniform was the Army's lack of planning. The Army was completely unprepared to accept women into the service, and their approach to developing and manufacturing women's uniforms reflected this lack of preparation. Shortly after it became clear that a women's corps was in the works, the Army cobbled together a team to design their uniform. Two representatives from the Quartermasters Corps headed the design of the WAC uniform: Colonel Letcher O. Trice, chief of the Standardization Branch, and Major Stephan J. Kennedy, chief of the Textile Section in the Research and Development Branch. Major Frank M. Steadman and Captain William L. Johnson, representatives sent by the Philadelphia Depot, joined the uniform design team three months after Trice and Kennedy had already obtained some sketches by famous designers. WAC representatives were also included at this time. None of these planners had experience in designing women's clothing, and all of them had different opinions as to how the uniform should look. This, WAC officials suggested, was a major reason for the uniform's unfortunate design.<sup>241</sup>

Director Hobby insisted that uniforms should be of the same color and material as men's uniforms as well as similar in design, since she was pushing Congress to pass a bill that would drop the corps "auxiliary" status and allow women to be incorporated fully into the Army. However she also insisted that the uniform "had to be judged according to accepted civilian custom for females." She rejected plans for slacks or culottes "in order to avoid a rough or masculine appearance which would cause unfavorable public comment." The Philadelphia

---

<sup>240</sup> Treadwell, *United States Army in World War II*, 36-38.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

representatives thought Waacs should have "nothing fancier ... than for combat soldiers," which threatened to leave the women dressed for office work in boots and coveralls. Meanwhile, the Quartermasters representatives wanted Waacs to wear blue instead of the typical olive drab and khaki since the initial legislation made it clear the WAAC was to be a distinct corps separate from the regular Army.<sup>242</sup>

WAAC officials were well aware of the original design's numerous flaws and sent representatives of the Philadelphia Depot and civilian consultant Dorothy Shaver, a vice president of Lord & Taylor, to assess the current uniform and make recommendations for improvement. Among the various complaints recorded were the following:

All garments were cut with wide collars and narrow hips, as for men; skirts, shirts, and jackets were for this reason generally ill fitting, uncomfortable, and unbecoming to the average woman. Hats were out of shape before they were issued; raincoats leaked at every seam in even a light shower; seams of hems were sewed down so that they could not be easily raised or lowered, and some garments had no hems at all. The suspenders on girdles were too short and pulled runs in stockings, as the War Production Board had allotted insufficient elastic.<sup>243</sup>

The WAAC, in short, had failed to produce a uniform that was either feminine or functional.

Further investigation into the poor design of the uniform revealed that the Philadelphia Depot had received an early and crude design of the uniform as opposed to the final and finished pattern. They created a "master pattern" from this design and issued it to men's clothing manufacturers, who then proceeded to develop their own size patterns based upon men's clothing sizes. The Quartermasters General had refused to contract the design to women's clothing manufacturers since, they argued, "The manufacturers of women's clothing were not able to

---

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 156.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 156.

handle the production of WAAC uniforms at the prices which the Philadelphia Depot was willing to pay.”<sup>244</sup>

The Quartermasters General and the Philadelphia Depot attempted to improve the WAAC jacket, but this resulted in even further dissatisfaction. The collar fit better around women’s necks, but designers had eliminated the belt since, in Hobby’s opinion, women had a tendency to pull it too tight. This necessitated a re-spacing of the jacket’s buttons, which resulted in one being situated quite low. Women had to unbutton this lowest button when sitting or suffer what Hobby called “an unsightly gap.” Additionally, the design had been handed over to men’s clothing manufacturers once again and the final result was considered still too stiff, awkward and flat across the chest to be flattering to most women.<sup>245</sup>

Ironically, the one item of the WAC uniform that was contracted to women’s clothing manufacturers was also the one item of clothing that was intentionally patterned after men’s uniforms: the shirtwaist. Both men’s and women’s Army uniforms called for ties and standing shirt collars. Men’s civilian clothing often included these components, and men’s clothing manufacturer’s accommodated them by sizing men’s shirts according to collars and sleeves. Most women’s civilian clothing, however, did not include standing collars or ties, and women’s blouses were sized according to bust rather than neck, a custom that the contracted companies followed. The result was an ill-fitting shirt. One male soldier stated perceptively, “I never yet saw a WAAC whose shirt collar fit her.”<sup>246</sup> One might modify this statement to “I never yet saw a WAAC whose *uniform* fit her” to convey an apt expression of public sentiment. [Figure 3]

### **Changing the WAC Dress Code**

---

<sup>244</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

Hobby met her objective of making the women's uniforms similar to those of men but failed in her expressed desire to avoid a "rough" or "masculine" appearance. In the beginning WAC and Army officials had tried to feminize women's uniforms simply by changing the pants to a skirt and through adding women's accessories, such as stockings and mid-heeled pumps. However, the symbolic femininity of "skirt" was dissipated because the uniform otherwise cloned a male uniform. The uniforms, on their own, were simply too masculine in appearance for the public, or the military, to accept as suitable for women. Although the WAC espoused a message of femininity, the uniform failed to convey the message.

The WAC attempted to create a more feminine appearance for female soldiers throughout the war, primarily through "accessories." Fred Davis has argued that one of fashion's, and hence clothing's, functions is to provide precisely this service. "The creation and reinvention of such emblemata [accessories] is, of course, the business of fashion."<sup>247</sup> The WAC tried sprucing up their uniforms by adding brightly-colored accessories and experimenting with "Army Pink" uniforms. Women were issued yellow chamois gloves and scarves as part of their new feminine accessories, and off-duty uniforms were designed by the Quartermaster General so that Wacs could have a "graceful, comfortable dress for their hours off duty."<sup>248</sup> Wacs were to wear these dresses during social events such as when they went on dates, to receptions, dances or the theater or when they were on furlough. White dress uniforms, with white accessories, were also issued, although it seems these uniforms were restricted to Wacs in the Washington, D.C. area. The tall and stiff Hobby Hat, which most women hated, was also abandoned in favor of the fold up envelope style garrison cap.<sup>249</sup> They even tried adopting more informal policies that encouraged

---

<sup>247</sup> Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, 28.

<sup>248</sup> Smith, *Dressed for Duty*, 348.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

women to visit Elizabeth Arden salons where they could get the “WAC pompadour” and simply to avoid “mannish hairstyles” altogether.<sup>250</sup>

WAC officials were also extremely reluctant to allot women pants as part of their uniforms, even though certain duties Wacs performed required them. For example, Wacs began to work as part of aircraft maintenance crews and in other capacities that required them to climb in and out of aircraft and up and down control towers. Their uniforms were ruined easily by grease, and their tight skirts made climbing either impossible or immodest. Skirts also proved to be a source of discomfiture for drivers. Although WAC drivers were given coveralls to protect their uniforms during routine maintenance, the coveralls were deemed “unsuitable and unsightly for wear when driving staff cars...,” and Wacs were expected to wear their uniform skirts, which proved too tight and too short. Furthermore, they were a source of embarrassment when “climbing over tail-gates into trucks, or standing on a rack about 3 feet high and leaning over washing the tops of passenger cars.”<sup>251</sup> Pants were suggested as part of the uniforms for women serving in Europe since they were warmer than skirts while women serving in New Guinea requested them because pants offered better protection than skirts against heat rash and insect bites.<sup>252</sup> Coveralls were eventually assigned to all Wacs, and Wacs overseas sometimes wore slacks with the tacit approval of their officers, but pants never became a part of their official uniforms during the World War II years.

The WAC had experimented with “trouser outfits” but enlisted men and male officers criticized them as “bulky” and “unbecoming.” Furthermore, they complained that they “could not be tailored to the female figure,” which made it difficult to distinguish between male and

---

<sup>250</sup> Meyers, *Creating GI Jane*, 154.

<sup>251</sup> Treadwell, *United States Army in World War II*, 162.

<sup>252</sup> Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 155.

female soldiers, as one befuddled marine traveling aboard ship with a group of Wacs headed to the Philippines made clear. “Geez, Sarge ... stick ‘em in fatigues, helmets, and Mae Wests, how’ m I meant to tell the he’s from the she’s?”<sup>253</sup> In spite of the obvious functionality of pants while performing certain tasks or the equally obvious health and comfort benefits of pants in certain climates, Hobby issued orders that required Wacs to wear skirts unless otherwise directed, a position from which she never budged.<sup>254</sup>

Underlying the men and Hobby’s objections to pants were two issues: the associations of male dress with male power and of “mannishness” with lesbianism. “Pants” were simply not standard feminine dress in the 1940s. Thus, “wearing the pants,” much like “wearing the uniform,” was symbolic of women’s appropriation of the types of power and qualities usually associated with men. The idea of Wacs dressing in pants generated anxieties among male military personnel as to their own positions and authority, and more generally, drew further public criticism.

Women’s dress is also closely linked with their sexuality, and the WAC in particular had suffered from the stereotype of attracting mannish women and lesbians. Women dressed in military trousers automatically translated to “mannish,” which the public at large associated with “lesbian.” The WAC uniform was already “too mannish” by popular standards, even with skirts. Take, for example, a cartoon drawn for the popular military comic strip “Male Call.” The series features a femme fatale named Miss Lace. In a segment titled “Know Which Arm You’re In,” Miss Lace awakens in her bed and is shocked when a WAC private sits up next to her. The Wac asks her if something is wrong, to which Miss Lace replies, “They should have more distinctive

---

<sup>253</sup> Ethel Starbird, *When Women First Wore Army Shoes: A First-Person Account of Service as a Member of the Women’s Army Corps during World War II* (iUniverse, 2010), 60.

<sup>254</sup> Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane*, 155.

insignia on those WAC uniforms!”<sup>255</sup> This particular strip was censored by the Army and not distributed to military camps, but it illustrates the assumption that women’s masculine appearance correlated to female homosexuality.<sup>256</sup> Moreover, it captures popular sentiment regarding the masculine look of the WAC uniform. Implicit in Miss Lace’s comment is the opinion that the WAC uniforms looked too similar to the men’s uniforms for comfort. If the uniform could fool a sex kitten like Miss Lace, it was too masculine.

As it became increasingly clear that the WAC reputation was suffering and that an unattractive uniform was partially responsible, the WAC attempted to link their uniform to the feminine world of fashion, a clear reversal of the leadership’s earlier stance. Early WAC propaganda tended to downplay the fashion angle of their uniform. For instance, a 1942 *Time* Magazine article, titled “What WAACS Will Wear” offered a succinct description of WAAC summer and winter uniforms: “Winter garb will be of olive-drab covert cloth; the auxiliary’s in a lighter shade worn by enlisted men. Summer dress will be of cotton twill or gabardine khaki. The single breasted jacket will be smooth ... and skirts will have six gores rather than pleats.” The focus in this article is on the similarity of WAAC uniforms to that of regular Army men’s, rather than on its fashion appeal. This is perhaps reflective of Hobby’s early insistence that women be portrayed publicly as soldiers while she campaigned to drop the WAAC’s auxiliary status and move the corps directly into the Army. *Life* magazine took a similar approach to describing the WAAC uniform.

In 1942, the magazine offered a full-length and detailed article into the life of Waacs, explaining their military purpose and how they lived. In general, it was a strictly informative piece, and any references to women’s appearance were made with respect to military

---

<sup>255</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*.

requirements rather than physical attractiveness. For example, one photograph showed a new recruit sitting at a hairdresser's station, with the caption below reading "Candidate Kenna's hair is too long when she arrives. Post hairdresser gets to work on it." This is followed by another picture of Kenna examining her new look in a mirror and the caption reading, "Hair-do is shorter when hairdresser is done. Proper length is 2 in. above collar."<sup>257</sup> In regard to uniform, the article included only a side-bar showing a picture of clothing folded neatly on a bench and providing a list of "WAAC Clothes, GI." There were no full-length photos of Wacs modeling the uniform.

Later, however, WAC propaganda took a more fashion-oriented approach, particularly visible in WAC propaganda pamphlets. Whereas an early 1942 pamphlet merely mentioned that women would be required to wear uniforms, a 1944 pamphlet showcased pencil drawings of women that resemble the high fashion drawings of a couturier. The pamphlet depicted six Wacs striking different poses in various uniforms and accessories and sometimes holding props such as books and tennis rackets. Another drawing showcased the "New Pumps—russet with Cuban heels," while still another featured a closeup drawing of a Wac wearing the new overseas cap and accessorizing with the "New WAC scarf and glove set in chamois."<sup>258</sup> The family of a Wac who joined in 1944 could even expect to receive a mass-produced "letter" from Hobby, in which they were informed that their daughter would be issued "her WAC outfit—34 items of clothing—complete uniforms for both winter and summer. And an expert tailor makes sure everything fits 'just so'."<sup>259</sup> In each case, the virtue of the uniform was touted not for its military

---

<sup>257</sup> "WAACS." *LIFE* Magazine, September 7, 1942, 78.

<sup>258</sup> "Women's Army Auxiliary Corps," (Recruitment Pamphlet, Recruiting Publicity Bureau, U.S. Army, May 13, 1942), 2 in UNCG General Printed Collection; and "A Book of Facts About the WAC," (Recruitment Pamphlet, Recruiting Publicity Bureau, U.S. Army, December 9, 1943) UNCG General Printed Collection.

<sup>259</sup> Mass produced letter from Oveta Culp Hobby to Family of Wacs. UNCG Philipps Collection.

function but rather for its stylishness. The uniforms, and the women modeling them, were made out to be worthy of models in a Paris fashion show as opposed to soldiers in the U.S. Army.

In spite of skirts, the “feminine” accessories, and the link to fashion, both the Army and the American public continued to disapprove of the WAC uniform. Gallup polls showed that women eligible for enlistment rated the WAC uniform as last in attractiveness and also cited their dislike of the uniform as their main reason for not enlisting in the WAC. Nevertheless, the public took an interest in modifying the uniform, and Hobby’s office was flooded with letters—from housewives and soldiers to Congressmen and designers—offering advice on how to improve the WAC uniform. Two obstacles prevented any major change in design during war years: money and WAC authorities’ obstinacy. Overhauling the uniform would have meant discarding thousands of dollars’ worth of clothing and spending thousands more to re-outfit Wacs. More important, however, was Hobby’s, and other WAC authorities’, convictions that an unattractive and ill-fitting uniform was not as detrimental to recruitment as the public insisted. In spite of growing evidence of the public’s dislike of the uniform, Hobby never took seriously the impediment the uniform posed to recruitment. Even the official WAC historian, Mattie Treadwell, referred to the uniform debacle as assuming “difficulty out of all proportion to its importance.”<sup>260</sup> Indeed, after one young woman wrote to inform Hobby that her decision not to enlist was based on the unattractiveness of the WAC uniform, Hobby personally dictated and signed the following reply: “Since the uniform is of so much importance to you in making your decision to join one of the women’s services, I suggest that you select the service which, in your

---

<sup>260</sup> Treadwell, *United States Army in World War II*, 36.

opinion, has the most attractive uniform.”<sup>261</sup> Many women took her advice and joined the WAVES.

### **Developing the WAVES Uniform**

The WAVES never experienced the same problems with public criticism as the WAC. Again, it should be noted that the WAVES were created after the WAC, and WAVES officials learned from the WAC’s negative experiences. They drew deliberate distinctions between themselves and the WAC and played on these distinctions in their recruitment literature in an attempt to define themselves as a college-educated corps of women ready to offer professional services to the Navy. Nowhere is this more evident than in the development and distribution of their uniform. Unlike the WAC officials, the WAVES authorities seemed to understand the power of uniform as a medium for the expression of values. “One thing we have kept in mind,” Lieutenant Commander McAfee noted, “is that there should be no effort to dress the women up to look like men. Their uniforms will be becoming and functional...”<sup>262</sup> The public was impressed and frequently declared their preference for the WAVES over any of the other women’s corps, often citing the attractive WAVES uniform as one of their reasons.

\*\*\*

The WAVES winter service uniform consisted of a two-piece suit for both enlisted women and officers. The jacket was made of tailored navy-blue wool that had slightly padded shoulders and had a distinctive collar that was rounded at each end. The skirt was also made of navy-blue wool; it had six gores and flared slightly. Officers wore white shirtwaists, while enlisted women wore reserve blue and navy blue shirtwaists. Other distinguishing officer

---

<sup>261</sup> Cited in Treadwell, *United States Army in World War II*, 167.

<sup>262</sup> Susan M. Samek, “Uniformly Feminine: The “Working Chic” of Mainbocher,” in *Dress* 20 no.1 (1993), 34-35.

insignia included gold buttons and reserve-blue sleeve stripes, while enlisted women's uniforms included navy-blue buttons and the standard Navy rate patch sewn on the left sleeve of the uniforms to indicate grades. Enlisted women also wore a soft-brimmed hat, which had interchangeable tops of navy-blue, white, and gray and white striped seersucker as well as a navy-blue tally with "U.S. Navy" embroidered in gold across the front. Officers wore a hat with upturned sides. It, too, had interchangeable tops of navy-blue, white and gray and white seersucker. Officers also wore their anchor insignia on their hats.

Summer service uniforms consisted of the same items as the winter uniforms for both officers and enlisted women but were made of white light-weight material, and dress uniforms were identical for both officers and enlisted women with the exception being their rank insignia. Additional garments included garrison caps, dark blue, white, and gray and white pinstripe; seaman's ties, black and reserve-blue; a black or white leather shoulder bag; a seersucker work dress with matching jacket; beige hosiery (rayon or lisle); black oxford and black or white pumps; a waterproof Havelock and raincoat; overcoat; blue denim coveralls, slacks or working blue smock (worn only as protective cover during appropriate working conditions); blue wool slacks (again worn only during appropriate working conditions); dungarees; blue chambray workshirts; cotton anklets in the appropriate color, with slacks only; and a white muffler.<sup>263</sup>

[Figures 5 & 6]

The WAVES uniforms were a success with both the military and American public. As stated previously, WAVES officials sought civilian advice in their effort to make feminine and functional uniforms that would be pleasing to the public, as well as to the military. They all but guaranteed their success when they asked Main Rousseau Bocher, known professionally as

---

<sup>263</sup> Smith, *Dressed for Duty*, 112-122 & 130-131. See also Bilger, "The Women's Army Corps and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service", chapter 4.

Mainbocher, to design their uniforms. He was a couturier familiar with women's clothing and also the only American couturier to have long-term success in the fashion-competitive city of Paris.<sup>264</sup> Thus, Mainbocher's design was sure to compare favorably against contemporary civilian women's clothing, and his name lent the WAVES uniform an aura of glamor.

Mainbocher had been linked with the world of fashion since the 1920s. He worked as a fashion editor for *Vogue*—both the American and the French magazines—for five years before opening his first house of fashion in Paris in November of 1930. He rose quickly to the top and catered to Spanish, French and English royalty as well as American film stars such as Claudette Colbert, Irene Dunn and Loretta Young. He relocated to New York City at the outbreak of World War II where he recreated his Parisian house of fashion.<sup>265</sup> In 1942 Josephine Ogden Forrestal, *Vogue* editor, civilian consultant to the Navy, and wife of Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, asked Mainbocher to design the WAVES uniform.<sup>266</sup> He agreed and also designed the SPARS uniforms and, later, uniforms for the Girl Scouts of America, the American Red Cross, and the Women Marines.<sup>267</sup>

“Feminine and functional” were the guiding ideas in Mainbocher's design. “They must be feminine,” Mainbocher stated, “and at the same time, while they should have a quality of discipline and dedication, they must be functional...”<sup>268</sup> The WAVES uniform design was Mainbocher's first experience with military uniforms, but he promised to make female sailors the best dressed women in the armed forces and, judging from the Gallup polls in which Americans consistently rated the WAVES uniforms as the most attractive, he lived up to this promise. He

---

<sup>264</sup> Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *Couture: The Great Designers* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang : Distributed by Workman Pub., c1985), 166.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid..

<sup>266</sup> “Recollections of Captain Mildred McAfee, 51.

<sup>267</sup> Milbank, *Couture*, 166.

<sup>268</sup> Samek, “Uniformly Feminine: The ‘Working Chic’ of Mainbocher,” 33.

drew on the long and slender silhouette that was fashionable in contemporary women's civilian suits for his basic design of jacket and skirt but also borrowed heavily from naval uniform history to give the uniform a "naval" quality.<sup>269</sup>

The WAVES understood their couture uniforms as an opportunity for publicity. Like the WAC, the WAVES linked their uniform to the world of fashion—a world that catered to women and was associated with femininity—to promote their institution. Unlike the WAC, however, the WAVES made these connections early in their existence and had a couturier connection that made their association to high fashion seem legitimate. "Waves Uniforms," an article in a September 1942 issue of *Life*, described the uniform in the same language fashion editors might use to describe the season's latest styles. The caption beneath a full-length picture of the service uniform reads, "Regulation WAVES uniform has trim, short service-dress blue jack, slightly built-up shoulders, gored skirt. Rounded collar on pointed lapels a new, distinctive feature and will probably be as characteristic of WAVES as the sailor collar is of seamen." Another photo shows a woman modeling a "flattering hat [that] has softly rolled brim at sides, high white crown with additional white and navy covers," and readers are also directed to "note the traditional black seaman's tie" that fits the collar of a blouse that "slips on over head." To "complete the outfit," the viewer is shown the winter overcoat, shoulder-strap bag, black low-heeled Oxford shoes and black leather and white fabric gloves. The photograph that dominates the spread, however, is of Mainbocher himself. He is seated behind a desk littered with drawing utensils, while hand-drawn designs of the uniform and fabric swatches are posted to the wall behind him. In front of him is a Wave modeling his uniform. The caption reads: "Mainbocher, U.S.-born

---

<sup>269</sup> Bilger, 41.

Parisian couturier, who at Navy's request designed complete outer wearing apparel for WAVES, inspects and approves final model."<sup>270</sup>

The WAVES also advertised any alterations made to the WAVES uniform to the public, again using language straight out of a fashion magazine. For example, in October of 1943, the WAVES publicized a change in their summer uniforms from the "Navy blue cotton suit" to the "[g]ray and white seersucker dresses and separate jackets, noting:

The new uniform, developed in keeping with the basic design for Navy women, combines feminine lines, displays cool comfort and military smartness, with the color selected conforming to the new slate gray uniform for use by male personnel.

The press release then goes on to describe the uniform's silhouette and details such as the new buttoned tie "designed to eliminate bulky material at the back of the neck" and "round neckline," among other descriptions.<sup>271</sup> Even a press release announcing the authorization for Waves to wear sleeve markings evoked words worthy of a high fashion magazine: "The new stripes, two inches in length, will be worn at a slant in the same position on the sleeve of a petty officer's rating badge.... The stripes will be white on blue uniforms and blue on gray or white uniforms."<sup>272</sup>

The WAVES also incorporated their uniforms into press releases meant to enlighten the public on the latest WAVES activities. For instance, a press release announcing the arrival of the first contingent of Waves in Pearl Harbor included a statement describing the women's attire. "The WAVES, in summer working uniform of gray and white pin stripe seersucker, marched down the gangplank in single file in strict military formation as a Navy band played Aloha."

---

<sup>270</sup> "Waves Uniforms" in *Life*, September 21, 1942, 49.

<sup>271</sup> "Summer Seersucker Uniforms for Navy Women, October 1, 1943. Reel 14. The WAVES: Records of the Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Women. (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1991). Hereafter WAVES Records.

<sup>272</sup> "Sleeve Markings Authorized for Women Seamen," October 12, 1944. Reel 14. WAVES Records.

Another press release on the same subject reported, “The WAVES were wearing the summer working uniform of gray and white seersucker and the new overseas cap. This was the first group to wear the overseas cap. They also carried raincoats—a precautionary measure that turned out not to be needed.”<sup>273</sup> An earlier release informing the public that more and more men are being released for sea duty as the ranks of the WAVES swelled saw fit to include a statement about uniform:

...the now familiar uniform for the Women’s Reserve was exhibited to the public with its designer, Mainbocher, present at a press showing to explain how it had been created. The uniform is a Navy blue suit with reserve blue sleeve stripes showing the rank of officers, and with the Women’s Reserve insignia of a fouled anchor and propeller on the lapels.<sup>274</sup> Again, the language used to describe the women’s uniforms is akin to that which could be found in a *Vogue* magazine article outlining the latest fashions out of Paris.

Adding to the glamor and couture experience of the WAVES uniform was the method of its distribution. Unlike the Wacs, who were issued their uniforms through the Quartermasters General, Waves were allotted \$200.00 to purchase and be fitted for their uniforms from major department stores. The WAVES joined forces with a number of department stores to centralize procurement and distribution of uniforms. New recruits could either visit particular department stores, such as Gimbels, Saks Fifth Avenue and Macy’s among others, to be fitted for their uniforms, or tailors could be sent to them.<sup>275</sup> Both Gimbels and Macy’s sent tailors to Hunter College to measure new Waves for their uniforms, and Marshall Fields set up a store in a

---

<sup>273</sup> Public Relations Office, Fourteenth Naval District, January 6, 1945. Reel 14. WAVES Records.

<sup>274</sup> “Women Reservists Rapidly Relieving Men for Sea Duty,” Reel 14. WAVES Records.

<sup>275</sup> “Navy Announces Agreement for Handling Uniforms for Women’s Reserve.” July 6, 1943. Reel 14. WAVES Records.

gymnasium at the University of Wisconsin where Waves could purchase uniforms and have them tailored to their figures.<sup>276</sup>

The same article in *Vogue* magazine that introduced the American public to Lieutenant Commander Mildred H. McAfee and lauded her for holding multiple academic degrees and reassuring the American public that she was “no feminist” also featured a photograph of her wearing the Mainbocher uniform.<sup>277</sup> The image served to reinforce the message that donning the uniform of the WAVES did not make McAfee a threat to traditional American femininity; it made her the embodiment of it. Indeed, the article went on to give a brief description of the uniform, highlighting that the WAVES conservatism in dress was reflected in the wearer’s personality. Here was an individual who represented the ideal American woman. She was intelligent, capable, and non-threatening to men and the masculine institution of the Navy. She was a woman who wanted to do what women had always done in times of peace or crisis: help men. She was simply doing so in a uniform. Any woman who donned the WAVES uniform could be understood in the same light.

### **Perspectives from the Field**

Like the public, servicewomen examined both the WAC and WAVES uniforms for femininity, and what they ascertained factored into their judgments about the corps. The uniform was even the decisive factor for a few women on which organization they would ultimately join. How women looked in their uniforms mattered. An attractive and feminine uniform indicated that the women’s corps it represented understood and valued traditional femininity. Moreover, women wanted to look attractive in their uniforms. Their decision to join the military was bound to raise eyebrows at best and incite condemnation at worst. Unattractive uniforms only

---

<sup>276</sup> Smith, *Dressed for Duty*, 128.

<sup>277</sup> *Vogue*, “The Waves,” October 1942, 68-69 cited in Bilger, 45.

added to the public derision aimed at servicewomen. A male marine stationed with Wacs in Australia confirmed as much in a letter to Wave Lillian Pimlott:

I think I told you before that I think whoever designed the WAC uniform played the dirtiest trick on womanhood since Bluebeard. I really feel sorry for those gals. Though some of the boys won't admit it, we have some nice lookers here but they have two strikes against them in that getup. I realize that they're not here to charm GI's, but an attractive uniform such as yours wouldn't hurt our morale, or theirs either.<sup>278</sup> Pimlott's friend and fellow Wave reiterated the significance of an attractive uniform to the wearer when she stated more simply, "I do think the "waves" uniforms by Mainbocher have the "Waacs" hung from the mizzen-mast."<sup>279</sup> Joan Angel expressed some dismay when she first donned her Mainbocher hat, but the tailor fitting her uniform informed her to "Cheer up. You should see my daughter in *her* hat. She's a WAAC."<sup>280</sup>

No Wacs in this study openly compared their uniforms to those of the WAVES, but a few did express some disappointment with the style and fit of their new wardrobe. Recounting the first time she put on her khaki uniform to her parents, Constance Cline stated, "Today I put on kahki [sic], and it's a very unglamorous uniform, to say the least, but it will serve as a work uniform and until we get our tropical [sic]."<sup>281</sup> Cline's hopes for a better fitting uniform in the tropical worsted were dashed, however, upon receiving her supply. "Oh, we got our tropical worsteds," Cline wrote. "Very sad. It seems that every once in a while they make very large 14 R's, and I got one that is miles too big all over. Very discouraging, but maybe alterations will take care of that."<sup>282</sup> Carol Goddard took her less-than-ideal-fitting uniforms in stride, but noted, "Some of the girls plan to buy suits in Des Moines, having them made to order, but I hate to and

---

<sup>278</sup> Letter from Don Delaney to Lillian Pimlott. August 20, 1944. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>279</sup> Letter from ? to Lillian Pimlott. December 20, 1942. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>280</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 70.

<sup>281</sup> Letter from Constance Cline Phillips to Parents. May 1, 1944. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>282</sup> Letter from Constance Cline Phillips to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

certainly won't now anyway. These look pretty good considering I am not a perfect anything and a lot is getting accustomed to the clothes."<sup>283</sup> Catherine Katopes also commented on the plight of women with ill-fitting clothing items, telling her friends, "Some of the girls have sizes too big and can't wait until they are able to exchange them."<sup>284</sup>

Of course, not all Wacs considered their uniforms a dirty trick and were actually quite pleased with their new wardrobe. Even as she spoke of the Army issuing women the wrong sizes of clothing, Katopes reassured her friends that the WAC made efforts to correct these mistakes. "Last night I went down to the clothing house to exchange my overcoat.... And it fits me very nicely. The coats are really lovely. Beautiful material with satin lining."<sup>285</sup> Constance Cline, who called her khaki uniform "unglamorous" and was "very sad" upon receiving her too-big tropical worsted uniform, gloated later when:

[W]e got our issue of GI stockings. They're heavy rayon and wear quite well. I'm just dying to get home and strut off all my GI clothes. Now I can't figure out just how I'll get all that stuff there to show you, but with my newly acquired GI ingenuity, I shall do my Sunday best.<sup>286</sup>

A few Wacs were especially delighted at the large number of new clothing items they received as part of their uniform and wrote home about their booty. Anne Bosanko listed everything from her hats to her shoes in a letter to her parents, while Betty Bandel did the same, noting, "I don't think I've ever had so many clothes in all my life." Interestingly, both women reported on their khaki-colored underwear, to which Bosanko exclaimed "Ick" and Bandel, "Very funny." Carol

---

<sup>283</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrin Goddard. Undated. UNCG Goddard Collection.

<sup>284</sup> Letter from Catherine Katopes to Dean and Jimmie ?. October 23, 1942. UNCG Katopes Collection.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid..

<sup>286</sup> Constance Cline Phillips to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

Goddard also gave her husband lengthy lists of the clothing items she received in several different letters, ultimately concluding, “The clothes are fine!”<sup>287</sup>

In an attempt to salvage WAC femininity, the Army eventually changed the WAC dress code to include an off-duty dress, pumps, and a tropical worsted uniform. Hobby noted that the change occurred after the Army “recognized this as essential to the morale and esprit of women.”<sup>288</sup> Indeed it was, for upon receiving them, a few Wacs stationed in New Guinea took the opportunity to show them off. A WAC newsletter recounted:

During the evening, the Wacs conducted a style show, featuring their new tropical worsted uniforms and off-duty dresses. To men so long accustomed to jungle greens and camouflaged fatigues, such clothing looked like a mirage.<sup>289</sup>

Treila Welch, a WAC civilian advisor, also appreciated the additional wardrobe pieces and informed Hobby, “Sunday night I had twenty in for supper and asked Lt. Eblin. She was lovely in her off-duty uniform and certainly sold the WAC to that group.”<sup>290</sup> Anne Bosanko was quite thrilled when she received her new work uniform, which she described as “extremely stylish and well made.” She went on to note that it was “kind of a rosy-brown beige color, and fit like a sport dress from Lord and Taylor. We are all very swish now.”<sup>291</sup>

The WAVES uniforms were so stylish that “joining for the uniform” became something of a joke among women in the naval reserve. In giving an address to the WAVES upon their first anniversary, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox even stated, “Some of you were even

---

<sup>287</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrin Goddard. November 7, 1944. UNCG Goddard Collection.

<sup>288</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Conference, Conference Minutes, 9/27-8/44, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>289</sup> Interesting Items Concerning WACS Overseas, Miscellaneous RE Conference, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>290</sup> Treila Welch to Oveta Culp Hobby, January 2, 1945, The Civilian Advisory Committee Great Kansas City, Missouri, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>291</sup> Green, *One Woman's War*, 148.

accused of joining for the uniform.”<sup>292</sup> It is true that some Waves appreciated the look of their uniforms. Joan Angel thought her “suit was beautifully cut, trim and efficient-looking without being stiff and masculine,” while Janet Muriel Mead even noted that the leather bag was “beautiful.”<sup>293</sup> Although many Waves were quite enamored of their couture uniforms, Joan Angel also assured her readers, “The Mainbocher cachet was not, of course, the only reason we boots were so anxious to get into uniform. The real reason was that nothing seemed really official or military when we did it in our mixed-breed civilian clothes.”<sup>294</sup>

Angel’s statement is indicative of what both the WAC and WAVES uniform represented to so many of the women who wore them: pride in serving their country. Women’s motivations for joining the military varied greatly. Some readily admitted that they were bored by civilian life and jobs and hoped the military would provide new and lively experiences. Others worried over their men joining the Army or Navy and hoped that their own military service would “Bring Him Home Sooner,” as a WAVES slogan promised. Still more sincerely believed that it was their patriotic duty to join in the war effort and considered military service the best course of action. Regardless of their motivations, once women put on their uniforms for the first time, they often wrote of a feeling they experienced that can only be described as pride. “By heavens, I *did* look impressive,” Wave Angel proclaimed during her first uniform fitting, “... with the fouled-anchor embroidery on the collar and black regulation buttons, it gave me the bearing of a woman in whom great responsibilities were vested.”<sup>295</sup> Arline Furstman wrote to her family:

---

<sup>292</sup> WAVES Anniversary Message by the Honorable Secretary of the Navy; Mutual Broadcasting System. July 27, 1943. Reel 14. WAVES Records.

<sup>293</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Parents. August 20, 1944. UNCG Mead Collection.

<sup>294</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 62.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

Our regiment went into uniform yesterday for the first time – me too of course! You have no idea what a thrill it was to put that dress on and know that you matched all over. We all feel like a million or more. Later we were told that our ties weren't exactly straight but even that couldn't dampen us.<sup>296</sup>

Shortly after putting on her first uniform, Wave Janet Muriel Mead told her family, “It is a very thrilling experience” and asked them to “think of your daughter when she steps out in her first review with her uniform on for the first time next Sat. [sic].”<sup>297</sup>

Uniform was crucial to the construction of women's military identities. By donning the uniform, women set themselves apart from their civilian selves. The media coverage and military propaganda tended to obsess over the fashionable style of uniform in an attempt to reassure the public that, just like civilian women, servicewomen displayed concern for all things feminine. Yet, for all their comments about the fit and style of their uniforms, servicewomen seemed to relish them because those uniforms made them feel, and identify as, authentically military. Joan Angel articulated this function of uniform when she commented that “Even Stinky, my beloved skunk coat, was beginning to seem like a relic of another world and another Joan Angel.”<sup>298</sup> In her unpublished memoir, Katherine K. Toll recounted the words of a fellow Wave who looked upon civilians with contempt. “E’body’s lookin’ at us! Guess they think our uniforms look funny,” the disgruntled Wave complained.

Well I can tell you I think they look pretty funny! I’m so used to shoes that are polished and hair that’s neat and gloves that are clean – look at that girl over there with the glamour bob, it’s just a hank o’ hair to me, hangin’ down practically over her stomach!<sup>299</sup>

---

<sup>296</sup> Letter from Arline Furstman to Shirely ?. August 27, 1944. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Furstman Collection.

<sup>297</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Parents. August 20, 1944. UNCG Mead Collection.

<sup>298</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 62.

<sup>299</sup> Katherine Toll. Unpublished Manuscript. Box 13. UNCG Toll Collection.

Writing to her mother about her new uniform, Wac Betty Bandel exclaimed, “It is a sight to behold.” She then went on to draw a distinction between Wacs and women working in the civilian sector:

Those who stay at home, and have to do the same old job, and eight or ten extras because of the war, and can’t have vacations, and have to save enough money for bonds and taxes, are the ones who are getting it in the neck. Theirs the work, and ours the glory, the uniforms, the change.<sup>300</sup>

As these various remarks attest, servicewomen had developed an awareness of themselves as different from their civilian counterparts. Their uniforms were essential to this distinction.

Some servicewomen were so excited at the prospect of wearing their new uniforms that they disobeyed orders to refrain from wearing any part of their uniforms until they had the whole and dressed in pieces of them secretly. Joan Angel wrote, “We weren’t supposed to wear any part of our uniforms until we had the whole works, but that didn’t prevent us from trying on what we had in our quarters every night.” She was one of the first women in her company to have a complete uniform and took pleasure as she “strutted around the room, making everyone else completely miserable.” She also commented on the “goon platoon,” which consisted “... of poor, bedraggled Cinderellas who have not yet received their uniforms from the tailors. These unhappy victims of the fitting-room must muster in their dingy civvies and watch the rest of the ship’s company breeze by in their snappy uniforms.”<sup>301</sup> Eleanor House Selzo understood the plight of the “goon platoon,” as demonstrated by a rather dejected letter she sent to her mother. She wrote that her company would be “wearing our uniforms in 2 weeks from last Friday. As

---

<sup>300</sup> Bandel, *An Officer and a Lady*, 7.

<sup>301</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 69.

soon as the 11 regiment is shipped. You see there are 2 here at a time. 1 with & 1 without uniforms.<sup>302</sup>

Servicewomen seemed to enjoy the exclusivity their uniforms offered them. Wearing the uniform separated them from civilians and visibly announced to the world their membership in what had once been an all-male club. To some degree, it even permitted women to engage in masculine activities—especially work-related activities—and they took genuine pleasure in such doings. Wac Betty Bandel commented on the fact that women seemed to prefer being mechanics rather than typists and often requested air force assignments, possibly because men preferred air force duty. An Army psychological study even noted that some “... recruits were motivated for enlistment by some type of masculine identification” and that “[f]or maximum gratification and greatest efficiency in work, these women wanted to be given a masculine type of employment.”<sup>303</sup> Kathleen Ryan drew similar conclusions in her study on Waves and Spars, noting that for the women she interviewed, at least, masculine work carried with it an aura of glamor.

Even as they enjoyed their foray into the world of men, servicewomen still wanted to maintain their femininity. They may have expressed pleasure in acting like men, but they made sure to let others know that they still looked like ladies. For instance, a Wac friend to Catherine Katopes stationed in Paris informed her:

No doubt some of these days you will see the Wacs marching down the Champs Eleysie [sic] in Paris, in the newsreel I mean. That was making history. It was a very impressive parade. Just think over 2000 of us, in uniform yellow scarves and gloves. And how nice we all looked.<sup>304</sup>

---

<sup>302</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. Undated other than Sunday Morning. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>303</sup> Albert Preston, “History of Psychiatry in the Women’s Army Corps,” February 21, 1947, Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>304</sup> Letter from Lee ? to Catherine Katopes. May 15, ?. UNCG Katopes Collection.

Wave Lillian Pimlott's comments upon her arrival to Hawaii also encapsulates the dual function of the uniform as representative of women's both feminine and military selves:

The overseas voyage was made in true Navy fashion, devoid of any frills and still we loved it! After living in dungarees for nearly a week, we hardly felt normal dressing again, yet any onlooker would admit it was a most impressive sight when our contingent of WAVES tripped down the gangplank in cool grey seersuckers, with matching overseas caps.<sup>305</sup>

Family and friends also felt compelled to verify women's beauty in uniform, such as when a male friend wrote Wave Nan Nabors, "Am afraid I am not going to see you in uniform. I know how attractive you must look. If I should suddenly run in to [sic] you and you didn't run you might get embarrassed."<sup>306</sup> Wave Charlotte Schuck's mother told her, "Everyone, or at least quite a few people have said, 'I bet Charlotte will look stunning in her uniform.'"<sup>307</sup> Schuck, herself, even took a few moments to write about the time Bill, her fiancé, praised her for wearing her white rather than reserve blue shirt. "[Bill] complimented me on my white shirt I had on last night.... He told me before that he liked the white shirt better on me. Goodness!"<sup>308</sup> Such comments from both servicewomen and their civilian acquaintances indicate that the attractiveness of the uniform, as well as the feminine allure it bestowed upon the wearer, was of equal importance to the admission it gave women into the masculine domain of the military.

One of the greatest appeals of uniform to servicewomen was its ability to transition to civilian life alongside the thousands of demobilized Wacs and Waves. The women's corps understood this as a potential recruiting point and, in 1944, issued advertisers a memorandum that emphasized this theme. The memorandum encouraged advertisers to let women decide what service uniform they wanted to wear, but to be sure they included a note about the attractiveness

---

<sup>305</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. May 13, 1945. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>306</sup> Letter from Roger ? to Nan Nabors. VJ Day. UNCG Nabors Collection.

<sup>307</sup> Letter from Mother to Charlotte Schuck. April 4, 1943. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>308</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. February 2, 1944.

of those uniforms. It also reminded advertisers to emphasize that military service, at least for women, was not a career; it was as temporary job wrought by extraordinary circumstances. It appears that most servicewomen agreed, as very few opted to stay in the post-war military and at least one woman had civilian plans for her uniform before she even joined a corps:

I just made up my mind to join when I saw that dress uniform. A good two-piece suit is one of the most valuable things a girl can own. I can detach the insignia after the war and get at least three or four years good wear out of it.<sup>309</sup>

After Joan Angel donned her uniform for the first time and took a long look at herself in the mirror, she concluded, “It was the kind of tailored outfit I might have bought in civilian life – but in navy blue.”<sup>310</sup> Wacs Carol Goddard, Betty Bandel, and Anne Bosanko also had plans to retain portions of their uniforms. Goddard became excited after she heard “...considerable talk of allowing WACs to retain their clothes, and it may be more fact than [sic] mere talk by the time I get out.... The girls ... have become attached to their clothes, and want to keep them.”<sup>311</sup> The WAC did allow the women to keep their uniforms, and both Betty Bandel and Anne Bosanko wrote to their families of their intentions to do so. It is Wave Helen Clifford Gunter’s comments, however, that best capture the civilian potential of the women’s military uniform. She wrote:

My new civilian clothes were too nice for every day and my Navy uniforms were too good to discard. I ripped the two lieutenant stripes off my jacket, removed insignia from lapels, and changed the brass buttons. Worn under my all-weather raincoat, a civilian beret replacing my officer’s hat, the uniforms were transformed into tailored serge suits....<sup>312</sup>

---

<sup>309</sup> Samek, “Uniformly Feminine: The ‘Working Chic’ of Mainbocher,” 34-35.

<sup>310</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 68.

<sup>311</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrin Goddard. August 22, 1945. UNCG Goddard Collection.

<sup>312</sup> Lieutenant Helen Clifford Gunter U.S.N.R. (ret.), *Navy WAVE: Memories of World War II* (Fort Bragg: Cypress House Press, 1992), 128-129.

This easy transition from uniform to civilian suit was perhaps the uniform's greatest sign of femininity. Once the war was over, Wacs and Waves could simply strip away the insignia, and with it their military identities, to resume their place in the civilian domain.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the moment it was announced that women's corps would be established to the end of the war, the American public remained fascinated with women's uniforms, looking for signs embedded in the uniform that would communicate cultural meaning. McAfee and Hobby could hold public conferences, do interviews, and publish pamphlets in an effort to educate the American public about the feminine and functional nature of their corps, but it was the uniform that acted as the most powerful medium of this message.

Both WAC and WAVES officials put considerable time and effort into the development of their uniforms, with "femininity" and "function" acting as their guiding design ideas. On the one hand, the uniforms needed to communicate that servicewomen were "still women." On the other hand, they needed to relay a message of military purpose. Finding the balance between these two principles and encoding them in uniform played a critical role in winning the public's favor.

The masculine look of the WAC uniform never managed to relay this message effectively. Although the poor design can be blamed on the numerous individuals who contributed ideas and pieces to the ultimate design, some responsibility must also be assigned to the WAC's and Army's failure to plan for the incorporation of women and specify their duties. The WAC's responsibilities changed throughout the war. Initially, Wacs were to be placed in clerical and driver positions, but they eventually served as mechanics and medics. The changing nature of their work necessitated changes in uniform that were slow in coming and which often

subjected women to embarrassing situations, such as climbing ladders in skirts, that compromised their modesty. Even the distribution of the WAC uniform conveyed mixed messages to the public. When Wacs were first brought in, they often showed up to their new posts without uniforms or with the wrong uniforms. For instance, as the corps ended its first winter, half the women in some training centers went through their entire training without uniforms. Additionally, the 42d WAAC Post Headquarters company descended their train at Fort Dix, New Jersey amidst a snowstorm wearing summer uniforms.<sup>313</sup> And when they did finally receive their uniforms, it was through the Quartermasters General—just like their male counterparts. In the end, the message conveyed by the WAC uniform was, perhaps, too “military” and therefore too “masculine,” which ultimately called into question the WAC and Army leaders’ insistence that their servicewomen were still “ladies” at heart.

Although the WAVES uniform conveyed a message of military function and naval tradition, their uniforms were coded effectively as “female.” The decision to bring in Mainbocher as designer and allow Waves to purchase and be fitted for their uniforms at fashionable department stores not only linked the WAVES uniform to the world of feminine fashion but also glamorized it. Furthermore, the WAVES uniform more effectively conveyed the WAVES commitment to purposeful utilization of American women for ending the war. Waves never shivered in summer uniforms while standing in the snow or sweated in winter uniforms while working in the summer heat. Although they, like the Wacs, came to occupy more than just clerical and drivers positions, their uniforms seemed to complement, rather than complicate, their work. And when their work was done, they simply shucked the insignia from their uniforms and emerged from the military as well-dressed civilian women ready to settle back

---

<sup>313</sup> Treadwell, *United States Army in World War II*, 149.

into domesticity. The WAVES uniform, from its sleek couture design to its easy transition into civilian wardrobe, made Waves, and their military service, less threatening to American understandings of cultural gender norms.

Indeed, it was Mainbocher's attractive design that inspired a few women to join the WAVES over the WAC. Women simply liked looking attractive. These women were part of a culture that celebrated physical beauty in women, and the WAVES uniform, more so than the WAC, conformed to the cultural ideal of that physical beauty. Moreover, looking like "women" deflected some of the criticism aimed at Waves for their unorthodox military service. Wacs took most of the public's—as well as other service members'—censure, with much of it focusing on the boxy silhouette of their uniforms. However, whether women wore the shapely WAVES or the shapeless WAC uniform, the majority of them were proud of what it represented: military service. They took pride in joining the U.S. military and providing a service to their country in a time of national need. Their uniforms separated them from their civilian counterparts and, in doing so, promoted the development of a military identity among women that they readily reconciled with their feminine selves. Throughout the war, women walked a fine line between feeling proud of working in the masculine world to which their uniform gave entrance and proud of the fact that they still looked feminine as they did so. Servicewomen were indeed soldiers and sailors, but they were also women. Their uniforms said as much.

## Chapter 4 - “Keep Your Beauty on Duty”: Cosmetics in the Military

“The utility bags the WACs carry are known as ‘portable powder rooms,’” a *Caribou County Sun* article informs the reader, “[and] WACs are permitted to wear lipstick, but they must wipe it off before putting on their gas mask and before going into the mess hall (so they won’t smudge the drinking cups). . . .”<sup>314</sup> Only after explaining that Wacs were issued two girdles but were not required to wear them, referred to their shoes as “gruesome twosomes,” and lovingly called their cosmetics “dry ammunition” does the article outline some of the actual work that Wacs performed as part of their military duties. Many newspaper and magazine articles about the WAC, WAVES, and other women’s corps followed this pattern of commenting first on the appearance of servicewomen and second on their jobs. Indeed, at WAC Director Oveta Culp Hobby’s first press conference, journalists focused their questions on whether or not the women would be allowed to wear makeup and nail polish rather than on the ways in which servicewomen would help bring the war to a quick and victorious conclusion.<sup>315</sup>

The American public remained fascinated with servicewomen’s appearance throughout the course of the war, and, next to uniform, cosmetics was their favorite topic. Numerous newspaper articles and cartoons poked fun at servicewomen who usually appeared as more concerned with applying their makeup than doing their work or for not wearing makeup at all and looking too masculine. Even articles of a more serious nature, which did focus on the women’s military labors, were often accompanied by photos of servicewomen situated in glamorous poses and who had carefully coiffed hair and visibly made-up faces. Occasionally, servicewomen were photographed applying their makeup. WAC and WAVES recruitment

---

<sup>314</sup> “Things You Never Knew ‘Til Now About Miss America,” *Caribou County Sun*. 30 December 1943: 2.

<sup>315</sup> PROBABLY MEYER

posters and literature also contributed to this national curiosity about cosmetics. Posters depicted servicewomen as great beauties with finely arched brows and full bright red lips, while recruitment pamphlets reassured women that they would be allowed to use makeup while wearing a uniform. In confirmation of this last assurance, Elizabeth Arden released new shades of lipstick and eye shadow designed specifically to complement WAC and WAVES khaki and navy blue uniforms.

Servicewomen were as equally enthralled with cosmetics as their civilian counterparts and military leaders. A close examination of letters, diaries, and memoirs reveals that servicewomen enjoyed giving and receiving cosmetics as gifts, looked forward to experimenting with new makeup, and shared advice about perfumes and nail polish with one another. Women also spoke frequently of their “need” to wash and set their hair, have their hair cut, or make time to receive permanent waves. Throughout the war, servicewomen paid careful attention to their appearance and drew on a variety of cosmetics to help them maintain their femininity while in uniform.

This chapter focuses on the various meanings and uses of cosmetics and their relationship to femininity in the women’s corps during World War II. Most scholarship on cosmetics falls into one of two schools of thought. One school views cosmetics as a form of social control that either rewards or punishes women, depending on how successfully they conform to idealized standards of beauty. The second school interprets cosmetics as a means through which women can express and create their identities as both women and individuals. While recognizing the validity of both arguments, neither will be elaborated in detail here. Instead, this chapter explores the cultural meanings embedded in makeup and the various ways in which makeup

acted as a medium for the construction and performance of femininity in the WAC and WAVES during the Second World War.

### **A Brief History of Cosmetics in America from 1900 to 1945**

Between the turn of the twentieth century and the outbreak of World War II, women's relationship with cosmetics experienced an incredible transformation. Nineteenth-century middle-class white women rarely used visible makeup, viewing the "painted woman" as an immoral and inauthentic representative of ideal womanhood. True beauty was rooted in one's character—that is, one's innermost and unchangeable nature—and manifested itself naturally in the unpainted face. Cultural historian Kathy Peiss explores the connection between beauty and character in her essay "Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Woman's Identity," arguing that nineteenth century women viewed the face as the most important visible marker of women's character. True beauty, which signified inner goodness, could be cultivated only through moral improvement and, to a limited degree, with the physical aids of cleanliness, exercise, and sobriety. "Expressive eyes" peeping out of a "translucent complexion" were the most critical links between outward beauty and inner character. Women employed a variety of homemade "complexion creams" designed to encourage a clear porcelain complexion but regarded makeup as a form of false advertisement. The only "women who painted" were either women who had something to hide or who were disreputable.<sup>316</sup>

By the 1930s, however, women's use of makeup was not only acknowledged as an acceptable female practice but considered a normal—and even natural—expression of femininity. Peiss cites portrait photography as crucial to middle-class white women's approval

---

<sup>316</sup> Kathy Peiss, "Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Woman's Identity," in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 313.

of cosmetics. When confronted with photographs of their naked faces, many women did not like what they saw and began to demand an application of makeup prior to having their portraits made. This practice, in conjunction with stage and film actresses' endorsement of cosmetics, normalized the made-up face. Moreover, cosmetic companies began to advertise specifically to white middle class women, encouraging them to create or enhance their beauty with blushers and lipsticks.<sup>317</sup> By the end of the decade, feminine beauty was no longer dependent on an inner moral character that manifested in "expressive eyes" and a "translucent complexion." It was something that could be carefully cultivated through the marking and coloring of the female face.

Women's made-up faces took on a new meaning when the United States declared war on the Axis powers in December of 1941. The government actively recruited women to both take up factory jobs and enlist in the military. Yet, in spite of the government's assertions that women's participation was crucial to military victory, the American public remained skeptical. Apart from concerns that women would be unable to do the work required of them, many also worried that traditionally male labor would rob women of their femininity – and all that "femininity" entailed. Cosmetics became a vehicle through which women could successfully navigate the world of men while still projecting femininity.

### **The Meanings of Makeup during World War II**

Throughout World War II, women were often depicted as the "girls back home" for whom the "boys in uniform" were fighting.<sup>318</sup> Robert Westbrook has explored this phenomenon in his article examining the World War II pinup, "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II."

---

<sup>317</sup> Ibid..

<sup>318</sup> Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane*, 19.

Westbrook argues that American servicemen openly embraced pin-ups not merely as objects of sexual desire but also, and perhaps more importantly, as reminders of their obligation to serve as the “protectors” of women. Meanwhile, women strove to fulfill their role of being the “protected” and posed readily for the “homemade cheesecake” pinups with which they sent their men to war. In short, men felt a moral obligation to fight on behalf of women, and women bore an equal responsibility to be something worth fighting for.<sup>319</sup>

Cosmetic companies frequently employed the ideal of “the girl back home” in their advertising campaigns throughout the war, peddling their wares as the tools that would help women transform themselves into something worth fighting for. This message is particularly evident in a 1942 Coty perfume ad, which features a wartime couple standing together closely. The man’s profile is barely in the picture, but it is obvious that he is a serviceman and that he is captivated by the woman, who is featured prominently in the image. Although the advertisement is in black and white, the viewer can see she has a classic wartime face. Her complexion is white as porcelain, her eyes and finely arched brows enhanced with makeup, and her lips are slicked with glossy color, most likely the bright red that was so popular during the war years. Her made-up face is framed by dark shining tresses barely covered with a white head scarf, while her white gloved hand only just grazes her chin. The ad reads, “His duty to serve— Hers to inspire—.”<sup>320</sup> A Maybelline eye makeup ad featuring a serviceman helping a woman into her coat reiterates this message. The ad reminds the viewer that while her man may be far away “fighting so bravely to protect” the things he loves most, “you, home, and country,” he wants “those eyes he adores to be bright and smiling. When he comes back to you, your eyes

---

<sup>319</sup> Robert Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II,” *American Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1990): 587-614.

<sup>320</sup> Coty Cosmetics and Perfume Ad, 1941. Author’s personal collection.

can be just as he pictured them in his fondest dreams.”<sup>321</sup> Both ads are simple, yet forceful, reminders that women needed to inspire their men to military service and that the cultivation of their physical beauty was crucial to their success. The right cosmetics—a dab of perfume here and a sweep of eye shadow there—assisted them in this duty. These ads allude to the notion that cosmetics would also assist women in fulfilling their ultimate duty of catching, and keeping, the eye of a man who would one day make her a wife.

However, the made-up woman also came to represent the American way of life. “It’s a reflection of the free democratic way of life,” a 1943 Tangee lipstick ad informed the reader, “that you have succeeded in keeping your femininity—even though you are doing a man’s work.”<sup>322</sup> Makeup, as a tool women employed to help them maintain their femininity, became invested with the qualities of freedom and democracy. Lipstick names took on patriotic tones such as Don Juan’s *Military Red*, Elizabeth Arden’s *Victory Red*, and Cyclax’s *Auxiliary Red*. Tussey’s *Fighting Red* lipstick claimed to glow “like Liberty’s torch” on the wearer’s lips. Tangee took the relationship between cosmetics and democracy even further when the company declared, “No lipstick will win the war ... it symbolizes one of the reasons why we are fighting ... the precious right of women to be feminine and lovely—under any circumstances.”<sup>323</sup>

Most importantly, however, makeup made it “safe” for women to operate in the public sphere without challenging the prescribed gender system. In a time when women increasingly encroached on the world of men, it became important for them visibly to embrace an appearance of the traditional gender order. Makeup marked women—quite literally—as feminine. It was more

---

<sup>321</sup> Joanna Douglas, “Maybelline Turns 100: A Look Back at the Affordable Makeup Line,” Yahoo! Style, May 15, 2015. <https://in.style.yahoo.com/post/122796257149/maybelline-turns-100-a-look-back-at-the>.

<sup>322</sup> Mike Hetherington, “The History of the Tangee Company: The Druggist, His Daughter, and the Power of Three,” May 17, 2015, [http://collectingvintagecompacts.blogspot.com/2014\\_06\\_01\\_archive.html](http://collectingvintagecompacts.blogspot.com/2014_06_01_archive.html)

<sup>323</sup> Ibid..

than just simple female adornment; it was a symbol, invested with the particular values that femininity purportedly upheld that marked the wearer as woman. Considering the feminine values makeup embodied, cosmetics allowed servicewomen to be seen as women first and soldiers second. It offered them protection against the slander campaign and acted as a tool that helped them negotiate their military work without sacrificing their feminine identities. Wearing makeup did indeed make it safe for women to maneuver in a masculine institution.

Cosmetics allowed women to create a visible femininity that helped deflect public criticism for their masculine wartime activities. Makeup transformed women into “something worth fighting for,” represented the American way of life, and made it safe for women to operate in traditionally male spheres without posing a threat to femininity and the larger cultural understandings of gender norms. Cosmetics enabled women to face challenging situations and do so with a bright red feminine smile.

### **The Women’s Corps and Cosmetics**

Cosmetics were a powerful, yet potentially dangerous, weapon that the WAC and WAVES employed as part of their defense against the public slander campaign. On the one hand, American society accepted women’s use of makeup as a normal—even necessary—expression of femininity. WAC and WAVES leaders understood that cosmetics could help them legitimize their corps in the eyes of a skeptical public as well as attract recruits who might otherwise have been doubtful of the military’s sensitivity to feminine needs. On the other hand, linking the women’s corps to cosmetics was a source of potential ridicule. The day after Oveta Culp Hobby’s first press conference, journalists introduced their readers to the WAC via articles titled “Fort Lipstick” and “Powder Magazines.”<sup>324</sup> These derisive titles played directly into the

---

<sup>324</sup> Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 49.

hands of those naysayers who argued that women would be more concerned with how they looked in a uniform than performing the military duties their uniforms required of them. However, as cultural historian Leisa D. Meyers has demonstrated, the WAC in particular, and the women's corps in general, worried more about rumors of "mannish" women and lesbians filling their ranks than suggestions that their women were empty-headed fashion plates.<sup>325</sup> Thus, they set about constructing a feminine image of their servicewomen and, consequently, embraced cosmetics in the hopes of promoting their organizations as havens for white femininity and appropriate outlets for respectable women's patriotic impulses.

Throughout the war, WAC and WAVES recruitment propaganda repeatedly assured women that they would be allowed to use makeup while in uniform. "May I Wear Makeup?" asked one of the questions listed in the WAVES recruiting brochure, *The Story of You in Navy Blue*. "Yes," reads the response, "a reasonable amount." A WAC handbook echoed this sentiment, noting that nail polish was fine as long as it was "of an inconspicuous shade. The same rule applies to make-up. Learn to apply your powder and rouge so that it will be inconspicuous." The WAVES brochure also informed women that they could wear their hair "in any style that is becoming to you" so long as it was "short enough not to cover the collar."<sup>326</sup> Again, the WAC made a similar statement:

If you are having difficulty getting your hair styled according to WAC customs – neat and well above the collar at all times – see what the hairdresser can do. You can get it cut or pin it up; but whichever you do, it must be neat and well above the collar at all times when in uniform.<sup>327</sup>

---

<sup>325</sup> See Meyers, *Creating G.I. Jane*.

<sup>326</sup> "The Story of You in Navy Blue," UNCG Williams Collection.

<sup>327</sup> "WAC Handbook," (U.S. Army, 1944), 5-6, in Idelle Singletary Meng Collection. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Meng Collection.

The WAC handbook made the additional warning that “mannish hairstyles are taboo,” while the WAC administration adopted a more informal policy that encouraged women to visit Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salons, where they could have their hair styled into the official “WAC pompadour.”<sup>328</sup>

Elizabeth Arden, along with other cosmetics companies, confirmed the WACS and WAVES’ acceptance of cosmetics by developing makeup colors designed specifically to complement servicewomen’s uniforms. A Tangee ad told servicewomen that their *Tangee Natural* lipstick was “The ‘Uniform Lipstick’ for individual loveliness,” while Cyclax proclaimed their *Auxiliary Red* to be “the lipstick for Service Women.” Elizabeth Arden advised Wacs to wear *Burnt Sugar* lipstick, which was “most effective with khaki . . .” and WAVES to “complement their uniforms of blue with the youthful vigor of *Redwood*.” Elizabeth Arden even offered make-up guides for “flattering combinations of powder, lipstick, cheek rouge, eye shadow, powder foundation and nail polish, to harmonize with costume colors.” Although neither the WAC nor WAVES could accept the official sponsorship of any company, they appreciated that various cosmetic companies incorporated servicewomen into their advertising and took pains to maintain a friendly relationship with beauty companies. No doubt such free advertising helped them to debunk the myth that servicewomen were not allowed to use cosmetics.

Cosmetic companies’ inclusion of servicewomen in their advertisements did more than just confirm that the WAC and WAVES would allow women to wear makeup. It helped to communicate a feminine image of the women’s corps to the American public at large. Cosmetics glamorized the women’s corps. It linked the women’s corps to the world of fashion – a world which catered almost exclusively to women – and served to reinforce the idea that the

---

<sup>328</sup> Meyers, *Creating GI Jane*, 154.

maintenance of femininity was a priority in the women's corps. A Wac in full uniform notified women that "You can do your 'bit' and be beautiful, both!" if they used Yardley's "Bond Street Beauty Preparations," which would allow them to "keep your best face forward..." DuBerry Cosmetics reminded the American public of this point in a makeup ad featuring Sky Cop Eunice Damant, a Wave who was "doing a man's job for the duration" but succeeded in "keeping pretty and womanly as ever with DuBerry Beauty Preparations."<sup>329</sup>

These advertisements also reaffirmed what society had already come to associate with makeup. Civilian women used makeup to transform themselves into something worth fighting for and to uphold their democratic right to be "feminine and lovely." Most importantly, American women marked and colored their faces in the hopes of attracting a husband and securing the life of domesticity they truly desired. These ads espoused that servicewomen did, too. This is especially evident in an Elizabeth Arden lipstick ad that showcased a sepia-toned drawing of a Wac looking off in the distance while in the background a serviceman admires her. The only flash of color is the red on her lips and fingernails. The ad begins with the statement, "Frankly, he was fascinated.... She had a certain elusive charm that defied description..." and then goes on to tout the role of Elizabeth Arden makeup in creating that charm.<sup>330</sup> This ad said nothing about the Wac's service to her country or the possibility of a career – military or otherwise. Instead, it focused exclusively on her ability to captivate men, even while wearing a uniform, with the help of a little lipstick and nail polish. It reinforced the link between women's looks and femininity and, the viewer can assume, communicated that women's ultimate goal was

---

<sup>329</sup> Yardley "Bond Street" Perfume and Beauty Preparations Ad, 1941. Author's personal collection and "Soprano Over the Sky." *LIFE*. May 1, 1944: 108.

<sup>330</sup> "Frankly He Was Fascinated" Elizabeth Arden Ad, 1944. Author's personal collection

to marry and settle into domestic bliss. Makeup aided them in this endeavor, and, in allowing servicewomen to use makeup, so, too, did the women's corps.

The women's corps' commitment to cosmetics was perhaps nowhere more visible than in their propaganda posters, which always featured servicewomen with clearly made-up faces and stylishly coiffed hair. In addition to makeup, the WAC and WAVES employed language, images, and messages in their poster campaigns meant to quell public fears that military service would destroy femininity by highlighting women's patriotism and the traditional theme of feminine self-sacrifice. Take, for example, the WAC poster "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory." A Wac looks up at the sky while behind her, in silhouette, men are engaged in combat. After explaining that her brothers and fiancé are on the front lines, the Wac asks what her contribution to freedom will be. "To sit and wait? Or to want freedom so much that I, too, will go out and help make it come sooner?" A WAVES poster employed a similar message. A sailor and his sweetheart embrace just before he is about to embark for the front on the train stationed beside them. The audience sees only the back of the sailor but is presented with a clear view of the woman's distraught face as she clings desperately to her lover. The words below them implore women to "Bring him home sooner; Join the WAVES." Such mottos emphasized women's patriotism and played to society's expectations that women would sacrifice their own wants and needs for the good of their families and, in times of national crisis, their country.

The "Mine Eyes have Seen the Glory" and "Bring Him Home Sooner" posters also drew strength from women's familiar role as "helpmeets" to men. The Wac and the soon-to-be Wave enlist to help their men bring the war to a faster close – not to complete this task on their own. "Speed them back; Join the WAAC," an earlier WAAC poster featuring a determined-looking Waac superimposed over soldiers marching to war, communicated the same message. Another

WAVES recruitment poster featured a rather solemn-looking woman with a yellow Western Union telegram in the background informing her that “Dan” was wounded and in the hospital. The caption reads, “That was the day I joined the WAVES.” Such messages reiterated society’s expectation that women’s first priority were the men in their lives. They encouraged the public to interpret women’s military service as an appropriate medium for women to provide men with their traditional support. For, whether they were their husbands or boyfriends, fathers or sons, women enlisted in the armed forces to assist their men. The only personal gain women could expect from military service was the safe return of their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers. Moreover, by emphasizing women’s traditional role as helpmeet, the WAC and WAVES assured the public that they, too, understood that it was a woman’s place to assist men in their work, not take over men’s work.

The WAC and the WAVES proclaimed that the greatest support women could provide men during the war was to take over non-combatant jobs and thus free more men to fight. “Join the WAC; Free a Man to Fight” and “Enlist in the WAVES; Release a Man to Fight at Sea” were catchy slogans that reinforced the “helpmeet” tradition and allowed women’s military service to be understood within the boundaries of proper gender relations. However, both organizations needed to educate the community on exactly how women would be of service to men. Thus, the women’s corps broadened their propaganda poster campaigns to include depictions of servicewomen at work. The WAC embarked on their “A Woman’s Place in War” poster series, which informed the public and potential recruits that “The Army of the United States has 239 jobs for women” and showcased Wacs plotting maps and repairing radio equipment. The WAVES presented their work almost as a challenge to American women, asking, “Have you got

what it takes to fill a job like this” and picturing women rigging parachutes or informing them, “It’s a Woman’s War, Too,” while a serious-looking Wave operates a telegraph machine.

In a bid to win over more women as the war dragged on and recruitment waned, the WAC and WAVES even went so far as to promise women adventure and educational opportunities that would lead to fulfilling postwar futures. A WAVES poster warned potential recruits with the message of “Don’t Miss Your Great Opportunity” with two women stroll along a river with the New York City skyline in the background. The WAC tried to tempt women with a chance to see the world via a poster that depicts a female soldier clad in helmet and overseas uniform with a pack on her back. She jauntily declares, “I’d rather be with them than waiting.” Such strategies had the potential to backfire with their appeal to women’s sense of independence – both during and after the war. However, the women featured in each of these posters still look like women. The Waves wandering along the river walk are wearing stunningly white dress uniforms and heels. The Wac’s overseas uniform molds gently to the curves of her hourglass figure while stylish curls peek out from under her helmet. Most importantly, all of the women are visibly made-up with painted eyes, rosy cheeks, and tinted lips.

Regardless of which organization they advertised or whether they depicted women at work or play, propaganda posters always featured women with classic wartime made-up faces. American society read WAC and WAVES propaganda posters for proof of the corps femininity. Wacs’ and Waves’ cosmetically enhanced features served as confirmation that the women’s corps understood femininity and did not intend to destroy the proper place of women in American society by turning servicewomen into unpainted Amazons who shunned husband, hearth, and home. Most importantly, however, cosmetics served as a mechanism by which women could execute men’s work without compromising their sense of their own femininity.

Military service had the potential to masculinize women, but cosmetics functioned as a kind of protective barrier against this threat. Cosmetics allowed servicewomen to appear as women first and members of the service second, as well as to carry their femininity with them as they moved about in a masculine environment. Although servicewomen were operating in a most masculine sphere, their femininity was proclaimed and protected by the makeup they wore.

Both the WAC and the WAVES presented painted servicewomen to the world, but Wacs often appeared in propaganda posters wearing more makeup than Waves. The American public never considered the WAC to be of the same caliber as the WAVES, having suffered, more so than any other women's corps, from accusations of being home to mannish women and lesbians. No doubt, the WAC photographed, painted, and drew servicewomen in propaganda posters with heavily made-up faces as an attempt to counter these rumors. Cosmetics functioned to communicate femininity to the public, but too much attention to cosmetics could also communicate a lack of purpose. Consequently, Wacs overly painted faces played directly into the hands of its many opponents, such as Virginia's House Representative Beverly M. Vincent, who suggested that women would be better at "putting on lipstick and looking in mirrors" than actually doing military jobs.<sup>331</sup> In 1944, an editorialist in the Roman Catholic journal *America* even chastised the WAC, as well as the other women's corps, for romanticizing servicewomen, putting only beautiful women on parade, and, in general, making WAC life seem like a Hollywood musical. This glamorization of the women's corps made civilian women skeptical that servicewomen actually performed the necessary military work that freed more men for combat duty.<sup>332</sup> While the WAVES, too, portrayed their poster women wearing makeup, the

---

<sup>331</sup> McEuan, *Making War, Making Women*, 36.

<sup>332</sup> "Draft of Women," *America* 69 (February 26, 1944): 575.

colors were often more subdued, thus allowing the WAVES to communicate the serious nature of their work in tandem with the femininity of their women. This presented a sharp contrast to the WAC propaganda posters, which often seemed to give priority to their women's femininity over the jobs they performed.

This is especially evident in a comparison of two widely circulated WAC and WAVES posters, *Girl With a Star-Spangled Heart* and *To Make Men Free*. [Figures 7 & 8] In the first, a Wac, with her head tipped back slightly and just tilted to the side, looks out at the viewer, while an American flag waves prominently behind her. The caption above her asks, "Are you a girl with a Star-Spangled heart?" The poster draws on several familiar themes. It appeals to women's patriotic impulses to serve their country while at the same time emphasizing that those impulses stemmed not so much from duty as from their hearts. It catered to the idea that women were driven by their traditional willingness to sacrifice their own wants and needs for the greater good rather than by an obligation to do so. The most obvious theme, however, is servicewomen's visibly constructed femininity. The Wac has a classically beautiful and painted wartime face. Her large eyes are set deep above prominent cheeks, while the corners of her full lips pull gently upward, almost forming a smile. Her features are enhanced significantly with eye shadow, eye liner, mascara, blush, and lipstick and arranged in a rather placid expression. She seems to glow. Indeed, if the poster did not implore women to "Join the WAC Now" because "Thousands of Army Jobs Need Filling," one might mistake the image for a model's glamour shot.

The WAVES poster incorporates similar visual elements and themes as *Girl with a Star-Spangled Heart*. In an echo of the WAC poster, the head and shoulders of a Wave are featured over the background of an American flag. The caption reads, "To Make Men Free ... you will

share the gratitude of a nation when victory is ours.” Like the WAC poster, it draws on the messages of female patriotism and self-sacrifice as well as visible femininity. However, the Wave’s feminine look is not showcased like the Wac’s. Instead, it serves to complement what appears to be the real message of the poster: servicewomen’s dedication to the WAVES and the seriousness of their purpose. The Wave does not stare wistfully at the viewer; she looks off in the distance with an expression of determination. Although the Wave is a classic beauty, the only makeup she appears to be wearing is a light application of red on her cheeks and lips. Here is a woman who is in command of both her femininity and her job, unlike the Wac, whose femininity seems to be her job.<sup>333</sup> Such images communicated a message of both the WAVES femininity and function and contributed to the public’s understanding of the WAVES as the most sophisticated of the women’s corps.

It is difficult to determine how much cosmetics contributed to the American public’s acceptance of the WAC and WAVES as appropriate organizations for women. On the one hand, rejecting cosmetics would fuel rumors of servicewomen’s masculinization. On the other hand, showcasing heavily made-up faces encouraged interpretations of servicewomen as flighty girls with fashion on the brain. However, American society expected their women to wear makeup and style their hair as a part of their daily beauty routines. It was perceived as a natural expression of femininity and a crucial means through which women could uphold their duty to

---

<sup>333</sup> Even when the WAC attempted to show their women at work, makeup featured heavily in these propaganda posters. For instance, in the “Woman’s Place in War” series, a Wac is depicted working on a map. Although she is doing an important job, her face is heavily made-up and her hair very stylishly coiffed. When compared with a similar WAVES poster, which features a Wave with a neat, but not salon-quality, hairstyle and a less visibly made-up, but still attractive, face rigging parachutes, the WAC comes off as too feminine in a negative way. It leaves the impression that Wacs were more concerned with how they looked while they were doing a job than with the actual job.

men of being something worth fighting for. Moreover, cosmetics companies assured women that if they maintained their femininity – particularly through the use of cosmetics – they could expect to be rewarded in the end by joining the ranks of the most respected women in the nation: white, middle-class wives and mothers. This was an especially important point, considering many worried that women’s military service would upset traditional gender norms. Thus, by incorporating cosmetics into their organizations, the WAC and WAVES demonstrated that they understood and upheld femininity. The women’s corps were not attempting to overturn traditional conceptions of American womanhood. They supported those conceptions – with the help of cosmetics.

### **Field Applications: Cosmetics and Servicewomen**

“More than any other group,” the New York Dress Institute informed readers after the U.S. declaration of war in 1941, “the women of a nation carry the delicate flower of morale in their hands. *From them*, as ever must come the fragrance of a life worth fighting for. *With them* must be found surcease from strain. *On them* is the burden of relief from the tragic, the grim and the drab.”<sup>334</sup> Throughout the war, women were subjected repeatedly to variations of this message. An Ivory soap ad told women to “Keep Your Beauty on Duty,” while an ad for Dorothy Gray’s “Headline Red” lipstick informed them that the color “meets a man’s idea of what your lips should be....” A Bonwit Teller department store ad in the *New York Times* made an even stronger case for a woman’s responsibility to remain feminine. “America doesn’t want its women dreary,” the ad read. “It wants you looking nice....” It then challenged women to be “more than the equal to a man. She must be his guiding star. Whatever war tasks she

---

<sup>334</sup> McEuan, *Making War, Making Women* 137

undertakes, she must still shine forth as Woman.”<sup>335</sup> Indeed, cultural historian Melissa McEuan has argued that women’s highest patriotic duty throughout World War II was to remain feminine.<sup>336</sup>

By World War II, however, Americans no longer understood femininity as an essential and internal state but rather as something that had to be cultivated carefully and demonstrated visibly. Various cosmetic companies’ advertisements served to remind women that their femininity had to be maintained and proven constantly through the deliberate manipulation of their exterior appearances, especially since so many of them were working in masculine environments. Women’s faces were crucial sites for judging how well they preserved their femininity, and makeup helped them achieve this goal. However, cosmetics did more than just preserve femininity. They created it. Kathy Peiss has suggested that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, makeup became a crucial component to the construction and performance of women’s feminine identities. Peiss writes:

[P]rofessional beauty "experts," had validated a female identity signified by, and to some extent formed in, the marking and coloring of the face..... In the period from 1900 to 1930, making up became one of the tangible ways women in their everyday lives confirmed their identities as women: they *became* women in the application of blusher, mascara, and lipstick.<sup>337</sup>

In short, cosmetics allowed a woman to spritz femininity over her neck, powder it onto her nose, rouge it into her cheeks, slick it over her lips, and style it into her curls.

Exposed repeatedly to messages that femininity was their duty, the act of femininity was especially important to servicewomen who were well aware that military service carried with it the threat of masculinization. Servicewomen understood that their femininity was not

---

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>336</sup> See *Ibid.*.

<sup>337</sup> Peiss, “Making Up, Making Over,” 330.

incontrovertible. It was something that had to be created, performed, and communicated on a daily basis. A Tangee Ad penned by Constance Luft Huhn, head of the house of Tangee, perhaps best encapsulated the servicewoman's obligation. Huhn's portrait draws the eye amid a background of servicewomen representing the WAC, WAVES, SPARS, Nursing Corps and Women Marines. "Many of us may be serving shoulder to shoulder with America's fighting men," Huhn stated, "—but we are still the weaker sex . . . It's still up to us to appear as alluring and lovely as possible."<sup>338</sup> Wac Josephine Downey reiterated servicewomen's need to look feminine when she recounted a WAC poem in a letter to her family members:

Baggy trousers, khaki shirt;  
Never a chance to wear a skirt;  
Always knowing where we're at --;  
Inside a barbed fence...;  
But a smile, a glint, a flick of the head;  
And a dash of lipstick, victory red;  
A friendly manner, a gay repartee;  
And the GI's appear from behind every tree.  
We're still women after all!<sup>339</sup>

Downey's poem poked fun at both the masculine look of the WAC uniform and military service's potentially de-sexing effects on women. However, her poem also reinforced the idea that both servicewomen's gender and sex are restored with a "dash of lipstick." Only then do men come flocking to see the Wacs, who are "still women after all."

Cosmetics were especially crucial to the cultivation of servicewomen's feminine identities since the women had little control over their clothing. Servicewomen frequently wrote to their family members thanking them for sending makeup and perfume, making note of various items they needed, or commenting that they wanted to make time to paint their nails. "The

---

<sup>338</sup> Mike Hetherington, "The History of the Tangee Company,"  
[http://collectingvintagecompacts.blogspot.com/2014\\_06\\_01\\_archive.html](http://collectingvintagecompacts.blogspot.com/2014_06_01_archive.html)

<sup>339</sup> Letter from Josephine Downey to Joseph Downey and Mrs. Joseph Downey, in *With Love, Jane: Letters from American Women on the War Fronts*, Lutz, Alma, ed. (New York, NY: John Day Co., 1945), 138-139.

makeup arrived the day before I left San Diego,” Wave Arline Furstman informed her friend Shirley. “Many thanks for it arrived in the nick of time – just when I was debating with myself about buying a box of ten cent powder or splurging on the good stuff.... I was out of makeup pads too, and I find those cleansing things just ideal for train travel. I certainly do appreciate you sending those things to me.”<sup>340</sup> A Wac in France told her friend and fellow Wac, Marcelle Fisher, “Two of the gals went on their Paris pass and I am next, will be going about Wednesday, am sweating that out as I hear we can get good perfume there,” while Wave Constance Cline asked her parents to send her “Evening in Paris bath powder, as I’ve run out.”<sup>341</sup> Wave Eleanor House told her mother and sister that she “slept for 2 hours after I polished my nail,s” while another Wave informed her friend and fellow Wave Mary West, “I need a manicure – a shower – and shampoo – so – I better get moving.”<sup>342</sup>

Interestingly, Wacs and Waves seemed to obsess more over their hair than their makeup. In their letters home, servicewomen wrote frequently about their long days, which often began around 5:00 a.m. and ended around 11:00 p.m. They told their friends and families that even as they tidied their rooms for inspection, marched to and from class, drilled in the heat of the sun or the dismal downpour of rain, hurried through meals, and then drilled some more, they still “had” to make time to wash and set their hair. In a 1944 letter to her mother and sister, Wave Charlotte Schuck informed her family that she walked into town, “sore as my feet and legs were and tired and haggard-looking as I was,” to pick up some photographs. Then she announced that she would “wash my hair and if I can I’ll wash a few clothes, too,” before reiterating her tiredness

---

<sup>340</sup> Letter from Arline Furstman to Shirley ?. September 5, 1945 UNCG Furstman Collection.

<sup>341</sup> Letter from Mildred Estabrook to Marcelle Fischer. May 27, 1945. Box 3. UNCG Fischer Collection and letter from Constance Cline to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>342</sup> Violet ? to Mary Ellen West. December 9, 1945. UNCG West Collection.

with “Oh! Can I sleep tonight.”<sup>343</sup> In a later note to her father, Schuck once again complained about being tired, “Last night I was so tired I hit the sack at 2000.” However, she also noted that before finally going to bed at 2230 when the bell rang, she “had time to get my hair pinned up and so on before taps.”<sup>344</sup> She also apologized for not writing sooner to her parents in a later missive because she “fell asleep at 2000 and thought sure that after a little snooze I’d be able to write you and Daddy, but I didn’t awaken until the 2230 bell rang and I had just ½ hr. to fix my hair and do the finishing touches before turning in for the night.”<sup>345</sup>

Other Wacs and Waves echoed Schuck’s sentiments regarding their busy schedules, perpetual tiredness, and need to fix their hair in their own letters to friends and family. After telling her family in a previous letter that she had to muster with her hair pinned up messily, Bandel wrote in another letter that she had developed a new system for a more manageable style, “The hair is OK – I do it up at night, put a net over it, and never even comb it in the morning— just stick the cockeyed hat on over it that I have to wear whenever I stick my nose out the door.”<sup>346</sup> Carol Goddard also adjusted to the limited time she had for grooming, especially in the mornings. “We are awakened at 5:30 and must be dressed by 6:00 A.M. I managed alright this A.M., even to combing my hair...”<sup>347</sup> Constance Cline even made note to her parents that before she went on an afternoon out, “I have to wash and curl my hair.”<sup>348</sup> Wave Eleanor House explained to her mother, “We’re pretty rushed now. We get through at 9 & have to get back to barracks & get our things laid out before 9:30 when the lights go out. Then we have just an hour

---

<sup>343</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Mother and Babs. April 10, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>344</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Father. April 12, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>345</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Mother and Babs. April 12, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>346</sup> Bandel, *An Officer and a Lady*, (16)

<sup>347</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrin Goddard. November 2, 1944. UNCG Goddard Collection.

<sup>348</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. May 3, 1946. UNCG Phillips Collection.

to get our showers & hair up & wash our clothes so you see how busy we are.”<sup>349</sup> Waves Rose Male and Arline Furstman recounted, respectively, “By the time you get back here, take a bath and do up your hair which I have to do[,] why it is time for bed,” and “Just a hasty scrawl to let you know that the doctor discharged me from sick bay today and I feel very much ok. I don’t have to go back to work until Wednesday, which is good because I have several things to do – like washing my hair and clothes.”<sup>350</sup> In a play written by and for Waves, women were depicted as even attempting to pin up their hair in the dark after the lights had been officially turned out for the night.

Servicewomen’s expressed needs to wash and set their hair undoubtedly stemmed from the requirements imposed on them by their corps. Both the WAC and the WAVES prohibited women from wearing their hair in styles considered messy or that hung past their uniform collars. Wave Mary Ellen West was even informed via training orders, “Back hair may touch but not fall below the collar, and side hair shall be trimmed or arranged to provide a fairly close contour,” and, “It is strongly urged that candidates requiring them have permanent waves and short haircuts before arrival at Northampton.”<sup>351</sup> At the same time, however, these needs also stemmed from societal and organizational demands that servicewomen look feminine. Countless propaganda posters portrayed the ideal servicewoman who, as a visible marker of her femininity, always had stylishly coiffed hair. Countless servicewomen took this ideal to heart and made sure that they, too, announced their femininity with fashionable hairstyles, even when they did not want to do so. Wave Charlotte Schuck lamented both society’s and the military’s expectation

---

<sup>349</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. January 5, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>350</sup> Letter from Rose Elaine Male to Family. June 7, 1945. UNCG Male Collection and letter from Arline Furstman to Shirley ?. July 23, 1944. UNCG Furstman Collection.

<sup>351</sup> Letter from Navy Department to V-10 Personnel Selected for Training at the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipman’s School. December 18, 1943. UNCG West Collection.

that she present herself as feminine when she complained to her family, “It’s been 9 months now since I’ve had a permanent so you know I haven’t any left, but I must be faithful every night and use those danged old bobby pins. Sometimes I could just about cuss when I’m so tired, that I can’t just flop and forget about my appearance.”<sup>352</sup> Wac Catherine Katopes warned one her friends who was considering joining the WAC not to cut her hair because the corps “discourage[d] boyish bobs - I guess since our hair is about the only bit of femininity we have left. Besides,” Katopes wrote her friend, “shaved necklines aren’t very pretty.”<sup>353</sup>

Katopes comment could also be interpreted as an expression of her personal expectation of femininity. Servicewomen were exposed repeatedly to images of idealized femininity via advertisements and propaganda posters, while the prospect of achieving ideal femininity was made real through easy access to the tools with which women needed to create it. Because of this, servicewomen developed a collective consciousness regarding how femininity should look and how best they could perform it. In making time to wash and set their hair or apply rouge and lipstick, even when they did not want to, women were enacting the gendered identity society had constructed for them. However, women were part of that same society and thus also contributed to the construction of that gendered identity. This, then, also furthered their “need” to look feminine. Katopes advised her friend not to cut her hair because the WAC did not like boy-short styles, but also because she, individually, did not think a shaved neckline was “very pretty.” Other servicewomen also expressed a personal desire to maintain their femininity in messages to their friends and families. Before her next trip home, Wave Eleanor House asked her mother, “Have the hair shampoo handy for you remember the condition I arrived in last time! I’ll jump

---

<sup>352</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. October 10, 1945. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>353</sup> Letter from Catherine Katopes to Betty. March 21, 1943. UNCG Katopes; Digital Project.

in the tub as soon as I get home.”<sup>354</sup> Wave Charlotte Schuck simply refused to go on an impromptu date because “I couldn’t venture out looking as I am for I was swimming again tonight, and my hair was positively stringy!”<sup>355</sup> Wac Constance Cline asked her parents for an extra five dollars to get a permanent because she wanted “to look presentable when I hit Concord, NC.”<sup>356</sup> Such statements suggest that women felt a personal obligation to look feminine.

In her unpublished memoir, Wave Katherine K. Toll revealed her own anxieties about the possibly de-feminizing effect of military service when she confessed, “When I first arrived the only thing I cared about was whether or not they had curly hair-dos. I’d trembled for days for fear I’d let myself into a group of slick boy bobs, flat heels, tailored suits, and a preference for cold showers.” She was pleased to discover:

Well, maybe in the company there was one or two such Amazons.... But you had to hunt; they were swept along and tumbled almost out of sight by the tide of girls with bright polish on their fingernails, straight stocking seams, and fraternity pins or military insignia on their jacket lapels. A Southern friend ... said the very first day “Why e’body in this house’s cute as Christmas.”<sup>357</sup>

Toll intended to publish her manuscript as a propaganda piece designed to calm public anxieties regarding the women’s corps and attract more recruits to the WAVES. She confronted many of the rumors that women would be unfit for military service and deliberately fashioned a feminine image of her corps by highlighting the womanly appearances of her uniformed compatriots to the American public. However, this work should not be evaluated purely as a servicewoman toeing the party line. There is a degree of individual agency, of self-fashioning, in this work. Gender,

---

<sup>354</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. September 12, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>355</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. January 31, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>356</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>357</sup> Katherine Toll. Unpublished Manuscript. Box 13. UNCG Toll Collection.

which is largely understood as an essential state of being, is a crucial component to the individual's identity. Servicewomen embraced and performed femininity not only because the American public demanded it of them, but also because they demanded it of themselves. Servicewomen's concerns regarding femininity and their attempts to create it should be recognized as attempts to construct their individual identities, albeit while acknowledging that these women were living in a society and serving in an organization that placed severe restrictions on the boundaries of femininity and which often circumscribed women's agency. To put it simply, many servicewomen identified with the larger cultural construction of femininity and, often, enjoyed acting like it.

Servicewomen regularly commented on other women's appearances in their letters home, often indicating whether or not they conformed to acceptable femininity. Katherine K. Toll told her family:

In the group of about 40 sworn in with me there were about two glamor girls; about two mannish creatures in stiff suits, with a hulking stride; about half a dozen "mice," timid, worthy, and hard working [sic] to the point of obnoxiousness; several girls who looked as if they'd had to make their own way and were used to no money and poor clothes but fed on stimulating ideas; and the rest -- well, just ordinary college girls.<sup>358</sup>

Wave Janet Muriel Mead told her family, "The girls here are wonderful – especially Helen. She is from W. Va., an auburn, very attractive, and has a very charming personality." She also mentioned in a later letter, "We have a new roommate – very tiny, cute..."<sup>359</sup> Not everyone measured up to the women's expectations, as Margaret Wenston Henry confirmed in a letter to her boyfriend, Dale, describing the appearance of a new Wave officer as "not much to look at,

---

<sup>358</sup> Letter from Katherine Toll to Family. September 14, 1943. Box 2. UNCG Toll Collection.

<sup>359</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Parents. August 26, 1944. UNCG Mead Collection and Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Parents. October 23, 1945. UNCG Mead Collection.

buck teeth and glasses –a former school teacher.”<sup>360</sup> Wave Catherine Katopes described her new roommate as a “very quiet person” who “doesn’t fuss about her appearance.”<sup>361</sup> Wave Violet compared her Wave training to that of the Women Marines in a note to a soon-to-be Wave, Mary Ellen West, claiming “On the whole, training wasn’t rugged at all. I talked to some Marine girls who came over with us & they had to take instructions in combat swimming, worked about twelve hours a day - & they looked it too.”<sup>362</sup>

Women also detailed their own appearances to friends and families. They complained or joked when thought they looked unattractive. After cutting two inches off of her hair, Wave Janet Muriel Mead protested, “[I]t looks like ‘\_\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_.’ We all look like the devil – and he wouldn’t look at any of us!”<sup>363</sup> In her memoir, Katherine K. Toll recounted her fellow Waves’ outbursts against the harsh effects of the chilly New England winter on their looks. “‘Hawaii was never like this!’ said Marcia, chattering in front of mirror. ‘My lipstick’s so cold – look – it won’t stick!’ ‘My legs are so chapped I spend more time on ‘em than I do on my complexion,’” another girl contributed aggressively.”<sup>364</sup> Wave Charlotte Schuck told her father playfully, “‘You should see me all curled up in bed now! ... I’ve had my bath and my hair is all pinned up – Oh! am I beautiful now!’” while Wave Rose Male lamented to her family, “‘Am afraid it is going to rain soon for it is clouding up. My poor hair.’”<sup>365</sup>

---

<sup>360</sup> Letter from Margaret Winston Henry to Dale ?. June 7, 1944. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Henry Collection.

<sup>361</sup> Letter from Catherine Katopes to Dean and Jimmie ?. December 9, 1942. UNCG Katopes Collection.

<sup>362</sup> Letter from Violet ? to Mary Ellen West. January 29, 1944. UNCG West Collection.

<sup>363</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Mother. August 11, 1944. UNCG Mead Collection.

<sup>364</sup> Katherine Toll. Unpublished Manuscript. Box 13. UNCG Toll Collection.

<sup>365</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. March 29, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection and letter from Rose Male to family. Undated. UNCG Male Collection.

Servicewomen also informed their friends and family when they changed their appearance and liked the results. Wave Rose Male described her new haircut in detail to her family. "I left here and went uptown and first I had my hair cut and wish you could see it now," she wrote. "I have just finished washing it and there isn't a curly strand. The girl did a very nice job at cutting it and of course there was a little curl so it looked pretty good but it is short."<sup>366</sup> Jaenn Bailey related to her mother that "I cut my hair on top. I have bangs. I think I might look like I did when I was small. The only thing missing is the long curls."<sup>367</sup> Charlotte Schuck confessed some frustration with her new hairstyle when she told her family, "Now, as soon as I tell you all the dope, I'll shower, put up my hair, and hit the sack. I've tried wearing my hair with a forward roll over my forehead resembling bangs, and it doesn't look half bad. But sometimes it just won't go that way."<sup>368</sup> Wave Marie Cody gave descriptions of daytime and evening looks to her future fiancé when she wrote, "Feel so completely comfy tonight because, literally, I've let my hair down. You see, in order to look a little more dignified (ahem!), I wear my hair with soft waves in the back and two rolls on the side with a few curls on top. Tonite [sic], I gave it one glorious shake and the whole works came tumbling down. So, now, your little (5'5 1/2" of me) gal is all cozy!"<sup>369</sup>

Women also delighted in receiving compliments on their appearances or new gifts that would help them enhance their charms. Wave Charlotte Schuck boasted that her boyfriend Bill was "quite proud of me ... introduces me to all his friends and remarks about my red hair...." Her friend, Dorothy, confirmed Bill's admiration of Charlotte's hair, which Charlotte then

---

<sup>366</sup> Letter from Rose Male to Family. February 4, 1945. UNCG Male Collection.

<sup>367</sup> Letter from Jaenn Bailey to Mother. July 11, 1945. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Bailey Collection.

<sup>368</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. October 10, 1945. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>369</sup> Letter from Marie Cody to Don ?. March 10, 1945. UNCG Cody Collection.

related to her family. “[Dorothy] saw Bill later that night ... and told me about the line of jibe he gave her – oh he thought I was swell and had the most beautiful red hair – not too light and not too dark. Oh!”<sup>370</sup> Wave Eleanor House’s beau, Charlie, bought her “the most exquisite perfume from Boston. ‘Secret de Suzanne’ is the name & all the girls are swooning over it including me. (And him naturally!) He said he smelled 15 kinds before he found what he liked. The gals say he’s quite a conosieur [sic] but that’s not all he is!”<sup>371</sup> A former neighbor sent Wave Shirley Tillson “some nice perfume for X-mas,” which she found to be “a pleasant surprise.”<sup>372</sup> Wac Constance Cline thanked her parents for “the prompt and generous contribution” so she could get a permanent that she hoped would help get her hair “under control.”<sup>373</sup> Even Florence Weil, who usually conveyed a no-nonsense attitude in her letters, confessed to becoming misty-eyed after a group of enlisted Wacs presented her with a departing gift of “perfume, handkerchiefs, silk stockings, skin cream, elegant soaps....”<sup>374</sup>

Femininity remained a priority among many servicewomen throughout the war. At an official WAC conference on recruitment, a Wac lieutenant even noted that rumors that women would not be allowed to wear makeup while serving in the WAC hindered recruitment. Women enjoyed indulging in the accoutrements of their gender, even though – or perhaps especially because – they were in uniform. Wave Shirley Tillson expressed excited anticipation at her upcoming leave. She planned to visit a servicewomen’s club where she could enjoy “a make-up parlor with all the Elizabeth Arden stuff imaginable for everyone’s use! I’m sure going to enjoy this – it’s good to get away!” She also conveyed enthusiasm when her friend placed an order for

---

<sup>370</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. February 2, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection and Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>371</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Jeannie ?. August 11, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>372</sup> Letter from Shirley Tillson to Family. January 3, 1945. UNCG Tillson Collection.

<sup>373</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. June 12, 1945. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>374</sup> Letter from Florence Weil to Parents. Undated. UNCG Weil Collection.

her with Avon. “I can hardly wait to see what kind of cases the lipsticks are in now.”<sup>375</sup>

Another Wave noted that the Red Cross deemed cosmetics important enough to include powder and hair pins in their care packages while Harriet Green Robinson and her fellow Wacs elected to pack their makeup into their gasmasks when they were warned that they might have to abandon ship while traveling to overseas. She recalled:

At first I couldn't figure out why some of the Wacs were stuffing their gas masks with cosmetics. ‘We might have to dump our duffel bags,’ they said. That made sense. The rest of us immediately got busy packing our cosmetics securely in our gas masks. I had to leave my Tabu in my duffel bag, but I did fit two of the smaller bottles in my mask.<sup>376</sup>

Robinson and her compatriots were sure that the Army would quickly replace their lost clothing, but not their lost cosmetics. In preparation for heading overseas, a fellow soldier informed Wac Marcelle Fischer, “They told us to get a years [sic] supply of make-up....”<sup>377</sup>

Many women even rebelled –albeit in subtle ways—when they felt the military threatened their ideas of femininity. The official WAC photographer, Charlotte McGraw, remarked that she could not use some of the photos she took of Wacs—especially those stationed overseas—because of the women’s sloppy appearance. It would seem that some women refused to take the time to maintain a feminine or even neat look, in spite of societal and military expectations. It is difficult to blame them when one takes into consideration that these women had limited access to water and sometimes lived in mud huts. Other Wacs, however, continued to demonstrate their commitment to the larger cultural ideal of femininity even if it meant flouting military regulations; McGraw also noted that she had to destroy some of her negatives

---

<sup>375</sup> Letter from Shirley Tillson to Parents. May 16, 1945. UNCG Tillson Collection and letter from Shirley Tillson to Family. March 29, 1945. UNCG Tillson Collection.

<sup>376</sup> Harriet Green Robinson; *The Gaylord Wacs*, (Laurel Press, 2001), 148.

<sup>377</sup> Letter from Mildred Estabrook to Marcelle Fischer. May 21, 1945. UNCG Fischer Collection.

because Wacs insisted on wearing silver jewelry, which did not lend itself to a military appearance.<sup>378</sup>

Many women also disliked the WAC and WAVES requirements that servicewomen keep their hair in styles that did not touch their collars. Some women refused to cut their hair short and opted to perm or pin up their long locks in order to pass inspection. Charlotte Schuck told her family, “I didn’t put my hair up last night and you should see it now. It’s really quite long.” She went on to note, “Must fix it tonight for Captain’s inspection tomorrow.”<sup>379</sup> Wave Rose Male opted to have an end curl even though she thought it was “kinda curly.... [But]” she insisted, “it will grow and I did have to have something done before I got a Captain’s mast....”<sup>380</sup> Wave Janet Muriel Mead noted good naturedly that her hair had “gotten long enough to go good page boy but it’s so long the officers cast a mean glance my way occasionally....”<sup>381</sup> Wac Anne Bosanko joked that, “Gray and I are having a hair race to see who can keep from cutting her hair the longest. Keep from, longest, not cut long—that would be impossible, huh?”<sup>382</sup> After complaining that she got in trouble during an inspection – again – for long hair, Rose Male stated stubbornly, “Personally, I don’t think it is so long but they do.” She then goes on to reveal “They can check it while we are in school so they make sure it is short enough” but that “When some of the girls get out they really let it grow.” One is left to wonder if, as an act of rebellion, she did, too.<sup>383</sup>

---

<sup>378</sup> Hampf, *Release a Man for Combat*, 160.

<sup>379</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. March 31, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>380</sup> A sailor received a “captain’s mast” for violating the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Letter from Rose Male to Family. Undated. UNCG Male Collection.

<sup>381</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Mother. July 9, 1945. UNCG Mead Collection.

<sup>382</sup> Anne Bosanko Green, *One Woman’s War*, 158-159.

<sup>383</sup> Letter from Rose Male to Family. February 4, 1945. UNCG Male Collection.

It appears that at least two Wacs took advantage of being out of basic to let their hair grow. A friend stationed overseas told Catherine Katopes, “There has been a relaxing of the hair rule over here—it still must be neat and tidy at all times, but it no longer has to be off the collar. That was a silly rule in the first place.”<sup>384</sup> As she came closer to getting out of the service, Constance Cline informed her mother, “My hair is getting very much longer, and we’re grooming ourselves every evening. I even had a starch pack facial the other evening, ‘to close the pores.’” As she contemplated both her grooming rituals and her eminent return to civilian life, Cline concluded, “How nice it will be to return to femininity.”<sup>385</sup>

As Katopes’ friend and Cline indicate, long hair and cosmetics symbolized their femininity. It is possible to interpret all of the servicewomen’s various attempts to remain feminine as an act of rebellion. The vicious rumors of the slander campaign and the public’s dubious regard of the women’s corps did not escape the women’s notice. They understood that their military service had the potential to disrupt gender norms and that they would have to prove their femininity on a daily basis if American society was finally to accept military service as a legitimate activity for women. Their hair and face were two of the only sites for judging femininity over which servicewomen had any control. Consequently, they took great care in styling their tresses and making up, sometimes at the expense of military regulations. At the same time, however, servicewomen took personal pride in looking like women. Their letters expressing satisfaction in looking feminine attest that maintenance of femininity was important to these women. In putting on lipstick and curling their hair, servicewomen reaffirmed their feminine identity to both the public and to themselves.

---

<sup>384</sup> Letter from Lee ? to Catherine Katopes. February 19, 1945. UNCG Katopes Collection.

<sup>385</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. August 15, 1946. UNCG Phillips Collection.

## **Conclusion**

By the time World War II broke out, American society accepted and expected women's use of makeup as a natural expression of femininity. They understood that cosmetics contributed to the making of women. Cosmetics allowed women to become women through the marking and coloring of their faces. During the war, makeup also ensured that women fulfilled their civic duty to men by transforming them into something worth fighting for. Indeed, making up was an expression of women's patriotism. More importantly, cosmetics promised those women who used them that their ultimate reward for doing so would be to join the ranks of America's most respectable women: white middle-class wives and mothers. There were numerous cultural meanings embedded in cosmetics, but those meanings were always rooted in the cultural assumptions regarding femininity and that cosmetics contributed to the making of femininity.

It is little wonder, then, that American society expressed interest, almost to the point of obsession, in whether or not the women's military corps would allow servicewomen to wear makeup. Women's military service was the most radical break with traditional gender norms during World War II, and society worried about the potentially negative effects this masculine institution would have on their women. More importantly, they worried that women's military service would undermine the nation's gender hierarchy and destroy traditional gender norms, both of which privileged white men. The WAC and WAVES needed to establish a feminine image of their corps if the public were to support their mission. Cosmetics helped them in this endeavor. By ensuring the public, via a rigorous propaganda campaign, that servicewomen would not only be allowed to use cosmetics but also have access to salons where they could have their hair styled and their faces painted, the WAC and WAVES demonstrated that they understood and respected femininity. Indeed, they suggested that their corps would defend

femininity against the ravages of war by offering women a medium for fulfilling their traditional duties of helping men and ensuring that they still looked like women while they did so.

Cosmetics could be difficult terrain to navigate, though, as the women's corps found out. Too little attention to makeup and the public decreed the servicewomen "mannish." Too much, and the women were frivolous at best and superfluous at worst. The women's corps had to communicate function as well as femininity if they were to win public approval. The WAVES proved to be more effective than the WAC in this balancing act. Both WAC and WAVES propaganda posters depicted servicewomen with made-up faces and styled hair, but Wacs were often more heavily made-up than their Wave counterparts. Poster Wacs appeared as debutantes who worried more about their appearances than the jobs they were doing, while the Waves, with their more subtle makeup, communicated both their femininity and function. The Waves' femininity was enhanced by the important jobs they were doing, while the Wacs' femininity overshadowed their work. Consequently, the WAVES continued to enjoy a more prestigious position in the minds of most Americans than the WAC, which bore the brunt of the unsavory jokes and vicious accusations directed at servicewomen.

Servicewomen also participated in the making of both their corps and personal femininity. American society had crafted a specific kind of femininity that they expected women to embrace and which included the demand that women make up. Servicewomen were exposed repeatedly to advertisement and propaganda campaigns that glorified the made-up woman and promised the rewards of white middle-class domestic bliss if they, too, crafted their visible femininity. Moreover, they were encouraged to master the outward markers of femininity as a means of protecting and preserving their womanhood while operating within the masculine atmosphere of the military. Servicewomen internalized these messages and proved their

femininity to their friends, family, and fellow Americans by pin-curling their hair and powdering their noses. The rules of womanliness meant taking the time to color one's face and style one's hair. Servicewomen contributed to the fashioning of their own femininity by not only doing these things, but also in writing about them. In detailing to friends and family members the time and effort they spent on their appearances, in spite of their cramped schedules, servicewomen indicated that they understood the rules that governed femininity and had not abandoned them just because they were in a masculine environment.

It is tempting to interpret these women as victims of a society that reduced their value to outward appearances, but it must also be acknowledged that servicewomen experienced pleasure in their visible womanliness. Women actively participated in the creation of their own femininity, and they liked it. To be sure, servicewomen's agency and independence were circumscribed by the society in which they lived in and the institutions they served. Their understandings of "femininity" were informed by the larger society. However, women identified with the dominant cultural interpretations of femininity and found satisfaction in the rituals that aided them in achieving that cultural ideal. They even went so far as to defy military orders when they felt their femininity was being infringed upon. The women's own words attest to this occurrence.

The female soldiers and sailors of World War II created anxiety among Americans. Civilians and servicewomen alike worried about the potentially negative effects of military service on traditional femininity. Consequently, both the military and servicewomen drew on every weapon in their arsenal to protect and defend American womanhood. Cosmetics were crucial to the construction of a female gendered identity and proved an effective weapon in helping both the military and servicewomen in their efforts to fashion femininity for war.

## Chapter 5 - “We Want to Be Feminine Once More:” Back to Civilian Life

“You’ve had to make your hairdo conform to your service hat, so now you’re aching to do something different. Well do,” advised *Mademoiselle’s* “A Special Bulletin for Service Women,” a pamphlet designed specifically for servicewomen transitioning back to civilian life.<sup>386</sup> The pamphlet goes on to suggest that women grow their hair “that extra forbidden inch or two and let it sweep your collar in a polished mane. Or pile it up the new way—all the bulk fastened just back of your crown.” The same pamphlet also offered tips on how women should apply new lipsticks and complement them with the proper shades of foundations, powders, blushes, eye shadows, and mascaras. The newly-minted civilians were also given advice on how to dye their uniforms a more flattering color and make them look more feminine by removing collars and pockets or changing out brass buttons for ones made of pearl. Most importantly, perhaps, the bulletin explained that as women transitioned from military to civilian life, they should give up any military-inspired fashions. “Now you’re out, spike your [uniforms] with bright, unmilitary colors in accessories—chartreuse, lime, scarlet.”<sup>387</sup>

The message to keep their appearance feminine would have been a familiar one to the various servicewomen reading through “A Special Bulletin for Service Women.” Throughout the creation and existence of the women’s military corps, leaders took measures both to reassure the American public that servicewomen would remain feminine and ensure that their

---

<sup>386</sup> “Job News: A Special Bulletin for Servicewomen,” *Mademoiselle Magazine*, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Office of the Director of Personnel and Administration Subordinate Offices, Director of the Women’s Army Corps, General Correspondence, 1942-1946, NM 84, Entry 54, Box 138, RG 165, NACP.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

servicewomen followed through on this promise. As a WAC pamphlet reiterated, these soldiers were still “ladies.” It is not surprising, therefore, that as World War II came to an end and thousands of navy- and khaki-clad women were discharged from service, women’s corps leaders, with the help of civilian agencies, continued to preach this message of femininity in the hope that their former servicewomen would practice it in civilian life.

These “ladies,” however, were coming back to civilian life with “manly” skills they could put to use in the workforce. “A Special Bulletin for Service Women” recognized this fact, and the bulk of the communiqué was actually given over to describing a number of jobs ex-servicewomen might want to pursue in their new civilian lives. The notice explained that women could use the skills they acquired in the service to find work in the medical, broadcasting, or advertising fields, among others, or even to start their own businesses or go to college. Interestingly, the only mention of “homemaking” in the whole pamphlet was in regard to “Big-Time Homemaking” in the restaurant or hospitality industry.

“A Special Bulletin for Service Women” encapsulated the dilemma of the returning servicewoman and post-war American gender norms in general. On the one hand, it upheld the prewar gender norms that encouraged women to differentiate themselves visibly from men by embracing a flamboyant femininity via pink lipstick and chartreuse scarves. On the other hand, it recognized that post-war American gender norms, and especially those pertaining to the workforce, had been altered by encouraging women not only to pursue careers in the civilian world, but to pursue careers in the civilian world that had once belonged exclusively to men. It would seem, then, that in spite of the military’s best efforts to preserve traditional femininity, World War II—and women’s role in it—had forever altered the landscape of American gender norms.

This chapter explores servicewomen's reconversion to civilian life. It argues that even as American society, the military, and women themselves encouraged ex-servicewomen to embrace a material culture that reflected traditional femininity, American society, the military, and women themselves also accepted that World War II had changed traditional femininity. Statistics on post-war America indicate that the majority of white middle-class women took up their customary positions within the home to become wives and mothers. Many of the women included in this study indicated they, too, believed that women belonged in the home and viewed homemaking as their vocation. But others were not quite so quick to answer the call of housewifery and expressed a desire to attend college or to work outside of the home. Of equal importance, there were some in the civilian sector who championed the ex-servicewoman's desire to find work outside the home. But even that championing was usually circumscribed by the still-dominant belief that once a girl got married, she should give up her career for a home and babies. Consequently, it is not surprising that the majority of white middle class women, including those who had been in the military, conformed to this ideal and retained their place in the private sphere. But neither is it surprising that other women challenged this ideal and vocalized their personal belief that they could, and should, have a permanent place in the public sphere. The Second World War created a tension between the traditional ideology that placed women directly in the home and women's wartime experiences that took place outside of it. This tension was made manifest in post-war women's fashion and career choices.

### **Back to Civvies**

“Since 1942 you have been the best dressed woman in America,” begins “Back to Civvies,” a pamphlet prepared for and distributed by the WAVES in 1945. “Your uniform was designed by a famous designer, your hat by a master milliner.... You’ve been smart from top to

toe. Now you must translate that smartness into your own terms... as an individual ... as a civilian.”<sup>388</sup> The pamphlet then provides a very detailed explanation of how the ex-Wave should craft, select, and purchase her new civilian wardrobe. It asked women first to decide whether they leaned toward “pretty,” “smart,” or “crisp” fashions. If they fell into the first category, then women should “choose a feminine hat, soft dresses.” If they styled themselves “smart,” then “a few very smooth clothes” would do. Those women who appreciated the “crisp” were to “stick to tailored clothes.” This section was then followed by encouragement to study fashion magazines and an admonishment to settle on a clothing color scheme that best-suited a woman’s coloring rather than on the colors she preferred. The pamphlet also included segments on “Buying Fashion,” “Good Grooming and Hair-Dos,” “Your Accessories,” and “Your Budget,” among many others. Although the WAC did not produce their own fashion pamphlet for their soon-to-be-civilian members, they did issue discharged Wacs a copy of “A Special Bulletin of Service Women,” which included similar, if less extensive, advice on how women could cultivate a feminine civilian look.

Such detailed advice leads one to wonder if the women’s corps, in spite of having assured the American public otherwise, was indeed worried that military service had corrupted their women’s femininity and felt compelled to tutor their Wacs and Waves in the art before they re-entered civilian society. Both the WAC and the WAVES put much time and effort into preserving their women’s femininity, and this was nowhere more evident than in how they uniformed their soldiers and sailors. However, the fact remained that those uniforms were still military, and no amount of custom tailoring designed to show off an hourglass figure could

---

<sup>388</sup> “Back to Civvies,” (U.S. Naval Training School and Service Women’s Center, 1945). Box 15. UNCG Toll Collection.

disguise completely the masculinity inherent in them. The WAC and the WAVES had attempted to mitigate their servicewomen's gender transgression by allowing them to spend their evenings in civilian pajamas and dressing gowns. The WAVES even permitted their women to wear civilian lingerie beneath their Mainbocher uniforms. Such gestures reminded both servicewomen and the public that at the end of the day and underneath it all, servicewomen were still women. But those servicewomen still spent most of their days clad in uniforms tainted by their association with a masculine institution. Servicewomen's femininity had indeed been compromised by the wearing of those uniforms and, along with it, the rules that governed proper gender roles. American society might have been willing to tolerate such compromises while the war was being waged, but wanted life – and gender norms – to get back to normal now that it had been won. As a *Harper's Bazaar* article proclaimed to their female readers in 1946, "The G.I. look is gone" and with it "broad shouldered masculinity."<sup>389</sup>

"Back to Civvies" and "A Special Bulletin for Service Women" were designed to guide women through the process of shedding the masculinity "the G.I look" had lent them and recovering their femininity via civilian dress. If one of the purposes of dress is to announce the wearer's gender, then postwar women's fashions intended to communicate unquestioned femininity. Women would reclaim their femininity by wearing jackets that "hugged an hourglass waistline" along with "colorful scarves" and "frilly blouses" that proclaimed them loudly as "woman" and which indisputably differentiated them from men.<sup>390</sup> Equally important, feminine civilian clothing would also help to reestablish the pre-war gender hierarchy in a post-war America that was bound to experience changes as a result of women's military service,

---

<sup>389</sup> "The Mood Has Changed," *Harper's Bazaar*, in *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, ed. Nancy Walker (Bedford Series in History & Culture, 1998): 198.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*.

particularly in the civilian workforce. Former Wacs and Waves would re-enter civilian life with skills that would prepare them for entering the paid workforce and, more importantly, into jobs that had once belonged exclusively to men. Whereas once upon a time only men worked as engineers and photographers, now women, having learned to perform these types of jobs while in the service, could, and would, in the post-war workforce, too. Consequently, just as it had been for Wacs and Waves throughout World War II, it was important for the maintenance of the established gender hierarchy that these civilian career women still look like women even as they continued to perform masculine labor in the post-war world. America's crisis of war may have passed with the surrender of Germany and Japan, but the nation's crisis of gender had not.

That post-war America was indeed experiencing a crisis of gender in the workforce is perhaps best demonstrated in a 1946 radio program sponsored by the YWCA in New York, titled "What About G.I. Jane?" The program follows the story of Janet Reid, a fictional corporal in the WAC and an X-Ray technician. The listener is first introduced to Reid while the war is going on, during which she has been assigned to a hospital in Normandy. She is standing behind an X-Ray screen when two doctors come into the room and begin a debate on the virtues of women in the military, without knowing Reid is present. Dr. Hal Ramsey lauds women's service contributions while Dr. Roy Harrison is more skeptical. He demands to know, "Why do they keep sending us those toy soldiers" and then declares "War is for men. So is medicine. No room for hysterics in this profession." Ramsey defends the nurses he with whom he has worked, claiming that they "take more than many men could," but Harrison remains adamant. "Sure," Harrison says, "because [nurses] know what's coming next. It's the unexpected they can't take." Angry and embarrassed, Reid stays hidden until the doctors leave the room, but Harrison comes back in only to realize, belatedly, that Reid has overheard his comments. Later, it

becomes clear that while Harrison has grown to appreciate Reid's abilities, he still does not think the military is an appropriate place for women. After Harrison announces he will soon be leaving for the front, he confesses to Reid that, if the situation becomes dire, he might request her presence. "But you won't need me until things become really desperate... Sir," Reid states scathingly. Harrison is flustered and wants to know when she will forget his initial remarks, but Reid informs him, "First impressions are awfully lasting...Sir." Ultimately, Harrison is wounded and winds up in Reid's care. She manages the crisis with a clear head and an efficient manner, thus proving that women are indeed capable of handling stressful medical emergencies.

In the second half of the show, the war is over and Reid is attempting to find employment as an X-Ray technician in a civilian hospital. She is unsuccessful. The doctor with whom she interviews is, in fact, looking for an X-Ray technician, but he is also looking for a secretary to handle the paperwork generated by the X-Ray department. Reid explains to her potential employer that her clerical skills are rudimentary but that she received excellent training and experience as an X-Ray technician while in the WAC. Still, the doctor refuses to hire her for any position other than secretarial. Irritated, Reid turns down the job and leaves the office only to run into Harrison, who is also having trouble finding work. The two have a friendly drink to reminisce and discuss their mutual post-war frustrations. Reid suggests that the two of them start a business together, but Harrison balks, and Reid, frustrated once more with his attitude toward women in the medical profession, retorts, "Still fighting against your toy soldiers, Captain," and storms out of the club.

Reid, however, is not ready to give up on her business scheme. She pursues the idea and speaks with a lawyer one afternoon, who, after listening to her business plan, encourages her to incorporate and apply for a GI loan. As it turns out, Reid and Harrison have stayed in touch, in

spite of their little spat, and they go out together that evening. Harrison has been trying to find a space to open up his own practice and informs Reid of a property he viewed recently. He says it is too large for what he had in mind, but, to Reid, it sounds perfect. She convinces Harrison to drive her up to the property so she can have a look and then confesses her plan to him. She wants to buy the house and set up her own X-Ray lab. However, she also wants to establish a general medical clinic and plans to rent out space to six doctors. Harrison is taken by the idea and suggests that she also turn one of the rooms into a conference room where doctors, nurses, technicians, and patients can get together. Then, as he slowly moves closer to Reid, he tells her that one of the things he liked best about Army medicine was that they all got together and worked together very well. Reid agrees, a little breathlessly, and then the listener is treated to a dramatic pause before hearing Reid murmur, “Oh, Roy...” and Harrison’s reply of, “I’ve wanted to do that for a long time, Janet.” We are left to assume that Harrison has just kissed Reid. He then announces that he wants to invest in her project and after Reid expresses her pleasure, he asks, “You didn’t think I’d let you try this alone, did you?” Once again, Reid conveys her happiness, and their story then ends with Harrison stating, “It’s a good solid idea, Janet. Besides, I’ll always know just what my wife is doing these warm spring nights.”<sup>391</sup>

“What About GI Jane?” is a particularly interesting piece of post-war propaganda because it captured both the changes and the continuities that took place for women as a result of the war. On the one hand, the program acknowledged that post-war America, particularly the post-war American workforce, would be forever altered. It urged Americans to accept the idea that returning servicewomen were capable employees and qualified to fill jobs that were once

---

<sup>391</sup> “What About GI Jane?,” YMCA Radio Program, 1946, General Correspondence. Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

considered masculine. On the other hand, it reinforced the traditional notion that women should marry and allow their men to take control. In the end of the program, it is Harrison who insists that he will not allow Reid to embark upon her business venture alone and then expresses his pleasure at the prospect of “always [knowing] just what [his] wife is doing....” Reid’s response is merely to laugh.

Throughout “What About GI Jane?” the listener is treated to commentary by Dr. Robert Goldenson, a professor in the department of psychology and philosophy at Hunter College, and Mrs. Oswald (Mary) B. Lord, chairman of the WAC Civilian Advisory Committee. Their comments echoed the “change and continuity” theme of Reid’s story.<sup>392</sup> At one point during the commentary, Goldenson noted that servicemen and women worked well together during the war and asked Lord if she believed that this cooperation would continue in the civilian workforce. Lord said she did, citing the partnership that developed between the two sexes as they worked side by side in the field and stating, “I think this is bound to have a good influence in business and the professions in our postwar world. It will help eradicate the prejudices and petty rivalries between them that have been all too prevalent in the past.” Goldenson then asked for specific examples of these prejudices, to which Lord replied:

One of the most unfortunate practices is to keep women out of certain fields altogether. For instance quite a number of Wacs studied engineering at Aberdeen, but they are having a tough time finding jobs in that so-called “masculine” field. Even photography is supposed to be reserved for men, though I can’t see why.<sup>393</sup>

Military service had changed women and their relationship to the civilian workforce. Jobs coded as “masculine” in prewar America would need to be reevaluated in postwar America. Lord understood as much and that the YWCA allowed her to broadcast her views via a national radio

---

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 8.

program suggests that others shared her convictions and wanted the country, as a whole, to rethink the gender of jobs as well.

“What About GI Jane?” spoke to other prejudices servicewomen faced, one of which was that their service was often overlooked as valuable job experience. In the program, Reid cannot seem to make her potential civilian employer understand that she performed technical and medical work in the Army rather than clerical work. Lord, commenting on Reid’s predicament, stated that this was a common problem among civilian employers. Even four years after the WAC’s establishment, many civilians still did not know that the women had done more than just type, drive, and cook while in the military. *Glamour Magazine*’s Eleanor Lake, who authored “A Smarter GI Jane Comes Home,” corroborated this statement, writing, “GI Jane, the belle of the military world, is often a wallflower in civilian life. Many employers, she finds, are interested only in her prewar experience. They don’t realize that in her exacting service jobs she developed a maturity she might never have found in peacetime.” Lake then gave an account of a former Wac’s unsuccessful job hunt:

Take, from thousands of similar cases, the story of a Wac – Betsy M., aged 23. Betsy was a ten-cent-store girl before the war. The Army gave her aptitude tests, sent her to Clerk’s School to learn stenography, and then shipped her to the Pacific as a sergeant, one of the 5500 Wacs who handled the paper work of MacArthur’s war. Betsy learned to organize her work in improvised offices in the steaming jungles of New Guinea. She typed secret plans in tents where the heat hung like a damp blanket and her fingers slipped off the keys; she picked strange insects out of her typewriter – and still turned out prompt, accurate work... By V-J Day, Betsy had grown up from an intelligent girl into a mature young woman. Back home, she pinned her discharge emblem proudly on her purse and went to look for a job. She found that the Army’s notes on her record meant nothing to civilian employers. She was offered jobs as a waitress, messenger-file clerk, and, full circle, a ten-cent-store girl... Thousands of girls like Betsy have grown up during the war without the civilian world’s realizing it....<sup>394</sup>

---

<sup>394</sup> Eleanor Lake, “A Smarter GI Jane Comes Home,” condensed from *Glamour Magazine*, (September 1946), Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Office of the Director of Personnel and

Numerous other servicewomen experienced the same problem as Betsy M., as made clear in a 1946 WAC Civilian Advisory Committee report. The report concluded, “[S]ervice experience is often given inadequate consideration by employers.” The report also stated that while some women were finding satisfactory employment in clerical positions, those women who sought more specialized (or masculine) positions were being turned away. Even the civilian medical field, where doctors and technicians were in high demand, considered women’s medical training in the military to be “inadequate.”<sup>395</sup>

Even if employers were willing to accept that women were qualified to perform what were once considered “masculine” jobs, they had other qualms about hiring women. Employers often held negative assumptions regarding women’s abilities to function in stressful jobs and their general reliability as employees. In the radio program, Harrison served as a medium through which these negative stereotypes regarding women workers were made manifest, as the character criticized women for their “hysterics” in the workplace and called them “toy soldiers.” The *Glamour* article “A Smarter GI Jane Comes Home” noted, “Employers have always claimed that women give in to fits of temperament, don’t follow through when the going is tough, don’t stay on a job.”<sup>396</sup> However, in “What About GI Jane?,” Reid was meant to serve as proof that women were capable of handling difficult work and keeping a cool head in the middle of a crisis when she x-rayed the critically wounded Harrison, while working in a make-shift battlefield

---

Administration Subordinate Offices, Director of the Women’s Army Corps, General Correspondence, 1942-1946, NM 84, Entry 54, Box 138, RG 165, NACP.

<sup>395</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Report from Mary P. Lord to Colonel Westray Battle Boyce, May 16, 1946, General Correspondence. Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>396</sup> Lake, “A Smarter GI Jane Comes Home,” Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Office of the Director of Personnel and Administration Subordinate Offices, Director of the Women’s Army Corps, General Correspondence, 1942-1946, NM 84, Entry 54, Box 138, RG 165, NACP.

hospital. “A Smarter GI Jane Comes Home” reinforced the message that military service turned the allegedly fickle female employee into the consummate professional woman by reassuring employers.

Girls in the service had such feminine vagaries thoroughly knocked out of them. A Wave who was called down by a red-faced captain didn't retire in tears. She saluted and went back to work. A Wac with a seven o'clock movie date didn't walk out when a two-foot pile of urgent papers hit her desk just as she was about to leave. She phoned her date, cursed under her breath and finished the job.<sup>397</sup>

Ultimately, Lake concluded that GI Jane was just “a typical American girl who ... wants ... a chance to use her hard-won skill and maturity in America at peace, as she did in America at war.”<sup>398</sup> Implicit in both the radio program and the article is the message that employers who gave a former servicewoman that opportunity would not be disappointed.

If the YMCA and *Glamour* magazine were chastening the business world into hiring GI Jane, American society had indeed been changed as a result of women's military service. However, that change was more cautious than decided. In the radio program “What About GI Jane?” Mrs. Oswald Lord spent much of her time commenting on the advantages of hiring servicewomen, but she also spoke to the virtues of marrying a former Wac. For instance, when her fellow commentator Dr. Robert Gold suggested that many ex-Wacs would get married rather than work, neither of them suggested that women could do both. Instead, Lord stated, “The practice they have had in running hospital departments, for instance, will help them in organizing their homes and running them in a systematic way. They have learned a great deal about men and their peculiarities and they will be better prepared to meet and work with their husbands on

---

<sup>397</sup> Ibid..

<sup>398</sup> Ibid..

an equal footing.”<sup>399</sup> The fictional heroine of the same program, Janet Reid, fought battle after battle, successfully, as she proved her value and skill in a so-called “man’s occupation” only to have her independence circumscribed when she ceded control of her nascent business to the man who would become her husband.<sup>400</sup> “What About GI Jane?” is demonstrative of American society’s unwillingness to fully liberate women from the domestic sphere. Even those who supported women’s emergence into the civilian workforce felt compelled to do so with restraint and sought to check the privileges women might enjoy that accompanied their newfound economic independence.

In spite of women’s contributions during the war and the plea by various individuals to consider hiring women for work once considered masculine, the majority of Americans still believed that women belonged in the private sphere, where they should continue more traditionally feminine pursuits. From the beginning of the Second World War to the end, advocates of the WAC and WAVES argued that women wanted to serve in the military not so they could invade the male’s public sphere, but so that they could protect their own domestic one. Alma Lutz, a former suffragist, contended that military service would “not wipe out women’s inherent love of home and the making of a home. If anything it will make them value home more.”<sup>401</sup> Hobby echoed these sentiments when she stated, “[A] girl’s experience in the WACs ... serves to accentuate her desire for home ... and children. When you put on a uniform you don’t change nature.”<sup>402</sup> Matilda Clark, a civilian concerned about WAC enlistment, unwittingly confirmed this belief in a well-intentioned, if humorous, letter to Hobby. Clark tried

---

<sup>399</sup> “What About GI Jane?,” YMCA Radio Program, 20, 1946, General Correspondence. Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid..

<sup>401</sup> Cited in Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 55.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid..

to convince Hobby that more women would enlist in the WAC if they were allowed to consort socially with male officers. “The American girl will not willingly tolerate any violation of the ‘Cinderella Dream,’” Clark informed Hobby. “Every stenographer is sustained by the idea that she might marry the boss. Occasionally she does. But that implied possibility is what makes her accept the dull routine of office housekeeping with so much grace...” Clark then stated that if the Army were to change the rule to allow enlisted women to socialize with male officers, they could sit back “and watch the gals stampede the women’s military services!”<sup>403</sup> In an equally humorous public relations measure, the WAC even tried the slogan “The WAC who shares your Army life, will make a better postwar wife.” This campaign did not last long, but the WAC did not give up the sentiment. Instead, they invited a group of religious leaders, including Catholic priests, Protestant ministers, and Jewish rabbis, to tour a WAC facility, after which the holy men issued the following proclamation:

There is ample evidence that this experience will strengthen their womanly character. The balanced program makes them better trained individuals, more ready to do their duty for the duration. However, we find them eagerly looking forward to the time when they may take up again those time-honored joys which surround home life and children, which still stand as woman’s historic contribution to the society of which they are a part.<sup>404</sup>

Mabel Lee, who headed a mid-western organization to help ex-servicewomen find jobs or gain admission to college noted that very few Wacs seemed to be availing themselves of her services, but then mused, “Perhaps this is due to the fact that so many of the girls have married or were

---

<sup>403</sup> Letter from Matilda Clark to Army Recruiting Publicity Bureau, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Office of the Director of Personnel and Administration Subordinate Offices, Director of the Women’s Army Corps, General Correspondence, 1942-1946, NM 84, Entry 54, Box 02, RG 165, NACP.

<sup>404</sup> Press Release, June 11, 1943, General Correspondence. Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP. General Correspondence. Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

married before entering the service and have returned to homemaking.”<sup>405</sup> Even servicewomen themselves seemed to think the domestic sphere their ultimate priority. The WAC Civilian Advisory Committee noted that while single women competing with single men for the same job believed they ought to be given full consideration, those same women were willing to back down from the job when their competition were married men “with family responsibilities,” which included providing for their homemaking wives.<sup>406</sup> And when Ernest Houser of the *Saturday Evening Post* asked Wacs what they wanted for themselves after the war, their response was, “A home and babies.”<sup>407</sup>

Still, it was impossible to return women fully to their “home and babies.” Women’s military service ensured that at least a few women would continue to test the boundaries of gender norms in civilian life as they took up masculine occupations. It is no accident that “A Special Bulletin for Service Women,” which purported to be the servicewoman’s guide to finding civilian employment, included a long and detailed guide on how women should dress their bodies, coif their hair, and make up their faces upon entering the civilian labor force, or that “Back to Civvies,” the Navy’s guide to the servicewoman’s new civilian wardrobe, included similar advice and even went so far as to make two wardrobe checklists for “the girl with a job.”<sup>408</sup> Both pamphlets advised women to choose feminine, for civilian clothing that marked these gender-benders as visibly feminine would help society negotiate these changes and preserve some semblance of pre-war gender norms.

---

<sup>405</sup> Letter from Mabel Lee to Mary P. Oswald, June 5, 1946, General Correspondence. Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>406</sup> National Civilian Advisory Committee Report from Mary P. Lord to Colonel Westray Battle Boyce, May 16, 1946, General Correspondence. Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

<sup>407</sup> “Those Wonderful G.I. Janes,” *Saturday Evening Post* 217 (September 9, 1944): 26-28, 60, 63.

<sup>408</sup> Back to Civvies. Box 16. UNCG Toll Collection.

In many ways, women's entrance into the postwar civilian workforce paralleled women's entrance into the military. Just like the military, the civilian workforce was most decidedly masculine. Just as they did in the military, women could provide useful services in the civilian workforce. Consequently, just like the women who served in the military, the women who operated in the civilian workforce needed to take measures to protect what they perceived as femininity lest it be tainted or even lost and, with it, the gender order. Colorful accessories, stylish coiffures, and the right lipstick would shore up the defenses of both femininity and the gender hierarchy.

### **I Could Wear Civilian Clothes**

In her account of life in the WAVES, *Angel of the Navy*, Joan Angel included a section describing her first leave home after basic training. Wanting to surprise her family, Angel had not told them she was coming home and thus found her house empty upon her arrival. Disappointed that no one was home to see her in her designer uniform, Angel felt let down. "Then, suddenly, I had an inspiration," Angel wrote. "What in heavens' name was I standing around mooning for? I was home on leave, I was alone in the house. I could wear civilian clothes!" She then gave a detailed account of her impromptu civilian dress-up session:

Faster than it takes a Marine to get fighting mad, I had whisked out of my uniform and taken my favorite black taffeta evening gown out of its cellophane garment bag. It swished over my head with a delightfully feminine sound. Out of their box on the top shelf came the silver slippers with the spike heels. On my ears went a pair of big fake aquamarine earrings, and I piled my wrists with every bracelet I could find the in the jewel-box. Then I dug up the black lace fascinator I had bought the year before for a New Year's Eve dance....<sup>409</sup>

As she stood admiring her reflection in the mirror, Angel's father appeared suddenly and was taken aback not only by his daughter's presence, but also by her civilian attire. He asked her if

---

<sup>409</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 99.

she had been kicked out, but Angel assured him that she was still a Wave, dutifully donned her uniform, and put her civvies back in her closet for the duration.

Joan Angel published *Angel of the Navy* in 1943 with the blessing of the Navy. The book was a WAVES propaganda piece meant to assure a skeptical public that military service would not corrupt women's femininity. Angel's confession that she donned her most frilly dress the first chance she had—even though she was still in the WAVES—served to reinforce that message. However, it is also worth noting that while Angel may have dressed the part of a feminine civilian woman to placate a worried public, she also did so to please herself. So did many other servicewomen.

Throughout their time in the military, many servicewomen wrote to their friends and families about the “civvies” they wore from time to time. Even when they were still enamored of their new uniforms, Wacs and Waves made a point of putting on the occasional piece of civilian attire, especially those pieces they considered to be feminine. For Waves, this often included lingerie. Unlike their WAC counterparts, who had to wear Army-issued brassieres and panties, Waves were allowed to wear their own civilian undergarments. In a letter to her mother and sister, Wave Charlotte Schuck confessed that she had “splurged” on “2 very pretty slips – a white one and a pink...” and planned to buy “some pretty lingerie.” She went on to note “It makes one feel a lot better to have new stuff on, even if one can't see it, right?”<sup>410</sup> Wave Katherine Toll also admitted that she bought herself a black lacy bra with matching panties for Christmas simply because she had always wanted a set.

Although Wacs had to wear khaki panties, they were allowed to wear pajamas in the color of their choice and frequently requested new pajamas and robes from civilian friends and

---

<sup>410</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Family. March 16, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection.

family members. Both the WAC and the WAVES encouraged women to adopt civilian attire in their evening hours. Such civilian touches sent the message that at the end of the working day, servicewomen were just women. However, servicewomen also, quite simply, enjoyed wearing attractive and non-military clothing – even if they only were pajamas. Wave Marie Cody liked lounging in pretty pajamas at the end of the day and even described her evening wear in a letter to her fiancé, Don, “You really should see me now.... I’ve gotten all ready for bed.... All bathed and powdered and comfy in new blue (light blue) p.j.’s....”<sup>411</sup> Eleanor House echoed her fellow Wave’s sentiments in a letter to her mother, explaining, “I received the most beautiful pair of light blue silk pajamas ... to-day [sic]. They were just gorgeous tailored & smart.”<sup>412</sup> Wac Constance Cline thanked her parents for sending some new pajamas, noting, “It’s so nice to have civilian clothes and color around me.”<sup>413</sup>

Servicewomen did not always hide their civilian clothing under uniforms or behind barracks doors, however, and occasionally clothed themselves in civvies for public affairs. Nice weather and sports offered servicewomen a legitimate outlet for wearing civilian clothing from time to time as Waves Lillian Pimlott and Janet Murial Mead indicated in letters to their families. “By the way,” Pimlott asked her mother, “could you mail me my white shorts and white moccasins as we play badminton on Thurs. mornings and I need them?” Mead told her mother that she wanted some of her civvies, since “I’m going to learn how to play golf and on Sun. a dress would look much better.” Mead also sent home for civvies she planned to wear to dances as did Wac Constance Cline. Mead asked her family to “send me my light colored pinafore and

---

<sup>411</sup> Letter from Marie Cody to Don ?. February 26, 1945. UNCG Cody Collection.

<sup>412</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. Undated. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>413</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

orchid blouse. . . . We have barn dances here—and civilian clothes are worn to them.”<sup>414</sup> In discussing the civilian clothes she wore to a dance, Wac Constance Cline stressed the freedom civilian clothes gave her from her military identity:

Last night was the dance, for which you sent the dress and sandals. . . . I preened, and cleaned, and got all ready to go, and Nita, our civilian secretary came out, so Big Mike took us both to the dance, having first given me a most beautiful orchid. . . . So, I just felt good. And civilian. In fact, you wouldn’t have known that I was a member of the women’s army corps. That’s not capitalized, because that’s not the way it was last night. So peace reigned, and I danced hours.<sup>415</sup>

Wave Nan Nabors drew a similar connection between civilian clothes and civilian identity, commenting to a friend with pleasure, “Summer is here and & we can traipse around in sports clothes – and nobody knows who we are – sailors dare whistle.”<sup>416</sup>

Cline’s statement that “you wouldn’t have known that I was a member of the women’s army corps” and Nabors’ comments of “nobody knows who we are” and that “sailors dare whistle” offer some insight into servicewomen’s penchant for dressing in civilian clothing: it allowed them to be, and be only, women. Military service challenged femininity in a way that no other war job did. Like their civilian counterparts working in factories, servicewomen were doing a job traditionally coded as masculine. But unlike their civilian counterparts, servicewomen could not step away from their jobs to resume their lives as women—and all that being a woman meant—at the end of the workday. Vera Lorraine advised Blanche Sheaffer to get a factory job rather than join the WAC for this very reason. “No, don’t join the WAACs,” Lorraine penned Sheaffer, “I’m sure you wouldn’t like it. You would be giving up so much. . . .

---

<sup>414</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Mother. July 26, 1945. UNCG Mead Collection.

<sup>415</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>416</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Mother. June 17, 1945. UNCG Mead Collection and letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. February 18, 1944. UNCG Pimlott Collection and letter from Nan Nabors to Pauline Walker. April 1, 1945. UNCG Nabors Collection.

[J]ust imagine never wearing dresses again.”<sup>417</sup> As Lorraine observed, servicewomen had indeed given up much of the visible markers of their femininity in joining the military. Unlike female factory workers, servicewomen could not take off their khaki or navy uniforms to put on red or black dresses. They could not let down their hair or shadow their eyelids with conspicuous makeup. They could not drape pearls around their necks or dangle diamonds from their ears. In short, they could not do the various things women often did to make “sailors dare whistle.”

That these women cared about making “sailors dare whistle” is also indicative of the larger cultural pattern of defining “femininity” and even the category of “woman” by how men saw them. Women’s femininity, their very identity as “woman,” was, to a degree, conferred upon them by the men who viewed them. Femininity was only partially affirmed by a woman’s act of wearing a form-fitting dress, carefully applying cosmetics, and styling her hair. The remainder of that affirmation came from the man who looked at the woman’s form-fitting dress, her carefully applied cosmetics, and stylish hair and said, “That is a woman.” Given that they lived and worked within a culture that privileged the male perspective, it is not surprising that servicewomen, too, sought to affirm their own femininity in the eyes of men. In some cases, women expressed a desire to please men by wearing clothing their men found attractive. For example, after learning that her fiancé liked “p.j.’s [sic]- blue preferably,” Wave Marie Cody felt compelled to tell him, “Well, I got another pair of ‘em on tonight but these are sky-blue with pretty little roses through them.”<sup>418</sup> In three separate letters to her fiancé, Dale, Wave Margaret Henry expressed her desire for Dale’s approval of her dress. “It will be so nice to dress for you

---

<sup>417</sup> Letter from Vera Lorraine ? to Blache Sheaffer. August 12, 1943. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Sheaffer Collection.

<sup>418</sup> Letter from Marie Cody to Dale ? March 10, 1945. UNCG Cody Collection.

and to wear the clothes you like and think I look well in,” she wrote. In a later missive, she stated, “I am going to try my suit after work – I hope it turns out nicely – my uniforms are really shot. My cutey will be ashamed to take me out if I don’t soon get something to wear, won’t you dear?” Finally, Henry informed Dale, “I went shopping and bought a little dress to lounge about in when our leave comes up – I think you will like me in it.”<sup>419</sup> Wave Mary Ellen Mullen felt compelled to criticize the civilian women still at Smith College, where the WAVES OCS was located, for their slovenly appearance and blamed it on the lack of men. “The few Smith gals we’ve seen are messes...,” she wrote her friend Mike. “Being around girls all the time, they all dress in any old thing like blue jeans & sloppy shirts, etc.”<sup>420</sup> In each of these situations, the servicewomen emphasized the importance of men’s perspectives and approval when assessing how women should cover their bodies.

Still, it should be recognized that servicewomen derived personal pleasure in looking feminine. Both WAC and WAVES leaders encouraged, even demanded, their members to look feminine, but servicewomen still had to follow military regulations regarding personal dress. For years, they spent most of each day attired in the same outfit and unable to indulge in more feminine apparel unless it was behind closed doors or underneath uniforms. This posed a challenge to their personal identities as women. It is not surprising, then, that so many women enjoyed lounging around in pretty pajamas or reveled in the secret knowledge that black lacy lingerie lay just beneath their military uniforms.

---

<sup>419</sup> Letter from Margaret Winston Henry to Dale ?. May 30, 1946. UNCG Henry Collection and Letter from Margaret Winston Henry to Dale ?. June 22, 1944. UNCG Henry Collection.

<sup>420</sup> Letter from Mary Ellen Mullen to Mike ?. Undated. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Hereafter UNCG Mullen Collection.

For a handful of women, however, frilly pajamas and feminine undergarments were not satisfying enough. They wanted to wear their civilian clothes openly and resorted to sneaking around in them. This practice seemed to become more commonplace as the war drew to a close. Wave Kathy Chandler gave her friend, and former Wave, Charlotte Schuck a detailed description of a new civilian suit she purchased: “A light green suit, wool, white silk blouse, luggage tan shoes – heeless [sic] & toeless, & a luggage hand-bag.” She then confessed:

I wore them once to the Marine officer’s club at Camp Catlin. I felt very much out of place for I was afraid of someone recognizing me. Well they did. Ran into a civilian girl that worked in the legal office. Ugh, I was really scared. Don’t think she told anyone over here – but I know she told her date that I was a wave. Guess you know I’d be the one to get caught.<sup>421</sup>

Chandler was not the only Wave to give in to the temptations presented by civilian fashions only to get caught. After dressing up in her “white skirt, light blue blouse, white dress shoes, no hat and looking very non-GI,” Margaret Henry went for a walk in the park and sat down to a light lunch when “– who walks in looking very military but four Wave officers, one who is over the Waves at Ben Franklin and knows me quite well.... To make a long story short, I felt a little uncomfortable after that, but if they recognized me they didn’t let on.”<sup>422</sup> Nan Nabors told her mother that when “I went out to lunch with my friends, I wore long woolen shorts, long sleeved red sweater and a baseball hat. ---- and some of my friends saw me! ..... shall be glad to be back in civilian clothers [sic] again.”<sup>423</sup> In another letter, she admitted with reckless abandon, “I want to wear a civilian dress tonight.....and I know that I am not supposed to. But ... I shall let you know that I have [sic] going to wear a civilian dress.”<sup>424</sup> Rose Male also indulged in a little

---

<sup>421</sup> Letter from Kathy Chandler to Charlotte Schuck. February 26, 1946. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>422</sup> Letter from Margaret Winston Henry to Dale ?. July 9, 1944. UNCG Henry Collection.

<sup>423</sup> Letter from Nan Nabors to Mother. August 17, 1945. UNCG Nabors Collection.

<sup>424</sup> Letter from Nan Nabors to Mother. Feb 26, 1946. UNCG Nabors Collection.

civilian masquerading, going for a walk in “a pink blouse..., my navy skirt and loafers with no stockings and no hat. It sure was swell.” She then justified her misbehavior by noting that “... some of the girls go out here with cotton dresses, sandals and such. They are usually going on dates.<sup>425</sup> Male also elected to “put on a pink sweater, blue shirt, and a pair of black sandals” while visiting some friends one weekend. “It sure was a grand feeling,” she revealed.<sup>426</sup> Before going on leave to visit a friend, Wac Anne Bosanko declared, “When I’m at Grace’s I’m gonna be a civilian, so there!” and asked her family to send her “Peach dress, green plaid suit, brown and white striped suit, spectators, white linen hat, white gloves, white purse, green pottery fish pin, pearls, green coat.” She justified her choice of dress by claiming, “But I’m tired of wearing khaki and everyone out here has such smooth clothes that I can’t stand it another minute.”<sup>427</sup>

Most servicewomen seemed satisfied to plan for and purchase their postwar wardrobes rather than wear them while still in the military. Wave Nan Nabors told her friend, somewhat wistfully, “Still I keep looking at civilian clothes, in spite of not being able to wear them.”<sup>428</sup> However, as the war drew to a close, women became quite preoccupied with their civilian shopping activities and many servicewomen wrote about their efforts in painstaking detail to friends and family. Nabors noted that when she went “looking” to buying civilian clothes, she would end up buying “a pair of brown alligator sling pumps .... beautiful things, made by Ross and Saturn....”<sup>429</sup> Wave Eleanor House asked her friend “to go into Terry’s & price that dress

---

<sup>425</sup> Letter from Rose Male to Family. Undated. UNCG Male Collection.

<sup>426</sup> Letter from Rose Male to Family. Undated. UNCG Male Collection.

<sup>427</sup> Green, *One Woman's War*, 148

<sup>428</sup> Letter from Nan Nabors to Pauline Walker. January 22, 1945. UNCG Nabors Collection.

<sup>429</sup> Letter from Nan Nabors to Mother. February 26, 1946. UNCG Nabors Collection.

that I liked so well. It was a shade of salmon red with a square neck.... The more I think if it the sorrier I am that I didn't buy it.<sup>430</sup> Wave Janet Muriel Mead wrote her mother:

I was going to say that I'm afraid I won't save much of my pay between now and the time I get out because I do want a few new things and after 2 years I think I should have some. After I see the money that some of the girls are spending I think I'm quite a spendthrift. Pat's dad is going to buy all her wardrobe when she gets home, but she has started on it to some degree. I'm not going to tell you what I've got or what I'm getting, but someday I will send it all home in a big suitcase and let you unpack it. I'm sure you won't think ... anything I'm getting is a bit foolish – in fact most of it is things I need – but some of it (the rest of it) are all things that are very practical and sensible.<sup>431</sup>

As a mustering out gift to herself, ex-Wave Connie “bought a grey jumper dress, a pair of shoes, a darling ... battle jacket with the new sleeve, a pair of slacks and a brown skirt. That just about rounds out my wardrobe – at least for winter.”<sup>432</sup> Wave Dorothy Robinson informed her friend Charlotte Schuck:

I bought a new suit yesterday.... It's a beautiful suit – reddish brown wool crepe. I was so glad to find it 'cause it fit me perfectly not a single thing had to be done to it, and for me that's unusual, especially in a suit. Other than that I haven't bought much for fall yet. I'd like a new coat, but I can't decide what kind I want so I'll probably end up wearing last year's. I'm envious of you and your nice fur coat.<sup>433</sup>

Another friend and fellow ex-servicewoman also told Schuck about her new civilian wardrobe, stating with some pride, “I have even managed a new addition to my wardrobe similar to yours – a grey persian [sic] lamb coat. I just bought it Saturday and it is still in the store but I know I'm going to enjoy it a lot. I've been wanting one since before I went in Service.”<sup>434</sup>

Wacs Anne Bosanko and Constance Cline also enjoyed planning and purchasing their civilian wardrobes. “My clothes came,” Bosanko informed her family. “I have Carmen a style

---

<sup>430</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Family. December 31, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>431</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Mother. Undated. UNCG Mead Collection.

<sup>432</sup> Letter from Connie ? to Charlotte Schuck. Undated. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>433</sup> Letter from Dottie Robinson to Charlotte Schuck. January 12, 1946. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>434</sup> Letter from Jane ? to Charlotte Schuck. February 25, 1946. UNCG Schuck Collection.

show Sunday. Civvies feel marvelous....” As the war came to an end, Cline concluded, “Have even got so far as to start wardrobe plans. They couldn’t need us more than a year longer, I really don’t think. So I’m figuring what that \$200 mustering out pay will do toward establishing a wardrobe.” Soon thereafter she acted on her assumption: “... I’ve been shopping, trying to get my civilian wardrobe together. Have done very well so far. Found a reduced suit, shoes, bag, gloves, and yarn for two sweaters.” She then asked her parents for money and told them she’d repay them with her mustering out money and added that “[T]he shopping was most worthwhile.”<sup>435</sup>

The WAVES pamphlet “Back to Civvies” warned women to hold off on buying civilian clothes as the quality of fabric was usually poor. Dorothy Robinson experienced this problem, noting in a letter to Charlotte Schuck, “I shopped for two days, and frankly was a little discouraged with the prices and materials.” She overcame the obstacle, however, by “... having a darling black and white checked suit made for me....”<sup>436</sup> Unwilling to buy expensive or cheaply-made items, Connie, a former Wave, also elected to make a few of her own clothes, including a “... red yarn bag to go with a pair of red specs that I bought.” She concluded that “... it’s going to be pretty cute if I ever get the darn thing finished.”<sup>437</sup> Still in the WAVES, Kathy Chandler asked her newly-minted civilian friend to send her the “first picture you have taken in civilian clothes...,” and then asked her, “Let me know how the buying and selecting of clothes goes, also. I, too, will soon be going through the same thing.”<sup>438</sup>

Other servicewomen followed “Back to Civvies” advice to continue wearing their uniforms, albeit with the insignia removed and with colorful accessories added to jazz them up.

---

<sup>435</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. August 21, 1945. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>436</sup> Letter from Dottie Robinson to Charlotte Schuck. January 12, 1946. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>437</sup> Letter from Connie ? to Charlotte Schuck. Undated. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>438</sup> Letter from Kathy ? to Charlotte Schuck. December 28, 1945. UNCG Schuck Collection.

Anticipating her discharge, Virgilia Williams expected to “wear my suits for a while and my overcoat. Don’t know what I’ll do for a hat” but could not “get excited or very concerned about wearing apparel.”<sup>439</sup> After being discharged from the WAVES, Connie opted to wear her navy suits to work “with fluffy blouses...,” while Dorothy Robinson, unable to find a suitable coat, cheerfully wrote, “I’m still wearing the good old Navy blue!”<sup>440</sup> Wave Jane also wore her Navy coat in civilian life but opted to make it more civilian with “white pearl buttons on it.” She also altered her navy suit by removing the insignia and putting “a big red apple pin on the lapel of the jacket,” which “really makes a nice suit.”<sup>441</sup> Wacs, too, planned to use portions of their uniform as part of their civilian wardrobes. Carol Goddard, Betty Bandel, and Anne Bosanko wrote their families of their intentions to start sending home bits and pieces of their uniforms while Constance Cline noted, “Tomorrow I’m going out to Knox with the Major. They have QM depot and I’m going to try to pick up a piece of material to make a civilian suit. It’s officers pinks, and a good buy, so I hear.”<sup>442</sup> Undoubtedly, these women took the advice in “Back to Civvies” and “A Special Guide for Service Women” to heart and had no intention of letting clothes made of a decent material get away from them. But it would also appear that they had no intention of keeping the style of those clothes military in their new civilian lives.

After years of sporting the same uniforms day in and day out, most Wacs and Waves relished the opportunity to cover their bodies with fabrics, colors, and accessories that were not government issued. They took pleasure expressing their gender in a way that marked them visibly and definitively as “female.” To be sure, these servicewomen were pandering to a culture

---

<sup>439</sup> Letter from Marian ? to Virginia Williams. Undated. UNCG Williams Collection.

<sup>440</sup> Letter from Connie to Charlotte Schuck. Undated. UNCG Schuck Collection and Letter from Dottie Robinson to Charlotte Schuck. January 12, 1946.

<sup>441</sup> Letter from Jane ? to Charlotte Schuck. February 25, 1946. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>442</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

that had very specific ideas on how a feminine woman should look and sought to gratify their society's expectations. However, they were also members of and participants in this same society and embraced "femininity" as a meaningful part of their personal identities. In August of 1945, nine disgruntled Wacs stationed in the Philippines wrote a letter to their Congressman expressing anger that they were unable to get out of the military even though the war was over. After stating their belief that the army was "a man's work," the discontented Wacs exclaimed, "We want to be feminine once more, to wear frilly dresses, high heeled shoes, and sleep in soft beds."<sup>443</sup> Pretty pink slips under uniforms, stolen moments in a park sans G.I. hat or hose, and colorful civilian wardrobes were weapons servicewomen employed to protect themselves against the potentially masculinizing effects of military service and symbols of their personal determination to maintain the femininity that, in part, defined their gender identities.

### **I Don't Care to be an Old Maid**

Marriage afforded servicewomen another opportunity to wear civilian clothes. One of the only times Wacs and Waves dressed in civvies with the blessing of the military was at their own weddings. While many Wacs and Waves elected to get married in their uniforms, others took advantage of their wedding day to indulge in more traditional civilian attire. Wave Shirley Tillson provided her family with an account of a fellow Wave's intention to do just that.

A kid in our class has been going steady with a Marine who was also in our class for a while & they're being married this Saturday. She's wearing white satin, a beautiful dress, her sister a formal of some sort & three of the girls are bridesmaids & they'll wear their blue uniforms.

---

<sup>443</sup> Letter from Irene M. Smith, et. al. to Congressman ?. August 4, 1945. General Correspondence. Army-AG, Project Decimal File, 1940-1945, Box 4257, RG 319; NACP.

Tillson went on to note, however, “Of course, Joe (her husband-to-be) will wear his blue ‘Flash Gordon’ uniform.”<sup>444</sup> The unnamed Wave’s plan to wear a traditional bridal gown and her husband-to-be’s intention of wearing his Marine uniform is representative of World War II American society’s larger understanding of gender roles. Although women had served in the U.S. military with distinction throughout the war, Americans still deemed soldiering a man’s prerogative and marriage a woman’s. In fact, Americans considered marriage so important to women that the War Production Board (WPB) actually exempted wedding dresses from the wartime fabric restrictions governing the production of other clothing. That both the military and the WPB made exceptions for wartime-women and their wedding gowns serves as a testament to society’s belief in marriage as the touchstone of femininity.<sup>445</sup>

Dating was a crucial precursor to marriage and both the WAC and WAVES encouraged their women to participate in this pastime. From time to time, female officers attempted to regulate women’s interactions with members of the opposite sex. For instance, Margaret Henry informed her fiancé, “Darling there is to be no more ‘necking’ on the balcony for the Waves, orders from Ensign Egan...”<sup>446</sup> The WAC and WAVES also refused to issue women contraceptives although their male counterparts had access to these devices. This was an attempt, as Leisa D. Meyers has demonstrated to great effect in *Creating G.I. Jane*, to subordinate women’s sexuality and, with it, their position in American society. Moreover, the women’s corps wanted to create a lady-like image for their corps in order to defend themselves against the slanderous rumors that servicewomen were really prostitutes. However, the WAC

---

<sup>444</sup> Letter from Shirley Tillson to Family. March 29, 1945. UNCG Tillson Collection.

<sup>445</sup> McEuan, *Making War, Making Women*, 155.

<sup>446</sup> Letter from Margaret Winston Henry to Dale ?. February 18, 1944.

and WAVES also needed to protect themselves against the equally vicious rumor that only lesbians joined the women's corps and thus allowed women to date.

Servicewomen took full advantage of both the corps' dating policies and the fact that the war brought them into contact with a multitude of men to enjoy active social lives throughout World War II. Wave Arline Furstman told a friend:

Social life here is roaring. Every evening from 5 to 10 one would think the fleet moved into our lounge. It is overrun with sailors – and that isn't bad either. Never knew there were so many cute sailors in one place. What is nice in a way is that it is all temporary. After all, we are only going to be here a short time & the same goes for them so there is no time to lose your heart or head over anyone – not that I'm the type to do that anyway.<sup>447</sup>

Wave Shirley Tillson enjoyed her own flirtation with a “Coast Guard sailor staring at [her] mouth ajar” after she “wiggled [her] eyes at him and giggled very foolishly. He came over....<sup>448</sup>

After being stationed in Hawaii, Wave Lillian Pimlott observed to her mother:

...they do not lack in MEN! After barely a few hours here we were already aware that to be inconspicuous you dared not be a woman and we know all too well what it means to be whistled after. Still, we've already met some fine boys – with the field wide open we've plenty of choice and we aren't suffering a single dull moment.<sup>449</sup>

Virgilia Williams joked that after WAVES boot camp she could “straighten bed corners beautifully & get the fellows to hang around! The latter is not an especial accomplishment, but rather depends upon 2 facts: i.e. -1 all Marines are wolves and 2 any dame looks dateable to them.”<sup>450</sup>

Parents must have expressed concern over those “wolves” and their daughters' active social lives from time to time, because occasionally a servicewoman would reassure her mother or father that she was taking care of her reputation. Anne Bosanko was quite open with her

---

<sup>447</sup> Letter from Arline Furstman Family. October 6, 1944. UNCG Furstman Collection.

<sup>448</sup> Letter from Shirley Tillson to Parents. January 17, [1945]. UNCG Tillson Collection.

<sup>449</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. Undated. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>450</sup> Letter from Virgilia Williams to “Birds.” September 1944. UNCG Williams Collection.

family about her alcohol consumption, smoking, and dating exploits, but was quick to respond to her mother's concerns about her casual attitude toward dating. "Don't get excited – Pansy [her nickname] has not degenerated completely," Bosanko humorously wrote, "Victorian Annie, they calls me."<sup>451</sup> Friends and families must have also worried about the marriage fervor that seemed to be sweeping the nation. Wave Eleanor House told a friend, "Did you hear that Elsie Mae Hess married an intern? Also Ruth H. is getting married in July! Gee whiz everyone's getting the bug!" She then added, "I wonder when it will be me!"<sup>452</sup> She got bit shortly thereafter and was engaged before she left the service.<sup>453</sup> Even women stationed overseas were not immune to wartime marriage, as indicated by Wac Mildred Estabrook, who told her friend Marcelle Fischer, "The girls sure got the marriage bug."<sup>454</sup> Lillian Pimlott expressed her dismay at a fellow

Wave's hasty nuptials:

My roommate, Jean, is planning on marriage. She's known the fellow 2 ½ mos. Perhaps at 37 I'll be desperate, but I can't imagine it.... The fellow is an Army Capt. and a big bag of wind. It's a pity – a nice girl throwing herself away but I think she was so flattered by his proposal – the case of a country school teacher who has so little life she doesn't know the real meaning of living.... Glory, she doesn't know a thing about him.<sup>455</sup>

Charlotte Schuck, whose letters home included frequent references to her dating exploits, took a moment to ease what we are left to assume was her father's fears about Schuck finding herself in a whirlwind romance and marriage. "Don't worry, Daddy," she soothed, "I'm not serious with anyone yet – but [the] thing I don't care to be is an old maid, ha!"<sup>456</sup>

---

<sup>451</sup> Green, *One Woman's War*, xx.

<sup>452</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Jean ?. March 28, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>453</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Mother. August 22, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

<sup>454</sup> Letter from Mildred Estabrook to Marcelle Fischer. July 30, 1945. Box 3. UNCG Fischer Collection.

<sup>455</sup> Letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. Undated. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>456</sup> Letter from Charlotte Schuck to Father. January 30, 1944. UNCG Schuck Collection.

It appears that other servicewomen shared Schuck's sentiments and that their ultimate goal was marriage. A few even expressed worry that they might wind up as the dreaded "old maid" to which Schuck referred. Constance Cline and Anne Bosanko appear to have gone through a dating drought, and both Wacs lamented their lack of men to their parents. In one letter home Bosanko cited the reason for her depression as "no men" and "poor frustrated homely Annie has no S.A. [sex appeal] except by mail."<sup>457</sup> Cline stated, "My only complaint is the difficulty that a young lady has in meeting nice young men," but then added optimistically, "[M]aybe time takes care of that."<sup>458</sup> Vera Lorraine, a nurse stationed overseas, gloomily informed her Wave friend, Blanche Sheaffer:

According to Millie's last letter I presume she's married by now. I guess you and I will have to sweat out which will get married if either. Gosh we are the only ones left and I don't know about you but as for me I'm not getting any younger.<sup>459</sup>

A short time later, she congratulated Sheaffer on her new beau and concluded, "Looks as though I'll be the old maid of the family. Does he have a friend!"<sup>460</sup> Looking like an "old maid" was equally disturbing for Connie, who confessed to her friend and fellow Wave Charlotte Schuck that she started wearing glasses at work even though she "certainly hated to get them" because she was "getting to feel more and more like a spinster, and wearing glasses helps a lot."<sup>461</sup>

There were, of course, women who expressed interest in going to college or having a career. Wac Constance Cline told her family, "Helen is thinking quite seriously about going back to school, and the more I think of it, the better Carolina sounds."<sup>462</sup> She ultimately joined

---

<sup>457</sup> Green, *One Woman's War*, xx.

<sup>458</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

<sup>459</sup> Letter from Vera Lorraine ? to Blanche Scheaffer. June 24, 1944. UNCG Scheaffer Collection.

<sup>460</sup> Letter from Vera Lorraine ? to Blanche Scheaffer. March 4, 1945. UNCG Scheaffer Collection.

<sup>461</sup> Letter from Connie ? to Charlotte Schuck. Undated. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>462</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. August 21, [1945?]. UNCG Phillips Collection.

her friend where she, too, enrolled in school. Education was important to Wave Nan Nabors, who expressed hope that her siblings would have better educational opportunities than she did before the war and noted that she wanted to complete her Master's and Doctorate in philosophy or literature when she was out of the WAVES. She even toyed with the idea of studying in France.<sup>463</sup> Dorothy Robinson was heartbroken after she did not get into Miami University, but consoled herself with the prospect that,

... there are a lot of other schools, and I still want to go somewhere, don't you? I think I will write to the University of North Carolina, see what they have to offer, etc. I'll let you know if it sounds good. How about the other schools in Ohio – wasn't there another one we were looking at?<sup>464</sup>

Schuck also received a letter from Connie in which the latter hoped her friend was "happier ... by now, and that you like civilian life better," but then stated, "I still think it stinks. I'm extremely dissatisfied here, but don't know what to do about it. I never realized life could be so dull as it is here."<sup>465</sup> Dorothy Robinson, who was friends with both Connie and Schuck expressed her own dismay at civilian life:

Connie writes quite often, and seems rather dissatisfied with her job and her life in general there in Stockton. She has mentioned the possibility of going to some place like China and doing clerical work in the Civil Service, and I find myself wanting to go, too. ... Rock Hill seems such a dull place now. Outside of my family I have no interests and although I like my job fine, I feel that I'd be happier some place [sic] else.... Maybe I just need a new hat, I don't know....<sup>466</sup>

Violet confirmed that other Waves also experienced dissatisfaction with civilian life, telling her friend that:

I'm sure I wrote you Frances Johnson left. I've heard from her – she is disgusted with civilian life as is all the girls I hear from. Evidently the change is too much. Fran

---

<sup>463</sup> Letter from Nan Nabors to Pauline Walker. April 1, 1945. UNCG Nabors Collection and letter from Nan Nabors to Pauline Walker. November 15, 1945. UNCG Nabors Collection.

<sup>464</sup> Letter from Dottie Robinson to Charlotte Schuck. January 18, 1946. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>465</sup> Letter from Connie ? to Charlotte Schuck. March 11, 1945.

<sup>466</sup> Letter from Dorothy Robinson to Charlotte Schuck. April 12, 1946. UNCG Schuck Collection.

enrolled in Alabama U. She reports there in January. All the kids write me to stay here as long as I can.<sup>467</sup>

Wave Virgilia Williams expressed her own lack of enthusiasm for civilian life when contemplating clothing choices, claiming she:

Heard from a Minn. girl who is back from Hawaii and getting her discharge from Great Lakes. They keep popping up in civilian life all the time, I guess, and most of them are no better equipped to meet the future than I. We can't decide what we want to do, let alone know what kind of clothes to buy.<sup>468</sup>

WAC Marcelle Fischer simply planned to stave off the potential boredom in civilian life by buying a car and traveling the country with her best friend, Mildred Estabrook.<sup>469</sup>

At least one woman spoke specifically to having a career rather than a husband. Nan Arbor, who planned to earn a Ph.D., boldly proclaimed, "I'll never have the courage to get married" and then criticized her sister for getting "married rather than manage for herself."<sup>470</sup> A few women attempted to have a career and a husband, such as the newly-married friend of Charlotte Schuck, who wrote that she took a job even though her husband did not approve. Lillian Pimlott actually encouraged her mother not to give up her job, in spite of her father's objections. "Yes, you would be foolish to give up the job," Pimlott admonished her mother, "What is there to do at home these days? You feel so much better, getting out in company. Oh I think I'd go mad if ever I had to stay at home!"<sup>471</sup> However, most women did not seem to think work and marriage were compatible. In a letter to Pimlott, Frances McKeena teased, "I

---

<sup>467</sup> Letter from Violet ? to Mary Ellen West. December 9, 1945. UNCG West Collection.

<sup>468</sup> Letter from Margaret Winston Henry to Jill. Undated. UNCG Henry Collection.

<sup>469</sup> Letter from Mildred Estabrook to Marcelle Fischer. October 22, 1945. Box 3. UNCG Fischer Collection.

<sup>470</sup> Letter from Nan Nabors to Pauline Walker. 1 April 1945. UNCG Nabors Collection and letter from Nan Nabors to Pauline Walker. September 5, 1945. UNCG Nabors Collection.

<sup>471</sup> Letter from Jeanne Silcox to Charlotte Schuck. March 19, 1946. UNCG Schuck Collection and letter from Lillian Pimlott to Mother. Undated. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

sometimes wonder if you'll ever lay aside [the] call to service for gingham, spade china, maple furniture and colonial chintzes. If ever you do, there will be one man in this world definitely to be congratulated."<sup>472</sup> Wave Marie Cody expressed her own belief that that she could not have a career and a husband when she recollected an encounter with the McCormacks, the parents of a young man she wrote to regularly. "A letter came through from him the other day in which he said the only mail he was receiving was from me," Cody recounted to her friend. "Embarrassing – especially when I tell his folks about my intentions of becoming a career woman. They just smile ever so sweetly and say, 'We shall see.'"<sup>473</sup>

McKeena's ribbing of Pimlott about setting aside the call to duty to pick up gingham and the McCormacks response of "We'll see" to Cody's objective of being a "career woman" rather than a wife are indicative of the broader cultural assumption that a woman could not be both a successful wife and professional. In 1944, *Ladies Home Journal* published "You Can't Have a Career and Be a Good Wife," by "A Successful Career Wife," which addressed this issue and emphasized the "unnatural" arrangement between a husband and his wife who worked:

Husbands become discontented as they feel themselves neglected; for no matter how much a business wife may be contributing to a mutual household in the way of an alert mind, an enriched personality and a wider circle of interests – quite apart from mere money – the husband who can't find his clean laundry considers himself abused and puts it all down to his unnatural home setup.

Time and again, the article urged women to consider the insult a successful working wife would be to her husband. After asking women to consider the time when "Caleb" had a rough day at work only to come home to his wife, "Sylvia," crying about her own job or when Caleb was passed over for a raise at work only to discover that Sylvia had received an unexpected bonus, the author stated:

---

<sup>472</sup> Letter from Francis McKenna to Lillian Pimlott. December 20, 1942. UNCG Pimlott Collection.

<sup>473</sup> Letter from Marie Cody to Don ?. April 22, 1945. UNCG Cody Collection.

A man wants comfort and someone to share his grouching at the boss at a low moment like that, and no matter how many articles are written to prove it shouldn't be so, it hurts his male pride to have his woman winning, on her own, the business laurels he had hoped to lay at her feet.

At the end of the day, A Successful Career Wife stated, a husband of a professional woman “has an age-old male resentment of the fact that his woman is out in the world about her own business instead of staying safely in the cave he provides for her.” The article reassured women that they, too, would be happiest nestled in that cave where they could devote all of their time and attention to the needs of their families rather than wearing themselves ragged by both working and attempting to give their husbands “an entirely normal home.”<sup>474</sup>

For many servicewomen, that “normal home” meant marriage, and marriage alone, rather than marriage and work. These women were members of a society that venerated marriage and motherhood as the most ideal and noble of occupations for women, and many of them wanted that occupation for themselves. Wac Constance Cline actually saw her time in the Army as excellent preparation for her career as a housewife. After complaining about having to spend her free evening ironing shirts, Cline added, “You should see those shirts though, I was pleased. And with my planned 6 boys, I shall have to know how to iron shirts. The army is a good way to learn such things.”<sup>475</sup> Mildred Estabrook commented on the conflict between family and work for women, although in a less-than-enthusiastic way, when she revealed that a fellow Wac might be pregnant. “She was planning on getting a civilian job here [France],” Estabrook wrote

---

<sup>474</sup> “You Can't Have a Career and Be a Good Wife,” *Ladies Home Journal*, in *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, ed. Nancy Walker (Bedford Series in History & Culture, 1998): 74.

<sup>475</sup> Letter from Constance Cline to Parents. Undated. UNCG Phillips Collection.

Marcelle Fischer, “but that has changed her plans a bit.”<sup>476</sup> Wave Dorothy Robinson also spoke to the conflict between work and family as she contemplated her own future:

Frankly, I think my mother would be happier if I married and settled down rather than going off to school – but I wonder if I can ever find anyone that I can love enough to marry! – besides I gotta get an education, haven’t I?<sup>477</sup>

Carol Goddard was more excited about giving up her work to return to married life. Anticipating her discharge from the WAC, she wrote happily to her husband:

I am getting so thrilled to think I will be home to live again, that I carry a smile all over my face. I feel years younger, just merely thinking that now I can be home to look after you and give you the attention you should have in EVERY way. Honey, I surely am happy to have you as my hubby. I think I can erase a lot of your aches; at least I will spend my days and years trying to make you a happy husband.<sup>478</sup>

Even Jeanne Silcox, who got married after she left the WAVES but decided to get a job anyway, planned to quit the work once she and her husband were able to move out of his parents’ home. She noted that the only reason she took a job was that taking care of their room was not the same as “being responsible for a whole house,” and she was “going crazy just sitting around the house all day....”<sup>479</sup> Wave Margaret Henry was also looking forward to settling down into a home and made her feelings known to her fiancé:

Your letter yesterday was so wonderful and made me very happy. To have the person you love to tell you, he loves you more than he has ever loved anyone and wants you for a wife, is the most wonderful thing that could happen to any woman. Thank you darling. I’ll try always to make you happy.<sup>480</sup>

---

<sup>476</sup> Letter from Mildred Estabrook to Marcelle Fischer. October 24, 1945. Box 3. UNCG Fischer Collection.

<sup>477</sup> Letter from Dorothy Richardson to Charlotte Schuck. January 18, 1946. UNCG Schuck Collection.

<sup>478</sup> Letter from Carol Goddard to Bertrin Goddard. August 22, 1945. UNCG Goddard Collection.

<sup>479</sup> Letter from Jeanne Silcox to Charlotte Schuck. March 19, 1946. UNCG Schuck File.

<sup>480</sup> Letter from Margaret Winston Henry to Dale ?. June 23, 1944. UNCG Henry Collection.

Wave Marie Cody perhaps best encapsulates this point in a series of letters to Don, the man who would eventually become her husband. At one point, Cody expressed interest in having a career over marriage but then jokingly informed Don:

... I want to go and cook dinner now. Yes, you read right - I said "Cook dinner"! I've been doing it all week and loving it. Another week of this domesticity and I'll be willing to chuck my "career" ideas out the window for a handsome flyer! (I should get back to D.C. and work - but quick!!!)<sup>481</sup>

In a later and more serious communication, she expressed her hope eventually to find domestic bliss, but only after she met the right man.

You see, I intend to (at least, I hope to) marry and settle down sometime but when I do it will be the "grade A" romance of all times.... My home life will be ideal because, if the old adage can be depended upon, "you get out of something only what you put into it" – I'll put my whole life into my marriage, please God.<sup>482</sup>

A message from Janet Muriel Mead notifying her parents that she was engaged to a fellow sailor named "Jack" echoed Cody's perspective. After telling her parents about her fiancé's husbandly qualities, Mead stated:

... I shall see you soon afterwards – in Sept. – and I won't be a wave. In the clause of our 1947 signing over it states that marriage is one reason for discharge – and I can't see staying in under any circumstances. Besides, Jack just won't hear to it – and besides, he asked me to quit my job at the Village Grill because I was beginning to ach [sic] and look tired.<sup>483</sup>

In most of the examples, the women articulated their personal desire to be married, and in all of them, they parrot the larger cultural belief that marriage was incompatible with work because it inhibited a woman's ability to care for her family.

Civilian clothing could, and did, serve as a representation of love, marriage, and a "normal home" for servicewomen during World War II. In a letter to her fiancé, Margaret Henry

---

<sup>481</sup> Letter from Marie Cody to Don ?. March 31, 1945. UNCG Cody Collection.

<sup>482</sup> Letter from Marie Cody to Don ?. August 27, 1945. UNCG Cody Collection.

<sup>483</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Parents. June 22, 1946. UNCG Mead Collection.

remarked, “[I]t is always wonderful being with you but somehow last evening was different, a little, both out of our uniforms, I couldn’t help but wishing, it was all over and we wouldn’t have to go into them again. You looked so nice and fresh in your white.”<sup>484</sup> In this case, Henry expressed her pleasure at seeing her fiancé in civilian clothing and, more importantly, at what those civilian clothes represented: an end to the war and a return to normality. Henry even told her fiancé, “I will be so glad when the war is over and we can settle down to normal living again....”<sup>485</sup> For many women, that “normal” meant marriage, and their civilian clothing symbolized that potential. Those women who had already secured fiancés often staged celebrations of their upcoming nuptials around their new civvies. After announcing their respective engagements, Janet Muriel Mead found time to have a “little party to celebrate ‘us,’” during which she “wore civilian clothes – one outfit I have been working on,” while Marie Cody “had a fashion show and I as the model, my new clothes being the cause of it all.”<sup>486</sup> Eleanor House pestered her family to send her Hope Chest after she was formally engaged to her long-term boyfriend and then happily informed them of both its arrival and her colleagues’ reaction to its contents. “I’m so pleased with my Chest & my negligie [sic] especially,” she gushed. “Everyone likes my cute red checked pajamas too.”<sup>487</sup>

Women’s military service could, and should, be interpreted as a feminist act. The Wacs and Waves of World War II contributed to the advancement of women’s rights in America. However, their feminism – and many would have balked at being identified by that term – went only so far. Ultimately, the majority of servicewomen considered their military service a detour

---

<sup>484</sup> Letter from Margaret Winston Henry to Dale ?. Undated. UNCG Henry Collection.

<sup>485</sup> Letter from Margaret Winston Henry to Dale ?. April 5, 1944. UNCG Henry Collection.

<sup>486</sup> Letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Parents. May 30, 1945. UNCG Mead Collection and letter from Janet Muriel Mead to Parents. June 22, 1946. UNCG Mead Collection and Letter from Marie Cody to Don ?. July 7, 1946. UNCG Cody Collection.

<sup>487</sup> Letter from Eleanor House Selzo to Parents. December 28, 1944. UNCG Selzo Collection.

on their road to marriage and motherhood. Take, for example, Janet Muriel Mead, a Wave who made a point of telling her mother that if she ever got married while in the WAVES, she “would want to wear Navy clothes ...” but that there was “no chance” of that happening. Yet less than a year later, Mead had not only become engaged but spent considerable time writing to her family about her wedding plans, including the traditional white dress she was having made. At the beginning of her service, Mead was proud enough of her military identity to want it incorporated into her wedding. However, after meeting her fiancé, who “could see no room for the Navy” in their future and would not “hear of” her staying in the service, Mead was ready to shed her uniform, and her military identity with it, to don a traditional wedding gown along with the future as just a wife, and probably a mother, that it represented.

### **CONCLUSION**

As the war drew to a close, both America and its skirted soldiers and sailors wondered what would become of traditional American womanhood. Most hoped to repair any damage military service had inflicted upon femininity and restore women to their rightful place within the domestic sphere. The outpouring of fashion advice encouraging women to proclaim their femininity boldly with colorful accessories and frilly blouses, to grow their hair out long and wear makeup colors the military denied them, were attempts to aid women in the recovery of their diminished femininity and the larger culture in the reestablishment of the pre-war gender hierarchy that had been undermined by women’s military service. Servicewomen seemed more than happy to listen to said advice and cheerfully went about the business of performing their gender identity in a way they had been unable to in the previous two, three, or even four years. They stripped their uniforms of insignia only to redecorate them with bejeweled brooches, vibrant scarves, and pearl buttons. They traded their low-heeled loafers for spikey high-heels

and their olive-drab overcoats for fashionable furs. They proclaimed loudly, via their ultra-feminine garb, that they were still women. Such a proclamation was as important to their personal sense of identity as to the established gender order. And as members of a society that believed a woman's primary duty was to marry, raise children, and build a home, many happily anticipated a post-war life of domestic bliss where they could fulfill this societal, and their own, expectation.

It is too simple to conclude, however, that post-war American society remained unchanged by women's military service. If society as a whole was not yet ready to accept a full-scale invasion of women into the public sphere, they were at least willing to entertain the prospect of allowing women into areas of that sphere – so long as the visible demarcations between men and women, and, by default, the gendered power relationship that went along with them, remained in place. Hence, Americans were treated to the YWCA's broadcast of "What About G.I. Jane," which urged them to set aside old prejudices regarding women employees even as the broadcast placed the plucky heroine of the story under the direction of her future husband.

A passage from Joan Angel's autobiography, *Angel of the Navy*, perhaps best captures both the American public's and servicewomen's perspective regarding women's World War II military service and how women should put their new-found skills to use in the post-war world. "I'm an old-fashioned man," Angel's father tells her. "I hate to think of what's going to happen to all these women in uniform after the war. You see, I still think a woman's first job is to marry and raise children and build a home." Angel sits beside her father, clad in her WAVES uniform, and agrees with him:

So do I. So do most of the girls I've met in the WAVES. More than anything else, we want to marry and raise children and build a home. But before we can do that, there's a job to be done. When it's done, when the men can come home again, we'll get out of these uniforms on the double-quick. The parachute riggers will turn their needles to tiny garments. The storekeepers will be buying family provisions at the corner Super-Market. The photographers will be taking pictures of their offspring. And so on right down the line.

Intrigued, Angel's father asks, "And you? Where does a medical technician fit into the scheme?" Joan smiles and says easily, "I'll just find me a nice doctor and be his helpmate in the office as well as at home!"<sup>488</sup>

---

<sup>488</sup> Angel, *Angel of the Navy*, 108.

## Epilogue

In the aftermath of World War II, Americans embraced domesticity. As Elaine Tyler May has famously argued in *Homeward Bound*, post-war American men and women fell readily into their respective roles as breadwinner and homemaker. The traditional family experienced an American revival with men and women marrying at younger ages and having more children than the generation who came before them as well as the generation who came after. It did not have to be this way. Both the Great Depression and World War II presented challenges to traditional gender norms by creating opportunities for men and, especially, women to step outside their customary roles as breadwinner and homemaker. Throughout World War II, thousands of women had a taste of economic independence when they took jobs outside the home or joined the military. They also had greater control over their reproductive systems with the advent of new birth control devices and their generally easy accessibility. Yet between the 1940s and the 1960s, the overall marriage and birth rates among Americans soared, while at the same time the divorce rate plummeted. In the aftermath of war, it seems, most Americans sought domestic bliss.

May has suggested that this exaltation of the traditional family was rooted in the political anxieties Americans experienced during the 1950s as a result of the Cold War. As the world around them became less secure and more chaotic, Americans sought to maintain some semblance of stability within their private lives by conforming to idealized standards of domesticity. There is certainly merit to this argument, but evidence indicates that this celebration, even adoration, of the nuclear family began during World War II. The Second World War brought chaos to American lives not only in the form of violence and bloodshed abroad, but also in the form of social upheaval at home. One of the ways in which Americans

contended with this general chaos was by attempting to manage gender along traditional lines even as those lines were crossed, blurred, and erased. Or, perhaps, especially because those lines were crossed, blurred, and erased. Throughout the war, Americans were inundated with propaganda that glorified the traditional family and even offered the protection of traditional gender roles as a reason Americans took up arms against the Axis powers.

During World War II, the lines between proper gender roles were nowhere more blurred than in women enlisting in the U.S. military. The formation of the women's corps became the focus of public fears that mobilizing women for war would undermine customary gender systems. Military leaders, both male and female, attempted to create a place for women within the military without disrupting contemporary cultural understandings of "masculinity" and "femininity." Since the women's corps could not draft women into service, their success depended on their ability to recruit women. But they did not simply have to recruit women. They had, in essence, to recruit the women's family and friends—mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, husbands and boyfriends—who would have some influence on their decision to join a corps. Considering public fears that women would become masculinized as a result of their service, the women's corps' success depended greatly on the various corps leaders effectively to communicate a message of femininity and continuity of the gender system that conformed to cultural norms.

The women's corps leaders made it clear that women would replicate their traditional position as "helpmeet" to men by working only in noncombatant positions limited to clerical and later mechanical work. Women, supporters argued, were more skillful than men in these areas of work because they did not mind performing monotonous tasks, had "keen eyes and quick fingers" and were patient, loyal, and conscientious. Furthermore, Army officials observed that

“women’s manual dexterity was valuable not only on a typewriter keyboard, but in maintaining and repairing the multitude of intricate small instruments essential to mechanized warfare.”<sup>489</sup>

Such declarations labeled women’s work as “feminine,” since it assisted men in their own work, as well as “necessary” since these valuable women’s skills were essential to the successful prosecution of the war.

In many ways, military leaders succeeded in their endeavor to replicate traditional gender norms within the women’s corps. Early women’s corps advocates never argued that women had an equal right to men to participate in military service. Instead, they defended women’s military service as a necessary aberration that would end with the war. Once the war and the women’s corps experiment were over, they said, servicewomen would go home and resume traditional female roles.<sup>490</sup> Thus, women’s military leaders had been guided by the determination to create a role for women in the military that maintained traditional gender norms.

This determination to maintain traditional gender norms had a profound influence on the ways in which the corps were organized and presented to the American public. It was not enough for women’s corps leaders merely to say women’s military service would uphold traditional gender norms. They needed to show that it would do so. Consequently, material culture played a critical role in communicating this message to the public. Both the WAC and the WAVES deployed a material culture heavily invested with traditional femininity in their efforts to create a wartime femininity compatible with contemporary understandings of womanhood that the public could readily accept.

How women’s corps leaders presented their branches to the public also had a profound influence on the ways in which servicewomen constructed their own military identity.

---

<sup>489</sup> Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 56.

<sup>490</sup> Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, 179.

Servicewomen, too, reiterated traditional gender norms throughout the war years, reassuring friends and families that their military service was simply a wartime extension of their domestic duties. One Waac recruit informed her family that servicewomen were merely fulfilling their traditional duty to “hold the home front steadfast, and send men to battle warmed and fed and comforted; to stand by and do dull routine work while the men are gone.”<sup>491</sup> In a society that viewed military service as the ultimate test of masculinity, such words served to normalize women’s military service by speaking of it as an expansion of women’s domestic sphere. By reiterating the norm that “women belong in the home,” the WAC, WAVES, and servicewomen attempted to negate the potential gender instability that women’s military service could cause.<sup>492</sup>

In some respects, however, World War II caused a crisis of gender identity for servicewomen because they took on roles that they had never performed in pre-war life. Although such a displacement of gender roles was justified in the name of the war effort, society at large remained uneasy about women in the military. For numerous reasons, the women who joined the WAC and WAVES were able to reconcile the terms “soldier/sailor” and “woman,” but, as products of their society, they too were anxious about their martial roles. The result was a heightened self-consciousness about both their respectability and their femininity.

Clearly, military service challenged how the women included in this study understood their own performance of gender roles. They were able to reconcile the terms “soldier/sailor” and “woman,” but these women were still a product of their culture, and that culture questioned the validity, morality, and femininity of women in uniform. Thus, in an effort to justify their service, women attempted to perform the “proper” characteristics associated with their gender.

---

<sup>491</sup> Cited in Haumpf, *Release a Man for Combat*, 43.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

They carefully styled their hair, painted their faces, adorned their bodies, and decorated their rooms with visible symbols that emphasized first and foremost their status as women.

Throughout the war, these women were adamant about proving that soldiering did not negate femininity. It is not surprising, therefore, that these same women readily embraced the rewards of femininity that were promised to them by advertisements and propaganda throughout the war: domesticity.

Nonetheless, neither the women's corps leaders nor servicewomen themselves were completely successful in their attempt to uphold contemporary definitions of "femininity" and "masculinity." Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how they could have been completely successful. Servicewomen might have continued to "perform" their proper feminine gender role during the war, but they were doing so in decidedly masculine costumes: military uniforms. Moreover, the fact remained that women were permitted entrance into a previously all-male arena, and there was no turning back from it, at least not completely, once the war was over. Certainly, after V-J day, most women, either because they had had enough of military life or because they believed that the women's corps would never become a permanent part of the military, returned to civilian life. But in the aftermath of V-J Day, both General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Admiral Chester Nimitz gave testimony in Congress supporting the permanent establishment of the WAC and WAVES, respectively, which Congress finally granted in 1948.<sup>493</sup>

During World War II, it was not servicewomen's intention to join the service and bring about this change in society's gender expectations. But there is little surprise that gender expectations did change. These first women to have donned a military uniform proved to their

---

<sup>493</sup> Bettie J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978*, (Washington, D.C.: CMH, 1990), 399; Akers, "Doing Their Part," 233.

country that they were more than capable of functioning in the military. More importantly, they proved to themselves that they could succeed in the military. Although many women were self-conscious about their military service and constantly felt the need to justify their decision to join the corps, many of the same women developed their own military identity and unique sense of worth in the Army or Navy. They demonstrated that they were patriotic individuals who also found varying degrees of satisfaction in their military work. Servicewomen knew they were contributing to the war effort in a very real way. “At the end of my working day,” one wrote to her friends, “I . . . know in my heart that ‘paper work’ is just as important in this business of war, as is ammunition and supplies.”<sup>494</sup> Women found their place within the service, and more than a few of them also found themselves. They came to appreciate the military and enjoy the rituals that went along with service.

One of the most important aspects of the women’s military corps experiment for women was the sense of power and personal growth many took with them from their military experience. As Anne Bosanko Green wrote, more than forty years after the war, “Joining the WAC gave me the chance to be more than a spectator in the worldwide upheaval that touched everyone’s lives.”<sup>495</sup> Military service helped these women to have more confidence in their individual capabilities. These women entered the corps for a variety of personal reasons, such as adventure, economic or educational opportunities, or simply sincere patriotism and love for their nation. They defied stereotypes, endured vicious gossip, and proved that they were worthy to be in the service of their nation, or rather, that the military was worthy of their service. Once the war was

---

<sup>494</sup> Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers’ War: American Women at Home and at the Front during WORLD WAR II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 122.

<sup>495</sup> Green, *One Woman’s War*, 307.

over, they faced a culture that continued to restrict women's opportunities outside the home by celebrating women's position within it.

The legacy of women's wartime contributions—in the military, in the factory, and in the home—remains inconclusive. Some historians argue that the Second World War was a watershed moment in the eventual reemergence of the feminist movement, while others insist World War II was an anomaly in what was otherwise women's continuous embrace of domesticity. As evidence from this study indicates, most servicewomen had absorbed the larger cultural ideals that venerated domesticity and readily set aside their military careers in favor of settling into the domesticity that so characterized the 1950s. However, as Elaine Tyler May has also demonstrated in *Homeward Bound*, the postwar domestic bliss that so many of the servicewomen in this study anticipated remained elusive for many more of the housewives who lived throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Given the inevitable imperfection of that imagined domestic bliss, it is not surprising that Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* captured the imagination of this generation of women who had stepped beyond of the domestic ideal to experience the world outside of it. But neither is it surprising that this same generation refused to abandon fully the traditional femininity when that post-war domestic ideal proved to be less than completely fulfilling. Reconciling long-held ideals with short-lived experiences could not be easy. Femininity, for these women, likely still meant homes, husbands, and children. But, as the evidence in this study also indicates, femininity is a thing made to be fashioned and refashioned. Although World War II servicewomen might have been done with their own fashioning of femininity, their extraordinary wartime experiences ensured that future generations were not. For these reasons, it took the next generation of women, who grew up in a different

social and cultural environment, to attempt to overcome the dissonance between ideology and experience and restart the movement for women's liberation.

# Bibliography

## Primary Sources

### Archives

Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA. Collections Consulted:

Bernice Moran Miller, Constance Cline Phillips, and Florence Weil, Jaenn Coz Bailey, Ruth Bonin, Marie Cody, Marcelle Fischer, Rose Elaine Male, Josephine Martin Flynn, Arline E. Furstman, Carol Goddard, Margaret Winston Henry, Catherine Katopes, Janet Muriel Mead, Bernice Moran Miller, Mary Ellen Mullan, Nan M. Nabors, Constance Cline Phillips, Charlotte Lavone Schuck, Eleanor Elizabeth House Selzo, Blanche Sheaffer, Shirley M. Tillson, Katherine W. Toll, Mary Ellen West, and Florence Weil.

National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

### Films

*Here Come the WAVES*. Directed by Mark Sandrich. 1944. Los Angeles, CA: Universal Studios. DVD.

*Keep Your Powder Dry*. Directed by Edward Buzzell. 1945. Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Home Video. DVD.

### Microfilm and Oral History

“Recollections of Captain Mildred McAfee, USNR (Ret.) (Mrs. Douglas Horton).” *The Reminiscences of The WAVES Volume I*. Annapolis, MY: U.S. Naval Institute (1971): 1-115.

*The WAVES: Records of the Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Women*. 20 reels. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1991.

### Newspaper and Magazine Articles

“Draft of Women.” *America*. February 1944.

“Miss Mac.” *TIME*. March 1945.

“Miami Story,” *Miami News* (Miami, FL), May 20, 1942.

“Our Girls in Uniform,” *Ladies Home Journal*. January 1943.

“Reform for a Uniform.” *Colliers*, June 1944.

Stephenson, Malvina. “Personality, Brains, Beauty Mark Oveta Culp Hobby Who Will Lead New Women’s Army,” *Hammond (IN) Times*; May 20, 1942.

“The Waves.” *Vogue*, October 1942.

“WAACS.” *LIFE*, September 1942.

“WAAC’s First Muster.” *Time*. June 1942.

“WAAC Officers Will Bulge Only in the Right Places.” *Manhattan (NY) Republic*, June 18, 1942.

“Waac Rumors” *Newsweek*. June 21, 1943, 46; *Washington Post*, June 11 and 16, 1943.

“WAACS and WAVES.” *LIFE*, March 1943.

“Wacks and Warns in Prospect for Petticoat Army and Navy.” *Newsweek*, March 1942.

“Waves Uniforms.” *LIFE*, September 1942.

“What WAACS Will Wear.” *Time*, June 1942.

### **Published Letter Collections and Contemporary Memoirs:**

Angel, Joan. *Angel of the Navy: The Story of a Wave*. New York: Hastings House, 1943.

Bandel, Betty. *An Officer and a Lady: The World War II Letters of Lt. Col. Betty Bandel, Women’s Army Corps*. Edited by Sylvia J. Bugbee. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2004.

Green, Anne Bosanko. *One Woman’s War: Letters Home from the Women’s Army Corps, 1944-1946*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989.

Henderson, Aileen Kilgore. *Stateside Soldier: Life in the Women’s Army Corps, 1944-1945*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001.

Lutz, Alma, editor. *With Love, Jane: Letters from American Women on the War Fronts*. New York, NY: John Day Co., 1945.

Yellin, Emily. *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2004.

## **WAC and WAVES Literature**

“A Book of Facts About the WAC.” (Recruitment Pamphlet, Recruiting Publicity Bureau, U.S. Army, December 9, 1943.

Army of the United States – Women’s Army Corps, *Facts You Want to Know About the WAC*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943.

“Handbook for the Women’s Army Corps”  
<[http://mscd.edu/history/camphale/wim\\_003\\_basic\\_training\\_handbook.html](http://mscd.edu/history/camphale/wim_003_basic_training_handbook.html)>

Ross, Nancy Wilson. *The WAVES: The Story of the Girls in Blue*. New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1943.

“The Story of You in Navy Blue.” (Recruitment Pamphlet, U.S. Navy, 1944. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA.

“Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps,” (Recruitment Pamphlet, Recruiting Publicity Bureau, U.S. Army, May 13, 1942. Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA.

## **Secondary Sources**

### **Articles and Books**

Akers, Regina T. “Mildred McAfee Horton.” In *Notable American: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century Women*, edited by Susan Ware, 311-313. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Allen, Ann. “The News Media and the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps: Protagonists for a Cause.” *Military Affairs*, 50 No. 2 (1986): 77-83.

- Anderson, Karen. *Wartime Women: Sex Roles Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981.
- Bellafaire, Judith. *The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of WWII Service*. CMH Publication. <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/wac/wac.htm>. Retrieved 13 October 2014.
- Blake, Penelope. *My Mother's Fort: A Photographic Tribute to Fort Des Moines, The First Home of the Women's Army Corps*. Book Surge, LLC, 2005.
- Bonnell, Francoise Barnes and Ronald Kevin Bullis. *Capturing the Women's Army Corps: The World War II Photographs of Captain Charlotte T. McGraw*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013.
- Campbell, D'Ann. *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Chatterjee, Partha. "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." In *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, edited by KumKum Sagari and Sudesh Vaid, 233-253. New Brunswick New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- Clemente, Deirdre. "Prettier Than They Used To Be: Femininity, Fashion, and the Recasting of Radcliffe's Reputation, 1900-1950." *New England Quarterly* 82, no. 4, (2009): 637-666.
- Colville, Quintin. "Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer: The Role of Uniform in Shaping the Class-and Gender-Related Identities of British Naval Personnel, 1930-1939: The Alexander Prize Lecture." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13, no. 6 (2003): 105-129.
- Cunningham, Patricia A. and Susan Voso Lab, "Understanding Dress and Popular Culture." In *Dress and Popular Culture*, edited by Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab, 5-18. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991.
- Davis, Fred. *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Devilbliss, M. C. *Women and the Military Service: A History, Analysis, and Overview*. Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1990.
- Doane, Mary Ann. "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator." *Discourse* 11 (Fall-Winter 1988-89): 42-54.

Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, & Difference*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Godson, Susan H. *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the U.S. Navy*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Gunter, Helen Clifford. *Navy WAVE: Memories of World War II*. Fort Bragg: Cypress House Press, 1992.

Gustafson, Melanie. "Oveta Culp Hobby." In *Notable American: A Biographical Dictionary Completing the Twentieth Century Women*, edited by Susan Ware, 303-305. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Hampf, M. Michaela. *Release a Man for Combat: The Women's Army Corps during World War II*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag Köln, 2010.

Hartmann, Susan M. *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982.

Hermann, Vic. *Winnie the WAC: The Return of a World War II Favorite*. Encinitas, CA: KNI, 2002.

Holm, Jeanne. *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982.

Joseph, Nathan and Nicholas Alex, "The Uniform: A Sociological Perspective." *The American Journal of Sociology*, 77 No. 4 (1972): 719-730.

McEuan, Melissa. *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1940-1945*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011.

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

Morden, Betty J. *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990.

Milbank, Caroline Rennolds. *Couture: The Great Designers*. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang : Distributed by Workman Pub., c1985.

Moblo, Brandon. "Keep Your Powder Dry: Motion Picture Production and the Portrayal of Women Soldiers during World War II." *The University of Vermont History Review* XXIII (2012-2013): 67-80. Accessed October 3, 2014.

<https://www.uvm.edu/~history/documents/2012-2013HistoryReviewXXIIIWebRelease5.22.13.pdf>.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

Neuhaus, Jessamyn. *Housework and Housewives in American Advertising: Married to the Mop*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

Pogue, Forrest C. *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory: 1943-1945*. New York: Penguin Books, 1973.

Riviere, Joan. "Womanliness as Masquerade." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10, (1929): 303-313.

Robinson, Harriet Green. *The Gaylord Wacs*. Laurel Press, 2001.

Samek, Susan M. "Uniformly Feminine: The "Working Chic" of Mainbocher." *Dress* 20, no.1 (1993): 33-44.

Sicherman, Barbara. "College and Careers: Historical Perspectives on the Lives and Work Patters of Women College Graduates." In *Women in Higher Education in American History: Essays from the Mount Holyoke College Sesquicentennial Symposia*, edited by John Mack Faragher and Florence Howe. New York: WW Norton & Co., 1988.

- Smith, Jill Halcomb. *Dressed for Duty: America's Women in Uniform, 1898-1972*. Vol. 2. San Jose, CA: R. James Bender Publishing, 2004.
- Starbird, Ethel. *When Women First Wore Army Shoes: A First-Person Account of Service as a Member of the Women's Army Corps during World War II*. New York: iUniverse, 2010.
- Stewart, Jennifer Nichols. "Wacky Times: An Analysis of the WAC in World War II and its Effects on Women." *International Social Science Review* 75. (2000): 26-37.
- Treadwell, Mattie . *The Women's Army Corps*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954.
- Tyrrell, Anne. *Changing Trends in Fashion: Patterns of the Twentieth Century, 1900-1970*. London: B.T. Batesford, 1986.
- Nancy, Walker, editor. *Gender Roles and the Popular Press*. Bedford Series in History & Culture, 1998.
- Weatherford, Doris. *American Women and World War II*. New York: Facts on File, 1990.
- Westbrook, Robert. "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II." *American Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1990): 587-614.
- Williams, Kathleen Broome. "Women Ashore: The Contribution of WAVES to US Naval Science and Technology in World War II." *The Northern Mariner* 8 (1998): 1-20. Accessed October 3, 2014.  
[http://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern\\_mariner/vol08/nm\\_8\\_2\\_1-20.pdf](http://www.cnrs-scrn.org/northern_mariner/vol08/nm_8_2_1-20.pdf).

**Unpublished Theses and Dissertations:**

Akers, Regina T. "Doing Their Part: The WAVES in World War II." Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2000.

Bilger, Kristie "The Women's Army Corps and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service: A Fashioning of American Womanhood and Citizenship." Master's Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2009.

Colville, Quinton. "The Role of Material Culture in Constructing Class-Related Identities among Male Royal Naval Personnel, 1930-1969." Ph.D. dissertation, Royal College of Art/Victoria & Albert Museum, 2004.

Pando, Robert T. *Oveta Culp Hobby: A Study of Power and Control*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, 2008.

Resnikoff, Shoshana M. *Sailors in Skirts: Mainbocher and the Making of the Navy WAVES* Master's thesis, University of Delaware, 2012.

Ryan, Kathleen. "When Flags Flew High": Propaganda, Memory, and Oral History for World War II Female Veterans." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 2008.

## Appendix A



**Figure 1. WAC Barracks**

Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*



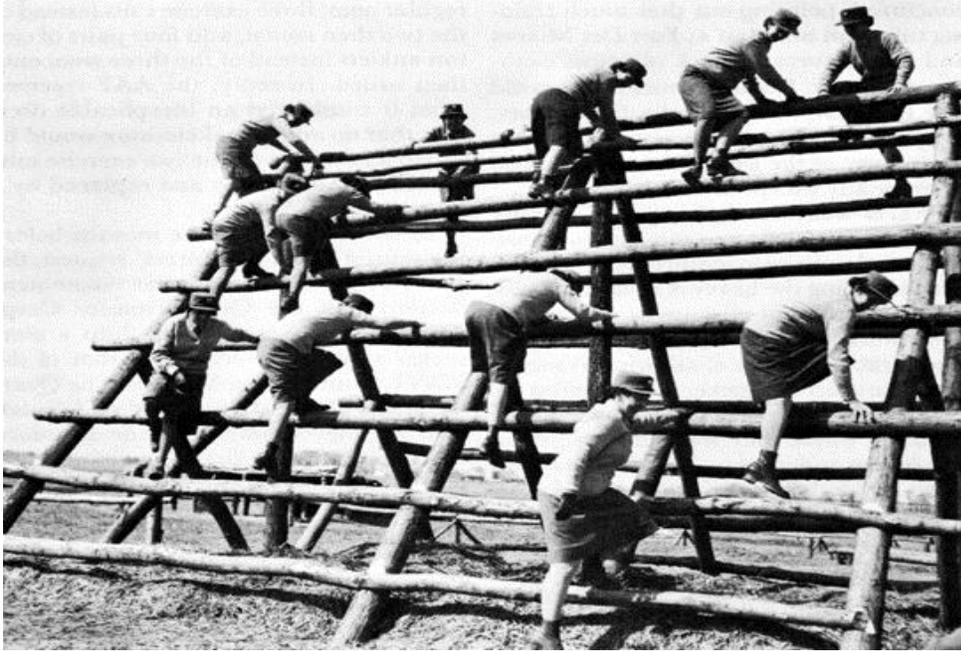
**Figure 2. Waves at Hunter College**

[http://www.womenofWorld War II.com/images/navywaves/navywaves35.jpg](http://www.womenofWorldWarII.com/images/navywaves/navywaves35.jpg)



**Figure 3. WAAC Enlisted Uniforms**

[Wacs outside photo laboratory, 1943] [Anne E. Heyer Papers] Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA.



**Figure 4. Wacs in Basic Training**  
Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps*



**Figure 5. WAVES Dress Blue Uniform**

[Gladys Dimmick in uniform, 1943] [Gladys L. Dimmick Collection], Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA.



**Figure 6. WAVES Summer Dress White Uniform**

[Wedding of Judith Bullock and Edward Thomson, 1943] [Judith Bullock Collection], Betty H. Carter Women Veterans Historical Project, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC, USA.



**Figure 7. WAC Recruitment Poster**

Courtesy Library of Congress



**Figure 8. WAVES Recruitment Poster**  
Courtesy Library of Congress