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The *International Journal of Military History and Historiography*'s special issue on "Women and the Second World War," edited by Sandra Trudgen Dawson, invites readers to consider women's experiences in less-familiar wartime roles, with an emphasis on women's agency.¹ Eighty years after the war's end, she argues, historians have only begun to scratch the surface of understanding women's experiences and participation in the conflict. The works in this issue are unique, focusing on women's civilian and military roles in various capacities: women who were married to spies, women who served in the Polish Women's Auxiliary Service, African American women in the United States Women's Army Corps, and United States Army Nurse Corps officers who became pregnant while in service. The goal of these articles, Dawson writes, is to "illustrate some of the hidden roles and choices women made during the conflict despite additional hurdles created by racism, and gender expectations" (171). This is not a new approach, as Dawson recognizes, noting that this journal issue "builds on and advances previous research to offer significant new directions for the study of women's experiences during the Second World War" (172). Accordingly, Dawson begins by citing Joan W. Scott's "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," as well as Margaret and Patrice Higonnet's "The Double Helix," two pieces that arguably provided the foundation for studying women in war.² The introductory historiography rightfully situates each article in the special issue within the broader context of existing works on civilian and military women's wartime experiences, demonstrating the international approach scholars have taken to understanding women's wartime roles.

In "Wives of Secret Agents: Spyscapes of the Second World War and Female Agency," Claire Hubbard-Hall and Adrian O'Sullivan collaborate to examine the lives of women who were married to British and German spies.³ The women in this article are not the usual wartime actors, such as women working in nontraditional jobs or who joined military forces. Instead, the women in this article were civilians who often came in closer proximity to the war than most civilians due to their husbands' work. Hubbard-Hall and O'Sullivan use case studies of women whose husbands worked for the Abwehr (German military intelligence), MI5 (British Security Service), MI6 (British Intelligence Service) and Special Operations Executive (SOE) to explore women's experiences in this capacity, focusing on women's wartime agency. Although spies'

¹ Sandra Trudgen Dawson, "Women and the Second World War," *International Journal of Military History and Historiography* 39 (2019) [hereafter *IJMHH*]: 171-180, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/24683302-03902002>.

² Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91:5 (1986): 1053-1075; Margaret Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet, "The Double Helix," in Jene Jackson Higonnet, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Weitz, eds., *Behind the Line: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 31-50.

³ Claire Hubbard-Hall and Adrian O'Sullivan, "Wives of Secret Agents: Spyscapes of the Second World War and Female Agency," *IJMHH*: 181-207, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/24683302-03902003>.

wives were not formally participants in the war effort, their relationships to their spouses put them in a unique position, Hubbard-Hall and O'Sullivan argue. At times, for example, these women also held the upper-hand when knowledge of their husband's wartime activities could be politically expedient, such as in the case of Araceli Pujol, who was married to an MI5 double agent and threatened to reveal his work to the Spanish.

While Hubbard-Hall and O'Sullivan appropriately place their study in the context of women's wartime agency, this is not just a history of World War II, but a way to think about how historians understand wartime marital relationships. In the process of analyzing women's marriages to secret agents, Hubbard-Hall and O'Sullivan tell us something about the British and German states' understanding of marriage and its supposed place at the periphery of men's careers. Considering spies' wives in this way opens new questions about how we understand women's wartime participation and wives' relationship to the state when their spouses worked for the government. As the authors note, governments "expected wives to maintain complete secrecy" (189). Yet they also point out that most wives were aware of their husbands' careers, an intriguing point that suggests that the state seemed to assume that women lacked agency.

Anna Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk's history of women auxiliaries in the Polish Women's Auxiliary Service (WAS) expands our understanding of women in military service, particularly on the eastern front.⁴ This is an interesting account of how the Polish state used women's military service in two ways: as a patriotic way to support the war effort and as a way to help Polish women leave the Soviet Union, with many participants ultimately serving outside of their country because, as Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk describes it, "The Polish army was re-established in exile" when the Germans and Soviets divided and occupied the country beginning in 1939 (263-264). Thus, their service was both in the "underground army in occupied Poland and the Women's Auxiliary Service in exile" (265). Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk uses official records to explain how the WAS was organized and operated during the war, as well as its overall goals and the experiences of the women who joined it; in particular, she focuses on women's service in exile, including service in Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the Middle East. Because this article draws primarily from state records, women's voices do not play a substantial role in the analysis, but that is not the primary purpose of Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk's work.

By focusing on a more structural history of the WAS and its operations, Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk provides information and analysis that could be useful in comparative histories of women in military service. For example, it would be useful to compare the WAS with British and American women's services. Future studies might also draw on any available oral histories or further use of participants' memoirs, which Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk references briefly, if these are available or if there are living veterans who might be interviewed. Beyond the war itself, Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk also raises thought-provoking questions about what happened to women veterans after the war, whether they settled in Poland or abroad: Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk points out that postwar Soviet occupation of Poland led many members of the Polish army, including women, to remain in exile (284).

If the Polish WAS is an understudied aspect of women's roles in World War II, Sandra Bolzenius's article brings readers to the venue which is arguably the most studied of those in this issue, the American Women's Army Corps (WAC).⁵ During World War II, Wacs – as members of the WAC were known – served in a variety of military support roles throughout the U.S. and around the world.⁶ Bolzenius's contribution is to more fully examine black women's experiences, expanding upon previous scholars' work, such as Leisa Meyer's foundational text on the WAC, Martha Putney's scholarship, and official

⁴ Anna Marcinkiewicz-Kaczmarczyk, "From Buzuluk to London: The Combat Trail and Everyday Service of Women Auxiliaries in the Polish Army (1941-1945)," *IJMHH*: 263-287, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/24683302-03902006>.

⁵ Sandra Bolzenius, "Asserting Citizenship: Black Women in the Women's Army Corps (WAC)," *IJMHH*: 208-231, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/24683302-03902004>.

⁶ Mattie E. Treadwell, *The United States Army in World War II, Special Studies, The Women's Army Corps* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1954), 543.

army histories.⁷ As Bolzenius indicates, African American women participated in small numbers and almost always completed their service within the U.S., but she makes the case that understanding their participation is essential to understanding how these women used military service to claim their identity and rights as citizens and military personnel.

While Bolzenius provides insightful details on the challenges black Wacs encountered once they joined the service—from training to assignment and beyond—her work demonstrates that historians need to focus our attention beyond women’s wartime experiences. For example, Bolzenius explains how the WAC separated white and black women for housing and training purposes, hoping to avoid problems that occurred in black male units led by white commanders. Consequently, these policies “ensured minimal contact between white and black Wacs,” meaning that African American Wacs arguably had more segregated military experiences than black men (216). Yet despite such policies, which contributed to extensive wartime limitations on African American women’s service opportunities, Bolzenius also points out that within five years of the war’s end, the WAC had become racially integrated—something that would take male forces much longer to achieve (229).

It is striking that this integration happened so quickly after these wartime segregation policies. Bolzenius’s work therefore highlights the need to consider American women’s wartime military experiences as part of a longer narrative, particularly for African American women. Although World War II has been an important framing period, when it comes to women’s experiences, Bolzenius argues that it is time to expand the definition of the war to include postwar policies and experiences that developed from the conflict itself, such as the quick racial integration the WAC after the war ended.

Finally, Ravenel Richardson examines the Army Nurse Corps (ANC), drawing attention to what happened when ANC officers became pregnant while in service.⁸ As Richardson notes, policy dictated that pregnant women would be discharged, thus ending a woman’s service. This was a documented administrative problem, but Richardson takes the reader beyond policies and statistics to look at the human side of such experiences, focusing on the letters of two ANC officers, Harriet Adams Earhart and Hildegard Peplau. Earhart served in Oklahoma in 1944, became pregnant and then married, only to be discharged right away. In contrast, Peplau served as a nurse in England and became pregnant as the result of an affair with a married officer. She hid her pregnancy until her daughter was born and continued to serve in the U.S. for a brief period of time. Looking at these two women’s experiences offers a more intimate study of women’s wartime service, as Richardson uses them to “demonstrate how complicated it was for women to navigate the proscribed sex and gender roles of war nursing” (233).

Both accounts showcase the challenges women faced when they engaged in romantic relationships while serving as nurses, a topic which Richardson rightly points out is not well understood from the perspective of women’s experiences. On one level, pairing Earhart and Peplau’s stories makes sense because each illustrates the ANC’s response to unexpected pregnancy, but the stories are not identical. While both women violated contemporary expectations of unmarried women’s abstinence, Earhart married the father of her child, while Peplau became pregnant as the result of an affair with a married officer. These differences fundamentally affected what happened to both women during and after their pregnancies, and it would be useful to consider these differences further. However, Richardson is right that at an official level, these details did not matter when it came to ANC policy.

While Earhart was discharged almost immediately, Peplau hid her pregnancy for as long as she could and was transferred stateside with other pregnant nurses and remained in the military until after her daughter’s birth. What Richardson’s work reveals, then, is that military policy was not always applied equally, a fact that speaks to the need for continued examination

⁷ Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women’s Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Martha S. Putney, *When the Nation Was in Need: Blacks in the Women’s Army Corps during World War II* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1992); Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps*.

⁸ Ravenel Richardson, “‘My Professional Future Can Be Lost in a Minute’: Re-examining the Gender Dynamics of U.S. Army Nursing during the Second World War,” *IJMHH*: 232-262. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/24683302-03902005>.

of women's lived experiences in and out of the military in wartime. Despite official policies, practicality could and did at times trump social mores: when nurses were needed, "bureaucratic limbo" at times became an expedient method for keeping women in the service even when they were not supposed to be there (256).

While all these articles examine women's agency in World War II, what may be more significant is that these articles not only draw attention to understudied topics, but offer ideas for potential future research. This is a particular strength of the special issue, taken as a whole. Individually, these pieces each offer foundational information that may be useful to scholars at various levels of research, from undergraduate to graduate, but they are most promising in their ability to suggest which stories have yet to emerge. Dawson concludes in the issue's introduction that these articles help us understand that women "were conspicuous actors who made decisions to fight for survival, for civil rights, and for participation in the war," and that these choices had important outcomes and consequences (176). Yet today, not just eighty years after the war, but decades after the onset of women's history as a specific field of study, this idea is not surprising. What is most significant and successful in this issue is that the authors consistently offer readers ideas for future research and possibilities for continuing to understand the war in new ways through women's history.

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