

Public Image and Perception: The Enlistment and Struggles of Women as World War II
WAACs/WACs

by

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Abstract

Women have been an integral part of history that has been decidedly left out of the picture until the last few decades. As history has been re-casted to include the contributions of women, this work examines the struggles endured by the American women who joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and/or the Women's Army Corps during World War II. Using a limited investigation into the newspaper coverage in the New York area and personal comments WAAC/WAC veterans, this report argues that early press coverage of women soldiers belittled and humiliated them, thus discouraging women from enlisting. Over time, coverage became more positive as journalists gradually accepted the importance of women's contributions to the military. By 1943, coverage was increasingly positive and articles about WACs received more prominent placement in newspapers. This shift occurred at the same time the number of women enlisting grew, suggesting the two are related. It was through the changes in the expected traditional proper place of women to a more realistic acknowledgment of the legitimacy of women's work in the military that helped lay the platform to more permanent positive changes for women in the workplace, society, and at home.

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Dedication

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Chapter 1 - Setting the Stage

Prior to America entering World War II in 1941, America's dominant gender ideology expected women to maintain the home and rear the next generation while men went to their jobs to earn money and maintain their roles as providers and guardians. This ideology was communicated and supported by the media when the nationally distributed magazine *Life* ran an eight-page spread that described the dutiful jobs that women, as homemakers, completed daily in its September 22, 1941 publication. The article concluded that "in the movies, in fiction and advertising in women's magazines, the modern U.S. housewife is portrayed as the sort of woman who keeps her figure, her husband, her makeup and her humor no matter how tough the going. One effect of this contact propaganda is that millions of U.S. women are doing just that."¹ This nationally distributed magazine "with the largest readership in America at the time" sent the message to women across the country that their duty to aiding the war effort was to maintain their homes (and lives) as they had before the war began.²

Government action and private companies had reinforced women's economic subordination by favoring male job applicants during the Great Depression on the assumption that men were working to support their families while women were working to pay for luxuries, but wartime mobilization created new economic options for women.³ Women were enticed by the promise of earning more money in a war job than they had in clerical or other menial positions, gaining greater social acceptance in the workplace, and feeling as if they were contributing to the war effort. However, some women wanted to contribute to the war effort by

¹ As quoted by Rupp from the article itself. Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1933-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 66.

² Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2008), 53.

³ *Ibid*, 116.

joining the military themselves. Their experiences challenged established gender roles and established a lasting presence for women inside the United States Army. Governmental, Army, and Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC)/Women's Army Corps (WAC) leaders manipulated gender ideology in ways that helped them use it to recruit women and win broad public acceptance of women's military service, but also constrained how women soldiers were seen by the public.

Early women's historians of women and warfare like Mattie Treadwell and Leila Rupp focused on recovering women's experiences to revise the narrative of American history. They hoped to reframe how American history is understood, including the history of World War II, by showing that half the population's contributions and experiences had been ignored. This was reflected in early scholarship on the WAC and WAAC, which focused on institutional issues. Mattie E. Treadwell's 1953 official history, *The Women's Army Corps*, traced the establishment and initial growth of the WAAC and WAC with a focus on the process of making the WAC a permanent part of the army.

Ann Allen has explored the role of the media in shaping perceptions of servicewomen during the early years of World War II. Allen argues that there is a correlation between the focus of news coverage and the public attitude toward the idea of women serving in a military capacity.⁴ She argues that the news media helped influence the public's opinion of WAACs which in turn helped to influence the government's subsequent policies and media strategy. Through her research that spans newspapers and magazines with national readership from May 1942 to August 1943, Allen concludes that the decreasing public interest in the WAACs was not

⁴ Ann Allen, "The News Media and the Women's Army auxiliary Corps: Protagonists for a Cause," *Military Affairs* 50, no. 2 (April 1986): 77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1987790>.

due to lack of coverage but to the “focus and content of news stories and the media practices of attempting to capture public attention through misleading headlines and article captions.”⁵ While Allen’s research ends in August 1943, this work continues her endeavor through the transition from WAAC to WAC to the end of World War II and is able to take advantage of types of gender analysis that were not available to Allen.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a shift to studying gender which shifted the focus of scholarship on women and war from recovering experience to studying how masculinity and femininity were constructed as mutually dependent concepts which shaped wartime experiences. Margaret R. and Patrice L.R. Higonnet’s essay “The Double Helix” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, remains the foundation of most historians’ explanations of why gender change proved elusive during the World Wars. They argued that because society defined women in relation to men as an “Other,” their place in society was defined by where they stood relative to men.⁶ Much like DNA has complimentary genes on either side of the double helix, women were meant to compliment men and move in relation to them. For example, when men go off to war, women were needed to fill their employment positions to keep the economy going, but they remained defined by their relative inferiority to men. Thus, when the war ended, and men returned home, the positions reverted to pre-war arrangements and women were expected to return to their pre-war subservient position to men. This argument highlights the importance of women establishing themselves as a necessary part of the military and institutionalizing their position during the war if any of their wartime gains in the military were to survive demobilization.

⁵ *Ibid*, 82.

⁶ Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987).

Scholars of American women in World War II have explored the role of gender stereotypes in shaping women's wartime roles and experiences. Emily Yellen argued that many Americans expected women soldiers to either fail miserably because they could not conform to the military way of life, could not perform the duties required within the military, or could not succeed in the conditions of the military because they were lesbians or sex maniacs.⁷ Leisa D. Meyer highlights the role of sexuality in mediating Americans' views of servicewomen when she contends that "while female sexual agency was a symbol of servicewomen's gender deviance, Army women's violation of contemporary gender norms by joining the WAC and donning 'male uniforms' also indicated their potential sexual deviance."⁸

Kimberly Jensen's *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* illustrated women's importance to America's war effort in World War I and the success of the postwar backlash against women's wartime military participation.⁹ Women during World War I (and subsequently World War II) were brought into the war setting by the choice of a few key political and military leaders whose positions allowed them to facilitate women's entry, but their wartime contributions alone could not fundamentally change the gendered construction of the military, American society, or work in America.

During World War II, sexual identity was becoming an important marker of citizenship which affected women's military service and how it was seen by the public. Women's integration into the U.S. military changed the way Americans (and later historians) viewed homosexuality, citizenship, and the proper place of women. In *The Straight State: Sexuality and*

⁷ Emily Yellen, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 321-327.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹ Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America, Margot Canaday explores the emergence of homosexuality as a category and its use to create a form of second class citizenship for women and sexual minorities during the twentieth century.¹⁰ The politicized definition of homosexuality has changed over time, and women's military service during World War II not only helped to define what military women were and were not, but also American society's understanding of what made a lesbian. This played a role in reinforcing the relegation of lesbians to second-class citizenship.

In *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligation of Citizenship*, Linda Kerber examined the social and legal norms which Americans believed protected women and their place in society. Kerber argued that since the founding of the United States, women's citizenship has been defined differently and as secondary to men's citizenship. This reflected a normative ideal of women as private citizens whose life existed in the family and not on the political or economic realm.¹¹ Sarah Deutsch argues that women defying the social stigma by violating gendered norms was necessary to push and re-shape the boundaries between men and women.¹² This project studies an important example of women who had to earn a living but wanted to make a meaningful impact on the war effort and in the process helped to guide the boundary changes between men and women as Kerber and Deutsch showed.

Despite the gender turn, women's history remains a relevant field of study. As Linda Gordon has argued, the inclusion of women in history "...does not simply add women to the pictures we already have of the past...It requires repainting the earlier pictures, because some of

¹⁰ Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000).

¹² Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

what was previously on the canvas was inaccurate..."¹³ Social history approaches that emphasize the history of everyday life, social interactions, social conflicts, and relationships between people of different groups is an especially effective way to include women in history. They emphasize how recovering women's experiences transforms traditional understanding of history and exposes the way expectations about how women should behave have shaped women's lives and American history. For the framework of this work, reference to traditional expectations, beliefs, or ideas regarding women refer to the fictional idea that women had always been and should remain strictly in the home and within the realm of women's proper place outside of the space of men. However, history has shown that women have always worked inside and outside of the home alongside and with men as well as on their own. These traditional ideals have been weaponized time and again against women who have sought to better align reality with expectations instead of being submissive to the idea that male or societal expectations should shape the place of women to suit the needs of men.

This work utilizes information and approaches from several subfields to understand and contextualize research into American women in the military during World War II. By examining the social and public response to women entering the Army (and masculine realm of the military) via New York area newspapers and magazines that were nationally distributed, the work synthesizes ideas from women's, social, and military history to help better understand the role of women in the war and how the war shaped American life. This analysis intends to examine the New York City and surrounding area's print media coverage of the WAACs as it progressed from an experiment by the government to fuller integration of women into the Army as WACs

¹³ Linda Gordon, "U.S. Women's History," in *The New American History: Revised and Expanded Edition*, The American Historical Association (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 258.

and how the information presented to the public affected the rate of recruitment.¹⁴ This work also draws on the first-hand accounts of servicewomen themselves. Since the 1980s, women have increasingly self-published their experiences or been recorded in other fashions to give depth to the overall historical picture of society. In the process, they have created a sub-category in history all their own.

Once the WAACs were established in May 1942, print media such as newspapers, like the *New York Times* and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, went to work reporting the recruiting efforts of the Army. Most women got their information about the WAAC from media coverage of its creation instead of directly from the government. Military officials tried to use the press to educate the public about the strategic and economic importance of women's enlistment to overcome many people's beliefs that women did not belong in the military or that women were merely joining the military to serve as company for the male soldiers (an idea that was encouraged by the whisper campaign in late 1942 and early 1943). As the government began to transition WAACs into full military status, making servicewomen equal to men in the military in mid-1943, media coverage of women in the Army also shifted to present WACs as acceptable replacements for their male counterparts in non-combat positions. Women that were exposed to media coverage of WAC activities during 1944 had to be convinced of the appeal and importance of joining the WACs despite the slander campaign that had plagued the socially-defiant and government-approved women. Additionally, public opinion had to accept the incorporation and permanency of the WAAC/WAC for elected officials to be willing to make it a

¹⁴ I have established this limitation to the New York area for several reasons. Since New York served as a main hub for deployment during World War II, it makes sense to look here for recruitment information as well. Also, since the majority of newspapers that were in small, noncoastal, or government related towns received their government news via the Associated Press, there is reason to believe that the information printed in larger publications closer to the government action would have more updated and relevant information.

permanent part of the Army and to convince enough women to join up since legal action alone could not guarantee acceptance or volunteers. Newspapers served as the communication tool between the recruits, public, and government officials.

This study relies on a sampling of stories that appeared in the New York City news market, government documents, and women veterans' personal papers to explore perceptions of the WAAC/WAC. It draws heavily from the *New York Times* and *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* between 1942 and 1944 to examine the different types of articles published (whether they were editorials, news stories, or letters to the editor), their connotation about women and the war, and their length and placement within each publication to analyze their message and intended effect. These sources are read in conjunction with the words of women, both in and out of the WAAC/WAC, to explore the interplay of male journalist's discomfort with women's wartime military roles and women's attempts to assert their right to equal citizenship through military service. These sources allow an initial exploration of this complicated and important topic and the evidence suggests there is an important link between newspaper coverage and recruitment, but more work is needed on this topic. Future scholars should expand the source and geographic base of this study even as they look to further recover women's own voices. Expanding the study to take account of women in different regions as well as women across class and racial lines will diversify the story and give a fuller picture of the challenges women faced in serving their country during World War II. This work is not intended to be an extensive investigation into the issue but rather a launch pad for future and further development that expand upon the themes that are prevalent in the study of women in history, such as issues with sexuality, reproduction, and promiscuity.

Chapter 2 - Uniforms, Underwear, Morals and Sexuality of WAACs

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States shifted from being a supporter of and supplier to other countries to an active participant that sent men to the different war zones in the European and Pacific theaters. This required the government to draft millions of able-bodied, single men over the age of 18. Republican Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers responded to the crisis by presenting a bill to allow women to join the military. Rogers had entered Congress in 1925 when she won a special election to fill a vacancy caused by her husband's death. Rogers' decided to help gain protection for women should they be called to work alongside men in a conflict. She first conceived of allowing women into the Army when she witnessed ill-prepared and untrained American women in France serving as civilian volunteer nurses during World War I. The women got the job done but did not get the veteran compensation or government pay and housing because although they were performing an essential military function, they were officially civilian volunteers working for private organizations. According to Treadwell's official history of the WAAC/WAC, "Rogers was resolved that our women would not again serve with the Army without the protection men got."¹⁵ Rogers proposed, drafted, and secured final passage of her bill by the Senate on May 14, 1942. Public Law 554 was signed by President Franklin Roosevelt the next day and the WAAC was established.¹⁶

Army officials set the initial recruiting goal at 25,000 for the first year despite Congress authorizing a total force of 150,000 women.¹⁷ As soon as the law was passed, newspapers

¹⁵ Mattie E. Treadwell, *The Women's Army Corps* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953), 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

¹⁷ Judith A. Bellafaire, *The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1993), 5.

reported that women were rushing to recruiting offices to enlist. On May 19, 1942, a New York Times headline “Women Here Rush For Army Service: Recruiting Office Deluged By Visits and Telephone Calls of WAAC Aspirants” appeared in their daily run.¹⁸ Despite an aspiration to enlist and a run on the recruiting offices, women were told by recruiting officials they had to wait a few weeks until the recruiting plans and requirements were set by the military. To be able to enlist in the military, women had to meet a specific set of standards. Potential WAACs had to be “...of excellent character in good physical health...,”¹⁹ older than 21 but not older than 45, be at least 5 feet tall, weigh at least 100 pounds, and they could not have any dependents that would require them to remain at home.²⁰ In contrast to these requirements for women, there were few restrictions for men. After the enactment of the Selective Service and Training Act in September 1940, all men between the age of 18 and 64 were required to register for the draft. Even though men up to the age of 64 had to register, in practice only men under the age of 44 were selected for service. While there were 36 million men enrolled in the draft, only 10 million were inducted into the military pool. “The majority of men rejected (6.4 million) had medical defects...[and] draft officers found only 510,000 registrants absolutely disqualified for service.”²¹ There were no restrictions on the character of men nor were there restrictions based on their family status including dependents that required care.

¹⁸ “Women Here Rush For Army Service,” New York Times, May 19, 1942, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9D03E6D8133CE03ABC4152DFB3668389659EDE> (accessed March 7, 2016).

¹⁹ *Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps Regulations (Tentative) 1942*. Helen Sagl. WAC Military Records. Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, Nebraska, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

²¹ Allan R. Millet, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2012), 370 and 381-2.

On May 16, 1942 Oveta Culp Hobby took her induction oath and became the first WAAC director.²² After graduating from University of Texas in Austin with her law degree, Hobby served as a parliamentarian for the Texas House of Representatives and met her husband, former Texas governor William P. Hobby, whom she married in 1931. After she became head of the Women's Interest Section of the War Department in 1941 and was offering ideas about the organizational chart for the WAACs and descriptions of how women could serve within the Army, Hobby was recommended by Congresswoman Rogers and the G-1 Division to become the first WAAC director.²³ Dressed in a single-color skirt and matching top with collar, wide-brimmed hat, and white gloves, Hobby was photographed by reporters as she was sworn in by three high-ranking uniform-wearing military officials as the first WAAC.²⁴ From the beginning of her appointment, Hobby attempted to ensure that recruiting efforts informed the women joining and the public at-large that the WAACs would be a "...sober, hard-working organization, composed of dignified and sensible women."²⁵ In an Associated Press article published in the *New York Times* on June 2, 1942, Colonel Don C. Faith reinforced Hobby's reassurances while backhandedly raising questions that focused on women and what impact they would have on the war effort.²⁶ In an article titled "WAAC Training Head Promises Hard Work, Not 'Glamour Girls' Play,' at Des Moines" Faith explained that the women who enlisted in the WAAC would help the war effort by relieving an enlisted man for active combat duty.²⁷ Even though Colonel

²² Treadwell, 46.

²³ *Ibid*, 28-29.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 47.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ After 25 years in the Army, Faith was a Regular Army officer who was chosen as a part of a nine-person planning group that had been indoctrinated in the military prior to the establishment of the WAACs. Faith was chosen as Commandant to the WAACs within the Army organizational chart. See Treadwell for more in-depth information about Faith and his association with Hobby and the WAACs.

²⁷ "WAAC Training Head Promises Hard Work Not 'Glamour Girls' Play,' at Des Moines," *New York Times*, June 2, 1942, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9B07E6DD173AE233A25751C0A9609C946393D6CF> (accessed March 7, 2016).

Faith made it clear that women would be working hard to fulfill their purpose in the military, the article devoted equal space describing women's dating opportunities and speculated that the close to four hundred male soldiers at the base would allow them to fill their free time. The claim that women would have time for dating soldiers, along with the included sub-article that described a thinning in applications for WAAC enlistment, led the general public to believe that relatively few women were eager to enlist because joining the WAAC raised questions about their morals and character.

The lack of news attention that was paid to the actual work the WAACs would be doing gives credence to the idea that women in the military would be doing little other than entertaining the men. The lack of focus on the WAACs' work also hurt recruiting efforts. Despite the government releasing statements and advertisements about needing women in the military to fulfill non-combat jobs and moderate support from the public in the form of letters to the editor, newspaper stories said little about the sacrifices the WAACs would endure, the value of their work, or the ways they would be helping their country.²⁸ Instead, the media's focus was concentrated on superficial concerns.

During her initial press conference right after she had been inducted as the Director of the WAACs, Hobby made only one statement that caused a considerable uproar in the media.²⁹ Hobby expected questions to arise about what would happen to a WAAC who became pregnant and was prepared with a response that was to be standard for the duration of the war. Hobby

²⁸ "For your country's sake today--For your own sake tomorrow. Go to the nearest recruiting station of the armed service of your choice." Color poster by Steele Savage, 1944. <http://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/photos/images/ww2-11.jpg> (accessed March 15, 2016); Hyacinthe Ringrose, "Women in War Favored" New York Times, May 31, 1942, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9403E1D61539E33BBC4950DFB3668389659EDE> (accessed March 7, 2016).

²⁹ Bellafaire, 6.

promised and warned that “any member of the Corps who becomes pregnant will receive an immediate discharge.” The *Times Herald* claimed that the birth rate would be adversely affected if corps members were discouraged from having babies.”³⁰

Hobby’s answer reflected her fear that the public would turn against the WAAC if it believed military service encouraged women to be sexually promiscuous. Even though Hobby was prepared for questions about pregnancy from the media, she and most other military officials associated with the WAACs were unprepared to answer reporters’ other “burning” questions, like what the women would wear and what color would their underwear be.³¹ These questions asked by the news reporters revealed the public’s anxiety about the morals of the women that would be enlisting in the military and the fear that they were there for the sole purpose of having sex with soldiers. The questions asked by the reporters were an attempt to humiliate the women who decided to join the WAAC by asking questions that publicized normally private matters. The reporters’ used their questions about personal matters as weapons to bully the women and hold them hostage to the ideological concept of where women should be, what they should wear, and how they should act. They justified their attacks by disguising them as an attempt to protect the women’s morals and virtue.

Morals of the enlisting women were not the only concern for the press or the public. Following the line of thought that women were enlisting for pleasure, there was a belief that women who signed up to become a WAAC were seeking to change the traditional/expected roles women were expected to hold in the household and family structure. There were fears that

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Treadwell, 48. Most of the questions directed at Director Hobby were about the clothes and appearance of the WAACs instead of what jobs would be performed by these women. The questions listed in this book give good context to the news articles that were written since the majority of news stories written prior to the first presentation of women at Fort Des Moines were based on the press conference held shortly after Director Hobby’s induction.

women who broke from the traditional roles associated with women as homemaker and duties of child rearing would help lead to the destruction of the nuclear family unit, family values, and the downfall of society. These expected traditional roles were just that: expectations. For centuries, women have been working outside of the fictional expectations that were placed on them by men and society, but some religious leaders within the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations were quick to warn that women doing war work were “a serious menace to the home and foundation of a true Christian and democratic country.”³² A Brooklyn church publication also compared the establishment of the WAACs as “no more than an opening wedge, intended to break down the traditional American and Christian opposition to removing women from the home and to degrade her by bringing back the pagan female goddess of de-sexed, lustful sterility.”³³ Even though religious leaders criticisms were often pointed, political and military leaders were more concerned about press coverage. WAAC and Army leaders battled hostile press coverage that often included sensationalized and even fabricated stories during their entire first year.

The press attacks reflected a double standard in how journalism and much of the public viewed military life. Despite women’s morals and character being called in to question for simply wanting to join the service, nobody objected that American enlisted men enjoyed the pinup girls that hung on their footlockers or in their barracks. Famous actresses and models were often photographed wearing clothing that left little to the imagination. Pinup girls were sexy reminders of everything that was good about being an American and were viewed by the general public and military officials as boosting men’s morale. These pinups served the purpose of

³² Weatherford, 90.

³³ “Women and War,” *Commonweal*, March 27, 1942, page 549 as cited in Weatherford, 94.

inspiring men to continue to fight while also reminding them what they were defending and protecting back home.³⁴ Society and soldiers envisioned WAACs would be attired like pinup girls if the assumption was that women in the military were to provide company for the men. The realization that the public had no idea what the uniforms would look like or what tasks women would be assigned encouraged newspaper stories that focused on the anticipated and expected styling and presentation of the women in uniform. The double standard and thinly-veiled attempt to hold women captive to the envisioned traditional and morally proper attire hurt recruitment and thus the war effort and revealed the public's unease with the challenge to gender roles the WAAC represented.

Prior to the commencement of the first WAAC officer training session, Director Hobby worked tirelessly to ensure that WAACs would be presented as ready and prepared to do the jobs required of them in the Army by appearing feminine but not overly sexualized. Hobby's aim was to curtail as much negative publicity as she could while still endeavoring to have the WAACs appear as a unified and respected part of the Army. While it was decided by the War Board that the uniforms issued to the WAACs would be patterned in the same style and color, Hobby "...desired that women wear skirts instead of slacks whenever possible, in order to avoid a rough or masculine appearance which would cause unfavorable public comment."³⁵ By presenting a modern but traditionally feminine image, Hobby sought to reassure the public, including the families of potential volunteers, that WAACs remained within traditional gender bounds even as they stretched them to help the social realignment of expectations versus reality. Their uniforms thus served to defend them against fears that militarizing women would masculinize them and

³⁴ Victoria Sherrow, *Women and the Military: An Encyclopedia*. (Denver, CO: ABC-CLIO, 1996), 220.

³⁵ Treadwell, 37-38.

possibly turn them into lesbians or at least attract lesbians to the WAAC by presenting a reassuringly feminine and heterosexual vision of military womanhood.

Over the course of the summer in 1942, *The New York Times* published several articles that exemplify the attention that was given to what WAACs would wear during their time in the Army. Headlines that were published just a week prior to the first basic training for WAAC officers, such as “WAAC Uniform Cost Tops All In Service: \$225 for Corps is Twice That for an Army Nurse” and “WAAC To Get ‘Sneakers,’” highlight the attention given to what women would wear while in the military instead of coverage about the jobs they would perform.³⁶ Director Hobby’s forward thinking appears to have saved the women from being deemed too masculine, but little could be done about the speculation about the women’s morals until the media received an answer about the color and style of the women’s undergarments.

This lingering question about what women would be wearing under their uniforms continued to be such a focus, that before the first WAAC officer candidate class began training, Army officials decided to initiate a two-week media blackout that would prevent media reports from encouraging anti-WAAC opinions based on resentment of the newly enlisted women might feel towards their government-issued clothing.³⁷ This blackout encouraged undercover reporters or “synthetic WAACs” to join the military to gain the story that was most sought after and then dropped out of training to avoid serving.³⁸ After her experience going through the fitting warehouse, one reporter from *Newsweek* magazine reported that even though she felt like her

³⁶ “WAAC Uniform Cost Tops All In Service: \$225 for Corps is Twice That for an Army Nurse” *New York Times*, July 2, 1942, <https://www.nytimes.com/1942/07/02/archives/waac-uniform-cost-tops-all-in-services-255-for-corps-is-twice-that.html> (accessed March 7, 2016); “WAAC To Get ‘Sneakers’” *New York Times*, July 7, 1942, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9B01E5DF1239E33BBC4F53DFB1668389659EDE> (accessed March 7, 2016).

³⁷ Treadwell, 63.

³⁸ Weatherford, 48.

uniform fit her like a straight-jacket, the other WAACs who enlisted for the duration enjoyed the uniforms.³⁹ This inside interpretation of the WAAC uniform suggests that the previous notion of women joining the military in order to “be loose” with the soldiers was invalid. Although the media was obsessed over the color and shape of WAACs’ uniform, most WAACs viewed the uniform as a marker of being in the military. The uniforms (and their publicity in the news) became a symbol of the fight women were enduring to be taken seriously in their endeavor to help win the war.

Since women were perceived to be joining the WAACs to fulfill their sexual needs or those of the soldiers, they were expected to fail miserably within the confines of the strict regulations set forth by the military. Instead, the majority of WAAC women appeared to thrive and enjoy their service. Even though the reporters did little to supply the general public with useful information about the WAACs’ responsibilities, WAACs continued to defend their decision to sign up. In a letter to the editors of the *New York Times* published on July 23, 1942, Elsie Testa denounced the WAACs as dangerous and degenerate and claimed that women joining the military were deliberately destroying the homes, lives, and morals of America. WAACs were going to be the chief reason for the “...morals and the spirit of American womanhood to hit a new low in the post-war America.”⁴⁰ Testa questioned whether the men who favored having the WAACs in the military really believed that they were crucial to winning the war. She also contended that the uniforms were what enticed the women to join; not the best interest for the country.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Elsie Testa, “Letters to The Times: Would Have Women Stay at Home,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1942, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9E03E6DD1339E632A25750C2A9619C946393D6CF> (accessed March 7, 2016).

In a response that was printed a couple of days later, WAAC Agnes Robinson stated that the men were proud of the women and that “the women are not joining up for the uniforms; to be eligible for the WAAC women need a few more requirements than just the desire to look attractive.”⁴¹ This response from Robinson to another woman shows the aggravation of WAAC women who wanted their efforts to be taken sincerely but were constantly being undermined by a media that seemed to refuse to present the WAACs as a serious subject and more than a curiosity. This anger was fed by reports focused on trivial or sensational stories concerning what the women would wear and who they could date. The lack of serious focus on women entering the military left most women ill-prepared for the culture shock of military life that included sharing every meal with close to 100 women and having little to no privacy when sharing bathrooms and bedrooms that had no doors and crammed as many women as possible into the smallest of areas. Rose Rosenthal expressed that shock in her memoir *Not All Soldiers Wore Pants: A Witty World War II WAC Tells All*. After Rosenthal has enlisted in the WAACs after several months of thinking about this decision, she is confronted with a sight she had only thought she was prepared for on her very first night in Des Moines:

After picking up my towels and linens I crossed over to the first building and walked up the outside stairway. Standing in the doorway, I looked into the room and went into shock. Weeks of palliative assurances hadn’t prepared me for coming face to face with living by the doze – two dozen plus one, to be exact, and it totaled four dozen plus two if you counted the twenty-five women on the first floor who would share the latrines... There wasn’t the tiniest pigeonhole where a

⁴¹ Agnes Robinson, “Letters to The Times: Home Fires Still Burning,” *New York Times*, July 25, 1942, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9504E5D6103CE33BBC4D51DFB1668389659EDE> (accessed March 7, 2016).

gal could sneak away for a few moments of quiet reading or a few moments of quiet tears, whichever the occasion demanded.⁴²

While these living arrangements were standard for male soldiers, women who had never faced or witnessed the life of a man in the military received little to no information about what they could expect from their living situation. The early media coverage of WAACs was belittling, uninformative, and only served to encourage the development of the slander campaign that overshadowed and undermined the Army's recruiting efforts at a time when public acceptance was key to the growth and integration of women in the Army.

Over the course of 1943, WAACs experienced a drastic change as the group transitioned from an auxiliary unit that aided the Army in its war endeavors to full-fledged members of the Army that were respected and even revered by the general public. The path to full Army status was not an easy one. During the first half of the year, WAACs continued to receive negative press coverage because of a slander campaign that caused the sharp decline in the rate of recruitment. As the WAACs transitioned into the Women's Army Corps (WACs), media coverage shifted from focusing on inflammatory reports about military women's clothing, sexuality, and suspected behavior to highlighting the work military women were doing and how they were helping win the war.

⁴² Rose Rosenthal, *Not All Soldiers Wore Pants: A Witty World War II WAC Tells All* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Ryzell Books: 1993, 52-3.

Chapter 3 - Strip Teaser to Supported: The Transition to Army Soldier

Winning public support for women replacing men in non-combat military positions was of high importance to the government at the beginning of 1943 since there was a plan to officially incorporate women into the Army mid-year. At the end of 1942 into January 1943, the Army General Staff concluded that in order to recruit the 1.5 million women needed to fulfill the initial recruitment goal that a change to the WAACs had to be made. Initially, officers considered drafting women into the WAAC but after some research it became clear that the public would oppose such a move. On February 6, 1943, officers concluded that physical limitations were limiting recruitment and a lack of proper housing and training space made accepting new recruits impossible.⁴³ Additional training space was authorized during this meeting but how to place women in these spaces became the question. The General Staff concluded that in order to meet the facility demands for recruiting and training WAACs, that they would have to utilize current Army housing and training facilities. The decision was made to convert WAACs from auxiliaries into regular soldiers by May 1943 and to decentralize and integrate the WAAC command into the Army command system as the Women's Army Corps (WAC). "It was desired to realign the WAAC organization in a way that would, as nearly as possible, parallel the command system for men and leave the Corps prepared for conversion to Army status, although, as the Director noted, planners were limited to doing "only those things which can be done legally" under existing legislature."⁴⁴ For recruiting and training efforts to move forward utilizing male-occupied Army accommodations, the WAACs needed to become full members of the Army. As a result, officers

⁴³ Treadwell, 122-23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 127.

decided that women in the Army would be trained for Army-specific jobs to help alleviate training demands on WAAC/WAC training command and allow WAAC/WAC counts to be considered in the total of the Army's Troop Basis count. Additionally, recruitment numbers were adjusted from a total recruitment target of 1.5 million overall to 150,000 by June 30, 1943, which is a number that would not be met during the entirety of the war.⁴⁵

The first step to ensuring support for this measure was to address the slander campaign that had begun within the ranks of the active duty men. In 1941, most commanders had been reticent to accept women in their commands, but by the dawn of 1943 there had been a swift change in perspective as WAACs were proving sharp and reliable in the tasks they were assigned. However, many enlisted men did not share this change in attitude and still wielded significant influence within the general public.

In January of 1943, soldiers were surveyed by the Special Services Division at the request of Director Hobby concerning their views about women in the military.⁴⁶ About 40% of men surveyed stated that they would not want their sister to join the WAACs, 35% were undecided and a mere 25% stated that they would like to see their sister join the WAACs.⁴⁷ Once these statistics were presented to higher ranking Army officials that could affect change within the ranks, it was decided that a film and handbook be put together to show the enlisted men why WAACs were important to the cause. *The WAACs* by Nancy Shea was accessible to the general public and military personnel as a guidebook and informal history of the WAAC establishment. This work described the continued need for and roles of women in the Army. The idea was that this media presentation, along with the 1943 *Handbook for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps*

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 765.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 171.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

that was given to each enlisted woman and the book *Women in War* that was intended for the general public, would ease the tension between the sexes in and out of the military.⁴⁸ By spelling out the need for women recruits to the men and educating the women on how to interact with the men and present themselves in the military, the hope was that a more positive view of WAACs would infiltrate the ranks and reach the public. Instead, men within the ranks continued to disregard and belittle the WAACs since enlisted men viewed them as endangering their lives by taking their place stateside to allow them to be sent to the front lines to fight on an active battlefield.

To make matters worse for the enlisted women during the first half of 1943, news reports tended to only report stories that presented WAACs in a bad light on the front page while stories that depicted a WAAC doing her duty were often hidden in the middle of a page and buried among other stories. The *New York Times* published an article on January 5, 1943 that showed WAACs as still upholding the picture of femininity while performing a needed task for the war effort. According to Ohio's first female member of the House, Frances Bolton, when she described what she had witnessed on a trip to the West Coast, "There are former judges and women with no previous training of any sort, but all are responding beautifully to Army training. And they are retaining their femininity to the last degree."⁴⁹ This article that highlights the range of backgrounds of women in the WAACs as well as their outward appearance in the military was buried in the middle of the publication on page 16 and was a small blurb that consisted of 15 lines of text within one narrow column on an eight-column page.

⁴⁸ *Handbook for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, Fort Des Moines, Iowa 1943*. Helen Sagl, WAC Military Records. Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, Nebraska; "Display Ad 92" *New York Times*, March 7, 1943, <http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1943/03/07/issue.html> (accessed March 7, 2016).

⁴⁹ "Says Waacs Retain Femininity," *New York Times*, January 5, 1943, <http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1943/01/05/85065511.html> (accessed March 7, 2016).

During the same timeframe that this New York Times article was published, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* published a three-part story that appeared in multiple issues and insinuated that the WAACs had knowingly accepted a woman of less than proper morals. This series was yet another weapon hurled at the women enlisted as a WAAC in an attempt to question of their morals. The first article that appeared on the third page of the December 14, 1942 edition was titled “Too Wacky for Waac, Dancer Gets the Hook: Shapely, Red-Haired Strip-Teaser Is Handed a Non-Exotic Discharge.”⁵⁰ This story was headlined in a way that was intended to make sure the reader understood that this woman had been accepted into the WAACs. The body of the article described a girl who did not “understand her responsibilities” and had snuck off-base and used a different name to dance at a local theater. This description of Kathryn (Kay) Gregory as a young 22-year-old woman away from home for the first time that was testing her limits does not help the image of a WAAC to look responsible and fit for duty among men.

The second article appeared in the January 27, 1943 edition. This small but well-placed story titled “Strip Teaser Shed by WAACs Will Wed Lieutenant” was sure to catch the eye of more than a few readers. This story depicted Gregory who was dismissed from the WAACs after she went absent without leave (AWOL) to strip for military men and announced her intent to marry a lieutenant in the Army Air Force.⁵¹ It also alludes to the idea that she used the WAACs as her chance to leave home, look for fame through dancing, and to find a military man to marry and support her; not to join the military to serve her country in its time of need.

⁵⁰ “Too Wacky for Waac, Dancer Gets the Hook,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 14, 1942, file:///E:/HIST%20928/1942/Brooklyn_Daily_Eagle_Monday_December_14_1942-stripper%20dismissed.pdf (accessed April 10, 2016).

⁵¹ “Strip Teaser Shed by WAACs Will Wed Lieutenant,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 27, 1943, file:///E:/HIST%20928/1943%20A/Brooklyn_Daily_Eagle_Wednesday_January_27_1943-stripper%20dismissed%20continued.pdf (accessed April 10, 2016).

A couple of days later, a similar headline for the third article appears on the front page of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. This time the article details the ex-WAACs anger over the dismissal of her claims by the lieutenant. Throughout the story, the woman is consistently referred to as “the strip-teaser” and is presented as being a nuisance to a man in uniform. This entire escapade by one woman was displayed as a moral dilemma that could have been avoided had she not been allowed to be around the male soldiers in the role of a military woman. It was understood that in polite society, that a woman would not go chasing after a man to make her husband and this woman’s behavior was of a brash variety that went against social norms. This published series of articles were a great example of how women were becoming unruly once they entered the male realm of the military in the eyes of the public. These articles also made sure to reference the subject as a red-head and a Texan, which carry separate stigmas with each label. In society, red-heads are often thought of as being fiery or strong-willed and Texas women have long been thought to be more rugged and masculine than women from other locations. These labels help to drive home the idea that this woman should have been obviously unfit to serve but was allowed in to the WAACs.⁵²

Even though hearings about the conversion of WAAC to WAC, thus making women equal to men in the Army in rank, had begun in February 1943, the change was not made legal until July 1943 and swearing in for WACs did not start until September 1, 1943.⁵³ This delay was due in large part to the slander campaign of rumors that had to be investigated to reassure legislators that women were upholding their integrity and following their Code of Conduct. Just after the proposal made by the General Staff in February 1943 to convert the WAAC to full

⁵² “Strip-Teasing Ex-WAAC Fumes as Officer Denies They Will Wed,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 29, 1943, file:///E:/HIST%20928/1943%20A/Brooklyn_Daily_News_Friday_January_29_1943-%20stripper%20denied%20on%20front%20page.pdf (accessed April 10, 2016).

⁵³ Bellafaire, 18.

Army status, there appeared to be a systematic spreading of rumors throughout the military ranks and public that sought to discredit WAAC credibility, which could hurt the chances of the new bill being passed to help better support the Army in their combat efforts. In yet another blow to the integrity of the WAAC image, columnist John O'Donnell of the *New York Daily News* published an article in his syndicated column, *Capitol Stuff*, on June 8, 1943 giving light to rumors that many WAACs were sexually promiscuous.⁵⁴ O'Donnell insisted that contraceptives were being issued by the Army with WAAC uniforms to encourage them to partake in sexual activities like the men in the military. In the way his accusation was written, a reader could take the context to mean that either the Army was encouraging this promiscuous behavior or that Army officials knew that women were being sexually adventurous and wanted to help prevent pregnancy and disease from removing women from service. Either way the reader took this accusation, the assumptions were both against social norms and the expected behavior of women, which in turn served to further the negative opinion and feelings towards WAACs.

O'Donnell's story prompted the War Department to investigate his claims, if not for their own purposes to transition the women to WACs then to help ease tension and concern in the public and ranks of the women and their families. At the onset of the investigation, Army officials believed the rumors to be the work of the Axis powers taking rumors and running with them and creating false government documents to help encourage the rumors and discredit the women who could help send more men to fight overseas. In the end, the rumors appeared to have been started and circulated by disgruntled servicemen who did not want to be sent to combat

⁵⁴ Yellin, 130.

zones, gossip between soldiers' wives, jealousy-inspired civilian women, gossips, fanatics, and "disgruntled and discharged Waacs."⁵⁵

Even though O'Donnell later recanted his article's contents and denials were issued by the War Department, Director Hobby, President and Mrs. Roosevelt, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and many others including congress members and WAAC officers, the damage to the image of WAACs had been done and the article was republished and quoted by other publications.⁵⁶ The differences in how the media presented positive versus negative information about the WAACs certainly exemplifies the media's attempt to discredit the women working hard to contribute to the war effort in a new way. In response to the lackluster reports by the media, the efforts to recruit women and public support for women in the Army were at a plateau and thus caused a delay in the decision to drop a letter from the WAACs. According to the government's numbers, recruitment was of concern and a major driving force for the decision to make women a part of the Army. During the WAACs first six months of existence from July to December 1942, only 12,767 women joined, which is shy of the 1.5 million overall the government had authorized with the creation of the WAACs.⁵⁷ This realization sparked the conversation within Army command to re-evaluate the WAAC's potential. After the decision was made to include women in the Army's Troop Basis count and remove auxiliary from their title in February until the final passage of the new bill in July 1943, the total number of recruits only increased by 13,297 from March thru June 1943.⁵⁸ At this juncture, it is apparent that something happened to impact the recruiting efforts outside of the Army not having the proper space for women.

⁵⁵ Treadwell, 206.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 204-205.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 765.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

Another cause for the delay was the lack of public support for the cause. In order to achieve lasting success for the women in the Army, the damage done by the slander campaign would have to be undone. The only sure way to do that was to use the media to shift public opinion in the WAACs favor.⁵⁹ Just prior to the publication and retraction of O'Donnell's story, reporters were beginning to realize the damage that had been done to the WAACs and their ability to help the war effort. In May 1943, *Time* magazine reported that "the Army has learned the desirability of its soldiers in skirts...One replacement group of 56 [women] replaced 128 men."⁶⁰ On June 27, 1943, the *New York Times* published a lengthy half-page article that described the efforts of the WAAC organization to discredit the rumors being spread within the slander campaign and to establish themselves as necessary to the Army and winning the war.⁶¹ This about-face by the media was the jolt needed to stimulate the recruiting efforts for the newly-formed WACs and it seemed to work according to the strength of the WAC post-July 1943. In the WAACs first year of recruitment (July 1942-July 1943) 61,403 women joined. After losing 10,800 women during the conversion period from July and August 1943, the recruitment numbers went from 51,268 women in August 1943 to 83,755 in August 1944 for a total increase of 32,487 in just a year.⁶² This means that even after the newness of women in the Army had worn off, lack-luster public support, and a very public slander campaign, that women were still interested in serving their country.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 236.

⁶⁰ Weatherford, 34.

⁶¹ "WAACs Fight Back: 'Sinister Rumors, Aimed at Destroying Their Reputation' Are Denounced," *New York Times*, June 27, 1943, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9B06EED81638E33BBC4F51DFB0668388659EDE> (accessed March 7, 2016).

⁶² Treadwell, 765.

As the transition from WAAC to WAC took place, some women decided to leave the organization. Their reasons for leaving, while varied, were very similar to those of Violet A. Kochendoerfer. In her memoir of her time during World War II, Kochendoerfer explained that she left the WAACs and did not become a WAC because she felt she could do more elsewhere. While others left to help family members at home, some left to join other organizations where they felt their skills could be of better use. Kochendoerfer described in a letter home dated July 28, 1943 that she had decided not to enlist in the Army as a WAC because she felt that her talents were not being utilized during all the busy work she had been assigned to do. When Kochendoerfer was asked by her lieutenant why she had decided not to join the WAC, she describes her response in her letter. "I told her my gripes-how I'd been in the Army seven months and hadn't done any significant work yet, how they kept shifting us from one thing to another, how we spent most of our energy on detail work around the barracks, running to the hospital for physicals, taking half a day off just to get ready for retreat parade."⁶³ After Kochendoerfer returned home, she ended up submitting an application to join the Red Cross and was accepted just three weeks later. During her time in the Red Cross, Kochendoerfer served as a director of a leave center in Bavaria and base clubs in England, France and Germany until the war ended.⁶⁴

Those that chose to enlist after the creation of the WAC did so for similar reasons as WAAC recruits. Some women, like Mollie Weinstein Schaffer, joined for two reasons: they thought they would be the only ones not joining the military and they believed that they had a

⁶³ Violet A. Kochendoerfer, *One Woman's World War II* (Lexington, KY, University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 29-30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

duty to help end the war by contributing their time to the Army.⁶⁵ In a letter to her sister, Anne Weatherbee Tinges described her decision to join the WACs when she did. “You thought it was good- not only from my personal side of it- but from a patriotic side. We were at war and there was a job to be done...determined to do a job and do it well. I wanted to make you all proud of me...”⁶⁶ While these intentions certainly were not unusual, they were daring in a time when the government was attempting to rebuild the image of women in the military and build up the recruitment efforts. In order to help persuade more women to join the WAC, the Army launched a new recruiting campaign in late 1943.⁶⁷ The All-States campaign focused more on presenting women in the Army as acceptable in the eyes of governors, statesmen, President Roosevelt and the First Lady in an attempt to get women from every state to enlist in a state company.⁶⁸ One ad that appeared in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* was endorsed by Governor Thomas Dewey of New York.⁶⁹ In an effort to show that married women from different states were enlisting in the WACs, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* also reported that women from all over the country were enlisting to help end the war more quickly.⁷⁰

Once women in the Army went from an auxiliary status to a non-combat status more equal to men than they had been before, press coverage concerning women in the military began to highlight the positive aspects of women in the military and explore the pride women individually felt to be within the recognized ranks of the American tradition during a world war.

⁶⁵ Mollie Weinstein Schaffer and Cyndee Schaffer, *Mollie's War: The Letters of a World War II WAC in Europe* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, Inc. Publishers, 2010), 1.

⁶⁶ Anne Weatherbee Tinges to sister, October 22, 1943, personal collection.

⁶⁷ Treadwell, 239.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 236.

⁶⁹ “Women of Brooklyn: A Message from Your Governor,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 22, 1943, file:///E:/HIST%20928/1943%20B/Brooklyn_Daily_Eagle_Monday_November_22_1943-Recruitment%20Ad.pdf (accessed April 10, 2016).

⁷⁰ “Women of Brooklyn: A Message from Your Governor,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 3, 1943, file:///E:/HIST%20928/1943%20B/Brooklyn_Daily_Eagle_Sunday_October_3_1943-%20to%20end%20the%20war%20quicker.pdf (accessed April 10, 2016).

It is unclear exactly why media outlets changed how they covered women in the military. It is possible that they realized they were reporting unsubstantiated opinion and innuendos, but it is likely that the government applied pressure, possible as part of its investigation into suspected Axis agents spreading anti-WAAC propaganda. Regardless, as a result of this wake-up call, reporters opted to follow the All-States campaign's lead and highlight the important and positive roles women had within the Army and society. The slander campaign that was waged against the WAACs early in 1943 slowly disappeared from the media reports as women in the Army transitioned into WACs. These women not only overcame great obstacles to serve their country, but they helped start the final conversation to ensure full military status and benefits for future generations of women by gaining the acknowledgement and acceptance of political officials. The acknowledgement and acceptance by public figures and the media are what helped WACs to finally secure widespread public approval. However, just as questions about the character and morals of the women that joined the Army were being put to rest, questions about the longevity and sustainability of women in the war effort began to take center stage in the media.

The efforts put forth by the Army in 1943 were rewarded with increasing enlistment numbers that topped just over 10,000 women recruited during 1943 and a growing positive media presentation that began to present the stories of women in the military as a highlight to read.⁷¹ Women that were exposed to the media coverage during 1944 had to be convinced of the appeal of joining the WACs despite the negative slander campaign from the previous year. The news reports and personal experiences of women in the Army were presented in a drastically different context from the year before and presented women in the military as a positive aspect of

⁷¹ Treadwell, 244-245.

American society. In 1944, recruiting efforts by the Army for women to join the WACs began to target specific audiences.

To reach out to women who had not previously considered volunteering because of negative images of military women, press outlets began to report on the different influential people that joined the WACs. On January 13, 1944, it was reported in the *New York Times* that the wife of Brigadier General D.A.D. Ogden had enlisted in the WAC.⁷² In another article published a month later, a woman with 12 children already enlisted in the armed services was anxious to join the military family if she could have found a branch to accept her.⁷³ The articles' message was that it did not matter what background a woman came from, the desire (and ability to meet Army requirements) is all that was needed to join the ranks of the brave. In addition to presenting the military as a viable option to women of different backgrounds, the media also began to report more favorably about the accomplishments of the WACs. The *New York Times* featured headlines such as "Wacs Save Friend's Life," "15 Wacs Get Medals For Good Conduct," and "Says Wacs Will Be Fine Wives."⁷⁴ Each of the headlines were connected to articles that told of good deeds by and positive outlooks about WACs. These headlines and their attached articles reveal a shift in the presentation of the women in the military. The bodies of each of these articles also showed how the women in the WACs were honoring their positions in

⁷² "Gen. Ogden's Wife Joins Wac," *New York Times*, January 13, 1944, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9800E1D91238E33BBC4B52DFB766838F659EDE> (accessed April 18, 2016).

⁷³ "Mother Wants to Serve: Parent of 12 with Armed Forces Says She Too Would Join," *New York Times*, February 12, 1944, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9B02E3DA1F3CEE3BBC4A52DFB466838F659EDE> (accessed April 18, 2016).

⁷⁴ "Wacs Save Friend's Life," *New York Times*, January 27, 1944, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=940DE0DD153DE13BBC4F51DFB766838F659EDE> (accessed April 18, 2016); "15 Wacs Get Medals For Good Conduct," *New York Times*, February 19, 1944, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C0CE2DA1030E53BBC4152DFB466838F659EDE> (accessed April 18, 2016); "Says Wacs Will Be Fine Wives," *New York Times*, May 5, 1944, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9E0CE7DE173DE03ABC4D53DFB366838F659EDE> (accessed April 18, 2016).

their service not just to their country but also to those around them. When a WAC, Captain Frances Sue Cornick, rushed to help a friend and fellow WAC who had caught fire, she was credited with saving her life and allowing her to only suffer a few burns instead of death.⁷⁵ When 15 WACs received medals for good conduct, they not only were recognized for their efforts, but they were also given an award that was given to both men and women which helped to send the message that women were assuming positions that were more equal to male soldiers.⁷⁶

Journalists also weaponized expected traditional gender roles and expectations for women in a bid to further sway public opinion about WACs. An article that described WACs as fine wives pointed out that the training these women received during their time in the Army would stay with them past their term of service and should be regarded as an “invaluable asset” in their married lives.⁷⁷ After a two-year battle, mainstream news publications were beginning to present women in the military as an asset to society, though gendered images continued to coexist and balance transgressive images of military women.

Newspapers also began to print the personal experiences of women in the military. Reporter Danny Raskin with the *Detroit Jewish News* used letters that Weinstein Schaffer sent home to her sister, Rebecca, to describe the harrowing yet exciting life she was living as a WAC abroad and serving her country.⁷⁸ In the August 11, 1944 publication that comes from a letter she wrote on July 22 in London, England, Weinstein Schaffer describes the scene she endured while

⁷⁵ “Wacs Save Friend’s Life,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1944, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=940DE0DD153DE13BBC4F51DFB766838F659EDE> (accessed April 18, 2016).

⁷⁶ “15 Wacs Get Medals For Good Conduct,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1944, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C0CE2DA1030E53BBC4152DFB466838F659EDE> (accessed April 18, 2016).

⁷⁷ “Says Wacs Will Be Fine Wives,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1944, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9E0CE7DE173DE03ABC4D53DFB366838F659EDE> (accessed April 18, 2016).

⁷⁸ Schaffer, 58.

overseas and dealing with the air raid sirens in the week after D-Day. “The air raid sirens are a frequent sound to us during the day as well as the night. And, it means the real thing over here – those damn buzz bombs come a floating round. They have been our unwelcome visitors both day and night since approximately one week after D-Day.”⁷⁹ Within this same letter home but omitted from publication, Weinstein Shaffer expresses her frustration with how little the public knows about what they do. “I am sure that many of the people I write to think because I write only of the pleasant things that there is nothing else that enters into our little lives. I don’t believe that the people back home can grasp any part of the situation over here. For some unknown reason, I know it just doesn’t penetrate.”⁸⁰ This article’s publication of what one woman was enduring is one example of the press attempting to share more with the public regarding the experiences of women in the Army in active war zones.

Anne Weatherbee Tinges started out as a WAAC officer who went through the first officer training in 1942 and transitioned to a WAC. Tinges also generated positive media attention for the WACs. In the September 1, 1944 edition of *The Union News*, the announcement of Tinges receiving the first Purple Heart to be awarded to a WAC officer overseas took up about a quarter of the front page and is continued further within the publication. Even though the matter of how she came to be awarded the prestigious award is not covered, what is even more telling is that the story describes her social life and desires that she expressed in letters she sent home.⁸¹ Tinges is described as taking vacations while in Europe and meeting boys from back in the States and wishing she had a bathing suit and tennis balls with her as well. The actual press release and photo that was supplied by the Army describes Tinges’ event that led to her receiving

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 67.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 66.

⁸¹ “Purple Heart Awarded Towson Girl,” *Union News*, September 1, 1944.

the Purple Heart, but the lack of detail in the newspaper reflected the survival of gendered conventions against printing explicit descriptions of women being harmed that survived even in the context of military service.⁸² This presentation of a woman receiving one of the highest honors in the military and yet reminding the public that she is still a person with wants and needs demonstrates the media's attempt to showcase women in the military in a more positive manner while respecting social norms which reinforced stereotypes that subordinated women to men even as their military service challenged the boundaries of that subordination.

After the transition to full military status, the perception of military women improved due to the saturation of encouraging attention from journalists who reported on the constructive roles for women within the military. The media also presented the full and positive message coming from government officials. Recruiting efforts for WACs experienced a steady upswing in the number of women recruited through D-Day once efforts to present women and their lives within the Army in a more positive style. During 1944, women were more open to the idea of joining the Army than they had been since the group's inception in May 1942. This acceptance has been shown throughout this analysis to correlate the media presentation of women and their activities during their time serving their country during its time of need in the military. As the end of the war drew near, women in the Army were given a positive presentation in the media using their own words and accolades of government officials.

⁸² Anne Weatherbee Tinges Personal Collection, *Official U.S Army Photo and Press Release*, (August 30, 1944).

Chapter 4 - Unmet Expectations and Beyond

Even though the enlistment for WAACs/WACs did not reach Colonel Hobby's initial goal of over a million women in the service by the end of the war, the enlistment numbers continued to grow. 1944 proved to be a combative year as the government officials and media publishers exerted their best efforts to encourage women to join the Army to free their male counterpart for active combat positions. Despite lackluster recruitment rates that did not meet the government's allotment for women nor Colonel Hobby's expectations, women's contributions were important to the American war effort. Fittingly, Hobby's praise of the women who served in the military during World War II reflected the contradictory reality that they challenged gender norms while exploiting, and in some ways reinforcing, the social norms to make their service more acceptable to the American public. Hobby noted that they were "...developing 'new poise and charm' and that they 'were only performing the duties that women would ordinarily do in civilian life.'"⁸³ The only difference was that they were doing those duties at a time and in a place where traditionally envisioned gender roles had well defined that space as decidedly masculine prior to World War II.

When women were first allowed into the Army as an auxiliary unit in 1942, women initially flocked to the recruiting stations for several reasons that typically included a want to do more to help their country win a grueling world war and a vision of different life experiences that they would not otherwise have staying at home or working a factory job. Newspaper articles supported this rush to the enlistment office through descriptions built on misconceptions and half-truths. Once the newness wore off, journalists exploited public anxiety about the WAAC to

⁸³ Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 510.

sell papers by printing sensationalized stories that portrayed the women who joined as lacking in moral character and not fulfilling any real duty to the United States. This attitude was carried through the first half of the following year. In 1943, newspapers conducted a slander campaign that continued to spell disaster for the recruiting efforts of the Army. When it was announced that WAACs would become full-fledged members of the military and known as WACs, popular and political figures encouraged a shift in media and popular perceptions of military women. This change in attitude continued through 1944 and helped establish better enlistment rates and social perception for WACs as war dawned on its conclusion.

The media's shifting portrayals of militarized women affected recruiting efforts. Though recruiting efforts did not reach the capacity Colonel Hobby had hoped for, by V-E Day (May 8, 1945), 99,388 women were serving in the WAC and over 140,000 women had worn the WAAC/WAC uniform at some point in the war. The personal stories of WACs and the change to a more positive presentation of these women in the media enabled them to end the war as pioneers and role models for the future generations of military women.⁸⁴ Although the women who joined the WAACs/WACs did not come into the corps with an established military tradition that gave them a clear path to follow, they all contributed to the creation of a lasting legacy that endured through the most turbulent of times. At the time of their departure from active duty after the conclusion of World War II, changes were made to give women veterans access to retirement benefits that were similar to (and eventually the same as) the benefits received by men including the right to be buried in Arlington cemetery. While the WAC survived the end of World War II, the group would not survive the 1970s. In the face of social changes that spurred equality reform

⁸⁴ Bettie J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 24-25.

throughout the federal government, the WAC was abolished in 1979 and women were integrated within the Army without designation as a woman.⁸⁵

While there are limitations to the research presented in this work, the utilization of the words of women, both in and out of the WAAC/WAC, and the thoughts of the public as verbalized by journalists helps to give credence to the argument that influences from the government, service members, and the public at large helped to establish and shape the rules and regulations as well as the image of women in the military. The argument made about the correlation between recruitment rates and public perception of the American military woman is viable and deserves additional research and development. Women of different colors had different experiences in the military as did women from different socioeconomic backgrounds. With further and future development, it will be possible to better understand the connections between the public image and perception of women who joined the military during and after World War II.

Recognizing the press' role in the battle women endured on the home front amidst a major international conflict helps bring greater understanding to why a woman being allowed to serve on the front lines as combat soldiers was so important for women's equality as citizens. While it took several more decades following the conclusion of World War II for women to gain access to combat positions and then the right to fight on the front line of combat with men, the precedent of women being included in the male preserve of the Army and the blurring of social norms for men and women had been set during World War II. Through the tenacity of those that joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, endured the negativity of the press and the slander campaign, and then joined the Women's Army Corps and made it a part of postwar Army,

⁸⁵ Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 530.

women achieved an important long-term advance that had been denied them by the postwar backlash after World War I and provided a base on which later generations of military women would build on as they pushed for greater equality within the Army.

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"For your country's sake today--For your own sake tomorrow. Go to the nearest recruiting station of the armed service of your choice." Color poster by Steele Savage, 1944.

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