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Abstract

The inadequate conditions suffered by women as army nurses, who were mostly civilians and did not get any care or compensation benefits by the US Army, laid the battlefront necessary for a further enhancement of a professional women's corp. Since the women who volunteered for World War I were not official members of the Army, they did not receive its protection and had to fend their food and accommodation on their own. Neither did they have any benefit in health care or legal protection. Furthermore, they did not receive the benefits of war veterans, as their male counterparts used to, either. The following step was the proposal of a law to establish a Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), later renamed Women's Army Corps (WAC) in the US Army in 1941. The law was finally passed on May 14, 1942. As a result, American women could work with the military during World War II and they received food, shelter, legal protection, health care, and a living wage. What we shall be looking upon this article is how the WAAC/WAC got to be created in the Army and its further involvement in the scenario during World War II.

Keywords: Army nurses – WAAC/WAC – World War II – Nurse Corps – war involvement.

1. Introduction

The inappropriate conditions suffered by women as Army Nurses during World War I, with the exception of a few nurses, who were mostly civilians and did not get any care or compensation benefits on behalf of the US Army, laid the groundwork necessary for a further enhancement of a professional Women Corp in the US military. The women who had volunteered for World War I were not official members of the army and they did not receive its protection, so they had to fend for food and accommodation on their own. Neither did they have any benefit in health care or legal protection. Moreover, on their return back home, they did not receive the benefits of war veterans either, as their male counterparts used to. Consequently, the following logical step was the proposal of a draft law in order to create a Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC)[1] in the US Army in 1941. Although the program was initially intended for women who voluntarily joined the military, this measure did not include their combat capacity. Quite obviously, the law was finally passed on May 14, 1942.

As a result, American women could work with the military during World War II, not as a part of it though, and in return they would receive food, shelter, legal protection, health care, a living wage and uniform regulations. Henceforth, only a few months later on, the WAAC was officially created in the United States with Oveta Culp Hobby being its first director. What we shall be examining along this article is how exactly the WAAC finally got to be created in the US Army and its further role and involvement in the European scenario during World War II. We shall mainly focus our attention on the role played by this group of women in such hazard times in worldwide history from almost the beginning of the conflict up to its very ending, with their further recognition by the US Army first, and the American society later. The American women who served in the WAAC during World War I were the first women to join the army, without being nurses.

[1] The *WAAC* was later transformed into the Women's Army Corps (WAC), as it will later be shown.

Whilst it was initially difficult to get used to having women in the military, as Leisa D. Meyer[2], Professor of History at the College William and Mary recognised, it was eventually recognized that it was best for the nation and, more importantly, that they were very helpful in time of war. The Women's Army Corps (WAC) was the women's branch of the US Army. It was created by an auxiliary unit, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) on 15 May 1942 by Public Law 554 and converted to full status as the WAC in 1943. Its first director was Oveta Culp Hobby, a prominent society woman in Texas: By Virtue of and pursuant to the authority vested in me by the Act entitled "An Act to establish a Women's Army Auxiliary Corps for service with the Army of the United States," approved May 14, 1942 (Public Law 554, Chapter 312, 77th Congress), and in order to accomplish the purpose of said Act, I do hereby establish a Women's Army Auxiliary Corps for non-combatant service with the Army of the United States for the purpose of further making available to the national defence the knowledge, skill, and special training of the women of this Nation; and do hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War, as a first step in the organization of such Corps, to establish units thereof, of such character as he may determine to be necessary to meet the requirements of the Army, with the number of such units not to exceed 100 and the total enrolment not to exceed 25,000[3].

2. The creation of the WAAC

On May 28, 1941, as the United States was preparing for the possibility of becoming involved in World War II, Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts introduced a bill in the US Congress to establish the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). Rogers used what women had done in the navy and marines during World War I as a model. However, it took the bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, and the entrance of the US into World War II to gain support for Rogers' legislation. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and General George Marshall got behind the bill, and the bill finally passed on May 14, 1942. The WAAC organization was designed by numerous Army bureaus coordinated by Lt. Col. Gilman C. Mudgett, the first WAAC pre-planner. However, as recognised by Mattie E. Treadwell[4], nearly all of his plans were discarded or modified before going into real operation because he expected a corps of only eleven thousand women. Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby was named the first director of the WAAC. Following the prestigious American sociologist researching in gender during World War II, Brenda L. Moore[5], and the first training centre was established at Fort Des Moines (Iowa).

The first group of enlistees, consisting of four hundred basic trainees and two hundred officer trainees, reported to Fort Des Moines on July 20, 1942.The WAACs were employed to free men from their non-combat duties so that they could go to combat zones. The women were not trained to use weapons and were not to serve in the combat front lines. At first, women in the WAAC were not well accepted by many of the general public, and jokes were made about the enlistees. The WAAC was modelled after comparable British units. In 1942, the first contingent of eight hundred members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps began basic training at Fort Des Moines Provisional Army Officer Training School (Iowa). Henceforth, as stated by Maine writer Margaret Flint[6], the women were fitted for uniforms, interviews, assigned to companies and barracks and inoculated against disease during the first day.

Basic training for the WAAC was eight weeks long and closely followed the basic training for the male trainees. The program was rigorous with exercises, close-order drills, classes on military subjects, and a lot more. The WAACs had a five-and-a-half day work week[7]. After completing basic training, the WAACs either went to duty stations or were sent to specialist training programs. Therefore, a physical training manual was published by the War Department in July 1943, aimed at bringing the women recruits to top physical standards. The manual begins by naming the responsibility of the women: <<Your job: to replace men. Be ready to take over>>[8].

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[2] Leisa D. Meyer. *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps during World War II,* Columbia, Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 28.

[3] Franklin D. Roosevelt. "Executive Order 9163 Establishing the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps", The White House, May 15, 1942.

[4] Mattie E. Treadwell. *The Women's Army Corps,* Washington, CMH Publications, 1954, p. 26.

[5] Brenda L. Moore. *To Serve My Country, To Serve My Race,* New York, New York University Press, 1996, p. 22.

[6] Margaret Flint. *Dress Right, Dress: The Autobiography of a WAC,* New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1943, p. 74.

[7] Saturday afternoons and Sundays were not scheduled for training, but women were often studying for the next exam during this time

[8] War Department. *WAC Field Manual Physical Training,* Washington, US Government Printing Office, 15 July 1943, p. 20.

The second and third WAAC basic training centres were established shortly after the first. By October 1942, a separate recruiting centre from the army's was established in Little Rock (Arkansas) for WAACs recruiters. And the first overseas detachment of WAACs was sent to General Dwight D. Eisenhower's headquarters in North Africa early in the 1943 Mediterranean campaign. By the beginning of 1943, the WAACs were proving that they could do the jobs asked of them, and additional women were recruited. A draft of women was even considered but failed to be approved. The fourth WAAC basic training centre was opened in March 1943 at Fort Devens (Massachusetts). More basic training space was badly needed. Three prisoner-of-war camps[9] were thus made available if the women made no changes to the plumbing, the sparse living quarters, or the barbed-wire fences. In addition to these five basic training centres, several specialist schools were set up around the US[10]. WAACs attended the so-called "paper schools" and received training in army forms and office administration. The trainees arrived in contingent of two hundred fifty to three hundred and stayed at the schools six to eight weeks.

The female MPs were the only WAACs to receive weapons training. On November 1, 1942, Congress passed legislation that equalized pay rates. But as editor Ethel Starbird[11] highlighted, until then, pay was less for women in the same rank doing the same jobs as the men they replaced. Another bill signed into law on July 1, 1943, dropped the word "auxiliary" from the name. This change made the women part of the US Army although they continued as a separate division, the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Both bills were sponsored by Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers from Massachusetts, who focused her efforts on the fully recognition of the WAC. Then, on September 9, 1943, the first medical technical school for WACs opened at the Army and Navy General Hospital in Hot Springs (Garland County). Some of the first one hundred and forty five WACs were assigned to six-week courses for medical or surgical technicians. Others were assigned to twelve-week courses for dental, laboratory, or X-ray technicians. Later on, training in physical or occupational therapy was added to the school's courses. As the WAC units completed their respective courses, they were sent to duty stations around the US, and some were even sent overseas.

At the Army and Navy Hospital, a reconditioning program was started to help patients with the transition to civilian life, and WACs taught high school courses and courses in life skills for the patients at the hospital. Other WACs worked as technicians in the hospital, and some worked in other capacities around the facility. WACs who were trained in Chemical Warfare Services arrived at the Pine Bluff Arsenal in early April 1943. The jobs they did there were typical of the variety of jobs WACs performed. WACs drove, serviced and cleaned the large army buses that connected the widely separated munitions buildings. Others ran the arsenal's military personnel section. The WAC program was originally supposed to be discontinued six months after the end of World War II. However, the women proved themselves to be an indispensable part of the military force of the nation, proficient in two hundred and thirty nine different army jobs they were trained to perform. The WAC, therefore, continued until 1978, after which time both women and men served together in the US Army. The conversion of the WAAC to the WAC and the image controversy of 1943 combined to cause a crisis in WAC recruiting. In desperation, some WAC recruiters lowered the standards for acceptance into the corps, and a few even resorted to subterfuge to obtain the necessary numbers of recruits.

The War Department and the WAC leadership recognised the immediate need to step up the recruiting campaign to increase the number of enrollers who sincerely wanted to aid the War effort. The result was the All-States Campaign[12] and the Job-Station Campaign[13]. Both campaigns were successful although they caused WAC administrations and training camp official's significant problems dealing with under strength and oversized sate companies and with women who would dictate the terms of their assignments after they had completed basic training. Although WAC enlistments never got to reach the high levels attained early in the war, recruitments maintained a steady pace from the fall of 1943 through early 1945, allowing the War Department to respond to overseas theatres' requests with additional WAC companies.

[9] These camps were the following: Camps Ruston and Camps Polk in Louisiana, along with Camp Monticello in Arkansas.
[10] These specialist schools included two administration schools: Arkansas Polytechnic College in Russellville (Pope County) and Arkansas State Teachers College in Conway (Faulkner County).
[11] Ethel Starbird. *When Women First Wore Army Shoes,* New York, Xlibris Corp, 2010, p. 60.
[12] In the All-States Campaign, General Marshall asked state governors to assign committees of prominent citizens the task of recruiting statewide companies for the WAC.
[13] The Job-Station Campaign allowed recruiters to promise prospective enlistees their choice of duty and assignment location after they completed basic training.

About fifteen thousand American women, according to chief historian Judith A. Bellafaire[14], served in the WAAC/WAC during World War II. They were the first women other than nurses to serve with the Army. While conservative opinion in the leadership of the Army and public opinion generally was initially opposed to women serving in uniform, the shortage of men necessitated a new policy. Whilst in the expert and common shared opinion of Alabama author Aileen K. Anderson[15], most women served state-wide, some went to various places around the world, including Europe and Africa. For instance, WACs landed on Normandy beach just a few weeks after the initial invasion. Many men ferociously opposed allowing women in uniform. They feared that if women became soldiers, they would no longer serve in a masculine preserve and their masculinity would be devalued.

Others feared, as it was put forward by professor at Austin Pay State University Ann Campbell, being sent into combat units if women took over the safe jobs[16]. Nonetheless, General Douglas MacArthur called the WACs "my best soldiers"[17] as it was later on recalled by Mattie E. Treadwell, former WAC and current Assistant Director of the Dallas Regional Office of the Federal Civil Defence Administration. He even added that they worked harder, complained less, and were better disciplined than men. Many generals wanted more of them and proposed to draft women but it was realized that this would provoke << considerable public outcry and Congressional opposition >>[18]. In consequence, the War Department declined to take such a drastic step. The WAC as a branch was disbanded in 1978. Women serving as WACs at that time converted their branches to whatever military occupational specialty they were working in. Since then, women in the US Army have served in the same units as men, though they have only been allowed in or near combat situations since 1994.

3. The participation of the WAC during World War II

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians as well as its veterans. It was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theatres of operations for almost six years. What we shall be analysing and discussing from this point on is the role played by the Women's Army Corps (WAC) during World War II. Over fifteen thousand American women served on the WAC during World War II. Members of the WAC were the first women, other than nurses, to serve within the ranks of the United States Army. Initially, following Colonel Bettie J. Morden[19], both the Army and the American public had difficulty accepting the concept of women in uniform. However, political and military leaders, faced with fighting a two-front war and supplying men and material for that war, realized that women could supply the additional resources so desperately needed in the military and industrial sectors.

Being given the opportunity so as to make a major contribution to the national war effort, women did serve it. Consequently, by the end of the war, these contributions would be widely heralded. The first auxiliary units and their officers to reach the battlefield went to Aircraft Warning Service (AWS) units. Since the US Army Air Forces could not rely on volunteer civilians to man stations twenty-four hours a day, by October 1942, twenty seven WAC companies were active at AWS stations up and down the eastern seaboard. WACs manned filter boards, plotting and tracing the paths of every aircraft in the station area. Some filter boards had as many as twenty positions, each one filled with a WAC wearing headphones and enduring endless boredom while waiting for the rare telephone calls reporting aircraft sightings.

Later on, graduates were formed into companies and sent to Army Air Forces (AAF), Army Ground Forces (AGF) or Services of Supply field installations. Initially, most auxiliaries worked as file clerks, typists, stenographers, or motor pool drivers, but gradually each service discovered an increasing number of positions WACs were capable of filling. Eventually the Air Forces obtained forty percent of all WACs in the army.

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[14] Judith A. Bellafiare. *The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service,* Washington, CMH Publications, 1972, p. 2.
[15] Aileen K. Henderson. *Stateside Soldier: Life in the Women's Army Corps,* Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2001, p. 96.
[16] Ann Campbell. *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 10.
[17] Mattie E. Treadwell. op. cit., p. 460.
[18] Ibidem, p. 95.
[19] Bettie J. Morden. *The Women's Army Corps,* Washington, DC, Center of Military History, United States Army, 1992, p. 43.

Women were usually assigned as weather observers and forecasters, cryptographers, radio operators and repairmen, sheet metal workers, parachute riggers, link trainer instructors, bombsight maintenance specialists, serial photograph analysts and control tower operators. Over one thousand WACs ran the statistical control tabulating machines used to keep track of personnel records. By January 1945, only fifty percent of AAF WACs held traditional assignments such as file clerk, typist or stenographer. Only a few AAF WACs were assigned to flying duties. Two WAC radio operators flew as crew members on B – 17 training flights. WAC mechanics and photographers also made regular flights. Three were awarded Air Medals, and even one woman died in the crash of an aerial broadcasting plane. Later in the war, women were trained to replace men as radio operators in US Army hospital ships. Three hospital ships[20] received each three enlisted women and one officer nears the end of 1944. This experiment proved successful and the assignment of female secretaries and clerical workers to hospital ships occurred soon after. WACs assigned to the Chemical Warfare Service worked both in laboratories and in the battlefield.

Some women were trained as glass blowers and made test tubes for the Army's chemical laboratories. Over one thousand two hundred WACs assigned to the Signal Corps worked as telephone switchboard operators, radio operators, telegraph operators, cryptologists, and photograph and map analysts. WACs assigned as photographers received training in the principles of developing and printing photographs, repairing cameras, mixing emulsions, and finishing negatives. Women who became map analysts learned to assemble, mount and interpret mosaic maps. WACs assigned to the Corps of Engineers participated in the Manhattan Project in connection with the atomic bomb[21]. WACs maintained the top secret files related to the project, working twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week. Other WACs involved in the project helped to coordinate the flow of information between English and American scientists cooperating on the project. The Army Ground Forces were initially reluctant to request and employ WACs. They eventually receive twenty percent of all WAC assignment. Many high-ranking staff officers would have preferred to see women and the defence effort by taking positions in industry: << In industry it is necessary to train personnel in only a single operation on the production line >>[22]. As a result, WACs assigned to the Army Ground Forces often felt unwelcome and complained of the intensive discipline imposed upon them.

Most of the WACs worked in training centres where seventy-five percent performed routine office work. The stories of Ground Forces WACs contrasted with those of women assigned to the Air and Service Forces, who were sent to specialist schools and quite often transferred between stations. In opinion of Professor from Center for Florida History, Doris Weatherford[23], the WAC members served worldwide during World War II: North Africa, the Mediterranean, Europe, the Southwest Pacific, China, India, Burma, and the Middle East. Overseas assignment were highly coveted, even though the vast majority consisted of the clerical and communication jobs at which women were believed to be most efficient at. Only the most highly qualified women received overseas assignments. Some women turned down the chance to attend the Officer Candidate School in favour of an overseas assignment during the war. The invasion of North Africa was only five days when, on 13 November 1942, Lt. Gen. Dwight D.

Eisenhower asked that five WAC officers[24], two of whom could speak French, were sent to the Allied Force Headquarters to serve as executive secretaries. These five women served on General Eisenhower's staff successively throughout the North African, Mediterranean and European campaigns. In 1945, Eisenhower stated: << During the time I have had WACs under my command; they have met every test and task assigned to them. Their contributions in efficiency, skill, spirit and determination are immeasurable >>[25]. The first WAC unit overseas, the 149th Post Headquarters Company, reported on 27 January 1943 to General Eisenhower's headquarters in Algiers. Initially, unit members were housed in the dormitory of a convent school and transported to the headquarters in trucks. They usually served as postal workers, clerks, typists and switchboards operators.

[20] The 3 hospital ships were the following: the Larkspur, the Charles A. Stafford, and the Blanche F. Sigman.
[21] Two WACs were involved in the experiments in connection with the atomic bombs, Elisabeth Wilson of the Chemistry Division at Los Alamos and Jane Heydorn of the Electronic Laboratory Group at Los Alamos.
[22] Karen Anderson. *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the Status of Women during World War II,* Florida, Abbey Publishing, 1981, p. 89.
[23] Doris Weatherford. *American Women and World War II,* New York, Castle Books, 2009, p. 83.
[24] These 5 WAC officers were: Martha Rogers, Mattie Pinette, Ruth Briggs, Alene Drezmal and Louise Anderson.
[25] Judith Bellafaire. Op. cit., p. 8.

Nightly bombings and accompanying anti-air craft fire made sleep difficult for the first few weeks, but most of the women acclimated fairly quickly. Additional WAC postal workers joined them in May. A WAC signal company arrived in November to take jobs as high-speed radio operators, tele-typists, cryptographic code clerks and tape cutters in radio rooms. Corps members assigned to the Army Air Forces arrived in North Africa between November 1943 and January 1944. One of the most famous WAC units to serve in the North African and Mediterranean theatres was the 6669th Headquarters Platoon, assigned to Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark's Fifth Army. This unit became the Army's experiment in the use of female units in the battlefield. The 6669th accompanied Fifth Army headquarters from Algeria across the Mediterranean to Naples and eventually all the way up the boot of Italy. Unit members remained from six to thirteen miles behind the front lines, moved with the headquarters group, and worked in traditional female skills[26]. Clark and his staff treated the WACs as valued members of the Fifth Army team, and the women responded by submitting to the hardships associated with forward troop movements with little or no complaint, in opinion of American author Doris E. Samford[27]. The WAC's success in the North African and Mediterranean theatres led to an increasing number of requests for WAC from overseas theatres.

But before the War Department could honour these requests, however, it had to find a solution to a more immediate problem. In early 1943, the number of women joining the WAC dropped drastically due to a sudden backlash of public opinion against the employment of women in the armed forces[28]. While the public and press discussed on the merits of the WAC, Congress opened hearings in March 1943 on the conversion of the WAC into the Regular Army. Army leaders asked for the authority to convert the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) into the Women's Army Corps (WAC), which should be part of the Army rather than serving it. The WAAC had been an unqualified success, and the Army received more requests for WAACs than it could provide. Although WAAC were desperately needed overseas, the Army could not offer them the protections if captured or benefits if injured which Regular Army soldiers received. The plans for an eventual Allied front in Europe required a substantially larger Army, with many more jobs than women could fill. The establishment of a Women's Army Corps with pay privileges and protection equal to that accorded to men was seen as a partial solution to the Army's problem.

On 3 July 1943, after a delay caused by congressional hearings on the slander issues, the WAC bill was signed into law. All WAACs were given a choice of joining the Army as a member of the WAC or returning to civilian life[29]. Women returned home for a variety of reasons, according to the view expressed by Professor Vera S. Williams[30]. Some were needed at home because of family problems. Others had taken a deep dislike to group living and Army discipline. Some women did not want to wear their uniform while off duty, as required of all members of the armed forces. Women electing to leave also complained that they had not been kept busy or that they had not felt needed in their jobs. Not quite surprisingly, the majority of those who left had been assigned to the Army Ground Forces, which had been reluctant to accept women in the first place and where the women were often underutilized and ignored. According to Martha S. Putney[31], some thirty four percent of the WAACs allocated to the Army Ground Forces decided to leave the service at the time of conversion, compared to twenty percent of those in the Air Forces and twenty-five percent of those in the Army Service Forces.

With the conversion of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps to the Women's Army Corps, former WAAC first, second and third officers became captains and first and second lieutenants respectively. And Director Oveta C. Hobby was officially promoted to the rank of colonel. In July 1943, the first battalion of WACs to reach the European theatre of operations arrived in London. The five hundred and fifty-seven enlisted women and the nineteen officers were assigned to duty with the 8th Air Force.WAC officers served as executive secretaries, cryptographers and photo interpreters.

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[26] The unit's table of organization called for 10 telephone operators, 7 clerks, 16 clerks, 16 clerk-typists, 10 stenographers and 1 administrative clerk.

[27] Doris E. Samford. *Ruffles and Drums*, Boulder, Pruett Press, 1996, p. 64.

[28] A variety of social factors had combined to produce a negative public image of the female soldier: letters home from enlisted men, civilian workers from military bases or even the American press.

[29] Although the majority of women decided to enlist, 25% decided to leave the service at the time of conversion from WAAC to WAC.

[30] Vera S. Williams. *WACs: Women's Army Corps*, New York, Motorbooks International, 1997, p. 56.

[31] Martha S. Putney. *When the Nation Was on Need*, New York, The Scarecrow Press, 1992, p. 165.

The demand for switchboard operators and typists remained so high that in 1944, two classes of approximately forty-five women each were recruited with the theatre and received three weeks of basic training in England. A detachment of three hundred WACs served with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). Originally stationed in London, these WACs accompanied SHAEF to France and eventually to Germany. As stenographers, typists, translators, legal secretaries, cryptographers, telegraph and teletype operators, radiographers and general clerks, these women assisted in the planning of D-day and all subsequent operations up to the defeat of Germany[32]. A definite example of the key role played by some WACs in the conflict may well be the following one. A WAC stenographer assigned to the G-2 Section (Intelligence) of SHAEF, whose work consisted of recording and translating reports from the French underground. These reports were received from short-wave radio, decoded, and made available to those responsible for the planning of the invasion of France. Each morning, the briefing reports were typed and presented to the commanding officers. And during the afternoon, this WAC helped to bring the situation map up to date. Battle lines were shown by map buttons listing the units engaged in each section and the enemy units opposing. SHAEF WACs worked around the clock throughout the planning period for D-day. Plans were changed daily and WACs typed both the critical changes and the alternate plans and routed them through the Allied command chain. On July 14, 1944, one year after the first contingent of WACs landed in England and thirty-eight days after D-day, the first forty-nine WACs to arrive in France landed in Normandy.

Assigned to the Communications Zone, they immediately took over switchboards recently vacated by the Germans and worked in tents, cellars, pre-fabricated huts and switchboard trailers. Then, as recorded by Charity A. Earley[3334], in February 1945, a battalion of black WACs received its long awaited overseas assignment. Organized as the 6888th Central Postal Battalion and commanded by Major Charity Adams, these eight hundred women were stationed in Birmingham (England) for three months, moved to Rouen (France), and finally settled in Paris. The battalion was responsible for the re-direction of mail to all US personnel in the European theatre of operations, including Army, Navy, Marine Corps, civilians and Red Cross workers, which made up a total of over seven million people. The WACs worked three eight-hour shifts, seven days a week to clear out the tremendous backlog of Christmas mail[35].In general, WACs in the European theatre, like those in the North African and Mediterranean ones, held a limited range of job assignments: thirty-five percent worked as stenographers and typists, twenty-six percent were clerks, and twenty-two percent were in communications work.

Just only eight percent were assigned jobs considered unusual for women such as mechanics, draftsmen, interpreters, or weather observers. Following former WAC Anne B. Green[36], by V-E Day, there were almost eight thousand WACs throughout the European theatre stationed across England, France and the German cities of Berlin, Frankfurt, Wiesbaden and Heidelberg. In the south-west Pacific Area, the need for WACs became acute by mid-1944. WACs were then stationed at Hollandia and Oro Bay (New Guinea) and at Leyte and Manila (The Philippines). Women who served in this theatre faced numerous difficulties, only a few of which were inherent to the geographic area they were assigned in. Eventually, seventy percent of the WACs who served in the Asian and Pacific theatre worked in administrative and office positions, twelve percent in communications, nine percent worked in stockrooms and supply depots, and seven percent were assigned to motor transport pools. Many WAC officers worked as mail censors and became very skilled at their sensitive work: "Women seem to have an uncanny knack for discovering the tricky codes soldiers devise for telling their wives where they are"[37], claimed the WAC officer's supervisor.

[32] WACs handled highly classified material, worked long hours with few days off, and were exposed to a significant amount of danger.

[33] Charity A. EARLEY: *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC,* Texas, Texas A & M University Press, 1989, p. 183.

[34] Charity Adams Earley (1918–2002) was the first African American woman to be an officer in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and was the commanding officer of the first battalion of African American women to serve overseas during World War II.

[35] Although the WACs workload was heavy, their spirits were high because they realized how important their work was in keeping up morale at the battle front.

[36] Anne B. Green. *One Woman's War: Letters Home from the Women's Army Corps*, Saint Paul, MN, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1993, p. 82.

[37] Jeanne Holm. *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution,* New York, Presidio Press, 1994, p. 264.

The women learned that office work far behind the front lines was frequently crucial to the success of men in the battle field. After the WACs had been in the Southwest Pacific Area for approximately nine months, the number of evacuations for health reasons jumped from ninety-eight per thousand to two hundred and sixty-seven per thousand, which was significantly higher than that for men. The high rate of WAC illness was directly related to the theatre's supply problems. Many women lost a significant amount of weight during their year's stay in the Pacific. Although the WACs performed well in the Southwest Pacific under daunting conditions, they did so at considerable personal cost.

Regardless of the high incidence of illness, WAC morale remained high. In July 1944, four hundred WACs arrived in the China-Burma-India theatre to serve with the Army Air Forces. WACs assigned to these areas served as stenographers, typists, file clerks, and telephone and telegraph operators despite the initial opposition of theatre commander Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell. He finally allowed Army Air Forces commander Major General George E. Stratemeyer to obtain a contingent of WACs on the condition that they would serve only with his units. One month after V-E Day, 8 May 1945, WAC Director Oveta Culp Hobby resigned from the corps for personal reasons. Colonel Hobby's dedicated and skilful administration was the primary force behind the wartime success of the organization from its formation and overall philosophy through its rapid growth. Director Hobby recommended as her successor Lieutenant Colonel Westray Battle Boyce, Deputy Director of the WAC and former Staff Director of the North African Theatre. Colonel Boyce was appointed WAC Director in July 1945 and oversaw the demobilization of the WAC after V-J Day in August 1945. The Army acknowledged the contributions of the Women's Army Corps during World War II by granting numerous individual corps members various awards.

WAC Director Oveta Culp Hobby received the Distinguished Service Medal[38] and sixty-two WACs received the Legion of Merit[39], awarded for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of duty during the war. Three WACs received the Air Medal[40]; ten women received the Soldier's Medal[41] for heroic actions not involving combat; sixteen women received the Purple Heart[42]. The Bronze Star[43] was awarded to more than five hundred women for meritorious service overseas. A total of six hundred and fifty-seven WACs received medals and citations at the end of the war. Much of the Women's Army Corps was demobilized along with the rest of the Army starting immediately after V-E Day in Europe. Not all the women were allowed to return home immediately, however. In order to accomplish its occupation mission, the Army granted its commanders the authority to retain some specialists, including WACs, in place as long as they were needed. Within six months, the Army bowed to public and political pressure and sent most of its soldier's home. On 31 December 1946, WAC strength was under ten thousand, the majority of who held stateside duty and who hoped to be allowed to stay in the Army. Earlier in 1946, the Army asked Congress for the authority to establish the Women's Army Corps as a permanent part of the Regular Army. This is the greatest single indication of the success of the wartime WAC. The Army acknowledged a need for the skills society believed women could provide.

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[38] The Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) is a military award of the United States Army that is presented to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the United States military, has distinguished himself or herself by exceptionally meritorious service to the Government in a duty of great responsibility. The performance must be such as to merit recognition for service that is clearly exceptional.

[39] The Legion of Merit (LOM) is a military award of the United States Armed Forces that is given for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements. The decoration is issued both to United States military personnel and to military and political figures of foreign governments.

[40] The Air Medal is a military decoration of the United States Military. The medal was created in 1942 and is awarded for meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight

[41] The Soldier's Medal is an individual decoration of the United States Army. It was introduced as Section 11 of the Air Corps Act, passed by the Congress of the United States on July 2, 1926.[1] The criteria for the medal are: "The Soldier's Medal is awarded to any person of the Armed Forces of the United States or of a friendly foreign nation who, while serving in any capacity with the Army of the United States... ...distinguished himself or herself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy."

[42] The Purple Heart is a United States military decoration awarded in the name of the President to those wounded or killed, while serving, on or after April 5, 1917, with the U.S. military. The Purple Heart is the oldest military award still given to U.S. military members.

[43] The Bronze Star Medal is the fourth-highest individual military award and the ninth-highest by order of precedence in the US Military. It may be awarded for acts of heroism, acts of merit, or meritorious service in a combat zone. When awarded for acts of heroism, the medal is awarded with the "V" device.

4. Conclusions

Ultimately, more than fifteen thousand American women served in the Army during World War II. The overall philosophy and purpose of the Women's Army Corps was to allow women to aid the American war effort directly and individually. The prevailing philosophy was that women could best support the war effort by performing non-combatant military jobs for which they were already trained. This allowed the Army to make the most efficient use of available labour and free men to perform essential combat duties. The concept of women in uniform was difficult for the American society of the 1940s to accept. In a 1939 Army staff study which addressed the probability that women would serve in some capacity with the Army, a male officer wrote the following:

"Women's probable jobs would include those of hostess, librarians, canteen clerks, cooks and waitress, chauffeurs, messengers and strolling minstrels"[44]. No mention was made in this report of the highly skilled office jobs which the majority of WACs eventually held; because such positions often carried with them significant responsibility and many people doubted that women were capable of handling such jobs. Although women in key leadership roles both within and outside the government realized that American women were indeed capable of contributing substantially to the war effort, even they accepted the prevailing stereotypes which portrayed women as best suited for tasks which demanded precision, repetition and attention to detail. These factors, coupled with the post-Depression fear that women in uniform might take jobs from civilians, limited the initial range of employment for the first wave of women in the US Army. Traditional restrictions on female employment in American society were broken during World War II by the critical labour shortage faced by all sectors of the economy.

As "Rosie the Riveter"[45] demonstrated her capabilities in previously male-dominated civilian industries, women in the Army broke the stereotypes which restricted them, moving into positions well outside of traditional roles. Overcoming slander and conservative reaction by many Americans, a phenomenon shared by their British and Canadian sisters in uniform, American women persisted in their service and significantly contributed to the war effort. The 1943 transition from auxiliary status to the Women's Army Corps was de facto recognition of their valuable service. The Women's Army Corps was successful because its mission, to aid the US in times of war, was part of a larger national effort that required selfless sacrifice from all Americans. The war effort initiated vast economic and social changes, and indelibly altered the role of women in American society. World War II and the establishment of the Women's Army Corps were watershed moments in the women's rights movements. Military service has always been an important step for any group seeking equal rights. Common military service breaks down social barriers, builds respect and leads to a sense of camaraderie among people who would otherwise remain strangers.

[44] Michaela Hampf. *Release a Man for Combat: The Women's Army Corps during World War II,* Köln, Böhlau Verlag GmbH, 2010, p. 247.

[45] Rosie the Riveter is a cultural icon of the United States, representing the American women who worked in factories during World War II, many of whom produced munitions and war supplies. These women sometimes took entirely new jobs replacing the male workers who were in the military.

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