THE WOMEN’S ARMY CORPS AND WOMEN ACCEPTED FOR VOLUNTEER EMERGENCY SERVICE: A FASHIONING OF AMERICAN WOMANHOOD AND CITIZENSHIP

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
HISTORY

December: 2009

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ABSTRACT

The focus of the study was to theorize and answer the question of why existing fashion theory in the U.S., as well as abroad, has not tackled the question of American womanhood and citizenship as evidenced in the images of the WACs and WAVES during WWII. Thorough examination of original source materials from pamphlets, recruiting booklets, memoirs, magazine articles, books, case studies, editorials, letters, photos and scrapbooks, a study of fashion has shown historical connections between existing gender systems, social orders, and political ideologies in WWII America. The present study focused on how women’s relationships to fashion transformed the evaluation of women’s roles and status during WWII and what clothing and adornment meant concerning women in the armed forces. The research also examined the concept of the new woman, and explored how the U.S. government successfully constructed a female appearance that satisfied both public and private concerns.

The ways in which women’s roles and status changed during WWII was the result of the government promoting visual identity that typified traditional gender ideology and feelings of national belonging as women contributed to an American victory in the armed forces. An evaluation of fashion was important to see how life in WWII America changed in ways that no other sources of material culture could show. The use of original research material and its application contributes to and builds upon existing scholarship.
on WWII as well the development of the WACs (Women’s Army Corps) and WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service). Not only is cultural and social history examined through the creation of WAC and WAVE uniforms but the social conditions, the political power shifts, as well as how the civilian population and female military personnel viewed themselves.

Research shows design changes in uniforms of the WACs and WAVES by a number of interested parties successfully reconciled the initial discord which arose between female recruitment needs and the opinions and perceptions of the public, male recruits, and participant families. Resolving misconceptions regarding the roles and expectations of women during WWII between what was considered acceptable and the changing roles of women and gender in American fashion culture was key to the eventual success of having women assisting the war effort. The roles of women and gender in WWII America alongside American fashion culture were considered within the social, economic, political and cultural implications of the creation of the WACs and WAVES in the 20th century. The military and the families of those women enlisting fulfilled their wartime duty, yet remained feminine and acceptable both in the public and private cultural and social spheres, through the careful fashioning of American women serving their country in WAC and WAVE uniforms.
AMERICAN women are on the march. Head high, eyes bright, they are stepping out in uniforms that symbolize America’s new determination. They are donning the shining armor of citizens of the world. Courage is their emblem of honor; sacrifice their invisible service stripe.

A salute to American women in uniform.

To my mother,
Kimberly Bilger
My constant source of inspiration and guidance
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted most sincerely to the group of archivists, librarians, committee members, family members, and friends that have guided me through this labor intensive study and project. To my advisor Dr. Beth Griech-Polelle, and committee members Dr. Susan Voso Lab, and Mr. Stephen Charter, I owe my graduate success to their belief in my topic and in my competence to complete the study as well as in providing both academic and professional guidance with their support, insightful comments, expertise, and enthusiasm for my topic.

I would also like to thank the unflagging assistance of the Bowling Green State University Library and Archival staff, most notably that of Carol Ann Singer, for providing and instructing me in the art of resource management and procurement, and for the phenomenal archival staff of the Center for Archival Collections which include Stephen Charter, and Frederick N. Honneffer, who patiently listened to me describe my topic and sought to fuel my research interests and inquiries.

Most notably my gratitude and love goes to my mother Kimberly Bilger, whose constant faith in me has made this manuscript possible and to my close friends Tim and Joanna Kostel for always being supportive.
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INTRODUCTION

The creation of the WACs (Women’s Army Corps and for the purpose of this study WAACs will be referred to as WACs) and the WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service) along with millions of other female based civilian and military organizations have provided an integral foundation for America’s victory in WWII and for the fabric of American wartime culture and identity. Not only were the WACs and the WAVES changing accepted gender and social roles of women during wartime but their admittance into the military meant far reaching changes for the modernity of women in America from that point forward. By examining women’s roles in the WACs and the WAVES, the research seeks to connect women’s personal identity to that of her public performance in the U.S. military through the examination and interpretation of women’s clothing in general and in the military uniforms of the WACs and WAVES. Women’s military uniforms were investigated for design and construction history and development, private and public opinions of both the beginning and final garment configurations, and the cultural significance in economics and politics. In the WWII era, 20th century women were questioned on the language of dress; developing their thoughts, roles, and relationships with themselves, as well as their role in the private and public spheres pertaining to clothing in history. The research will incorporate as well as move beyond illustrations and images of clothing to broader social and cultural contexts to examine the questions regarding the modern meaning invested in the dress of WACs and WAVES in WWII America.
Despite the much historicized and documented examples of women’s efforts and sacrifices during WWII, complete and thorough examinations into the rich material culture of the American service women and their images has been sadly absent from historical research and historiography. Even the area of gender and fashion studies have failed to fully examine and properly synthesize the question women’s roles and national responsibilities displayed in the images of WWII WACs and WAVES. Any discussion of WACs and WAVES in the current historiographic landscape reduces women’s uniform apparel history to brief and unsatisfying generalities on necessities of wartime rationing or leaves the topic completely out of the discussion. In the growing academic acceptance of fashion theory, which has been steadily and positively growing since the late 20th century, Europe has led the way in finding the meaning for fashion choices far beyond just standards of acceptable appearance. European scholars have supported legitimized study of fashion theory as a worthwhile academic endeavor often focusing on the British, French, Italian, and German perspectives on the affects of history on fashion. Fashion history has been examined and analyzed for the purpose of studying the WWII era fashion choices for future scholars. Research that legitimized fashion theory and understanding fashion beyond its mere physicality include: Irene Guenther’s Nazi Chic?, Jennifer Jones’s Sexing La Mode, Mila Ganeva’s Women in Weimar Fashion, Rene Konig’s A La Mode, Fred Davis’ Fashion, Culture, and Identity, Eugenia Paulicelli’s Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Shirt, and Dominique Veillon’s Fashion Under the Occupation. The above authors’ works are a few of the more focused writings on how fashion changes with the pressures of war. An American perspective on the affects of war on women’s apparel is often either lacking or completely absent. If the
The topic of the WACs and WAVES is mentioned in fashion theory; it is underdeveloped in the context of American women's roles and national responsibilities in war as it is intertwined in the images of the WACs and WAVES. Unlike their British female counterparts, also called the WAAC (Women's Auxiliary Army Corps), which have been thoroughly documented and celebrated in historical theory since the late 1940s, not only have British authors and historians documented the role of their women in uniform but such categories of women's participation during wartime have been celebrated and become the basis for such books as D. Collett Wadge’s *Women in Uniform*, Elizabeth Ewing’s *Women in Uniform through the centuries*, and even the recently published memoirs of Christian Lamb entitled *I only Joined For the Hat: Redoubtable Wrens at War, Their Trials Tribulations and Triumphs*. Such theoretical work has also produced such works as Elizabeth Wilson’s *Adorned In Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, which encompasses not only a history of fashion but the central concepts of clothing as an extension not only of the physical body but of the culture and society of people.¹

Why then has women’s fashion theory focused on the European perspective and not on the American? More specifically, why does existing U.S. fashion theory not tackle the question of American women’s roles and national responsibilities in war as it is intertwined in the images of the WACs and WAVES. The research used original source materials from pamphlets, recruiting booklets, memoirs, magazine articles, books, case studies, editorials, letters, photos, and scrapbooks. Fashion provided historical connections between the existing gender systems, social orders, and political ideologies that existed in WWII America. Research focus will be less on women’s 1940s clothing styles and more on analyzing how women’s relationship to fashion transformed the concept of women’s roles and status during WWII and what clothing and adornment
meant concerning women in the armed forces. In tandem with the concept of the new American woman, research will also examine and explore how the U.S. government constructed a female appearance that would soothe both the public and private image concerns in many ways. Some of the ways image concerns were addressed was through official gender ideology and feelings of national belonging where women contributed to the nation’s identity and purpose, as well as promoting an American victory.

The research questions why fashion is important to examine. What can fashion tell us about WWII America that other sources of material culture cannot? The research project and resulting knowledge will be documented for the purpose of contributing and building upon existing scholarship on WWII and the development of the WACs and WAVES. The research examines women’s clothing in WWII and exactly what place of importance the women of the WACs and WAVES held within the spheres of culture, politics, and economics. Along with examining cultural and social history an exploration of the power and meaning embedded in the uniforms reflected the political power shifts, and the ways female military personnel viewed themselves along with their male and female civilian counterparts. Lastly through the application of the uniforms of the WACs and WAVES the U.S. government had to attempt to reconcile the discord between female recruitment and national war responsibility with the opinions and perceptions of the public, male recruits, families, excreta.

The research links the roles and expectations of women during WWII with that of the accepted, as well as, the changing roles of women and gender in the making of American fashion culture. The research will explore the roles of women and gender in WWII America and in the making of American fashion culture with questions addressed
within the social, economic, political and cultural implications of the creation of the WACs and WAVES during WWII. For both the military and the families of women enlisting it was vitally important to fulfill their wartime duty, yet remain feminine and acceptable to the appearance sensitivities both in the public and private cultural and social spheres.
CHAPTER I

THE CULTURE OF FASHION

The culture of fashion was rapidly changing for women in the 20th century, by WWI and most definitely by the 1920s mass manufacture of clothing and ready accessibility along with advanced textile technology allowed women to diversify their clothing choices to meet their changing roles in society. Starting with “reform dress” or rational fashion choices that were more comfortable, healthful, and beautiful women were freed from constricted clothing practices and designs at the turn of the century which continued until the end of WWI. When more mass produced and streamlined clothing was readily available women were freed from exclusively furnishing their own wardrobes. They were also taking on more diverse positions outside of the home than had been possible for the average American female. The new active lifestyles of a large majority of women were impacting textile technology, women’s place in society was changing, and resulting clothing styles reflected lifestyle changes.

Along with the rapidly changing roles of women in the workplace and in society, the rising popularity of sports and outdoor activities in the United States also made women demand less cumbersome, heavy clothing which propelled more functional sportswear. To reflect women’s changing interests and roles in activities outside of the home several trends evolved in apparel history. Out were heavy clothing and restrictive undergarments, like stiff steel and whalebone corsets, quickly lost favor with women as the ideal foundation garment. Lighter more flexible support garments replaced restrictive garments which were both more comfortable and allowed for ease of movement needed
for vigorous activity. Replacing the corset, once the cornerstone of women’s silhouette clothing were trousers, bloomers, and gym suits. No longer burdened by too many undergarments and unwieldy corsets, trouser garment forms and shorter skirt forms became the accepted sport uniform. Sport attire reflected not only women’s interest in vigorous sports but also enhanced their ability to engage in and enjoy exercise and everyday activities fully. Change in apparel design allowed women to be active participants in society in a way that had not been readily available before for individuals outside of the elite strata. Unfortunately widespread use and acceptance of trousers and other sport clothes, beyond farm work and physical education classes, were slow in catching on, not truly finding more universal acceptance until WWI and WWII. Trousers gradually became the only practical solution for the ever evolving and necessary roles and activities that women needed to engage in for the war effort. Despite women’s progressively demanding roles socially and culturally, items like trousers still challenged ingrained gender ideals and in some cases tried the patience of individuals who found pant forms unfeminine.

The impetus for changing fashion culture for women began just prior to WWI when women were challenged physically by increased demands in the workplace, resulting in more practical and functional apparel for work, travel, health, and comfort. By the time of America’s induction into WWI, women were not only active in an expanded set of workplaces but were also being utilized in war support and military activities both abroad and at home.

By 1917, in WWI, America was faced with a manpower shortage and the United States Army requested the procurement of women in France to help as telephone
operators and other federal service employees. Respect for women and their abilities, both abroad in the Nursing Corps and in various homefront needs moved the procurement request quickly forward. Women were deployed to France outfitted and uniformed like their male counterparts in soldiers’ clothing. Deployed women’s official status was however still civilian similar to the female Army Nurse Corps. Subsequent civilian contracts for women used for military purposes overseas and in “civilian volunteer welfare groups,” were met with positive results. Both the work ethic and exhibited conduct of civilian women volunteer groups were met with positive results. The excellent moral and ethical conduct of women meeting national and international war needs positively impressed the United States Army who then sought to officially and permanently organize and recruit women as a part of the Army Service Corps. Serious concern were raised when the status of women changed to permanent military status no longer just being used for emergency or wartime service needs. Debates flourished on what the resulting categories and conditions of women would be if they were to be accepted into the Army; would they to be “enlisted, Civil Service, or uniformed contract employees.” Along with questions concerning service corp. categorization were the unspoken social and cultural repercussions of having women serving in the military with possibly the same status and requirements of men. Debate continued with the additional concerns of what effects such a restructuring would have on larger homefront social needs such as in child rearing, job availability, and the roles and positions considered acceptable for women that would not offend or degrade established social femininity norms. Despite opposition from the War Department on the feasibility of accepting women into the military, several Army agencies felt that a Women’s Army Corps was the
solution to armed force shortages and therefore did not view the addition of women as a
direct assault on previously held feminine ideals of American society. Seeking to make
women a viable part of America’s answer to war needs the Quartermaster General of the
Army began to secure legislation for the authorization for enlisting women, between the
ages of 21-45, to be established into the Women’s Auxiliary Quartermaster Corps.12
Other civilian organizations in similar war needs quickly followed the lead of the
Quartermaster General. One organization suggested a possible uniform for the newly
created women’s group that should be of “soft silver brown wool material, with a tan
pongee blouse and brown Windsor tie, and that no furs shall be worn with the uniform.”13
However, despite the committees’ proceedings into the planning and creation of the
Women’s Corps the concept was not looked upon favorably by the War Department. The
proposed legislation was ultimately disapproved of in 1917 stating that “the enlistment of
women in the military forces of the United States has never been seriously contemplated
and such enlistment is considered unwise and highly undesirable…” and again in 1918
with “industrial conditions in the United States are not yet in such shape that it is
necessary to undertake a line of action that would be fraught with so many difficulties.”14
While Army authority took a stance on excluding women from enlisting, the Navy and
Marine Corps however, had no qualms when it quickly and decisively passed necessary
legislation to make women active corp. members with the same status as men.15 Quick
actions resulted in “nearly 13,000 women enlisted in the Navy and Marine Corps on the
same status as men and wore a uniform blouse with insignia.”16 Given the same status as
men “these women were the first female forces in the United States to be admitted to full
military rank and status.”17 The early attempts of the Army in establishing civilian Army
Nurse Corps uniforms helped to secure for women an acceptable status as useful and essential members of the war effort. Early uniform efforts established basic parameters of acceptability with regard to uniforms being similar to men in style, but not at a cost to discounting the need for femininity or the important requirement for styles that would not hinder women in specific war jobs.

Any further appeals or proposals by the Army or civilian committees ended with the cessation of WWI hostilities on November 11, 1918. The idea for a Women’s Army Corps was not forgotten and in the late 1930s the idea was once again resurrected, by a Massachusetts Congresswoman named Edith Nourse Rogers.18 The tenacity of Congresswoman Rogers and adamant women’s organizations on the Army for more than a year produced bill H.R. 4906. Introduced on May 28, 1941, along with statistics on the real possibility of manpower shortages convinced Congress to accepted H.R. 4906 and the status of women in the Army on an auxiliary status.19 Auxiliary status was not the first choice of Rogers and other military and civilian groups, who preferred complete and equal military status with the Army, but the result of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was a definite advancement for women which would prove invaluable in the coming WWII era.
CHAPTER II

WWII

Much like the generation from WWI, women were given more respect for meeting national wartime needs and WWII proved to be an even bigger opportunity for women as both civilian homefront and armed force needs expanded. Building upon advancements gained during WWI and the success of Congresswoman Edith Rogers, women who joined the WAACs, (which eventually became the WACs when it was fully incorporated into the Army without auxiliary status), and the WAVES (the naval female equivalent to the male forces) gained societal acceptance through the development of appropriate uniforms. The evolution of women gaining expanded acceptability in the workplace and women living more active lives, qualify military uniforms as a symbol of women’s ever growing and changing roles. The military, as in the case of the Army, was unprepared for change in women’s roles and status. Some Navy personnel were more diligent in trying to preserve previous passive and accepted ideals of gender and femininity within a design that would also address activity, vitality, and modernity required of the new American woman. Women were actively seeking identity with military men who were trying to eradicate our wartime enemies. Women’s military uniforms became primary visual evidence of both women’s effort to be able to choose roles that were expanding in society and in the military and in promoting the mature and responsible decision to step up to the nations needs during crisis of war. Women proved themselves worthy of the nations respect be setting aside other personal preferences for
individualism in dress when they embraced the collective identity of a uniform when the

call was made for the entire nation to step up to the challenges of war.

Along with the rise of the new responsible modern woman was the escalation of
the war effort and the wartime rationing of supplies and materials of which military
uniforms were not immune. After America entered the war, the government quickly
issued rationing of materials limiting the types and amounts of fabrics that could be used
in apparel. Following the British rationing concept of “utility clothes,” American women
both in the military and in civilian life adhered to the simple but effective adage of being
thrifty, reusing old garments in new ways, and contributing to the war effort by buying
war bonds. In rationing the military needed silk resources for parachutes and cotton
fiber for packing around explosives. U.S. rationing of fabric resources directly affected
women’s apparel resulting in shorter and simpler silhouettes. Along with rationing and
women doing without, fashions of the time reflected the military inspired designs
showing non regulation military influences and clothing trends that mimicked uniforms
in a more militaristic approach to fashion. Once again as in WWI, the use of overalls,
trousers, ties, and jackets became more body slimming along with the use of fewer
foundation garments. Women’s new roles in society, their expanded duties, were
reflected in their outward appearance in the exhibition of collective patriotism and
national identity.

Wartime civilian responses to the roles and responsibilities of women and their
places in the newly created WACs and WAVES were generally mixed. In the upper
military echelons, women’s role in the military was considered invaluable. The civilian
front posed a different set of perspectives from mothers, fathers, siblings, guardians,
neighbors, and boyfriends as to the role of women in the military noting their place in and responsibilities for the armed forces as fraught with apprehension. On one hand family members were proud of their daughter’s desire to serve in the total war effort but they were also apprehensive about just what kinds of influences and attitudes their female members would be subjected to and have to experience. Would they be corrupted? Compromised, injured? In articles such as “Are Women in Uniform Immoral?” from Woman’s Home Companion, family member’s worst fears were given credence by rumors and articles divulging thoughts like: “you may have heard, that any woman in uniform is on the make, that most girls who go in the service are tramps, that the girls who aren’t tramps are abnormal.”

Constant threats to the norms of established gender roles and femininity along with the worry over the perception of the caliber of the women choosing to join the services directly affected that choice on concerned family members. The symbol of the uniform became derisively laden with innuendo and slander often based entirely on the ignorance of what military tasks and roles women were performing which the United States quickly tried to combat. Unflattering views of women in the services were stopped by producing and releasing a series of pamphlets on the responsibilities and duties of WACs and WAVES in the military. Pamphlets, posters, articles, and even memoirs of female veterans’ experiences were quickly propagated to combat unflattering and erroneous statements. The United States military coined this homefront sabotage of female service members as the “slander campaign,” and took to defending the nation’s women quite seriously.

The chief promoter at the forefront of the positive image of the WACs was Director Oveta Culp Hobby, who along with the Corps, wanted to impress upon the
public and the press that women of honor joined the Corps were lead by an organization that was sober, hard working, and composed of dignified, sensible women. Director Hobby wanted to showcase the work of the WACs as very much needed and a real contribution to the country, while there may be “problems of feminine adjustment, the War Department did not intend to encourage frivolity.” Hobby also took issue with the ways in which the press represented women in the armed forces in the “news.” Often times three stereotypes of the American woman were presented: 1) “as a giddy feather-brain frequently engaged in powder-puff wars and with no interest beyond clothes, cosmetics, and dates; 2) as a henpecking old battle-ax who loved to boss the male species; or 3) as a sainted wife and mother until she left her kitchen, whereupon she became a potentially scarlet woman.” Derogatory images and views of women were unsettling to Director Hobby who stated that “WACs will be neither Amazons rushing to battle, nor butterflies fluttering about.” In essence, Director Hobby’s view of and issues with the civilian and press attitudes toward women in the armed forces lead to the publications: The Waacs, written by Nancy Shea, and Women in Battle Dress, by Russell Birdwell. Shea and Birdwell’s publications disseminated the ideas and history of the WACs assuring the civilian population that women in the Corps were citizens performing essential wartime duties and not used for “morale purpose” or for bringing companionship to male soldiers.

Wartime military responses to the “slander campaign” were powered by a direct assault on the ignorance of the roles and duties which WACs and WAVES fulfilled for the war effort. One such pamphlet entitled “Someone to be proud of: your daughter in the WAC/Women’s Army Corps, Army of the United States,” took on the matter of defending
and educating the civilian population about the role and responsibilities of women in the military. In the government pamphlet, the public was first given a personal message from the Director of the WACs, Oveta Culp Hobby, explaining the roles of women in the military, as well as the courage they displayed in serving their country and the pride family and friends should feel for their “soldier daughters,” who were above all else “good soldiers.” The government pamphlet also goes on to give a “gallant” history of the American WACs as well as quells loved ones fears about military life by pages dedicated to “She lives a happy, well planned life,” and “The church on the post provides religious guidance.” The informative brochure also tackled questions on female basic training, opportunities for specialized training, and listed over 239 war necessary jobs that desperately needed WACs to fulfill for their country. Positive incentives for female members of the WACs who chose to join were given glimpses into the productive lives of other female military personnel from all around the world, in such glamorous and exotic places as England, France, Italy, India, Australia, and Hawaii. The brochure’s depictions of WACs in action provides testimonials from WAC soldiers and family members which celebrated the roles and sacrifices made in and for the WAC. Celebrity testimonials are additionally provided by Oveta Culp Hobby, Ernie Pyle, Brig. Gen. William R. Arnold (Chief of Chaplains of the U.S. Army), and Dorothy Dix, who all supported the hard work of the WACs while appeasing family member fears by upholding the feminine virtues of their loved ones. Another military government pamphlet that promoted respect and prestige for the WAC effort was titled “A book of facts about the WAC: Women’s Army Corps,” in which ranking officers including General George C. Marshall, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Mark W. Clark,
and General H.H. Arnold openly supported the WACs and their efforts as an integral part of the armed forces. The following quote by General Dwight D. Eisenhower made perfectly clear that “the smartness, neatness, and esprit constantly exhibited by our contingent of WACs have been exemplary,” and that the determination and femininity of female troops had not been harmed by service in the Army and that quite the contrary was evident by their work ethics and service records. Men respected for their integrity and honor maneuvered public objection to women in the military to the same elevation of men who also served their country with distinction. Government brochures aligned either WACs or WAVES with that of their male counterparts by listing equivalent means of pay, rank, and benefits. Female service members were distinguished further on pages dedicated to female soldier’s apparel comparing the uniform to fashions considered “the best-dressed woman of the year.” Perspective female soldiers and their family members could view smartly dressed WAC uniforms in the same venue as their civilian feminine counterparts. Illustrations of the ideal female soldier, shown in assorted poses and uniform choices showed military women as just as hard working as their male counterparts while retaining a proper feminine appearance. Fashion trends of the time were worked into the uniforms which encompassed sportswear, scarves, trousers, pumps, and a leather handbag to entice women into the Corps.

Another WAC booklet produced by the Recruiting Publicity Bureau of the United States Army, “73 Questions and answers about the WAC,” covered the most popular concerns about the Women’s Army Corps. Topics of interest included in the sixteen page booklet touched upon “the need for WACs, the work WACs do, Officer’s training, life in the WAC, WAC regulations, WAC pay, enlistment, eligibility, and on WAC
In the question booklet, like various other government productions provide a very clear message about women in the WACs in the U.S. military war effort concluding that women were invaluable. The nation was expecting a lot out of women because the government, civilians, and the world at large needed their focused attention on war needs. The common thread exhibited in all related pamphlets was found in the special care taken to ensure that feminine virtues were respected and protected. Women had a real sense of commitment to their country through an understanding that the WACs were performing services in the Army Air Forces, the Army Ground Forces, and the Service Forces, and hospitals so that men could be released for more dangerous duty overseas. Women took jobs more traditionally considered for men only because they wanted to be responsible citizens and provided services for the country. Many women knew the work was only for the duration of the war, but the work was patriotic, unthreatening, and non-competitive to men while still being properly outfitted in traditional feminine clothing.

Wartime military responses to slander against the much needed women’s volunteer services also lead to several pamphlets clearly stating what types of jobs women would be fulfilling in the service of the Women’s Army Corps. Of the 239 jobs listed in numerous WAC booklets most adhere to the guidelines of traditionally female jobs. For instance in “Facts you want to know about the WAC: Women’s Army Corps-Army of the United States,” the list of jobs available for women are numerous and include the following categories: technical and professional, under which medical, personnel, public relations, instruction and training, physical sciences and mathematics, photography, languages, drafting, weather, and miscellaneous are listed. In the same brochure it goes on to list the possible professions in the radio field: communications,
administrative and office, motor vehicle drivers, food preparation, supply and stock, as well as mechanical, trade and manual, which has subcategories of mechanics, textile and fabric work, motor vehicle mechanics, and miscellaneous. All of the war jobs listed for women in the Army as well as in the Navy were quite diverse but these opportunities still adhered to traditional gender appropriate occupations. Jobs considered acceptable for women were most often positions placed away from the actual fighting and in support roles so that the male forces could be free to fight on the battlefields and on the high seas. Brochures such as “The WAC with the Army Ground Forces,” and “College women in the WAC,” were delineating the possible 239 different types of Army duties and also made it quite clear that women were support forces and that in support roles they would be challenged but also kept safe from most of direct and dangerous fighting. Booklets promoted self-advancement, a sense of national pride and squelched the slander campaigns by uneducated individuals who had no idea of the severity of national war needs. The message was clear: female family members and friends will be kept safe and virtuous while uniting with men in the armed forces for the overarching purpose of a national victory over the war.

While the Army preferred to reach its civilian audience through WAC images and information through brochures, books, and pamphlets the Navy preferred the method of memoirs and fiction writings of its veterans to calm the apprehensions and inform the civilian populations as to the conduct and work ethic of the WAVES. In “By Your Leave, Sir” The Story of a Wave,” Lieutenant (JG) Helen Hull Jacobs, U.S.N.R. creates the composite figure of Becky McLeod, the epitomized image and character of a woman dedicated to serving her country. The story follows Becky McLeod in her human
relations during the process of becoming a WAVE. In the example of McLeod, the Navy showcases an every woman who faces hardship, difficult decisions, and pride in her military career, all of which reinforced the ideal that women were not promiscuous, in their military endeavors but instead fine American women dedicated to Naval service.46

Another memoir written during WWII about WAVE experiences in the military is *Angel of the Navy: The Story of a WAVE*, by Joan Angel, Pharmacist’s Mate, U.S.N.R.47 The story of Joan Angel, *Angel of the Navy* candidly relays the experiences of Joan Angel from enlistment to assignment and eventually active duty. Like “*By your Leave, Sir,*” Joan Angel through her experiences gives a behind the scenes look into Navy life for a woman. The memoirs are both humorous and serious, answering and soothing all apprehensions about what really happens to women in the Navy from training, shore leave, procurement of uniforms, duty assignments, and even romance, all relayed and included in a non-threatening manner which both celebrates women’s growing independence and individuality while maintaining their patriotic duty.

Two other memoirs written well after the war also reinforce the inaccuracy of civilian responses to what women were like and how they behaved in the military. In *More than a uniform: A Navy woman in a Navy man’s world*, written by Captain Winifred Quick Collins explores the doubts that she herself developed prior to enlisting in 1942. Such thoughts as “Do we have to wear a man’s uniform?” and “I did not want to dress like a man,” began Winifred Collins military considerations but quickly changed after learning the true facts of the military and rather than relying on trivial hearsay and ignorance in Naval practices.48 Much like *More than a uniform*, retired Lieutenant Helen Clifford Gunter, also relayed her memories of serving in the WAVES. In *Navy WAVE: 
Memories of World War II, Helen Clifford Gunter explores how the Navy opened job possibilities to her not to be found in the civilian sector and that as a woman with an extensive education (a bachelors in education, and a master’s and Ph.D. in Archeology) her options would have been limited to that of a grade school teacher. In Navy WAVE, Gunter explores both the opportunities afforded to her in the military as well as the drawbacks. In the following quote Gunter dispels the prevalent yet ignorant view of women in the military and combats such inaccuracies with wit and reason:

Then, the natural human frailty of using clichés to generalize about the new role of women in military service was sometimes offensive. Some of the macho males suggested that all WAVES volunteered to snag husbands. On a train going home on leave I remember a woman who said most of the WACs, WAVES, SPARS and LADY MARINES were ‘camp followers’ with a knowing look that implied they were prostitutes. Hopefully her opinion wasn’t general. If that was true of women in the armed forces, what could be said of all American women?49

After that statement Gunter goes on to state that similar perceptions were false, and that the enlistment requirements for WAVES was very high and that WAVES joined primarily to help win the war and to participate in the greatest adventures of their lives. Marriage for most WAVES would have been nice, Gunter concluded, but after the war, it wasn’t their most driving motivation.50

Wartime civilian and military responses to the induction of women in the United States military reflected a society changing its traditionally held views of women’s roles into the realities facing women in war. Often times the transition facing women was uneasy and threatened past gendered roles held by women in American society, but with
support and truth provided in pamphlets, booklets, works of fiction, and memoirs, the United States military was able to blend traditional feminine roles with that of equality with men in the military. The government stance on the business of war was to face truth, the truth of the need for women as integral of the war effort despite campaigns to slander women who met their national war responsibilities by serving their nation in the military. By defending the women in the print media and in the images and uniforms of female military personnel, the government was able to reinforce the reality of women as true patriotic citizens capable of serving their country with honor while maintaining a sense of individuality, while conforming to military standards for the purpose of national unity.
CHAPTER III

THE ARMED FORCES

The following quote from *American Women in Uniform* by Mary Steele Ross from 1943 clearly articulates the atmosphere of American women’s changing roles in WWII and the determination of women both in the military and in civilian organizations to show their true worth in honesty and truth through hard work and high standards of conduct:

Today American women are serving their country as never before. In the Army, the Navy, in business, in war industries, in the everyday task of making the homefront wheels go round, they have harked back to the traditions of their fighting Puritan grandmothers. They are facing squarely their responsibilities, demonstrating that they can take it…and come back for more. Gone are the fluffy rufflers, the neurotic whiners, the petted darlings with their fine seams and cushions. In their place is a woman able, clear-eyed and unafraid. She is proving that she is *dependable.*

Women in the armed forces had already proven and demonstrated themselves to be respectful, capable, and responsible long before the advent of WWII. During WWI Army and Naval nurses as well as numerous women’s civilian organizations had provided essential wartime services and needs. However, despite the tried and true capabilities of women in the military and numerous attempts at legislation it wasn’t until 1942 that women in national service were given a permanent place in the armed forces. Women had to fight to be in the military and not just serve in supportive roles.
The Army was the first to accept women in an auxiliary status into the military, initially called the WAACs, or the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, based most closely to our British relative also called the WAACs. The history of the WAC has much to do with Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers who first introduced the bill to create the Women’s Army on May 28, 1941. By May 14, 1942, Public Law No. 554 was enacted by Congress. The following day President Franklin Roosevelt established the WAC by an Executive Order authorizing an immediate strength of 25,000 women. However, the purpose of the WACs was to be of service to the Army Corps in non-combatant roles and in essence, to provide for national defense “when needed, the knowledge, skill and special training of the women of the nation, thus enabling the release of able-bodied men in the Army from non-combat duty to active service in combat.”

Women eligible for the WACs, in general terms, were “all citizen women, regardless of race, color, or creed, between the ages of 21 and 44.” Specific requirements that an applicant must adhere to were:

a. Be a woman citizen of the United States
b. Be between 21 and 44 years of age, inclusive.
c. Submit satisfactory proof of date of birth and citizenship.
d. Have an excellent character.
e. Present two character references from responsible business or professional people in her community, not relatives, who are personally acquainted with the applicant’s ability.
f. Pass a mental alertness test.
g. Be not less than 5 feet nor more than 6 feet tall.
h. Meet the height and weight requirements for the various age levels; the minimum weight is 100 pounds.

i. Meet physical requirements and pass a physical examination by Army doctors.

j. Submit statements from employers or other persons testifying to her skill in the occupations desired where the applicant desires to qualify as an expert.

Additional requirements were needed for those that chose to enlist if married. A married woman could join the WAC but: “no woman will be accepted who has anyone financially dependent on her pay as a member of the WAC, and mothers of children under fourteen are not eligible for enrollment, if such children would thus be deprived of maternal care.” On May 16, 1942 Oveta Culp Hobby was appointed and sworn in as the Director of the WAC. Also on that day the selection of Fort Des Moines, Iowa was selected as the training center, and on May 22, 1942 uniform designs for the WACs were also announced. By August 15, 1942 the first “auxiliaries” completed basic training and were either immediately assigned to and went for further training to Specialist Schools. Nonetheless, despite stellar WAC approval ratings, problems within the WAC and their auxiliary support standing to the Army and not an integral part of the Army proved difficult for Administrative purposes since they lacked comparable rank and pay grades for women versus men. To correct the administrative entanglement, on January 14, 1943 Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers introduced a bill to take the WACs into the Army, no longer on an auxiliary status but to meet the full fledged need for military status. Full military status would give women in the Army the right and opportunity to have full Army status with comparable rank, pay, insurance, burial benefits, and privilege to all
Army administrative procedures as men, meaning they would be officially soldiers of the Army and be subject to all codes of conduct, and discipline just like the men.63 Eventually by June 28, 1943 the WAC bill was finally passed by the Senate and the WAAC became the WAC, or Women’s Army Corps now a full fledged member of the Army of the United States, and by July 1, 1943 the President signed the bill.64 The Army was “given ninety days to arrange for the dissolution of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps.”65 The deadline of September 13, 1943, was given for all previously known as WAACs “must be enlisted or commissioned in the WAC, or discharged, for the WAAC would cease to exist.”66 The process required by September 13, 1943 all eligible WAAC officers and enlisted to be sworn into the WAC with grades, and rank equivalent to that of the WAAC. Women who choose not to make the conversion to the WAC were disposed and discharged when the WAAC cased to exist.

“WHAT IS A WAVE?
A rag, a bone, and a hank of hair,
A job to do and suit to wear,
All faults and virtues purely human,
But most of all a WAVE’s a woman.”67

Unlike the Army and the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, then the Women’s Army Corps, the WAVES or Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service did not have the same problems. While the passage of the WAC Bill was facing opposition in the House, the same bill for the Navy and the WAVES had already passed in 1942, and gone on along to the Senate, affirming the full military status of women in the Navy with benefits.68 The Navy quickly installed Lt. Commander Mildred H. McAfee, as the
organization’s leader. However, while Navy WAVES may have had the benefit of full military status, Navy women were still not allowed to go overseas while the WACs were the first to be eventually cleared for overseas duty. Another point of contention was that the WAVES received higher monetary privileges in the way of sign on recruiting bonuses versus that of their Army counterpoints. The Navy also standardized its officer and enlisted grades much more quickly than the WACs giving overall a more cohesive state of operations than the Army. Added to the cohesive perception was the fact that naval requirements for women were higher than that needed for Army admittance. In general the most basic requirements for the Navy were that all possible inductees be native-born or naturalized citizens between the ages of 20 and 36. Specific WAVE requirements also included:

a. Be a citizen of the United States.

b. Obtain the written consent of the parent or guardian where the applicant is under 21 years of age.

c. Have no dependents nor children under 18 years of age.

d. Agree not to marry until basic training is completed, and, if married, may not enlist if her husband is in one of the armed services.

e. Be of excellent character and furnish three references from responsible people in applicant’s community.

f. Have two years of high school education (high school graduate preferred).

g. Submit a record of all occupations since leaving school.

h. Be in good physical and mental condition and pass a medical examination.
i. Be not less than 5 feet tall and weigh not less than 95 pounds; her weight must be proportionate to her general body build.

j. Have good vision, i.e., not less than 6/20 in the worst eye, with binocular vision (two eyes) not less than 12/20. Each eye must be correctable, with glasses, to 20/20. (Explanation: 12/20 means that one can read at 12 feet what perfect eyes can read at 20).

k. Have good hearing, i.e., ability to hear and distinguish whispered words at 15 feet distance.

l. Have sound natural teeth or satisfactory replacements.

m. Pass an aptitude test. An aptitude test can be taken only once.71

Other miscellaneous provisions were also required of WAVE applicants and personnel to adhere to regarding marriage and pregnancy:

a. A WAVE may marry after the training period, but if she marries a Navy man she must resign or be discharged.

b. If a WAVE has a baby she will be honorably discharged.

c. If an applicant’s husband goes into the armed services before she goes on active duty, she will be discharged, but if the applicant goes on active duty (i.e., becomes a WAVE) and her husband then enters the armed services (other than the Navy) her status will not be affected.72

In fact the Meek report, established by a Mr. Samuel W. Meek, a member of a competing Army advertising agency, contended that “the public was not aware of the urgency of the Army’s need for WACs; that the WAC did not have the public standing of the WAVES; that three out of four women said they would choose the WAVES in preference to the
WAC; that the public thought WAVES got better treatment, more suitable jobs, more attractive uniforms; and that the WAVES had commissioned more outstanding women educators.\textsuperscript{73} Gallup’s surveys showed that public perception of WACs and WAVES was about even with the only source of demarcation in the uniform. Even the Army did not dispute the fact that most prospective and current female military personnel preferred the WAVE uniform to that of the Army version.\textsuperscript{74}

Even the creation and description of the newly formed WACs and WAVES as well as the enlistment requirements reflected the changing roles of modern American women. Careful word choice and image choices were paramount to combat uncomplimentary perceptions and remarks toward women in the service. Careful threads of connection were laid by weaving the concepts of American womanhood to that of being in the WACs and WAVES, giving descriptions of the average female service member were circumspect and incorporated both physical attributes as well as character and personality traits. One such example of the “description of the average WAVE,” explored specific traits considered essential: that the recruit be a healthy American girl in her early 20s, eager to do a good job, conscientious, unselfish, loyal, tolerant, persistent, enthusiastic, sense of humor, endurance, patriotic, but last to say so, warmth, courage, generosity, warmth, honor, respect, and willing to do a hard job, which she does to the best of her ability.\textsuperscript{75} Concepts of femininity without frivolity but with conscientious efforts toward good citizenship tied together with patriotic unity were essential in making women respectable in the perceptions of both the public civilian population as well as in the military sector. The most dominant image for women going from homefront to warfront was that of the WAC and WAVE uniform. No other example of material culture
so solidifies the role of women in the shifting gender, political, social, and cultural systems of WWII America than the military uniform. The uniform is tangible evidence within the material culture which solidifies America’s acceptance of apparel suitable for representing all American female patriots during wartime.
CHAPTER IV

THE CREATION OF MILITARY UNIFORMS

Long before the actual acceptance of the WACs by Congress in May of 1942, the question of what would female military personnel wear was very much on the minds of both the military and the civilian populations. Special considerations had to be taken into account including that of recruits, their family and friends, the press, the civilian and military populations, the Army, the Navy, and even the financial and procurement offices were considered in the fashioning of the newly created WACs and WAVES. As early as June of 1942 magazines such as *Time* were producing articles with the latest on Army fashion trends stating, “What WAACS will wear” giving as complete an explanation of the wardrobe for women in the Army as was possible.76 In *Time*’s article the description of the fashion was concise describing the officer’s winter and summer auxiliary uniforms. “Winter garb will be of olive-drab covert cloth; the auxiliary’s in the lighter shade worn by enlisted men. Summer dress will be of cotton twill or gabardine khaki. The single-breasted jacket will be smooth…and skirts will have six gores rather than pleats.”77 The key theme of the uniforms being similar in shade to that of the men’s Army uniforms was very much on purpose by the Army and its designers. Director, Oveta Culp Hobby was also instrumental in making sure that the women’s uniforms would be made of the same materials and color schemes of that of in men’s designs.78 The designs of the olive drab and khaki uniforms were used continuously from their 1942 inception until 1951.79 Not only did Director Hobby insist on equality with that of male soldiers for the Women’s Corps but she was also trying to keep uniform costs low, and make the visual transition
of women in Army camps and posts from civilian life to Army life as smooth as possible.\textsuperscript{80}

However, while the uniforms themselves were to be functional and appropriate for the Army its actual progression was fraught with problems rather than solutions for the early WACs and the Army. One source of contention was that the Quartermaster personnel were not prepared for outfitting the new female military force because they had very “little or no past experience upon which to draw,”\textsuperscript{81}

No body of information existed in reference to design, pattern, sizing, specifications, or procurement of women’s clothing such as that which had been built up over the years for men’s clothing.\textsuperscript{82}

Added to the apprehensions of providing a uniform that pleased all sectors of American viewpoints the Army also had to, in this new venture, give haste to the design, procurement, and distribution of the uniform for the WAC. From its inception in 1942 to 1945, the WAC uniform’s maiden voyage was spearheaded by two Quartermaster personnel, a Colonel Grice, chief of the Standardization Branch, who was the pioneer in the WAC design and planning from February to August 1942, and Major Stephen J. Kennedy, chief of the Textile Section in the Research and Development Branch.\textsuperscript{83} Both Grice and Kennedy ironed out the preliminary design details and oversaw the WACs clothing program. Added to the design mix were two Philadelphia Depot personnel also officers, by the name of Major Frank M. Steadman and Captain William L. Johnson.\textsuperscript{84} Grice, Kennedy, Steadman, and Johnson all shared a lack of specialty in women’s clothing design and development. Realizing the need to expand the capabilities of those on the staff several recruitment changes were made such as female consultants and those
that had specific experience in women’s apparel design and manufacturing. Added to the
design staff were additional civilian sources, which included “manufacturers, stylists,
designers, technical experts, and department store buyers of women’s garments.”

Civilian consultation was not immediately sought until it was realized that modifications
to the first completed and issued WAC uniforms were sorely needed. Difficulties
continued because it wasn’t until 1945 that the Army established a Women’s Clothing
Section. Prior to the establishment of the Women’s Clothing Section the uniforms were
delegated to organizations within the military that previously had only handed men’s
clothing and supplies. The consequence of trying to make male uniform specifications
into female uniforms resulted in unattractive, ill fitting, and unusable clothing that did
nothing for recruitment, morale, or prevailing criticisms of women in the military as
being mannish and unattractive. One poorly created example resulted in a jacket made of
haircloth and heavy canvas, that was difficult to wear and the antithesis of what was
deemed desirable for women’s outerwear in the 1940s. What auxiliary female soldiers
were allotted as part of their total uniform allowance, exclusive of her uniform, included:

6 rayon panties-khaki colored and often called drawers in true Army language
2 suits of pajamas-cotton, peach-colored seersucker, or so called “butcher boy”
style.
2 suits of pajama-flannelette, for winter
3 slips of khaki rayon jersey
8 pairs of cotton hose
8 pairs rayon hose
The actual uniform of the WACs consisted of two versions one for winter and the other for summer. The winter uniform for individuals with officer rank were comprised of a dark olive drab uniform of covert cloth that was single breasted with a four-button jacket, complete with another WAC staple, the six gored and flared skirt. The color combination of the winter design included contrasting light and dark drab olive which was interchangeable befitting the occasion. One of the essential accessories of the officers’ wardrobe was a winter cap, the cap was manufactured of the same covert cloth as the uniform and was detailed with a semi-stiff crown and visor which had a cloth chin strap. The winter cap quickly became known as the “Hobby Hat,” for WAC Director Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby, who gave direction in the design of the hat. The following excerpt from a three-stripe Sergeant Frances DeBra in a letter to her Dad and Mother from Paris in 1945 describes her feelings on the design of the cap, “we are to turn in our ‘Hobby Hats,’ after packing them across an ocean. I am certainly glad to get rid of it. That hat was a mistake the WAC will never live down.” On the infamous winter cap was the officers’ insignia of an eagle design in cut-out form in metallic gold color.

The summer uniforms for officers in the WAC were made of cotton twill or gabardine in regulation Army khaki. Also exclusive to officers’ uniforms was the attachment of shoulder loops and or tabs on coats, jackets, and shirts allowing distinguishing rank insignia to be clearly discernible. The use of braid was also incorporated to denote rank on WAC uniforms, where it was placed in quarter inch wide stripes and attached four inches above the cuff of their winter or summer uniform jacket and overcoats (the braid for winter was black and for summer khaki in color). The use of braid continued to include garrison caps where officers, both male and female, were
allocated edging braid of gold and black while enlisted personnel were issued braid colors such as old gold and moss green.\textsuperscript{97}

The clothing allotment for enlisted WACs, often called auxiliaries, was the identical olive drab colors worn by their fellow enlisted men.\textsuperscript{98} A differentiating amendment was that the eagle design on the winter cap was super imposed on a gold metallic disk rather than in the cut out form.\textsuperscript{99} For summer auxiliaries wore water repellent twill and, just like the officers, the uniforms were outfitted in Army khaki colors.\textsuperscript{100}

Accessories for both the officers and the auxiliaries included hosiery, shoes, gloves, and a general use bag. On the topic of her handbag Sergeant Frances DeBra stated that the “handbag was a pebble-grained leather envelope, styled by KORET,” which was in the general shape of a half circle complete with an adjustable shoulder strap.\textsuperscript{101} “We would have preferred to wear it on one shoulder, but regulations demanded that we wear it across the body.”\textsuperscript{102} Due to rationing and the availability of certain leathers, the general use bag was made of hides not deemed essential to the war effort such as water buffalo, seal skin, or goat skin. For her bag Sergeant DeBra was convinced that hers’ “was surely water buffalo.”\textsuperscript{103} The hosiery, due to rationing, was comprised of rayon and mercerized cotton lisle, the rayon was intended for dress purposes and the cotton was for utility purposes and exercises, stocking colors were issued in suntan shade, and khaki colored cotton anklets.\textsuperscript{104} The Army also issued brown kidskin leather winter gloves and khaki cotton gloves for simmer use.\textsuperscript{105} Women were allowed two pairs of shoes, both oxfords, one in golden brown calf skin for dress wear, and the other pair were white canvas with black soles.\textsuperscript{106}
Along with the basic winter and summer uniforms were other supplemental garments which included:

A double-breasted covert overcoat with vertical slash pockets and an inverted pleat in back held in by a half belt; a utility coat of cotton-rayon fabric, with removable woolen lining and a hood; a long-sleeved shirtwaist of mercerized cotton, with convertible collar; a necktie in khaki shade.\textsuperscript{107}

All of the buttons for supplemental garments like that of the uniforms were made of plastic complete with the American eagle embossment or “WAC buzzard,” as it became known among the female soldiers, for its lopsided appearance.\textsuperscript{108} Reactions to the uniform by the female soldiers were mixed. Most of the women were thrilled with the plethora of clothing and equipment given to them by the United States Army, which in some cases was much more than they had in their civilian wardrobe. A few new additions to the military uniform did cause some problems or, at the very least, adjustments. Articles in the new military uniform like the necktie, were foreign to female fashion and took some time to get used to:

the issued shirts were styled with a convertible collar without the standing collar band that the men’s had. The shirts never did fit neatly around the neck with a necktie…the tie was a complication for me. I had no idea at all how to tie it. For two or three days one of my friends fixed the knot in mine, then after a good deal of coached practice I finally managed to tie my own necktie.\textsuperscript{109}

By the blending of the masculine and the feminine elements of dress the United States Army was able to design an image for the WACs that was attractive, neat, and
professional looking retaining Army regulations, and military characteristics such as coordinating color schemes, insignia, and use of classic elements such as the necktie and coveralls. As Director Oveta Culp Hobby had intended, the WACs uniform, additional clothing issued and accessories reflected much of their male counterparts. WAC uniforms had to fit the female figure and include additional female essentials such as pumps, purses, gloves, and stockings. The Army made sure to align the WACs on equal footing with male Army soldiers in the matter of dress. The Army also differentiated between male to female insignia with the use of Pallas Athene, the goddess of Wisdom and Victory, which supplied the motif for the WACs. The motif of Pallas Athene adorned every lapel of the officer’s winter jacket, as well as a place on the left end of the collar of the shirt. The design of Pallas Athene is showcased on garments in a cut-out design in gold colored metal, along with Pallas Athene, were the letters U. S., worn at each end of the collar of the officer’s winter jacket, and again at the right end of the summer shirt collar, opposite of the goddess design. For the enlisted or auxiliaries the insignia was also cut out on gold colored metal depicting the initials U.S. on a disc worn at the right end of the collar, along with Pallas Athene, also on a disc, at the left end of the collar or jacket. Despite the marked difference of the goddess motif the rank insignia for officers and enlisted corresponds with that of Army officers and non-commissioned officers of equal rank, the only addition is the W.A.C placed below the chevron for auxiliaries holding a rank.

The issued version of the WAC uniform was produced in three months between February and May 1942, with several successive versions and modifications following the criticisms which developed after the first issued uniforms were released to soldiers in
July of 1942. Despite Director Hobby’s input the uniform was slow to find acceptance among military personnel and the general public. Often times because the supposed “finished” result of the WAC uniform failed to take into consideration and develop appropriate and functional apparel that was suitable to the wide variety of occupations performed by Army women. Part of the delay in complete autonomy and productivity was due to the fact that the uniform was not the result of one cohesive design effort, like that of the Navy with Mainbocher’s design work, but rather the result of innumerable conferences, commissions, and group work. Another complicating factor was supply shortages which left a permanent need for better supplies simply not available as needed for the growing Army Corps. Mistakes in uniform design could not be revised without delaying contracts, and while the public may have ranked through Gallup polls the WAC uniform the last in attractiveness it was also not willing to “support expensive measures to modify the thousands of dollars worth of unsightly and ill-fitting garments.” Despite clothing hardships the WAC persevered and led in recruiting numbers over all of the women services, during the war. Despite the statistical evidence that the WACs led in recruitment to that of all other women services the military was very sensitive to the image of women being portrayed in the media, in order to achieve recruitment success and raise numbers the images of women as being both feminine and respectable were essential.

While the Army struggled with Congress, inexperience with women’s apparel, supply problems and trying to procure the most attractive uniform, the Navy had a considerably easier line of attack in the creation of the WAVE uniform. In 1942, after the WAVES were established by an Act of Congress women became an integral part of the
Navy. While the Army had trouble translating functional male uniforms into attractive and functional female uniforms the Navy had the opposite reaction to the creation of female naval uniforms. Before American born couturier Mainbocher volunteered to create the uniforms for the WAVES talks among various bureaus and personnel departments in the Navy abounded. One such advisory member to the Advisory Council and Bureau of Naval Personnel was Virginia Crocheron Gildersleeve, Dean of Barnard College of Columbia University in New York City. To avoid some of the negative press that the Army encountered in creating the WAC uniform the Navy requested the advice and guidance of college personnel in how to treat, train and organize the Women’s Reserve. Serving as the chair of the Naval Advisory Committee Virginia Gildersleeve and other influential female Deans and President’s of colleges aided the Navy in detailing the plans for the women’s reserve. Of particular interest for the Navy, as well as the committee, was the establishment of the WAVE uniform. Gildersleeve recalls of that meeting:

A handsome young lieutenant from the Navy’s Committee on Uniforms ‘sounded off’ by saying that the Navy wanted its women officers to be proud of their uniform, but, he added, it did not want this uniform to be navy blue or white like those worn by the men or have any gold braid. The colors tan, gray, and slate blue were suggested. I saw the faces of the women around the long conference table light up with faint, repressed smiles at this somewhat revealing opening gambit in inducting women into the Navy, but no one of the group started to argue against this decision, feeling sure that Naval uniforms, in spite of anything, would inevitably turn out to be navy blue and white, as they did.119
Like the Army, the Navy had concerns about women in the military, but unlike the Army the Navy sought educated civilian opinions, designs, and couturier’s more familiar and attuned to what the female figure needed and how to outfit women in clothing that was respectful, functional, and professional. The Navy in its early female uniform inception even went so far as to produce designs that were too glamorous for military needs.

Gildersleeve and others in the Advisory Council, found the lack of functional pockets with zippers in the jacket, a hindrance to the functionality of the WAVE uniform and at first their recommendations were ignored.\textsuperscript{120} Gildersleeve and the council in the first proposed WAVE uniform designs found that “utility was sacrificed to looks, they certainly looked very attractive and no doubt won my recruits for the Navy, but lacked essential components to make the WAVE functional and attractive.”\textsuperscript{121} Eventually the Navy heeded the advice of the council and changes were made to the WAVE uniform before they were issued which included pockets with zippers in the jacket as well as in subsequent female Naval uniforms until the 1970s.

Eventually, the Navy went public with the decision to have Chicago born Parisian couturier Mainbocher design the uniforms for the Women’s Navy Reserve. In the \textit{New York Times} in August of 1942, the following article, “Mainbocher adds WAVES to Clients,” introduced the public to the couturier and discussed the image of the women in the Navy.\textsuperscript{122} In the Mainbocher article attempts were made by newly appointed Head of the WAVES Lieut. Comdr. Mildred H. McAfee to describe the yet to be released designs of the WAVES uniform, “one thing we have kept in mind,” she said, “is that there should be no effort to dress the women up to look like men. Their uniforms will be becoming and functional we are not concentrating on making them look impressive.”\textsuperscript{123}
The future WAVE couturier Main Rousseau Bocher, was born in Chicago’s West Side, on October 24, 1890. Always drawn to the arts and encouraged by his parents Mainbocher drew and played various music instruments even dabbling in singing. Twelve years after becoming a Sergeant major in the American Expeditionary Force’s secret service for France during WWI, Mainbocher became a first rate American dressmaker in Parisian couture. Mainbocher also dabbed as a very successful Fashion editor of American and French Vogue when after five years with the magazine he opened his first house of fashion in Paris, aptly named, Mainbocher, in November of 1930. Despite the Great Depression Mainbocher thrived and his aim to “dress women like ladies,” has proven to be a successful recipe in fashion. Self taught and determined Mainbocher drove himself with talent to the top of Parisian and American fashion houses. Some of Mainbocher’s most noteworthy clients including the WAVES and SPARS (Women’s Reserve of the Coast Guard), have been the Duchess of Windsor, Constance Bennett, Kay Francis, Irene Dunne, Miriam Hopkins, Loretta Young, Claudette Colbert, and various French, Spanish, and English royalty. At the outbreak of WWII Mainbocher and his family, temporarily closed his establishment in Paris and returned to America settling in New York where in 1942 he volunteered to design the uniforms for the WAVES of the United States Navy. Mainbocher also went on to design the SPARS uniform adopting a style similar to that of the WAVES. Other military and civilian service uniforms that Mainbocher designed include the Girl Scouts of America, the American Red Cross (1948), and the Women Marines (1952).

“They (women’s uniforms) must be feminine and at the same time, while they should have a quality of discipline and dedication, they must be functional and
suitable... The designs Mainbocher produced for the WAVES were his first foray in military uniforms and the first time the United States armed services had ever utilized the talents of a well known fashion designer. Mainbocher was drawn to the project by a fellow co-worker from Vogue, Mrs. James V. Forrestal, the civilian uniform advisor to the Navy. After volunteering his services to the Navy, Mainbocher designed and delivered on his promise to make the women of the Navy the best dressed of the armed forces. Mainbocher’s WAVE designs were so popular with the public, military, and service members because they melded the elements of femininity with functionality seamlessly. Especially in his naval designs, Mainbocher incorporated not only feminine elements that would be flattering to the individual sailor but that drew heavily upon naval uniform history, as in the case of the Havelock and Seaman hat, both retooled and recycled elements from the Navy’s uniform past.

The following month in September of 1942, Life produced an article entitled “Waves Uniforms,” where an in-depth look was given to the designer and his most prestigious American clients, the WAVES. In the Life article stress was placed highly on the uniforms being functional yet feminine. The first publicized Mainbocher WAVE uniform was pictured in the article, and described as a “trim, short service-dress-blue jacket, slightly built-up shoulders, gored skirt. Rounded collar on pointed lapel is a new, distinctive feature and will probably be as characteristic of WAVES as the sailor collar is of seamen.” Other essentials of the WAVE uniform included a hat which was described as a “flattering hat with softly rolled brim at sides, high white crown with additional white and navy covers.” Even the standard, simple and clean white blouse complimented by the traditional use of the black seaman’s tie, was given detailed
clothing description and deemed essential to every female naval uniform. Attention in the article was also given to the outerwear of the typical WAVE were a Mainbocher raincoat and Havelock were pictured and described as being designed for protection in inclement weather. The Havelock is also given historical context in this article as Mainbocher describes its provenance as being originally named for an English 19th Century general, which became the inspiration for another American seaman hat of 1760, off of which this design was based.138 Lastly in the Life article Mainbocher gives the public a view of the winter overcoat, complete with “slashed side pockets and belted back.”139 Other essential accessories for the well dressed WAVE were the “should-strap bag, black low-heeled Oxford shoes, black leather and white fabric gloves which complete the outfit.”140

Officially by 1943 the U.S. Navy had released the complete list and guide of essential WAVE uniform requirements in the historic document “Uniform Regulations, Women’s Reserve, United States Naval Reserve, 1943.”141 In the regulations document and in subsequent Naval guides like Guide Right: A handbook of Etiquette and Customs for members of the Women’s Reserve of the United States Naval Reserve and the United States Coast Guard Reserve, the complete list of uniform regulations and acceptable behavior for the WAVES were detailed by the Bureau of Naval Personnel. Along with exact and detailed uniform regulations, Guide Right, broke down uniform procurement as well as exact descriptions on: accessories, the basic uniform, shirts, necktie, collar bars, rating badges, stockings, shoes, hat, coats, purse, gloves, sport dress, special uniform apparel, and the crucial guide on how to take care of the uniform, along with any other questions on military usage or behavior in the WAVES.142 Guide Right was one of first female based Naval instruction manuals, before that like the WACs the WAVES issued
military manuals and regulation books that were intended for men and were not gender specific. Before *Guide Right* was published and released in 1944, women of the WAVES were issued the following eight books which were intended for male naval recruits:

- *Fighting Fleets, a survey of the navies of the world*
- *A Short History of the United States Navy*
- *Naval Leadership*
- *The Naval Reserve of the United States Navy*
- *The U.S.N. in National Defense, by Frank Knox*
- *Naval Administration*
- *The Bluejackets’ Manual*
- *Naval Customs, Traditions, and Usage*¹⁴³

In the recruit manuals it was explained that unlike the WACs who were given their uniforms the WAVES were provided with a uniform allowance of $200.00 for uniforms, with the official uniform cost of $160.00 that left a $40.00 allowance for shoes, underclothing and other miscellaneous items.¹⁴⁴ Uniforms for officers in the WAVES wore the traditional navy blue, topped with the aptly designed Mainbocher hat, the insignia on the hat identical to that of male United States officers, and depicted a gold eagle and shield motif.¹⁴⁵ The suits of the WAVES were completed with short jackets that had rounded collars “embroidered with a reserve blue propeller and white anchor insignia.”¹⁴⁶ Uniform insignia on the suit included gold buttons, and sleeve stripes designating rank in reserve blue.¹⁴⁷ The suit was completed with the white dress shirt and a traditional seamen’s tie in black.¹⁴⁸ The official accessories of the WAVES were black Oxfords with low heels, black gloves for winter, white for summer, and the use of a
raincoat, rain hat, or Havelock for inclement weather. Unofficially was the “permissible” over the shoulder black leather pouch bag.

Enlisted personnel had the same uniform regulations as those of the officers but with a few exceptions. For the enlisted WAVE reserve blue and navy blue were worn under the jacket not the white shirt given to officers. On the winter and summer uniforms of the enlisted personnel the jacket buttons were navy instead of gold, and the winter hat was all navy while the summer cap was blue and white, and on the hat and collar were the propeller and anchor motifs in blue and white as well. All dress uniforms for both officers and enlisted WAVES were the same with the exception of their appropriate rank insignia. Compared with the detailed differences between officers and enlisted in the WACs, the WAVES uniform system was much more streamlined and simple, only denoting differences in rank by clearly identifiable insignia on the collar, jacket, and hat, with minor color variations. Where the WAC uniform differed from its male counterparts in the Army, the Navy’s uniform system did not, only making allowances for female specific garments like skirts, hosiery, gloves, and lingerie, all other elements of the uniform closely followed male color schemes and simplicity in design. Unlike the WACs, the WAVES uniform was considered the best example of feminine design in military clothing. Several Gallup polls conducted during the war, especially one in January of 1944, of the general civilian population including both men and women overwhelmingly preferred the WAVES uniform version out of all the service branches, the WAC uniform was last in its likeability in public opinion.

However, despite public favorites all the uniforms of the WACs, the WAVES and other female military services addressed the issues of self sacrifice and respectability of
soldiers with a uniform that was both feminine and professional. Without the feminine
details of figure flattering skirts, jackets, hats, and accessories the idea of letting one’s
loved one join the services would have been beyond comprehension. Uniforms did try to
mimic 1940s desirable trends and silhouettes and the women wearing them not only
represented the woman of the day helping her country but also presented an acceptable
figure in civilian life that would not threaten social or cultural norms but instead added to
national identity and unity.

The Navy constantly exposed the public to the new WAVE uniform and the type
of women who were in the Navy. One Navy article in the October 1942 Vogue magazine
issue promotes women in the Navy by introducing the public, to Naval women in one of
the most premier fashion magazines to the highest ranking WAVE. In the Vogue article
entitled “The Waves,” Lieutenant Commander Mildred H. McAfee, the leader of the
WAVES, and the wife of the Under Secretary of the Navy, Mrs. James V. Forrestal are
depicted in the WAVE uniform. In the Vogue article the image of McAfee and Forrestal are
shown in the Mainbocher designed uniforms and the reader is informed that not only is
McAfee the holder of 10 academic degrees, but she is also attractive, and “no feminist, no
hard-shelled crier for women’s rights, Miss McAfee, who is Missouri-born and Yankee-
voiced, is wise to women, expert at handling them in bulk.” Essentially not only is
McAfee smart, and attractive, but she is also not a threat to military men, the male
establishment, or to the women who choose to join her service, she is just another smart
woman doing her part in times of war. A brief description of the uniform is given to
match the images again asserting that WAVE conservatism in dress and in personality
aligns together in a respectfully feminine fashion that is practical and distinguished.
Mrs. James V. Forrestal also allays the fears of the public conscience by divulging how she and Mainbocher both were once *Vogue* fashion editors and that the image of American women in the Navy was both feminine and glamorous in serving the national goals of victory.\(^{157}\)

Mainbocher’s success as a designer for the Navy WAVES was very much evident in the fact that many demobilized sailors after the war modified their uniforms, removing rank and insignia, to continue to wear the quality made design even after being discharged:

> My new civilian clothes were too nice for every day, and my Navy uniforms were too good to discard. I ripped the two lieutenant stripes off my jacket, removed insignia from lapels, and changed the brass buttons. Worn under my all-weather raincoat, a civilian beret replacing my officer’s hat, the uniforms were transformed into tailored serge suits, appropriate for a New York business woman.\(^{158}\)

However, as with the WAC uniform there were those military personnel that felt the design fell short of certain expectations, for instance, much like that of the “Hobby Hat,” the Mainbocher hat drew criticism for its supposed “shapeless receptacle with a brim,” and its “limp, unflattering lid.”\(^{159}\) However, despite small criticisms and with many more acclaims Mainbocher successfully fulfilled his and the military’s intention to provide an attractive as well as functional uniform that portrayed the WAVES to the world as well dressed, lady like, and acceptable members of society aiding the war effort at home and abroad.
CHAPTER V

INDIVIDUAL DECISION MAKERS

The first Director of the WAC was Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby. After the WAC was established and the Army began looking for female candidates to fill the WAC Director position certain criteria was demanded of the applicants. Specific criteria stated that the applicant must be healthy, “of an active temperament, between the ages of 30 and 50, with executive experience involving the successful management of both men and women assistants, and most important, they must have had no previous affiliation with any ‘pressure group.’” Mrs. Hobby, already working for the Army in the Bureau of Public Relations was well liked by several Army administrators especially Congresswoman Rogers and Hobby’s name headed the list of possible Directors. At the time of the nomination, Hobby was 37 yrs old, the wife of former Governor William P. Hobby of Texas, and the mother of two children. For executive experience Hobby had served on the Texas legislature as parliamentarian, worked as a newspaper and radio executive, publisher, lawyer, writer and President of the Texas League of Women Voters. Along with all of her accomplishments Hobby also served on various civic organizations at the local and state level, not to mention her current position as Chief of the Bureau of Public Relations, in which she was instrumental in organizing. Professionally Hobby was already familiar with the WAC plans, Army protocol, procedure, and along with the accomplishments and knowledge were personal factors like Hobby’s “energy, magnetism, sincerity, and idealism,” as well as a “very considerable diplomatic ability on all matters combined with a certain stubborn determination in pursuing major issues.”
Subsequently on May 16, 1942 Oveta Culp Hobby became the first official WAC Director and was given the rank of Major.

Described as a “trim pretty woman, with a soft Southern drawl, Mrs. Hobby will never be the kind of militarized woman that cartoonists like to make fun of,” claimed the Christian Science Monitor. Director Oveta Culp Hobby was the perfect choice as leader of the WACs she was a “small attractive woman with prematurely graying hair. Her dark eyes and brows are expressive, as is her ready smile.” Hobby personified the perfect combination of attractiveness and dignity that the Army was trying to depict to the press and the civilian population. What better example than Hobby of beauty with brains and how women could work alongside men in the military and not be mannish or overbearing, but instead professional and efficient. Director Oveta Culp Hobby was the prefect example of the responsible female serving her country with pride and accomplishment. Hobby was married and had children and was therefore viewed as a good role model for impressionable young women who joined the WACs. As a woman with a family Hobby exemplified what the Army wanted: attractive, feminine, educated women looking to serve their country and relieve men for front line duty. As Director of the WAC Hobby stated in her first term: that the “WACs will neither be Amazons rushing to battle, nor butterflies fluttering about.”

In August of 1942, Mildred Helen McAfee was appointed to the position of head of the WAVES. Like Oveta Culp Hobby, Mildred McAfee had extensive executive experience and academic training. McAfee excelled in academic achievement having received over ten advanced academic degrees throughout her career including a B.A. from Vassar, M.A. from the University of Chicago, and honorary degrees from Oberlin,
Goucher, Wilson, and Williams Colleges, Mt. Holyoke, Bates, Boston, and Wesleyan
Universities. Along with academic endeavors McAfee was also an exemplary
education executive serving as a teacher, dean, executive secretary, and president to such
schools as Monticello Seminary, Centre College, Vassar, Oberlin, and Wellesley
Colleges. McAfee also was a woman of great character proving herself to be “a woman
who combined intellectual honesty, leadership, tolerance, savoir faire, sympathetic
understanding of youth, vision, and a sense of humor.” Added to her scholastic
endeavors McAfee also served on various boards and contributed to scholarly journals
about education and woman’s rights. When the preliminary plans for the WAVES were
being formed McAfee had already been serving as a member on the Educational
Advisory Committee, for the Naval Training Program, which had been working in
conjunction with the Bureau of Naval Personnel on plans for a Woman’s Reserve, like
Hobby, McAfee was the strongest candidate and was selected as the leader and sworn in
on August 3, 1942.

Much like the driven force of Director Hobby, McAfee was the prefect example
of what the Navy wanted its recruits to be both intellectually and in physical appearance.
Like Hobby, McAfee was attractive and youthful, with “curly hair, slender, vivacious,
popular, warm, gracious, and engaging with a wonderful sense of humor,” the
consummating example of feminine determination, courage, and proactive citizenship.
Like Hobby in the WACs, McAfee was integral to the WAVES public perception of
women in the military. As the ultimate leadership role in an all female naval service,
McAfee connected the private, attractive, and unmarried woman to her very much public
persona as Lieutenant Commander Mildred H. McAfee, woman in uniform, and head of
the WAVES. McAfee was not viewed as mannish, dominate, or threatening to the military institution and she like Hobby personified both the changing roles of the modern woman as well as reinforcing established gender and social roles. McAfee was highly educated and well versed in professional settings but she also did not “smoke, drink, or play cards,” only enjoying “dancing, going to the movies, and reading an occasional detective story.” Again Hobby and McAfee were women pioneers of the WWII era in military leadership, and responsible citizenship. The visions of Hobby and McAfee in their WAC and WAVE uniforms has left an indelible imprint on the fashioning of American women dedicated to responsible citizenship as seen through the WACs and WAVES in WWII.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The following quote by General George Washington taken from the *The Officers’ Guide*, in 1941, states under Chapter XVIII, PRIVILEGES, RIGHTS, AND RESTRICTIONS OF OFFICERS, “A man does not put aside the citizen when he becomes an officer.” In *The Officer’s Guide*, given to both men and women of the Army during WWII, the idea of gender and citizenship is greatly intertwined and celebrated in American military practice. Newly inducted women in the WACs and WAVES identified with this concept from the forefront of their experiences in the war and in the military. Through the establishment of the WACs and the WAVES, the United States was successful in WWII. Like the men serving in the military during WWII, women’s uniforms represented and respected the United States, successfully managed their new found responsibilities and duties to the country, and promoted patriotism, national unity and good citizenship. The uniforms for women of the WACs and WAVES represented nothing less, than their male counterparts yet existing historical and fashion theory has failed to adequately explore American women’s contributions to the war effort and good citizenship in the images of the WACs and WAVES. The uniforms of the WACs and WAVES were a tangible piece of material culture representing both the accomplishments and steadfast character of modern American women in the United States as well as the traditional values of femininity and acceptability.

Women had been emerging from less traditional roles since the eve of WWI, and their clothing practices and routines had also changed, evolving from corsets and
petticoats to slacks, coveralls, and suits, and with changing roles women pushed the modes of acceptable behavior. In WWI like that of WWII women were needed to fulfill not only their traditional roles of home and hearth but also those that had been held traditionally by men in the factories, farms, and in the military. Manpower shortages opened opportunities for women to again be utilized in non traditional roles and their clothing reflected the shift in changing social and cultural attitudes. As in the images of female military personnel during WWII, women needed to be viewed as both competent and reliable, to assuage the fears and apprehensions that women in the military were a threat to established gender roles and a society at war. With the idea of acceptability foremost in mind the Army and Navy strove to make enlistment in the military and women’s image in the service acceptable. Through the creation and procurement of women’s uniforms in the military, the uniform became a symbol of women’s changing roles, their essential role in the war effort and the ability to perform just as well as men no matter what the job required but that once the war was over, back to the home.

However, the images and the uniforms of the WACs and WAVES tell a different and much more complex story, beyond that of feminine acceptability. The uniforms and the women tell a story of respect, respect for themselves, their county, and their ability to accomplish goals, beyond the WWII homefront and military posts. As Oveta Culp Hobby stated, “From now on, you are soldiers defending a free way of life. Your performance here, in the field, and abroad will set the standards …this is a hard task. You will live in the spotlight. Even though the lamps of experience are dim, few, if any, mistakes will be permitted you. You are no longer individuals. You wear the uniform of the United States. Respect that uniform. Respect all that it stands for.”

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