

Modern Jobs for Modern Women
Female Military Service in Britain, 1945-1962

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THESIS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AG	Adjutant General.
ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service.
BAOR	British Army of the Rhine.
DGM	Director General of Manning.
DATS	Director of the Auxiliary Territorial Service.
DWAAF	Director of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.
DWRAC	Director of the Women's Royal Army Corps.
DWRAF	Director of the Women's Royal Air Force.
DWRNS	Director of the Women's Royal Naval Service.
KR	King's Regulations.
NS	National Service, National Serviceman.
QR	Queen's Regulations.
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force.
WRAC	Women's Royal Army Corps.
WRAF	Women's Royal Air Force.
WRNS	Women's Royal Naval Service.

SUMMARY

“Modern Jobs for Modern Women: Female Military Service in Britain, 1945-1962” examines the first generation of British servicewomen to serve in peacetime under regular, full-time engagements. The Women’s Royal Air Force, the Women’s Royal Army Corps, and the Women’s Royal Naval Service were created out of the successful women’s auxiliaries that had employed hundreds of thousands of women during the Second World War. Through the 1950s and 1960s, these permanent services employed British women in clerical and domestic, as well as technical, positions all over Britain and the world. Although this period is generally considered a low ebb of feminism, Britain’s armed forces were at the same time declaring their commitment to recruiting women as an “integral part” of their services. Based on an extensive reading of official files alongside materials produced by servicewomen themselves, I examine how women fit into the military in peacetime, both in terms of discipline and employment as well as identity and lifestyle. Although the women’s services were initially formed in anticipation that the next war would be a total war on the same lines as the Second World War, their place in overall personnel policy evolved to meet the new nuclear strategy. Women were intended to help rebalance the distribution of tasks in the armed forces, so that men could be employed almost exclusively on technical and combat-oriented tasks. Postwar servicewomen continued the process started by wartime auxiliaries of claiming military symbols and culture for themselves. Their organizations were models of a conservative kind of feminism, giving women authority in their own sphere and promoting the pursuit of career goals alongside domesticity. The dissertation thus contributes to literature that expands military history beyond the realm of active campaigning and technological development, as well as literature on gender and war and the history of women’s work.

INTRODUCTION

In 1959, the Women’s Royal Army Corps (WRAC) was about to introduce a new working uniform, and the editors of *The Lioness*, the WRAC Association’s magazine, anticipated a poor reaction from the public. Their pessimism had little to do with the design itself; rather, they dreaded the clueless and demoralizing questions that would face servicewomen wearing the unfamiliar uniform: “How smart you are, dear, but what exactly *are* you?... You don’t mean to say *that’s* still going... Weren’t you disbanded after the war?... Weren’t you abolished with National Service?... Whatever are you *for* in peacetime?” How frustrating, they complained in their editorial, that ten years after the introduction of permanent military service for women—twenty years after the formation of women’s auxiliaries for the Second World War—large parts of the public were still so uninformed about and unappreciative of the women’s services. “How long will it take parents and schoolmistresses to realize that WRAC officers are professional women like any others, secure in a permanent and progressive career, earning a good living by work that calls out all their intelligence and personality?”¹

Controversy over the opportunities available to women in the military² are familiar today; most recently a 2013 decision to allow women in the United States forces to participate in combat appears to have prompted a review of policy in the United Kingdom.³ British women have a long tradition of uniformed service, but the status and

¹ Italics and ellipses in original. Editorial, *The Lioness* vol 32 no 2 (May 1959), 20-1.

² Although, strictly speaking, “military” refers only to land forces, in this dissertation I use the word to indicate all three uniformed armed forces, land, sea, and air.

³ Paul Harris, “Women in Combat: US Military Officially Lifts Ban on Female Soldiers,” *The Guardian*, 25 Jan 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/24/us-military-lifts-ban-women-combat>; Ewen MacAskill, “Women Set to Get Green Light for Combat

function of servicewomen in the decades immediately following the Second World War continue to be relatively unknown. The women's services created at that time first defined the appropriate role for women in the peacetime armed forces, and deserve to be considered as historical subjects in their own right. This dissertation tells the story of the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC), the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF), and the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) in the period from the end of the Second World War to the end of National Service, 1945 to 1962. During the Second World War, women were recruited into the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), and the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) to take over non-combatant duties and free men to fight. These were much larger services, taking on a much more exciting range of duties compared to their First World War predecessors, including, notably, mixed-sex anti-aircraft batteries. After the passage of the National Service (No. 2) Act late in 1941, women could be conscripted into industrial or military work, but women remained auxiliaries rather than regular military personnel. Hundreds of thousands of women joined the auxiliaries during the war, and their dedication and service were impressive enough that the government and armed forces agreed that servicewomen should be employed in peacetime. On 1 February 1949, the ATS and WAAF received their new names along with a new military status whereby their members would now be subject to the disciplinary codes imposed by the Army and Air Force Acts. On the same day, the Admiralty announced that the WRNS would henceforth be a permanent service and an "integral part" of the Navy although, crucially, it did not come under the Naval Discipline Act and remained essentially civilian. Women who

Roles in the British Army," *The Guardian*, 8 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/08/women-set-for-combat-roles-in-british-army>.

were already members of one of the auxiliaries had the chance to make fresh commitments to these new services, while volunteers came forward from among those who had already been demobilized and young women who had been too young to join during the war. The postwar British women's services were among very few in the world at that time which enlisted women for full time careers in permanent services. They survived not only their own disappointing recruiting but also strategic re-focusing and organizational reform over their first decade and a half in existence, confirming the principle that the nation's armed forces should draw upon both sexes in fulfilling their manpower needs. Since the mid-1990s, British women join the Army, Navy, or RAF directly on the same terms as men, and many of the restrictions on the type of work they are allowed to do have been lifted. However, the WRAC, WRAF, and WRNS were the direct, probably essential, predecessors of today's servicewomen, and the precedents they set are still important for our understanding of gender in the armed forces today.

There are three major historiographical contexts for the story of the postwar permanent women's services: the history of women in the armed forces, which practically speaking has often been written as the history of women's participation in war; the history of the women's movement and of gender roles in the 1940s and 1950s; and the history of the British armed forces over the same period. The postwar services shed light on many of the themes common to these literatures, including changing gender roles and performances in the twentieth century, the meanings and uses of modernity, and the contrast or otherwise between times of war and peace.

Recent literature on British women's involvement in the world wars stresses the connection of their activities to both combat and citizenship. Scholars have produced a growing body of work documenting the mutual influence of gender and war in the twentieth century. War tends to reinforce and exaggerate gender norms and hierarchies, not least in the aftermath, when women's behavior takes on new importance as key to regaining normalcy.⁴ Women across Europe were workers and fighters in the world wars, and even in domestic roles or as sexual partners their activities took on new meaning as symbolic of the nation itself.⁵ British women's participation in these wars was particularly colored by the extraordinary demands of total war, and by Britain's proximity to the fighting in western Europe.⁶ During the Second World War, aerial bombing brought British women close to combat as victims, but the threat of invasion

⁴ Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Sarah Fishman, *We Will Wait: Wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940-1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Atina Grossman, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

⁵ Maria Bucur and Nancy Wingfield, eds., *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁶ Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1994); Janet Lee, *War Girls: The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry in the First World War* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University, 2005).

also made it possible to imagine them acting as combatants, defending their homes and their bodies in the last resort.⁷

The women's military auxiliaries formed during the First World War and revived for the Second World War were a particularly important aspect of women's wartime involvement as they placed women close to the fighting in a high profile and official capacity. Lucy Noakes' *Women in the British Army* offers the best overview of the subject, arguing that these auxiliaries should be understood in terms of the military's desire to control women's labor as much as women's advancement into new roles.⁸

Although women, particularly during the Second World War, were able to participate in the prosecution of war, for example by staffing anti-aircraft gun sites alongside men, they continued to be barred from officially becoming combatants if only through the flimsiest of pretexts.⁹ Other scholars have emphasized the role of female initiative in creating the forces, both in the case of the variety of volunteer groups that emerged at the beginning of the First World War, and in the reinstatement of official auxiliaries at the outbreak of

⁷ Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women, and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University, 2007); Helena Schrader, *Sisters in Arms: British and American Women Pilots during World War II* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2006); Hazel Nicholson, "A Disputed Identity: Women Conscientious Objectors in Second World War Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 18, no. 4 (2007): 409-428; Juliette Pattinson, *Behind Enemy Lines: Gender, Passing, and the Special Operations Executive in the Second World War* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University, 2007).

⁸ Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London: Routledge, 2006); see also Jeremy A. Crang, "'Come into the Army, Maud': Women, Military Conscription, and the Markham Inquiry," *Defence Studies* 8, no. 3 (2008): 381-395.

⁹ Gerard J. DeGroot, "Whose Finger on the Trigger? Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries and the Female Combat Taboo," *War in History* 4, no. 4 (1997): 434-53; Gerard J. DeGroot, "'I Love the Scent of Cordite in Your Hair': Gender Dynamics in Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries during the Second World War," *History* 82, no. 265 (1997): 73-92.

the Second World War.¹⁰ Two dissertations, by Krisztina Robert and Tessa Stone, further explore the ways in which members of the women's auxiliaries laid claim to military identities.¹¹ Robert argues that women volunteers during the First World War justified their work by constructing a new model of femininity based on finding "feminine" traits and behaviors that would correspond to "masculine" military ones. Stone, writing about the Second World War, calls attention to the way in which women auxiliaries drew motivation and pride from their association with service traditions and combat operations. This emphasis on women's initiative and agency reveals that these auxiliaries were an outlet for women's aspirations: they projected a role for women in national defense that was theirs by right. Regardless of the very real inequality they experienced, women auxiliaries participated in military culture while taking ownership of their own military identities.

Far less has been written about the permanent services which are the subject of this dissertation, and which represent the first group of women to serve in the military as regular volunteers in peacetime. Much of what has been written about the postwar permanent forces is in regimental histories produced primarily for an audience of ex-servicewomen.¹² These books, based on anecdotes and personal letters provided by

¹⁰ Krisztina Robert, "Gendering Class, Patriotism, and Militarism: The Women's Corps Movement in Britain During and After World War I" (PhD diss., University of Houston, 1998); Jeremy A. Crang, "The Revival of the British Women's Auxiliary Services in the Late Nineteen-thirties," *Historical Research* 83, no. 220 (2008): 343-57.

¹¹ Robert, "Gendering Class, Patriotism, and Militarism"; Tessa Stone, "The Integration of Women into a Military Service: The Women's Auxiliary Air Force in the Second World War" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1999); Tessa Stone, "Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity: The Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War," *Women's History Review* 8, no. 4 (1999): 605-24.

¹² Katharine Bentley Beaman, *Partners in Blue: The Story of Women's Service with the Royal Air Force* (London: Hutchinson, 1971); Shelford Bidwell, *The Women's Royal*

veterans, give a valuable insight into much of what these women thought was important about their service. However, they lack a critical perspective, and, as Krisztina Robert points out, their interpretation was often influenced by later campaigns for expanded opportunities.¹³ Lucy Noakes discusses the postwar WRAC briefly at the end of her book, arguing that it was a regressive step for military women. Any significance the organization may have had for blazing a trail was drowned out by the larger narratives of reconstruction, in which “the key image of the postwar woman was that of a wartime worker or member of the auxiliary forces returning to a normality symbolized by domesticity.”¹⁴ Rather than building on the advances of the ATS, the WRAC hearkened back to the First World War-era preoccupation with separating and defining men and women, by decisively excluding women from anything remotely resembling combat and by promoting conformity with established gender norms. Noakes concludes that, as an organization, the WRAC placed “militarized women squarely behind the military man, both in terms of occupation and in terms of status.”¹⁵ This dissertation takes Noakes’ assessment as a starting point, but argues that the postwar services deserve more credit for innovation. Scholars have highlighted how the pressures of war and the possibility of introducing measures “only for the duration” were key to allowing women to move into

Army Corps (London: Leo Cooper, 1977); Roy Terry, *Women in Khaki: The Story of the British Woman Soldier* (London: Columbus Books, 1988); Beryl E. Escott, *Women in Air Force Blue: The Story of Women in the Royal Air Force from 1918 to the Present Day* (Wellingborough, UK: Patrick Stephens, 1989); Marjorie Fletcher, *The WRNS: A History of the Women’s Royal Naval Service* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989); Ursula Mason, *Britannia’s Daughters: The Story of the WRNS* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992).

¹³ Robert, “Gendering Class, Patriotism, and Militarism,” 9-10.

¹⁴ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 135.

¹⁵ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 156.

highly unconventional roles.¹⁶ The postwar services were the first to enlist women without those unsettling circumstances, and required a re-negotiation of roles under the presumption of permanence. Nevertheless, military women did not forget their wartime achievements and regarded their smaller, more limited services as simply building a foundation for future expansion.

Other countries established women's military services after the Second World War, and this study of the British women's forces contributes to a better understanding of women's military activities globally. Of the major combatants in the Second World War, only the United States had a postwar organization that could compare with the British services; the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 created regular and reserve land, air, and sea services on the same disciplinary basis as men.¹⁷ The US women's forces were similar in many ways to the British ones, having a separate command structure for women and employing them in largely clerical roles, although in some ways it seems that the American women faced more outright resistance. For instance, the American women's forces were legally capped at 2% of total strength, whereas the British forces had no such cap and ranged from 1% to 4% of each service's strength in the 1950s.¹⁸ In the Soviet Union, women had served in combat during the war

¹⁶ Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Harold Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain during the Second World War," *The Historical Journal* 27, no. 4 (1984): 652-72.

¹⁷ Bettie J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1990), 29-33, 35-60, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/030/30-14-1/index.html>; Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the US Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 163-8, 176-7.

¹⁸ See data in Table 1; Godson, *Serving Proudly*, 167.

on the strength of communist ideas about gender equality. However, their opportunities to serve in peacetime were dramatically limited as women were barred from the service academies and there was no precedent for a separate women's service. Reina Pennington concludes that despite the unusual actions of women soldiers and pilots during the war, "there was no change in the cultural perception that, except during emergencies, war (and therefore military service) was simply not women's work."¹⁹ The wartime Free French women's auxiliaries had postwar successors in the Service Feminin de la Flotte and the Personnel Feminin de L'Armée de Terre, although these seem to have had a rather less military character than their British counterparts.²⁰ Canada and Australia both disbanded their wartime auxiliaries before rebuilding permanent services in the early 1950s.²¹ The British women's services are thus significant in a world context both for being exceptional and for being indicative of a wider trend. Women in many countries were recruited into woman-led military organizations for peacetime employment in the 1950s, with varying cultures and conditions of service. However, the United States and the United Kingdom were the only two major countries to employ women in permanent, uniformed regular forces subject to military discipline as well as reserves. The British example was a direct influence on other countries, and understanding how these services

¹⁹ Reina Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas Press, 2001), 143-59.

²⁰ I have not found scholarly work about these services and I am not sure about their size or legal footing; "WRNS Visit to Paris, April 1950," *The Wren* 189 (Oct 1950), NMRN 1988.350.18.17: 8-9; Lt-Col CA Cecil, "The Personnel Feminin de L'Armée de Terre," *The Lioness* 28, no. 1 (Feb 1955): 8.

²¹ W. Hugh Conrod, *Athene, Goddess of War: The Canadian Women's Army Corps: Their Story* (Dartmouth, NS: Writing and Editorial Services, 1983); Janette Bomford, *Soldiers of the Queen: Women's in the Australian Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8-9.

worked in greater detail will help make clear what is distinctive in other national contexts.

In the broader context of British society, the women's services reflect some of the assumptions and tensions surrounding women's work at a critical junction. The 1950s can no longer be seen simply in terms of regression given recent work which draws attention to a continuous tradition of women's public activism. Feminist scholars of the 1960s and 1970s identified themselves as part of a "second wave" of feminism, separated from the "first wave" suffrage campaigns by a period of backsliding domesticity from the 1930s through 1950s. This is the basic view put forward in texts like Martin Pugh's *Women and the Women's Movement*, for instance.²² However, this formulation fails to tell the whole story. Once they had won the vote, women used their new platform and status to address social problems and improve women's lives. The 1920s and 1930s saw a range of legislation passed for women's benefit, much of which became the foundation of the postwar welfare state.²³ Women's civic organizations founded between the wars were particularly active in promoting active citizenship through education, debate, and local campaigning on a number of issues important to women's lives.²⁴ Women throughout

²² Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000).

²³ Patricia Thane, "What Difference did the Vote Make? Women in Public and Private Life in Britain since 1918," *Historical Research* 76, no. 192 (2003): 268-85; Seth Koven, "Borderlands: Women, Voluntary Action, and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840 to 1914," in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 94-135.

²⁴ Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Movement as a Social Movement* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997); Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928-64* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2013); Helen McCarthy, "Service Clubs, Citizenship and Equality: Gender Relations and Middle-Class Associations in Britain between the Wars," *Historical Research* 81, no. 213 (2008): 531-52; Carroll Pursell,

this period were politically important as voters and constituents, particularly because of their economic role as consumers.²⁵ Moreover, the equal pay campaign won increasing public support over the 1940s and 1950s, with the government announcing its intention to introduce equal pay for women teachers and civil servants in 1954.²⁶ Overall, recent scholarship confirms that women built upon past successes and continued to assert their right to respect and an expanding public role after the suffrage campaign had ended. Although they tended to avoid the label “feminist”, women’s organizations in the 1950s engaged with the social and political issues of the time, seeking to reduce the disadvantages and prejudices that faced women as political, legal, and economic actors.

The 1950s were also a time when the dimensions and status of women’s work were changing, laying the foundation for future, more dramatic social change. One of the most significant lasting impacts of the Second World War on women’s status was the expansion of women’s work; specifically, continuing to work after marriage became far more common and acceptable.²⁷ Moreover, by the 1950s, the idea that middle-class girls

“Domesticating Modernity: The Electrical Association for Women, 1924-86,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 32, no. 1 (1999): 47-68.

²⁵ Esther Breitenbach and Pat Thane, eds., *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century: What Difference Did the Vote Make?* (London: Continuum, 2010); Harold L. Smith, “The Politics of Conservative Reform: The Equal Pay for Equal Work Issue, 1945-1955,” *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 2 (1992): 401-15; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁶ Harold Smith, “The Problem of ‘Equal Pay for Equal Work’ in Great Britain during World War II,” *Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981): 652-72; Dolly Smith Wilson, “‘The True Sphere of Women’: Work, Gender and Equal Pay in Britain, 1945-1975” (PhD diss., Boston College, 2004).

²⁷ Harold Smith, “The Effect of War on the Status of Women,” in *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, ed. Harold L. Smith (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1986), 208-29; Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945: Women, Family, Work, and the State in the Post-war Years* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005).

should be encouraged to choose and train for a responsible career was becoming more entrenched, particularly among education professionals.²⁸ As a result, the model modern woman was increasingly one who adhered to the so-called “two roles” pattern of life, working until her children were born, leaving paid work to raise them, and then returning to her career after they were in school.²⁹ This model was a step forward in that it normalized women’s careers to a degree, although at the same time it tended in practice to reinforce the limited opportunities available to women.³⁰ Marriage and motherhood were held up as every woman’s “true” vocation, while working mothers were still largely condemned.³¹ Thus working mothers sought to define their paid work in such a way that it could be understood as part of being a good mother; like the housewife members of the non-feminist women’s organizations mentioned above, working mothers argued for better treatment and remuneration based on the importance of their role in the family, not in opposition to it.³²

²⁸ Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (London: Routledge, 2005).

²⁹ Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women’s Two Roles, Home and Work* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1956).

³⁰ Evelyn Kerslake and J. Liladhar, “Angry Sentinels and Businesslike Women: Identity and Marital Status in 1950s English Library Career Novels,” *Library History* 17, no. 2 (2001): 83-90; Sarah Jane Aiston, “A Good Job for a Girl? The Career Biographies of Women Graduates of the University of Liverpool Post-1945,” *20th Century British History* 15, no. 4 (2004): 361-87; Anne Allsopp, “Employment Opportunities for Luton Secondary Schoolgirls, 1930-1965,” *History of Education Researcher* 82 (2008): 95-104.

³¹ Pat Starkey, “The Feckless Mother: Women, Poverty, and Social Workers in Wartime and Post-War England,” *Women’s History Review* 9, no. 3 (2000), 539-557; Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, c.1945-2000* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2012).

³² Dolly Smith Wilson, “A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain,” *Twentieth Century British History* 17, no. 2 (2006): 206-229.

Although it has by and large been pursued as part of women's history, the history of women in the forces is equally an important part of military history. Military history is often associated with strategic questions, but since the 1980s the field has increasingly turned toward the social and cultural circumstances and implications of war. This "new" military history is also sometimes referred to as war studies or war and society studies.³³ In more recent years scholars have further extended their view from the medieval and early modern periods into the modern era, and from periods of active warfare to times of peace. Such a perspective recognizes that military history cannot be understood by only examining the most important strategic moments. For the purposes of this dissertation, this literature also provides a better context for understanding the history of military women and their relevance to the overall history of modern militaries, including the history of those forces' operational readiness and strategic organization. If a focus "on wars and battles, rather than on the dreary years of garrison service" does injustice to "the lot of most [male] soldiers" then it does worse to women who have served in the military in the twentieth century and been barred from participation in combat.³⁴ Most of the discussion of postwar military personnel has centered on the continuing conscription of men under National Service. Servicewomen tend to be invisible in this literature as they

³³ Stephen Morillo and Michael Pavkovic, *What is Military History?* (Somerset NJ: Wiley, 2013), 37-44.

³⁴ David French, *Military Identities: the Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c.1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 83. French's point is to draw attention from active campaigning to peacetime, but Jeremy Crang's comment on British soldiers during the Second World War suggests that the same idea can apply even in time of war: "For most soldiers, therefore, the experience of war was not one of daring deeds at the 'sharp end', but rather of a sedentary existence in camps or depots across the country polishing their brasses and wondering why they were there." Crang, *The British Army and the People's War 1939-1945* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 2.

were not subject to conscription.³⁵ L. V. Scott concludes that the women's services made "a valuable contribution but limited in scale," not enough to significantly influence decisions about National Service.³⁶ David French describes the women's services in terms of a failed attempt to shift policy, describing how the Army Council tried in the 1950s to expand the size of the women's services to make up numbers. He argues that this was unsuccessful due to a "fundamental confusion in the minds of the military authorities about the place of women in the army."³⁷ Both of these assessments are accurate as far as they go, but there is still need for a full account of the role women played in the postwar services, and how women's inclusion in the peacetime services influenced the culture of those services as well as society more generally.

This dissertation contributes to the existing literature on both women and the military in several important ways. First of all, while the literature on gender and combat is extensive and crosses disciplinary boundaries, the historical role of women in military organizations and policy has been largely overlooked.³⁸ This dissertation is the most in-

³⁵ Tom Hickman, *The Call-Up: A History of National Service* (London: Headline, 2004); Trevor Royle, *The Best Years of Their Lives: The National Service Experience 1945-63* (London: Michael Joseph, 1986); Roger Broad, *Conscription in Britain, 1939-1963: The Militarization of a Generation* (London: Routledge, 2006); Keith Miller, *730 Days Until Demob! National Service and the post-1945 British Army* (London: National Army Museum, 2003).

³⁶ L. V. Scott, *Conscription and the Attlee Governments: The Politics and Policy of National Service, 1945-1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 79.

³⁷ French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War: The British Army and Military Policy, 1945-1971* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 179-80.

³⁸ Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender*; Margaret R. Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz, eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter, *Sexing the Soldier: The Politics of Gender and the Contemporary British Army* (London: Routledge, 2007); Gerard J. DeGroot and Corinna Peniston-Bird, eds., *A Soldier and a Woman: Sexual Integration in the Military* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2000); Paul Higate, ed., *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*

depth study to date of women's lives and work in the postwar British armed forces at a key point in their history. The permanent women's services under discussion in this dissertation represent a new turn in military manpower policy, an essential precedent for later developments, and a legacy of "the people's war" that took over a decade to sort itself out. British women had first claimed the duty to serve their country in uniform during the First World War, and the Second World War concept of "equal sacrifices", along with the development of women's citizenship and voting rights between the wars, confirmed that women could and should support military operations during a national emergency. But the permanent services enshrined in law the principle that women would be a regular part of the military from the late 1940s on, regardless of whether the country was at war. These services were altered in subsequent decades, but they were only dismantled in the 1990s. Thus the structure and culture of the postwar women's services are important as a foundation or baseline which continued to influence women's opportunities until quite recently, if not up to the present day.

Secondly, this dissertation highlights the complexity of military gender politics. Fault lines rarely ran cleanly between men and women, and each service's distinctive identity played a greater role in decision-making than current literature would suggest. Women were not always the ones pushing for more opportunities or greater responsibility for women, and men were not always the ones insisting on restrictions and limitations. Women officers were often more cautious and protective than male military leaders, and the principle that women should have their own organizations with female leaders was

(Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); D'Ann Campbell, "Women in Combat: The World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union," *The Journal of Military History* 57, no. 2 (1993): 301-323.

most sacred to women, not men. Moreover, each of the three women's services was created with a distinctive set of principles governing its relationship with the male parent service, and this, along with each one's unique culture, shaped gender relations. The Royal Air Force's meritocratic self-image, the army's segregation of women into their own regiment, and the Navy's refusal to place women on the same legal and disciplinary basis as men produced unique gender politics in the three forces when they interacted with ideas about women and the nature of war held in common. Where other scholars have focused on one branch of the services, this dissertation takes all three together, seeking to understand where their approaches converged and differed, and why.

Furthermore, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of what we might call "conservative feminism". As noted above, women from the 1930s to the 1950s often distanced themselves from feminism and embraced traditional roles as wives and mothers, but these women nevertheless were also active in claiming their citizenship and asserting their right to fair treatment. Military women provide an excellent example of women who were not explicitly pursuing a feminist agenda but nevertheless sought wider opportunities and respect in their work. Women officers in particular were generally emotionally loyal to established military hierarchies and customs, and were eager to make a place for themselves within that system. This dissertation also calls attention to the roles and attitudes of men with regard to women's advancement. With relatively little outside pressure, senior military leaders and civil servants believed that permanent women's services were in the nation's best interest and were willing to support them accordingly. This dissertation, therefore, shows how women have been able to expand the

opportunities available to them in a particular even when they have accepted underlying ideas about gender.

Finally, this dissertation provides new insight into the meaning of the Second World War for women. The title, *Modern Jobs for Modern Women*, comes from a mid-1950s WRAF recruiting pamphlet, which features a photo of a young woman in uniform staring intently into the sky; behind her, a jet is parked on the tarmac. Opposite this photo, the brochure's short introduction stresses the modernity of the WRAF:

The following pages tell you something about life in the Women's Royal Air Force—now an integral part of the RAF. It is a completely new life, for never before recent years have women been accepted for peace-time careers in the Service. It can take you to new places, enable you to meet new people, offer you a real aim in life. In fact the Women's Royal Air Force is a modern job for a modern woman.³⁹

Much has already been written about modernity and its often ambiguous meaning. Modernity is difficult to define in a historical context, because it is a relative concept, serving to distinguish the “present” from the past by emphasizing novelty and discontinuity. The concept of the modern woman can be equally difficult to define, although scholars have identified technology, fashion, mobility, consumerism, and particular bodily practices as characteristic of the interwar modern woman.⁴⁰ Many of these concrete signifiers can be found in the postwar women's services—see for example

³⁹ “Women's Royal Air Force” pamphlet, n.d. (ca. 1954?), TNA:PRO AIR 20/9106.

⁴⁰ Brigitte Søland, *Becoming Modern: Young Women and the Reconstruction of Womanhood in the 1920s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Martin J. Daunt and Bernhard Rieger, eds., *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Fiona Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity in Interwar Britain* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013); Laura Doan, “Primum Mobile: Women and Auto/Mobility in the Era of the Great War,” *Women* 17, no. 1 (2006): 26-41; Bernhard Rieger, “‘Fast Couples’: Technology, Gender and Modernity in Britain and Germany during the Nineteen-Thirties,” *Historical Research* 76, no. 193 (2003): 364-388.

the reference to “new places” in the advertising copy above, and the use of a photo of a jet on the facing page—but I am using the term primarily to highlight a sense of innovation that pervaded planning for the women’s services. Modernity in postwar Britain was tied up with the nation’s reconstruction after the devastation of war: a “balancing act between innovation and tradition” in search of an improved normality.⁴¹ The women’s forces were part of this postwar modernity, as they were self-consciously a product of new ideas and circumstances brought about by the demands the war effort had placed upon women. The opportunities for travel, training and independence offered by the services were due in no small part to their organizers’ desire to be up-to-date and forward-looking, in step with the times. Military leaders deployed the concept of “modern women” in the belief that this would be attractive and compelling to potential recruits, suggesting that the concept had become mainstream and even respectable by the late 1940s. The self-declared modernity of the women’s forces suggests the degree to which the Second World War was believed at the time to have changed women’s status, regardless of later assessments. The services were meant to provide modern jobs for modern women, and the complexity of what that would actually mean in practice, for the jobs and for the women, will be evident in the analysis given in this dissertation.

Modern Jobs for Modern Women contains seven chapters, which cover planning and policy as well as the individual experiences of servicewomen. It is based for the most part on an extensive reading of Public Record Office files from the Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, and Ministry of Defence, deposited in the National Archives. These

⁴¹ Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, introduction to *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964* (London: Rivers Oram, 1999), 20.

materials document the process of policy making in the context of larger government and military concerns. Another important source base comes from the WRAC and WRNS collections now held at the National Army Museum and National Museum of the Royal Navy, respectively. The directors of these two services kept their own records which help to illuminate debates and concerns among the women themselves, particularly through the minutes of senior officer conferences and newsletters. I have drawn upon other materials held by these two archives as well as holdings from the Imperial War Museum and the National Maritime Museum.

The first three chapters look at the organization of the women's forces and their function in the larger military organization. Chapter one covers the decision to retain women in the postwar military and the debates over the exact form these peacetime women's services should take. The decisions made at this time were based on particular perceptions both of future needs and best practices, as well as the probable reactions of servicewomen and the public. The second chapter is devoted to women officers, whose authority and power to discipline were nominally on a par with men, but in practice circumscribed by organizational separation and notions of femininity. Chapter three looks at servicewomen's work: the kinds of opportunities and training that were available to them. Women made up one source of labor among several in the armed forces at this time, and this chapter argues that their role can best be understood in terms of a redistribution of "exciting" work toward male volunteers and "boring" work toward women and civilians.

Chapters four and five take a more cultural approach and explore how women related to the services they had joined, as well as the role the services played or tried to play in

women's personal lives. The fourth chapter focuses on how women appropriated military traditions to assert their own belonging in their services' culture. The WRAF and WRAC both claimed to be "integrated" with their male parent services, and the way they interacted with military traditions and culture sheds light on each service's understanding of that integration. Chapter five considers women's leisure time and relationships. Since servicewomen lived and worked away from their families, these were important and deeply gendered areas of concern for female leadership in particular.

Chapter six looks at the British women's forces in a global context. This chapter covers servicewomen's postings overseas and personal travel, as well as the relationship of the British women's services to their foreign counterparts. The opportunity to serve overseas was an important part of the women's services' self-image, as it represented their participation in the nation's military commitments. Moreover, contact with other countries' military women often served to make the British services look particularly progressive. Thus servicewomen's global profile was an important morale-booster beyond the simple excitement of travel.

Finally, chapter seven considers the reasons why women left the services and the very short period of time they served on average. The leaders of the women's services hoped that military service for women might become the sort of proud tradition that it was for men in certain circles, but in fact all three services suffered from disappointing recruiting and high turnover. This chapter examines how the women's services coexisted with and tried to accommodate conventional ideas about marriage, motherhood, and domesticity.

The women's services formed after the Second World War achieved more than they have been given credit for. They held on to a status as a substantial, permanent part of the

armed forces that was only matched in the United States, and this solidified women's claim to military customs and rituals even if that claim was often resisted. The women's services were small and limited, but they faced the dangers of military life in global hotspots like Cyprus and Egypt, and women officers in particular were able to pursue careers which gave them real responsibilities. Most importantly, the postwar women's services established a precedent that British military manpower needs would be filled by both men and women in uniform, even outside of a pressing national emergency. This dissertation will shed light on the origins and functions of these services, and through them, on a critical period for British women and the armed forces.

1. Womanpower for Peacetime

A few yards from the Cenotaph in London stands a memorial to women war workers dedicated in 2005. Sculpted versions of women's work clothes – military and nursing uniforms, welder's overalls, firefighting gear, a housewife's dress – “hang” as if from pegs on a central bronze block which bears an inscription in large letters: THE WOMEN OF WORLD WAR II.¹ Women, the memorial suggests, took up all these varied roles during the war and then hung them back up at the end of hostilities. However, this narrative misses an important fact about women's military service in the 1940s. The outbreak of war brought the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), and the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) into being, and the experience of war shaped the services and military leaders' perception of them in fundamental ways, but they did not end with the end of the war. As early as 1942, military and political leaders were discussing the possibility of retaining the women's services in peacetime. These debates intensified as the war ended and ultimately resulted in the creation in 1949 of the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF), Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC), and a permanent WRNS.

The debate over women's services was a debate over the place of women in the postwar workforce and society more broadly, but it was also intimately connected to important questions about military identity and the roles of men and women in national defense. After all, the women's auxiliaries of the First World War had been disbanded at the end of that conflict, in contrast to the decisions made in the 1940s. Material motivations, such as the shortage of available men and the lower paychecks of women, mixed with less tangible motivations to produce a new opportunity for women to have careers in the regular armed

¹ Website of sculptor John Mills, accessed 1 Dec 2010, www.johnwmills.com.

forces. The women's auxiliaries had done valuable work and would be needed again; refusing to maintain them in peacetime would be a serious blow to morale and an insult to loyal and dedicated servicewomen. Furthermore, it seemed as though the experience of war had permanently changed the place of women in society. The postwar world would be different, and the military would do well to take note.

The services created in 1949 were announced as a permanent new departure for military women. Although their organization and policies were a product of their time, nevertheless they proved to be hardy. There were those in the military and in the government who felt it was untenable to spend money on non-combatant personnel and expected that sooner or later the women would be gone. The crisis came in the late 1950s with the end of National Service and the need for an all-volunteer service. However, the government confirmed its commitment to the recruitment of female personnel and to making a place for women in the military. Other chapters will elaborate what that place was, and the public perception of this policy, but here I will argue that the establishment of female military services in the late 1940s was a durable change in policy. Reinforced by the enticing aura of modernity surrounding rhetoric about expanded opportunities for women, senior government and military officials committed and recommitted themselves to co-ed armed forces in the twenty years following the Second World War.

The postwar permanent services originated in the organizational confusion that surrounded the re-formation of women's forces at the beginning of the Second World War. Military women may have won a degree of respect during the First World War, but they became doubly unpopular after 1918 because of their associations with both militarism and women's employment. The carnage of the war made peace and domestic quiet more attractive ideals for many, while high levels of unemployment led many Britons to accuse working women of

taking jobs away from veterans.² By the 1930s, although the possible roles of women figured in the speculation about a coming war, military authorities were hesitant to commit themselves to a plan or to begin recruiting. As a result, a number of motivated women began to act independently in hopes of gaining official recognition down the line, often drawing on their experiences from the First World War. Two major competing organizations emerged, one led by Lady Londonderry, the noted hostess, and the other by Mary Allen, a fascist sympathizer. This situation was not only politically untenable, it also clashed with the War Office's efforts to modernize and centralize the British Army. As a result, the War Office reconsidered its stand and began organizing a reserve in late 1938.³

If the re-formation of women's services for the Second World War confirmed the importance of women to modern mobilization, the disorganization of these services in the early days of the war proved that they could not be thrown together overnight. The announcement that the government was forming women's services brought a flood of volunteers into recruiting offices which were often not equipped to enroll them.⁴ Billeting, training, and outfitting were all marked by delays, shortages, and inadequacies, resulting in frustration and, female leaders believed, the loss of good personnel to other, more organized forms of war work.⁵ Mary Tyrwhitt, an ATS officer who had been recruited before the outbreak of war, brought her company to Chatham only to discover that there was no furniture

² Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London: Routledge, 2006), 84-92; Noakes, "Demobilising the Military Woman: Constructions of Class and Gender in Britain after the First World War," *Gender & History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 143-62; Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London: Pandora, 1987).

³ Jeremy A. Crang, "The Revival of the British Women's Auxiliary Services in the Late Nineteen-Thirties," *Historical Research* 83, no. 220 (2008): 344-350; Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 94-101.

⁴ Crang, "The Revival of the British Women's Auxiliary Services," 351-354, 356.

⁵ Air Publication 3234: *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force, 1953*, TNA:PRO AIR 10/5546.

in their billet, and moreover “none of the senior officers really understood what we were supposed to do. They all wanted clerks and used to say: ‘I want a nice girl who can sit on my knee when she takes down direction.’”⁶ The situation improved with time, but the inefficiency, unpreparedness, and disrespect of the early days convinced female and male military planners alike that something must be done to ensure continuity for the future. In the words of the RAF’s Director of Manning, “had there been in existence a very small permanent WAAF prior to the time of mobilization for the present war a large number of our difficulties would have been overcome and with greater efficiency.”⁷

Politically, the idea of permanent women’s services first surfaced in a Parliamentary inquiry meant to raise the public profile of the auxiliaries. In February 1942, the Deputy Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, appointed Violet Markham, a well-known public figure who had participated in a similar inquiry during the First World War, as the chairman of an independent body of predominantly female notables including MPs Thelma Cazelet and Edith Summerskill.⁸ The committee’s remit was to investigate living conditions in the women’s services, but politically it was meant to smooth the introduction of the conscription of women by demonstrating to parents that their daughters would be well taken care of in the forces.⁹ Although its discussion of moral standards surrounding sex and pregnancy attracted the most attention, the report helped paint a picture of female auxiliaries as an efficient and beneficial part of the military. Such useful women should not be sent home too soon, the report suggested, lest the nation lose the “new riches” it had gained “in this great development of

⁶ Quoted in Roy Terry, *Women in Khaki: The Story of the British Woman Soldier* (London: Columbus Books, 1988), 110-1.

⁷ Note by Director of Manning, 28 Jun 1943, TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824.

⁸ *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Markham, Violet Rosa,” by Helen Jones, accessed 8 Sep 2014, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/view/article/34881>.

⁹ Jeremy Crang, “‘Come into the Army, Maud’: Women, Military Conscription, and the Markham Inquiry,” *Defence Studies* 8, no. 3 (2008): 389-90.

skilled capacity created by the war.”¹⁰ The committee members therefore recommended that women should make up part of the military contingent that would undoubtedly be dispatched to help with reconstruction efforts in occupied territories.

A second committee under Ralph Assheton, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, directed the service ministries to decide whether or not women would be needed in peacetime and in what capacity. Taking into account testimony from male officers as well as the female heads of service and Violet Markham herself, the committee concluded in June 1943 that the forces should each work out some scheme “to ensure that these [women’s] Services can be 26srael26ar and built up promptly and efficiently” in the event of a future war. Although the report emphasizes that no firm plans can be made “until the general plan has been made for the 26srael26arizi of our armed forces after the war and until financial and other conditions are known,” in practical terms the committee envisioned the retention of a small “nucleus” along with a more extensive reserve. Depending on the size and needs of each service, however, this nucleus might be a small cadre of officers or a standing force large enough to serve as a skeleton for future expansion.¹¹ The committee’s conclusions therefore laid out the terms of the debate over postwar women’s services, declaring that continuity and readiness were essential goals while suggesting a range of organizational forms that could be adopted.

More fundamentally, the committee affirmed the success of the wartime auxiliaries. Hundreds of thousands of women had joined the ATS, WRNS, and WAAF. Their contributions had been instrumental in helping the armed forces succeed in combat. Military women had proven that they were capable of replacing men, often on a one-to-one basis, in a

¹⁰ Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare Conditions in the Three Women’s Services, 15 Aug 1942, TNA:PRO CAB 66/27/41.

¹¹ Report of the Committee on the Women’s Services, 24 Jun 1943, TNA:PRO CAB 33/38/19.

variety of roles, including some unlikely ones such as anti-aircraft gunnery. There had been no large scale cultural backlash, with military women conducting themselves honorably and even enjoying a certain level of popularity in the media. Finally, and perhaps most significantly from an official standpoint, women had come forward in large numbers to serve; even with conscription providing additional impetus, the number of enthusiastic female volunteers seemed to decisively indicate that a usable large proportion of British women viewed military service as an attractive outlet for their energy and patriotic feelings.

The role of these two Parliamentary committees in initiating debate points to the fact that while planning discussions were generally very insular, with male military officers and civil servants doing most of the discussing, they were also necessarily tied to the wider spheres of politics and society. Specifically, planning discussions reflect the belief of many senior officers and civil servants that the war had substantially changed British culture, particularly with regard to women's work. The planners agreed with the Treasury that it was important not to appear to place an "obstacle" in the way of "the establishment or resumption of marital relations."¹² However, they were also aware that policies that appeared too prejudicial against women could stir up opposition from women MPs, a lesson that had been learned from the dustup over wartime injury compensation: civilian women injured in bombing were initially only paid two-thirds of the male rate, a situation that was rectified in late 1942 after campaigning by women politicians.¹³ As the Secretary of State for Air pointed out, planners had to keep in mind that "these days... we have women Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament, women Mayors, Magistrates and Justices of the Peace" and it might prove

¹² Minutes of meeting between representatives of the Treasury, Admiralty, War Office, and Air Ministry, 30 Aug 1946, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5725.

¹³ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 278.

“indefensible” to restrict women too much.¹⁴ Recruitment bonuses were agreed upon partly out of the fear that “if we offer nothing to the women there may be an immediate cry that we are trying to get the women on the cheap.”¹⁵ Being too conservative could lead to a challenge which, if conceded, might be labeled a feminist victory and form a dangerous precedent. The internal debates on issues of organization and administration were thus carried out with a keen awareness that whatever plan was devised, it would have to be acceptable to Parliament, the Treasury, and the public.

Both of these factors, the success of the wartime auxiliaries and the apparent change in social mores, contributed to the decision to not only retain military organizations for women, but to solidify and raise their status. The first step in the planning process, before concrete proposals for conditions of service could be discussed, was to justify and characterize the project: why should the Army, RAF, or Navy employ women in peacetime at all, and would a part-time reserve be sufficient or was something more extensive needed? Either a reserve or a regular service would allow Britain to be prepared for a future conflict. However, it was also true that women, who had proven themselves in some cases more capable than men, could supply needed labor in the anticipated shortage. In order to make this contribution, however, women would have to be full time members of the forces. And wartime experiences strongly suggested that women who were full-time members of uniformed services ought to be subject to military discipline.¹⁶ These factors made up the official line of argument justifying the creation of large permanent services instead of simply creating a reserve.¹⁷

¹⁴ Secretary of State for Air to Secretary of State for War, 31 Mar 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

¹⁵ Lawson to First Lord, 2 Aug 1946, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5725.

¹⁶ See chapter two for a fuller discussion of the problems of military discipline.

¹⁷ Extract from the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems, 31 May 1945, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

Without this important practical justification, the women's services might have ended up as reserves, but we should not discount the less tangible factors playing into this decision. The Air Ministry in particular consistently included the desire to acknowledge and reward the wartime achievements of women alongside more material motivations. In 1944, the Committee for the Manning of the Post-War Royal Air Force listed the following among the reasons for creating a permanent WAAF (my emphasis):

Women have played their part in the war-time air force with marked success, and they will *expect* to take their share in the post-war regular forces. They would *resent* this share being limited to service on a non-regular basis, and this resentment might even prejudice recruitment for the reserve.¹⁸

In approaching the Cabinet the following year, the Secretary of State for Air again alluded to these concerns when he proposed among discussion points for an inter-service committee:

Will there be public pressure for women to be allowed the opportunity of a career in the military Services as in the Civil Service, on the ground that they have amply proved their fitness for a wide range of Service duties?¹⁹

Giving women a permanent regular status was indeed a kind of reward according to established military practice: witness the outcry against the insult of a regiment being closed. The ATS and WAAF were also given the honorific "Royal" in their permanent titles, not without some controversy. The Prime Minister felt strongly that the wartime names should be retained, in order to build on the positive reputation that had grown up around them. Nevertheless, military officials wished to shed the temporary connotation of "auxiliary" and emphasize the new permanent nature of the women's services through their titles.²⁰ The

¹⁸ Sixth Interim Report, Committee appointed by the Air Member for Personnel to Discuss the Policy for the Manning of the Post-War Royal Air Force, Dec 1944, TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824.

¹⁹ Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air for the Cabinet, "Future of the Women's Services," Aug 1945, TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824.

²⁰ Minutes of the Standing Committee of Service Ministers on Common Administrative Problems, 9 Jun 1947, and attached documents SMA/P(47)8, 11, and 19, TNA:PRO DEFE 10/147.

names finally chosen met this goal, with “WRAC” incorporating both “women” and “Royal” in a pronounceable acronym, and “WRAF” emphasizing the women’s membership in the RAF.²¹ Together, regular status and a “Royal” title marked out the creation of permanent services as more than simply another plank in manpower policy. They underlined the connection between wartime service and postwar developments and strongly implied the cause and effect of achievement and reward. David French notes that a number of Army units, including the Army Ordnance Corps and Tank Corps, received a “Royal” title after the First World War “in recognition of their recent service and in expectation that it would help sustain morale and recruiting in the future.”²² In this context, servicewomen were justified in interpreting their permanent services as a reward for their good work.

Outside the military context, this dynamic echoes the way women’s suffrage was discussed and presented in the aftermath of the First World War. Women gained the vote (in a limited way) in 1918, and, in historian Nicoletta Gullace’s words, “the idea that women’s suffrage was granted for loyal wartime service was long regarded as axiomatic by contemporaries and historians alike.”²³ Although more recent scholarship has complicated this straightforward link, nevertheless, the powerful example of the First World War and women’s suffrage set certain expectations about both the role of women in total war and about the outcomes of war for society. In *Britain in the Century of Total War*, Arthur Marwick argues that after both the

²¹ Agreement on “Women’s Royal Army Corps” can be found in the minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee of Service Ministers, 23 Jan 1948, TNA:PRO DEFE 10/148. This meeting agrees that the WAAF’s new title will be RAF(W), a proposal that dates back at least a year. I have not found evidence of when or how WRAF was finally adopted but it seems certain it was chosen to align with WRAC and WRNS, and may well have been the Prime Minister’s intervention; at any rate it did not come from the Air Ministry. WRAF was the name given to the women’s auxiliary to the air force in the First World War.

²² David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 92.

²³ Nicoletta F. Gullace, *“The Blood of Our Sons”: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 169n12.

First and Second World Wars, women's participation was rewarded with a "symbol of female rights" – suffrage following the First World War, and equal pay following the Second.²⁴ After the Second World War, amidst a larger set of understandings about the impact "the People's War" had had on social attitudes, it seems safe to say that many people expected women's war work to again effect some upward change in status. The Air Ministry's planning and policy discussions in particular were concerned with this dynamic, and they therefore brought it into the wider inter-service debate. A reserve might be sufficient for preparedness, but women "would undoubtedly resent this share being limited to service on a non-regular basis," a sentiment which might well undermine a reserve from the start.²⁵ Appearing properly appreciative was essential to retaining and recruiting good-quality personnel.

Nevertheless, material concerns – the concrete contribution women's services could make, and whether they would save money over an equivalent number of men – were the predominant factors under discussion. However much the women had "earned" ongoing recognition, nothing could happen without a clear understanding, justifiable to the Treasury and Parliament, of the benefits to be gained from permanent services. The War Office, Admiralty, and Air Ministry all identified a manpower shortage as the major deciding factor in considering the future of the women's services. As the Auxiliary Under Secretary wrote in January of 1945, this was "not primarily a feminine question, but a question of combined man and woman power requirements" and the first step therefore must be an evaluation of necessary male strength in peacetime.²⁶ By the end of the war, the directors of personnel in

²⁴ Harold L. Smith, "The Problem of 'Equal Pay for Equal Work' in Great Britain during World War II," *Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981): 672n105; Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change, 1900-1967* (Boston: Little Brown, 1968), 294.

²⁵ Defence Committee brief, 10 May 1946, TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824.

²⁶ Note by RC Richards, 25 Jan 1943, TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824.

the War Office and Air Ministry were convinced that “while money was a pressing problem for the time being... taking a long term view we should have, as a nation, to think in terms of man-hours instead of money.”²⁷ Meanwhile, the Directors of the ATS and the WAAF reported that their women were “constantly” asking whether they would be able to continue serving in peacetime.²⁸ Women had helped make up the manpower shortage during the war in dramatic fashion; it seemed logical to think they would be able to ease the situation in peacetime.

The structural relationships between men’s and women’s forces devised in the late 1940s were fundamental to the way women experienced military careers in the following decades. The military was made up of a number of organizations in addition to the regular force: auxiliaries, reserves, volunteers, youth corps and observer corps all played their parts at various points. Women regulars were a new departure and it was not a foregone conclusion how they would fit into the larger scheme; for instance, would pay raises for soldiers automatically apply to women or would they have to be separately decided? This fundamental issue had various aspects that will inform multiple parts of this dissertation but initially the question centered on the legal status of the new forces. Whereas the Air Ministry chose to stress the equality of airmen and airwomen, the War Office took the opposite approach and confirmed the separatist principle it had established during the war.

The RAF had long prided itself on its meritocratic culture, supposedly the natural character of a service built around modern technology, and this became an important guiding principle

²⁷ Air Council Conclusions of Meeting 1(46), 15 Jan 1946, TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824.

²⁸ Minutes of the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems, 31 May 1945, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

in the development of the WRAF.²⁹ As early as 1944, the Committee on the Manning of the Post-war Royal Air Force had made plans for an integrated RAF comprising both men and women. Its Sixth Interim Report summarized the rationale behind the formation of a permanent WAAF, included a memorandum from senior WAAF officers suggesting questions to be settled, and outlined some basic policies as a starting point for discussion. The report prioritizes gender equality by presenting “full and cordial co-operation and reciprocal trust” between male and female personnel as a major goal of a permanent service. One reason offered in favor of retaining the WAAF is to combat “antagonism and prejudice in the Service against the introduction of women.” A “lack of understanding on the part of RAF officers of how to command and administer WAAF personnel” during the war had caused “difficulties” which would have to be eradicated in order to build long-term efficiency. Furthermore, the committee declared that “public opinion should be educated and accustomed to the continued employment of women in the Services.”³⁰

A group of senior WAAF officers made a number of suggestions in this report which were incorporated into policy. In a document appended to the Sixth Interim Report, the Director of the WAAF argues that women must, at the most basic level, be entered into the proposed service on the same terms and in the same way as men. The women’s service should be “legally constituted as part of the Air Forces under the Air Force Act,” and its personnel should be attested as members under the same disciplinary code as the RAF. Moreover, “a WAAF officer should have the same status as a male officer of HM Forces” and “have mutual

²⁹ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); John James, *The Paladins: A Social History of the RAF up to the Outbreak of World War II* (London: Macdonald, 1990).

³⁰ Sixth Interim Report of the Committee Appointed by the Air Member for Personnel to Discuss the Policy for the Manning of the Post-War Royal Air Force, n.d. [Dec 1944], TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824.

powers of command over airmen and airwomen.”³¹ This fundamental equalizing move was incorporated into the Manning Committee’s “Notes on the Basis of a Post-war Regular Women’s Service” which opened with a definition of the legal basis of such a service in the following terms:

If a regular force is to be maintained, it is considered that the balance of advantage would lie in constituting this force as part of the RAF and bringing it under the Air Force (Constitution) Act and the Air Force Act. This would mean that in law the position of women members of the Service would be identical with that of male members, and the implications of this fact would be brought to the notice of all women entrants before attestation or appointment to a commission.

The radical reorganization being proposed is perhaps best exemplified by the closing sentence of the Note, and therefore of the report as a whole:

Special instructions will no doubt be necessary to govern the position of officers and airwomen married to other members of the RAF.³²

In the new RAF envisioned by the Manning Committee, there are no essential difficulties with employing men and women on the same footing; even the prospect of members of the service being able to be married to one another can simply be addressed through regulations. There is no sense here that this would be absurd or unthinkable. The Air Ministry carried this vision of normalized female service into its participation in inter-service discussions. Although language like this does not figure in War Office or Admiralty discussions, a joint proposal to the Defence Committee declared that “the employment of women on a full time basis should come to be regarded as a natural incident of service life.”³³

The War Office’s discussions turned on a different set of assumptions and priorities. Unlike the WAAF, the ATS had been organized on a principle of strict separatism, and this was a guiding factor in planning for the permanent service. Male and female officers alike felt

³¹ Appendix A, *ibid.*

³² Appendix B, *ibid.*

³³ Brief submitted to the Defence Committee, 10 May 1946, TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824.

that the ATS, “an essentially non-combatant volunteer force composed entirely of women” was clearly incompatible with the “highly disciplined fighting machine” that was the Army.³⁴ It would be “utterly impossible,” wrote Leslie Whateley, Director of the ATS from 1943-1946, “to try to run a women’s service on identical lines with those of a male organization.”³⁵ Just as senior WAAF officers expressed pride in being integrated with the RAF, senior ATS women were proud to have staked out their own place free from male interference. Whateley wrote in her memoir how she glad she was to have “a very much freer hand in running our own service” compared to the WAAF, without male officers meddling with and stifling the women.³⁶ When the Director of Military Training suggested in an early planning meeting that allowing women to join the Royal Artillery might be more efficient in future, Whateley insisted that she “was strongly in favour of the present system,” and was backed by “general agreement... that there would be endless difficulties if women in the Army were to belong to various corps and arms other than their own.”³⁷

The Admiralty took a different path to a different conclusion. As the Air Ministry and War Office decided that legislation establishing regular forces subject to military discipline would be needed, the Admiralty held back. It was unclear how the Navy would fare in the postwar budget, and moreover it was unclear how a small body of women who could not serve at sea could possibly be useful in addressing any manpower shortages. Simply having a reserve seemed like a more practical option given the particular features of naval service, and this view seems to have been accepted even outside the Admiralty. Nevertheless, senior naval authorities kept an eye on the other services and insisted on being kept abreast of

³⁴ J.M. Cowper, *The Auxiliary Territorial Service* (London: War Office, 1949), 25.

³⁵ Leslie Whateley, *As Thoughts Survive* (London: Hutchinson, [1949]), 49.

³⁶ Whateley, *As Thoughts Survive*, 50.

³⁷ Extract from the minutes of the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems, 31 May 1945, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

developments. The Naval Personnel Reconstruction Committee initially recommended retaining only a Volunteer Reserve with perhaps one or two permanent WRNS officers employed in the Admiralty to manage it.³⁸ Such a reserve would be able to “prevent the experimental period of 1939/40” and allow a larger force to be quickly assembled in the event of war.³⁹ However, further meetings made a case for establishing both a permanent service and a reserve, and this was the proposal put to the Board in 1946 for approval. The First Lord felt strongly that “we should not be too ready to follow [the] other services in this matter” and that the best solution for the WRNS was a “nucleus headquarters staff” overseeing “voluntary auxiliary local branches.”⁴⁰ The Board’s eventual recommendation in favor of a permanent service was largely put in negative terms, that is, that maintaining a permanent service would *not* negatively harm men’s prospects, would *not* incur a higher cost, etc. The only positive reason given was that a permanent service would allow for more rapid emergency expansion than a reserve.⁴¹ Judging from the file as a whole, the impetus for this decision appears to have been external: “if the other Services have permanent forces, the Admiralty will be under constant public and political pressure to follow suit.”⁴² The argument for the permanent WRNS was, in the end, that, as establishing a permanent service of 5,000 women would not actively hurt the Navy, and might conceivably save money, it was not worth risking the criticism that would come with being the only service not to retain its women.

Despite the important decision to make members of the WRAF and WRAC regulars, members of all three services would remain secondary to the men, since they were not to be

³⁸ Summary memorandum by George Dunn, 22 Dec 1945, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5725.

³⁹ Meeting on the Future of the Women’s Royal Naval Service, 8 Nov 1945, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5725.

⁴⁰ Telegram First Lord to Markham, 17 Apr 1946, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5725.

⁴¹ Telegram Markham to First Lord, 27 Apr 1946, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5725.

⁴² Meeting on the Future of the Women’s Royal Naval Service, 8 Nov 1945, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5725.

combatants and would not receive any kind of arms training. As Corinna Peniston-Bird and Penny Summerfield show in their study of women's involvement in the Home Guard, not everyone in wartime Britain agreed that armed national defense was inappropriate for women in an emergency situation.⁴³ It is unsurprising therefore that the question of small arms training came up in the early days of permanent service. In 1948, Mary Tyrwhitt, then the Director of the ATS, proposed that the time was right to "define the basic function of a woman in the Army qua soldier," and specifically how "women could usefully contribute to active defence" so that they could "be regarded as an asset at all times instead of becoming a liability in the last resort."⁴⁴ This suggestion was taken up, although the idea that women ought to be trained for active defense was not well received initially:

There is no doubt that it would be distasteful, to the Army and to the British public in general, that women should be compulsorily trained in the use of arms, and without such compulsory training, the issue of arms in any circumstances would obviously not be sanctioned. Moreover, the political repercussions which would undoubtedly follow publication of such a policy could only lead to unfortunate misconceptions at Home and abroad, as to the true function of the WRAC. Neither the Army nor the nation are yet sufficiently accustomed to the idea of women in the fighting Services for it to be safe to adopt a course of action which might be misconstrued.

This paper concluded that "the obvious occupation for women in a great Emergency is in succoring the wounded," and that women should therefore be trained in first aid.⁴⁵ However, a meeting held to discuss the policy proved far less dismissive of the original idea. Here Tyrwhitt received support from the Army's Director of Personnel Services:

He had previously been against the arming of women in any circumstances, but his examination of the proposals for the new Geneva Conventions, and the knowledge of the events of the last war in the Far East, etc, had convinced him that it would not be

⁴³ Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University, 2007).

⁴⁴ Minute DATS to AG, 22 Apr 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13173.

⁴⁵ Draft paper "The Defensive Role in War of the Women's Royal Army Corps," n.d., circulated 21 Jul 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13173.

right to send women into a Theatre of War unless they had been taught to defend themselves.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the medical authorities doubted that women could be trained to be useful first aid responders without a much longer period of training than was practical. The meeting thus concluded that a paper should be drawn up proposing to introduce a scheme of voluntary weapon training for women to be put to the Executive Committee of the Army Council; the Air Ministry and Admiralty representatives present declared themselves supportive of this proposal. However, in the end, the measure was rejected and the WRAC remained a firmly non-combatant corps.⁴⁷ The only opportunity servicewomen had to shoot a gun was in sport competitions, and women's role in emergencies would frequently be to fill in for civilian staff. The fact that women would not be able to defend themselves with a gun seems to have been fairly unremarkable to contemporaries on the whole. Winifred Phillips, who spent 22 years in the WRAC after signing up in 1948, commented in her memoir that "if I had been asked to shoot or use a gun I'd never have countenanced joining up. To me, being in the army didn't have to mean killing or injuring anyone."⁴⁸ Further chapters will elaborate on how women felt that they were a part of the military despite being barred from combat.

The women's services came into being on February 1, 1949, and although they survived into the 1990s, there was certainly criticism and resistance. Military men's feelings on the subject are hard to generalize about, but there were clearly some who felt that the women's services were undesirable. Some objections rested directly on gendered ideas about how women ought to behave: one Lieutenant Colonel told a Treasury inspector that "a large

⁴⁶ Minutes of meeting held 5 Nov 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13173.

⁴⁷ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 149-152.

⁴⁸ Winifred Phillips, *Mum's Army: Love and Adventure from the NAAFI to Civvy Street*, with Shannon Kyle (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 94.

section of the WRAC are ‘not normal in any way and misfits from civil life’.⁴⁹ Those who refrained from making such personal judgments could harbor “grave doubts whether it was a really sound idea” to invest in a permanent women’s corps.⁵⁰ A civilian advertising firm reported similar attitudes in the RAF: “It was several times asserted in my hearing by senior RAF officers that eventually the WRAF must be discontinued, and that this would not be a bad thing.”⁵¹

A scene from the 1961 WRAF recruiting film *Flight of Decision* suggests that women could expect to come across such attitudes in their work. The protagonist, an unnamed WRAF officer, is deciding whether to leave the service or accept a permanent commission, and the film portrays three factors in making this decision in the form of flashbacks. The first depicts the officer’s satisfaction in her job, and the second, the friends she’s made. In the third flashback, she remembers working for a brusque commanding officer in Singapore, and being determined to prove that “women can be efficient too.” Nevertheless, although she wins this man over, she complains to her female superior that she’s considering leaving because she’s “fed up with being taken for granted.” The female superior acknowledges her frustration but chides her for wanting an unrealistic amount of praise and being too ready to quit in the face of opposition.⁵² *Flight of Decision* portrays misogyny as the product of ignorance and inexperience: if women buck up and work hard, they can overcome such attitudes with the undeniable fact of a job well done. Male skepticism is a challenge, the film suggests, but a

⁴⁹ Report on visit to Western Command, 24 Jun 1949, TNA:PRO T 213/126.

⁵⁰ Report on visit to Eastern Command, 23, May 1949, TNA:PRO T 213/126.

⁵¹ This report was compiled in hopes of launching a larger-scale market research project. It is not clear whether it was invited in any way, and does not appear to have been well received. Masius and Fergusson Limited, *WRAF: A Summing Up of the Basic Recruitment Problems*, Feb 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 20/9659.

⁵² *Flight of Decision*, IWM Film collection, COI 352; production documentation and scripts held at TNA:PRO INF 6/882.

worthy one. This diagnosis is reminiscent of the Committee on the Manning of the Post-War RAF's report, but does not quite match up with the complaints we have seen recorded above. Naysayers focused on a structural criticism that the money spent on women's forces would be better spent on men. The efficiency or ability of individual women was all well and good, but in the big picture some men at least were unconvinced that the women's services weren't just an expensive social experiment.

Within the government and service departments there were voices of doubt about the usefulness and value of the women's services. The Treasury, perhaps unsurprisingly, was one bastion of such skepticism. As the WRAC and WRAF came into being, the Treasury strongly opposed expanding the number of high-ranking (and thus highly-paid) posts available to women, a problem that was particularly acute in the Army. An inspector was sent to evaluate the posts being proposed for higher rank and determine whether it was justified in each case. His conclusions were pessimistic:

I imagine it would not be possible, at this stage at any rate, and without backing from much higher authority, to press either for [the WRAC's] complete elimination, its partial replacement by civilian units, or, at any rate, its concentration into fewer pockets of staff. But we ought certainly to bear these considerations very much in mind when any question affecting the WRAC comes up for decision.⁵³

Indeed, in 1956 we again find the Treasury advocating "serious consideration... [of] whether the Women's Services ought not to be abolished."⁵⁴ The context of this fresh evaluation of the women's services' existence was a larger restructuring of the armed forces in the face of the Cold War and the end of National Service. In the late 1940s, when National Service was introduced, military and government leaders anticipated that the next war would look substantially like the last one and would not start for another ten years. Under these

⁵³ Conclusions of Treasury inspection of senior WRAC officers, 12 July 1949, TNA:PRO T 213/126.

⁵⁴ Memorandum by A Johnston, 17 Dec 1956, TNA:PRO T 225/830.

circumstances, a relatively small set of regular forces training conscripts who would then fill out reserves seemed like a practical organizational strategy. However, by 1954 planners were thinking in terms of thermonuclear rather than conventional warfare, a much faster-paced and more devastating prospect which would not allow for the kind of build-up that had been taken for granted.⁵⁵

The 1957 Defence White Paper laid out an overhauled defense policy meant to address this new situation. It called for smaller forces operating the latest technology: a model that was driven partly by the “New Strategic Concept” of nuclear warfare, but more importantly by the political desire to reduce defense spending without reducing Britain’s profile on the world stage.⁵⁶ It might not have contained much that was strictly novel, but its policies “would slay whole herds of sacred cows,” for instance calling for army regiments to be amalgamated.⁵⁷ What the 1957 White Paper did not do is spend time outlining the role of military women. “This document of seventy-three paragraphs analyses the manpower requirements of the new defence policy in some detail... It does not mention women once.”⁵⁸ This was not only disappointing and insulting to the women, it set up doubts about the future of the women’s services.

For many observers in the forces as well as in the media, the omission was a clear indication that the women’s services were going to be cut. The *Sunday Dispatch* ran a scathing article under the headline “Are These Women Really Necessary?” The article led with two questions and an assertion: “Could men do the jobs that women in the Services now

⁵⁵ David French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War: The British Army and Military Policy, 1945-1971* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2012), 36-46, 153-7.

⁵⁶ French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War*, 160-1.

⁵⁷ French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War*, 159, 164, 171.

⁵⁸ Para 217, Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Grigg Committee), Cmd 545, Oct 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1238.

perform? Could civilians do this work? Mr. Duncan Sandys, the Minister of Defence has been asking these questions.”⁵⁹ Senior women officers complained that their corps were suddenly viewed as on the way out. The Grigg Report on recruiting acknowledged this backlash as evidence of a “lack of emphasis on the need for Women’s Services in time of peace”: there was “little doubt” that the paper had caused “quite erroneously, an impression that women were no longer wanted in the Services.”⁶⁰

However “erroneous,” the ambivalence sensed by critics of the women’s services was real. Part of the women officers’ annoyance at the flap over the White Paper was the lack of clear and immediate rebuttal. The Ministry of Defence was hesitant to issue a formal denial of the rumors; in relation to the *Sunday Dispatch* article mentioned above:

It appears that the article was examined fairly closely in the War Office by the Adjutant General, Director WRAC, and Director of Public Relations, all of whom felt that although there were some inaccuracies in it (particularly in the looseness with which some of the statistics were handled) there was more than a grain of truth in some of the allegations. The War Office therefore felt that it would not be in their own real interests to make any attempt to reply.⁶¹

Since the case for abolition was so often based on the expense of hiring women, it seems that the desire to avoid engaging on those grounds, combined with a certain uncomfortable level of agreement with the critics, prolonged the uncertainty about the women’s future.

Nevertheless, direct proposals to abolish the services never gained much traction within the service departments. As mentioned above, the Treasury remained most critical of the WRAC’s administrative overhead and the possibility of abolishing it was raised again in 1956 at a meeting between Treasury and War Office officials. It was not well received; one comment on the minutes sent to the Treasury observed that “the amount of space given to my

⁵⁹ 21 Jul 1957.

⁶⁰ Para. 217, Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Cmnd 545), Oct 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1238.

⁶¹ Memorandum by Mr Locke, 8 Nov 1957, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1918.

suggested abolition of the WRAC is rather amusing!”⁶² As in 1949, “backing from much higher authority” would have been needed to overcome the high-level support for the women’s forces.⁶³

As it happened, in the aftermath of the 1957 White Paper the forces made a new commitment to the women’s services. The service ministers announced plans to expand the WRAF and WRAC, and women were included in new recruiting strategies. Their role was adapted to fit the new profile of the fighting forces, as the following chapters will explore in greater detail. Against the expectations of many within and without the military, then, the women’s services survived major restructuring. Nevertheless, the women’s services in 1962 were not quite living up to the hopes of the 1940s. Women had not come out en masse in peacetime as they had during the war and recruiting numbers seemed permanently slumped. Ten years earlier the War Office had already concluded that while “women, in very large numbers, will come forward in a spirit of service in war, without coercion,” these same women were “hesitant” without an emergency, and in fact there was “quite a low limit in peace-time on the numbers of volunteers who will come forward.”⁶⁴ Traditional concerns about the impact of a military job on marriage prospects and femininity seemed to be harming recruiting, and recruiting materials shifted to address these concerns.

Still, the survival of the women’s services must be viewed as significant, both in 1949 and in 1957. The rhetoric around them was still optimistic, and most importantly, it still stressed the ongoing, permanent, need for women’s contributions to the armed forces. The idea that

⁶² Comments on the Record of a Meeting held in the Permanent Under Secretary of State’s Room, War Office, 21 Dec 1956, TNA:PRO T 225/830.

⁶³ Conclusions of Treasury inspection of senior WRAC officers, 12 July 1949, TNA:PRO T 213/126.

⁶⁴ Report of the WRAC Working Party (Lucas Committee), Feb 1952, TNA:PRO WO 216/521.

women had a place in the armed forces had been established and solidified at the highest levels. Sociologist Mady Segal theorizes that in order for women to be able to be included in the military outside of a national emergency, “either the military has to be perceived (by policymakers and the populace) as transformed to make it more compatible with how women are (or are perceived to be), or women have to be perceived as changing in ways that make them more seemingly suited to military service.”⁶⁵ Postwar Britain met both of these conditions. The women’s forces were conceived of within the service departments as part of and indicative of changed circumstances, and accordingly the service departments presented the women’s services to the public by appealing to those changed circumstances. The postwar British women’s services were relatively uncontroversial because the rhetoric and politics of the Second World War made these changed circumstances seem undeniable. One might hypothesize that resistance to the women’s forces was strongest among male regulars who wished to re-establish pre-war conditions, as these were the people most likely to deny or reject social changes wrought by war. The expansion of women’s military roles would have to wait for further conspicuous social changes, such as the reemergence of a vocal feminist movement. In the meantime, however, the women’s forces spent the 1950s seeking to more precisely define their role and identity.

⁶⁵ Mady Wechsler Segal, “Women’s Military Roles Cross-Nationally: Past, Present, and Future,” *Gender and Society* 9, no. 6 (1995): 758.

2. Gender, Authority, and Power: Officers and Discipline

In 1954, a columnist for the *Daily Express* began his report on meeting the new Director of the Women's Royal Army Corps by recalling his attitude toward women in the army during the Second World War:

I thought of the fury I used to feel back in 1939 when I had to salute a woman officer. We all used to feel the same. An instinctive rage that women should have invaded that world of uniform.¹

This author's anger at having to acknowledge a women's superiority points to an important issue in thinking about women's military careers. The military's use of female labor dates back centuries; women have always had an important role in equipping, feeding, housing, and otherwise providing for armies. As Lucy Noakes argues, the innovation made during the world wars was to incorporate of this labor into the organized ranks of the military, so that women were no longer civilian camp followers but uniformed service personnel under state control. The permanent women's services certainly fit into this interpretation, with one important new development: women were now able to be commissioned as regular officers. This female intrusion into a role that was inherently associated with power and authority was potentially radical.

Received military wisdom upheld the importance of officers for an efficient fighting force, and women officers were key to the success and survival of the permanent women's services. They made up the professional core of the services and posed one of the foremost challenges to the masculine identity of military service. Women officers were figures of authority, and their ability to give orders and hand out punishments conceivably put them on a par with men. In the WRAC and the WRAF, women officers

¹ William Hickey, "Express Diary: Oh, there's something about THIS soldier!", *Daily Express* 13 Mar 1954.

held the King's (or Queen's) Commission in the same way as men did. However, although women took on a new kind of role as commissioned military officers, they did not take on a new kind of authority; and although Army and Air Force women's commissions created a crucial difference between them and women officers of the WRNS, their roles were perhaps not as different as this legal distinction might imply. The role of the woman officer in the 1950s was very much a product of the early twentieth century woman's movement. She was envisioned as a professional woman who specialized in the management of other women; an expert in her own public, feminine sphere. Whatever other qualifications she may have, her primary function was to care for, guide, and protect the women in her care, and to administer punishment and advice so that no woman would have to be dealt with, or dealt with solely, in such sensitive moments by a man.

The women directors strongly believed that good officers were essential to the successful launch of their new services, because they attributed the disorganized and often chaotic formation of the women's auxiliaries at the beginning of the Second World War to a lack of good, professional officers. In the early days, women leaders for the auxiliaries tended to come from the social elite, with titled ladies appearing as the natural candidates to help organize their local auxiliary unit. This had been the accepted practice among male reservists for generations, but in the new and unfamiliar realm of women's military work, it led to disorganization and disagreement.² Rapid expansion and periods of high demand also made "the whole business of appointments... a 'see-saw' affair" throughout the war, as standards rose and fell according to the urgency with which new

² Barbara Green, *Girls in Khaki: A History of the ATS in the Second World War* (Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2012), 16-17.

officers were needed.³ It was difficult for the directors to provide thorough training or root out problem officers while the war was still going on, but they recognized that the quality of leadership in their services was not always as high as they could wish. The introduction of the peacetime forces offered a chance for a new beginning. To this end, any officers who wanted to remain in the service had to reapply for a commission in the permanent service. The directorate staff at the Air Ministry and War Office then had the opportunity to more or less hand-choose their officers; in some cases they offered permanent commissions to women who had been demobbed already.⁴

Women military officers in the 1950s were occupying a new kind of public role, but they were not exercising a new kind of authority. The “good officer” the women’s services insisted on recruiting was primarily characterized by her potential to be a good “woman manager” or manager of women, rather than her social standing or technical skills. The woman officer was conceptualized as a carer, and as such she represented another manifestation of the maternalistic strand in the women’s movement. Indeed, many of her duties and responsibilities corresponded exactly to those of a social or welfare worker in the civilian world. In part, this can be attributed to direct historical links between those professions and the development of military leadership roles for women.

The entry of middle-class women into professional work in the late nineteenth century was largely in the realm of “social” work, underpinned by a widespread belief that women had special skills or a special capacity that allowed them to care for the needier

³ Air Publication 3234: *The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force*, 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 10/5546.

⁴ Dame Felicity Hill, manuscript “The Sure Possession,” IWM 86/25/1 (P), 88-89.

members of society. Urbanization and the increased role of the state in providing charity and regulating the lives and work of the poor pushed affluent women out of a realm they had dominated for generations.⁵ Although it would be untrue to say that the suffragist movement was a purely middle-class phenomenon, it is nevertheless significant to note that one of the key ways in which middle-class women asserted their public authority was by intervening in matters related to working-class women and families. Whether they were campaigning for protective legislation, engaging in “rescue work” among prostitutes, or providing wholesome entertainment for factory girls, middle-class women were making a case that they knew better than men how to care for the poor and needy.⁶

Class-based claims were supported by beliefs about femininity and the kinds of knowledge that were supposed to be “innate” to women. The idea that women had a special capacity to care for others, on the small scale in the home and on the large scale in creating policy, meshed well with a wide range of political, religious, and feminist beliefs.⁷ As Lisa Tickner observes, “suffragists were keen to argue the compatibility of motherhood and vote,” both in the sense that laws and policies impacted women in the home, and in the sense that the qualities that made women good housekeepers would

⁵ Dorothy Thompson, “Women, Work and Politics in Nineteenth-Century England: The Problem of Authority,” in *Equal or Different: Women’s Politics 1800-1914*, ed. Jane Rendell (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 57-81.

⁶ Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 1980); Carolyn Malone, *Women’s Bodies and Dangerous Trades in England* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2003); Angela Woollacott, “From Moral to Professional Authority” *Journal of Women’s History* 10 (1998): 87; Ruth Livesey, “The Politics of Work” *Women’s History Review* 13, no. 2 (2004): 249.

⁷ Seth Koven, “Borderlands: Women: Voluntary Action, and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840 to 1914,” in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, eds. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 94-135.

make them good citizens as well.⁸ For conservatives, this ideology made no claims that women could or should compete equally with men in the same realms of activity; on the contrary, it could justify seeking out types of work that would benefit from uniquely feminine traits.⁹ Identifying areas that needed the input of women experts was a way of opening up new possibilities for women's employment in a wide range of exciting new fields without essentially challenging ideas about the natures of men and women.

Women's developing professional authority in the early twentieth century was thus based on both gendered and classed assumptions. Just as mistresses of households had claimed moral authority over their servants in their special feminine domestic sphere, professional women could claim a similar authority over working-class women in factories or poor neighborhoods based on both common femininity and social difference.¹⁰ For example, women became part of the justice system in no small part because they could help to deal with female offenders.¹¹ During the interwar period, women campaigned to be able to join the police on a variety of grounds, including the special perspective women could bring to juvenile cases, and by the analogy to the

⁸ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 158-9.

⁹ Mitzi Auchterlonie, *Conservative Suffragists: The Women's Vote and the Tory Party* (New York: I.B Taurus, 2007), 43-8.

¹⁰ Anne Summers, "Public Functions, Private Premises: Female Professional Identity and the Domestic Service Paradigm in Britain, c. 1850-1930," in *Borderlines: Gender and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930*, ed. Billie Melman (London: Routledge, 1998), 353-76; Ruth Livesey, "The Politics of Work: Feminism, Professionalisation, and Women Inspectors of Factories and Workshops," *Women's History Review* 13, no. 2 (2004): 233-262; Angela Woollacott, "From Moral to Professional Authority," 85-111.

¹¹ Anne Logan, "Professionalism and the Impact of England's First Women Justices, 1920-1950," *The Historical Journal* 49 no. 3 (2006): 841.

acknowledged female field of social work. Once instituted, women police became specialists in types of crime involving women, children, and the home.¹²

Female officership fits directly into this development of authoritative careers for middle-class women. The women who shaped the First World War women's corps drew directly on their own personal histories as women claiming authority, whether as philanthropists, suffragists, or as women in charge of servants in a household. They forged a new concept of "female soldiering" incorporating feminized military virtues and maternalist authority.¹³ This First World War innovation was carried into the Second World War auxiliary forces when so many women, particularly in leadership roles, returned to help re-form the services. By the end of the Second World War, this concept of women's leadership was a tradition unto itself. Thus, into the late 1950s, a model of female officership prevailed that was closely related to an archetype of women's public authority that had first arisen in the first decades of the twentieth century. If male officers were fundamentally men who could lead other men into battle, women officers were fundamentally women who would ensure the well-being and efficiency of the military's female workforce. When senior officials talked about needing to recruit good officers, they meant women who would aspire to a responsible, professional job comparable to civilian fields open to middle-class women: "personnel management, social services, local government and the like."¹⁴ This was a specifically female task, different from the

¹² Louise Jackson, *Women Police: Gender, Welfare, and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006).

¹³ Krisztina Robert, "Gendering Class, Patriotism, and Militarism: The Women's Corps Movement in Britain During and After World War I," (PhD dissertation, University of Houston, 1998), 272-95.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Meeting of the WRAF Recruiting Advisory Panel, 21 Dec 1959, TNA:PRO AIR 2/15201.

administration of men, due to the “recognized fact that the young woman of 18-20 needs more detailed care and supervision than her brother of the same age, and works better under efficient and sympathetic administration.”¹⁵ The concept of sympathy was central to the way women officers were expected to be effective in solving problems.

The three women’s services differed in size and in their particular relationship to their male service, however, and this shaped the particular qualities and problems of each officer corps. Broadly speaking, women officers could be employed in two basic types of role: woman management roles, in which a woman’s primary job was to take care of the problems of women non-officers; or “replacement” roles, in which a woman’s primary job was in a specialist field, and the woman was considered to be replacing a man.

Replacement roles might be in technical fields, which might require women to have scientific qualifications already when they joined. However, clerical roles could also be considered replacement as long as the work, for example, managing pay rolls, would have been done by a man. In the WRAC and the WRNS, although some women officers were employed in replacement roles, the majority were in woman management roles.

Figures compiled for the Executive Committee of the Army Council in 1952 showed that only 106 out of a total of 431 women officers were considered to be employed “in substitution of men”. Far more, 305 or 75%, were solely employed in administering women.¹⁶ The WRNS was much smaller, so that the specialist replacement officers made

¹⁵ DDWRAF to DDO, 5 Feb 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12604.

¹⁶ See Table 4. Draft ECAC Paper, “Project for Extending Limited Service Commissions to WRAC,” Jun 1952, TNA:PRO WO 32/15721.

up a larger percentage of the whole: 44% were considered to be employed in lieu of men, or 131 out of 298 total.¹⁷

The WRAF took a proudly different direction, with the Air Ministry deciding on a policy of “full integration” whereby all women officers would be both replacement and management officers. One of the first tasks of the postwar WRAF was to eliminate the “G” branch, which had been dedicated to woman administration, and to introduce a system whereby women officers, trained in some replacement trade, administered airwomen as a secondary duty. Women officers could be posted for a tour to a large base for full time administration, but all were members of some other RAF branch such as Secretarial or Equipment. Stations with more than 171 airwomen were to have one officer on full-time administrative duties in addition to at least three “women officers other than medical or dental available on the station.”¹⁸ WRAF officers of any trade other than medical or dental were expected to serve regular two or two and a half year tours of duty in these full-time administrative posts, and, in consequence, all officers therefore needed to be trained in administration as well as their particular “substitution” trade.¹⁹

This policy meant that there would be no WRAF officers who spent their entire career solely employed in the administration of women, but rather every officer would be assigned these duties as a central part of her workload. The WRAF put an increasing emphasis on the administration of WRAF personnel over the 1950s, insisting that dual responsibility should not mean non-replacement duties were unimportant. Officer training

¹⁷ See Table 5. Statistics on WRNS trades, sent to the Ministry of Defence by the Admiralty 6 Nov 1953, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1918.

¹⁸ Memorandum to all commands, Mar 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12604.

¹⁹ Ibid; Minutes of a meeting on the administration of airwomen, 2 Mar 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12604.

and recruitment materials did not put any less stress on this aspect of a woman officer's job in the WRAF than in the other two services. The 1959 recruiting film *Flight of Decision* shows a woman officer dealing with a belligerent airwoman; when the airwoman refuses to confide in her and storms out, the officer reflects that "I knew I had to try again to help her, because that's what it means to be an officer, you have to care about girls like Betty Wills." Although there were important differences between the way the WRAF organized women officers' duties and the approach taken by the WRAC and WRNS, the special duty of the woman officer to care for and administer her fellow women was nevertheless very much in evidence.

Regardless of her service, an officer's woman management duties extended beyond paperwork, inspections and requisitions to a personal level of care and solicitude. A 1965 WRAC recruiting film depicts a fictional officer "Anne" going about her duties:

Many girls in the WRAC work in the Ministry of Defence as typists and so on. What Anne had to do was to go round and see their bosses and make sure everyone was happy.

The voiceover later explains:

One of the things Anne has to do is look after these girls who work in her section and help them cope with their personal problems. These may range from a broken heart requiring sympathy to a broken home needing full use of the WRAC's welfare facilities.²⁰

This business of "going around" and establishing individual contact with female other ranks was the bread-and-butter of the woman officer's role. Only by investing her time in learning about her charges could an officer determine what needed to be done to improve their morale and physical and emotional health, whether the solution was organizing a hockey team or petitioning the Commanding Officer about a problem in working

²⁰ *Hers to Command* (1965), IWM Film COI 304.

conditions. As Senior WRNS Officer in Plymouth, Marion Kettlewell spent much of her time visiting about nine different area establishments where WRNS were stationed, performing kit inspections as well as checking up on working conditions. When she was posted to Portsmouth she successfully negotiated a messing schedule that would allow the women to eat lunch alongside the men, eliminating a long trip back to the WRNS barracks in the middle of the day; she was also given responsibility for running a women's badminton program. Her duties in both places also included raising money for the women's welfare fund, something she learned about from the Admiral's wife in Plymouth.²¹

Discussions about problems like out-of-wedlock pregnancies and desertion often concluded with a renewed call to officers to establish close, caring relationships with their subordinates. The first duty of the WRNS Unit Officer, according to the service's disciplinary code, was the "maintenance of the good order and well being of the WRNS personnel in her Unit, keeping in close touch with those in her charge and being at all times ready to advise and help them" while demonstrating "firmness, tact, and sympathy, coupled with unswerving fairness."²² At a Senior Officers' Conference in 1950, the DWRNS considered "the tragic thing in so many cases" of unwed pregnancy was that the girls did not feel they could bring their problems to their officers, and she mused "whether there might be too much formality in the relations between officers and

²¹ Kettlewell's tutorial in fundraising raises questions about the relationship between women officers and officers' wives, the latter being frequently relied upon to perform demi-official duties without pay, as Cynthia Enloe noted. The relationship deserves more research. Marion Kettlewell interview, recorded May 1998 IWM cat#18220; Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women's Lives* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1983), 48-9.

²² §0107, BR1077/1953 *Regulations & Instructions for the Women's Royal Naval Service*, 1953, NMM DAU/103/4

ratings... In fact, do Unit Officers really know their ratings?"²³ A good officer would take it as "her duty to get to know the ratings; their good and bad qualities, to encourage their ambition, arrange classes for them, and ensure that they realized that she was interested in them" in order to be "forewarned if there was any trouble or discontent brewing."²⁴ In 1957, the deputy director of the WRAF stated it as an "established principle" that "women serving in the RAF must at all times have a woman officer accessible regarding all personal and welfare matters" and that women officers "must have the time to gain the confidence of the airwomen."²⁵ In 1950, the Air Ministry reminded all commands that if a WRAF administrative officer "does not accept her share of the responsibility [for identifying and dealing with pregnant airwomen] or is not the type with whom one can discuss these matters with the necessary frankness, she is not up to her job and should be made the subject of a report under KR 332."²⁶

The female leaders of the women's services wanted their officer training to be at least closely analogous to men's, if it couldn't be identical, but cost and questions of prestige hindered this goal. Administrative women officers represented a major expenditure on personnel who were extraneous to the male organization, and given the limited funds available to the military, there was pressure to reduce this expenditure. The leaders of the women's services fought for the idea that women officers deserved a full course of training, but had to settle for shorter courses. In sketching out her proposal for new, expanded officer training, the Director of the ATS in 1948 made a case for replacing the

²³ Notes of the Senior WRNS Officers' Conference, 9 Feb 1950, National Museum of the Royal Navy 1988.350 (28.1).

²⁴ Punctuation as in original. Notes of the WRNS Officers' Conference, morning session, 11 May 1950, National Museum of the Royal Navy 1988.350 (28.1).

²⁵ DDWRAF to DDOEst(1), 5 Feb 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12604.

²⁶ Air Member for Personnel to all commands, 24 Jun 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14082.

fourteen-week wartime course with a nine-month course complete with general education classes:

So long as an obviously 56srael training is considered sufficient for the commissioning of WRAC Regular Officers – compared with the 18 months training provided for Regular Military Officers – the type of potential officer urgently required is unlikely to regard the WRAC as a sound peace-time profession.²⁷

This nine-month scheme was criticized as “too ambitious” given that “Sandhurst is training cadets who may rise to the highest positions in the Army... the WRAC officer will be restricted to a far more limited career mainly on routine administrative duties... the cadet’s head would be filled with masses of unnecessary detail.”²⁸ After much further discussion, in which the argument that “there was no need to give young women the general education which was given to cadets at the RMA Sandhurst” continued to carry weight, the Army Council finally approved a nine-month course which included lessons in history and music appreciation, although the courses in English and mathematics were heavily slanted toward the practical business of writing memos and balancing mess accounts.²⁹ The WRNS similarly increased their officer training from eight weeks to three months in the permanent service.³⁰ Woman management, although an essential task, was not something the financial authorities thought merited much training: in essence, the task of caring for fellow women was something that should come naturally.

²⁷ Proposal and outline syllabus for expanded OCTU training, circulated by DATS, 17 Jun 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13514.

²⁸ Comments by DF(A), 10 Sep 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13514.

²⁹ ECAC minutes 26 Aug 1949; memo from DWRAC to Commandant of WRAC School of Instruction, 22 Nov 1949; WRAC School of Instruction Syllabus, Jun 1951, TNA:PRO WO 32/13514.

³⁰ Minutes of the Senior WRNS Officers’ Conference, 21 Apr 1948, National Museum of the Royal Navy, 1988.350 (28.2); Recruiting Booklet, *Serve with the Royal Navy in the WRNS*, n.d. ca 1955, National Maritime Museum DAU/149/1.

Anxiety over the cost that women officers added to the budget was sharpened by the limited functionality of those officers. It was difficult for male officers and civil servants to regard woman administration as equally demanding as male officers' roles; regimental administration, which was usually only one part of a male officer's career, was the entire task of most WRAC and WRNS officers. Certainly the Treasury was unimpressed with the large numbers of WRAC officers they were being asked to bankroll in 1949, particularly given that the WRAF had a lower ratio of other ranks to officers.³¹ Senior women defended their officers, pointing out the special challenges they faced. WRAC officers had "the extremely difficult task, which we do not demand from a male officer, of being responsible for the command, administration, and well-being of women who are employed by somebody else."³² They were also far more visible and responsible from the beginning, as "on commissioning an officer of the WRAC cannot as is usual with the men be posted to any large concentration as a battalion where there are experienced Warrant Officers and NCOs who would be able to help her."³³ The fact remained, however, that women officers were expected to specialize in an activity that was understood to be quintessentially feminine and thus essentially un-military.

The fact that all women officers were expected to be "substitution" officers was a key point not only in establishing the WRAF's distinctive identity but also in convincing the Treasury that the WRAF was, on the whole, a money-saving measure. Nevertheless, Directors of the WRAF throughout this period resisted the suggestion that money could be further saved by reducing or even eliminating women's administrative posts

³¹ Comment by JJ Clark on letter Ottley to Clough, 13 Jan 1949, TNA:PRO T 213/126.

³² Meeting to discuss OCTU training, 16 Nov 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13514.

³³ Comments by DWRAC (Tyrwhitt) on draft ECAC paper on OCTU, 2 Jun 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/1351.

altogether. On the contrary, they wanted to see a greater investment in woman management by giving administrative posts to higher-ranking officers. Concerns about the greater pressure of work placed on “dual responsibility” officers, first raised in 1949, came up again in 1954 at a meeting of senior WRAF administrative officers. The specific complaint here was that newly commissioned officers were being placed in dual responsibility posts and then becoming overwhelmed by their duties, resulting in bad consequences all around but not least the humiliation of having the Commanding Officer relieve her of some part of her duties. The Inspector of the WRAF investigated the issue and concluded that junior officers “lack the maturity and the experience of service life which are essential for anyone in charge of numbers of adult women with their own particular feminine problems;” her recommendations included upgrading the rank of WRAF administrative posts.³⁴ In her report on substitution officers, the Inspector also made the telling observation that

whilst some officers would most definitely resent being taken off the duties of their own branch, however small the chances of promotion, it is clear that others wishing to specialize in WRAF administration are all the more eager to do so as it seems to them that their careers in their own branch will be handicapped by virtue of the fact that they are women. This was particularly so in the Equipment and General Duties (Ground Section) branches.³⁵

Ultimately, in all three of the services, there was no route for advancement except through administration, as the Director of the WRNS made clear in 1948:

Director WRNS said it is not possible to provide more responsible jobs for Secretarial and other specialist officers as these are reserved for naval officers. There can therefore be no promotion in the specialist branches beyond Second

³⁴ Report No. 342: Survey by the Inspector of the WRAF into the Administration of WRAF Sections by WRAF Officers Filling Posts Established for Other Duties and also into the Employment of WRAF Officers Generally, 28 Jul 1955, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12604.

³⁵ Ibid.

Officer. The only avenue for further promotion is by way of administration – officers who wish to do so and who are recommended as suitable will be given the opportunity to take the administrative course, and thereafter, given experience in administrative work as and when possible.³⁶

The Directors of the women's services were at once important and marginal. Each service had a Director and a group of senior administrative officers who made up the top of the pyramid of women officers. The women Directors could be very influential. They often defended the principles of women managing women and the need for all enlisted women to have a competent woman officer at close range when proposals threatened these practices. They were also often key in ensuring that women were not overlooked in various schemes including pay raises and gratuities. When the Director of the WRAC, WRNS, or WRAF declared that a particular posting was unsuitable for women, she was generally listened to.

Because of the integration policy, the Director of the WRAF's position was more tenuous than her counterparts, because rather than having the final word on the policies affecting women in the air force, she instead gave advice. The essentially advisory nature of her role was determined at the outset of the permanent service, when Felicity Hanbury argued that the DWRAF should control all posting of WRAF officers since they would all have responsibility for administering women in the permanent service. This idea was firmly rejected as “a quite unacceptable case of the administrative tail wagging the substitution dog,” and the posting of women was kept within the existing (male) structure, albeit with the “full collaboration” of the Director and her staff.³⁷ The

³⁶ Notes on the Senior WRNS Officers' Conference, 9 Nov 1948, National Museum of the Royal Navy 1988.350 (28.2).

³⁷ Minute by DGP(I), 21 Jan 1948, and Minutes of a meeting between DGP(I), DGP(II), DWAAF, and D of P(B), 4 Feb 1948, TNA:PRO AIR 2/11882.

Director's role was therefore defined not as "queen bee" of women in her service but as an advisor, and while she was generally sent the files for policy discussions which might affect the WRAF, she and her staff sometimes had to assert themselves in order to avoid being excluded. In November 1955, when the RAF was in the process of introducing a new system of officer selection and building new facilities to house it, the Director was displeased to learn that building plans had been prepared for a new Ground Selection Centre that did not include accommodations for women. This was despite the fact that she and her staff had asserted earlier in the year that "the methods of selection applied to RAF candidates should also be applied to WRAF candidates and that therefore WRAF candidates should be catered for in the setting up of the centre."³⁸ Scribbled notes in the file documenting phone calls indicate that diligence was needed to avoid being left out of meetings. At the same time the Director was involved in a heated discussion with the Directorate of Selection over the degree of representation she should have on officer selection boards. "It appears that DDSel feels that the virginity of 'complete integration' is tainted if a woman's opinion is voiced in the processes of selection," commented Deputy Director Stephens on the matter.³⁹ In the end, the Ground Selection Centre was built with facilities to house women candidates, but DWRAF had to settle for contributing her opinion on individual women candidates through informal comments on files rather than through an *ex officio* seat on the selection board.

Women who worked in the Directorate seem to have experienced it as busy but diffuse. Felicity Hill described the role of Deputy Director as "a slightly nebulous post

³⁸ DDWRAF to DDSel, 11 May 1955, and DWRAF to DGM, 29 Nov 1955, TNA:PRO AIR 20/7886.

³⁹ DDWRAF to DWRAF, DWRAF Representation on PC Boards, n.d. but ca. Oct 1955, TNA:PRO AIR 20/7886

and for most officers who filled it... a rather unsatisfactory one.”⁴⁰ The Directorate’s advisory role was sometimes interpreted within the Air Ministry in somewhat unusual ways. Frances Stone remembered being assigned to a committee while Deputy Director that was reviewing the furniture and kitchen equipment to be included in married quarters: “I, as the only woman present, was expected to give advice... sometimes I, who had never run a house, was well out of my depth.”⁴¹ Both Felicity Hill and Jean Conan Doyle served as Directors of the WRAF, but, looking back over their careers, remembered their time as station commanders more fondly because they had had the final word in that role.⁴²

Women officers’ caring role shaped their relationship to hierarchical power within their particular service departments, but it also informed their access to the direct kind of power inherent in military discipline. Discipline was the key “sensitive” moment that women officers were expected to handle, but this involved a transfer of power that was not uncontroversial.

Discipline had been a difficult point for the women’s auxiliaries during the Second World War. The initial disciplinary codes devised for the auxiliaries caused many difficulties for women officers who found that they had few powers of enforcement. While officially the military insisted there was no crisis of misbehavior, in fact problems

⁴⁰ Dame Felicity Hill, manuscript “The Sure Possession,” 136, IWM 86/25/1(p).

⁴¹ Frances Stone, manuscript “Turn the Wheel Slowly,” 133, IWM 88/2/1.

⁴² Dame Felicity Hill, manuscript “The Sure Possession,” IWM 86/25/1(p); Interview with Dame Jean Conan Doyle, BL:NSA C465/03/01-07.

were much more common, in part because of the effects of conscription.⁴³ Perhaps most fundamentally, there were few serious consequences for deserters. As a 1947 memo explained, “with the introduction of conscription for women, an anomalous position arose in that women directed into civil labour who absent themselves were liable to civil imprisonment for a term of months, whereas those directed into the ATS who did likewise could only be awarded 14 days’ CB [confinement to barracks].”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, military authorities – and more importantly, the British public and their politicians – were uncomfortable with the idea of applying military discipline to women. Wartime legislation was meant to bring the women’s services under discipline, but as Tessa Stone has shown, this law was resisted and the status of Britain’s military women remained ambiguous.⁴⁵

The establishment of the permanent services was a chance to address this legal problem. The WRAF and WRAC were brought under military discipline as laid out in the Army and Air Force Acts, while the WRNS remained independent of naval discipline for decades. At issue was not simply devising effective measures that would keep enlisted women in line without offending public sensibility: the question of which punishments women officers would be authorized to assign meant further defining them as “real” officers. Did women officers, have the power as officers to punish those under their

⁴³ Gerard J. De Groot, “‘I Love the Scent of Cordite in Your Hair’: Gender Dynamics in Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries during the Second World War,” *History* 82, no. 265 (1997): 85-6.

⁴⁴ Annex to Appendix A to RWS/P(47)6: “Discipline of ATA and WAAF during the War: Historical Note,” 24 Feb 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

⁴⁵ Tessa Stone, “The Integration of Women into a Military Service: The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force in the Second World War” (PhD dissertation, Cambridge, 1999).

authority? Or were they, as women, ultimately obliged to hand their problem cases over to men, who did have that power?

In the WRAC and the WRNS, women officers generally had power to punish the women in their section by delegation: their power was derived from the male Commanding Officer of their formation. Only in extraordinary circumstances would WRAC officers have power over men delegated to them by the General Officer Commanding.⁴⁶ Serious offences requiring severe punishments were dealt with by male officers. The WRNS had a similar arrangement, with Commanding Officers authorized to delegate the power of punishment only for specified minor offences and punishments, although it was acknowledged that in practice “there has been far more delegation of authority than is strictly permissible under the approved arrangements.”⁴⁷ In the Admiralty there was hesitance to allow too much power to go to women officers, ostensibly because the officers were so much younger, on average, than male officers of equivalent rank. Special allowance was made for the Superintendent of the WRNS training establishment, HMTE Dauntless, in 1950 on the grounds that it was “difficult to explain to a trainee why someone else has to be brought in from outside to deal with comparatively minor disciplinary offences,” but even this met with resistance.⁴⁸

Women officers were frequently called upon to act as witnesses to punishment and to manage the offenders’ reactions to their treatment. Whether or not a woman officer was involved in the act of punishment, she did have a key role in following up on that

⁴⁶ Extracts from the minutes of the 75th meeting of the Army Council, 30 May 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160; Extracts from the minutes of the 307th meeting of the ECAC, 16 May 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

⁴⁷ Minute by Head of N.II, 17 Oct 1947, TNA:PRO ADM 1/20884.

⁴⁸ Minute by DWRNS, 25 May 1950, TNA:PRO ADM 1/21977.

punishment. Part of her checking-in duties was to talk to women who had been disciplined, gauging their reaction, and diffusing any resentment or offering encouragement to those intimidated by the experience. A good woman officer would help the women in her care to reform their behavior and to use their punishment as an opportunity for growth. Furthermore, women officers were frequently expected to communicate with their peers when a troublemaker transferred units, and to pass on any information that would be useful in managing her. Rehabilitation was a key goal of women's discipline, and one which the caring woman officer was expected to help achieve.

Applying the terms of the Army and Air Force Acts to the WRAC and WRAF offered a chance to tighten up discipline but also raised a range of questions about the "appropriateness" of awarding various punishments to women. One of the major complaints about the wartime disciplinary system was that there was no effective way to punish women involved in serious misdeeds other than simply discharging them, which was particularly unsatisfactory since, from the perspective of the guilty party, getting out was more like a reward. In fact, officers suspected that women who wanted to get out regarded misbehavior as a kind of loophole. Attention was duly paid in the creation of the permanent services to creating a more complete scale of punishments for women. The top of the scale of punishments in the Army and Air Force Acts contained four basic types of punishment, in order of descending severity: death, imprisonment, dismissal, and detention. Dismissal had already existed in the auxiliary codes, and imprisonment was easily taken care of through liaison with the Home Office, which agreed to receive any women so sentenced.

Execution was a sticking point, however, giving rise to a dispute between the War Office and the Air Ministry over whether women should be exempted from this punishment. The death penalty was far from a neutral subject in the late 1940s when these discussions were taking place. The abolition of capital punishment, civil and military, had been a hot topic between the wars, and although opinion shifted over the period it remained controversial through the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁹ Although reformers had successfully eliminated cowardice and desertion as military crimes worthy of capital punishment in 1930, the punishment remained in the scale for treacherous offenses and there were those who felt strongly that it must remain.⁵⁰

This history of controversy is clearly present in the 1947 discussions between the Air Ministry and War Office about how to apply military discipline to women. The Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems, in their initial discussions about the disciplinary code for the permanent force, recommended that the death penalty should be eliminated from the WRAC code “on the grounds of public opinion and in view of the probability that any such sentence would not, in practice, be carried out,” although it acknowledged that “in principle” this was illogical since civil law provided for the execution of women.⁵¹ The Secretary of State for Air, however, went further, urging that the death penalty should be abolished altogether, for men and for women, thus “regularizing *de jure* a situation that has long existed *de facto* in the Air Force and, I believe, the Army as

⁴⁹ Victor Bailey, “The Shadow of the Gallows: The Death Penalty and the British Labour Government, 1945-51,” *Law and History Review* 18, no. 2 (2000): 305-349; Claire Langhamer, “The Live Dynamic Whole of Feeling and Behavior: Capital Punishment and the Politics of Emotion, 1945-1957,” *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 2 (2012): 416-441.

⁵⁰ John McHugh, “The Labour Party and the Campaign to Abolish the Military Death Penalty, 1919-1930,” *The Historical Journal* 42, no. 1 (1999): 233-249.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

well.”⁵² The Executive Committee of the Army Council, in response, and dismissing the Air Ministry’s opinion as “irrelevant,” ruled that abolition was “an unnecessary concession to sentiment”: “women were as likely as men to commit military offences (such as treachery) for which the maximum penalty was death” and if the idea of executing women soldiers was distasteful, “reliance should be placed on practice, rather than on law.”⁵³ However, the Army Council continued to be divided on whether women should get a special exemption. The Secretary of State for War worried that including capital punishment in the women’s disciplinary scale might incite such opposition in Parliament that it would “jeopardize the application to women of the rest of the Army Act.” The Chief of the Imperial General Staff argued that “the soldier was a citizen” and therefore “women soldiers should not be exempt from a penalty to which they were subject in civil life,” while the Under-Secretary of State argued that while “he was strongly opposed to capital punishment,” the death penalty “remained the law of the land” and that therefore he could not oppose it being included in the women’s disciplinary code. Furthermore, he speculated that it might not be such a political disaster, as “feminist bodies... might not wish for any exemption.” To this, the Secretary of State responded that “the feminists might desire equality of men, even on the scaffold, but the House would not support them.”⁵⁴ Ultimately the question was subsumed by the larger debate over capital punishment occasioned by the 1947 Criminal Justice Bill; aware of the possibility that the death penalty might be abolished in Britain altogether, service

⁵² Secretary of State for Air to Secretary of State for War, 31 Mar 1947 (TNA WO 32/13160, attachment 105b).

⁵³ Extract from the Minutes of the 307th Meeting of the ECAC, 16 May 1947 (TNA WO 32/13160, attachment 106a).

⁵⁴ Extracts from the Minutes of the 75th meeting of the Army Council, 30 May 1947 (TNA WO 32/13160, attachment 109a).

ministers agreed that there was little point spending further time and energy crafting an exemption for women. Women would thus be liable to the same extent as men.⁵⁵

Arguably the most problematic of these severe punishments was actually the establishment of women's detention barracks in the WRAC and WRAF; the least severe of the four harshest punishments. Detention, distinct from imprisonment, was a punishment involving removing a soldier from his unit and sending him to a special barracks to perform drill and routine duties in relative isolation under close supervision. Significantly, unlike death, imprisonment, and dismissal, detention did not involve the individual leaving the service. This form of punishment, on the men's side, was associated with several scandals in the 1940s. In 1943, Rifleman William Clayton died at a detention barracks at Chatham, sparking allegations of harsh treatment and neglect, as well as promises of investigation and reform.⁵⁶ Scandal resurfaced in 1945, when a Private Hanlon hanged himself while undergoing detention at Stakehill Military Detention Camp.⁵⁷ In February 1946, when detained men at the facility in Aldershot (known as "the Glasshouse") mutinied and led a group escape, the *Daily Express* printed on its front page photos of the detention block burning and men throwing debris off the roof.⁵⁸ Although the Army defended its practices and insisted that Private Hanlon's death and the Aldershot riot were not caused by poor conditions, politicians and the public clearly connected all these incidents and saw in them an ongoing pattern of abuse.⁵⁹ "The deaths of prisoners at Chatham and Stakehill have not been forgotten," warned the *Daily*

⁵⁵ Naval Law Brief, 5 Dec 1947, TNA:PRO ADM 1/24325.

⁵⁶ HC Deb 18 May 1943 vol 389 cc916-20.

⁵⁷ HC Deb 7 Nov 1945 vol 415 cc1390-6.

⁵⁸ 25 Feb 1946.

⁵⁹ HC Deb 26 Mar 1946 vol 421 cc183-90.

Mirror. “Those occurrences greatly disturbed the public mind, and the latest affair at Aldershot will hardly serve to allay anxiety.”⁶⁰

This context of controversy made the establishment of detention as a punishment for women politically sensitive, but WRAF and WRAC officials insisted that such measures were necessary. The Army Council in 1946 agreed that “the Army must have some power of restraint over the physical movement of women, for instance, power to detain them when arrested for a serious offence,” but was wary of actually establishing a separate detention barracks for women, and concluded that sentences of detention should be served in detention rooms within the unit.⁶¹ The Air Ministry similarly described detention as a potential “stumbling block... when the question of ‘glass-houses’ is so much in the public eye” but thought it might be feasible to introduce a “modified form of detention” which would “convert it to something on the lines of a school of correction.”⁶² In Parliament, Emmanuel Shinwell answered questions with firm declarations that “there is no question of a ‘glasshouse,’ or anything of that sort.”⁶³

Nevertheless, public discomfort with the idea of detention for women was very real. One WRAC sergeant who had volunteered to be trained as detention room staff had to withdraw because of her family’s objection to this career move:

Because my people are so much against the idea of Detention Camps my family life has been very strained, and it looks as though it will go on being so until I do something about it. I was hoping to bring my family round to my way of thinking

⁶⁰ “Light on the Glasshouse?,” 26 Feb 1946.

⁶¹ Minutes of the 75th meeting of the Army Council, 30 May 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

⁶² Note by the Air Ministry about the Disciplinary Code in the Post-War Women’s Services, Inter-Service Working Party on Women’s Services, ca. 11 Jul 1946, TNA:PRO AIR 2/9838.

⁶³ HC Deb 6 Feb 1948 vol 446 cc2079; letter from PJ Crisp, 3 Feb 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/13679.

and tried to get my cousin who is in the Police to put in a good word, unfortunately my cousin is also very much against the idea... Owing to my mother's age (70) and failing health I do not wish to cause her any further unhappiness which this matter is now doing.⁶⁴

This sort of discomfort and disapproval, from family members as well as the women themselves, resulted in a shortage of volunteers to train as detention staff. While authorities insisted that “no one should be coerced... nevertheless from experience it has proved possible after interview to obtain volunteers from amongst women who have been nominated,” particularly if the opportunities for promotion were made sufficiently clear.⁶⁵

Since detention did not involve the offender leaving the service, it could conceivably serve a rehabilitative end, a quality which seems to have boosted its importance in the eyes of women leaders. In 1949 DWRAC prepared an educational syllabus for women in the detention center which included a commodities-based approach to history and geography, various crafts such as sewing and knitting, and basic mathematics. The educational syllabus was meant to fill the time that men in detention would use for “military training of a kind which is not applicable to women, e.g. weapon training” as well as to “encourage the women to be both better ‘soldiers’ and better citizens.”⁶⁶ At the Prison Commission's suggestion, the syllabus was cut down and refocused on providing more remedial lessons, but education remained an important part of the detention curriculum alongside drill, PT, menial labor, and “voluntary Divine Service” on Sundays or the woman's Sabbath.⁶⁷ In the end, the women's detention rooms may have gained a

⁶⁴ Sgt Veronica Clancy to DWRAC, 20 Dec 1951, TNA:PRO WO 32/20846.

⁶⁵ DWRAC to all commands, 9 Feb 54, TNA:PRO WO 32/20846.

⁶⁶ DDWRAC to Miss Mellanby, Prison Commission, Home Office, 19 Aug 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/20846.

⁶⁷ Daily Curriculum for Members of the WRAF and WRAC Undergoing Detention, n.d., ca. 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12100.

reputation for “softness” with airwomen telling their fellows “that they spent a comparatively lazy time at the [Central Unit Detention Room] and had wonderful food to eat.”⁶⁸ A report published in the *Daily Mirror* dubbed the WRAC detention room “a very comfortable homely sort of ‘glasshouse’.”⁶⁹ This, the Inspector of the WRAF felt, “must be regarded as a fault on the good side. It would be most unfortunate if the WRAF CUDR earned the reputation unfortunately associated with the military ‘glasshouses’.”⁷⁰

In practice, however, few women were ever actually sentenced to detention, and the underused barracks were eventually consolidated. In both the WRAF and the WRAC the lengths of sentences that women could serve were restricted; while a sentence of 56 days could be awarded, first offenders were not to serve more than 14 days, while subsequent offenders should not remain for more than 28 days.⁷¹ In 1956, eleven airwomen were sentenced to detention, and in 1958 only seven; the numbers were even lower in the WRAC, since the punishment there could only be awarded through court martial.⁷² Whereas in 1952 there had been plans to establish nine joint detention rooms around the world, by 1959 the two services had agreed that a single detention barracks, in England, would be able to meet the need.⁷³ In 1955, the Inspector of the WRAF observed that some station commanders seemed to feel that “for chivalrous motives, women should not

⁶⁸ Inspector WRAF Report No.350: Report on the Effect of the Introduction of Detention as a Punishment for Airwomen, 2 Dec 1955, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14451.

⁶⁹ Bill Greig, “Glasshouse for Girls” *Daily Mirror* 31 Jul 1953.

⁷⁰ Inspector WRAF Report No.350: Report on the Effect of the Introduction of Detention as a Punishment for Airwomen, 2 Dec 1955, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14451.

⁷¹ Minute by DWRAF, 9 Feb 1954, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12100; letter to all commands, 12 Nov 1956, TNA:PRO WO 32/16638.

⁷² DPS(A) to DGPS, 22 Jul 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14451; DPS(AM) to PM1(WO), 26 Jan 1959, and letter DGPS(AM) to PM1(WO), 2 Sep 1963, TNA:PRO WO 32/16638.

⁷³ Letter to all commands, 18 Apr 1952, and letter DPS(AM) to PM1(WO), 26 Jan 1959, TNA:PRO WO 32/16638.

be sentenced to this punishment. These CO's would rather put the airwomen up for discharge than 'inflict such a penalty upon them'.⁷⁴ Detention's role as a reformatory punishment implied that those assigning it judged that the woman in question was both capable of and worth re-educating. Given that women were not expected to remain in the service very long (the average woman spent only two years in the service), it may also be that the attitude prevailed that it was more economical simply to discharge a woman. At any rate, the punishment never became as widespread as was first imagined.

The particular sensitivity around women and detention suggests that many members of the public and military officials alike felt that "good girls" did not need discipline, and that the use of disciplinary measures implied a moral and, by implication, sexual deviancy among servicewomen. In fact, in 1957 as the "problem" of making the WRAF more feminine was discussed in the House of Lords, one suggestion was to follow the example of the Women's Royal Naval Service and dial back the level of military discipline.⁷⁵ When the permanent services were being drawn up in the late 1940s, the Admiralty had chosen to keep the WRNS a civilian organization and were happy to explain this with the "quality" of their recruits and general environment:

The Board has already decided to make no change in the disciplinary status of the WRNS. In arriving at this decision, the view was taken that the standard of discipline had not suffered unduly during the war by reason of the fact that the WRNS was not subject to the Naval Discipline Act and that, as the recruitment of the comparatively small permanent force was likely to be highly selective, the application of a penal code would not be required to maintain that standard.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Inspector WRAF Report No.350: Report on the Effect of the Introduction of Detention as a Punishment for Airwomen, 2 Dec 1955, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14451.

⁷⁵ *HL Deb 10 July 1957 vol 204 cc962-3*.

⁷⁶ Memorandum: Structure and Conditions of Service for the Permanent WRNS Rating Force, circulated 19 Jul 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

WRNS officers were not so confident that stricter measures were unnecessary. In 1946 and 1947, successive Directors of the WRNS protested against plans to leave the service essentially unchanged from a disciplinary standpoint: “the present position is anomalous and illogical,” wrote Vera Laughton Mathews. “Although actual difficulties have not been insurmountable, the position has frequently been undignified and humiliating. It is not right for a Service entitled ‘Royal’ and ‘Naval’ to have an Officer of the Royal Navy telephone to say, ‘My wife is not coming back and I know there is nothing you can do about it.’”⁷⁷ Similarly her successor wrote a long minute to illustrate her thesis that “it is not correct to say that the present disciplinary arrangements of the WRNS are entirely satisfactory.”⁷⁸ Despite these protests, the WRNS was not placed under the Naval Discipline Act until 1977 as part of a larger set of “rationalization” policies.⁷⁹ The matter of putting women under the Naval Discipline Act was raised by women officers periodically in the 1950s, “but each time the question has been settled by a reiteration of Their Lordships’ satisfaction in the standard of discipline in the WRNS.”⁸⁰ In other words, stricter disciplinary measures were only necessary in response to an increase of bad behavior, as determined by senior male officials. Satisfactory recruiting returns negated the complaints of women officers.

⁷⁷ Memorandum by DWRNS Vera Laughton Mathews, 12 Jun 1946, TNA:PRO ADM 1/24325.

⁷⁸ Minute by DWRNS Jocelyn Woollcombe, 28 Jul 1947, TNA:PRO ADM 1/24325.

⁷⁹ Ursula Stuart Mason, *Britannia’s Daughters: The Story of the WRNS* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), 111-2.

⁸⁰ Dame Mary Lloyd’s lecture to the Senior Officer Training Centre outlining the history and organization of the WRNS, dated 9 Jan 1953, with annotations dated 1 Apr 1957, National Maritime Museum DAU/85(2); see also Director’s opening remarks, Minutes of Senior WRNS Officers’ Conference, 18 Jul 1947, National Museum of the Royal Navy 1988.350 (28.2).

Despite the challenges and controversies, women service leaders in particular believed the inclusion of severe punishments to be necessary in order to bring their services in line with the men. The desire to provide the permanent women's services with a full range of punishment options was undoubtedly based on practical experience, but they also point to a desire that the women's services be taken seriously. The disparity between men's and women's punishments suggested that men's actions were more important, and worth more attention. Light punishments and quick discharges for women implied that their bad behavior didn't matter much, and further, that women had an indifferent effect on the military's overall functionality. The women's services were keen to refute this charge. Another motivation was more compelling to the male authorities, however: the effects of lax female discipline on male personnel. That "inequalities of justice occurred" when a man and a woman received different punishments might be regarded as unfortunate.⁸¹ It became a positive menace however, when a man and woman, "having been involved in the same offence, the former persuades the latter to take the blame and makes good her stoppage of pay;" this kind of thing "obviously brings discipline into ridicule."⁸² Women officers may have been galled by women who managed to get released from their obligations through bad behavior, but the loophole that lax women's discipline offered to men was the one that got the attention of the male authorities.

Military women posed a challenge to historic structures of authority and discipline. Postwar consumerism, growing egalitarian sentiment, and full employment were already

⁸¹ Discipline of ATS and WAAF during the War: Historical Note, prepared for the Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems, Sub-Committee on the Regular Women's Service, 24 Feb 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

⁸² Letter from the Secretary of State for Air to the Secretary of State for War, 31 Mar 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

softening the traditional claims made over servicemen's freedoms. However, control, authority, and punishment had gendered implications as well which came to the fore when women were added to the equation. The immediate post war women's services intended to bring women into a "real" military life in many ways. In the Army and RAF enlisted women were subject to the Army and Air Force Acts and to commissioned officers. However this life was not ultimately considered entirely compatible with womanhood. Women officers' authority was, to a large extent, justified by established ideas about caring. Their career paths too were restricted accordingly. And although discipline was recognized as essential for efficiency, implementing it was still an uncomfortable task. Evidence suggests that in many cases male authorities considered it preferable to simply let a woman go rather than subject her to the unpleasantness and shame of the military discipline she was subject to. Underlying conflicts about women officers' authority or appropriate punishments were differing ideas about the importance and seriousness of the women's forces.

3. Manpower, Work, and Skill

The women's forces were very much a product of the Second World War: the decision to retain them was not only based on wartime experience, many of the key decisions in the process were made while the conflict was still active. However, their shape and role changed over the next few decades along with Britain's overall military situation. The end of empire, the uncertain early years of the Cold War, and the steady demands of foreign commitments all dramatically changed the mission of the armed forces during this time. Although the women's forces had been created to be ready for the next war, the profile of that war was looking radically different by the end of the 1950s. As we have seen, the existence of the women's forces was confirmed amidst these changes, but in order to understand how they fit into the everyday operation of Britain's armed forces, we will need to look at their role as a source of non-combatant labor.

In this chapter, I will consider the women's services as a field of employment and servicewomen as workers in a larger military industry. This question of military service as work is essential to a fuller understanding of why the women's services existed and what they were doing. Military and government authorities were interested in continuing the women's services because the women were useful workers, regardless of any other motivations or ambitions. Likewise, whatever sense of loyalty or benefits they enjoyed, at the most basic level women joined the services to work. Moreover, thinking about military women as employees highlights that the postwar period was not simply a time when women were forced "back" into domestic roles. Rather, conventions around women's work were complex and evolving, with a much larger proportion of the female population working as a matter of course. After the Second World War, it was widely

expected that young women would work between leaving school and starting a family, using this opportunity to save money for a wedding or a house and perhaps enjoying some level of independence. This was not just a matter of changing gender norms; young women were participating in the nation's productivity drive, with full employment making a level of selectivity possible in finding work. Although during the war women might be motivated to join up by the desire to help further the fight or to avoid conscription, after the war the decision to join the services was a career choice in this new context. The services' pay scale and training opportunities were crucial for attracting and retaining employees, although service leaders hoped that the lifestyle would also be enticing. Like other employers of women, military leaders believed that the vast majority of women were essentially transient workers and were only looking for work in the years before starting a family.¹ Thus women employees were more available in the wake of the war, but employing them did not necessarily pose a serious challenge to the military's gender status quo.

Women's labor played a distinctive role in the manpower economy of Britain's postwar forces, and one that evolved with the larger personnel picture. Servicewomen were always expected to be supplemental, as they could not replace combat troops, but early in the period there does seem to have been an expectation that the women's services could supply as many workers as necessary. When this proved to be untrue, and with growing pressure to entice more male volunteers, women's role increasingly became defined by their ability to take over certain kinds of duties and alleviate perceived dullness for the men. Their importance was therefore more about quality than quantity.

¹ See chapter seven for a further discussion of this issue.

Servicewomen's "bread and butter" trades were by and large the same kinds of work commonly done by women in the civilian world, a situation that if anything intensified as time went on. The change from wartime, when women performed a wide variety of often unconventional jobs, to the late 1950s, when opportunities were more restricted and numerically favored domestic and clerical roles, was not simply a matter of smaller forces. Nor was it simply a case of social engineering, putting women back into comfortable roles. It was to a large extent a matter of redistributing responsibility for various tasks across the available military workforce so as to free up, to the greatest extent possible, the most complex and militarily significant work for fighting men. Understanding the role of women in the military at this time requires paying attention not only to the dynamic of male and female, or skilled and unskilled, but also the key element of operational and non-operational work.

Women were one small part of the armed forces' overall manning picture. During the war, the women's auxiliaries had been impressively large, with strengths in the hundreds of thousands. In contrast, the WRAC and WRNS tended to be about 5,000-6,000 strong in the 1950s, while the WRAF was generally more in the 8,000-9,000 range. Thus women made up between about one and four percent of each of the services in the 1950s, with the Navy having the highest percentage and the Army the lowest due to the respective size of the male forces (see Table 1). Military manpower was composed of at least four major categories: regular servicemen, men who had been conscripted under National Service, servicewomen, and civilians. Members of the reserve organizations also made a contribution, sometimes supplying specific skilled personnel to handle a task; however these were not full-time. National Servicemen, servicewomen, and

civilians were all perceived as supplementing the most important category: regular servicemen, who were not only trained and liable for combat, but contracted for a relatively long period—eight to twenty-two years—and bound to serve anywhere in the world. Full employment, the financial restraints on the size of the armed forces, and complaints about National Service all worked together to push mundane day-to-day tasks further away from the more exciting and manly realm of combat training and cutting-edge technology.

Both women and civilians were a way to shift low-status jobs unconnected with combat duties off the shoulders of those who had been designated as fighting men, a goal that gained urgency as the end of National Service approached. Thought of as a necessary evil by politicians across the spectrum, conscription was regarded as a temporary policy from the beginning even though no ending date was set. Conscription, like militarism, has often been seen as an essentially foreign phenomenon, anathema to British liberty; National Service in peacetime was thus an uncomfortable proposition.² In February 1957, when the Minister of Defence, Duncan Sandys, decreed that the last group of conscripts would be called up in 1960 (exiting in 1962), the precise dates were more a surprise than the principle of National Service ending.³ From 1957 onward therefore the services' primary manpower concern was to make plans to recruit the all-volunteer force, an issue

² Matthew Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902-1914* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 10-6; L.V. Scott, *Conscription and the Attlee Governments: The Politics and Policy of National Service, 1945-1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 7-9.

³ S.J. Ball, "A Rejected Strategy: The Army and National Service 1946-60," in *The British Army, Manpower, and Society into the Twentieth Century*, ed. Hew Strachan (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 45-6.

that had to do not only with living conditions and quality of life, but also with the kinds of work and vocational training available to soldiers, sailors, and airmen.⁴

One specific factor that made National Service unpopular was the lurking suspicion that it was not really necessary. The issue was colloquially centered around “bull”: the idea that young men were being forced into the military only to waste their time doing drill and menial chores. Such complaints were bad enough when they made the public dislike National Service, but they could also threaten future voluntary recruiting if men believed that “bull” was the normal way of life in the forces. Thus the Army in particular adopted the policy that “every soldier should, to the greatest possible extent, be free to do a soldier’s job.”⁵ This went beyond simply hiring more people to peel potatoes; it extended to the overall division of labor in the forces. There were “still far too many men operating telephone switchboards and driving staff cars,” a situation which was identified as one barrier to reaching satisfactory recruiting levels.⁶ With the transition to an all-volunteer service, the forces had to compete with civilian jobs under conditions of full employment. Volunteers would need to feel confident that they would enjoy a long upwardly-mobile career in an exciting and active field. Therefore women and civilians helped reduce the number needed for less exciting work. Nevertheless, women could not entirely relieve men of physical chores. The authorities did not want to divide the work such that men would end up having to do only the heavy and unpleasant jobs that could

⁴ Peter Johnston, “Join up and See the World! British Military Recruitment after National Service,” talk given at the National Archives, Kew, 4 Jun 2013, posted as podcast 28 Jun 2013, <http://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/join-up-and-see-the-world-british-military-recruitment-after-national-service>.

⁵ Memorandum to all commands on civilianization policy from Director of Staff Duties, 18 Aug 1958, TNA:PRO WO 32/17064.

⁶ §216, Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Cmnd 545), Oct 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1238.

not be given to women, and there was a risk of creating “a surplus of male ‘dullards’” if there were no menial jobs to be done by them.⁷

Civilianization policy and the women’s forces coexisted somewhat uneasily. The kinds of jobs that could be given to civilians (assumed to be male) and to servicewomen tended to overlap. Cleaning, food preparation, and routine clerical work such as typing were all targets for civilianization as well as bread-and-butter roles for women. Geographically too, civilianization efforts were focused on establishments that were relatively large and stable, rather than field-force units that had to be self-contained and ready for deployment; these were the same establishments that women tended to be assigned to.⁸ Financially, “speaking in general terms there is very little difference in the cost to the country of a member of WRAC and a civilian.”⁹ Although in 1949 the Air Ministry’s civilianization goals were reduced because of the availability of the WRAF, after a relative lack of growth through the 1950s, there was a danger that civilians might be given women’s jobs.¹⁰ The Director of the WRAC warned in 1958 that “in going ahead with their civilianization plans, Commands might not pay sufficient regard to those jobs for which WRAC are best suited.”¹¹ She had not been invited to the first meeting of this committee, but joined in subsequently, pointing out “improved recruiting of clerks, drivers, and signals trades” and encouraging Commands to make bids for women rather

⁷ Report of the WRAC Working Party (Lucas Committee), Feb 1952, TNA:PRO WO 216/521.

⁸ Memorandum to all commands on civilianization policy from Director of Staff Duties, 18 Aug 1958, TNA:PRO WO 32/17064.

⁹ Minutes of the fourth meeting of the WRAC Working Party, 11 Feb 1952, TNA:PRO WO 32/14524.

¹⁰ Draft history of civilianization policy in the RAF, signed Johnston, ca. late 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 20/6424.

¹¹ Minutes of the second conference on the progress of civilianization, 17 Nov 1958, TNA:PRO WO 32/17064.

than civilians where possible.¹² Women did have some advantages over civilian workers. They could in theory be posted anywhere and were thus a more practical source of labor for isolated establishments without a large population nearby. In addition, one of the thorniest problems in employing civilians was “reconciling civilian and service career aspirations.”¹³ Since women were expected to marry, military officials did not expect many of them to seek promotion, as opposed to civilian men, who were presumed to have a right to career progression. As we have seen, those women who did remain in the service long enough to enter higher ranks were overwhelmingly channeled into the administration of their own services so that they would not pose a threat to men’s career paths.

The Director of the WRAC’s comment about “those jobs for which WRAC are best suited” above points to another factor in determining which jobs would be open to women. The most important principle characterizing women’s work during the Second World War, in the armed forces as in industry, was substitution: “from one point of view, the history of substitution is the history of the WAAF, since the organization and administration of the service were built up in order that substitution of women for men might take place.”¹⁴ Each trade women were employed in had a substitution ratio indicating how many women were needed to replace how many men. Women might be able to do some jobs equally as well as men, in which case the substitution ratio was 1:1,

¹² Minutes of the third conference on the progress of civilianization, 29 Jul 1959, TNA:PRO WO 32/17065.

¹³ Draft history of civilianization policy in the RAF, signed Johnston, ca. late 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 20/6424.

¹⁴ Air Publication 3234 *The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force*, 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 10/5546; HMD Parker, *Manpower: A Study of War-time Policy and Administration*, History of the Second World War: United Kingdom Civil Series (London: HMSO, 1957), 283-4.

one woman to one man. In other lines of work, the ratio might be 2:1 or 3:2; at any rate, it was assumed that women were not equally capable as men in all tasks, and had to be trialed to determine just how their work compared to men's. In industry, trade unions and government ministers agreed to implement a "dilution" policy, replacing a male worker with several female workers. This was done in order to prevent men's jobs being taken over by cheaper female workers during the war and to maintain the important "skilled" status of men against the perceived "unskilled" status of women.¹⁵ In the armed forces, ratios were reduced to 1:1 over the course of the war in almost every trade, although this fact was interpreted differently by men and women. Female officers saw the ratios as proving women's broad potential, but men tended to interpret them as limited data gathered from discrete empirical trials. For example, the Admiralty's plans for the postwar WRNS involved very specific discussion of which jobs the women might fill. Suggested jobs were carefully delineated and described as ones in which "women were more efficient than men" or "generally more capable than men," although it might be noted that substitution ratios were never written in such a way as to suggest that more than one man might be needed to do a woman's job.¹⁶

Women in the services tended to embrace the idea of substitution as a straightforward way to quantify their standing in relation to the men. Dwindling ratios were, in the eyes of women in particular, proof that servicewomen were worthy of respect and, indeed, served to support the formation of permanent services. The official history of the WAAF in the war stresses how substitution ratios, initially set at 3:2, were revised "cautiously

¹⁵ Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

¹⁶ Minutes of Meeting on the Future of the WRNS, 8 Nov 1945, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5727.

and slowly,” and “only after experiment”; “successful” is the term used to describe these experiments when women proved equal to the task.¹⁷ Former WAAF officer Katharine Bentley Beauman summed up this view when she wrote that one-to-one substitution “proved by experience” that women in the postwar WRAF should “qualify on equal terms with men for careers.”¹⁸ Lucy Noakes describes the history of women in the British army as a process of rationalization and increasing control: women’s labor was key to military operations in the nineteenth century and before, but they were kept at the periphery as camp followers and sutlers. These unofficial, independent workers were then brought under central command through the auxiliary organizations of the two world wars, a process that culminated in the permanent postwar services.¹⁹ Seen in this way, the military acted in keeping with the characteristics of a modern state in rationalizing this segment of its labor force, all the more so given the heightened interest in government planning and control in Europe from the 1930s through the 1950s.²⁰ Women in the leadership of these organizations were enthusiastic participants in this process, as the quotations from the official history of the WAAF demonstrate. A key segment of women organizers during the First World War were set on gaining official recognition and even incorporation for women, and senior women officers in the 1940s were the direct heirs of

¹⁷ Air Publication 3234 *The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force*, 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 10/5546.

¹⁸ Katharine Bentley Beauman, *Partners in Blue: The Story of Women’s Service with the Royal Air Force* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 239.

¹⁹ Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London: Routledge, 2006).

²⁰ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 76-83; Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 67-72.

this spirit.²¹ The pride with which histories of the auxiliaries written by women dwelled upon the matter of substitution ratios can be read as indicating the desire of these women to have their work seen and understood by the state, through the military authorities. Substitution ratios were a language that could communicate women's equality.

A new recruit was assigned to her trade during her first few weeks of basic training, although the selection process had already begun at the recruitment office. Applicants to the WRAF took two written tests at the recruitment office (three if they were interested in mechanical or electrical trades), followed by three more tests once they had arrived for training. These, put together, were used to determine which trades the candidate was most suited for.²² The major challenge for the forces was to handle the process in such a way that a woman could be enticed into joining at the recruitment office with being told a particular trade she was suited for, and then have that trade still available to her at basic training. Basic training involved instruction in drill, physical training and games, and "general service knowledge" as well as this crucial process of trade allocation, and its format was tweaked over the years in an effort to improve recruiting.²³ In 1958 a WRAF officer criticized the current format of basic training for giving recruits too much bureaucratic detail about trades and not doing enough to interest and excite them in the varied work of the RAF.²⁴ As the armed forces shrank from their wartime size, women

²¹ Krisztina Robert, "Gendering Class, Patriotism, and Militarism: The Women's Corps Movement in Britain during and after World War I," (PhD diss.: University of Houston, 1998), 235-6, 272.

²² Technical Training Command Research Section Report No.163: Study of WRAF Acceptance Standards, 18 Dec 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13505.

²³ Recruit Training WRAF, 4 Aug 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 32/318.

²⁴ G/O CM Ambrose, "Report on visit to No. 31 SWRT Wilmslow by the TT Command WRAF Administrative Officer 18th to 22nd November 1957," 16 Jan 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 20/9659.

were phased out of many of the more “unfeminine” duties they had been doing, and the range of trades open to them in the permanent service was much narrower than during the war.²⁵ Nevertheless there was a basic confidence in women’s abilities instilled by the wartime substitution experience reflected in the idea that women in the forces were doing jobs that they were suited for. Although some trades were opened to women over the course of the 1950s and others were closed, the basic outline of opportunities available to women remained the same across the period.

Trade training followed after the basic training period was over. Trade training was generally mixed, with women and men regulars taught in the same classes, as it was part of the purpose of the services that women received the same training as men. Evidence suggests that some of the training was more challenging for women than men, or more precisely that women were disadvantaged by the use of long written examinations. An Air Ministry researcher, looking into the abnormally high failure rate of women on a clerkship training course, blamed the notorious three hour written paper that served as a final exam. Blighted by “pedantic phraseology,” the exam was feared even by those who had just arrived. The researcher concluded that “the prospect of a reputedly difficult trade test has a more depressing effect on many of the airwomen... for psychological reasons this is far more serious in the case of airwomen than for airmen.”²⁶ In another instance, a class of WRAF Equipment Assistants burst into a mysterious “mass hysteria” during their final exam, another three hour written paper. In this case the investigator asked in her

²⁵ This was not always a clean break; see for instance the case of one Sjt Brock, still employed as a Draughtswoman (Topographical) in 1951 although this trade did not officially exist in the peacetime WRAC. She had been allowed to stay on in her role at the end of the war. TNA:PRO WO 32/13696.

²⁶ W Vaughan, Memorandum on WRAF Clerk GD Training, 25 Aug 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 32/317.

conclusions, “if people of this intellectual quality and educational background are accepted for training, why test them in a way that is certain to send inexperienced people into a panic? A three hours non-stop written paper is too severe an ordeal for people not habituated to examinations.”²⁷ The presence of women on training courses seems to have pushed the RAF at least toward more practical and hands-on instructional methods.

Many women in the services worked in domestic or clerical roles not unlike in the civilian world. The Ministry of Defence summarized the basic categories of employment as “Technical, Communications, Clerical, Supply, Household, Medical, and Administrative,” and the services also distinguished between skilled “trades” and unskilled “employments.”²⁸ Administrative trades were largely the territory of officers and NCOs, although the WRNS’ rank structure allowed for ratings in some of these roles. Since qualified nurses were organized into their own services, and women doctors were actually commissioned into the male forces, servicewomen’s medical trades were limited to orderly or “assistant” roles.

Clerical and supply roles were fairly closely related. A wartime Wren described supply work as “mainly accounting”:

When you were issuing stores, you had to account for every single thing, permanent things and consumable things. And different procedures for this and different procedures for that, and various ledgers, and if you lost something it had to be reported on S1091. If you were demanding stores from the dockyard it was on a S134D, in quintuplicate.²⁹

²⁷ MD Allen, WRAF Equipment Assistant Training Wastage, Oct 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 32/300.

²⁸ Note on Recruitment to the Women’s Services submitted to the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Grigg Committee) by the Ministry of Defence, 9 May 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 10/246.

²⁹ Peggy Stoker, quoted in Chris Howard Bailey, “‘Ambassadors of England’: Work and Leisure for the Wrens in Malta, 1944-1950,” *Oral History* 21 (1993): 58.

As clerks (“writers” in the Navy), women were employed in typing pools, as accountants, in record offices, and as personal secretaries. These roles were hardly foreign to women at the time. A survey of WRAF recruits in 1950 showed that 30% of new entrants had been working as clerks, and 18% in shops prior to joining (see Table 7). In her memoir, Joan Blackburn recalled the resentment of National Servicemen on her typing course at having to become “a ‘poofy’ typist.”³⁰

Domestic (“household”) work was another major category for women in the forces as it was in civilian life. Servicewomen employed as “stewards” and “orderlies” cleaned living and workspaces, served as batwomen (personal servants) to officers, and staffed messes. Cooks were another major trade in this category, with various catering positions being filled by women. These trades and employments were filled with women who received low scores on the intelligence and ability tests and tended to have high turnover and frequent shortages. Shortages could lead to more arduous workloads, contributing again to recruiting difficulties.³¹ The services attempted to address these shortages by more thoroughly mining the lower-achieving applicants and even lowered the cut-off to this end.³² Conditions in these employments were somewhat improved over wartime by the increasing introduction of labor-saving devices, something one senses was less widespread than official enthusiasm would suggest.

³⁰ Joan Blackburn, *Naafi, Knickers and Nijmegen: The Postwar Adventures of a WRAF Airwoman* (Bognor Regis, UK: Woodfield, 2009), 38.

³¹ Notes of the Senior WRNS Officers Conference, 22 Sep 1953, NMRN 1988.350.28.1.

³² Joan Harris, “Army Operational Research Group Report No 1/58: An Assessment of the Value of Enlisting Women with Low Scores on the Recruiting Office Test for Employment in Routine Domestic Work in the Women’s Royal Army Corps,” Jan 1958, TNA:PRO WO 291/2167.

Clerical, supply, and household trades were the “bread and butter” of the women’s services, sitting firmly within accepted ideas about women’s work while filling in those roles considered undesirable by men.³³ These trades not only employed the majority of servicewomen, they were also the growth trades. In 1952, a WRAC Working Party solicited bids from Arms Directors to determine how many more WRAC could be employed and what new trades might usefully be opened up to them. Twelve new trades, including Armourer and Vehicle Mechanic, were suggested, employing a projected 919 additional women. However, the Arms also bid for 1,016 additional clerks, 985 additional cooks, and 1,466 additional orderlies.³⁴ The demands for women workers in these fields was always high, and only grew more urgent as it became more desirable to keep National Servicemen and then volunteer regulars out of them.

Servicewomen were not strictly limited to clerical, supply, and domestic work, however, and plenty of them worked in technical roles, including communications and signals work. During the Second World War, much of Britain’s radar system was staffed by WAAF, and women made up a large part of the staff at the famous code breaking facility at Bletchley Park. Communications work was by this time a largely feminized form of technological work, but this is not to say it was an entirely mundane field. When Winifred Phillips joined the WRAC, she insisted on being categorized as a switchboard operator because one of her brothers had been in signals during the war and “it sounded

³³ Third draft report of the WRAC Working Party, circulated 19 Jul 1961, TNA:PRO WO 32/18686.

³⁴ Statement Showing Current Allocation WRAC and Additional Requirement in Trades and Employments, Based on Bids of Arms Directors, Appendix A of the Lucas Report (WRAC Working Party), Feb 1952, TNA:PRO WO 216/521.

interesting, taking calls from all over the world.”³⁵ Women in signals roles were also trained to perform a certain level of maintenance, set-up, and repair.

Women with technical aptitude were employed as mechanics and engineers in all three services. Radios, aircraft, ground vehicles, and a variety of technical instruments were fixed and serviced by women. In general, recruits had to have some kind of prior experience to enter these roles; in the WRAF this was measured in part by an additional test of mechanical and electrical terms administered at the recruitment office.³⁶ Women with university degrees in mathematics, physics, or geography could receive a Short Service Commission in the WRNS for meteorological work, for instance.³⁷ Requiring women to have some kind of technical ability or familiarity before joining likely narrowed the number of women qualified for technical jobs, but the number and range of jobs was also limited by the determination that trade training of more than six months was “uneconomic” for women. In the War Office this was admitted to be an “arbitrary figure” but it was decided on nevertheless.³⁸ The calculation that women’s wastage rates meant that more than six months’ training would go to waste did not take place in a vacuum. The period of National Service each young man would have to perform had crept up from 12 months (1947) to 18 months (1948) to 2 years (1950), a period that many in the military quickly recognized as inefficient. Keeping National Servicemen under trade training for long periods not only tied them up but also tied up large numbers

³⁵ Winifred M. Phillips, *Mum’s Army: Love and Adventure from the NAAFI to Civvy Street*, with Shannon Kyle (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 92.

³⁶ Technical Training Command Research Section Report No.163: Study of WRAF Acceptance Standards, 18 Dec 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13505.

³⁷ §0320, BR 1077/1953, *Regulations & Instructions for the Women’s Royal Naval Service*, 1953, NMM DAU 103/4.

³⁸ Minutes of the third meeting of the WRAC Working Party, 25 Jan 1952, TNA:PRO WO 32/14524.

of regulars in running the training system.³⁹ Thus the decision with regard to the women was almost certainly the fruit of deliberation about men.

Women were subject to special working conditions that dated back to the war, primarily structured around the principle that women were safest working among other women. Night duty continued to be a particular point of concern. Policy sent out in 1947 (previously it had been “generally regarded as an unwritten law”) stated that “an airwoman is not to be employed alone on night duty unless she is within call of another airwoman.”⁴⁰ This policy could cause difficulty and even lead to WRAF posts being given to the RAF, and some station commanders wanted to overlook it or repeal it. However, the WRAF directorate held firm, reissuing guidance that upheld the prohibition on solo night duty in 1950 and 1958. In DWRAF Nancy Salmon’s view the issue was not simply “fear of molestation” but also “the psychological effect of loneliness, the possibility of sudden sickness,” and danger an airwoman might face on her way to and from work.⁴¹ The night duty issue mimicked in microcosm the impact rules about administrative oversight had on women’s employment opportunities (see chapter two). Women in theory might be able to do a particular job, but unless there were enough women to justify the training, the administrative overhead of moving onto a new base, or make up a suitably balanced rota, they might not in practice be able to take it on.

³⁹ Ball, “A Rejected Strategy,” 39-43; Scott, *Conscription and the Attlee Governments*, 110-1, 231-2, 240.

⁴⁰ AOCinC Flying Training Command to USofS, 30 Jan 1947, and Air Ministry Letter to all commands, 23 Apr 1947, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13825.

⁴¹ Minute by DWRAF, 26 Jul 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13825; for an interesting contemporary take on the negative effects of night duty for male police officers see “The Policeman’s Lot,” *The Medical Press* 218, no. 10 (3 Sep 1947), 205.

So far, I have discussed the jobs that were available to women in material terms: the services hoped women would take over less popular work and make the forces more attractive to men, and women's opportunities were limited by the judgment that they would not serve long enough to make long training pay off. However, the services were aware of the relationship between the kinds of jobs on offer and the attractiveness of a service career, and in this connection it was consistently recognized that technical jobs, and jobs with a clear connection to operations, were most attractive. By the late 1950s, the Director of the WRAC was of the opinion that "the general country wide aversion which is growing towards work of the more domestic kind" meant that the Army should reassess its recruiting targets for these trades.⁴² Furthermore the women's services could not be popularly associated with domestic work if the public was to be convinced that there was a "need for the employment of women in the Service in this missile age."⁴³ The idea that expanding the types of work available to women could help recruiting recurs throughout the period. A 1952 War Office committee that included Dame Caroline Haslett, a prominent woman engineer, urged that "every possible trade in which women could be employed should be made available and offered to them" on the grounds that "the wider the net is spread, and the more interesting the types of trade, the more likely we are to attract recruits." The committee also recommended that more publicity should

⁴² Minutes DDWRAC to PA1, 2 Dec 1959, TNA:PRO WO 32/18686; see also the third draft report of the WRAC Working Party on this file, which recommends that the requirement in domestic trades be reduced as it would be "useless" to resist this trend.

⁴³ This sense is contained in DDWRAC's minute cited above; DWRAF Barnett to DGPS, 5 Feb 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 9/9659.

focus on the “interesting careers available in particularly interesting subjects, e.g. radar, telecommunications, and so forth.”⁴⁴

The prestige attached to technical jobs was at least as much about maintaining a link to operational work in peacetime as it was about asserting the skilled nature of servicewomen’s work. This was a concern for both the WRAF and the WRAC, whose predecessor organizations had tried hard during the war to position themselves as part of the front lines. Wartime experiences showed that women wanted to make a real contribution to the war effort and valued most highly the jobs that put them closest to operations.⁴⁵ For example, parachute packers were reputedly “a contented body of women” despite monotonous work, long hours, and lack of promotion prospects because “they were working directly for the aircrews, an important factor for women, and sometimes they were even thanked personally by members of those crews whose lives had been saved by carefully packed parachutes.”⁴⁶ Both the Air Ministry and War Office recognized the challenge that the end of hostilities posed in this regard, and made efforts to give women a connection to operational technologies. In peacetime, however, and particularly given the pressure to entice male volunteers with active, manly work, widening women’s opportunities was often treated only as a matter for publicity and morale, where a token few could do the trick.

⁴⁴ Report of the Committee on the Women’s Royal Army Corps (McLean committee), Jul 1952, TNA:PRO WO 216/521.

⁴⁵ Tessa Stone, “Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity: The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War,” *Women’s History Review* 8, no. 4 (1999): 613; Gerard J. DeGroot, “‘I Love the Scent of Cordite in Your Hair’: Gender Dynamics in Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries during the Second World War,” *History* 82, no. 265 (1997): 77.

⁴⁶ Air Publication 3234 *The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force*, 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 10/5546.

On the army side, mixed anti-aircraft batteries were one of the great female success stories of the war. Gerard De Groot notes how women gunners became an “evocative symbol of a nation united in struggle,” both in fictional settings like “air raids” staged at Selfridges department store and through the stories of real women heroes who died at their posts.⁴⁷ Women continued to work in these roles after the war. However, the disbandment of AA Command in 1955 brought this distinctive employment to an end.⁴⁸ The demise of mixed HAA batteries was mourned with a retrospective collection of anecdotes and tributes in *The Lioness*: clearly this was not just the end of a particular type of employment, but the demise of an important aspect of WRAC self-image.⁴⁹ “The severing of connections with the Royal Artillery after so long and happy a union was a sad blow,” reported the Independent Company that was formed out of the formerly mixed regiment in Gibraltar, who went on to note optimistically that thanks to mixed messing arrangements “the feeling of being ‘mixed’ does in fact remain.”⁵⁰ Women were offered the opportunity to be remustered, and while some took the “chance of stepping up to the trade of experimental assistant in gunnery or kinetheodolite operator,”⁵¹ others went into non-technical fields or got out altogether: the Gibraltar unit noted a “large increase in the

⁴⁷ De Groot, “I Love the Scent of Cordite in Your Hair,” 74-5.

⁴⁸ NW Routledge, *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery: Anti-Aircraft Artillery, 1914-55* (London: Brassey’s, 1994), 439.

⁴⁹ *The Lioness* 28, no. 2 (May 1955).

⁵⁰ “Overseas News – Gibraltar,” *The Lioness* vol 29 no 2 (May 1956), 28.

⁵¹ Experimental assistants in gunnery were involved in “testing, checking, and carrying out research work on new weapons and ammunition.” Kinetheodolite operators “take and develop photographs of shell-bursts, and by mathematical calculation test the accuracy of gunfire.” D. Collett-Wadge, ed., *Women in Uniform* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, & co., 1946; repr., London: Imperial War Museum Department of Printed Books, 2003), 127.

number of marriages” amidst the re-structuring.⁵² Women continued to have an association with artillery work but this was not apparently able to fill the symbolic hole left by the mixed batteries, and the loss was felt. By 1958, the Ministry of Defence reported that the War Office felt that “a type of employment with an operational flavor such as existed in the mixed AA regiments in the past” would have to be found if “a really significant increase in numbers is to be obtained.”⁵³

The Air Ministry meanwhile spent several years on a tortured and ultimately abortive attempt to launch a women pilots scheme. During the Air Estimates debate in 1947, the Secretary of State for Air, Philip Noel-Baker, stated:

it is proposed, when circumstances permit, to train and employ a very limited number of women to begin with as aircrew for employment on non-combatant duties, in communication flights, anti-aircraft cooperation duties, etc. Consideration is also being given to the formation of a flying branch for women in the Reserve, into which women who are already qualified pilots, including women who have served in the ATA during the war, can be entered. Here is a real hope for women flyers in the RAF, both in the active service and in the auxiliary.⁵⁴

The Air Ministry regarded this statement, particularly the last sentence, as a promise, one that had sparked considerable “enthusiasm in women’s circles.”⁵⁵ Training women as pilots had the potential to boost morale and recruiting in the WRAF, and would allow the retention of those talented women ferry pilots who had served with the Air Transport Auxiliary during the Second World War. It was decided that “the important thing is to get some non-regular WAAFs flying and get them soon,” with flying to be incorporated into

⁵² “The Last of the Regular Mixed HAA Regiments,” *The Lioness* vol 28 no 2 (May 1955), 21; DWRAC’s Quarterly Liason Letter no 5 (Sep 1955), NAM 9211-97-12.

⁵³ Note on Recruitment to the Women’s Services submitted to the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Grigg Committee) by the Ministry of Defence, 9 May 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 10/246.

⁵⁴ *HC Deb 17 March 1947 vol 435 cc 106*.

⁵⁵ Minute by AUS(P), 22 Apr 1947, TNA:PRO AIR 2/9798.

the regular service once the auxiliaries had been established.⁵⁶ The project was fast-tracked, and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force Voluntary Reserve List (Flying) opened in October, 1947.⁵⁷

Although, as the Secretary of State's comment indicates, the WAAF/VR List (Flying) was meant to signal a new chapter for women in aviation, in fact it was overwhelmingly backward-looking. The conditions of service were modeled on those laid down for male reservists, including the requirement that women have 100 hours of solo flying time logged in order to join. This in practice limited potential membership to ATA women, as there was no program that subsidized women's flying in postwar Britain and 100 hours therefore represented a significant outlay of money. A Miss Northridge wrote to the Air Ministry in 1948 asking whether an exception could be made in her case as "the cost of flying as it is to-day make it a very expensive hobby, and... I find it very difficult to fly more than a couple of hours each week." "It seems a great pity," she complained, "that would-be pilots are being deterred by excessive Club Fees, especially the ex-WAAF who did not have the opportunity of obtaining their wings during the war, but instead had to service the aircraft; and now, having the chance to attain their ambitions, foot the expense them-selves."⁵⁸ Miss BJ Drew, another would-be pilot asking for an exception, estimated that "the cost of another 75 hours [solo flying time] would be 95srael95. £225"; Miss Hester Willink, with one more hour of experience, described the cost of finishing the 100 hours as "the whole of a year's salary at present rates."⁵⁹ ATA veterans, meanwhile,

⁵⁶ Emphasis in original. Minute by AMP, 2 May 1947, TNA:PRO AIR 2/9798.

⁵⁷ Note of Action, 22 Sep 1947, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10666.

⁵⁸ Letter from Miss B.I. Northridge, 1 Jun 1948, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10666.

⁵⁹ Letter from Miss BJ Drew, 16 Feb 1948, and Letter from Miss Hester E. Willink, 16 Nov 1947, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10666.

could meet this requirement and made good material for the press besides. That the publicity planned for the List's launch focused on highlighting "some of the better known ex ATA pilots" underlined the reserve's status as a successor organization.⁶⁰ This was not, however, the recipe for a growing organization, and already in September of 1948, DWAAF was warning that the entry standard would need to be lowered if any new members were to be recruited.⁶¹ At this time, however, a meeting called to discuss the issue concluded that "it was desirable to maintain a high standard of qualification" and that "ultimately, the necessary flow to this reserve should be obtained by having a flying branch for women in the regular service which would feed the reserve with trained pilots."⁶²

The attempt to create a flying section in the regular WRAF faced even greater difficulty. Although in 1949, the Air Member for Personnel did "not anticipate any difficulty" in starting a program of training "6 pilots, 3 navigators, and 3 signallers per year," in fact no women regulars ever started flying training in the WRAF during this period.⁶³ A Working Party considered the details of the program over the course of 1949 with a mix of pragmatism and pessimism. The Chairman of the Working Party complained in November:

I understand it costs some £10,000 to train a Bomber Pilot and to train one of these girls up to useful standard for employment in the RAF cannot fall far short of this sum. It is then proposed that she should only spend a limited period on these duties of some 4½ to 5 years and then go to the Reserve or back to her

⁶⁰ Minute from PR3, 20 Sep 1947, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10666.

⁶¹ Minute by DWAAF, 13 May 1948, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10666.

⁶² Note by AMP, "Auxiliary and Reserve Forces Committee: WAAF VR List (Flying): Qualifications required of Candidates for Pilots Duties," n.d. (quoted conclusions cited as from a meeting taking place 24 Aug 1948), TNA:PRO AIR 2/10666.

⁶³ Note by AMP for Air Council, "Flying Training of Members of the WRAF," 10 Sep 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10457.

ground branch. In my opinion this is a gross waste of money. In war we shall need fully trained front-line aircrew and unless we use our training capacity to this end I feel we are being most uneconomic.⁶⁴

AMP emphasized that “we were fairly definitely committed to this training in the Estimates Speech” even if “we shall get little real service value” out of it, but conceded that six or nine months of postponement were acceptable.⁶⁵ Further discussions continued in an increasingly pessimistic vein: “The Chairman stated that it would seem there was no flying job on which these women could be employed if only trained up to ‘wings standard’.”⁶⁶ This issue of finding some sort of useful job once women pilots had been trained ultimately led to a year’s postponement in 1950.

At the appendix to the report is a statement showing the flying posts which the Working Party consider could be filled by women. On the other hand there is no real need for them to be so filled. The scope of their employment is of course limited to non-combatant duties, and in time of emergency there is no doubt that we could fill these posts without difficulty with ex-officers or aircrew who were no longer suitable for the front line... I feel we should reconsider carefully before we commence a scheme which must grow—and which to many people outside the Service may appear to be a stunt and a waste of public money.⁶⁷

Ultimately the Estimates promise was abandoned: the plans for a regular pilots corps were permanently shelved, and the Reserve was quietly wound down. The WRAFVR (Flying) List went first, the casualty of a wider reorganization of the Reserve as well as the long-standing problems surrounding recruiting and promotions. When DWRAF attended a meeting of the Air Public Relations Association in 1950, she learned from editors and reporters that they had received a significant “volume of correspondence... from women pilots of the WRAFVR (Flying) Branch on the absence of any recruitment

⁶⁴ Minute by DDPS1, 11 Nov 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10457.

⁶⁵ Minute by AMP, 15 Nov 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10457.

⁶⁶ Minutes of Second Meeting of the Working Party, 12 Dec 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10457.

⁶⁷ AMP to SofS, 13 Feb 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10457.

to the branch under the existing conditions of entry.”⁶⁸ As a result of this dissatisfaction (and, undoubtedly, its leakage into the press), the standard of entry was in fact lowered from 100 hours solo flying to the possession of a private pilots license.⁶⁹ The question of promotion was another point of difficulty: could women be awarded RAF wings if they were not trained in bombing and gunnery? After much discussion it was decided that “there was no moral or policy objection to women pilots wearing RAF wings,” leading to the award of wings to Pilot Officer Jean Bird, herself an ATA veteran, in 1952.⁷⁰

However, these measures were not enough to address the underlying problems, and the purpose and future of women pilots in the Reserve were still glaringly unclear.

Meanwhile male reservists were being laid off as a result of widespread restructuring.

Thus the end of the WRAFVR (Flying) List came in July 1953, when the Auxiliary and Reserve Forces Committee decided that as “operationally the Section had no value,” the women’s contracts should not be renewed and the whole thing wrapped up quietly.⁷¹ The theoretical regular section, meanwhile, had been postponed yearly since 1950. In March of 1954, the Under Secretary of State requested that a final decision be made one way or another; in December, the Air Council agreed “to abandon the scheme agreed in 1947 for giving flying training to members of the WRAF but to make no announcement unless the matter was raised from the outside.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Minute by DWRAF, 11 Mar 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 10/10666.

⁶⁹ Campbell to Home Command, White Waltham, 13 Sep 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10666.

⁷⁰ Minute by DGPI, 4 Jun 1952, and Minute by S.14/F.8, 14 Nov 1952, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10666; Newsreel “First RAF Wings for Women,” *British Pathé* 1952, <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/first-r-a-f-wings-for-women-aka-1st-woman-gets-raf>.

⁷¹ Minutes of Auxiliary and Reserve Forces Committee, 27 Jul 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10457.

⁷² Minute by USofS, 23 Mar 1954, and Extract from Air Council Conclusions 22(54), 2 Dec 1954, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10457.

The fact that it took so long for the women pilot project to finally be killed off speaks to a certain level of seriousness about realizing it. One finds references, as in a meeting of November 1949, to the expected increase in recruiting once flying instruction is introduced.⁷³ The Air Ministry took seriously the morale and recruiting value of such a program, recognizing that women would be enticed by the illusion of potential pilothood just as men were. Given the lack of opportunities for women of ordinary means to even learn to fly, and the absence of careers in aviation once they did so, the Air Ministry was probably correct to think that a certain cachet was available to them. However, certain apparently concrete principles doomed the project. Chief among these was the idea that women absolutely could not be combat pilots, relegating them to a status far below male pilots. The kinds of duties considered suitable for women were thought of as being too “basic” and ultimately unskilled to justify much investment in training or practice. Meanwhile, the production of male pilots created a backlog that could meet whatever need arose. The Central Office of Information designed a WRAF recruiting poster in 1959 that showed an airwoman standing in front of a fighter plane, “a setting that is exciting to the average girl.” However, this proximity was only proximity, as women could hope only for “a close association with the glamour of aircraft and flying” rather than possession of that glamour as a pilot.⁷⁴

The Admiralty was less concerned about linking the work of Wrens to naval operations; indeed, the separation between ship and shore was firm for women. However, issues of the WRNS Association magazine, *The Wren*, suggest that members of the

⁷³ Notes of meeting held by DM(PP) to discuss length of initial engagements and extensions of service for airwomen, 14 Nov 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10316.

⁷⁴ Memorandum from COI, 23 Jan 1959, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12636.

service were keen to demonstrate the links between their work and activity at sea. *The Wren* regularly reported on “visits to ships” and “sea trips,” occasions when Wrens would be invited to go aboard a naval vessel for a tour and a short cruise. A group of Wrens “putting in some ‘sea-time’” with a day aboard the HMS Chichester in 1958 had an unusually active experience when the ship was diverted to assist a merchant vessel in distress. The fifteen Wrens’ tour was interrupted and they were put to work operating the ship’s radar equipment.⁷⁵ A visit to a ship was usually a much more sedate affair, but nevertheless “memorable for its excitement and interest, the kindness of their hosts and the realization of what it means to be part of the Royal Navy.”⁷⁶ Going on board ship sometimes (but rarely) was part of a woman’s job: members of a typing pool spent several days in 1957 aboard HMS Ark Royal helping to process paperwork produced by a naval exercise.⁷⁷ One group of Wrens got to go to sea in the aircraft carrier HMS Bulwark as babysitters to “children of families who were having a day at sea being shown something of the Navy at work.”⁷⁸ The symmetry between the Wrens invited aboard the HMS Chichester and these families invited to see the aircraft carrier was not accidental. It was beneficial to the Navy for both categories of women, Wrens and wives, to feel part of a naval family and to understand the work of the men at sea.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, by 1960 the women’s forces primarily hoped to recruit many more drivers, domestic workers, secretaries, and cooks for the volunteer services. This fact reflects not only the limits of service leaders’ concern about women’s morale

⁷⁵ KS Ayres, “The HMS Chichester Drama,” *The Wren* 216 (Feb 1959), NMRN 1988.350.18.44.

⁷⁶ “Operation Shop Window 1957,” *The Wren* 212 (Oct 1957), NMRN 1988.350.18.40.

⁷⁷ “A Change in Routine,” *The Wren* 213 (Feb 1958), NMRN 1988.350.18.41.

⁷⁸ EM Garrow, “At Sea in HMS Bulwark,” *The Wren* 213 (Feb 1958), NMRN 1988.350.18.41.

but also the belief that women's work was women's work because women to some extent enjoyed these roles. "We do not think that clerking is necessarily a dull or routine occupation and we believe that it is one for which women are eminently suited. We look for an increase in the number of WRAC clerks."⁷⁹ In Germany, senior officers reported that National Servicemen made poor clerks because they viewed the role as a stepping-stone to better things, whereas "it was possible for girls to regard secretarial work as a whole-time and satisfying occupation."⁸⁰ Although it was recognized that women valued jobs that placed them in close proximity to operations, women's contributions further behind the line were ultimately more valued by services that were trying to carve out more exciting and operational work for the purpose of enticing male volunteers. "We shall always want hewers of wood and drawers of water," wrote the RAF Inspector of Recruiting in 1957, and increasingly women, civilians, and labor-saving technology were expected to relieve soldiers of these type of tasks.⁸¹ Women's connections to operational work all suffered from the same challenge: while some women might enjoy proximity to the "teeth" for a day or even a few years, there was little opportunity for them to enjoy a full-fledged future there.

Women's work in the armed forces bears several similarities to women's work in the civilian world at this time. The permanent services were a reaction to the same labor shortage that had the government officially encouraging women to remain in industry at the end of the war. More basically, women in and out of the forces were frequently

⁷⁹ Third draft report of the WRAC Working Party, circ 19 Jul 1961, TNA:PRO WO 32/18686.

⁸⁰ Inspection of the WRAC in BAOR, 22 Jun 1949, TNA:PRO T 213/216.

⁸¹ Cover letter to Review of WRAF Recruiting, I of R to DWRAF, 25 Jul 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 20/9659.

working in the same fields: cooking or secretarial work, for instance. In employing uniformed women to do this work, the military was redrawing the gendered lines of work and reassigning low-level male personnel to a new, higher status in an effort to boost recruiting. Nevertheless, women remained interested in work that was technical and related to military operations, and military recruiters were careful to display the fact that some of these roles were still open to women in peacetime. It seems therefore, that both men and women were attracted to the same types of military work: jobs that required training that could be transferable to civilian life, used advanced technology, and were closely related to the sharp end of the forces. Because these kind of characteristics corresponded to common ideas about what made careers, and the military, essentially masculine—men were meant to be breadwinners over a long lifespan, and soldiers were meant to fight for their country—military leaders tried to make sure that the majority of male recruits had jobs that fit this profile. In contrast, women's access to these roles was considered new and unusual, not to mention potentially disruptive. Military policy thus allowed for a few women to have such jobs in order to substantiate their claims to be a modern employer, while anchoring the female workforce predominantly in traditionally feminine roles that would not challenge the status quo. The prestige of doing nationally important work as signified by wearing a uniform, and the equal citizenship that this implied, could do a great deal for recruiting both men and women, although as a newly enfranchised population, women were perhaps more attracted to it than men. In a society where women were generally employed in only a few low-status categories, this could be an intangible but important benefit.

4. Femininity, Tradition and Respect

The observance of customs in the Army, whether it be the dignified ceremonial of Trooping the Colour, or the wearing of a piece of coloured cloth behind a badge, is an integral part of military life, derived from military experience through the ages. To the uninitiated these customs may be regarded as meaningless or are scoffed at as being useless anachronisms: but to those who understand their origin, they are the basis of that potent driving force in the British Army – *103srael de corps*.¹

Belonging, status, and respect: these three linked concepts lay beneath the traditions and visual identities the women's services adopted. The success of the women's services was not simply a matter of numbers – the numbers of women who joined and the number of years they served. The senior women who shaped the services also aspired to give women a “real” military career, including all the trappings of the British military identity. Of course they also hoped that by leaning on the culture of their parent services they would also succeed numerically as well. Girls might now choose to carry on their family's service tradition, and as the quotation above illustrates, it was common sense that traditions helped to bind people together, leading to longer, happier service. Finally, the visual links between men's and women's service created by uniforms and insignia helped to solidify the women's membership in an authentic part of the military. Adopting elements of the distinctive identity of their parent services was one way for the women's services to assert their permanence and importance.

Looking at the ways the women's services assembled their own military identity and tradition sheds light on some of the differing meanings of gender integration in the 1950s. As we have seen, the WRAF made a conscious effort to integrate its leadership, discipline, and training with the RAF, whereas the WRAC remained “a women's service

¹ Formatting in original. This book was an assigned text at Sandhurst. Introduction, Major TJ Edwards, *Military Customs* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1947), xix.

run by women”. Nevertheless, the WRAC regarded itself as “integrated” with the Army, particularly when compared to the WRNS or with other countries’ services. On the other side of the question, the WRAF used many of the same institutions and branding elements to counteract their integration and create their own identity and female space. The meaning of gender integration in this context included a certain amount of separation between the sexes. The desire to build a good reputation by emulating and appropriating masculine traditions was countered by the need to preserve and promote femininity. Too much militarism in the women’s public image was potentially a very bad thing indeed: not only might it lead to political opposition, but it could convince parents and young women that this novel career path was not “nice”. With the end of National Service on the horizon at the end of the 1950s, service ministers began to raise recruiting targets for women to help make up the shortfall despite the fact that women’s recruiting had lagged for years. This pressure to improve recruiting, and the outside attention it attracted, resulted in even greater emphasis on femininity. If girls could be reassured that there was nothing unnatural or unattractive about joining up, it was thought, more might be persuaded to do so. Expressions of femininity were also important for the postwar services in trying to distance themselves from their temporary, wartime predecessors. Building up a distinctive military identity was one important way the women’s services could assert their right to be respected, but, as women, it could not stand alone. Respectability and femininity were also essential.

The women directors of the 1940s and early 1950s were by and large women who believed in and respected the “proud tradition” of Britain’s armed forces. Whether or not an individual regards a military career as desirable depends of course on his or her class

background, philosophical or religious beliefs, and personal or family experiences; but these women tended to be “insiders” with a real investment in the services. Leslie Whateley, director of the ATS from 1943 to 1946 and therefore part of many discussions on the future of the women’s service, was the daughter of an Army officer, and as a young woman worked as a secretary to her grandfather, Sir Evelyn Wood VC, as he wrote his memoirs.² Her successor, Mary Tyrwhitt (director 1946-1950) was the daughter of an admiral of the fleet, and sister of another successful naval commander who went on to be second sea lord.³ Vera Laughton Mathews, the highly influential director of the WRNS from 1939 to 1946 was the daughter of Sir John Knox Laughton, a naval instructor who became a pioneering naval historian at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and King’s College, London.⁴ Her successor, Jocelyn Woollcombe (director 1946-1950), was also the daughter of a naval officer, and her maternal grandfather was an Army Colonel.⁵ The directors of the WRAF immediately postwar, Felicity Hanbury (1946-1950) and Nancy Salmon (1950-1956), did not have this family background, but they, like all their fellows named above, had joined up at their earliest opportunity in

² *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Whateley, Dame Leslie Violet Lucy Evelyn,” by Roy Terry, accessed 20 Aug 2012, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/view/article/45561>.

³ *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Tyrwhitt, Dame Mary Joan Caroline,” by Roy Terry, accessed 20 Aug 2012, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/view/article/65699>.

⁴ *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Mathews, Dame Elvira Sibyl Maria Laughton,” by Lesley Thomas, accessed 20 Aug 2012, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/view/article/34937>; *ibid*, s.v. “Laughton, Sir John Knox,” by GAR Callender, accessed 20 Aug 2012, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/view/article/34420>.

⁵ *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Woollcombe, Dame Jocelyn May,” by Lesley Thomas, accessed 20 Aug 2012, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/view/article/60971>.

1938 or 1939 and served throughout the entire Second World War.⁶ Laughton Mathews had also served in the WRNS from 1917-1918 in its first iteration. These women were all well-versed in military customs and traditions, and all believed that women ought to take the same pride in their military careers and identity as the men they were familiar with did. This personal context helps to explain the emphasis the women's services placed on their traditions.

When women joined the military they were not simply attracted by the achievements of the women's services in isolation; rather, many were drawn to the army, navy, or air force as institutions. Some chose to follow in their family's tradition, joining the service their father or brother had been part of. Women directors were keen to establish the kind of family traditions that had helped recruit men, especially officers, for the services for generations. WRAC advertisements played on such traditions with a 1951 print campaign titled, "Girls Can Join the Army, Too!" In one ad, a uniformed young woman with her arm around a pipe-smoking older man comments, "It was an eye-opener to Dad when I joined the Army. He was always telling me of the thrills of *his* soldiering days." In another, the servicewoman declares, "Yes, I showed that big brother of mine! Came home on leave, proud as a peacock, full of the grand time *he* was having in the Army. As if his younger sister couldn't do the same!"⁷ In 1954 Dame Vera Laughton Mathews, the wartime Director of the WRNS told the following anecdote as part of her address to a reunion:

⁶ *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Peake, Dame Felicity Hyde," by Humphrey Wynn, accessed 20 Aug 2012, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/view/article/77403>; Obituary, "Dame Nancy Snagge," *Times*, 30 Nov 1999.

⁷ WRAC advertisements, 1951, TNA:PRO INF 2/86.

The other day at one of those delightful gatherings which I often attend at the Association Branches, when members were comparing notes about their children—or, as in my case, their grandchildren—one young mother said, ‘I have two and they’re both going into the Navy’. ‘Oh,’ said I innocently, ‘they’re both boys.’ ‘No,’ she said, ‘one boy and one girl’—just like that. How that remark brought back to me the early days of recruiting for the WRNS in 1939, the heartening screeds we used to receive from girls who wrote that they had longed all their lives to be able to join the Navy. It is splendid that such a remark can now be made so simply, because the love of the sea which is the heritage of our country is as strong in its daughters as in its sons, and will remain so as long as Britain stands in the sea.⁸

The leaders of the women’s services regarded a close relationship with the traditions of their “father” services as a valuable aid to morale and recruiting, and they were probably right to do so. Each of the services had its own relationship to the traditions of its parent service, and each used those traditions in the context of its own particular struggle to define a place and claim respect as part of the fighting forces.

Organizationally, the WRAF was “fully integrated” with the RAF, but this was part of a larger cultural integration that had its roots in the wartime Women’s Auxiliary Air Force. In her work on the WAAF, Tessa Stone has stressed the pride these women took in their unique relationship to the RAF. Their status as substitution workers and their close integration in RAF workplaces played a role, but also important was the fact that the WAAF wore “the same” uniform as the men with the same fabric, crest, badges, and buttons.⁹ Women’s role in RAF operations was both justified by and evidence of the meritocratic culture supposed to be created by the use of cutting-edge modern

⁸ *The Wren*, 202 (Jun 1954), NMRN 1988.350.18.30: 4.

⁹ Tessa Stone, “Creating a (gendered?) Military Identity: The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War,” *Women’s History Review* 8, no. 4 (1999): 605–24; Tessa Stone, “The Integration of Women into a Military Service: The Women’s Auxiliary Air Force in the Second World War,” Ph.D., Cambridge, 1999.

technology. The RAF prided itself on being forward-thinking, and promoted the idea that anyone who was good enough to do the job, regardless of social status or background, would be allowed to do it.¹⁰

The introduction of the permanent WRAF with its tightly integrated structure strengthened the RAF's self-image as the most modern of the forces, and the leaders of the WRAF were proud of their unique status as members of the RAF itself. That women were not part of a separate body but were part of the RAF proper on equal terms with men was a commonplace, but the use of the title "Women's Royal Air Force" created a certain ambiguity which deserves investigation. Indeed, Air Ministry Orders described the 1948 Army and Air Force (Women's Service) Act as follows: "Women officers and airwomen will be fully integrated into the force to which they belong and will not be organized as a separate corps or body."¹¹ In 1947 the opinion of the Air Ministry was that since "in future the women officers and other ranks will be members of the RAF like anyone else," it was not "necessary or desirable to have a separate designation for them," but in regulations they favored referring to them as "RAF(W)."¹² It is unclear from the records when or why this preference changed, but it seems likely "WRAF" was chosen in order to be parallel to the WRAC and WRNS, and this was the name the service had when it was launched.¹³ In 1959 it seems to have been policy that in printing recruiting

¹⁰ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008).

¹¹ A.75, Air Ministry Orders Class A: Standing Orders, 20 Jan 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 19/808.

¹² Titles of the Women's Services, Report by the Principal Personnel Officers to the Committee of Service Ministers on Common Administrative Problems, Ministry of Defence, 4 Mar 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

¹³ "WRAF" was the title used for the air women's auxiliary during the First World War, so it was not without some precedent.

materials “the ‘W’ in WRAF when used as a name block is to be the least prominent letter.”¹⁴

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to say that the WAAF ceased to exist or that the WRAF was merely a label. The same cultural and social influences discussed in other parts of this dissertation helped to mitigate the effect of the RAF’s radically egalitarian rhetoric. As we have seen, the belief in “woman management” shaped both the business of the woman officer and the living conditions of airwomen. The RAF – and the WRAF – were not immune from the belief that women needed a special environment in order to thrive. Furthermore, despite the WRAF’s cache as a unique type of women’s force, institutional common sense dictated that the three women’s services should be treated as a single problem. Politicians, treasury officials, and senior civil servants alike were convinced that the WRAF, WRAC, and WRNS should have as similar policies as possible. In the Air Ministry, this instinct was supported by a desire not to allow the other services to have an unfair recruiting advantage. The WRAF was in fact very closely integrated into the RAF, far more so than the WRAC or WRNS was integrated with their parent services, and the WRAF enjoyed a culture which stressed merit and ability above factors like class or gender. But it did not exist in a vacuum: the WRAF’s integration was subject to the limitations imposed by prevailing ideas about gender in 1950s Britain.

These tensions were at the forefront in discussions about the formation of a WRAF Officers’ Association in 1954. The First World War-era Women’s Royal Air Force Old Comrades Association had merged with the Comrades of the Royal Air Forces Association in 1941 to create an organization that would shortly be renamed the Royal

¹⁴ Call report, 29 Mar 1959, TNA:PRO INF 12/799; DDM3 comments on poster design, 30 Jan 1959, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12636.

Air Forces Association; thus welfare services for men and women of the air force were already integrated before the end of the war.¹⁵ However, as the first regular officers began to leave the service in the mid-1950s, Director Nancy Salmon saw a need for a group that could organize social events among serving and former officers and help them keep in touch. She invited all of the former Directors of the WRAF and WAAF to join the new WRAF Officers' Association as vice presidents in order to give it an auspicious start, but Helen Gwynne-Vaughan and Katharine Trefusis-Forbes both declined, expressing their misgivings at this new woman-only venture. "You have so magnificent an opportunity in the RAF of being officers and not just women-officers; it is a pity to weaken this by segregating yourself," wrote Gwynne-Vaughan.¹⁶ The organization addressed an important need, especially since many women officers got married shortly after leaving the service, and it was undoubtedly a comfort for women to be able to find and reconnect with old friends despite having moved and changed names. However, as Gwynne-Vaughan warned, its existence also reinforced the differences between men and women officers and any notion that the WRAF should be a social circle unto itself.

The development of postwar RAF and WRAF uniforms further illustrates the complex reality of gender relations in the air force. During the Second World War, men and women wore the same uniform, with the exception that women wore skirts instead of trousers. This design became iconic through the publicity surrounding the young pilots of the Battle of Britain, but some senior officers disapproved of what they perceived as the

¹⁵ "The history of the RAF Association," accessed 7 Nov 2012, <http://www.rafa.org.uk/Who-we-are/History>.

¹⁶ Helen Gwynne-Vaughan is better known as the Director of the ATS from 1939 to 1941, but she had been Director of the WRAF for just over a year in 1918-19 which was the basis for this invitation. Gwynne-Vaughan to Salmon, 12 Aug 1955, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14371.

tunic's sloppy appearance, particularly with regard to the expandable patch pockets below the tunic's belt. Plans were accordingly drawn up for a new style Home Pattern Dress to be introduced after the war. This new streamlined design, put forward in 1946, was specifically drawn up with the "desirability of similar uniforms being worn by officers and airmen of the RAF, and by officers and airwomen of the WAAF" in mind: the women's jacket was to be the same as the men's except with smaller buttons and a faux instead of a real belt. Significantly, these plans also called for officers and airmen/women to wear as similar uniforms as possible, another indication of the egalitarian vision the Air Ministry had of its future.¹⁷

The new pattern uniform was short-lived, however. In 1949, the Inspector General recommended that the uniform question be reopened, having been "impressed with the intensity of feeling against some of the recent changes in RAF uniform" during his visits to stations.

Officers object to [the new jacket] from both the sentimental and practical points of view. As regards the former, they point out that the old type has the tradition of the 1939-45 war behind it... they feel that we should not lightly discard a garment of which so many people are proud.

He concluded that "it would be unwise to disregard or suppress the widespread dissatisfaction which exists over our uniform. It is a nettle which must be grasped, even though it may mean retracing our steps."¹⁸ This report sparked a wide ranging review, including a survey of all commands to solicit feedback and suggestions, ultimately

¹⁷ Report of a Committee on RAF and WAAF Home Pattern Dress, Dec 1946, TNA:PRO AIR 2/9746.

¹⁸ Inspector General's Report No.430, "RAF Dress," 15 Feb 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10675.

resulting in the reinstatement of the wartime-style Service Dress, albeit with a slight rearrangement of the buttons.¹⁹

Amid the outcry about the men's uniforms, the women's uniforms also came in for criticism and revision. In response to the Inspector General's report DWRAF Hanbury reaffirmed that "we should adhere as closely as possible to the designs proposed for men," but also suggested that "as further changes are now being contemplated, it might be a good opportunity to try and evolve a really first class design." Her comments reveal a preoccupation with the adaptations "necessary to suit the female figure": "a shirt, as designed for men, is in my opinion an ugly garment for a woman when worn without a coat and I should like to see a more suitably designed shirt-blouse introduced for women."²⁰ The questionnaire responses from the commands expressed support for a rethinking of the women's uniform.²¹ An extensive critique compiled by women stationed in the Middle East declared that "it does not seem to be necessary to dress the WRAF in slightly modified RAF attire... There can be little objection, as far as tradition is concerned, to a complete re-design of WRAF dress on more feminine lines."²²

As it turned out, there was an objection to departing from the established practice, but it was overwhelmed by the drive for a more woman-specific uniform. In late 1950, DWRAF received approval to test a new design of her own devising, "a long, plain jacket

¹⁹ Submission to the King, 5 Mar 1951, and Signal to all commands, 9 Mar 1951, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10675.

²⁰ DWRAF Hanbury, comments on IG Report No.403, 14 Apr 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10675.

²¹ Summary of responses as of 3 Jan 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10675.

²² MEAF Review of Dress Policy, signed by G/C HAV Hogan, 22 Apr 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10675.

with no breast-pockets, no belt, and with false side pockets... [and] a six-gored skirt.”²³ This pattern was met with almost unanimous disapproval during its trial run. “Dowdy in the extreme,” declared Maintenance Command: “the general opinion is that the uniform is drab, unimpressive, and in fact, imparts a ‘convict-like’ appearance to the unfortunate wearer.”²⁴ In Fighter Command, where opinion “borders on intense dislike,” the comparison was to “a Mid-Victorian Church Army uniform.”²⁵ “I cannot stress too strongly my recommendation that the uniform now under discussion should not be adopted for general use in the WRAF,” wrote the Commander of Coastal Command.²⁶

The new Director responded to this wave of dissatisfaction by asking noted fashion designer Victor Stiebel to help, but the responses from most commands indicated a desire to return to a previous pattern.²⁷ With the swirl of uniform changes going on at this time, it is not always clear which “old pattern” is being referred to, but 90 Group at least was “strongly in favour of returning to the same pattern as the RAF.”²⁸ Similarly, Transport Command reported that “WRAF personnel would prefer to have a uniform as nearly identical as possible to that of the RAF,” and more specifically that “officers would prefer to return to the old pattern as the RAF has done.”²⁹ Nevertheless, the criticism

²³ Report and Recommendation of the Working Party on Home Dress, Jul 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10675; Edward Ford to Air Marshal Sir Leslie Hollinghurst, 1 Sep 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12601. This design was based on the WRAF Band uniform: see TNA:PRO AIR 2/10502.

²⁴ CinC Maintenance Command questionnaire reply, 20 Dec 1951, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12601.

²⁵ CinC Fighter Command questionnaire reply, 23 Jan 1952, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12601.

²⁶ CinC Coastal Command questionnaire reply, 10 Dec 1951, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12601.

²⁷ Stiebel to Salmon, 13 Jun 1952, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12601.

²⁸ CinC 90 Group questionnaire reply, 1 Nov 1951, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12601.

²⁹ CinC Transport Command questionnaire reply, 15 Jan 1952, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12601.

frequently focused on a lack of “smartness,” a problem which was interpreted as a lack of femininity.

Stiebel’s brief was clearly to feminize the WRAF uniforms and make them more attractive by the standards of contemporary fashion. The WRAC by this time had introduced their new uniforms, designed by the Queen’s dressmaker, Norman Hartnell (discussed in greater detail below). The Stiebel uniform, which was ultimately adopted, continued the trend toward a streamlined, suit-like appearance, in contrast to the men’s uniforms with their multitude of pockets.

The new uniform is less to do with the change in detail than with a change in shape. Women’s uniforms in the past have been based on a masculine shape, i.e. square shoulders, longish jacket and straight skirts. The shape of women has changed a good deal since the war. This is probably to do with the change in shape of their clothes. Accordingly the new uniform has tended to bring ‘the shape’ up to date, the jacket being shorter, the shoulders less square and the waistline more defined and smaller. The uniform skirt is also on more practical lines, also smarter by the fuller flare.³⁰

“Shape” was indeed a key preoccupation of women’s fashion of the 1950s and the preeminent criterion for femininity in dress. The so-called New Look, often associated with Christian Dior, called for fabric and corseting to be used to achieve an hourglass shape, explicitly linked in advertising and fashion writing with luxury, individuality, theatricality, and female sexuality.³¹ One oral history respondent remembered thinking

³⁰ This description is not attributed in any way within the memo to Stiebel, but it addresses the basic design concept in language that so exactly reflects contemporary fashion rhetoric that it seems likely that it owes something to the designer himself. E13(e) to DWRAF, 5 Jan 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12601.

³¹ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: IB Taurus, 2003), 225-7; Colin McDowell, *Forties Fashion and the New Look* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 178-9; Angela Partington “The Days of the New Look: Consumer Culture and Working-Class Affluence,” in *Labour’s Promised Land? Culture and Society in Labour Britain 1945-51* ed. Jim Fyrth (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), 252; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Women under Austerity: Fashion in Britain during the

the trend was “an expression that everything was going to be different and new and more lavish... the use of yards and yards of material. There was this need to get away from this semi-masculine influence [of the war years].”³² The WRAF design provided by Stiebel was certainly not as exaggerated as civilian fashions of the period, but its emphasis on “the female form,” reiterated in press reports, was very much of the moment.³³

The Stiebel design was adopted without the testing of the previous iterations, and seems to have been well-received despite some difficulties in the manufacturing arising from its fitted profile. But its departure from the men’s uniforms did not go unnoticed, and the Inspector of the WRAF, Group Officer Anne Stephens, complained about the design and the whole project of introducing femininity to the uniforms. Stephens wrote that she was “dismayed and greatly perturbed” that the uniform was apparently almost ready to be introduced, and warned against it “for reasons of both morale and practical value.” The design, she wrote, was “essentially a 1952 fashion,” and being so plain was not recognizably military, and therefore a hindrance to recruiting efforts. Without any pockets the jacket was impractical and “airhostessish.” But above all, “members of the WRAF are tremendously proud of belonging to the Royal Air Force... great pride is felt in wearing the same uniform.” “There is no need for a special crusade to feminize the service and therefore no need for a specially feminine cut of uniform,” Stephens warned, and introducing one unnecessarily would only encourage those men who were already

1940s,” in Moira Donald and Linda Hurcombe, eds., *Representations of Gender from Prehistory to the Present* (New York: St Martin’s, 2000): 218-37; Margaret Maynard, “‘The Wishful Feeling about Curves’: Fashion, Femininity, and the ‘New Look’ in Australia,” *Journal of Design History* 8, no. 1 (1995): 51-2.

³² Maggie Wood ed., *“We Wore What We’d Got”: Women’s Clothes in World War II* (Exeter: Warwickshire Books, 1989), 70.

³³ “Express Photonews: Air Girls Get a New Shape,” *Daily Express*, 12 Feb 1954.

hesitant to accept integration.³⁴ There is no recorded response on file to Stephens' critiques, but her letter demonstrates that although some women in the WRAF welcomed femininity in their work clothes, not all were entirely pleased with leaving the men's designs behind.

"The point we so want to stress is that members of the Women's Royal Air Force are fully integrated with the RAF and are not a separate Women's Service," wrote the Director in 1959, suggesting a draft message for the Queen to send for the WRAF's 10th anniversary.³⁵ The same decade that saw the proud introduction of a policy of integrating women into the air force also saw a dramatic differentiation of men and women's uniforms. Perhaps the policy of dressing men and women alike became unnerving when it was paired with a policy that could make that equality real; although we should note that women, particularly the Directors of the WRAF, took the lead in introducing changes. For these women, it was essential that their service project a feminine identity in order to assert itself as a normal activity for women. Uniforms, the public presentation of women's bodies, were the easiest and most obvious place to increase femininity.

The changes in air force uniform also suggest that history and modernity had different meanings for men and women in these circumstances. For men, a new design represented a break with the glorious past. Men wanted to be associated with the heroes of the Battle of Britain, and abandoning that uniform and its rakish glamour was a deeply unpopular move. In contrast, the WRAF was embarking on something new, something they hoped would be enticingly, excitingly modern. The Stiebel uniform rejected the masculine influences of wartime fashion, embracing instead the new idiom of postwar fashion with

³⁴ Inspector WRAF to DWRAF, 8 Dec 1952, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12601.

³⁵ DWRAF minute, 20 Feb 1959, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14876.

its emphasis on the female form. The WRAF uniform designed by Victor Stiebel was the product of a complex series of decisions that ultimately excluded the continued use of a single design for both sexes.

The Auxiliary Territorial Corps, the WRAC's predecessor, struggled with image problems throughout the war. The ATS was the largest of the three women's auxiliaries, and therefore in most need of women being directed into work; however, it was also the least popular and so was reputed to be full of "bad" girls, with mannish manners and loose morals. Accusations of widespread immorality were largely put down by 1943, but the ATS was always open to accusations of being "not nice" while the WAAF and WRNS enjoyed a more selective reputation. This issue of immorality and low quality was of course something the ATS' leaders vehemently denied and tried to work against, but in setting up the WRAC they took several steps to revamp the image of women in the Army. The WRAC's size and duties were still determined by the availability of men, and so women were still in many ways second-class. But as a regular Corps, they had access to the highly symbolic material culture of the British Army, specifically the regimental tradition.

The British Army's regimental system was not only an organizational framework but an ideology that defined what it meant to be a part of the army. Men, whether officers or other ranks, were expected to belong not so much to the army as to a regiment: a regiment which had a specific local identity, glorious history, uniform, and set of customs. Through learning about their regiment's history and signifiers, recruits were given inspiring examples to live up to and a reputation to defend. The regimental system

created by the late Victorian Cardwell-Childers reforms was meant to envelop the soldier in a “family” environment in which he was looked after and watched over at all times, with his regimental identity coming first and foremost. The “classic” Cardwell-Childers regimental system began to be actively disassembled by the Attlee governments after the Second World War, though many of its cultural elements had been undercut by reality for decades. Britain’s changing strategic position, financial difficulties, and the belief that decreased imperial responsibility would also decrease overseas campaigns, all led politicians and senior War Office figures to conclude that a flexible, more centralized system was needed in the Army. Meanwhile cultural and demographic trends undercut an older vision of regimental life. Men living in a country with full employment were not willing to sacrifice creature comforts, leisure time, and personal autonomy for work and the basics of life in the way their ancestors had been. Demographically, Britain’s postwar population was more urban and mobile than ever, and the regiments’ regional identities meant less.³⁶

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the WRAC was being established, the ideal that each regiment ought to have a distinct identity, and this identity must be conveyed to new recruits, was still strong even as the regimental system of organization was becoming defunct. The WRAC subscribed wholeheartedly to the basic assertions of the regimental system – all the more as a way of justifying, normalizing, and valorizing their separatist administrative organization. A regimental identity gave women something of their own to rally around that was – depending how one looked at it – something of men’s culture appropriated by women, or something exclusively female and off-limits to

³⁶ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c.1870-2000* (Oxford, 2005), 290-333.

men. A regimental identity allowed women to own their exclusion and even express it as inclusion. The regimental system was a language of separatism endowed with honor, history, and tradition, that allowed women to be a part of army culture without actually threatening to de-gender that culture.

In constructing the WRAC's regimental identity, senior officers were faced with a problem: it was necessary to preserve and celebrate the tradition of women serving with the Army, but the ATS had not enjoyed much popularity during the Second World War. There was therefore a strong incentive to start fresh, although this had to be done in a way that would not upset or insult the very important corps of serving ATS officers. Heraldic symbols and language were commonly used by regiments to evoke a chivalric tradition stretching back through history: a world in which honor and respect ruled supreme, and for the women this historicism helped to gloss over the controversies that were part of their own past.³⁷ The WRAC's badges, motto, and uniform all made reference to a broadly painted military past lightened by touches of conventional femininity. Particularly important was an emphasis on "strength" which allowed for the idea of cooperation without passivity. The creators of the WRAC's symbolic arsenal tried to avoid any reference to competition or comparison between the sexes. Overall, the goal was to blend into the existing regimental system.

The WRAC's motto, cap badge, and buttons were discussed together in the late 1940s, although the badge and buttons were finalized in time to be announced with the new uniform design in 1949, and the motto was not announced until 1955. The ATS cap badge had simply been "a laurel wreath with the lettering ATS in the centre surmounted

³⁷ French, *Military Identities*, 86.

by a Crown,” and its buttons were the “general service” pattern.³⁸ The senior ATS officers involved in the design process clearly wanted something figurative for their permanent corps; one commented, “I could bear a scroll under the badge bearing a motto but I could NOT bear a scroll saying ‘Women’s Royal Army Corps.’ It’s too like the Women’s Land Army.”³⁹ Words or initials were well enough for a hastily assembled women’s volunteer force, but a real regiment should have its own heraldic symbolism to draw on.

Classical references were explored: Boadicea, “a very militant British lady and a soldier” was one candidate.⁴⁰ The College of Heralds suggested an Amazon, pictured holding a dagger, but DATS, reviewing the designs, nixed this idea on the grounds that it was too “ominous” as well as “misleading as the WRAC may not carry side arms.”⁴¹ One senior ATS officer employed at the War Office suggested that Atalanta could feature on the capbadge, and the buttons could have apples on them:

The story of Atalanta is analogous to the internal history leading up to the national acceptance of women as members of the Armed Forces. Their fight against prejudice eventually only won by reason of force of circumstance, later consolidated by their success and proven usefulness in time of war. At the same time their weaknesses also became apparent in that, retaining their womanly attractions, they were tempted by the golden apple, many of them thus being carried off into a state of matrimony and lost to the service.

This officer amended her own proposal, striking out the idea of apple buttons with the comment “on second thought, too liable to rude construction.”⁴² Rudeness proved a more pressing problem than avoiding emblems that were already being used by other

³⁸ First Report of the Committee on Post-War Dress for QARANC and WRAC, 2 Apr 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/13699.

³⁹ Controller Julia Cowper to DDATS, 23 Feb 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

⁴⁰ Minute by AG4(d), 20 Apr 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

⁴¹ DDATS to DDOS(G), 28 Oct 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13020.

⁴² Memo by ADATS AG19, 3 Mar 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

regiments. “It is difficult to think of any animal which would relate to the ATS, and we wish here and now to veto any suggestion of lambs or any other species known to lie down with lions,” wrote one officer, referencing the British Army crest adopted in the 1930s, which featured a prominent lion.⁴³ One male officer cautioned that “it is difficult to suggest [a motto] that completely defeats Thomas Adkins’ genius for rudery.”⁴⁴ A military identity was a difficult thing to pin down for women without straying into something too gentle and pacifist, or adopting something which could have a sexual double meaning. Nevertheless, the final badge design adopted by the WRAC portrayed a lioness within a laurel wreath – “the female counterpart of the lion that figures in so many Military badges.”⁴⁵ The buttons featured the monogram of the Princess Royal, Mary, who was the “Controller Commandant” of the WRAC as she had been for the ATS.⁴⁶

ATS officers were asked to contribute their suggestions for the new motto, and the submitted lists reflect a diverse range of values, from pious Christian womanhood to a more militant posture. Various mottos in English and “shocking Latin” were sent in from around the country expressing sentiments such as Fearless in War, Faithful in Peace; Let God be our Guide; Friendliness Makes Peace; and perhaps less seriously, “Hoc Age: ‘This is your job’ or ‘Mind what you are about!’”⁴⁷ North Midland Group ATS suggested that the WRAC could adopt a Latin motto with the acronym ATS in order to preserve those initials: Agmini Toti Subveniamus (“Let us help the whole column”); Agmini Toti

⁴³ Minute by ADATS AG19, 12 Apr 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

⁴⁴ Major TJ Edwards AG4d to Controller EWI Hobkirk, n.d., TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

⁴⁵ First Report of the Committee on Post-War Dress for QARANC and WRAC, 2 Apr 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/13699.

⁴⁶ “The Girls Go Green – And Grey,” *Soldier* vol 5 no 10 (Dec 1949), 8-9; First Report of the Committee on Post-War Dress for QARANC and WRAC, 2 Apr 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/13699.

⁴⁷ Submissions 1948-1953, TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

Subvenir (“We came to the help of the column”); or Adiuvars Tecum Sequor (“I follow to help you”).⁴⁸

The motto finally selected, “Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re” (“Gentle in manner, resolute in deed”), balanced strength and boldness with femininity, while the choice to use a Latin phrasing reflected a heraldic and gentlemanly tradition in the army.⁴⁹

Gentleness and resolution were both important values as far as the Director of the WRAC who selected the motto was concerned. To go along with the new motto, the Chief Staff Chaplain composed a collect to serve as the official WRAC prayer, which concluded with the line, “Direct our lives so that we may look each to the good of others in word and deed, for His sake who loved us and gave Himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.”⁵⁰ The Director wrote back with a proposal to change this as follows: “Direct our lives so that we may have courage and resolution in the performance of our duty and hallow all our friendships by the blessing of Thy Spirit, for His sake...”. Her criticism of the original prayer was that while “the prayer you have given me does in fact approach very nearly to the spirit of the Motto in so far as the ‘Suaviter in Modo’ part goes; it does not however include the ‘fortiter in re’ part.”⁵¹

The WRAC’s badges and buttons had been part of the design of their new uniform, itself a very important part of establishing a unique regimental identity. The ATS had worn khaki, which was problematic from both aesthetic and cultural standpoints. Oral history testimony confirms that khaki was an unpopular color during the Second World

⁴⁸ Translations as given in original. Northern Command to DATS 7 May 1948, TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

⁴⁹ Memo to all commands, 1 Apr 1955, TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

⁵⁰ Chief Staff Chaplain to DWRAC, 17 Jan 1955, TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

⁵¹ DWRAC to Chief Staff Chaplain, 20 Jan 1955, TNA:PRO WO 32/13167.

War, and many women noted blue uniforms as an attractive feature of the WRNS and WRAF.⁵² On a deeper cultural level, the idea of women wearing khaki had been a symbolic battleground during the First World War over the proper roles of the sexes in wartime. “Wearing khaki” became shorthand for heroic national service when derived from the British Expeditionary Force’s khaki uniforms, and when women’s organizations adopted this cloth for their own uniforms, it represented for some a serious transgression.⁵³ By 1939, this particular controversy had died out and the ATS’ khaki uniforms were less inflammatory. But whether from lingering connotations or aesthetic dislike, khaki had not been a successful color for the ATS and the WRAC was eager for a change. In fact such a change was taken as a given as early as 1945.⁵⁴

The Committee on Post-War Dress for QARANC and WRAC, chaired by DWRAC Mary Tyrwhitt, above all wanted a design that would make women “recognizable as part of the Army,” while still projecting an independent regimental identity.⁵⁵ Thus the committee chose bottle green as the main color for the new uniform, in order “to avoid adopting a colour which closely resembles one already worn by a particular Regiment or Corps... [bottle green] is different from the Rifle and Light Infantry Green.” Four

⁵² Tessa Stone, “Creating a (gendered?) military identity,” 605-24; Marion Kettlewell interview, recorded May 1998, IWM cat#18220.

⁵³ Lucy Noakes, “Eve in Khaki: Women working with the British military, 1915-18,” in *Women and Work Culture: Britain 1850-1950*, ed. Krista Cowman and Louise Jackson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 213-228; Janet Lee, “‘I wish my mother could see me now’: the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and negotiation of gender and class relations, 1907-1918” *NWSA Journal* 19, no. 2 (2007): 145.

⁵⁴ First Report of the Committee on Post-War Dress for QARANC and WRAC, 2 Apr 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/13699.

⁵⁵ The QARANC was given the same dress uniform as the WRAC except in grey and scarlet. The two services had separate administrations, and the common uniform is evidence of the way many senior military and governmental officials regarded women associated with the military as a single problem.

prominent designers were recruited by the Ministry of Supply and the Society of British Dress Designers to submit their designs for a jacket, skirt, greatcoat, beret, and ceremonial forage cap: Charles Creed, Norman Hartnell, Edward Molyneux, and Aage Thaarup. Of these, Hartnell's design was the winner, "as it has a feminine line and yet is reminiscent of Military Uniforms of the early nineteenth century."⁵⁶ The British Army magazine noted that the design featured "three Hussar-style cross cut seams across the front" and that the lower part of the jacket resembled the cut away style used by Scots regiments.⁵⁷ These historical and military allusions were precisely what the committee had been looking for.

The Committee had "felt that a No.1 Dress created by a well known designer would have considerable recruiting value" but the designers were not the only famous names closely associated with the uniform. The new design had strong links to the royal family, which helped to strengthen the "heraldic" quality of the WRAC's identity, as well as being useful for attracting prestige both internally and externally. That Norman Hartnell was the Queen's dressmaker was a key detail in all the reports about his WRAC design; as a later recruiting film commented, "the uniforms themselves are designed by the Queen's dressmaker, which is more than most girls' clothes were before they joined up."⁵⁸ Aage Thaarup's design for the forage cap was selected above Hartnell's: the Queen and Princess Elizabeth were patrons of Thaarup as well, and the press was informed that the WRAC forage cap was similar to the hat, also designed by Thaarup, worn by Princess

⁵⁶ First Report of the Committee on Post-War Dress for QARANC and WRAC, 2 Apr 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/13699.

⁵⁷ "The Girls Go Green – And Grey," *Soldier* 5, no. 10 (December 1949).

⁵⁸ *Hers to Command*, Imperial War Museum COI/304.

Elizabeth “at the first Trooping the Colour ceremony after the war.”⁵⁹ Royal review was routine for changes to any military uniform, but the Post-War Dress Committee were keen to publicize the fact that “their Majesties have shewn profound interest, and have in fact selected the designs recommended.”⁶⁰ The strong and special royal connection asserted for the WRAC uniform was not simply a matter of celebrity endorsement or discouraging any opposition to the new design. It gave the uniform, and by extension the WRAC, a special prestige based on a deeply traditional and historical source.

The British Army’s regimental system provided a logic whereby women could participate in army traditions and culture without being admitted to the identities claimed by men. Although the WRAC defended its structure as “a small but efficient women’s corps run by women,” it used its visual identity as a realm in which it could assert its membership in the Army’s culture.⁶¹ The leaders of the WRAC were familiar with Army tradition and used the customs and elements of the regimental system wholeheartedly. They clearly felt that the Army’s tradition of culturally independent regiments was one that could work to their advantage, and in fact they felt that the regimental system was one that, in the long run, was best suited to integrate women into the military, since in their eyes women were inherently unable to participate in active combat. Adopting regimental traditions was a way of asserting that women had a right to be part of the Army proper: they were not merely civilians working for the Army, or wives, daughters, and camp followers.

⁵⁹ “New Outfit Disguises OS Girls,” *Daily Express*, 5 Nov 1949.

⁶⁰ First Report of the Committee on Post-War Dress for QARANC and WRAC, 2 Apr 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/13699.

⁶¹ Report of the Committee on the Women’s Royal Army Corps (McLean Committee), Jul 1952, TNA:PRO WO 216/521.

Women's relationship to a naval identity was necessarily dictated by the fact that they did not serve at sea. The existence of their service was explicitly attributed to the fact that "the acquisition of sea experience [was] the first and most important requirement in building up a peacetime Navy," and a supply of women to staff shore establishments would allow men to spend more time at sea.⁶² Nevertheless, the association with the sea and the Senior Service was both potent and distinctive, and the WRNS attempted to make use of it. WRNS recruitment materials stressed that "the customs and traditions of the Royal Navy affect the very tenor of [a Wren's] life... She is a member of a ship's company and, as in the Navy, 'goes ashore' when she proceeds on leave and 'returns on board'."⁶³ Women ratings wore ribbons with the name of their establishment on their caps, a privilege granted during the Second World War. The Admiralty believed that "the main appeal of the WRNS is that it is part of the Navy," and this was supported by recruit surveys.⁶⁴ Publicity materials accordingly featured images of women boarding boats that would take them to work. The fact that WRNS officers training took place at the Naval College in Greenwich also made for picturesque publicity, with groups of new officers standing in the famous Painted Hall representing the naval heritage of their service.

Wrens could and did appropriate naval tradition in many ways, but their anomalous disciplinary status was not forgotten. In the case of their training facility, named HMTE Dauntless in 1948, it seems clear that at least for some male officers the disciplinary

⁶² Account of address by Admiral Denny, Minutes of Senior WRNS Officers' Conferences, 18 Jul 1947, NMRN 1988.350.28.2; see also the discussion of this issue in chapter one.

⁶³ "Serve with the Royal Navy in the WRNS," NMM DAU/149/1.

⁶⁴ Secretary of State for the Navy to Hon Richard Wood, MP, 7 Apr 1959, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1165.

difference between men and women could be used to keep women in their place and away from too much ownership of naval identity. It was traditional in the Navy that shore establishments were commissioned as “ships”; as the WRNS brochure quoted above indicates, entering or leaving a naval base was referred to as boarding or going ashore. In order to achieve this legal fiction, an establishment had to have an officer and “ship’s company” subject to the Naval Discipline Act, and the Admiralty would designate some sort of craft to serve as the “name ship”. Since the WRNS training facility was run and used entirely by women, who were expressly not subject to the Naval Discipline Act, it had not been given the status of HMS but rather HMTE when it was founded in the late 1940s.

In 1952, the Second Sea Lord proposed that the Dauntless should be properly commissioned: this “would constitute a well deserved recognition of the store set upon the WRNS by the Royal Navy” and “would give a great fillip to recruiting and morale in the WRNS.” He pointed out that the medical officer assigned to the training camp, along with the two or three sailors who were engaged in maintenance work, could constitute the “ship’s company” without much of a stretch: “Within the strict interpretation of the law ‘Dauntless’ is as fully qualified to be styled ‘HMS’ as is the Royal Naval Barracks at Portsmouth.”⁶⁵ Although he asserted that promoting Dauntless “could give no possible offence to anyone,” it is clear from the wording of his proposal that he was already aware of opposition. The Secretary of the Ships Names Committee declared in response that “all these qualifications exist in such an exiguous form... that if we used them in support of the granting of the HMS designation we should really be using a very little mannish tail

⁶⁵ Minute by Second Sea Lord, 19 May 1952, TNA:PRO ADM 1/24846.

to wag a little lady-like dog.”⁶⁶ The Second Sea Lord was “undaunted (? Dauntless) and unconvinced.” The conventions surrounding ‘HMS’ were all “based on a quibble” and there was no logical reason why that quibble should not extend to cover Dauntless. More importantly, in his view, “it is not encouraging to the WRNS that every shore establishment a Wren serves in except ‘her own’ is styled HMS.”⁶⁷ Ultimately the question was settled in a private meeting in November 1953, and HMS Dauntless was commissioned as such on December 11, 1953.⁶⁸

The debate over the HMS/HMTE Dauntless demonstrates how tenuous the WRNS’ hold was over the naval identity that they valued so highly. The idea that shore establishments were ships was clearly a fiction, and women were in theory an integral part of the navy even though they had a separate disciplinary code. For the Second Sea Lord these ambiguities could mean extending to women the dignity of having their own “ship,” but for others this was unacceptable. Women could not be treated as members of the navy like any others; they were not subject to the Naval Discipline Act and this distinction had to be maintained. It is worth noting that while the Director of the WRNS was involved in the original selection of the name “Dauntless” from 1946 to 1948, she was not formally part of the discussion over “HMS”. The decision was made in a meeting between the First Lord, the Second Sea Lord, and the Secretary of the Ships Names Committee. Women could not claim this honor as a right, but rather it was a privilege granted to them by male gatekeepers. If the Second Sea Lord believed that commissioning the Dauntless was an important act of recognition, “the only way to do

⁶⁶ Minute from Secretary, Ships Names Committee, 3 Jun 1952, TNA:PRO ADM 1/24846.

⁶⁷ Minute by Second Sea Lord, 30 Sep 1952, TNA:PRO ADM 1/24846.

⁶⁸ All Fleet Order 3785, 11 Dec 1953, TNA:PRO ADM 1/24846.

justice to the WRNS,” it seems that his opponents objected to just that kind of recognition; in their eyes it would be better if the women’s establishment were different from other naval establishments, because the women were and had to be different.⁶⁹ The Wrens ultimately got commissioned status for their training facility, and many threw themselves into naval life and lingo, but as this small debate shows, there were men who did not believe that the women really deserved to be part of their traditions.

As we have seen in chapter three, naval women were sometimes invited on board ships to observe the Navy at work, and some of them had the chance to crew small vessels as well. Wrens stationed in Portsmouth were part of the crew of Motor Fishing Vessels during expedition training trips, along with National Service trainees, on at least two occasions. These trips went out to the Channel Islands, with the Wrens “taking their turn at the wheel and in the galley,” although bad weather often interfered.⁷⁰ Another group of two officers and eight ratings stationed at HMS Drake in St Budeaux participated in various navigation and sailing exercises during their expedition, as well as exchanging potato projectiles with a Patrol Boat.⁷¹ The expeditions seem to have been largely oriented toward giving participants some basic sea-going skills, a goal which was also served by opportunities for women to learn sailing; women were involved in sport sailing with mixed crews, and on at least one occasion joined a crew tasked with moving

⁶⁹ Minute by Second Sea Lord, 19 May 1952, TNA:PRO ADM 1/24846.

⁷⁰ S.V.A. McBride, “A Stormy Weekend in the Channel Islands,” *The Wren* 212 (Oct 1957), NMRN 1988.350.18.40; F.A.B. Browne, “Expedition Training—MFV 1015,” *The Wren* 213 (Feb 1958), NMRN 1988.350.18.41.

⁷¹ V.E.M. Perkins, “Expedition Training at Sea, Wednesday November 5th 1958,” *The Wren* 216 (Feb 1959), NMRN 1988.350.18.44.

a yacht from one port to another.⁷² Women's participation in these activities was by invitation or by volunteering and was neither required nor directly related to their duties, but they were important in building up a nautical spirit that would help bolster the WRNS' naval character. The morale value for the women involved should not be underestimated. "Above all" wrote the officer who reported on one trip from Portsmouth, the women had gained from their expedition "the joy of knowing that never again could they be taunted with the cry: 'Wrens never go to sea'. They had taken their full share of all the duties and earned a very special commendation from the Captain."⁷³ Even though it is hard to say what proportion of women in the WRNS ever got a chance to participate in one of these activities, it seems certain that an even larger number would have read about them in *The Wren* magazine. Members of the WRNS could then have pointed to such sailing and boating expeditions as a part of what their service was involved in, even though its members would not be stationed on ships.

The WRNS did not change their status, and they did not change their uniform. In the midst of the changes in the WRAC and WRAF uniform, the Director of the WRNS was successful in petitioning for a better quality of fabric and construction for WRNS uniforms, but declined to press for any changes to the design. As she pointed out, the cost of improving the existing uniform would be "negligible in comparison with the expensive alterations in uniform which are being introduced into the other two Women's

⁷² R.A. Bailey and S. Thomas, "Around the Bristol Channel in Fourteen Days," *The Wren* 213 (Feb 1958), NMRN 1988.350.18.41; L/W Mills, "Sailing at HMS Ariel," *The Wren* 222 (Feb 1961), NMRN 1988.350.18.50.

⁷³ S.V.A. McBride, "A Stormy Weekend in the Channel Islands," *The Wren* 212 (Oct 1957), NMRN 1988.350.18.40.

Services.”⁷⁴ The WRNS also successfully introduced a Mess Undress uniform, consisting of a long skirt, white blouse, and bolero jacket. Such uniforms represented an enormous amount of headache connected to design and production, but they had deeper significance in that they allowed women to carry a professional identity into a social setting. During the war, Wrens had attended dinners and other evening parties in ordinary civilian formal dresses. The Director tried to have a regulation introduced that would mandate uniforms in these situations, citing the high cost of clothing, but senior officers resisted; their arguments made it clear that they preferred for the women to attend social events as women, not as coworkers or fellow officers.⁷⁵ Once Mess Dress had been reintroduced for men after the war, the Director renewed her case for a female equivalent, but there was still resistance. Men’s dress uniforms, the Admirals reasoned, served a vital function in “showing the flag” in foreign ports; since women did not serve on ships, their formal uniforms were unjustifiably expensive.⁷⁶ However, the tricky question of what women should wear in the mess persisted, and by the middle of 1951, Victor Stiebel had produced a design for Mess Undress for WRNS Officers, featuring a long black skirt, a white blouse with a softly scalloped collar, and a black bolero jacket on which a woman would wear her decorations and rank braid.⁷⁷ Officers who were eligible to wear this uniform were given a blouse and the black material from stores, along with a cash grant to pay for having the jacket and skirt made.⁷⁸ Femininity was a top priority in the design

⁷⁴ DWRNS minute, 19 Mar 1958, TNA:PRO ADM 1/26661.

⁷⁵ See discussion about plainclothes, TNA:PRO ADM 1/1501.

⁷⁶ Head of CW minute, 7 Apr 1949, TNA:PRO ADM 1/26660.

⁷⁷ See letter from Gwenyth Jenkins of Foote, Cone & Belding Ltd to Director of Victualling, 22 Jun 1951, TNA:PRO ADM 1/26660.

⁷⁸ Director of Victualling minute, 4 Dec 1951, TNA:PRO ADM 1/26660.

process: in the words of the Fourth Sea Lord, “I shall not approve of any masculinity in the evening, and I am glad to find the Queen shares my views.”⁷⁹

Unlike the army or air force, the navy did not regard integration as a possibility, much less a priority. Where the army and air force had come to see womanpower as an important part of their future manning plans and revamped their services accordingly, the navy was content with having an essentially auxiliary women’s service. Although the WRNS took part in naval traditions and culture, they were always in a tenuous position.

All three women’s services recognized that the traditions of their parent services were a valuable recruiting tool. Each service adopted and adapted male military culture to itself: the WRAC gave itself the trappings of a regiment; the WRNS embraced naval lingo; and the WRAF were proud to contribute to the RAF’s progressive self-image. Participating in military tradition and culture was a way for the women’s services to assert their importance. The women’s services were making a case through what we might now call their “branding” that they were worthy of funding, quality recruits, attention, and respect.

In the late 1940s as the services were just getting started, this issue of military respect took precedence over any concerns about femininity, but as time went on the question of whether the services were feminine enough gained increasing urgency. The impetus for this increased gender anxiety was less any specific or explicit allegation of “mannishness” and more the pressing concern over the rate of recruitment. Faced with the impending end of National Service, military and government leaders hoped to expand the women’s services as part of their plans to make up for the loss of this source of

⁷⁹ Minute, 13 Dec 1950, TNA:PRO ADM 1/26660.

personnel. At the same time, recruitment numbers for women, although they had been promisingly strong in the early 1950s, had lagged, and by 1957 when the Defence White Paper was released, the services were having difficulty maintaining their levels, much less growing.

Increased femininity in clothing was one persistent proposed solution to this major problem.⁸⁰ Lord Tedder's comments during the 1957 Air Estimates debate resonated in the Ministry of Defence:

I see that it is hoped in this Memorandum, to increase the strength of the W.R.A.F. I wonder whether the answer to that problem may not be to 133srael133a, or perhaps I should say "133srael133a", the women's Services a little more—in other words, give up trying to militarise the women so much. In war time it may well be that women like to be and want to look as military as possible, but I very much doubt whether that is true in peace time. I suggest that a process of 133srael133arizing women's uniforms might well pay a useful dividend in increased and better enlistment.⁸¹

Uniforms were perceived as inherently masculine, not simply because of their association with combat but because it was assumed that women wanted or even needed to express individuality in the way they dressed. This was particularly so in the 1950s: the New Look's emphasis on custom fit and adornment was widely understood as a rejection of the minimalist homogeneity of Utility styles, and despite concern on the left, the New Look was far more popular.⁸² The tension between feminine individuality and military uniformity was difficult to square, but the authorities took several measures to ease the situation. As we have seen, both the WRAF and WRAC introduced new "No.1" uniform designs that were explicitly intended to be more feminine. Toward the end of the decade,

⁸⁰ See chapter seven for a fuller discussion of recruitment woes, and chapter five for a further discussion of femininity and fears about lesbianism.

⁸¹ HL Deb 10 July 1957 vol 204 cc 931.

⁸² Partington "The Days of the New Look," 252; Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 225-7; Maynard, "The Wishful Feeling about Curves," 43-59.

the services introduced more comfortable tropical uniforms and also focused on providing more feminine and attractive forms of working dress. WRAC working dress, described by the War Office as an “ugly and ill-fitting khaki battle dress and skirt,” was replaced for clerical workers with a more suit-like outfit.⁸³ These changes to women’s uniform were intended to create a closer affinity with civilian women’s clothes, in hopes of making this aspect of military life less alien.

Meanwhile, the 1958 Internal Recruiting Survey conducted in the WRAF concluded that

there does seem to be a real need to cater for the feminine desire to dress up for social occasions. Whereas the airmen may be quite content to relax in their blues... it is evident that airwomen seek a sharper contrast to the routine and uniformity of service life during their leisure hours.⁸⁴

Civilian clothes took on a greater prominence in recruitment materials in the 1950s, serving as an important signifier that military women weren’t “all work.” Recruiting films such as the WRAF’s *Flight of Decision* or the WRAC’s *Hers to Command* showed women in their off hours wearing floral dresses; *Hers to Command* opens with a WRAC officer shopping in a market in Singapore wearing a red dress, and *Flight of Decision* stages an important conversation between WRAF officers arranging flowers in pastel day dresses. Print advertisements similarly were careful to note that “civilian clothes may be worn at all off-duty times,” of which there would be “plenty of opportunities.”⁸⁵

An advertising firm carrying out a review of WRAF recruiting materials in 1956 recommended highlighting “more feminine pursuits in place of the present emphasis on

⁸³ War Office note on uniform, circulated Mar 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 10/246.

⁸⁴ Internal Recruiting Survey 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 77/306.

⁸⁵ WRAC full page advertisement, seen in *Vogue* Nov 1954; WRAF full page advertisement, seen in *Vogue* Mar 1954.

careers, security, sports, and travel.”⁸⁶ Four years earlier, the MacLean Committee had suggested that WRAC publicity should focus less on drill and parades.⁸⁷ The need to be perceived as “feminine” was a constant problem for the women’s forces; contemporary ideas about gender defined femininity as an essential trait for normal, healthy women, and this quality was potentially absent among a group of women working in such an explicitly male environment. However, gender identity was not the only challenge for women in the services. Women leaders were keen to assert their services’ right to claim military traditions and trappings for their members and thereby to claim respect both as women and as servants of the nation and the Crown.

⁸⁶ *WRAF: A Summing up of the Basic Recruitment Problems*, prepared by Masius and Fergusson Ltd, Feb 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 20/9659.

⁸⁷ Report of the Committee on the Women’s Royal Army Corps (McLean Committee), Jul 1952, TNA:PRO WO 216/521.

5. Service Life and Personal Development

Military service generally coincided with formative years of a young woman's life. As such, the services were implicated in the personal formation of their recruits, an issue that was particularly dear to the hearts of female leadership. As Vera Laughton Mathews, the influential wartime director of the WRNS, advised a young officer, "you don't only have to turn out good Wrens; you have to turn out good citizens, and if you don't do that you have failed."¹ The services by their nature presumed an independent phase in a woman's life, in which she would live and work away from her family, and without a home and family of her own to keep. This independence was both an opportunity for young women to broaden their horizons and build their characters, and a potential danger to their reputations and prospects. The women's services' concept of "independence" thus included the kind of control over individuals that had long been a mark of military life for men. However, protection could not be the only priority, as personal relationships, both homosocial friendships and heterosexual romances, were considered to be a mark of healthy normalcy and a perk of community living. Although personal development is by its nature an intensely idiosyncratic subject, this chapter will attempt to outline some of the major ways in which the women's services attempted to shape their members' characters through the totalizing environment of military life.

Women in the military were working in a masculine realm implicitly associated with violence, but they were also, more basically, away from their homes, and this latter fact was arguably a more immediate problem. While it was thoroughly appropriate and even laudable for a young man of 17 or 18 to leave home and join the service, the same action

¹ Vera Laughton Mathews, *Blue Tapestry* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1948), 280.

was rather more bold when performed by young women – tellingly referred to as “girls”. Independence from family in the form of a job, if not living arrangements, was perhaps the fundamental characteristic of the twentieth century’s modern girls. Although this was no longer a new development by the 1950s, nevertheless living at home was still the respectable norm for girls. One reason lay in the perceived need for parents to carefully watch over girls’ behavior and morals, but there were other, more material objections. Although both boys and girls might be expected to put their wages back into the household economy, daughters often also contributed necessary labor, both in terms of doing household chores, and in the form of caring for children, elders, and the sick. In many families it was a daughter’s duty to provide this labor and she had no right to withhold it. Most British girls could expect only a “brief period of quasi-independence from parents or husband,” and even this was limited.²

The women’s services offered, or demanded, a greater degree of independence than the norm, as servicewomen would live in provided housing away from their families for the duration of their enlistment and would be moved around with no consideration of the distance from home.³ Home ties posed a persistent challenge to recruitment and retention. Materials introduced in 1956 guided WRAC recruiting officers to ask questions about each girl’s home life, and to give the lowest scores to girls whose parents “rely on her to a marked extent for money or domestic help or both.”⁴ That “change in home

² Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work, and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (London: Routledge, 2005), 81.

³ “Local service” schemes were experimented with in a limited way, but normal Regular service required a woman to go where she was sent; see discussion in chapter seven.

⁴ Army Operational Research Group, Report No. 4/57: *An Assessment of the Value of the Grading Questionnaire in use at WRAC Recruiting Offices*, prepared by Joan Harris, Mar 1957, TNA:PRO WO 291/1521.

circumstance” was grounds for a girl to receive compassionate discharge suggests that a close connection was recognized to exist between an unmarried woman and her home. The death of a parent or the loss of a caretaker created a demand for a daughter’s help that the government recognized. Miss M. Doherty, who titled her service memoir “The Best Years of My Life,” was certainly not the only person to leave a much-loved career to care for an elderly parent. “Having now got family commitments, my Army career really began to come to an end,” she wrote, describing how her mother’s sudden death resulted, apparently inevitably, in her returning home to care for her father until the end of his life.⁵

The services were not interested in challenging accepted familial conventions by any stretch of the imagination, but they did want recruits who would be willing and able to serve for the long term. It was thus in their interest to convince parents that their daughters would find a safe, supportive home environment in the forces. It was no good if young women were attracted to the services if their parents objected; even if she did join up, pressure from home could easily cut her military career short.

It is now generally felt that the parent is the key to our recruiting problem, and if parents can be made interested in the service, aware of the training and career prospects that it can offer, and reassured as to the care given to their daughters, the fact that their daughters, if they join the service, must live and work away from home, would no longer constitute an objection.⁶

Indeed, parents were often resistant to letting their daughters enlist. Two mothers who visited their daughters’ workplace at RAF Hospital Nocton Hall expressed their “relief” at conditions there, having “imagined that WRAF personnel lived under primitive, field

⁵ Miss M. Doherty, “The Best Years of My Life,” NAM 1998-02-66.

⁶ WRAF1 for DWRAF minute, 6 Aug 1954, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12636.

like conditions, with an inadequate diet.”⁷ Such preconceptions were a continual bugbear to those involved in creating recruitment materials.

In spite of all the publicity and National Service many civilians are surprised when they hear how much the service does for its members in the way of welfare, further education, and how much trouble is taken over the individual. The wartime picture of women living a hard life and doing an exacting job dies hard, especially as it is probably fostered by the thousands of ‘hostilities only’ men and women who like to remember past hardships and have probably not bothered to find out about post war changes.⁸

Brochures and films frequently included images of servicewomen’s rooms, invariably depicted as modern and comfortable, with beds made up and teddy bears positioned on pillows. Make-up mirrors and framed photographs were other common pieces of set dressing, while captions or text generally mention the central heating. Such images were not only directed at young women who might be intimidated by the prospect of military life, they should also be read as intended for parents, to reassure them that their daughters were not being asked to live in hard masculine conditions.

Parental skepticism and the comfort of recruits were not concerns limited to women, but they were gendered. The armed forces tried to reach out to parents of National Servicemen, too, and to reassure them that their sons were being adequately cared for. Conscription, particularly after the end of hostilities, was a very sensitive political issue, and military leaders knew they could not afford scandal or widespread disgruntlement. Furthermore, as the end of conscription drew near, it became increasingly important for National Servicemen to carry home positive reports about living conditions and career opportunities in order to encourage voluntary recruiting. Some of the measures employed

⁷ Report on parent visits to Home Command, 8 Oct 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 2/12636.

⁸ Loose minute “Recruiting—WRAF” by Wing Officer BG Martin, 12 Sep 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 20/9659.

to convince parents to entrust their daughters to the services were also used to reassure parents of National Servicemen that their sons were not suffering. “Open days” on stations and invitations to parents to visit their children were tactics used for both men and women.⁹ With the welfare state and full employment ensuring a certain minimum standard of living, soldiers were less likely to come forward to commit themselves to a harsh life of uncertainty, risk, and deprivation. Furthermore, soldiers and officers alike were far more likely to be married. All of this meant a new emphasis on providing amenities for servicemen and their families: schools for the children, modern housing, more appetizing meals, shops, recreational facilities, and leisure time out of uniform. In short, the military’s attempts to become a competitive employer in the welfare state meant modifying the all-male ethic that had severely limited the rights and presence of wives in the nineteenth century, and introducing a sort of family-friendly heteronormative environment that emulated contemporary civilian ideals.

The women’s forces were thus introduced in the midst of larger changes to military life meant to conform the life of the soldier or sailor more closely to civilian standards. The influx of men from civilian life, combined with public pressure, during the Second World War helped to bring about a significant amount of social change in the armed forces during the war, such that “in terms of both its personnel and institutional values the army became more a part of the nation.”¹⁰ Women were part of this; their employment during and after the war was often justified in terms of broader patterns in civilian

⁹ See discussion of station open days on TNA:PRO AIR 2/12636; on this same file, a minute by M1 to D of M mentions a booklet “The RAF and Your Son” being sent to parents of National Servicemen, which parallels the approach to WRAF parents under discussion.

¹⁰ Jeremy A. Crang, *The British Army and the People’s War 1939-1945* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 140.

employment: “it is recognized that no large organization should carry out its obligations by relying solely upon men. Women have become an integral part of industry and the Civil Service, and do vital work in the fire service and the police.”¹¹ These developments had the most impact in the army, as the RAF had a shorter history and naval life afloat was still an all-male preserve. Where the regiment had once been an all-male family, soldiers and officers were now more likely to have their own, literal families, and even workplaces were now liable to be “mixed”. The women’s services did not cause military bases to provide more amenities, but “comfortable” living conditions possibly made servicewomen’s presence seem more natural and the continuation of the women’s services less of a burden or contradiction.

Throughout the period under consideration, the services emphasized a custodial principle over any notion of servicewomen’s individual rights. Since many of the recruits were under 21 and therefore legally minors, the services found themselves in the position of being *in loco parentis* to young women, who, in the “natural” course of thing, would eventually become wives. The goal was to care for girls as their parents would, nurturing a virtuous homely devotion even without actually being physically at home. Girls were encouraged, if not compelled, to find all their activity and companionship within their little service world, and the services took seriously their obligation to provide girls with opportunities to learn, socialize, and have fun within a safe and controlled environment.

The educational schemes in place for men were also open to women, although evidence suggests that women may have had less opportunity to take advantage of them. It seems that commanding officers were less likely to think it necessary to give women

¹¹ Para. 216, Report on the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Grigg Committee) Cmnd 545, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1238.

time out of the working day for classes, and women were unlikely to complain.

Educational provision was a recognized part of the military's obligation toward young men doing their National Service, and therefore had a political imperative behind it even if the men were resistant.¹² Women's education simply did not have such an imperative, particularly when such large numbers of servicewomen were leaving within two years to get married. The opportunities were there, however; Brenda Smith worked toward her O-level in maths while in the service.¹³

Classes in dressmaking, toy making, leather working, and other crafts were a common offering for servicewomen. Handicrafts such as knitting were a very common pastime for civilian women of all ages, and could offer a productive or responsible way to use free time while also providing a background to socializing.¹⁴ Servicewomen had the opportunity to display their work at handicraft exhibitions, which could attract some local press attention, especially when members of the royal family visited, and thus provided wholesome publicity for the services. Exhibitions proved that servicewomen were feminine women interested in feminine activities, including making baby clothes and soft toys. Although such classes can be seen as a way for officers to keep their charges quietly occupied with feminine busywork, an interest in crafting was clearly not confined to women in the ranks. The scrapbook of Lieutenant Colonel DCM Hingston contains seven

¹² Leslie Wayper, *Mars and Minerva: A History of Army Education* (Winchester, UK: Royal Army Educational Corps Association, 2004), 265.

¹³ Recorded interview with Brenda Smith, Bawdsey Oral History Project, IWM cat# 30998.

¹⁴ Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000), 42.

prize certificates from handicrafts exhibitions in the mid-1950s for items of knitting, crochet, and embroidery.¹⁵

Sports were a significant part of women's service life as they were for men. From the late nineteenth century, senior officers organized and encouraged soldiers to play sports, frequently asserting that participating in such competitions would prepare them for war. However, there were many other, more documentable benefits to the practice. Sports helped men keep fit and gave them a chance to bond as a group; they made the military seem more attractive to potential recruits and encouraged civilian interest in a local camp or establishment. Furthermore, games and practices kept men busy, and gave them something wholesome to do with their free time.¹⁶ Women's sport was encouraged on very similar grounds; in fact, it was recognized that servicewomen needed physical exercise in the outdoors even more than men did, since their work tended to be more sedentary.¹⁷ Furthermore, fully qualified female Physical Training Instructors were not always available to every women's unit; apparently the services were not endorsed as a good employer by the relevant colleges. The women who had filled these roles during the war seem to have been soured by the opposition they encountered and the tendency to assign them other assorted "entertainment" duties. Sport – physical recreation rather than physical training – was therefore the most reliable avenue open for the women's services to keep their members in good shape, particularly on stations with smaller numbers of

¹⁵ Scrapbook of Lt Col DCM Hingston, NAM 2004-04-66.

¹⁶ Tony Mason and Eliza Riedl, *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880-1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ DWRAC minute in defense of time allotted for games in the proposal for an officer training school presented to the ECAC, 2 Jun 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/13514.

women.¹⁸ In the WRNS, women officers and senior ratings could be sent on a four week course at the Naval Physical Training School which taught them how to teach, organize, and referee various games and athletic events. These women could then operate as the designated “sports officer” in their establishment, organizing teams and matches in their spare time.¹⁹

Servicewomen competed in a number of sports. The WRNS sports courses covered athletics, badminton, cricket, fencing, golf, hockey, netball, rifle shooting, “squash rackets,” swimming, and tennis. Initially the most time was given to fencing, athletics, and cricket, but this was revised in 1951 to focus on “the general encouragement of the everyday games,” usually identified as hockey, cricket, netball, and tennis or badminton. These latter games were the ones considered to be more commonly known by recruits and more accessible in terms of equipment.²⁰ Each sport had its own organizing committee, and the Royal Navy’s Sports Control Board provided £500 each year to defray expenses connected with Inter-Service competition.²¹ Wrens also participated in the Royal Naval Tennis Championships held annually at Wimbledon.²² Servicewomen’s participation in sports tournaments, like handicraft exhibitions or cookery competitions hosted by the hospitality industry, provided an opportunity to raise public awareness and build up the services’ reputation. Brenda Smith, who swam for the RAF, later recalled

¹⁸ Report of Committee to Investigate the Organization Required for the Advancement of Physical Training and Sport in the WRNS, 8 Jul 1947, TNA:PRO ADM 1/20822.

¹⁹ Courses approved in 1948 and modified in 1951: see discussion on TNA:PRO ADM 1/20822.

²⁰ Discussion and syllabuses found on TNA:PRO ADM 1/20822.

²¹ Minutes of Senior WRNS Officers Conferences, 18 Jul 1947, NMRN 1988.350.28.2.

²² Report of speech by Superintendent Robertson at WRNS Association Annual General Meeting, *The Wren* 204 (Feb 1955), NMRN 1988.350.18.32.

that not only were there plenty of opportunities for her to swim or play tennis or hockey, at times she felt encouraged to put sports ahead of her work.²³

Servicewomen were involved in a variety of hobbies and activities, with the particular facilities and resources of their stations and colleagues opening up a wide range of opportunities. The pages of the WRAC Association's magazine, *The Lioness*, indicate that in various parts of the Army world, women were learning and enjoying mountaineering, painting, snorkeling, darts, horseback riding, sailing, and skiing, to name just a few. The British Woman Chess Champion of 1957 was a WRAC officer, and the HQ Northag RASC Car Rally, "a grueling test of 500 miles," awarded a Ladies' Prize.²⁴ British servicewomen distinguished themselves in international long-distance marching challenges at Nijmegen and elsewhere throughout the period.²⁵ A report from an artillery unit in *The Lioness* includes a kaleidoscope of activities: this group reported a contestant on *What's My Line*; champion cricketers and javelin throwers; a successful fundraiser for the WRAC Benevolent Fund; prizes in a local Handicrafts Competition; and one woman who appeared in the Garrison Dramatic Society's production of *Gaslight*.²⁶ It seems likely that a woman's opportunities to take up a sport or activity that she was interested in depended a great deal on circumstances: whether there was a club or proper facilities on her particular station, whether the men engaged in an activity would welcome and help her, and whether her own personality could face these challenges. Nevertheless, it seems

²³ Brenda Smith, Bawdsey Oral History Project interview, IWM cat# 30998.

²⁴ "The British Chess Championship," *The Lioness* 30, no. 4 (Nov 1957), 71; "With the Army on the Rhine," *The Lioness* 30, no. 3 (Aug 1957), 46-47.

²⁵ "The Nijmegen Marches," *The Lioness* 30, no. 4 (Nov 1957), 71; S/Sgt Wilson, WRAC (TA), "Going it Alone," *The Lioness* 33, no. 4 (Nov 1960), 64; for WRAF see Joan Blackburn, *Naafi, Knickers and Nijmegen: The Postwar Adventures of a WRAF Airwoman* (Bognor Regis, UK: Woodfield, 2009).

²⁶ Report from Shoeburyness, *The Lioness* 33, no. 4 (Nov 1960), 61.

clear that many women did take the opportunity to expand their horizons while in the service, just as the recruiting materials promised.

The evidence suggests that senior officers were earnest in their desire to protect their charges and provide them with a wholesome service environment that would either emulate or make up for their home life. Recruiting and other public-facing materials generally reflect this seriousness. Although advertisements and films often engaged with the ironic tradition surrounding military service, acknowledging for example that a recruit's brother might have told her horror stories about leaky huts and interminable boredom, they generally concluded that the girl would discover that this was just masculine bluster. For instance, the opening narration of WRAC recruiting film *Hers to Command* notes:

When Anne Bartlett first joined the army, an ex-soldier friend of hers told her that she'd probably spend most of her time living in a damp Nissen hut on Salisbury Plain. But (not for the first time) he was wrong.²⁷

The idealized official narrative always stressed the national importance and personal fulfillment of women's work in the forces, often through a (fictional) girl's ability to contradict cynics. However, it would be incorrect to think that everyday life for members of the women's services was weighed down by sober striving for the advancement of British womanhood. In considering the role of friendship in service life we can begin to see some of the humor and irony that women experienced in this environment.

The opportunity to make friends figured highly among the reasons why girls chose to join the forces in the first place. In 1958, 49% of respondents to a WRAF survey claimed that "companionship, to meet people, make friends" was a top reason they had joined,

²⁷ Littleton Park Film Productions, commentary script for *Hers to Command*, ca. 1965, TNA:PRO INF 6/913.

and 60% of those planning to stay in the service cited “companionship” as their reason for doing so.²⁸ A lecture preserved in the WRNS historical files characterizes new recruits as follows:

They come – sometimes straight from school, perhaps wishing to extend those days in which they enjoyed companionships, out of door activities and other benefits of community life which they might not find elsewhere – often from shops, factories and offices, wishing to break away from the routines of their present lives, to meet people and extend their horizons beyond those of the cities, towns and villages where they live and work.²⁹

Opportunities for socializing and making friends consistently featured in advertising alongside a competitive wage and the chance to travel. Part of the dull, unsatisfying nature of the imagined future recruit’s office job in such advertisements is the fact that, at the end of the day, everyone scatters to their own homes, and the girl must fight her way back on a crowded bus alone; recruiting materials made much of this dismal bus commute. For many young unmarried women, a life among other young unmarried women in the service must have been very attractive. New recruits spent a period of weeks in a female-only environment undergoing training, giving them a chance to bond and form friendships. The forces’ role in creating and shaping female friendships continued even after women left; a key function of each service’s Association was helping women keep in touch or reconnect with their old friends in spite of moves and name changes. Association magazines often featured appeals from women looking for others with similar experiences for correspondence or socializing, and reported on groups of veterans who had formed their own local clubs.

²⁸ Internal Recruitment Survey, Science 4 Memo No. 70, June 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 77/306.

²⁹ Longhand lecture, no date or heading, perhaps a draft for Senior Officer Training address in same file? in WRNS Historical Section File J: Miscellaneous, NMM DAU/168.

Service friendships were often based, at least in the first instance, on a shared feeling of absurdity that rose in part from the contrast between themselves and an emphatically masculine military culture. The perceived incongruity of women wearing uniforms, complaining about the brass, and talking in military slang which inspired cartoonists during both world wars was also present in postwar women's own understanding of their new lifestyle. The mismatch between consumer priorities and military standards generated gendered experiences of absurdity around the clothing issued to new recruits. "Passion killer" knickers and "beetle crusher" shoes were at least as foreign to postwar women as they had been to wartime auxiliaries and continued to form a standard part of women's memories of being inducted into the services.³⁰ Into the 1960s women were issued with a set of underwear from military stores, although they were allowed to wear their own privately purchased underwear. Most women chose not to wear the provided underwear, and little wonder. "Ordnance" brassieres were projected to last three months longer than commercial models, and issued corset belts were expected to last nearly twice as long as their civilian counterparts: "this is presumably because the official issues are more robustly made – which is probably one of the reasons why our women will not wear them."³¹ For many young women, the experience of having these "robustly made" girdles handed over the counter in their first week was a key moment in bonding with fellow

³⁰ Blackburn, *Naafi, Knickers and Nijmegen*, 22-3.

³¹ JH Thomas, War Office, to WG Angle, Treasury, 10 Feb 1956, TNA:PRO ADM 1/26662.

recruits. One woman, looking back from the late 1970s, wondered how later recruits ever managed to break the ice without the “astonishing” underclothes to marvel over.³²

Opportunities for friendship in the military are conditioned by rank, and for women this could also play out in terms of gender. Women in the ranks worked alongside men, and for many friendships with men developed naturally from that contact. The social spaces that allowed romance to blossom (discussed further below) were also the setting for male-female friendships. For women officers, however, friendships could be more difficult to form and navigate. The higher their rank, the more physically and socially isolated they tended to be. Since the women’s hierarchy was smaller and more geographically far-flung than the men’s, a woman could find herself without female peers on a station at a much lower rank than a man. Each of the Directors hosted Senior Officer Conferences for her service, sometimes multiple times each year, and these take on new significance when considered in this context: such occasions probably served a social as well as an administrative purpose. Some women chafed against the idea of restricting their friendships only to others of appropriate rank. Frances Stone recounts in her memoir the following incident, which took place in the late 1940s:

One day, a senior WAAF officer said to me, ‘I hope that now you are a Wing Officer, you will find your friends among other senior officers.’ My reply, ‘I do not choose my friends by rank,’ may have seemed rude, but rank consciousness was something that I had never been able to tolerate. ‘After all,’ I thought, ‘they could always promote my friends!’³³

Other women accepted the conventional wisdom and found that being a senior officer meant a different range of possible friendships. Jean Conan Doyle remembered that it

³² Helen Renton, “Women’s Royal Air Force,” in *Service Women WRNS WRAC and WRAF*, ed. Vivienne Reynolds, Elizabeth Saxon, and Helen Renton (Reading, UK: Educational Explorers, 1977), 99-100.

³³ Frances Stone, *Turn the Wheel Slowly* IWM 88/2/1.

was “awfully lonely being the senior woman in any job, because you can’t really make friends with your junior officers however much you might like to.” Nevertheless, her memories of her years in senior ranks were happy thanks to the many male friends she made, and overall she declared it was “very nice” having so many men in her life.³⁴

Of course, the desire to meet new people had a romantic side as well. Eighteen-year-olds in the 1950s had every expectation of marrying, and for many, paid work was incidental to this bigger narrative. Once training was over, women were posted to stations that obviously included large numbers of men and the attendant social opportunities. Servicewomen were not isolated from servicemen but encouraged to socialize in controlled environments like NAAFI canteens or organized dances. Male-female socializing was considered normal and healthy, particularly among young people, and the services did not wish to stand in the way, particularly considering that parents might be happier to hear that their daughter had gotten engaged than promoted.³⁵ Girls whose ultimate goal was marriage would not stay in the service if it meant being kept away from possible mates. Furthermore, wartime experiences seemed to confirm the hypothesis that servicemen would be less likely to be involved in unsavory activities if there were a ready supply of “nice” girls to socialize with. Thus, plenty of legitimate opportunities for mixed company were needed in order to keep both groups happy.

Of course, in reality not all relationships were so pure and innocent. The services, mindful of their responsibility of care and of their reputation, viewed pre-marital sex as illicit in itself, but the problem of pregnancy outside of wedlock was the issue around

³⁴ Interview with Jean Conan Doyle, BL:NSA C465/03/05, side A.

³⁵ For changing attitudes toward “mixing” see Marcus Collins, *Modern Love* (London: Atlantic, 2001).

which discussion centered. Stories about high pregnancy rates had caused problems for the auxiliary services during the war, and having once repelled this rumor, the authorities did not wish to do so again. Procedures for dealing with pregnant servicewomen largely mirrored those developed in wartime. Regulations published in 1951 stressed the importance of discovering cases of pregnancy early on, suggesting even that the WRAF administrative officer should gather the women every month to remind them of their obligation to admit to being pregnant as soon as they found out.³⁶ Although the rules were clear that “no responsibility devolves upon the Service once the airwoman is discharged, and this should be made quite clear to the airwoman,” nevertheless officers were given extensive guidance about how to help the woman make arrangements for herself and to claim what was hers by rights. Officers were advised not to enquire about the father or intervene in his regard in any way, but they were instructed to inform the woman about the “simple” procedure for obtaining an Affiliation Order. Similarly, officers were instructed to study the National Health Act and National Insurance Act (both 1946) “so that they may ensure that, on discharge from the Service, an airwoman does not lose through ignorance of the regulations anything to which she may be entitled.” Although the service was unbending in viewing an unwed pregnancy as serious stain on a woman’s character – such women were normally barred from reenlisting unless a strong endorsement on her behalf was made from a former superior – nevertheless the tone of advice was compassionate and allowed a certain amount of discretion. “Every effort” was to be taken to encourage the girl to write her parents herself, with the officer

³⁶ Air Publication 3269: Administrative Instructions for WRAF Officers in Dealing with Pregnancy Cases, Aug 1951, TNA:PRO AIR 10/6561. The second edition of this document, in 1957, suggests “periodic meetings” rather than monthly ones: TNA:PRO AIR 10/6562.

writing a “carefully worded letter” only if she refused and was under 21. If a woman suffered a miscarriage before actually being discharged, DWRAF could allow her to remain if she felt this could be done without endorsing immorality or encouraging “illegal action.” The booklet containing these regulations also included several pages of charities and maternity homes, both religious and secular, which an officer could contact on behalf of a pregnant airwoman who needed help. Officers were explicitly counseled not to pressure the woman into getting married and to encourage her to wait until after the child was born to make any decisions about adoption.³⁷ By getting pregnant a girl had unavoidably removed herself from her service family, but nevertheless the caring woman officer was expected to go on caring for her on her way out.

Pregnancy rates remained low compared to the general unmarried female population, but women officers still fretted over them as evidence that their young charges were finding opportunities to go astray. Their responses reflected certain stereotypes about young women and sex. Officers were encouraged to keep an eye on their subordinates in order to identify any who were “troubled” – since presumably a “good” girl would struggle before making the decision to go all the way. Although the WRAC and WRNS both incorporated aspects of sex education into their training programs, the WRAF was unsuccessful in introducing a mandatory session in the early 1950s. The Chief Chaplain and DWRAF put forward a joint proposal for a lecture alternately titled “sex hygiene,” “women and marriage,” or “the Christian view of life” to be made a compulsory part of training, with Roman Catholics permitted (reluctantly) to have their own parallel session. After much debate, the proposal died in 1955 with the Under-Secretary of State

³⁷ Air Publication 3269: Administrative Instructions for WRAF Officers in Dealing with Pregnancy Cases, Aug 1951, TNA:PRO AIR 10/6561.

adamantly opposed to making such a lecture required. Personal measures – the officer noticing a problem and addressing it – were considered much more effective and far less controversial as a response to the problem of extramarital sex in the services.³⁸ Unwed pregnancies were the tangible proof, as it were, of a morally depraved environment, the worst-case scenario for a cautious parent, and so such cases were at the heart of concerns about the moral environment in the women’s services. It was the job of women officers, friendly and attentive, to prevent women from getting into bad situations to begin with.

The prominence of the chaplains in discussions about sex education indicates the welfare role they filled above and beyond any strictly spiritual matters. The Services felt bound to provide for women’s spiritual welfare along with their more material needs. In most aspects of religious life the women would have been served by the chaplains of their station in the same way as men, but female Chaplains Assistants formed one unique aspect of spiritual and welfare provision for women. These “Cas” had been introduced in 1942 at the suggestion of the chaplains themselves who apparently felt the need for help ministering to the crowd of young women now added to their charge. Cas were selected and administered by an ecumenical committee, the Committee for the Church’s Work for Women in the Forces. After the war, this Committee handed administration over to the Chaplain’s Departments, although it continued to handle selection and hiring. Chaplains Assistants were civilians on a temporary engagement with the Forces, but they were required to buy and wear officer’s uniform and received free accommodation in officers’ quarters and messes. They wore special CWWF cap badges which prominently featured a cross, but although they were of “officer status” socially, their pay and benefits were

³⁸ Discussion and debate at TNA:PRO AIR 2/14082.

determined by analogy to the Civil Service. Hiring Cas was difficult in peacetime; although their conditions of service were comparable to civil servants in welfare positions, they were not as attractive as those of women officers or of civilian church workers. The Army and Air Force each allowed for something like 12 Cas globally, but neither ever had more than 4 or 5 at a time.³⁹ The introduction of Chaplains Assistants was one of the measures taken during the war to combat rumors about the women's loose morals, and this welfare role continued after the war. The Chief Chaplain was occasionally annoyed by this attitude, and cautioned against a view of Cas as merely dealing with sex problems. Nevertheless, it was hoped that their civilian status might help them reach women who were too shy to bring their particular problem to their military superior, although in general the authorities put more stress on the ability of a caring, competent, and interested officer to address morale and welfare problems.

A *Daily Mirror* article about life in the WRNS was unequivocal about "what the Navy has to offer us girls... in a word: SAILORS": "you can bet your bell-bottomed trousers there is no shortage of boy friends!"⁴⁰ This kind of attitude was not without an official parallel. "It is common knowledge that many happy marriages result from the association of men and women in the Service," wrote the Air Member for Personnel in a demi-official confidential letter of 1950, "and despite the wastage to the WRAF this involves, I am glad of it." Ultimately, falling in love and getting married was what girls of the average age of service recruits were supposed to do. To further quote the AMP's letter:

I know that we cannot take large numbers of healthy young men and women away from their home atmosphere, put them together, and expect them, without

³⁹ Details of Chaplains Assistants' terms of service on TNA:PRO WO 32/19158 and AIR 2/14211.

⁴⁰ Marjorie Proops, "Why the Nice Girls are Sailors," *Daily Mirror*, 12 Mar 1958.

exception, to behave perfectly, nor do I want there to be any interference with the development of normal social relationships into legitimate romances, provided those do not interfere with normal discipline... These healthy young women with their Service training and experience make the finest possible wives for men making a career in the RAF and their loss to the WRAF when they change their status from serving personnel to that of 'married women on the strength' is offset by the steadying influence they have on their husbands.⁴¹

Social life, including romance, was an important part of service life, encouraged by the authorities even if conventional boundaries on sexual activity were tested as a result. The services did not wish to be perceived as a threat to established gender roles, and in order to avoid this it was necessary not to put barriers in the way of women's path to marriage. This was a minefield they had already had to cross during demobilization after the Second World War, when retaining a demobbed man's wife in the service seemed like preventing the resumption of normal family life. Women's military service was socially acceptable insofar as it did not take women out of circulation for marriage and family.

The emphasis on "healthy" and "normal" in the letter quoted above points to one kind of romance the authorities were emphatically not willing to tolerate. In postwar Britain, lesbianism was predominantly understood in terms of psychological abnormality. Albertine Winner, a doctor with wartime experience of the women's services, surmised in 1947 that "probably the psychological mechanism underlying male and female homosexuality is the same," namely, "an arrest of normal sexual development at an adolescent stage."⁴² Although psychologists and experts were undecided whether schoolgirl crushes were necessarily linked to adult sexuality, nevertheless emotional or

⁴¹ Demi-official confidential letter from AMP to Commanders in Chief, Jun 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14082.

⁴² Albertine Winner, "Homosexuality in Women," *Medical Press and Circular*, 3 Sep 1947, 219-220.

physical encounters at a formative age were believed to have the potential to ruin a woman's heterosexual future.⁴³

A candid file documenting WRAF policy with regard to lesbianism helps to outline certain commonly held beliefs about homosexual women – although it must be said that the various commenters on the file, male and female, demonstrate varying levels of antipathy toward the women under discussion. “Unnatural friendships” were thought to be of two sorts: accidental relationships, which might blossom out of an intense friendship between two immature and misguided women; and deliberate, or even predatory, lesbianism, which constituted “actual practice of the vice”. In the former scenario, two young women might unfortunately become fixated on one another, and with timely intervention from an officer and swift reposting the relationship could be broken up and each girl saved from being “permanently converted to it.”⁴⁴ This concept was eclipsed in policy thinking by the problem of predatory lesbians: “abnormal women who enter the service already perverted.”⁴⁵ Rather than the service providing an environment in which two girls might mutually go astray, the file suggests that by the mid-1950s service leaders were far more concerned about the possibility of innocent girls being preyed upon by hardened practitioners of vice. DWRAF Nancy Salmon was particularly outspoken on this issue, lamenting that the service “together with all other large female organisations [was] bound unwittingly to attract the people who are on the lookout for a suitable environment in which to carry out their nefarious purposes.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Rebecca Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls: A Lesbian History of Post-War Britain 1945-71* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007), 18.

⁴⁴ Minute DPS to AMP, 8 Sep 1942, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

⁴⁵ DWRAF memorandum, 19 Jul 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

⁴⁶ DWRAF memorandum, 19 Jul 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

Lesbians were thought to have certain characteristics in common with male homosexuals, but legally their situation was entirely different. “The female homosexual is as recognizable to a normal woman as the male homosexual is to the normal man,” wrote the Director of Personnel Services.

It is not true that women are really demonstratively affectionate to one another beyond the adolescent stage. In the fashionable world there is a superficial behavior of a demonstrative kind which is not unhealthy in any way, but to a healthy woman the caress of another woman having an underlying homosexual motive is identically as distasteful and loathsome as the same overture to a normal healthy male.⁴⁷

However, whereas male homosexuality was a crime, lesbianism was not, and this presented a challenge when attempting to investigate female suspects. Furthermore the law also took a “more serious view... of allegations made against the sexual conduct of women”: there was a risk that expelling a woman on the basis of alleged sexual behavior could qualify as slander and damage to her reputation.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, WRAF policy was focused on getting a woman suspected of lesbian behavior out of the service as quickly as possible. Procedure for dealing with allegations of lesbianism appears to have remained largely the same from wartime to postwar service, undergoing a process of definition and codification. This was the result in the first instance of the new legal status of the WRAF – if it had been at all possible before simply to dismiss someone, there were now procedures to follow, and discharge had to be justified within a set range of categories. Codification was also the result of a question raised in 1956 when a father complained to his MP about the treatment of his daughter,

⁴⁷ The then-Director of the WRAF, Nancy Salmon referred to this as “an excellent minute” which “makes all our points”. Private minute by DPS, 20 Apr 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

⁴⁸ Memos by DLS 14 Mar 1956 and 8 Jun 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

whose letters had been read as part of a kit search. This incident threatened to challenge established procedures, and prompted the DWRAF as well as the legal and provost branches in the Air Ministry to define these procedures and defend the involvement of the police and police tactics like questioning and searches. The protocols laid down in 1956 were as follows. "Specially selected investigators" from the WRAF Police were dispatched at the request of the Station Commander to hear the allegation or complaint that had been made. If they felt that this allegation was credible, the investigators would then – again with the permission of the Commander – open an investigation, carrying out interviews with "witnesses" on the station, and if necessary, travelling to other stations to interview those who might be involved. Only when "sufficient material" had been collected would the investigator confront the woman who had been accused.

Frequently at this stage the suspect may make a statement admitting her guilt in the matter, but if in the event of a complete denial by the suspected person of any part in the allegations, the WRAF police investigator will then ask the subject if she has any objection to a kit-search.

Great stress was placed on this search and particularly on importance of reading letters:

I feel quite confident in stating that 80% of the proven cases of lesbianism in the WRAF have only been so proved by extracts taken from letters written by airwomen and brought to light only as a result of the kit-search.

Although the accused woman was expected to "confess all as soon as it is realized that the police are in possession of incriminating facts," it was possible that she would continue to deny the allegations. At any rate, the investigator would compile a report once she had had this encounter with the accused, which was then distributed both to the Station Commander and Group or Command Headquarters as well as to the relevant branches in the Air Ministry, where a decision would be made. If the woman was not to be discharged she would be warned and then subjected to police checks at "three or six

monthly intervals.” These checks did not involve interviews with the woman herself but rather with the officer in charge of WRAF on her station, “asking if she is satisfied with the conduct of the person under review.” Presumably these checks might be discontinued if her good behavior lasted, although the memorandum does not address this possibility.⁴⁹ This memorandum not only lays stress on the importance of reading a woman’s letters but also on the crucial element of police investigation, two elements perceived to be at risk in 1956. In 1958, it was decided that a woman would be permitted to submit a statement in her own defense, although this was admittedly only for the sake of appearances and the Air Ministry “should of course continue to take our own line”⁵⁰ – “such a decision, once made at Air Ministry, cannot be altered” – but it was good on principle to not dismiss a woman purely on a police report.⁵¹ The next major development in procedure wasn’t proposed until 1966, when the involvement of an RAF neuropsychologist was proposed.⁵²

Throughout this time period, speed of dismissal was a primary goal. In relation to the new element of requiring a statement from the accused, one senior woman worried:

If we are to fully comply with the regulation there will be a necessary slowing down of action as before we can discharge the individual she should have the option of making a statement. Not that in these cases it is likely to make any difference to the ultimate decision, but we should have the statement before the individual leaves the service.⁵³

Lectures given during officer training on “Unnatural Relationships between Women” in 1941 and 1960 were substantially the same, and the emphasis on “the protection of the

⁴⁹ Loose Minute PM/C.152/3 by Air Commodore H. Proud, DPS (PM), 28 Jun 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

⁵⁰ Minute by DDPS(3), 15 Aug 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

⁵¹ Minute by DDWRAF Turner, 29 Aug 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

⁵² Loose minute by MA2, 11 Feb 1966, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

⁵³ Handwritten note by DDWRAF Turner, 14 Nov 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

innocent and also the preservation of service discipline” was unchanged across two decades.⁵⁴ Ultimately, a woman with such proclivities had to go, and as quickly as possible so as not to infect others or bring shame on the service at large.

Despite these harsh measures, the evidence suggests that the services did have a reputation as a place where lesbians could meet likeminded women. In her book on lesbianism in postwar Britain, Rebecca Jennings cites the example of Margaret Cranch as one woman who joined the WRAC out of a specific “expectation of meeting other lesbians there.”⁵⁵ Another woman, Janine Sammons, first learned that there were many “other women like me” when she joined the WRAC, “where practically everybody was gay.”⁵⁶ Not coincidentally, one gay man who participated in the same oral history project went to a woman veteran when he first began to struggle with his identity, because “I’d heard that people who had been in the women’s army have come across this thing, they know about it.”⁵⁷ The women’s services were insistent that homosexual women had to be dealt with swiftly and firmly in order to send a message to others that they were not welcome, but it seems that their efforts were not entirely successful. The services continued to be associated with lesbianism both inside and outside the homosexual community.

Men’s military service, particularly in the twentieth century era of volunteer forces of citizen soldiers, has often been linked with the process of “becoming a man”. Military

⁵⁴ Typescript lectures “Unnatural Relationships between Women,” 1941 and 1960, TNA:PRO AIR 2/13859.

⁵⁵ Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls*, 1-4, 70.

⁵⁶ Brighton Ourstory Project, *Daring Hearts: Lesbian and Gay Lives of 50s and 60s Brighton* (Brighton, UK: QueenSpark, 1992), 19.

⁵⁷ “Bobby” in Brighton Ourstory Project, *Daring Hearts*, 19-20.

training, in the view of the services and wider society, was uniquely capable of turning any young male into a full-fledged Man, fortified with self-discipline and the ability to defend the weak. This transformative value was less clearly present in the case of the mid-twentieth century women's services. On the contrary, much of the culture of these services was geared toward preserving certain aspects of girlhood: innocent pastimes, education, team sports, and female friendships. The services tried to create a girls-school atmosphere, in which young women would be kept "safe" and encouraged to thrive in the ways their own parents would approve of.

Romance – heterosexual romance culminating in marriage – was the experience expected to turn girls into women, and the services were not unaware that they now were a prime location for young men and women to meet and fall in love. Although romance was something women very frequently experienced while in the service, it was something that tended also to end their service, as we shall see in greater detail in chapter seven. There was some hope and expectation that service life would make a woman a better citizen, make her more responsible, increase her knowledge of the world, and give her confidence through the experience of responsibility. However, this was generally perceived as an extension of girlhood; something that the services could certainly do better than a dead-end job or life at home, but still not in itself the great transformative experience of a girl's life. Better citizenship and working habits were, for the majority, valued as preparation for married womanhood. It is hard to avoid the conclusion, based in part on what makes up the archival record, that for the majority of women, military service was not a turning point in their lives.

Nevertheless, the official parental atmosphere does not tell the entire story of life in the permanent women's services. Away from their family homes, young women formed close female friendships based in part on their unusual experiences in unconventional environments. They got to experience other parts of Britain, if not the world, and meet women with very different life stories and outlooks. Their romances were not always serious, chaste, or marriage-minded; young servicemen and women enjoyed dances, sports, and nights at the station club together in a very modern atmosphere of mixing between the sexes. And for homosexual women, the services could be a place filled with more potential girlfriends than imagined, despite draconian policies. The services may not have been a site for a radical transformation into womanhood on analogy with men's military service, but they were a place where young womanhood – independent, if only temporarily – could be enacted and enjoyed.

6. British Servicewomen on a Global Stage

Of the personal materials that have been deposited in museum collections by servicewomen of this period, most include memories of overseas service. In part, this is probably because women who were more committed to a service career were more likely to get to go abroad, even multiple times, and these women were also more likely to want to share their stories with posterity. However, when we take life writing, scrapbooks, and particularly the magazines produced for serving and ex-servicewomen together, it quickly becomes clear that women considered their connections with the wider world to be very important. All of these materials reflect an intense and wide-ranging interest in recording the experiences of British women abroad as well as the impressions of foreigners of the WRAC, WRAF, and WRNS. Such encounters were an important factor in making them “real” members of the armed forces, especially in an era when combatant status was off the table. Moreover, servicewomen’s global profile and connections resonated with basic aspirations of the women’s movement, giving these activities a deeper significance.

Postwar servicewomen’s connections to the wider world fall into two main categories: their postings to British headquarters and bases overseas, and their formal and informal contacts with military women in other countries. Both of these activities seem to have occupied a high profile in the way committed members of the services thought about their organizations, and both had deep importance for the women’s identities and status. Although British servicewomen played a limited role in their nation’s conflicts in this period, they were established in various posts overseas including such hot spots as Kenya, Egypt, and Cyprus. Furthermore, the permanent British women’s forces made connections with other women’s forces around the world, and servicewomen were eager

to learn about their counterparts abroad. In an era when the United States was surpassing Britain in global power, British military women were pleased to think that their services were at least on a par with the Americans, and that they were helping their country maintain its commitments abroad. Women and politicians from other countries in Europe and around the world visited the British women's training centers and used the services as a model. The postwar women's services certainly had their limitations, but for many of their members, their position on the world stage was a particular point of pride.

Global postings and international reputation correspond to two basic aspects of women's emancipation, mobility and visibility. The assertion of women's right to move freely can be seen in any number of historical causes making up the women's movement, from protests against the detention of prostitutes to dress reform. In the early twentieth century, women's adoption of technologies such as bicycles, automobiles, and airplanes were often caught up symbolically with the idea of the liberated woman.¹ Empire is an important context for this mobility as women's experiences of travelling in the empire helped to define racial hierarchies and imperial superiority.² On the other hand, campaigners for women's rights were also concerned with raising women's visibility, both as productive members of society and as persons suffering from various injustices.³ This often included a level of international awareness, as in pacifist and internationalist

¹ Sean O'Connell, *The Car and British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring, 1896-1939* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1998); Justine Lloyd, "The Impossible Aviatrix," *Australian Feminist Studies* 15, no. 32 (2000): 137-52.

² Angela Woollacott, "All This is the Empire, I Told Myself": Australian Women's Voyages 'Home' and the Articulation of Colonial Whiteness," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 4 (1997): 1003-29; Liz Millward, *Women in British Imperial Airspace, 1922-1937* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

³ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987).

movements, or in the case of aspiring female diplomats who wished to represent their country abroad.⁴ However, we can also point to the importance of image and bodily display in the construction of female modernity, whether this had a degree of political and sexual assertiveness attached to it deliberately or not.⁵ These currents can all help to explain why the global stage was so important to British servicewomen: living and working abroad, and making contact with foreign servicewomen both confirmed their participation in a new, liberated way of being a woman. As we have seen, service life was full of limitations and inequalities, as was civilian life for women at the time; perhaps this intensified the importance of these international connections. Whether individual recruits were actively looking for liberation or not, and it seems likely that most young women were not explicitly thinking on these lines, nevertheless these resonances helped to inform the emotional value of these activities.

The idea of national representation is also important in relation to servicewomen's role on the global stage, and a useful parallel here might be the case of British women diplomats. Women's societies campaigned for equal access to posts in the Diplomatic and Consular Service from the 1920s onward, but women only became eligible for these jobs in 1946. Although practical concerns about safety and marriage were an important

⁴ Helen McCarthy, "Petticoat Diplomacy: The Admission of Women to the British Foreign Service, c. 1919-1946." *Twentieth Century British History* 20, no. 3 (2009): 285-321; Carol Miller, "'Geneva—the Key to Equality': Inter-War Feminists and the League of Nations," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 219-45.

⁵ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Modern Girl Around the World Research Group [Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G. Poiger, Madeleine Y. Dong, and Tani E. Barlow], "The Modern Girl Around the World: Cosmetics Advertising and the Politics of Race and Style," in *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, edited by the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 25-54.

part of the debate, the conceptual problem of whether a woman could effectively represent national power was also central. Foreign Office authorities insisted that it was absurd to think that a woman could ever command the kind of respect due to His Majesty's Government. The campaigners argued that the bar against women made Britain seem backward, and pointed to the League of Nations as evidence that feminine qualities were a crucial part of international relations.⁶ This debate suggests the importance of gender in the nation's global profile: both the establishment's insistence on the maleness of authority, and the value placed on being able to participate in such international representation by members of the women's movement. As part of Britain's military presence overseas, service women were part of a very similar kind of national representation. After the Second World War, British governments were determined to maintain their worldwide military commitments and status as an equal partner (at least in theory) with the United States, despite intense financial pressure.⁷ We can thus see women leaders' pride at insisting that their services take postings around the world as pride in making a contribution to fulfilling these commitments. Moreover, the women's services were keen to compare themselves to other countries' women's services in order to reaffirm their country's advanced status. Although a Cold War comparison between British and Soviet women springs to mind, there are practically no references to Soviet women in official publications or policy documents. However, we may surmise that in

⁶ Helen McCarthy, "Petticoat Diplomacy: The Admission of Women to the British Foreign Service, c. 1919-1946," *Twentieth Century British History* 20, no. 3 (2009): 285-321.

⁷ David French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War: The British Army and Military Policy, 1945-1971* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 148-53.

the charged atmosphere of the 1950s, a sense that British women had broad horizons might have seemed like a point in the democratic system's favor.

Both kinds of international contact had precedents during the Second World War, when the participation of British women in all aspects of the war effort had been part of the public image of the war. Both women and men came to Britain from across occupied Europe, the colonies, and the new world to join the fight against Hitler. During the war the ATS was directly involved in the creation of Polish, Palestinian, and Indian women's services, while 1,300 Polish women were formed into their own parallel WAAF unit.⁸ The ATS, WAAF, and WRNS were linked with women's auxiliaries in other allied countries and in the commonwealth, and Norwegian and American officials sought input from high ranking British women officers when drawing up their services.⁹ Women auxiliaries didn't just fight the Second World War from the British Isles, either. The ATS briefly accompanied the BEF in France early in the war, and women auxiliaries were posted to the Middle East, Far East, Africa, and Caribbean, as well as following the invasion onto the continent.

The postwar permanent services solidified the obligation of women to serve anywhere in the world as part of the women's new "integral" status. During the war, servicewomen had to volunteer to go overseas, although in theory the services had the right to make compulsory postings. In January 1942 the option to enlist for service in the United Kingdom only was withdrawn from the ATS, and in 1944 an announcement was made in Parliament that women might now be drafted overseas without volunteering. However, in

⁸ JM Cowper, *The Auxiliary Territorial Service* (London: War Office, 1949), 78-9, 103, 115-6; Air Publication 3234: *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force*, 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 10/5546, 63.

⁹ Leslie Whately, *As Thoughts Survive* (London: Hutchinson, [1949]), 33.

practice, all the women who were sent overseas had volunteered and been subject to a careful system of vetting.¹⁰ This caution seems justified in light of the controversy raised in 1945 when compulsory posting of members of the ATS was debated in Parliament.¹¹ Women's bad behavior or even discomfort was more likely to cause public scandal, and so both stations and the individuals to be sent abroad had to be carefully chosen and prepared.

Women cannot be sent overseas so readily as can men; the possible effect of climatic conditions, the concern of parents for their daughters, their security, both physical and psychological, the provision of special kit, of suitable accommodation in troopships, of medical arrangements and of living conditions—all these factors must be most carefully considered before the decision is taken.¹²

Although the postwar change in policy was regarded as a desirable step in bringing male and female practices into line, nevertheless the practice of individually interviewing each candidate for overseas posting to verify her suitability was retained, as was the principle that compulsory drafting was a measure of last resort.¹³ This continuity of practice should not overshadow the important fact that liability for service anywhere in the world was part of WRAF and WRAC conditions of service from the beginning, whereas during the war the legal position of compulsory posting was ambiguous.

Women's liability for overseas service was an important part of their claim to be "real" military services in two important ways. First of all, Britain's standing army had been constructed to support the empire; units were organized around the principle that

¹⁰ Minute by DUS, 11 Oct 1947, TNA:PRO AIR 2/9278; JM Cowper, *The Auxiliary Territorial Service*, 70, 102; Air Publication 3234: *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force*, 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 10/5546, 105-6.

¹¹ HC Deb 24 January 1945 vol 407 cc 841-906.

¹² Air Publication 3234: *The Women's Auxiliary Air Force*, 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 10/5546, 105.

¹³ Minute by DWAAF, 14 Jan 1948, TNA:PRO AIR 2/9278.

part of the unit would fulfill British commitments overseas. A service that could not serve abroad would not only be accepting more limited terms of service than men, it would be accepting terms of service that would specifically exclude one of the most important *raisons d'être* of Britain's military establishment. Secondly, women stationed on overseas bases were occupying a kind of frontier space associated with the potential for active combat, however well established and comfortable these bases were in reality. When the question of the ATS being posted overseas was debated in the House of Commons, Labour MP Frederick Pethick-Lawrence introduced the subject with "the general question why it is that in civilized countries women have not taken part in the combatant Services." He then built from this consideration of women's prohibition from combat to the distastefulness of forcing them to serve overseas.¹⁴ This association between the combat taboo and the specific issue of their service overseas is not as far-fetched as it may seem at first glance. Women's service overseas was, if only in the symbolic order, the activity that brought them closest to combat, arguably more so than manning heavy artillery gun sites or performing maintenance on deadly warplanes. Although the specific circumstances of the Second World War, namely bombings of major cities, and the introduction of nuclear weapons blurred the geography of "home" and "front", still service overseas was conceptually associated with danger in a way that posts at home were not. Posting overseas, especially after the war had ended, involved taking women out of a safe place and putting them in harm's way.

However, it seems clear from the evidence that postwar military authorities no longer considered the bare fact of danger to be a sufficient justification for keeping women from

¹⁴ HC Deb 24 January 1945 vol 407 c 842.

this kind of posting. At the beginning of 1952, the Second Tactical Air Force (2TAF) revised their policies to exclude women from serving in the “the tactical element of the command,” which is to say their bases in Germany. The Commander in Chief justified this change as “entirely operational,” arguing that the presence of the WRAF would impede the kind of rapid deployment 2TAF was meant to prepare for.¹⁵ The Director of the Women’s Royal Air Force recognized this policy as deeply threatening to her organization, arguing in reply that it was “inconsistent with the policy of employing women in the fighting services to suggest that they cannot be employed at places likely to be subject to attack,” and expressing her fear that such policies might spread to other commands.¹⁶ Indeed, in September of the same year, the Commander in Chief of FEAF requested permission to introduce a policy mandating the immediate evacuation of WRAF personnel on the outbreak of war.¹⁷ This policy was denied, although the 2TAF one was upheld. In deliberations, the Air Ministry explicitly rejected the simple argument of “danger” in these cases. The final ruling allowing for the 2TAF policy specifically states that the exclusion of airwomen must be based on their being “an embarrassment and a headache” in case of mobilization rather than on danger.¹⁸ This eclipse of danger constitutes an after effect of the Second World War, in which many civilians as well as women auxiliaries were killed by bombs, industrial accidents, and other tragedies of war. Moreover, women in uniform had been dispatched to the continent in both world wars and had already been honored for their actions in dangerous places. Thus the rationale was shifted to the notion that women would disrupt the cohesion and efficiency necessary

¹⁵ Memorandum from CinC 2TAF, 21 Mar 1952, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10589.

¹⁶ Minute by DWRAF, 2 Apr 1952, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10589.

¹⁷ Correspondence on TNA:PRO AIR 2/10589.

¹⁸ Minute by AMP, 10 Apr 1952, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10589.

in an emergency, an argument that would continue to be deployed against women in combat for many decades.

The possibility of “seeing the world” was widely agreed to be an attractive and important factor in recruiting young women to the services, although recruiters and young women might have had different reasons for finding it appealing. Travel was one area in which the military had a distinct advantage over other employers as servicewomen had “a much better chance than most girls in a civilian job” of going abroad.¹⁹ Furthermore, other glamorous jobs for girls who wanted to see the world had a higher age bar than the forces: air hostesses had to be 21, and hostesses on cruise liners had to be 25.²⁰ Given the predominance of young marriages in Britain after the Second World War, time was of the essence. As Margaret Yates, a former headmistress hired by the Ministry of Defence as an advisor and liaison on the subject of women’s recruiting noted, “the real glamour of overseas service” was “more potent than ever to girls who know they will certainly be tied down with a household in a few years’ time.”²¹

Recruiting materials accordingly stressed this possibility at every chance. Photographs of women overseas were invariably included in brochures and booklets. A series of ads targeting older teens in the magazine *Heiress* (formerly *The Girls’ Own Paper*) in the mid-1950s featured thumbnail profiles of five airwomen and NCOs. Each ad has its own particular angle and stress, but all of them portray their subject as “eager to go abroad,” “looking forward to going overseas,” or making “plans to apply for overseas posting.”

¹⁹ Memorandum by WRAC1, “Women with the British Army”, May 1956, NAM 1992-11-97-6.

²⁰ *I Want to Be... A Girl Book of Careers* (London: Hulton Press, 1957), 42.

²¹ MF Yates, “The Shortage of Candidates for Commissions in the Women’s Services,” 2 Feb 1960, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1165.

Hers to Command and *Flight of Decision*, recruitment films for the WRAC and WRAF respectively, both feature scenes shot on location in Singapore.

A career story serialized in *Heiress* in 1955 further underlines the perceived importance of overseas travel to recruiting, as it spells out the way the ideal recruit was expected to enter the services.²² The main character, Sarah Cameron, first considers the WRAF when she meets a sunburnt airwoman during an otherwise dreary commute: “I flew in from Malta this afternoon,’ said the girl, as casually as if she were speaking of a taxi ride.”²³ Shortly after this encounter, Sarah has an epiphany while looking at a WRAF poster; the design described in the story was a real poster in use at this time.

The airwoman in the poster wore a light skirt, and an open-necked shirt. She stood confidently against a background of blue sky and sea, white sands and tall palm trees and, in that moment, with the humdrum, everyday life of Fairfield Market Square all about her, Sarah Cameron knew that she wanted above all to accept her invitation and join the Women’s Royal Air Force.²⁴

Sure enough, by part four of the story, Sarah is serving at Changi Airbase in Singapore, taking her holiday on those white sand beaches from the poster and buying her bedroom slippers from obsequious Chinese market sellers. As a piece of advertising, “Sarah Joins the WRAF” hits all the talking points, as career fiction was meant to do, and the prospect of a glamorous life in Singapore was an important one. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that foreign postings were indeed a factor in girls’ decision to join up. In 1958, 68% of airwomen claimed that the “chance to travel, at home and abroad” had influenced their choice of a military career. Furthermore, 59% of WRAF members planning to reengage

²² Shirley Darbyshire, “Sarah Joins the WRAF,” *Heiress* Feb, Mar, Apr, May 1955. The story was also published as a career novel: Shirley Darbyshire, *Sarah Joins the WRAF* (London: Bodley Head, 1955).

²³ Darbyshire, “Sarah Joins the WRAF,” *Heiress* Feb 1955, 9.

²⁴ Darbyshire, “Sarah Joins the WRAF,” *Heiress* Feb 1955, 52.

cited “opportunities to travel” as a primary motivation, and 16% of those who felt that WRAF life was disappointing explained that they had “expected more chance to travel or go overseas.”²⁵

Much of the detail about women’s lives on foreign stations comes from non-official sources as women were far from a top priority in official eyes in these places. The information available about these postings overall is uneven, with the activities of women in some places more thoroughly documented than in others. However, it is clear that British women, particularly members of the WRAC and WRAF, served in a variety of climates and locales throughout the period under discussion. Table 8 gives a snapshot of where women in all three services were serving in 1957, and Table 9 gives detailed information for the WRAC’s distribution around the world from 1950 to 1962. The WRAC data is the most thorough I have found for any of the three services and provides an invaluable glimpse at where and how women were deployed in this period.

Within Europe, West Germany was a major site for women to make overseas tours; as discussed above, British servicewomen had been part of the Allied occupation almost from the invasion. Mary Colvin, who arrived in Hamburg in 1945, was a Staff Officer in the military government and was instrumental in re-forming the *Bürgerschaft* there.²⁶ Many of the servicewomen in Germany in those early days were struck by the devastation they found. “Hamburg was a shattering spectacle,” wrote Felicity Hill, who was assigned to Blankenese in February 1946. “I had not realized how much the German population must have suffered from our bombing.” The British “lived in a world apart”

²⁵ Science 4 Memo No. 70: WRAF Internal Recruiting Survey 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 77/306.

²⁶ Colvin papers, NAM 9401-240.

from this suffering, namely in “the best of the surviving buildings,” and Hill felt a great distance between herself and the German civilians whom she found obsequious.²⁷ A Treasury inspector who visited BAOR in June 1949 commented that “none [of the WRAC officers] had bothered to learn German and... the gulf between them and the German population seemed to be very wide.”²⁸ For an NCO like Mary Doherty, who supervised a typing pool of German civilians including “political ex-prisoners and concentration camp victims” in Hamburg in 1948, the distance was less notable.

Doherty’s attempts to make friends with her subordinates were helped by the parcels of food she received from family in Ireland each month and shared out.²⁹ Later in the 1950s, women benefitted from the significant infrastructure that went with the large service population in Germany, with horse riding and gliding clubs and plenty of scope for sports. For women employed as batwomen or orderlies, Germany was almost their only opportunity to go abroad as non-white local workers were commonly employed in these roles elsewhere, and as a result the female service population was more occupationally diverse than elsewhere.³⁰ This was also one area where women were encouraged to build up positive relationships with local women and children. In 1950, the WRAC stationed at BAOR Headquarters hosted two days of Christmas parties for local children.³¹ In 1955, the Mayoress of Munchen Gladbach hosted a tea to introduce ten of the WRAC to

²⁷ Dame Felicity Hill, manuscript “The Sure Possession,” 79-81, IWM 86/25/1(P).

²⁸ Inspection of the WRAC in BAOR, 22 Jun 1949, TNA:PRO T 213/126.

²⁹ M. Doherty, manuscript “The Best Years of My Life,” NAM 1988-02-66.

³⁰ “With the Army on the Rhine,” *The Lioness* 30, no. 3 (Aug 1957): 46-7.

³¹ Newsletter from Alys Hildyard, 14 Battalion WRAC, HQ BAOR, *QMAAS & ATS Comrades Association Gazette* (Jan-Feb 1950), 6-7.

daughters of local businessmen, giving “the girls an insight into the German way of living.”³²

Women also served in the Mediterranean at the historic British bases in Malta and Gibraltar. Wrens in Malta were stationed at HMS St Angelo and at the Naval Air Station HMS Falcon, where women did a variety of work from stores to safety equipment.³³ Table 8 suggests that in 1957 Wrens were the only servicewomen being posted to Malta, but small numbers of WRAF had been posted there earlier in the decade, and the WRAC were not unknown there. In 1962, a WRAC Private was cited for distinguished conduct when she rescued a soldier who had been swimming off the coast.³⁴ Gibraltar was home to a WRAC anti-aircraft artillery company which arrived with some fanfare in 1952 and remained there for ten years.³⁵ Among other things, these women trained (male) members of the Gibraltar Defence Force in the use of predictor equipment. “Although bemused at first... to hear our names called out without any adjectives enriching them,” the men praised the “progressive” hands-on method of the WRAC Sergeant in charge of the training and delivered a sound endorsement of the women gunners “whatever other people will say.”³⁶

Servicewomen worked in a number of Middle Eastern postings. In the early 1950s WRAF could be found at the joint British Headquarters at Aden, as well as Air

³² News from BAOR, *The Lioness* 28, no. 1 (Feb 1955): 6.

³³ Address of Superintendent Robertson to the Annual General Meeting of the WRNS Association, 23 Oct 1954, *The Wren* 204 (Feb 1955), NMRN 1988.350.18.32: 19-21.

³⁴ “WRAC Private Saves Soldier,” *The Lioness* 35, no. 1 (Feb 1962): 1.

³⁵ Scrapbook of 18th Independent Company, WRAC, NAM 1995-01-82.

³⁶ L/Bdr A Chincotta, Gibraltar Defense Force, “Six Weeks with the WRAC,” reprinted by permission of *Stand Easy*, *The Lioness* 28, no. 4 (Nov 1955): 68.

Headquarters at Habbaniya in Iraq and Ismailia, Egypt.³⁷ The Egyptian posting for the WRAC was at Headquarters in Fayid. Despite instability in the area, “the only drop in morale occurred when an incorrect report in the English papers stated that all WRAC were being evacuated!”³⁸ By 1955, the headquarters in Iraq and Egypt had moved to Nicosia, Cyprus. The initial group of WRAC arriving in Cyprus from Egypt was made up of three officers, twelve warrant officers and sergeants, and 44 other ranks.³⁹ By 1960, there were over 200 WRAC, with a detachment in Tripolitania, Libya.⁴⁰ For several years in the late 1950s, women were not permitted to leave their camps without special permission and an armed escort, leaving many feeling “like a prisoner.”⁴¹ Despite the beautiful weather and scenery, the women found it challenging to be surrounded by “a bitterness and fear which is hard to understand in relation to ourselves.”⁴²

We longed to go for a good long walk, and to go shopping in the old city, but troops on foot were supposed to go out in fours, two of these armed, so WRAC spent their time in transport of one kind or another. The old city of Nicosia remained out of bounds for the entire period of our stay, and whenever we managed to visit the ports there seemed to be a curfew, an out-of-bounds rule, a strike, or the shops were closed for the Greek or British Easter. We did not care much for living and working behind barbed wire, either, but then, who does?⁴³

An officer who got married during her tour described it as “a beautiful island, marred by restrictions, the explosions of Eoka bombs, and never knowing if your husband would

³⁷ A helpful guide to RAF organization in the Middle East (and its changes) in this period may be found in David Lee, *Flight from the Middle East* (HMSO 1980), 25-34

³⁸ “WRAC in Egypt Today,” reprinted from *Khaki Issue, The Lioness* 25, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1952): 4.

³⁹ News from Cyprus, *The Lioness* 28, no. 3 (Aug 1955): 45.

⁴⁰ “New Look in MELF,” *The Lioness* 33, no. 4 (Nov 1960): 60-1.

⁴¹ Winifred Phillips, *Mum’s Army: Love and Adventure from the NAAFI to Civvy Street*, with Shannon Kyle (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 182.

⁴² “Princess Royal’s Day at Home and Abroad: Cyprus,” *The Lioness* 29, no. 3 (Aug 1956): 47-8.

⁴³ Capt PD Southcott, WRAC (TA), “Three Months in Cyprus,” *The Lioness* 29, no. 4 (Nov 1956): 76.

return safely at the end of the day.”⁴⁴ In contrast, Cyprus was an active posting for women in the Provost Section. These female military police, “unarmed and quite unafraid,” performed searches on civilian women and helped staff roadblocks, “whisking (more quickly than the men) through ‘wanted’ lists.” They were also instrumental in restraining “irate Cypriot women” as their husbands were being arrested, and were sometimes pelted with rocks and vegetables.⁴⁵

WRAC were stationed in Kenya until July 1, 1957, although by then their numbers had been run down in response to the Mau Mau uprising. Only three officers and eighteen other ranks were in Nairobi on February 1st, 1957, compared to the slightly larger numbers shown on Table 9 for the previous years.⁴⁶ These women were employed in secretarial roles at the Headquarters in Nairobi and lived in a small camp in the city:

There is a nice little recreation room, store, platoon office, sergeants’ sitting room, sergeants’ mess, rank-and-file mess, and all this is contained in two huts at right-angles to each other. An ablution block and cookhouse fill up the rest of the square camp site and, in the middle, is a small bare patch with a huge eucalyptus tree under which the African boys do the washing and ironing with large charcoal-filled irons.⁴⁷

Although “not a healthy spot,” the women posted here reported in 1955 that “local releases are becoming fashionable,” not exclusively due to marriage.⁴⁸

In the Far East, both the WRAF and WRAC had a presence in Singapore, and, as already noted, it was a favorite setting for recruiting materials. RAF Changi, the airbase in Singapore, was a staging post for operations in Korea, and the area was not without its

⁴⁴ K. O’Kelly de Conejera (Major KM Meredith, WRAC), “Nostalgia,” *The Lioness* 32, no. 1 (Feb 1959): 10.

⁴⁵ Sgt GWJ Pepper, Military Observer in Cyprus, “The Army’s Policewomen,” *The Lioness* 32, no. 2 (May 1959): 26.

⁴⁶ “Princess Royal’s Day Overseas,” *The Lioness* 30, no. 3 (Aug 1957): 42.

⁴⁷ News from East Africa, *The Lioness* 23, no. 4 (Nov-Dec 1950): 11.

⁴⁸ News from East Africa, *The Lioness* 28, no. 3 (Aug 1955), 46-7.

dangers in the early 1950s. Felicity Hill remembered that by 1950 “personnel were forbidden to leave the island unless armed, and if one needed to drive over the Causeway on a duty trip an armed airman rode in the car.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the station enjoyed a lively, even hectic, social life:

Singapore offered every kind of entertainment—good restaurants, dancing, cinemas, Chinese opera and all-in wrestling at the Happy World (a Chinese fairground), visiting orchestras and theatre companies, a superb Botanical Garden and beautiful walks in the forested area around McRitchie Reservoir.⁵⁰

Another officer, Frances Stone, felt it “was really too much for me. I love an occasional party, but when it recurred night after night, the enjoyment began to pall, and I found the accepted custom of wearing a long dinner dress to go to an outside cinema show on a Sunday evening far from relaxing.”⁵¹ WRAC at Singapore, mostly assigned as clerks in the various headquarters offices, lived “about five miles from Singapore City in the GHQ Area of Tanglin.” Their housing featured wide verandas, ceiling fans, and easy access to the garrison’s swimming pool, cricket field, and cinema.⁵² As in the Middle East, rioting in the area could prevent local workers from coming in and throw extra work, both in the signals room and in the cookhouse, on the servicewomen.⁵³

In the Caribbean, three WRAC officers and NCOs were dispatched to Jamaica to run 5 Independent Company there. Originally formed during the Second World War, this company was made up of local women employed as clerks in various roles. Although this was designated as a WRAC company, members lived at home, often with husbands and children, did not undergo basic training, and were overall “rather like civilians in

⁴⁹ Dame Felicity Hill, manuscript “The Sure Possession,” 98-9, IWM 85/25/1(P).

⁵⁰ Dame Felicity Hill, manuscript “The Sure Possession,” 109, IWM 85/25/1(P).

⁵¹ Frances Stone, manuscript “Turn the Wheel Slowly,” 150, IWM 88/2/1.

⁵² News from Singapore, *The Lioness* 23, no. 3 (Sept-Oct 1950): 15.

⁵³ News from Singapore, *The Lioness* 30, no. 1 (Feb 1957): 2.

uniform.” 5 Independent Company was wrapped up on 1 July 1962 as a consequence of independence for Jamaica.⁵⁴

A few miscellaneous posts round out the picture. Women staff officers were sometimes given postings outside of the usual stations, and WRNS cryptography and signals officers in particular were posted to British diplomatic establishments. In 1951, a WRNS officer and five ratings were assigned to the Staff of the Commander in Chief, Allied Forces Northern Europe, in Norway, and officers were also given appointments as assistants to naval attachés in embassies around Europe.⁵⁵ The WRAF had members at NATO headquarters in Oslo, Norway, and Fontainebleau, France.⁵⁶ WRAC gunners’ assistants were posted to a Weapons Research Establishment outside Adelaide, Australia, beginning in 1960.⁵⁷ Finally, servicewomen who were assigned as personal assistants to high ranking male officers had a unique opportunity to see the world. One Sergeant Jones, WRAC, was the PA to the Chief of Staff, GHQ FARELF, and accompanied him on a whirlwind tour of Hong Kong, Japan, Hawaii, Fiji, Australia and New Zealand in 1959.⁵⁸

By all accounts, women thoroughly enjoyed their postings overseas; certainly their lives abroad were a world away from home. Compared to home, a warm climate with plentiful local markets could be heavenly; in 1958, 82% of women who had served

⁵⁴ News from Jamaica, *The Lioness* 33, no. 3 (Aug 1960): 47; “Good-bye to the Caribbean,” *The Lioness* 35, no. 3 (Aug 1962): 46-7.

⁵⁵ Marjorie Fletcher, *The WRNS: A History of the Women’s Royal Naval Service* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 98; Ursula Mason, *Britannia’s Daughters: The Story of the WRNS* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), 128.

⁵⁶ Felicity Hill, manuscript “The Sure Possession,” 120, IWM 86/25/1(P).

⁵⁷ Major Sharcott, WRAC, “Down Under,” *The Lioness* 34, no. 1 (Feb 1961): 6.

⁵⁸ Sgt IF Jones, WRAC, “All in the Day’s Work,” *The Lioness* 32, no. 1 (Feb 1959): 8-9.

abroad described life overseas as “much more pleasant” than life in Britain.⁵⁹ The opportunity overseas postings gave for exotic holidays should not be underestimated. The services ran holiday camps and recreational facilities for soldiers and dependents, some of which were also equipped to house single servicewomen. A change-of-air station in the Cameron Highlands in Malaya was run by a WRAC major with a handful of military staff and a larger local staff, and catered to single soldiers, members of the WRAC, and other ranks and NCO families.⁶⁰ In the Middle East, women could use a leave center at Mombasa, Kenya.⁶¹ Aside from these official schemes, servicewomen were in an enviable position to strike out during their leave and visit foreign countries; travelogues of this kind receive almost as much ink in *The Lioness* as reports on more directly service-related matters. Servicewomen travelled alone or (more commonly) with a friend, visiting the famous cities of western Europe as well as Egypt, Turkey, and Malaya. From Egypt or Cyprus, women could easily make trips to Israel, as Winifred Phillips did in 1958.⁶² Women’s service connections were often useful in travelling, whether through standby seats on flights or hospitality in foreign places. The three WRNS officers who accompanied the Queen on her tour of Australia visited several ex-Wrens who had settled there, reporting back to their Director about their well-being.⁶³ By the late 1950s, members of the British Army were able to stay in French Army facilities for their leave;

⁵⁹ Science 4 Memo No. 70: WRAF Internal Recruiting Survey 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 77/306.

⁶⁰ Major M Yeates, “Change-of-Air-Station,” *The Lioness* 30, no. 4 (Nov 1957): 67.

⁶¹ Air Ministry message to all commands, 9 May 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 2/11545.

⁶² Phillips, *Mum’s Army* 187.

⁶³ Correspondence 25 Jan 1954 – 3 Apr 1954, NMM DAU/76(2-5).

WRAC could choose to stay with French army women at Versailles or Dieppe.⁶⁴ In 1960, Wren RE Parry was able to apply for an RAF Indulgence flight to see her husband, a Marine Sergeant stationed at Aden, for Christmas.⁶⁵ For some women, being posted to the Far East might have been the only way they could have afforded to visit family in Australia or New Zealand. Warrant Officer KM Holmes made just such a journey in 1960; although it took a bit of research and luck to work it out, she reported that it was more than worth the trouble to see her brother again after fourteen years apart. “Our slogan ‘Join the Army and See the World’ is absolutely right if one sets out to make the most of one’s opportunities,” she concluded, and many women did.⁶⁶

Marriage rates were noticeably higher in overseas postings than at home, something which increased the service Directors’ feeling that only well-prepared, mature women should be allowed to go abroad. There were a number of factors contributing to the higher marriage rates. British women abroad were in high demand socially, and not only in areas where the local women were non-white; as the only Allied servicewomen in Berlin, the WRAC stationed there were popular guests in both their own and the American quarter.⁶⁷ In many other areas, marriages were probably encouraged inadvertently by security policies that required women to have an escort when leaving base. This was generally the case in the Middle East: “Englishwomen do not go out alone

⁶⁴ Sgt CMR Ainley, WRAC, “A Guest of the PFAT,” *The Lioness* 32, no. 1 (Feb 1959): 6; see also, on the same page, “Art for Art’s Sake” which notes that Capt Honor Lyster honed her painting skills while staying at the PFAT barrack in Versailles.

⁶⁵ Wren RE Parry, “The Migratory Wren,” *The Wren* 227 (Oct 1962), NMRN 1988.350.18.55: 14-7.

⁶⁶ WO1 KM Holmes, “Visit to New Zealand,” *The Lioness* 34, no. 4 (Nov 1961): 54.

⁶⁷ News from Berlin, *The Lioness* 28, no. 3 (Aug 1955): 47; Capt ST Russell, “Life in Berlin,” *The Lioness* 32, no. 3 (Nov 1959): 58-9.

in the camp areas outside Tripoli, but there are plenty of boy friends to act as escorts.”⁶⁸ Even without an explicit policy, life on an isolated station could have a similar effect; the WRAC near Adelaide, Australia reported that while transportation into town was difficult, “several of the WRAAFs have cars and take the girls to beaches or through the wine-growing valleys at weekends, and there are several boy friends with cars.”⁶⁹ Of course, for women unable or uninterested in acquiring one of these obliging boyfriends, the situation could be grim:

During this tour I travelled quite a lot, as my boss felt being confined to the garrison [at Fayid] would not make for a happy clerk. You see, to get out of the garrison, one had to have an escort, and being plain as rice pudding, I never seemed to go out. I must say my boss was very tactful in taking me with him on his various trips round the units.⁷⁰

Finally, close relationships were encouraged by arrangements whereby servicemen and women shared the same messing facilities and Naafi clubs. “A mixed Mess was our undoing,” commented one officer on the situation in Cyprus.⁷¹ The WRAC unit in Gibraltar reported that “the Company’s liaison with the Battalion is almost too good, as three members of the unit have recently married into the Regiment.”⁷² One Wren officer leaving Malta presented her unit with a farewell gift of a “knife for cutting wedding cakes,” a gift “which is likely to get plenty of use.”⁷³

Servicewomen’s lives in colonial areas echoed established imperial models. In Middle and Far East commands, local people were employed to do all the cooking and cleaning

⁶⁸ “New Look in MELF,” *The Lioness* 33, no. 4 (Nov 1960): 60-1; Phillips, *Mum’s Army*, 115.

⁶⁹ Major Sharcott, WRAC, “Down Under,” *The Lioness* 34, no. 1 (Feb 1961): 6.

⁷⁰ M. Doherty, manuscript “The Best Years of My Life,” NAM 1988-02-66.

⁷¹ K. O’Kelly de Conejera (Major KM Meredith, WRAC), “Nostalgia,” *The Lioness* 32, no. 1 (Feb 1959): 10.

⁷² “Unit News: 18 Independent Company,” *The Lioness* 35, no. 4 (Nov 1962): 62.

⁷³ News from HMS Phoenicia, *The Wren* 226 (Jun 1962), NMRN 1988.350.18.54 : 28.

“as is the custom in all hot countries.”⁷⁴ Senior other ranks were employed to supervise these people: “all the rooms and washing are done by the boys under the eagle eye of Sergt Pitt, WRAC, who has served in East Africa before. She knows enough of Swahili and the tricks of the boys to be able to deal with them more than adequately.”⁷⁵ Local women were also hired to look after British women officers. Felicity Hill remembered her surprise at meeting her “amah” at Changi Air Base, Ah Tim, who spoke pidgin

English:

It had never occurred to me that pidgin English was really actually used outside a performance of ‘Aladdin’... I was disturbed by this and felt it would be insufferably patronizing to reply in kind. I soon learned that Ah Tim could not, or would not, understand my English English, however slowly spoken, so I gave up trying and in the end hardly heard myself saying things like ‘Me go Hong Kong tomollow, bleakfast sixee o’clock.’ I grew very attached to Ah Tim and gravely spoiled by her.⁷⁶

Some servicewomen came to know local people beyond their role as employees. Women at Headquarters in Cyprus reported in 1955 that “many of us have made friends with Cypriot families and have been invited to their family parties and experienced the hospitality for which the people of this beautiful island are renowned,” and in 1957 Major P. Riley wrote an account of a Chinese wedding she was invited to attend by the groom’s mother, a cook in the Sergeants’ Mess at Singapore.⁷⁷

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the Air Ministry denied a request from the Far East Air Force to introduce a policy whereby servicewomen would be immediately evacuated on the outbreak of hostilities. Members of the WRAC and WRAF were proud

⁷⁴ News from No.4 Independent Company (Singapore), *The Lioness* (Sep-Oct 1950): 15.

⁷⁵ News from East Africa, *The Lioness* (Nov-Dec 1950): 11.

⁷⁶ Felicity Hill, manuscript “The Sure Possession,” 111, IWM 86/25/1(P).

⁷⁷ News from Cyprus, *The Lioness* 28, no. 3 (Aug 1955): 45; P. Riley, “A Chinese Wedding Feast,” *The Lioness* 30, no. 1 (Feb 1957): 10.

to have the prerogative of staying on when wives and children would be sent away. Their obligation to serve anywhere in the world, even under dangerous conditions, was an important indicator of their true military status, particularly when contrasted with the types of service open to women in other countries. British servicewomen had contact with their counterparts around the world through official and unofficial visits, letters and news articles, and exchange programs. Through these channels, British women learned to appreciate the relatively advanced organization they were a part of.

The Lioness is not only a rich source of information about British women's postings worldwide, it also reflects the intense interest these women had in military women of other nations. Articles, often quite dry and factual, about the organization and terms of service of the women's army corps of other nations, appear frequently in the magazine. One ex-servicewoman was so enthusiastic about such information that she brought the article about Denmark's Lottekorps with her on holiday to that country in hopes of meeting a member. It was a highlight of her trip to find herself sitting next to a "Lotter" on a train.⁷⁸ All three British services had contact with military women in other countries through visiting officers, exchange programs, and invitations to special events or training programs. Whether through official or unofficial channels it seems clear that British military women were eager to learn more about and develop deeper contacts with other military women in the democratic world. Such interest and activity forms an interesting military parallel to the kind of pacifist internationalism that has often been identified as characteristically womanly.

⁷⁸ GD Hardy, "Lottekorps Sequel," *The Lioness* 28, no. 4 (Nov 1955): 70.

In the European context, Britain stood out as the country with the most extensive regular forces for women. On this ground, Denmark's Lottekorps and Norway's Lotteforbund were both active in making contacts with British military women. In 1955, four members of the WRAC and two Wrens were invited to participate in a week-long winter training course in Norway, where they learned to build shelters out of snow and also about the civilian character and military aspirations of the Lotteforbund.⁷⁹ The following year, a senior Lotteforbund officer visited a WRAC Territorial unit in Dorset.⁸⁰ Two WRAC officers represented their service alongside Norwegian, Swedish, and American women at the Lottekorps' tenth anniversary celebration in 1956.⁸¹ In 1959, the Director of the Danmarks Lottekorps spent a fortnight touring WRAC facilities in Britain to learn about their organization and to consider possible avenues for giving the Lottekorps' handful of full-time employees military status.⁸² The Danish Kvinelige Marinere, a women's naval service run on a part-time basis, was apparently also interested in their British counterparts, as they invited a British diplomat to give them a talk about the WRNS and its reserve in 1955.⁸³

British servicewomen also enjoyed several invitations to France. In 1950, twelve Wrens, who had all paid their own expenses, were welcomed in Paris by their counterparts, the Service Feminin de la Flotte. Their trip included receptions at the

⁷⁹ "Winter Course with the Norges Lotteforbund," *The Wren* 205 (Jun 1955), NMRN 1988.350.18.33: 22-3; S/Sgt L Hodgson, "With the Norges Lotteforbund," *The Lioness* 28, no. 2 (May 1955): 29.

⁸⁰ Capt EB Sinclair, WRAC (TA), "The Norges Lotte Forbund," *The Lioness* 29, no. 4 (Nov 1956): 72.

⁸¹ Capt BM Godin, WRAC, "The Birthday of Danmarks Lottekorps," *The Lioness* 29, no. 3 (Aug 1956): 56.

⁸² "Danish Conquest," *The Lioness* 32, no. 3 (Nov 1959): 44.

⁸³ Correspondence with EA Berthoud, 13 Jan and 19 Feb 1955, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1918.

Ministere de la Marine and the Town Hall (featuring “a delightful speech by the Mayor, concluding that if, by any misfortune, there should be another Trafalgar, the French would at once lay down their arms at the sight of such charming enemies”), radio interviews, a visit to the Naval Museum, and a special viewing of Christian Dior’s spring collection.⁸⁴ Members of the Territorial Army got a chance to meet their French counterparts in 1960, when women of 310 (Hampshire) Battalion paid their own way to spend part of their annual camp with the PFAT.⁸⁵ In the mid-1950s, the WRAC arranged a yearly officer exchange with the Personnel Feminin de L’Armée de Terre (PFAT). Lt-Col CA Cecil reported back from her experience that while the PFAT had very chic uniforms and “almost luxurious” accommodation, the WRAC could hold their heads up on another score:

The military code of discipline in the PFAT in many ways resembles our own, but day-to-day routine discipline is practically non-existent, and nowhere do you find drills and parades taking place. Consequently, PFAT are not accepted as an integral part of the Army, as we in the WRAC are.⁸⁶

This judgment was echoed by the officer who visited the PFAT training facility in 1956 and concluded that the PFAT was “rather behind us regimentally.”⁸⁷

These comments suggest that contact between British military women and their counterparts in other countries served the purpose of reinforcing and building up their status in their own eyes. Such encounters emphasized military women’s ability (and right) to serve as national representatives, as well as members of a common military

⁸⁴ “WRNS Visit to Paris, April 1950,” *The Wren* 189 (Oct 1950), NMRN 1988.350.18.17: 8-9.

⁸⁵ News from the TA, *The Lioness* 33, no. 4 (Nov 1960): 67-8.

⁸⁶ Lt-Col CA Cecil, “The Personnel Feminin de L’Armée de Terre,” *The Lioness* 28, no. 1 (Feb 1955): 8.

⁸⁷ Major AA Locke, MA, WRAC, “Les Stagiaires,” *The Lioness* 30, no. 4 (Nov 1957): 70.

profession. It seems that the primary lesson taken away by British women was that they themselves were part of a very progressive organization. British women liked to see themselves as a model for other countries, a self-image that comes across clearly in a 1956 *Lioness* article about Thailand's Women's Army Corps. The author, a WRAC officer visiting Thailand, observes that the corps' uniform is American-inspired like their name, but concludes:

We are obviously welcome in this country and well liked as a race, and our Corps is held in great honour and respect. It may be that they have American instructors for the men, but most of the women's ideas are British and I know that other visitors from the WRAC will always be made as welcome as I was.⁸⁸

British women had less frequent contact with American servicewomen, but these two allies enjoyed a number of official connections. Captain Joy Bright Hancock, the Director of the Navy Women's Reserve (WAVES) and Colonel Mary Hallaren, the Director of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) visited their British counterparts in 1949 as part of a six week European tour.⁸⁹ Hancock was impressed that "the British women were doing many tasks which had not even been studied as to suitability for WAVES." She came away from the trip with plans to post WAVES to Naval Headquarters in London and a deep admiration for the WRNS.⁹⁰ One British admiral later reported that Hancock had told him that "it made it very much easier if when she wanted to carry out any particular idea, she could say that it was done by the British Wrens."⁹¹ In 1949, then-DWRAF Felicity

⁸⁸ Major P Riley, WRAC, "With the Thailand Women's Army Corps," *The Lioness* 29, no. 3 (Aug 1956): 54.

⁸⁹ "The 'Waves'," *The Wren* 185 (Oct 1949) NMRN 1988.350.18.13: 8-9; Joy Bright Hancock, *Lady in the Navy: A Personal Reminiscence* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press), 245-6.

⁹⁰ Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, 247-8.

⁹¹ Summary of address by Admiral Sir Henry Moore to WRNS Benevolent Trust general meeting, *The Wren* 188 (Jul 1950), NMRN 1988.350.18.16: 3-4.

Hanbury paid a visit to the United States Women in the Air Force (WAF) at the invitation of its director, Geraldine May. Hanbury and May “took to each other at first sight,” and the two spent a fortnight flying around the US to visit officer, new recruit, and trade training facilities. During the trip Hanbury had several opportunities to address the press and tell them about the work British servicewomen were doing to aid the Berlin Airlift, and she credited the trip with giving her “inspiration and zest for my own duties as Director of the WRAF.”⁹² May returned the visit the following year, Hanbury having to get creative in order to come close to matching American hospitality in austerity Britain.⁹³

Hanbury identified the inclusion of women officers in the USAF-RAF officer exchange program as one of the chief outcomes of these reciprocal visits. Women were initially exchanged only between the administrations of their own services but in 1951 the Air Ministry proposed that positions with “functional as distinct from purely Women’s Service administrative duties” should also be made available.⁹⁴ A list from 1957 indicates six posts in America that were earmarked for women: one on the staff of the Director of the United States Women in the Air Force (D-USWAF), the Officer Assignments Division in Air Defense Command, Headquarters Tactical Air Command, Headquarters Strategic Air Command, the WAF Training Wing, and the Supply Directorate.⁹⁵ One of the exchange officers, F/O Jean Jeffers, was mentioned in a 1950 *New York Times* article about WAF basic training, indicating that some of these posts at

⁹² Felicity Peake, *Pure Chance* (Shrewsbury, UK: AirLife, 1993), 185-92.

⁹³ Peake, *Pure Chance*, 193-4.

⁹⁴ Minute by ACAS(P), 17 Apr 1951, TNA:PRO AIR 2/11507.

⁹⁵ British Joint Services Mission (RAF Staff), Consolidated List of Exchange Appointments for RAF/WRAF Officers in USAF/USN Formations, Jul 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 8/1787.

least were long-standing.⁹⁶ American women in the United Kingdom worked in the WRAF directorate and Technical Training Command on roughly parallel types of work. Women's participation in the exchange scheme was marginal to its primary purpose of giving RAF officers access to American technology and solidifying Britain's relationship with its most important ally. Britain had some difficulty matching American exchange posts in a way that would keep the program mutually valuable and not financially burdensome. Women's posts were ultimately disposable, but since they had been agreed at a "very high level" they were also safe amidst the periodic retooling.⁹⁷ A letter from 1950 specified that WAF exchange officers could be given information "up to and including the security category which is stated on their orders" but not "on such matters as strategy, foreign policy, Commonwealth or domestic affairs, which are outside the field of the operation, development, organization and administration of the Women's Royal Air Force and the work on which they are engaged."⁹⁸ Although this was a limited role, nevertheless the exchange served to strengthen the relationship between the two women's forces and, perhaps more importantly, bolstered the "integral" status of each within its own home force.

Commonwealth countries looked to Britain as a model of how women could be used in the military although few introduced anything as extensive as existed in Britain. A group of Burmese women officers visited the WRAC depot in 1957, as did a party of

⁹⁶ Gertrude Samuels, "It's 'Hup, 2, 3, 4' and 'Yes Ma'am': Schooling of a WAF," *New York Times*, 3 Sep 1950.

⁹⁷ RAF/USAF Exchange Posts Which We are Prepared to Lose, 22 Oct 1956, TNA:PRO AIR 8/1787: this list consists of three posts, two of which are WRAF. In contrast, none of the 45 "essential" posts on the accompanying list are women's posts. "Very high level": minute by DPol(AS), 3 Apr 1952, TNA:PRO AIR 2/11507.

⁹⁸ Memorandum to all commands, 6 Oct 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 8/1787.

Ugandan women councilors in 1960 on a trip sponsored by the British Council “to see the status and employment of women in this country.”⁹⁹ Begum Ra’ana Liaquat Ali Khan, First Lady of Pakistan, visited the WRAC at Guildford in 1948, the year before she formed the Women’s National Guard and Pakistan Women’s Naval Reserve.¹⁰⁰ The Canadian government requested data from the Ministry of Defense in 1948 to contribute to their debate about the postwar shape of their women’s services: “(a) turnover in personnel, showing causes such as marriage etc; (b) incidence of sickness; (c) efficiency; (d) discipline; (e) trades in which employed; (f) general moral standard.”¹⁰¹ Felicity Hanbury stopped in Canada to visit the Royal Canadian Air Force’s Women’s Division on her way home from her 1949 visit to the United States. She recalled that the Canadian “Wids” and the WRAF had “little to learn from each other” thanks to their close wartime association, a rather different characterization to the way she describes her relationship with the USWAF.¹⁰² The re-introduction of the Women’s Royal Australian Army Corps in 1950 was partly influenced by the example of Britain’s WRAC, and the British example was cited in discussions surrounding uniform provision and whether women should be made to resign after marriage. Three WRAAC officers attended the WRAC staff college before it closed and an exchange program was proposed in 1957.¹⁰³ On a

⁹⁹ News from WRAC Depot, *The Lioness* 30, no. 2 (May 1957): 29; and 33, no. 1 (Feb 1960): 6.

¹⁰⁰ Photo, “Visit of the Begum Ali Khan Guildford 1948,” NAM 1995-0115-4; Mehr Nigar Malroor, *Ra’ana Liaquat Ali Khan: a biography* (Karachi: All Pakistan Women’s Association, n.d.), 43; Kay Miles, *The Dynamo in Silk: A Brief Biographical Sketch of Begum Ra’ana Liaquat Ali Khan* (Rome: APWA, 2nd ed 1974), 12.

¹⁰¹ Letter from LTC RL Raymont, Canadian Joint Liaison Officer, 17 Nov 1948, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1918.

¹⁰² Peake, *Pure Chance*, 191-2.

¹⁰³ Janette Bomford, *Soldiers of the Queen: Women in the Australian Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8-9, 37-9.

smaller and more informal scale, in 1956 the Director of the New Zealand WRAC set up a pen friend program with 16 Independent Company WRAC in the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁴

Considering connections within the Commonwealth raises the question of race in the British women's services. Officially, there was no color bar in either the Army or RAF, and the women's services followed the men's services line on this issue. Both the Air Ministry and War Office were quick to stress publicly that any man who entered a recruiting office would be evaluated according to the same standards regardless of his race. The stress placed on the idea that non-white recruits had to meet the same standard as any other man in order to join does not eliminate the possibility of discrimination. Within the War Office and Air Ministry were many senior officers who were ready to praise the performance of colonial troops in the war but who also doubted that they could successfully fit into British units, which they thought of as normatively white. While it was true that recruiters could reject any man they thought would detract from *esprit de corps*, race was, in practice, considered to be evidence in itself that someone would be a disruptive presence. Neither service was eager to have large numbers of non-white men in their regular ranks.¹⁰⁵ The Army apparently had a quiet "limit of not more than 2% of coloured men in any corps."¹⁰⁶

These attitudes transferred into the women's services. Whereas the Army was apparently willing to enlist white women in the colonies and transport them to Britain, the RAF insisted on strict fairness and introduced a policy whereby both white and non-

¹⁰⁴ DWRAC's Quarterly Liason Letter No 9, Oct 1956, NAM 9211-97-15.

¹⁰⁵ There were various "local" regiments and air forces overseas set up and run by the Army and RAF which recruited non-white men, but these were administratively quite separate from the main forces.

¹⁰⁶ Unsigned typed minute, 10 Aug 1961, TNA:PRO HO 344/28.

white women would have to make their own way to Britain before enlisting.

Nevertheless, the question of running recruiting campaigns directly in the colonies came up periodically. In the early 1950s, the Air Ministry could see how such recruiting could be presented as evidence of their progressive outlook:

There is the wider political advantage that to open such recruiting in the Colonies, and to offer Colonial Airmen the same conditions of service as to UK airmen, would be a direct reply to the standard line of Communist propaganda that we are interested in the Colonies only in order to exploit the natives and to deny them equality of treatment with our own people.¹⁰⁷

However, they ultimately concluded that such recruiting would not be worth the trouble it would cause, not least in aggravating local governments trying to fill their own services' ranks. By the early 1960s, with the end of National Service on the horizon and a possible manpower shortage looming, the War Office was eager to begin recruiting overseas, often frustrating the Home Office and Ministry of Labour with their haste and apparent disregard for the larger problems surrounding colonial migration to Britain. Although women were not mentioned in the discussions about this program, several women did enter the WRAC this way. By the 31st of October 1961, 47 women from the Seychelles and 12 from Fiji had enlisted; the first group from Fiji arrived in Britain during a snowstorm on the very last day of the year.¹⁰⁸

Once in the service, men and women of color did not have the same opportunities as their white counterparts, insofar as it was policy not to post them to "areas in which it is impossible to guarantee them the treatment they have a right to expect as British

¹⁰⁷ Minute by DDM(Pol), 12 Jul 1951, TNA:PRO AIR 2/11467.

¹⁰⁸ Hansard extract: col. 101 written answers 20 Nov 1961, TNA:PRO HO 344/28; "News from WRAC Depot and Training Centre," *The Lioness*, 35 no. 1 (Feb 1962): 5.

subjects.”¹⁰⁹ No indication of color was allowed to be made on a serviceman or woman’s record. Thus the posting policy had to be implemented through personal contact between commanding officers and Records. Official eagerness about racial discrimination and a firm conviction that non-white men and women were not the “normal” recruit make black servicewomen hard to find in the documentary record, but their presence and contributions must nevertheless be noted.

The legacy of British servicewomen’s interest in foreign women’s forces is perhaps the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives, formerly the Committee on Women in the NATO Forces. This Committee was officially recognized in 1976, but had its origins in unofficial meetings dating back to 1961.¹¹⁰ The resolutions of that first meeting, among other things, “stressed the importance of contact between Nato countries by the exchange of visits between the women’s services.”¹¹¹ At such meetings, senior British women officers represented not only their own services but their nation, sharing Great Britain’s relatively extensive experience employing women in the military with the country’s allies. They upheld, in their own way, Britain’s claims to be a leading power in NATO and the world more generally. Visits from foreign women’s service directors were not widely covered in the press, and British women’s eagerness to learn more about Norway might seem somewhat quaint today, but such activities encouraged the idea that the British women’s services were models for others. Perhaps some servicewomen found it

¹⁰⁹ Air Council letter, 12 Oct 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 20/11290; for War Office iteration see WO 32/16642.

¹¹⁰ “NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives,” accessed 5 Mar 2013, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50327; Jean E Klick, “Utilization of Women in the NATO Alliance,” *Armed Forces and Society* 4, no. 4 (1978): 673-8; “Visit to Britain by NATO Airwomen: Pooling Knowledge on Services,” *Times*, 28 Aug 1962.

¹¹¹ “Women in NATO Defence,” *The Lioness* 35, no. 2 (May 1962): 32.

consoling to think that, even if their military opportunities left something to desire, women in other countries were worse off.

When the Director of the WRNS attempted to develop a dress uniform for her service in 1949, one reason put forward against the proposal was that “WRNS Officers do not serve in seagoing ships and the ‘showing the flag’ aspect does not apply to them to anything like the same extent as to other officers.”¹¹² This was, strictly speaking, true, but by the late 1950s anyone looking at the women’s services as a whole would have to conclude that they were in fact “showing the flag” all over the world. Although combat remained off-limits – only nurses served in Korea, for instance – nevertheless, women were keen to be part of the way Britain’s military appeared to the world. Without challenging the idea that military service was a primarily male activity, women also participated in running Britain’s overseas outposts and building up friendly relationships with allied forces. The women’s services contributed to Britain’s standing in the Cold War world, exemplifying the freedom and opportunity available in the democratic system, as well as placing Britain on an equal level with the United States as a model for other states to follow. This kind of activity helped to reinforce the idea that servicewomen held a high status as full members of the military, an association that might help to explain why overseas opportunities were so prominent in recruiting materials beyond the literal appeal of the chance to travel. “Seeing the world” was one possible motivation for joining up, but for women already in the services, the thought of being visible to the world was even more powerful.

¹¹² Minute by Head of CW, 7 Apr 1949, TNA:PRO ADM 1/26660.

7. Marriage, Desertion, and Wastage

One of the greatest obstacles to the success of the women's services was the fact that their members only remained members for such short periods of time. Most women signed up for initial engagements of less than five years, and the average amount of time actually served by a servicewoman in the 1950s was only about three years.¹ This was in stark contrast to the military's usual employment patterns, which assumed that most male volunteers would serve at least seven or eight years, acquiring a wife and children along the way. Moreover, the report submitted by the Ministry of Defence to the Grigg Committee on Recruiting noted that "for [female] other ranks the wastage rate has averaged over the last five years about 25%" compared with just 5% among the comparable group of men.² The majority of women being recruited were not signing up for a long-term career, both in terms of the promises they made and in terms of the way their careers played out. In consequence, the services were actually shrinking year over year in the latter half of the 1950s (see Table 10). Meanwhile, recruiting targets were high, particularly after the services began planning to expand the women's forces in the late 1950s. Not only were the services failing to meet their recruiting targets, the gap between the targets and the actual numbers was getting wider.

This high wastage in the women's services, repeated year after year, provided a compelling economic argument against offering the women longer training, access to new trades, more opportunities to serve abroad, or greater financial incentives. The high wastage rate also gave ammunition to male officers resistant to seeing military women as

¹ Para 21, Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Cmnd 545) (Grigg Committee), Oct 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1238.

² Note by the Ministry of Defence, Recruitment to the Women's Services, 9 May 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 10/246.

equals; it was difficult to make the case that women were not losing money for the services at a time when money was hard to come by. One anonymous Lieutenant Colonel considered in 1949 that “the extra drain on the Army’s administrative resources caused by the WRAC was out of all proportion to the services rendered by them,” but even those who thought the women did good work could have “grave doubts whether it was a really sound idea to set up the WRAC on a permanent basis.”³ Female leaders hoped that such opinions would be dispelled once men saw servicewomen’s hard work, but competence could not provide much answer to high turnover and shrinking numbers. Perhaps military work was unnatural for women after all; perhaps most women, even if they could be persuaded to try it, disliked it in the end. Such conclusions could threaten the continued survival of the women’s services.

Short terms of service and insufficient recruiting returns were a defining characteristic of the postwar women’s services. Disappointing numbers reinforced essentialist ideas about women’s goals and priorities and cast doubt on the thesis that the unprecedented participation of women in the war effort signaled a lasting change in working women’s status. Although these doubts did not prevail in the sense of shutting down the women’s services, they did succeed in stunting those services’ development. Any momentum there may have been from women’s unconventional contributions during the war was undermined in no small part by this problem of wastage.

Many women left the forces simply by not re-engaging when their initial period of service was over: the reenlistment rates in the WRAC and WRAF sat at about 10%, and

³ Reports by Cairncross, inspecting WRAC establishments on behalf of the Treasury: respectively, Western Command 24 Jun 49, and Eastern Command 23 May 49, TNA:PRO T 213/126.

just below 15% in the WRNS.⁴ However, there were other ways to leave before that commitment had been filled. The services made provision for women who got married to leave, a form of discharge with important cultural resonance. Women were perceived as having moral obligations to their families beyond marriage, however, and so compassionate discharges were available for those whose family circumstances were deemed sufficiently serious. Both of these methods gave official sanction to the notion that women's work within the home and family was more important than any work outside the home, even in the national armed forces.

Reasons for leaving related to family caring were generally categorized as “compassionate” cases, and the term could cover a range of situations that were viewed as valid grounds for obtaining a discharge. A compassionate discharge might be approved for a woman whose parents were ill and needed her to come home and act as nurse, for a woman whose mother had died and whose father needed her as housekeeper, or for a girl whose family had fallen on hard times and needed her contribution to the household labor. Winifred Philips was persuaded to leave the service in 1956 by her father, who she suspected “just wanted to try and make amends a little for our broken family.” The family had broken up when Winifred and her brothers were small and perhaps her father thought having his daughter living under his roof would be a more normal state of affairs. After only a few months of living with her new stepmother and working at an unpleasant hotel job, Philips gave up, went back to the WRAC, and re-enlisted at her old rank.⁵ This story suggests the power that a parent's wishes could have over a young woman as well as the

⁴ Note by the Ministry of Defence: Recruitment to the Women's Service, 9 May 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 10/246.

⁵ Winifred Philips, *Mum's Army: Love and Adventure from the NAAFI to Civvy Street*, with Shannon Kyle (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 175-8.

normality and respectability of having an unmarried adult daughter live at home. It also shows how marriage was one facet of a larger complex of women's family responsibilities. Parents continued to have strong claims over their daughters which could result in compassionate discharges.

Disgruntled servicewomen might simply wait for their engagement to end, but if they couldn't stand to wait they had options. Misbehavior could elicit a discharge by way of punishment, an escape hatch authorities were aware of and tried to close off.⁶ A woman could pay a set sum for her discharge by purchase; this could be quite expensive depending on how much time was left in the woman's engagement. More illicitly, some servicewomen chose to desert. In the immediate aftermath of the war, desertion spiked as women, and British people more generally, scrambled to claim or reclaim peacetime jobs and reestablish "normal" lives. However as demobilization progressed and the permanent services, bolstered by military status, superseded their wartime predecessors, desertion ceased to be a major issue for the WRAC and WRAF. Air Ministry data in Table 12 reflects this situation as WRAF desertions are high in 1948 but are practically non-existent after 1953.

However, desertion continued to be a significant problem for the WRNS well after the situation had calmed for the other services. As Table 14 indicates, the WRNS lost more than a hundred women each year to desertion in the mid-1950s. The topic came up again and again at WRNS senior officers' conferences throughout the decade as women leaders struggled to cope with the problem, but it was little discussed outside of these circles. The WRNS' desertion problem makes no appearance in inter-service discussions of

⁶ See chapter two.

recruiting, although it may lie behind the way its numbers were compiled for the Grigg Committee in Table 11. In this table, “disciplinary reasons,” “unsuitable,” and “purchased discharge” are combined for the WRNS; there is no mention of desertion, but given how much higher this category is in the WRNS compared to the other two services it seems likely that deserters were quietly included here. This situation hinged on the unique disciplinary code of the WRNS. As discussed in chapter two, the Admiralty resisted placing the WRNS under the Naval Discipline Act, and thus deserters could not be forced to come back but could only be charged with breach of contract in a civil court. However, it was the Navy’s policy not to pursue such suits, no doubt partly because women were not considered worthwhile, but also because Admiralty officials did not want to publicize the flimsiness of WRNS contracts. If the ease of desertion were known, not only might more women desert, it could also upset the treasured distance between men and women created by separate disciplinary codes. After all, it was possible that the government might press to have the WRNS brought in line with the other services and placed under the Naval Discipline Act if the desertion problem came to public notice. Having a fundamentally different disciplinary code kept the women in a subordinate position in the Navy, and this was of great importance to many sailors, officers, and leaders who were not prepared to accept women as equal co-workers. As a result of this situation, women’s desertion did have remarkably few consequences. A deserter’s Unit Officer could appeal to the police to help locate a deserter, and then write letters and visit the woman to try to persuade her to return.⁷ However, if the woman refused, the WRNS was obliged to return her ration card and other papers promptly, with no more than two

⁷ Notes on the Senior WRNS Officer Conference held 9 Nov 1948, NMRN 1988.350.28.2.

weeks' delay.⁸ Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Admiralty was correct to think that widespread knowledge of the situation would encourage desertion, although they were incorrect to think that the situation was at all under wraps within the service. "Neither the ratings nor their parents give any thought to the contract made by the rating with the Admiralty on enrollment," one officer concluded; "they are aware of the ease with which they can leave the service."⁹ Another reported that a deserter had responded to an appeal to return by asking "how can it be disgraceful [to desert] when it is permitted[?]"¹⁰ Moreover, the fact that from the 1940s to the 1960s naval husbands encouraged their Wren wives to desert suggests that naval men did look at the different disciplinary codes as evidence that women were not "really" part of the Navy.¹¹ Thus while the Admiralty was happy for the public to believe that the WRNS was an "integral part" of the Navy, within the ranks men were welcome to bolster their own status by reference to women's subordinate status even if this meant a certain level of disruption in the WRNS.

There are doubtless many idiosyncratic circumstances surrounding each servicewoman's exit that we cannot fully recover, but the authorities were convinced that marriage, in their view the inevitable and natural career of every woman, was the major cause of wastage. This view was largely uncontested, although female leaders in

⁸ Notes on the Senior WRNS Officer Conference held 25 Oct 1949, NMRN 1988.350.28.2.

⁹ Minute drafted by First Officer Margaret Bray on Desertion of WRNS Ratings for the Commodore for Commodores' Meeting, n.d. [ca. 1948], NMRN 1988.350.28.3.

¹⁰ Notes of the Senior WRNS Officers Conference, 23 Sep 1952, NMRN 1988.350.28.1.

¹¹ References to such incidences can be found in: memorandum by DWRNS Vera Loughton Mathews, 12 Jun 1946, TNA:PRO ADM 1/24325; Notes of the Senior WRNS Officer Conference held 18 Mar 1952, NMRN 1988.350.28.1; Notes of the Senior WRNS Officer Conference held 11 Sep 1962, NMRN 1988.350.28.4.

particular tended to place more emphasis on changing women's employment habits and encouraging them to take the idea of a long, committed career more seriously.

Marriage could be the reason behind a woman's departure even when it was not the formal reason for her discharge. The desire to take a better-paying job could arise from the desire to set more money aside for a wedding and new home. One WRNS deserter explained in a letter:

During my time in the Service I learned all the forms of release, including the marriage priority, as there are several months before my marriage, this is of little use to me. It's now I need to be earning a good salary to enable me to save.¹²

Official discussions of the wastage problem were conceptually framed by the idea that all women would want to get married, and that the vast majority would do so at a relatively young age. These suppositions were present in early policy planning sessions when decisions were being made about women's eligibility for pensions; later, new recruits (and their parents) would be reassured in advertisements that a military commitment would not impede a girl from getting married. Marriage, and the motherhood which was assumed to follow automatically, was the immovable object, the essentially distinctive characteristic of a woman's life that would necessarily get in the way of attempts to make women's working lives fit male patterns.

The fact that marriage figured so centrally in the armed forces' conception of their potential recruits' lives reflects the fact that the relationship between work and motherhood was one of the central debates about women's roles in the 1950s. The relationship between women's work and marriage was changing dramatically after the Second World War, as economic circumstances and a new discourse about "dual roles"

¹² Punctuation as in original. Copy of a letter from DM Barnes, dated 10 Jun 1948, NMRN 1988.350.28.3.

encouraged women to continue working after marriage. Marriage and motherhood took on a particular postwar emphasis, shaped by wartime disruption and aspirations for a higher standard of living in peacetime. Evacuation, military service, the destruction of houses by bombs, and intensely demanding work schedules all contributed to disrupted family life during the war as well as a heightened awareness, in some cases, of child poverty. The growing conviction that poverty and its related social ills should not be allowed to persist in the postwar welfare state focused to a significant degree on restoring and improving family life, the lynchpin of which was considered to be the mother. Thus a competent mother, raising mentally and physically healthy children while maintaining a hygienic and attractive home, emerged as a key figure responsible for the success of British peacetime life.¹³ Nevertheless, economic pressures combined with cultural trends already evident earlier in the twentieth century to expand women's role in the workforce, particularly among married women. The Labour government's policies urged women to remain in the workforce and ease the labor shortage, even as they also reinforced the domestic role of women and the centrality of their child-rearing duties.¹⁴ The increased number of married women in the workforce was one of the most striking outcomes of the Second World War as marriage bars became a thing of the past.¹⁵

¹³ Pat Starkey, "The Feckless Mother: Women, Poverty, and Social Workers in Wartime and Post-War England," *Women's History Review* 9, no. 3 (2000): 551; Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, c. 1945-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 112-37; Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Viking, 1997), 292-4.

¹⁴ Jim Tomlinson, *Democratic Socialism and Economic Policy: The Attlee Years, 1945-1951* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005), 187-191.

¹⁵ Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain*, 196-7.

The tensions between these two phenomena produced a new model of adult womanhood which combined both domestic roles and paid work. Based on an analysis of career advice literature as well as mainstream magazines, Stephanie Spencer argues that girls in the 1950s were discouraged from thinking about work as simply a stopgap measure. Rather, work was acknowledged as a realm in which a girl ought to pursue personal fulfillment both before and after the phase of her life dedicated to raising small children.¹⁶ The sociologists Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein identified this “two roles” phenomenon in the mid-1950s, describing it as an essentially progressive and modern development, a view shared by the many women and commentators who took it up as a model.¹⁷ Although the concept of the dual role and the acceptance of women’s education helped to normalize working wives to some extent, tension and conflict remained, and would help fuel later feminist movements. For working-class women, of course, working was often simply reality, but middle-class mothers felt the need to defend their activities by pointing out how paid work benefited the household. The idea that wives’ work was non-essential—“pin money” or funding some marginal increase in the family’s quality of living—was widespread and helped to justify many women workers’ low status and lack of opportunities.¹⁸ By and large, therefore, a woman’s most important role, both socially and in terms of her own individual life course, was as a mother actively raising children.

¹⁶ Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work, and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁷ Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women’s Two Roles, Home and Work* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1956); Jane Lewis, “Myrdal, Klein, Women’s Two Roles and Postwar Feminism 1945-1960,” in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* ed. Harold Smith (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1990), 167-88.

¹⁸ Dolly Smith Wilson, “A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain,” *Twentieth Century British History* 17, no. 2 (2006), 206-

Servicewomen who got married could request their discharge within a certain window following the date of their marriage, but did not have to do so. The initiative to leave therefore rested on the woman herself in contrast, for example, with the policy of the Canadian Women's Army Corps in the same period, whose members had to get special permission to remain in the service after marriage.¹⁹ The idea that women should remain in the service by default was part of the shift away from marriage bars that characterized postwar Britain. Prior to the Second World War, it was common in many lines of work, including the civil service, that women would be required to leave their job when they got married. During the war, marriage bars were lifted in order to address manpower shortages, and although the government had intended to reinstate the bar at the end of the war, campaigning by MPs and the continued high demand for labor led to its permanent abolition in the civil service.²⁰ The absence of a marriage bar in the armed forces was another way in which the women's services were designed to be in touch with modern life. In discussions with the Treasury on this point, military officials argued on the basis of changing customs, that "the tendency was rapidly increasing among women to go in for long-term careers in the same way as men, and no longer to regard marriage either as a probability or as a necessary termination to their own careers."²¹ All three services agreed, in the words of the Admiralty, that women would have the "option to take their discharge on marriage" but would not be forced to do so, although "the contract would

229; Dolly Smith Wilson, "The True Sphere of Women': Work, Gender and Equal Pay in Britain, 1945-1975" (PhD diss., Boston College, 2004).

¹⁹ W. Hugh Conrod, *Athene, Goddess of War: The Canadian Women's Army Corps: Their Story* (Dartmouth, NS: Writing and Editorial Services, 1983), 383.

²⁰ Dolly Smith Wilson, 'The True Sphere of Women'? *Gender, Work, and Equal Pay in Britain, 1945-1975* (PhD diss., Boston College, 2004), 62-6.

²¹ Minutes of an Inter-Service Meeting with the Treasury, 30 Aug 1946, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5727.

automatically be terminated on the member's assumption of family responsibilities," that is, on pregnancy.²² The Air Ministry further specified that "married women and widows should also be eligible to enter or re-enter the Service, provided that they can show that they would be fully mobile."²³ This issue of mobility, as we shall see, was for many women a marriage bar in practice.

Although many young women probably saw their marriage license as a ticket out of the forces, some women did choose to stay on for at least a little while after their marriage. The unusual set of data in Table 13 shows a shrinking percent of married WRAF officers over the early 1950s, while among other ranks the percent of married women remains low but steady. Although this data does not indicate how long any of these married women remained in the service after they had been counted on the 1st of July each year, it does indicate the effect of the policy of not forcing married women out of the services. DWRAF Nancy Salmon felt it was "beneficial to our Service to have in it a certain number of married women," and did not wish to adopt any policy that would rigidly exclude women based on marital status.²⁴ In 1952, a WRNS officer proposed that the policy should be changed to require women to leave on marriage; her objection was that women who elected to stay often deserted soon after, causing disruption and demoralization. Her proposal was rebuffed as "women who elected to remain in the

²² Minutes of Meeting on the Future of the WRNS, 8 Nov 1945, TNA:PRO ADM 116/5727; c.f. Minutes of the 51st Meeting of the Committee on the Policy of the Post-War RAF, 1 Dec 1944, TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824; Forty-second Interim Report of the Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems, 7 May 1947, TNA:PRO WO 32/13160.

²³ Mobility was a wartime concept describing women who did not have domestic dependents, e.g. small children or elderly parents, and could therefore be posted anywhere. Sixth Interim Report of the Committee on the Manning of the Post-War RAF, Dec 1944, TNA:PRO AIR 2/7824.

²⁴ Memorandum Salmon to Head of OAR, 24 Apr 1953, TNA:PRO AIR 20/7886.

Service after marriage must be accepted as this was a general directive of national policy.”²⁵

Nevertheless, military policymakers clearly envisioned the prototypical servicewoman as single, even though it was increasingly accepted that soldiers, sailors, airmen, and officers would be married men with families. Historically, the armed forces had discouraged if not actually prohibited men from marrying, with only a small proportion in each regiment officially permitted to marry in the nineteenth century. Such policies were intended to restrict the military’s liability for dependents, as well as increasing efficiency by limiting outside claims on enlisted men.²⁶ After the Second World War, however, in the face of demographic change, the services began to bring in more amenities for families, such as housing, schools, and retail services.²⁷ Men’s desire to form nuclear family households had to be respected in order to recruit sufficient numbers in the postwar welfare state, but accommodations for working mothers were thought to be inappropriate if not unnecessary, as women’s obligation to dedicate themselves totally to family life were clear. Married servicewomen received no special treatment as far as postings were concerned, but could easily receive a compassionate discharge in order to set up house with their husbands “as a refusal would be against the public interest and,

²⁵ Notes on the Senior WRNS Officers Conference, 23 Sep 1952, NMRN 1988.350.28.1.

²⁶ Myna Trustam, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 29-49; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Marriage and the British Army in the Long Eighteenth Century: “The Girl I Left Behind Me”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28-60.

²⁷ David French, *Army, Empire, and Cold War: The British Army and Military Policy, 1945-1971* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 75-77.

also, would be indefensible if the refusal were criticized.”²⁸ Posting therefore was probably one of the main prompts for married women to leave the forces along with pregnancy. WRAC Major Eleanor Thompson got engaged to a Flight Lieutenant in the RAF while both were serving in Singapore, and “although I could apply to resign from the Service after marriage, we had not considered it,” since neither she nor her 207srael was due to be posted away from Singapore for more than a year. However, after the wedding Major Thompson (now White) found that “for me, a career in the Service and marriage were incompatible”; as a wife she could no longer give the same “single-minded attention to the requirements of the ATS and the WRAC” as she had done as an unmarried officer. Thus about three months after her wedding, she requested a replacement so that she could resign. Interestingly, although she had left the WRAC, she was hired as a civilian to fill a Staff Officer position at Army Headquarters in Singapore, a post she held until she returned to Britain with her husband thirteen months later.²⁹ Service policies on marriage thus were built to enforce a gendered view of married life, whereby male breadwinners supported female housewives who were devoted to home and children full-time, even if things were not always so simple in practice.³⁰

²⁸ §5 Married Women and Legal Guardians, WRAC Recruiting Instruction No. 1: Enlistment from Civilian Life, 27 Jan 1949, TNA:PRO WO 32/13166; Notes of meeting held by DM(PP), 14 Nov 1949, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10316.

²⁹ Eleanor Joan White (nee Thompson), manuscript “Service with the Auxiliary Territorial Service and Women’s Royal Army Corps, September 1939 to August 1951,” 1988, NAM 2004-05-28.

³⁰ The authorities recognized that full-time military housewives and single servicewomen were often the same women in different phases of life: “These healthy young women with their Service training and experience make the finest possible wives for men making a career in the RAF and their *loss to the WRAF* when they *change their status* from serving personnel to that of ‘married women on the strength’ is offset by the steadying influence they have on their husbands” (my emphasis). Demi-official confidential letter from AMP to Commanders in Chief, Jun 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14082.

Official records provide little evidence to support the idea that women left the services because they were unhappy or disliked military life, but this is probably not a reliable reflection of reality. As discussed at the opening of this chapter, the notion that dissatisfaction lay behind wastage was one with dangerous potential consequences for the women's services. Moreover, the senior women officers involved in discussing this sensitive problem were also the women most likely to believe strongly in the importance and advantages of a military career. Such women were also likely to believe that only "bad girls" would dislike the service and that women who disliked the service were probably "bad girls" without whom the service was better off. Thus, many if not most senior women officers were predisposed not to take seriously any suggestion that there was anything about the way the services were organized or run that was driving women out. Even if they did not think the range of jobs available or the levels of pay were entirely ideal, they felt that a girl of proper civic, patriotic spirit would not let these factors draw her out of the services.

However, data on deserters compiled by senior WRNS officers in the mid-1950s suggests that the services' ongoing emphasis on domestic work likely did have a negative effect on retention, if not also recruiting. Data circulated at a Senior WRNS Officers Conference, reproduced at Table 14, shows the numbers of deserters in each occupational category over a period of about two and a half years. Cooks and stewards, employed in domestic service roles stand out with notably high rates of desertion. The ranks of Sick Berth Attendants and Dental Surgery Attendants probably lost some members to professional medical training; these were essentially orderly roles in the WRNS since any qualified nurses would have been employed in a nursing corps. By the 1950s, domestic

service was no longer the commonplace form of employment it once had been, and with a much wider choice of work open to them, young working-class women could successfully avoid going into service. It is thus unsurprising to find that many women who had been assigned to the same type of work in the navy were unhappy enough with it to leave, particularly since so much else of the WRNS experience mirrored hated aspects of domestic service such as the employer's control over free time and the employer's ability to dictate clothing. Officers interpreted this situation as less to do with the undesirability of domestic work, as with a particular classed "type" of woman who both ended up in domestic roles and tended to get married quickly. "It was a fact," the Director of the WRNS told her senior officers in 1953, "that those in the domestic categories tended to marry at an earlier age which accounted for our heavy rate of wastage in the domestic and SB [sick berth] categories."³¹ Women were assigned into their trade category according to how well they had performed on selection tests when they were recruited, and those who had the lowest scores had no choice except domestic roles. Low intelligence, lack of ambition, and eagerness for marriage (driven perhaps by loose sexual mores) combined to make women in domestic categories less likely to complete their contract in the WRNS in the eyes of their superiors.

If nothing else, work in the categories which suffered the highest levels of desertion, whether domestic or clerical, had a great deal in common with the kind of work commonly available to women in the civilian world. Officers observed that deserters often cited "no reason other than that she had the opportunity of a good job at home," interpreting this to mean that "there is no question of grievance or dislike of Service life

³¹ Notes of the Senior WRNS Officers Conference held 22 Sep 1953, NMRN 1988.350.28.1.

involved.”³² This may be, but it was also the case that much of the work in certain categories was not well distinguished from civilian work, and clearly the atmosphere, benefits in kind such as housing, and potential patriotic boost of service life were not convincing for all recruits. “The work has no meaning for me whatsoever,” one deserter wrote to her former senior officer in 1948, “it does not seem worth-while. So you see, I cannot go on this way.”³³ Many deserters were making a rational decision about how they could get the most out of their working years, and it is clear that the unique way of life in the services which women officers were so proud of was not compelling for recruits who had larger financial goals in mind or who chafed at restrictions.

The War Office and Air Ministry introduced a number of measures to try to increase recruiting, particularly once they began to count on an enlarged women’s section to offset the effect of the end of National Service. These measures were varied but tended on the whole toward lessening the level of commitment a woman needed to make in order to join. Shorter initial lengths of service were introduced, although female leaders in particular were skeptical and warned that these would be counterproductive as girls would always choose the shortest term on offer. By the late 1950s, with the end of National Service looming and recruiting slowing down, the WRAF and the WRAC were prepared to introduce new regulations that would allow women to leave the service on the anniversary of their engagement each year. The Grigg Committee advised that girls

³² Memorandum on Desertions from WRNS by Senior WRNS Officer Portsmouth, 21 Jun 1948, NMRN 1988.350.28.3.

³³ Copy of letter from Wren K. Burns, dated 12 Jun 1948, NMRN 1988.350.28.3.

should be allowed to give six months notice at any time after their initial two years' engagement, a proposal that spurred bitter resistance in the service departments.³⁴

The WRAC and WRAF also explored a new enlistment model which would allow a girl to serve while living at home. At the beginning of the Second World War, women had been accepted into the auxiliaries whether or not they were "mobile", but as the services expanded this proved to be a bureaucratic headache and being mobile soon became a requirement. The postwar regular forces inherited and solidified this mobile status; not only was mobility part of being regulars on the same terms as men, the postwar services were much smaller than their wartime predecessors and needed the flexibility to move their members around. The Local Service schemes introduced in the mid-1950s thus suggest a kind of problem-solving based on doubt about a fairly fundamental characteristic of the services combined with certain ideas about girls and their homes. If Local Service were a success, it could be interpreted as a demonstration that the masculine framework adopted by the women's services was misguided, and that women's terms of service ought to be built up on a dramatically different basis.

A Local Service scheme was first seriously proposed in the WRAC by the McLean Committee report in 1952. "Women do not like leaving home," the committee observed; "not only do they prefer to be at home for the sake of companionship and local friendships, but pressure is brought to bear on them by their parents to stay." As a result, it concluded, the majority of British young women were effectively immobile, and in

³⁴ Para. 226, Report of the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Cmnd 545) (Grigg Committee), Oct 1958, and response to this paragraph in Government's Comments on Report of Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Cmnd 570), Nov 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1238; Minutes of a meeting among the service branches to discuss recommendations of the Grigg Committee, 12 Sep 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1604.

order to expand the WRAC would have to consider whether and how it could employ such women.³⁵ The WRAF began drawing up plans for a local service scheme in 1957 to pull in more recruits for trades “which also happen to be trades that will have vacancies when [National Service] ends.”³⁶ One source of controversy in these schemes was that they seemed to open the door to less oversight of young female personnel. The Director of the WRAF in particular felt that the service could not simply allow women to live wherever they liked. “Ideally members of this local Service should live at home,” she wrote, but if this was not possible the WRAF ought to have the right to inspect a woman’s living arrangements and dismiss her if they were not acceptable. “We must bear in mind that the Service will still be responsible for the welfare of young airwomen, and to allow them to live out in lodgings of their choice without regard to suitability would in my opinion be extremely unwise, and might lead to harmful repercussions on the public opinion side.”³⁷ The scheme was further challenged by the Treasury, whose officials were “frankly puzzled” as to why these women should be recruited as WRAF rather than civilians, given that their conditions of service seemed to be essentially the same as civilian employees.³⁸ Local service was eventually accepted, however, on the WRAC precedent, for a trial period of three years. In the first six months, from April to September of 1959, 331 women joined the WRAF for local service; by way of comparison, 328 women joined the WRAF on regular engagements in the first three

³⁵ Para. 18, Report of the Committee on the Women’s Royal Army Corps (McLean Committee), Jul 1952, TNA:PRO WO 216/521.

³⁶ Paper by DWRAF and DM(PP): Proposal to Introduce a WRAF Local Service Engagement, 25 Apr 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14663.

³⁷ Loose minute DWRAF to S10, 25 Sep 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14663.

³⁸ Owen (Treasury) to Francis (Air Ministry), 16 Sept 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 2/14663.

months of 1958.³⁹ Local Service was not such a rousing success for either the WRAC or the WRAF to suggest that it was the superior model for the women's services, but it did bring in a useful number of recruits for some of the less skilled and less popular occupations. Moreover, at least some young women took on Local Service engagements because they were unsure or their parents opposed their taking up regular engagements, and these girls represented an opportunity for the services to make positive impressions and eventual recruits.⁴⁰

To introduce shorter engagements, less demanding terms of service, and easier discharges in order to counteract the problem of too many women leaving the service may seem counterintuitive, but both the problem and the solutions were based on the deep-seated cultural belief that young women's jobs were primarily a stopgap between school and marriage. These measures were intended to emphasize the compatibility of a conventional desire for marriage with a military career. Poor recruiting, in this way of thinking, derived from the fact that a "normal" girl would be skeptical about signing up to a job that seemed to lock her out of getting married and settling down; high levels of wastage were explained by women's natural prioritizing of marriage over professional opportunities or commitments. This was certainly the theory articulated by Mr. ALM Cary of the Air Ministry in 1959:

³⁹ Report on WRAF Local Service recruiting for the Minister of Defence, 29 Oct 1959, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1165; Recruiting figures for March 1958, prepared 29 Apr 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 10/245.

⁴⁰ The most frequent answers given by LS recruits as to why they hadn't joined the regular forces were: no wish to leave home (45%), difficult to leave home for personal reasons (19%), trying out the service before joining as regular (9%), and opposition of parents (8%). PJ Sadler, PJ Hitch, and MF Carvell, Science 4 Memo number 111: A Survey of the WRAF Local Recruiting Scheme, Mar 1962, TNA:PRO AIR 77/341.

Unlike a man the unattached woman is not thinking primarily in terms of a career, but in terms of a husband and a family. Even the so-called ‘career woman’ is not averse to matrimony and one of the implications of matrimony is that she should cleave to her husband. For women in the very sensitive age group which comprises the vast majority of other ranks in the three Women’s Services, undertaking to continue to serve is a serious and even unnatural step... I think the fact still remains that a woman, faced with the choice of continuing to serve or of a return to civil life, is bound to view it in quite different terms from a man. Put at its lowest, she would view it not in terms of a change of job, as a man would, but in terms of opportunity for getting engaged, married, and settling down.⁴¹

The women Directors of the services felt especially strongly that it was possible to “educate” young women and their families about the opportunities available to them. Although they acknowledged marriage as something the vast majority of women would eventually give up their jobs to pursue, they also believed the public ought to learn to respect women with professional ambitions and to encourage girls to think about how they could make a different contribution to society other than as wives and mothers. In her analysis of the recruiting situation, Wing Officer BG Martin of the WRAF pointed to the media as an influence which tended to give girls a narrow view of their future:

There is a vast amount published for women and it seems to me that in general the quality is mediocre and the range of interest very narrow. By the time one has eliminated love, clothes, make up, and household hints, there is little left... In spite of the increase in University Education and in opportunities, the nation seems to educate its women to this type of work and this narrow range of interests...⁴²

“I am still of the opinion,” wrote DWRAF Felicity Hanbury in 1950, “that by sticking to our guns we can and will get the public into the frame of mind of regarding the WRAF as a worthwhile career and not just merely the provision of a stop-gap job for a few years

⁴¹ Cary was making an argument for why it was appropriate to “bribe” women with long-service bounties although the same measure was ineffective for men. Cary to Abercrombie, 13 Apr 1959, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1604

⁴² Loose minute from Wing Officer BG Martin: Recruiting – WRAF, 12 Sep 1957, TNA:PRO AIR 20/9659.

that anyone can go into who has nothing better to do.”⁴³ The Directors of the WRAF consistently took the line that raising standards would produce better results than lowering them; in this instance, Hanbury intended to teach by means of resisting the introduction of a two-year initial engagement instead of three or four years.

This emphasis on changing the culture of young women’s work was reinforced in 1959 when the Ministry of Defence hired Dr Margaret Fulton Yates, a former headmistress, as a consultant and schools liaison for the women’s services.⁴⁴ In her eyes, the forces were just one of a variety of employers looking for “‘qualified’ women”: “women in their late teens and early twenties who by disposition and educational qualifications are potentially well fitted to organize and supervise the work of others.”⁴⁵ The demand for these qualified women represented a major trend in education and employment, and thus Yates argued that standards should be raised rather than lowered in order to position the forces as a serious and demanding competitor in the labor market. Glamour, she argued, was “out of date for the new generation of Vith formers,” the best of whom wanted stimulating, meaningful work.⁴⁶ Yates clearly believed that the best way to entice promising young women into officer roles was by challenging them, and suggested that talks given to schoolgirls should include “a short, simple, convincing statement of defence policy, which put the Women’s Services into perspective.”⁴⁷ At the same time, she was keenly aware of demographic and life-cycle trends and urged service

⁴³ DWARF Hanbury to DGM, 6 Jan 1950, TNA:PRO AIR 2/10316.

⁴⁴ “Recruiting Advisers,” *Times*, 19 Nov. 1959.

⁴⁵ Miss MF Yates, memo: The Shortage of Candidates for Commissions in the Women’s Services, 2 Feb 1960, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1165.

⁴⁶ Notes by Dr Yates for the Minister of Defence on the first meeting of the WRAF (Officers) Recruiting Advisory Panel, 4 Jan 1960, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1165.

⁴⁷ Minutes of a meeting on Recruitment of Officers for the Women’s Services, 16 May 1960, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1165. This same file includes a sample talk prepared by Yates.

leaders to adapt their recruiting and engagement structures to better accommodate the dual career model.

The Services ought to be the first organization to make a special drive for the very young and the much older woman. Luckily the structure of the WRAC and the WRAF enables them to absorb both kinds at once, provided the powers that be are prepared to alter their accustomed patterns of thought on these matters.⁴⁸

Yates' suggestions clearly came from an outsider; her take on officer recruiting was naturally more informed by the civilian job market than the accumulated wisdom about military manpower. However, she echoed the tone of the women directors who believed that women did not necessarily have to be short-time workers looking for something undemanding to fill their time. In most debates surrounding the women's forces, it is difficult to identify a clear gendered division of positions. Partly this is because the files are so male-dominated; only a handful of women ever weighed in and they needed male support to carry their points. However, it is evident that in approaching recruiting and retention problems men tended to regard women's working patterns as fixed and derived from an unchanging female nature, while senior women officers tended to believe that these working patterns could be changed. They rejected the idea that girls (and their parents) would never think about their work as a career and saw themselves as being in a position to encourage young women of the officer class to take a serious view of their working lives. This was not a particularly feminist position; no one in the War Office or Air Ministry, much less the Admiralty, thought that young women should view marriage as less desirable than paid work. It is significant that Wing Officer Martin, quoted above, offers no particular solution in her memo to the "narrow range of interests" presented to

⁴⁸ Notes by Dr Yates on a Headmistress Conference, 20 Jun 1960, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1165.

British girls. She suggests that girls ought to be encouraged to pursue interests beyond romance and domesticity, but she also asserts that “the woman’s place is in the home”, and leaves the tension between these two ideas unresolved. However, the emphasis on “educating” and challenging young women to take up a serious career in the forces points to a belief that the modern woman ought to regard her job as part of her identity and her contribution to society, and not simply a practical expedient.

The permanent women’s services represented an attempt to make a wartime innovation into a normal peacetime practice. How far was this attempt successful with the general public? The wartime auxiliaries, although initially prone to controversy, were widely accepted by the end of the war. Did British people come to accept that the military was a viable career option for their daughters in the 1950s?

Both high wastage and disappointing recruiting suggest that the services were unsuccessful in this task. Certainly women did not embrace long military careers. This was partly due to stunted opportunities for advancement, which allowed only a small percentage of women to have a long career, and then only in particular fields (see chapters two and three). As we have seen, marriage itself, and particularly motherhood, was viewed as incompatible with an unsettled military career. Moreover, young women often made the economic decision to leave the forces for a higher paying job elsewhere because of their relatively short-term goal of paying for a wedding or having money to bring to a marriage. As women’s work was considered a secondary priority to domestic and caring roles, so the forces failed to inspire long-term commitment to a military

career. It should be noted that this was an intentional failure, since almost no one in authority wished to challenge “normal family life” and normative gender roles.

The idea that the public at large did not understand or did not approve of the women’s services lurked behind most publicity and recruiting discussions. This lack of understanding was often linked to persistent wartime memories; as long as the public associated military women with wartime hardship and disruption, they would not accept the relevance of the forces for their own daughters. An editorial in the WRAC magazine encouraged former members of the Corps to examine their own contributions to its reputation:

Does our natural, healthy fear of showing off keep us silent when we hear servicewomen discussed? Or (terrible thought) is it possible that in our love of reminiscence, our joyous gloating over the archaic clothes of 1917, the prehistoric accommodation of 1940, we are unconsciously sketching a picture of army service which is accepted as the standard for 1959?⁴⁹

Another article the following year noted in particular the influence of parents on young people’s impressions of service life:

Many times it is discovered that the parents served during the war in one of the Services, and although proud of his or her service, cannot visualize the peacetime career—remembering perhaps only a draughty nissen hut, brown stew and lisle stockings.⁵⁰

For those without a direct connection to the services, attitudes about military women were probably the product of opinions about National Service and memories of the war, undergirded by opinions about the character of service personnel, the morality and value of military service generally, and the desirability of women’s work in an expanded range of fields. Certainly stereotypes of servicewomen as unfeminine or even lesbian were alive

⁴⁹ Editorial, *The Lioness* 32, no. 2 (May 1959): 20-1.

⁵⁰ Major B Paget-Clarke, WRAC, “We Sell the Army Too,” *The Lioness* 33, no. 2 (Aug 1960): 42.

and well throughout the period, as evidenced by senior officers' sensitivity around these points. It seems that the services were too unfeminine to be glamorous and attractive, while being too feminine in the kind of limited opportunities available. War correspondent Kate Adie recalled:

When in the late fifties I first encountered the two formidable service ladies who came to my school, clomp clomp clomp, in huge shoes surmounted by neatly pressed shapelessness, I could not conceive of wanting to spend adult life looking like that. Nor did I ever hear anything subsequently during my teenage years which might have suggested an exciting career in the military. It appeared to be the usual round of typing and filing, while being subject to rules which were the reason for leaving school behind.⁵¹

In some cases these factors could add up to a vehement dislike of military women.

Winifred Philips once faced a man who began "shouting and cussing" at her when she was travelling by train in uniform.

He was screaming about women shouldn't be allowed to be in the armed forces, and he started waving his hands in my face, and kicking my bag. 'Who do you think you are?' he screamed. 'Being in the army and wearing a skirt!'⁵²

Philips' fellow passengers quickly intervened and forced the man off the train. When she returned to her barracks, she reported the incident to a police officer, who declared that he would meet her off the train from that point on. Denigrating attitudes were probably more commonly expressed in less violent ways, but clearly there were some who felt affronted by women's continued presence in this otherwise male domain. Although women were involved in a smaller range of duties, members of the permanent service were intruding even more upon a masculine domain after the war than during it.

⁵¹ Kate Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War*, in association with the Imperial War Museum (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003), 215.

⁵² Philips, *Mum's Army*, 156.

In sum, the services failed to become a widely respected and sought after career for young women, as the founding female officers had hoped. Even after they had joined, few service women were committed to a long-term career, as evidenced by high wastage and low re-engagement rates. This likely had to do with the limited opportunities available to women, which were in turn blamed on women's high wastage rates, as well as the perceived incompatibility of a service career with marriage and motherhood. Although the services survived, the effect of marriage and family on the usefulness of women as military personnel remained an important and unresolved question. Ultimately societal norms would have to be challenged before women's position in the military could be changed.

CONCLUSION

Writing about the design of postwar barrack blocks, architectural historian Miles Glendinning observed that as military housing is “concerned with some of the most apparently conservative and class-stratified organisations within society,” it might seem like an unlikely site for modernist design.¹ Nevertheless, the Royal Army’s Hyde Park Cavalry Barracks was an unimpeachably modernist building project. In explaining this apparent contradiction, Glendinning argues that “the army has not been devoid of the ideals of Utopian progress that were central to modern architecture,” particularly in the decade or two following the Second World War. Just like the modernists, military authorities stressed the importance of environment for character and community building, and the experiences of the war had strengthened their faith in central planning. Thus, he argues, “in some ways, paradoxically, the army provided potentially fertile ground for the Modern Movement’s ideals of building a man-made future and of the total environment.”²

The armed forces may seem like unlikely patrons of modernist design, and they were also unlikely promoters of women’s progress. However, the permanent women’s services established in the late 1940s marked a new stage in women’s military activity, as they were now given regular status. Women adopted military culture in many ways, from uniforms to mess silver, and participated in their nation’s imperial and global commitments by being posted around the world. Nevertheless, this new step was shaped

¹ Miles Glendinning, “The Tall Barracks Artistically Reconsidered: Hyde Park Cavalry Barracks and the Total Environment of Modern Military Life,” in *Man-Made Future: Planning, Education, and Design in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Iain Boyd Whyte (London: Routledge, 2007), 223.

² Glendinning, “The Tall Barracks,” 223-6.

fundamentally by gendered restrictions. Women's opportunities were limited, both in terms of the types of work they could do and in terms of the scope of their careers. The cultivation of conventional femininity remained a central concern, and women who were suspected of lesbian inclinations were forced out, lest they contaminate their coworkers' status as "normal, healthy girls". Finally, of course, women were barred from anything approaching combat, with their primary role being support. Their place in the military was predicated on their being able to take over jobs that were unwanted by men. Thus, just as the women's services were, at base, "real" military services with a permanent and regular standing, the military was also at base unbendingly male, built on an understanding of combat which excluded women by definition. These two facts, each tending in a contrary direction to the other, shaped the policies and experiences which have been under discussion here.

The postwar women's services have been overlooked by historians, but deserve more attention for what they can tell us about both women's history and the development of military policy at this time. After the First World War, the auxiliaries had been disbanded as their uniformed military work was considered inappropriate employment for women in peacetime. In contrast, already by 1943, military authorities were ready to concede that such organizations were essential for fighting total wars and that, at minimum, a framework should be maintained after the end of the war. The eventual formation of permanent regular services was not a foregone conclusion, but it proved to be an abiding change in policy. If the wartime auxiliaries marked the transition of women's labor from informal and peripheral to being directly controlled by military authorities, the permanent services meant that this control and inclusion were no longer just an emergency measure.

Women would now be a pool of workers the military could draw upon even in peacetime, allowing the authorities to not only address male recruiting shortfalls but also to use gendered ideas about work to promote military careers. With women and civilians taking over the bulk of the mundane tasks, the male volunteer could, in theory, focus on developing technological expertise. Women were never numerous enough to feminize the tasks that they were concentrated in, but their exclusion from other tasks, including combat, made an important statement about masculinity.

Gender politics in the services were not always straightforward or consistent, being influenced by the particular culture of each of the parent services. Male officers and civil servants working in the Air Ministry, Admiralty, and War Office were often supportive of the women's services in a way that men in the formations frequently were not. Beyond the attitudes of individuals, policies governing women were sometimes coordinated between the three service branches but could also serve as a site for the fashioning of each branch's self image. For example, the RAF's meritocratic self-image could give legs to fairly radical proposals, like recruiting women as pilots or allowing women to be in command of men. Even though the RAF was not, in general, as egalitarian in practice as it was in theory, its approach to WRAF policy gave it an opportunity to confirm its status as a modern service, not bound by tradition. For the Navy, the special WRNS disciplinary code reinforced the unique manly quality of naval discipline and sea service, while in the Army, the WRAC echoed regimental tradition in a way that could be both inclusive and exclusive. Although policies relating to women were often similar across the three services, there were also real differences, especially between the women governed by the Army and Air Force Acts and the WRNS. Servicewomen became part of the larger

landscape of military culture and policy in the late 1940s, and although they were assigned a limited, peripheral role at first, we should be attentive to the way their presence influenced the development of these organizations in the following decades.

Each service had its own model of “integration”, and women were at least as eager as men to preserve separation between men and women. In general, women did not resist their subordinate status in the military hierarchy but tried to bolster their position through strengthening their own separate, specialist organizations. The women’s services are therefore another area in which we can observe the operation of conservative feminism. Women officers, particularly those in senior positions, sought to expand the opportunities available to servicewomen as well as the respect and recognition given to them, without denouncing or challenging the basic system they were part of. They believed that strong performances by military women would provide the grounds to argue for greater opportunities, just as their courage and hard work during the war had won them regular status in their own permanent services. Senior women officers sought to shape their services in such a way as to be “good for women”, both in the sense of helping individual women and in the sense of advancing the cause of the equal woman-citizen. Women officers, many of whom came from families with a tradition of military service, considered it symbolically important that women should be able to serve their country in uniform as men did. They hoped that women would have influence in the military as in government and business. Women’s military service was thus motivated not only by progressive ideals common in the women’s movement, but also by concepts of tradition and duty.

The women's services were, as this dissertation has argued, specifically designed to offer "modern jobs to modern women." Senior women officers were determined to prove that the military could offer ambitious young women a good job, and that these young women could and should contribute to the nation's defense. Male and female authorities alike were well aware that the permanent services were only possible in the postwar world, because women had taken on so many crucial roles during the war and because reconstruction needed the contributions of all members of society. The services were therefore formed and presented with emphasis on the new development they represented. Like other exponents of postwar British modernity, they drew on tradition to temper this innovation, but nevertheless were firmly oriented toward the future.

British women continued to serve their country in the WRAF, WRAC, and WRNS for another 30 years after the end of National Service. Cultural and social change, particularly surrounding the sexual revolution called some of the assumptions that lay beneath service policies into question in the 1960s, although organizationally the women's services remained the same. Manpower shortages put pressure on women's recruiting to help make up the shortfall, and it was these shortages that drove investigations into expanding the kinds of roles women could fill.

Dame Marion Kettlewell remembered, when she was Director [1967-1970], a very senior Admiral sinking into an armchair in her office and saying, "It's no good, the Wrens will have to go to sea. The billets [in the Navy] are not being filled." To which, she said, "I replied if the billets are not being filled and the Wrens are qualified to fill them, then let them. But I did not feel the Wrens were ready, and I don't think the Navy thought so either."³

³ The second set of brackets is Mason's. Ursula Mason, *Britannia's Daughters: The Story of the WRNS* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), 118.

Real structural change was set into motion in the 1970s and 1980s, as the lines between the men's and women's services were gradually blurred.⁴ The WRNS finally came under the Naval Discipline Act on 1 July 1977, while small arms training began in the WRAF in 1981 and in the WRAC in 1988.⁵ In 1990, all three services announced landmark changes that signaled the imminent end of the women's services: the first Wrens went to sea, a woman was commissioned as an operational RAF pilot, and those members of the WRAC who were employed with a Corps were transferred out of the WRAC and into that Corps. The WRAC ceased to exist in 1992, the WRNS in 1993, and the WRAF in 1994.⁶ Thus, while the status of women in the armed forces, their access to higher ranks, and their role in combat continue to be controversial, they are no longer organizationally segregated as they once were.

In 1961, the WRAC Association magazine, *The Lioness*, painted a playfully optimistic picture of the change a century might bring:

Perhaps in a hundred years' time some student of military history browsing through the first forty-odd numbers of *The Lioness* in the national archives or the dentists' waiting-rooms of his age, will attempt to reconstruct the early decades of the WRAC from the viewpoint represented in these pages... Having accepted us all his life as an old-established part of the Army with its origins lost in the mists of time, he will find it hard to understand our preoccupation in early years with the phases of our own development. The achievements, the dignities, the

⁴ Joan Chandler, Lyn Bryant, and Tracey Bunyard, "Women in Military Occupations," *Work, Employment and Society* 9, no. 1 (1995): 123-4; Mason, *Britannia's Daughters*, 108; Shelford Bidwell, *The Women's Royal Army Corps* (London: Leo Cooper, 1977), 140.

⁵ Mason, *Britannia's Daughters*, 109, 115-6; Kate Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War*, in association with the Imperial War Museum (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003), 215.

⁶ "Women of the Royal Air Force: Timeline," Royal Air Force Museum website, accessed 3 Sep 2014, <http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/online-exhibitions/women-of-the-air-force/timeline.aspx>; "History of the WRAC," WRAC Association website, accessed 3 Sep 2014, <http://wracassociation.org.uk/xs/background>; "History," WRNS Association website, accessed 3 Sep 2014, <http://www.wrens.org.uk/history>.

traditions, the anniversaries, which he has always taken for granted—were they ever really headline news?⁷

Although it is not yet 2061, it might be said that the women's services of the mid-twentieth century are somewhat "lost in the mists of time." It is my hope that this dissertation has shaken some of the mist off of this important development.

⁷ Editorial, *The Lioness* 34, no. 1 (Feb 1961): 1.

TABLES

Table 1. Composition of Strengths of British Forces (All Ranks), 1946-1961.

	Royal Navy			Army			Royal Air Force					
	Regular	NSM	WRNS	Total	Regular	NSM	WRAC	Total	Regular	NSM	WRAF	Total
1946	100.6	110.5	8.1	219.2	126	726.3	38.5	890.8	69.5	247.2	25.8	342.5
1947	111.3	44.6	7.2	163.1	160.9	475	18	653.9	99.6	178.8	20.1	298.5
1948	117.5	19.1	6.7	143.3	177.7	240.2	11.5	429.4	109.7	109.6	14.5	233.8
1949	122.5	11.4	6	139.9	184.7	188.5	7.7	380.9	114.5	76.5	11.5	202.5
1950	124.5	6.7	4.9	136.1	197.6	197.8	6.1	401.5	125.6	77.4	8.8	211.8
1951	135.1	4.1	4.7	143.9	207.8	226.5	6	440.3	164.6	91.4	9.5	265.5
1952	133.9	6.4	4.7	145	214.9	227.7	6.9	449.5	183.4	81.3	9.9	274.6
1953	125.1	7.1	4.5	136.7	213.3	218.7	6.9	438.9	189	72.9	9.1	271
1954	115.8	8.9	4.4	129.1	227.5	205	6.4	438.9	183.8	67.5	7.7	259
1955	108	11.4	3.7	123.1	202.8	202.2	5	410	165	72.6	6	243.6
1956	105.5	9.5	3.3	117.8	218.3 *	182.6	4.7	405.6 *	155.3	74.5	5	234.8
1957	99.2	6.2	3.5	108.9	181.6	153.4	4	339	143.6	52.6	4.8	201
1958	96.3	3.1	3.3	102.7	174.3	131.9	4.3	310.5	142	28.2	4.4	174.6
1959	94.8	0.8	3.3	98.9	162.7	103.8	4.6	271.1	140	19.5	5.2	164.7
1960	91.8	0.2	3.1	95.1	158.3	81.7	4.6	244.6	139.5	16.5	5.4	161.4
1961	91	0.1	2.9	94	165.9	37.1	4.7	207.7	136.1	7.3	6	149.4

As of December 31 each year.

Numbers given in thousands.

“NSM” indicates National Servicemen.

Τοβλε 32. This figure includes 14.3 recalled Reservists.

Source: compiled from the *Abstract of Army Statistics* (TNA:PRO WO 384/21, 25, 28, 37, 41, 45).

Table 2. Strength of the Royal Air Force, 1948-1960.

	Male Officers	Airmen	Total Men	Female Officers *	Airwomen	Total women	Grand Total
1945	103,023	859,575	962,598	6,233	146,719	152,952	1,115,550
1948	20,820	201,345	222,165	575	14,941	15,516	237,681
1949	19,165	185,981	205,146	520	13,937	14,457	219,603
1950	19,531	163,152	182,683	878	9,531	10,409	193,092
1951	21,026	220,370	241,396	914	8,880	9,794	251,190
1952	25,775	236,445	262,220	998	9,454	10,452	272,672
1953	28,385	239,793	268,178	1,083	8,927	10,010	278,188
1954	26,589	225,333	251,922	1,142	7,982	9,124	261,046
1955	25,930	219,790	245,720	1,027	6,300	7,327	253,047
1956	25,722	210,350	236,072	943	4,892	5,835	241,907
1957	25,579	190,353	215,932	902	4,294	5,196	221,128
1958	23,455	156,617	180,072	824	3,962	4,786	184,858
1959	21,772	144,168	165,940	810	4,557	5,367	171,307
1960	21,742	136,363	158,105	757	4,927	5,684	163,789

As of July 1 each year.

* Members of Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service (PMRAFNS) are included in the Female Officers column.

Source: compiled from the *Annual Digest of Royal Air Force Statistics* (TNA:PRO AIR 10/7396, 7397, 7398, 7401).

Table 3. Active British Army Strengths, 1951-1963.

	Male Officers		Male OR		Male Total		WRAC officers	WRAC OR	Female Total	Grand Total
	of whom NS	OR	of whom NS	OR	of whom NS	OR				
1951	32,749	4,031	392,924	219,000	425,673	491	5,616	6,107	431,780	
1952	33,925	4,147	404,834	219,528	438,759	441	5,792	6,233	444,992	
1953	34,042	4,485	405,239	223,287	439,281	439	6,635	7,074	446,355	
1954	34,114	4,759	403,974	216,270	438,088	440	6,361	6,801	444,889	
1955	33,861	5,038	395,177	200,054	429,038	469	5,644	6,113	435,151	
1956	32,830	4,809	368,653	197,813	401,483	429	4,377	4,806	406,289	
1957	30,830	4,166	338,039	170,070	338,039	388	4,230	4,618	342,657	
1958	28,124	3,214	294,517	141,490	322,641	331	3,790	4,121	326,762	
1959	25,970	3,000	271,958	121,997	297,928	300	4,072	4,372	302,300	
1960	24,452	2,678	233,738	95,338	258,190	286	4,327	4,613	262,803	
1961	22,655	1,757	202,474	63,095	225,129	274	4,396	4,670	229,799	
1962	20,408	484	166,028	25,304	186,436	265	4,953	5,218	191,654	
1963	19,506	14	155,573	119	175,079	274	4,900	5174	180,253	

As of March 31 each year.

“NS” indicates National Service. “OR” indicates Other Ranks.

Source: compiled from the *Abstract of Army Statistics* (TNA:PRO WO 384/3, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 28, 37, 41, 45, 49).

Table 4. Employment of WRAC officers, 1952.

<u>Employed on administration of women.</u>		<u>Employed in substitution of men.</u>
In basic administrative units		49
In Training units		9
In Technical units:		3
MT	5	1
Signals (incl. TAPS)	30	5
46 (M) HAA Regt	10	1
Drivers & Clerks TC	7	
PT School	1	
	Total Technical Units	68
Provost (Regular and TA Perm Staff)		13
TA Perm Staff (Other than Pro and Sigs)		3
Records		6
Band		2
PT Staff		2
Personnel Selection		2
Schools Lecturers		1
Staff College Staff		3
WRAC Directorate and Service Branches		38
Total employed, directly and indirectly, on WRAC administration	305	106
		20
		431

Source: Draft ECAC Paper: Project for extending Limited Service Commission to WRAC, circ. 27 May 1952 TNA:PRO WO 32/15721

Table 5. WRNS Trades and Strengths, 1953.

		<u>Ratings</u>
<u>Officers</u>		
Administrative duties		46
In lieu of men:	167	224
Secretarial and Confidential Books	66	105
Pay and Cash	5	405
Communications	16	35
Safety Equipment	8	1
Personnel Selection	7	77
Photographic Interpreter	5	63
Instructional Film Librarians	3	63
Meteorological	14	230
Air Radio	5	365
Special Duties	2	510
Total in lieu of men		110
		93
Total Officers	131	425
		255
		135
		105
		115
		50
		205
		155
		40
		520
		34
		32
		1
		4400

Source: Memorandum submitted by Admiralty to Ministry of Defence, Nov 1953, TNA:PRO DEFE 7/1918.

Table 6. Trade and Officer branches open to women, 1958.

WRNS:

- **Officers:** General Administrative Duties, Secretarial Duties, Personnel Selection, Education, Victualling, Meteorological Duties, Safety Equipment.
- **Ratings:** Air Mechanic, Radio (Air), Radar Plot, Range Assessor, Meteorological, Cinema Operator, Motor Transport, Signals, Switchboard Operator, Telegraphic Writer (i.e. Clerk), Stores, Clothing and Victualling Duties, Cook, Steward, Sick Berth Attendant, Dental Surgery Attendant, Disciplinary duties, Quarters Assistants, Education, Welfare.

WRAC:

- **Officers:** General Administrative Duties in respect of WRAC Staff Duties on Headquarters establishments, RAOC technical duties, REME technical duties, R. Signals technical duties, Photographic interpretation.
- **Other Ranks:** Bandswoman, Clerk, Cook, Driver, Experimental Assistant Gunnery Education Instructor, Mess Steward/Caterer, Operator Kinetheodolite, Operator Keyboard and Cypher, Operator Office Machine, Switchboard Operator, Medical Orderly, Post Orderly, Postal Worker, PT Instructor, Provost, Radar Mechanic, Storewoman, Telecommunications Mechanic, Tailoress, Training Instructor, Vehicle Mechanic.

WRAF:

- **Officers:** Fighter Control and Radar Supervisor, Photographic Interpretation, Technical Branch, Equipment Branch, Secretarial Branch, Catering Branch.
- **Airwomen:** Accounting and Secretarial, Air Traffic Control and Fire Services, Aircraft Engineering, Catering, Dental, Electrical and Instrument, General Engineering, General Service, Ground Signalling, Mechanical Transport, Medical, Musician, Photography, Police, Radar Operating, Radio Engineering, Safety and Surface, Supply.

Source: Note on Recruitment to the Women's Services submitted to the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Grigg Committee) by the Ministry of Defence, 9 May 1958, TNA:PRO DEFE 10/246.

Table 7. Civilian occupations of WRAF recruits, 1950.

Clerks (incl. typists and other kindred occupations)	219 (30.4%)
Shop-girls	129 (17.9%)
Factory workers (incl. machinists, laundry workers, etc.)	174 (24.1%)
Domestic workers (incl. hotel staffs, waitresses, private service, etc.)	115 (16.0%)
Other occupations (incl. 31 nurses and student nurses)	84 (11.6%)
Total:	721

No significant regional differences found.

Source: RC Sewell, Memorandum no. 67: *Women's Royal Air Force Regional Differences in Civilian Occupations of Recruits, and in RAF Trades to which Recruits are Allocated*, March 1950 (AIR 77/423)

Table 8. Employment of Women Oversea [sic], 1957.

	Royal Navy	Army	RAF	Total
Malta	250	-	-	250
Gibraltar	20	32	-	52
Germany	-	302	300	602
Middle East	-	308	150	458
Far East	-	163	160	323
Misc. Posts	30	3	40	73
Total Oversea	300	808	650	1,758
Total in Service	3,400	4,000	5,000	12,400

Source: Note by the Ministry of Defense on the Women's Services for the Defense Minister's Committee, 14 Oct 1957 (TNA:PRO DEFE 7/559).

Table 9. WRAC All Ranks Strength at Home and Overseas, 1950-1962.

	UK	BAOR	Berlin	MELF	East Africa	FARELF	West Africa	Gibraltar	Caribbean	Others	Transit	Total
1950	Officers	434	23	-	19	-	17	-	1	2	9	507
	OR	4,803	293	-	289	-	165	-	1	-	-	5,562
	Total	5,237	316	-	308	-	182	-	2	2	9	6,069
1951	Officers	402	19	-	18	1	18	-	1	-	-	459
	OR	4,599	377	-	250	13	139	-	1	-	147	5,526
	Total	5,001	396	-	268	14	157	-	2	-	147	5,985
1952	Officers	373	21	-	21	1	16	3	1	3	-	1,889
	OR	5,458	366	-	293	16	162	52	1	-	107	6,455
	Total	5,831	387	-	314	17	178	56	2	3	107	6,894
1953	Officers	361	21	-	25	3	15	3	1	4	2	435
	OR	5,423	326	-	303	31	162	50	2	-	159	6,456
	Total	5,784	347	-	328	34	177	53	3	4	161	6,891
1954	Officers	375	25	-	34	4	17	3	1	2	-	461
	OR	4,991	305	-	365	30	177	54	2	-	31	5,955
	Total	5,366	330	-	399	34	194	57	3	2	31	6,416
1955	Officers	356	28	-	25	5	18	2	1	-	3	438
	OR	3,846	271	-	254	32	147	18	1	-	27	4,596
	Total	4,202	299	-	279	37	165	20	2	-	30	5,034

Table 9 continued

	UK	BAOR	Berlin	MELF	East Africa	FARELF	West Africa	Gibraltar	Caribbean	Others	Transit	Total
1956	Officers	317	30	21	4	13	-	3	1	-	18	412
	OR	3,669	246	179	26	143	-	24	2	1	27	4,317
	Total	3,986	276	200	30	161	-	27	3	1	45	4,729
1957	Officers	263	28	21	-	20	-	3	1	-	9	345
	OR	3,059	234	229	-	107	-	25	3	1	56	3714
	Total	3322	262	250	-	127	-	28	4	1	65	4059
1958	Officers	248	20	16	-	6	-	2	1	-	2	305
	OR	3301	262	194	-	107	-	26	2	1	110	4003
	Total	3549	282	210	-	123	-	28	3	1	112	4308
1959	Officers	243	20	13	-	9	-	2	1	2	-	290
	OR	3462	290	266	-	160	-	38	2	-	58	4276
	Total	3705	310	279	-	169	-	40	3	2	58	4566
1960	Officers	238	17	12	-	11	-	2	1	1	-	282
	OR	3455	301	207	-	160	-	41	2	11	124	4301
	Total	3693	318	219	-	171	-	43	3	12	124	4583

Table 9 continued

	UK	BAOR	Berlin	MELF	East Africa	FARELF	West Africa	Gibraltar	Caribbean	Others	Transit	Total
1961	Officers	18	-	12	-	11	-	2	1	1	2	255
	OR	3595	311	201	-	140	-	42	3	10	165	4480
	Total	3803	329	213	-	151	-	44	4	11	167	4735
1962	Officers	255	18	10	-	9	-	2	-	1	-	266
	OR	4,064	391	159	-	158	-	21	-	11	193	5009
	Total	4289	409	169	-	167	-	23	-	12	193	5275

As on December 31 each year.

“BAOR” indicates British Army on the Rhine.

“MELF” indicates Middle East Land Forces; NB: reorganized as Near East Land Forces (NEARELF) in 1960.

“FARELF” indicates Far East Land Forces.

Figures for Berlin included in BAOR before 1961.

Source: compiled from the *Abstract of Army Statistics* (TNA:PRO WO 384/21, 37, 41, 45, 49).

Table 10. WRAF, WRNS, and WRAC: Strengths, Inflows and Outflows of Other Ranks, 1 Jan 1954 to 1 Jan 1958.

	Year	Strength at 1 Jan	Recruitment in year	Outflow in year (see note)
WRAF	1954	8465	1824	3123 (37%)
	1955	7166	1398	3023 (42%)
	1956	5541	1327	2334 (42%)
	1957	4534	1223	1767 (39%)
	1958	3990		
WRNS	1954	4242	1469	1579 (37%)
	1955	4132	845	1560 (38%)
	1956	3417	844	1175 (34%)
	1957	3086	1068	1190 (39%)
	1958	2964		
WRAC	1954	6456	2272	2773 (43%)
	1955	5955	1518	2877 (48%)
	1956	4596	1999	2331 (51%)
	1957	4264	1471	2021 (50%)
	1958	3714		

“Note: The figures in brackets are the annual outflows expressed as a percentage at the beginning of the year.”

Source: Figures provided to DWRAF by H. Frost, 14 May 1958, TNA:PRO AIR 20/9659

Table 11. Analysis of those who left the Service in 1957.

	WRNS	WRAC	WRAF
Completion of engagement	327	776	690
Compassionate (marriage etc)	398	730	838
Medical reasons	23	137	121
Disciplinary reasons	}	25	1
Unsuitable	}	171	11
Purchased discharge	}	144	81
	1,190	1,983	1,742

Source: Note by the Ministry of Defence on Recruitment to the Women's Services, provided to the Advisory Committee on Recruiting (Grigg Committee), 9 May 1958 (TNA:PRO DEFE 10/246).

Table 12. Exits from the RAF – WRAF Officers and Airwomen, 1948-1960.

Year	End of Engagement	Death	Medical	Compassionate	Desertion	Marriage and Pregnancy	Purchase	Disciplinary Discharge	Services No Longer Required	Total
1948	8,854 (539)	5 (0.3)	305 (19)	209 (13)	30 (2)	*	-	7 (0.4)	1,531 (93)	10,941 (666)
1949	4,490 (322)	8 (1)	293 (21)	170 (12)	-	*	92 (7)	5 (0.4)	1,563 (112)	6,621 (475)
1950	3,921 (384)	4 (0.4)	239 (23)	108 (11)	4 (0.4)	1,342 (132)	137 (13)	4 (0.4)	51 (5)	5,810 (569)
1951	1,216 (130)	1 (0.1)	212 (23)	62 (7)	3 (0.3)	1,462 (157)	163 (17)	4 (0.4)	40 (4)	3,163 (339)
1952	642 (65)	5 (0.5)	227 (23)	110 (11)	2 (0.2)	1,801 (182)	201 (20)	1 (0.1)	45 (5)	3,034 (307)
1953	1,211 (127)	3 (0.3)	213 (22)	82 (9)	2 (0.2)	1,737 (183)	179 (19)	8 (1)	50 (5)	3,481 (366)
1954	1,097 (122)	1 (0.1)	227 (25)	106 (12)	-	1,623 (189)	105 (12)	5 (0.6)	55 (6)	3,219 (358)
1955	1,133 (166)	4 (0.6)	146 (21)	77 (11)	5 (0.7)	1,538 (225)	87 (13)	-	43 (6)	3,033 (444)
1956	1066 (199)	-	134 (25)	40 (7.4)	-	1,098 (204)	57 (10.6)	2 (0.4)	31 (5.8)	2,428 (452)
1957	770 (163)	1 (0.2)	122 (26)	34 (7.2)	-	804 (171)	81 (17.2)	1 (0.2)	15 (3.2)	1,828 (388)
1958	537 (135)	2 (0.6)	99 (25)	30 (7.6)	-	711 (179)	46 (11.7)	-	11 (2.8)	1,436 (362)
1959	505 (103)	3 (0.6)	96 (19.5)	93 (18.9)	-	757 (154)	58 (11.8)	1 (0.2)	18 (3.7)	1,531 (312)
1960	450 (79)	1 (0.2)	82 (14.4)	104 (18.3)	-	862 (152)	75 (13.2)	1 (0.2)	52 (9.1)	1,627 (286)

Table 12 continued.

Figures in brackets indicate rate per 1000 strength.

* Included in Services No Longer Required.

Source: compiled from the *Annual Digest of Royal Air Force Statistics* (TNA:PRO AIR 10/5580, 7396, 7397, 7398, 7401).

Table 13. Percentage of Personnel Married – WRAF, 1949-1954.

	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954
Officers	Married	84	80	58	50	48
	Single	436	456	482	530	567
	% Married	16%	15%	11%	9%	8%
Airwomen	Married	575	428	362	374	274
	Single	13,362	9,103	8,518	9,000	8,653
	% Married	4%	5%	4%	4%	3%

As of July 1 each year.

Source: *Annual Digest of Royal Air Force Statistics* (TNA:PRO AIR 10/5580).

Table 14. WRNS deserters by category, 1953-1955.

	1953	1954	7 mos of 1955	TOTAL	Present numbers borne
Air Mechanic	8	4	2	14	151
Air Stores	4	2	6	12	138
Cine/Operator	2	0	0	2	53
Clothing	6	3	2	11	201
Cook (O)	0	1	2	3	68
Cook (S)	10	10	8	28	171
Dental Surg. Att.	3	2	1	6	51
Education	1	0	0	1	17
M/T Driver	2	0	0	2	72
Meteorological	3	1	2	6	49
Qtrs Asst	1	0	0	1	51
Radar Plot	1	1	1	3	176
Range Assessor	1	1	1	3	43
Radio (Air)	2	2	2	6	99
Regulating	0	0	0	0	59
Sick Berth Att.	13	10	5	28	176
Signals	8	14	6	28	344
Steward (G)	9	4	7	20	203
Steward (O)	19	25	14	58	357
Switch Op.	8	5	3	16	127
Telegraphist	2	0	3	5	181
Writer (G)	12	15	4	31	407
Writer (P)	8	10	8	26	262
Writer (S)	2	5	1	8	106
	127	118	81	326	3562

Source: Papers related to Senior WRNS Officers Conferences (NMRN 1988.350 (28.1)).

Table 15. WRAC Re-engagements by Trade, 1955.

Trade/Employment	No. completing their engagement	No. re-engaged	No. discharged	% re-engaged
Admin, Wos, NCOs	21	15	6	71.4%
Drivers (incl. D. Instr.)	36	15	21	41.6%
Operator Keyboard & CIPHER	25	9	16	36%
Clerks (SW ST T & GD)	137	46	91	33.5%
Cooks (incl. Cook Instr.)	57	19	38	33.3%
Orderlies (Mess GD Stores)	113	30	83	26.5%
Clerks (RAOC)	17	4	13	23.5%
Operators switchboard	26	5	21	19.2%
Storewomen RAOC	65	6	59	9.2%
All other trades	115	49	66	42.6%
TOTAL	628	203	425	32.3%

Named trades/employments are those with strengths over 100.

Source: DWRAC's Quarterly Liason Letter No. 5, Sep 1955 (NAM 9211-97-12).

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The NAM received the collection of the WRAC Museum (Guildford) when it closed, ca. 1992.
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DWRAC's Quarterly Liaison Letter, 1954-1961: 1992-11-97 (-9 to -23).
Other photographic and archival materials as noted.
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HMS Dauntless was the training depot of the WRNS from 1953-1981. The NMM collection covers 1914-21 and 1939-75.
Photographic and archival materials as noted.
- National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN), Portsmouth: WRNS Collection.
The NMRN received the WRNS archive when it disbanded in 1993.
Issues of *The Wren*, 1946-1962: 1988.350.18 (.1 to .60).
Senior WRNS Officers Conferences, 1947-1962: 1988.350.28 (.1 and .2).
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Presentations

"You don't mean to say *that's* still going?": Women's role in the British armed forces, 1945-1962," upcoming: Society for Military History (Montgomery, AL), April 9-12, 2015

"Soldiers' Jobs and Women's Work: Gender and Manpower Policy in the Armed Forces during National Service," poster presentation, North American Conference on British Studies (Minneapolis, MN), November 7-9, 2014

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"Permanent military service for women: the spoils of war?" Midwest Conference on British Studies (DePaul University, Chicago IL), October 12, 2013

"Sensitive moments: gender and discipline in the British armed forces, 1945-1962," Social History Society (University of Leeds, Leeds UK), March 26, 2013

"Mother figures: women military officers in Britain in the 1950s," Newberry Seminar on Women and Gender (Newberry Library, Chicago IL), March 1, 2013

- “Femininity, tradition, and respect in Britain’s armed forces,” Newberry Seminar in British History (Newberry Library, Chicago IL), February 1, 2013
- “In the same way as men: The meanings of gender integration in the British Army in the 1950s,” New England Historical Association Conference (Merrimack College, North Andover MA), October 13, 2012
- “‘Work that serious-minded women find both impelling and satisfying’: gender, authority, and professionalism in the British military in the 1950s,” New York State Association of European Historians Conference (State University of New York at Oswego, Oswego NY), October 6, 2012
- “Women ferry pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary and the logic of equal pay during the Second World War,” Social History Society (University of Manchester, Manchester UK), April 15, 2011; and Midwest Conference on British Studies (Indiana State University, Terre Haute IN), November 5, 2011

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Service

Academic

- Served on the Library and IT Assessment Committee (2009-2011)
- Helped organize the third Chicago Graduate Student History Conference (2008-2009) and headed the planning committee the following year (2009-2010)
- Represented the History Department at Graduate Student Council for two years (2008-2010)

Community

- Tutored ninth and tenth grade girls in the College Orientation Program at Metro Achievement Center, Chicago (2013-present)
- Gave historical and architectural tours of St Francis Xavier Cathedral and Diocesan Museum in Green Bay, Wisconsin (Summer 2013)