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Queering the WAC: The World War II Military Experience of Queer Women

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Queering the WAC: The World War II Military Experience of Queer Women

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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In
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By

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BA, University of New Orleans 2013

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ABSTRACT

The demands of WWII mobilization led to the creation of the first standing women's army in the US known as the Women's Army Corps (WAC). An unintended consequence of this was that the WAC provided queer women with an environment with which to explore their gender and sexuality while also giving them the cover of respectability and service that protected them from harsh societal repercussions. They could eschew family for their military careers. They could wear masculine clothing, exhibit a masculine demeanor, and engage in a homosocial environment without being seen as subversive to the American way of life. Quite the contrary: the outside world saw them as helping to protect their country. This paper looks at the life of one such queer soldier, Dorothee Gore. Dorothee's letters, journals, and memorabilia demonstrate that for many lesbians of her generation, service in the WACS during WWII was a time of relatively open camaraderie and acceptance by straight society.

Keywords: WWII, WAC, queer history, lesbian history

INTRODUCTION

It is 1943. A group of soldiers in uniform were drinking beer and whiskey at the canteen and joking about pin up girls. They were taking a break from their many duties for the war effort. Among them were military police, aerial photographers, mechanics, and clerks. A few were married. Most were single. They gave each other nicknames and teased each other about where they are from or about the way they laughed. They have come from all over the United States when they signed up. Far away from home and family, they created tight bonds with this community on base. They had a sense of pride in their mission, and their lives were heavily dictated by military culture. They represented patriotism, American sacrifice, and the very best of American ideals. Not only did these soldiers take pride in their country and their work, but their country also took pride in them. This would never have been true in more peaceful times, however, because these soldiers happened to be queer women.

World War II has remained an important part of American memory and identity since the Japanese surrender in 1946. For many Americans, it still embodies the idea of American expetionalism and strength. Not surprisingly, American culture celebrates and reveres those who contributed to the war effort. The stories of WWII veterans have been the subject of countless books, miniseries, museum exhibitions, and movies. Academic careers have been built upon the uncovering of these stories, and the appetite for these narratives does not appear to be slowing down.

Yet these discourses surrounding WWII have largely focused on the exploits of white heterosexual males in the war effort. This has led to a certain mythology surrounding the war that has created and lauded an ideal American manhood that pushed to the periphery the

contributions of those on the margins such as African Americans, women, and homosexuals. While the effort to begin to tell the stories of those on the margins has intensified in more recent decades, queer individuals have been the last group to have their stories told. This is particularly true of queer women who have been largely ignored in public and scholarly discussions of WWII.

The access to oral histories and first hand accounts of the war from queer women stands as the largest obstacle to an increased presence of their stories. This is exacerbated by the swiftly thinning ranks of surviving WWII veterans. Their stories, if not recorded, will go with them. While this is true of all demographics that served in the war, this becomes an even larger challenge when trying to access the stories of queer women. The WWII generation has historically been reluctant to accept homosexuality, and queer individuals of this time did not speak publicly about their private lives. Journals and letters written during the war were often coded in order to evade detection. The women of this generation lived during a time that still saw homosexual activity as deviant and punished it through legal and political marginalization. While the voices of these women are few, they give great insight into the lives of queer women who served during WWII. This paper looks at the life of one such soldier.

Dorothee Gore, born in 1908, possessed many attributes. She was a lover of travel, a friend to animals, a published poet, a proud aunt, and a devoted fan of Greta Garbo. She was also a lesbian. Before the war, Dorothee Gore had lived in Greenwich Village in New York City and then Washington D.C. She briefly joined the Women's Army Auxiliary Core (WAAC) for 5 months in 1943 before joining the Women's Army Corps (WAC), the army's new division of female soldiers that replaced the WAAC, in 1944 and serving until 1945. While serving in the military, Gore was stationed in Fort Sill, Oklahoma; Patterson Field, Ohio; Fort Oglethorpe,

Georgia; San Francisco; and Dutch New Guinea.¹ For Dorothee, and others like her, the war offered many opportunities; a chance for employment, a chance to travel, and an environment where queer women could flourish. For Dorothee, and many others of her generation, this was a time when the hetero-normative constraints of society relaxed, and they could explore and express their sexuality and gender in bolder ways. They could not have predicted, perhaps, how unique this period would prove to be and how swiftly circumstances would change for them after the war.

Based upon the experiences of Dorothee Gore and her colleagues, this paper argues that WWII, and by extension the Women's Army Corps, offered American lesbians a time and space with which they could more easily explore their sexuality and gender expression with the cover of respectability. The need for a large and equipped military mobilization led to the easing of social dictates that had previously functioned in American society. This was particularly true of gender and sexuality, as increasingly numbers of women were needed to support the war effort. The first standing women's army was created during this time, and the masculine culture of the

¹ Obituary, For Dorothee Elizabeth Gore, Undated newspaper clipping, Box 4, Folder 1, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.; She traveled throughout France in her formative years and collected tickets and memorabilia from her travels in a scrapbook. (Scrapbook, 1924, Box 8, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.) She describes going overseas as great desire for her time in the WAC. (A Soldiers Diary, WAC autograph book, 1944, Box 3, Folder 12, , MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.); She collected newspaper clippings and cartoons featuring cats and dogs. (Newspaper Clippings, Undated, Box 4, Folder 10, , MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.); Obituary, For Dorothee Elizabeth Gore, Undated newspaper clipping, Box 4, Folder 1, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.; Her scrapbooks contained numerous images and newspaper articles on the actress. (Scrapbook, Undated, Box 7, Folder 2, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.); "Dorothee Gore Collection Finding Aid," The New York Public Library, accessed November 15, 2014, http://archives.nypl.org/uploads/collection/pdf_finding_aid/gore.pdf.

army was juxtaposed with units made up of women and absent of men. This was a desirable situation for queer women, and a female queer subculture flourished in its ranks.

With the end of the war, just as all women were pushed out of the work force to free up jobs for returning men, queer women were pushed back into the closet. In the interest of restoring the lives of American men and traditional American families, American society celebrated with new zeal heterosexual norms and cast shadows on the lives and experiences of those who did not conform. Hence, the stories and experiences of queer women have been largely ignored, and their involvement in the war has been left out of the collective American memory. Yet there were queer women who both shaped and were shaped by WWII. This paper seeks to investigate and understand the experience of queer females who served in the WAC during WWII and the ways in which they were granted a level of respectability in that period, provided they kept quiet and made no efforts to intrude upon the rest of American society.

This project has been influenced to a great degree by George Chauncey's pioneering book, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (1994). Chauncey grappled with issues such as respectability, the connection of gender to the homosexual identity, and the homosocial influence on its prevalence. He shows the ways in which gay New Yorkers at the turn of the century navigated their homosexuality in a world that sought to punish them for it through legal and social ramifications. Like the subject of my paper, they used coded language in letters and conversation.² But unlike Dorothee Gore during the war, their sexuality often times had to be separated from their professional lives in order to maintain their respectability.

² George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1920* (New York, Basic Books, 1994), 265.

Chauncey also points out that the advent of the homosexual male identity was steeped in femininity.³ Gay men wore women's clothing and makeup. They spoke in high pitched "feminine" voices, and carried themselves in much the same way as their female contemporaries did.⁴ "True" homosexuals were also defined by their passive roles in sexual encounters with the same sex. Working class men could still retain respectability as "normal men" so long as they still played the masculine role in sexual acts.⁵ Queer women, as this paper will demonstrate, represented and appropriated masculinity instead of femininity. Their physical appearance and demeanor resembled traditional male roles of the time, and their sexual deviancy was defined by their role as the sexual aggressor. They represented, in many ways, the mirror image of the gay men Chauncey studied.

Much in the same way that my paper claims that the all-female environment of the WAC made it more open to lesbians, Chauncey claims that the homosocial activities of the immigrant populations of New York made male homosexuality more prevalent.⁶ There was what Chauncey referred to as a "bachelor culture" that allowed men to eschew a family without suspicion of queer tendencies. This "bachelor culture" also led immigrant families to closely monitor their daughters and limit the amount of time they spent with their male contemporaries. This led to a social life that was largely restricted to their own gender for many immigrant men.⁷ Chauncey also looks at the effects of this homosocial environment on military culture when he cites the

³ Gay inmates at in New York were assigned "women's work" in the prison laundry. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 93.

⁴ Ibid. 99-100.

⁵ Ibid. 135-136.

⁶ When female prostitutes were not available due to vice crackdowns, working class men easily substituted the effeminate men that were. Ibid, 82.

⁷ Ibid. 135-136.

rampant homosexual activity at the Naval Training Station in Newport, Rhode Island, and the difficulty that gay sailors had upon returning home after WWI.⁸

There are relatively few scholarly treatments of lesbian military life during WWII. Leisa Meyer focuses her book, GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During WWII (1996), on what she refers to as the "burgeoning field" of women's military history. Her book deals with a cross section of female experiences. These included different sexualities, races, and marital statuses among others. She breaks down the historical image of female soldiers into two categories. These include the sexually promiscuous heterosexual that seeks to fulfill the sexual needs of male soldiers and the overly mannish lesbian (which had been a cultural symbol of lesbianism even before the war).⁹ Meyer claims that in an effort to thwart these stereotypes, the military framework for the WAC did not offer the same gender and sexual liberation as the civilian labor force.¹⁰ Meyer also does not recognize WWII as a time of tolerance for lesbians in military culture.¹¹

Allen Berube's, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II (1990), focuses on the pressure and power the military exerted over male and female homosexuals in order to keep them in the closet during wartime and how, ultimately, this repression affected the gay rights movement.¹² Michaela Hampf examines the creation of the "woman-soldier" during WWII in Release a Man for Combat: The Women's Army Corps

⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 145.

⁹ Leisa Meyer, *Creating GI Jane* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 7.

¹¹ "While World War II marked a turning point in both the development and consolidation of lesbian subcultures, in contrast to some historians, I do not see military "tolerance" of lesbians as either an adequate characterization of lesbians' military experience during World War II or the sole reason for the consolidation of these subcultures." Leisa Meyer, *Creating GI Jane* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 9.

¹² Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women In World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

During WWII (2010). She argues that WWII created a space for women to serve in the US military, but that this clash between what it meant to be a woman and what it meant to be a soldier created many contradictions and tensions.¹³

Unlike these previous works, my paper focuses on lesbians during WWII, and how WWII gave lesbians a cover of respectability in which to explore gender and sexuality. Before the war, lesbian subcultures existed in a few large cities such as New York or San Francisco, but these communities were insular and hidden. Any attempt to publicly explore gender and sexuality marked queer women as social deviants and cast them beyond mainstream society. This changed with WWII. Queer women from around the United States joined the Women's Army Corps, and it created a cover under which they could thrive. Before the war, society identified queer women through stereotypes based on "masculinity". These included more masculine fashion choices, career paths, or masculine mannerisms and interests in general. One of the most glaring ways in which the public spotted and marginalized queer women was the lack of a husband and children.

Involvement with WAC offered queer women all of these same avenues of queer identification and culture. Women could wear masculine clothing such as pants and military uniforms. They could focus on their military careers and engage in masculine roles such as mechanics and military police. The presence of a family unit was absent, and homosocial activity was the norm. Instead of being seen as counter-culture, queer women involved in the WWII campaign were a part of the American war effort, as patriots and freedom fighters. Not only did the war allow queer women a uniquely concentrated environment in which they could thrive. More importantly, its cover of respectability sheltered them from repercussions such as

¹³ Michaela Hampf, *Release a Man for Combat: The Women's Army Corps During WWII* (Köln Weimar Wien: Böhlau Verlag GmbH & Cie, 2010).

legal ramifications and social stigma. This idea of respectability was a result of the war, and with the end of the war also came the end of the sheltering wartime environment. Without the war effort as a reason for being single and childless or for wearing pants instead of dresses, queer women were once again maligned by the society they had just served. This is not to suggest that lesbian culture in the military was completely free of surveillance and discrimination. But on the whole, it offered queer women more freedom than pre-war and post-war life.

BACKGROUND

The United States declaration of war caused a great need for military and civilian personnel to serve the war effort, and this need upended societal norms that greatly benefited queer women such as Dorothee Gore. Soon after the United States declared war, the war machine quickly got to work. In the fall of 1939, only 200,000 men were enlisted in the US Army. By 1944, the army had approximately 6 million soldiers enlisted.¹⁴ It became imperative for the United States to mobilize quickly and in great numbers. When large numbers of American males left their homeland to fight in the war in far off places, it caused many repercussions to every day American life back home. The signs and stigmas that had previously marred queer women such as the way they dressed, their lack of family life, and their occupations became common place, and they began to blend in with their straight counterparts.

With young men enlisting, women who had been out of the workforce became factory workers and military support staff. The military needed people to serve in all different functions,

¹⁴ United States. National Park Service, National Park Service. "World War II Mobilization Effort." National Parks Service. September 3, 2014. Accessed October 2, 2014.

and they created a female unit to serve non-combat roles. As these women found themselves in close quarters and spending much time together during an absence of male companionship, lesbian relationships and a lesbian subculture flourished. The military was aware of these transgressions and that homosexual individuals were serving in their ranks. On the whole, the social activities of lesbian women were ignored by the military as the war effort was a more pressing matter than the regulation of gender and sexuality.

Before WWII, different branches of the US military held varying laws and regulations for homosexual activity. Before WWII, the idea of the homosexual identity was not an issue for the US military. Instead of focusing on military personnel's personal identity, they focused on the act of "sodomy." They punished an act, not a stereotyped set of behaviors. Sodomy was defined as anal or oral sex, and it was a criminal act. Individuals were punished for such sexual acts, not for their identity. In 1920, Article 93 of the Articles of War created the first regulation of sodomy making it a dischargeable offense.¹⁵ With WWII, however, a new code was established.¹⁶ Article 125 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice stated,

Any person subject to this chapter who engages in unnatural carnal copulation with another person of the same or opposite sex or with an animal is guilty of sodomy. Penetration, however slight, is sufficient to complete this offense. Any person found guilty of sodomy shall be punished as a court-martial may direct.¹⁷

While the sodomy law does not differentiate between sodomy acts among heterosexuals or homosexuals, there was a discrepancy about how these acts were handled. Sodomy acts between homosexuals were prosecuted much more seriously than acts between consenting heterosexuals

¹⁵Hampf. *Release a Man for Combat*, 257.

¹⁶ Ibid. 257-258.

¹⁷ "United States Code of Military Justice," Us Military, <http://www.ucmj.us/>, accessed March 25, 2014.

or lesbian women.¹⁸

During the first half of the twentieth century, including the period of World War II, homosexuality shifted from a criminal to a psychological issue in medical circles and among law enforcement.¹⁹ This was influenced by the ongoing medicalization of homosexuality. The homosexual identity was slowly recognized through the medicalization of homosexuality. Foucault sums up this change by stating,

We must not forget that that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized... less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.²⁰

By 1942, the military enlisted psychiatrists to evaluate all personnel wishing to enlist with mental health screenings. The screenings were designed to eliminate those that were “neuropsychiatrically unfit” or those with “psychopathic personality disorders.” These included what were then known as “homosexuals”.²¹

During the war, the military prison system was overstrained, and officials sought out new ways to deal with homosexuals. Some homosexual personnel were discharged without a trial, while others were retained so long as their service was considered “essential” to the war effort. Eventually the medical term homosexual replaced the legal term sodomist as the medical community gained greater influence in the discourse and implications of homosexuality.²²

¹⁸ Hampf, *Release a Man for Combat*, 258.

¹⁹ Hampf, *Release a Man for Combat*, 258.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1978) 43.

²¹ *Ibid.* 258.

²² *Ibid.* 260.

Also with the WWII era, came a greater expression of gender liberation for women. This occurred as they entered the work force to make up for the lack of males to help run the domestic effort on the home front.²³ As a result, women became a permanent fixture in the US military. Initially, they served in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in roles that encompassed office and secretarial work. In 1943, the WAAC was supplanted by the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Women who served in the WAC were part of the military and enjoyed the same military status as male soldiers.²⁴

CREATION OF THE WAC

The Creation of the WAC brought women coming under the command and influence of the military, and this heavily masculine culture embraced women who transgressed traditionally feminine social mores as the military viewed them as beneficial to defeating the Axis powers. Before 1941, the idea of a military corps made up of women was met with an overwhelming negative reaction from the public.²⁵ However, the bombing of Pearl Harbor made this idea seem much less ridiculous, and the idea of a female military unit gained acceptance. America entered

²³ "Rosie the Riveter Project," National Park Services, <http://www.nps.gov/pwro/collection/website/rosie.htm>, accessed April 26, 2014.

²⁴ Hampf, *Release a Man for Combat*, 5.

²⁵ The first bill to request a women's army was introduced before Pear Harbor, and it languished in Congress, as the US government did not take it seriously. Betty Morden describes the public's reaction as "never!" when the idea was brought up and the public particularly opposed to the idea of women in helmets attacking the enemy with guns and women generals giving orders to male military personnel. When the bill was debated, the discourse was particularly "bitter" according to Morden. Bettie Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990) 3-5.

the war with a large demand of labor to support the war, and the only way to fulfill the need was to let groups of soldiers, such as women, that had been historically forbidden from the military.²⁶

For this reason, Republican Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts served as the architect of the bill to create with WAAC in 1941. Rogers had served during WWI as a civilian, as many American women did, but she was not eligible to receive the same benefits as male soldiers. She saw this bill as the solution to the recurrence of a similar problem in WWII.²⁷ This bill sought to secure veterans benefits, disability pensions, and hospitalization privileges for women.²⁸ After much debate and push back from both the army and powerful male political and cultural figures, a watered down bill was passed in which the women's corps was limited to an auxiliary status instead of the full military status sought by Rogers. This meant women were once again denied equal rank, benefits, and pay to male soldiers.²⁹ It was passed and accepted as it was seen as necessary to the war effort.³⁰ The military appointed Oveta Culp Hobby as the first director of the WAAC. Hobby, herself, believed that the WAAC should exist temporarily, and that after the war, female soldiers should return "to their families and their primary duties as mothers and wives."³¹

The creation of the WAC, a corps with full military recognition, and thus, full respectability, was spurred on by two factors. The first was the creation of the WAVES, the Navy's all female corps. The Waves were given equal pay and benefits to male navy members. The WAVES bill became much easier to pass after the WAAC bill faced the brunt of criticism

²⁶ Morden, *The Women's Army Corps*, p. 3-5.

²⁷ Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, p. 11

²⁸ Ibid. p. 12.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 16.

³⁰ George C. Marsall approved of the idea as he saw it as "a conduit for enrolling thousands of women during wartime, thus releasing men from administrative jobs and making them available for combat duty." Morden, *The Women's Army Corps*, p. 3.

³¹ Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, p. 16-17.

before them. The second factor was the confusion and frustration that resulted from the administration of two different sets of regulations for male and female soldiers.³² Thus, the auxiliary corps (WAAC) became the WAC, a corps that became fully under the control of the military and received equal benefits to male soldiers. The most often voiced concern was that the WAC would be used as a “cadre of prostitutes” for male soldiers.³³ At the beginning of the war, the character of the women who joined the WAC was often challenged.³⁴ Many in American society saw WAC women as women who left their husbands and children to chase the adventures of wartime.³⁵ They were often characterized as drunks that frequent bars. Female reserve units began to pop up in all units of the US military. The WAVES made up the female corps of the Navy, The SPARS served in the Coast Guard, and a Marine Corps Women’s Reserve also came into existence.³⁶ The initial hesitancy of the American public to accept women who transgressed traditional female behavior shows the radical and quick ascension of queer sensibility during the war. The number of females and their ubiquity within the military soon made women’s participation a part of the American fabric instead of a stain on it.

The first women to enter the WAAC were an elite group in terms of education. Over 40 percent of officers were college graduates, and the average age for officers was thirty. The average age of enlisted personnel was twenty-four and over 60 percent were high school

³² Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, p. 38.

³³ Ibid. p. 39.

³⁴ Morden claims that this gossip and ridicule originated with male service members who felt threatened by the presence of women. She states that it then spread to civilians and then the media. This gossip campaign against the WAAC lasted about a year. Morden, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 11. Meyer claims journalists such as John O’Donnell gave a mainstream voice to these criticisms. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, p. 35.

³⁵ “One recruiting officer summed up the negative images prevalent at her post: ‘The WAC is made up of women who are tired of living with their husbands, give their children away for someone else to care for and seek the adventure and case around with GIs.’” Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*, p. 42.

³⁶ Morden, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 6.

graduates. Many of these women had amassed some college experience. WAAC members studied military protocol and organization, map reading, and first aid. They participated in drills, ceremonies, and parades. They also stood guard duty.³⁷

The success of the WAAC helped it to gain full army status, but this change brought about a new landscape. The WAACs were under control of Oveta Culp Hobby. She made the rules and ran the corps. As a separate female unit run by a female, not under the management of the male dominated military structure, the public profile of the WAAC was more traditionally female than that of the WAC. With the creation of the WAC, the female units and Hobby herself, came under command of the Army structure and it ended up filling more traditionally masculine roles within the military.³⁸ Instead of working only as typists, clerks, and drivers, women began to work as mechanics, weather observers, radio operators, intelligence analysts, photographers, carpenters, painters, parachute riggers, postal workers, heavy equipment operators, medical personnel, radio tower operators, and aerial photographers.³⁹ Dorothee Gore worked, as many women did, as an MP (Military Police). She gravitated to the role seen as conventionally more manly, and the war gave her an opportunity to hold this type of job with pride instead of condemnation.

The demands of “total war” radicalized the way nations, and in particular the US, waged war in the 20th century. The ascent of women in the military is one such example of how the war greatly shaped America’s domestic life. During the war, 140,000 women served in the military.⁴⁰ In addition to the tolerance of women’s changing roles in American society, the war effort adapted a certain tolerance for homosexuality. Of the 18 million men examined during

³⁷ Morden, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 7-8.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 12.

³⁹ Morden, *The Women’s Army Corps*, 19-20.

⁴⁰ Hampf, *Release a Man for Combat*, 31.

WWII, only 4,000-5,000 were rejected due to homosexuality. This relatively low rate of rejection on the ground of sexuality was partly due to quotas for military personnel.⁴¹ The total war effort made the recruitment and retention of homosexuals necessary from a strictly numbers standpoint. The 1943 handbook Psychology for the Fighting Man points out the need for more tolerance during the war. It states that homosexual men had “no feelings of inferiority or shame” or “mental conflict” over their homosexuality, and that they:

readily applied their interest and energy to the tasks of army life. If they are content with quietly seeking the satisfaction of their sexual needs with others of their own kind, their perversion may continue to go unnoticed and they may even become excellent soldiers.⁴²

At the end of the war, lesbian contributions were also beginning to be noted when Brigadier General William Menninger commented that lesbians were “most efficient and admirable women.”⁴³ This tolerance of soldiers who exhibited both a queer identity and an identity as a good soldier point to the respectability military involvement allowed queer individuals. Fighting for one’s country and sacrificing one’s life trumped the perceived “perversion” of homosexuality.

The visibility of lesbian relationships within the WAC was apparent to queer soldiers. One former member of the WAC explains, “There was a tolerance for lesbians if they needed you...If you had a specialist kind of job [to do] or if you were in a theatre of operations...where bodies were needed, they tolerated anything, just about.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 33.

⁴² Ibid. 51

⁴³ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 34.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 256.

RESPECTABILITY

For many lesbians of the early and mid twentieth century, the idea of respectability stood as a barometer in which they measured their success as queer individuals. To live as a queer woman and to still maintain social respectability meant that lesbians often lived in what is now known as the closet. In an article on lesbianism in the 1920's and 1930's, two modern researchers analyzed data recorded by a lesbian (known as M.B.) in Salt Lake City during this time. M.B. interviewed and recorded notes from over 20 lesbians in her community. While this data gives only the information of a particular geographic group, it does shed some light on lesbian culture before WWII. The women often cited their definition of success as their ability to keep their sexuality a secret from the general public. In turn, they consider themselves generally accepted by their peers. However, they view San Francisco as a gay mecca, and they travel there when they can as they relish the chance to attend gay bars and live more openly. They obsess over the idea of their own respectability, and it becomes an important barometer for their personal success. M.B. never published her data. She worked in a defense plant during the war where she met her partner whose children would eventually publish and analyze her work for her. ⁴⁵ These women attained respectability by hiding their homosexuality from the general public. They found an outlet for themselves in a tight knit community of other lesbians that socialized and helped to protect each other's secrets. Therefore their only safe spaces of queer expression were in their own homes.

⁴⁵ Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, "Lesbianism in the 1920s and 1930s: A newfound Study." *Signs*, Vol. 2, no.4 (Summer 1977): 895-904.

For lesbians living in larger cities, their spaces of existence extended beyond the home and into the bar. These spaces for social interaction were important as they helped to stymie a sense of isolation and oppression, and they helped to create a community outside of one's own home. Before the war, bars were the only space outside of the home in which lesbians could socialize. Following the war, this became true once again until sexual liberation began in the 1960s. ⁴⁶ Gay and Lesbian bars were well established in New York during the time Dorothee lived there. This was particularly true of her neighborhood, Greenwich Village, which was known as gay friendly part of town. The prevalence of gay bars could be found in large cities (such as New York and San Francisco), but they were still absent throughout much of the country. John D'Emilio and Allan Bérubé both cite the 1940s (the years in which WWII took place) as "the turning point when gay and lesbian social life became firmly established in bars in most cities of the U.S. ⁴⁷ The access to other lesbians in public spaces (whether a bar or the WAC) added to lesbian consciousness, and helped lesbians define together what it meant to be a gay woman of this time.

This is one of the aspects that made the army so attractive to lesbian women. It was a space, outside of their homes where women could freely experiment with both masculinity and close relationships with other women, and it did not seem totally out of the norm as these were the conditions prescribed onto all WACs to a certain degree. They could experiment with what it meant to be a gay woman and still retain a sense of respectability. Women shared barracks⁴⁸ and often traveled with each other on furloughs where they slept in the same rooms and beds. This homosocial activity was not unusual and did not immediately single out lesbians as counter-

⁴⁶ Brett Beemyn, editor, *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 27-28.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 27-29.

⁴⁸ Morden, *The Women's Army Corps*, 19.

culture or subversive as it did in times when the nation was not at war. Some lesbians from WWII cite the benefit of WWII to lesbians as not helping lesbians to be self-supporting and independent, but for helping heterosexual women become that way and thus making lesbian women harder to identify.⁴⁹

QUEER LIFE IN THE WAC

The lesbian subculture visible in the WAC during WWII was heavily influenced by the history and culture of war surrounding it, and this environment was created and sustained by men making it hyper masculine. This is evident in the clothing, behavior, and interactions of queer women during this time. WWII allowed women who otherwise might not have left their homes and communities to do just that. They were able to join the military or find jobs in the civilian sector of the war effort, and they were able to find financial independence that allowed them to leave the more conservative confines of family life. Thus, according to D’Emilio “World War II created a substantially new “erotic situation” conducive both to the articulation of a homosexual identity and to the more rapid evolution of a gay subculture” thanks to its population mobilization.⁵⁰

By joining the WAC, Dorothee Gore and other queer women found an opportunity to start fresh as an integral part of the American war machine. Dorothee Gore had some familiarity with the queer scene in New York before the war, as she had lived there in her 20’s and

⁴⁹ Beemyn, *Creating a Place for Ourselves*, 37.

⁵⁰ John D’Emilio *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1983) 24.

corresponded with friends who still lived in the area.⁵¹ Prior to the start of the war, she left New York in order “to make a clean break from deteriorating forces and start all over again.”⁵²

Dorothee was not happy in New York. She had amassed debt while there and seemed depressed.⁵³ She was looking for a fresh start, and the war offered the opportunity she longed for. She had been following the developments of the conflict since the beginning, and she had attended benefits for the British War effort even before American involvement.⁵⁴ Her knowledge of the war mostly concerned the Western Front, and she had a desire, like most Americans, to defeat the Nazis.⁵⁵ Her friend Marge, a lesbian living in New York, wrote to her in the winter of 1942 of her desire to join the WAAC:

As far as the WAAC's are concerned, Dotty, I've either got to get into it as soon as I can or I'm afraid I'll change my mind. It's just that I'm getting terribly fed up with myself mostly, but everything in general. Frankly, if it wasn't for the Xmas and New Year holiday coming on I'd join up right away. The idea was originally Mother's, John's, and Helen's. They think it would be a good chance for me to learn something other than working at hosiery and I've become quite enthused about it and want to join just as soon as I possibly can. I know that you'd like me to wait for you but if I did I probably wouldn't join at all. Incidentally, I'm quite sure that I'll be sent back to N.Y. after my 6 weeks training in Iowa. From what I've heard they do send you back to your own city rather than switching people to strangers cities and strangers to their city (is that clear?) It isn't to me! Anyway, Ducky, don't worry about it, we'll discuss it thoroughly when I see you next. It will be impossible for me to see you over the Xmas weekend and I will

⁵¹ In one pre-war letter a New York female friend writes of asking another female out on a date. (Letter, Marge to Dorothee, September 8, 1942, Box 1, Folder 4, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.)

⁵² Letter, Marya to Dorothee, October 12, 1942, Box 1, Folder 4, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.)

⁵³ Letter, Marya to Dorothee, October 12, 1942, Box 1, Folder 4, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.)

⁵⁴ Scrapbook, Undated, Box 11, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

⁵⁵ Her scrapbook contained numerous articles and cartoons chastising the Nazis. (Scrapbook, Newspaper Clippings, Box 7, Folder 2, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.)

be down after New Year's regardless of what I decide to do. So if we don't talk too much about it when you come up, we'll talk about it when I come down.⁵⁶

Marge, once enlisted in the WAC, made it clear to Dorothee that the WAC would be a good fit for her. Marge revealed that other lesbians they know from New York have joined the WAC.⁵⁷ Marge expressed her pleasure of serving in the WACS to Dorothee and encouraged Dorothee to join as well. The WAC created a haven for many lesbians throughout the country who were searching for others like them. Many cited their homosexuality as reasons for joining the military. Pat Bond, a former WAC member, stated later in life that was the impetus for her enrollment in the army. She stated, "Then I decided I was in love with this woman who obviously was not in love with me. And the thing to do was escape into the Army Women's Corps."⁵⁸ Prior to the war, there was no such large-scale lesbian movement. Before the war, lesbian enclaves such as New York and San Francisco existed, but now you had a lesbian network that spanned the entire country. This lesbian movement, both in the physical and in the political sense, came about as a result of World War II. The opportunity for queer fellowship was available to women throughout the country, and they had the cover of war in which to go off and explore it.

Dorothee joined Marge and their mutual friends and enlisted in the WAC herself. She made many friends in the WAC, and her fellow officers described her fondly as "everybody's

⁵⁶ Letter, Marge to Dorothee, December 19, 1942, (Box 1, Folder 4, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.)

⁵⁷ Others such as Kay Lamb took the military exams, but decided on civilian life instead. Kay worked in a defense plant during the war before becoming a teacher. (Box 1, Folder 5, Letter from Kay Lamb) In a letter from Marge, she explains that other mutual friends from New York are joining the WAC or recognized her on base (Letter, Marge to Dorothee, Box I, Folder 5, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.)

⁵⁸ Peter Adair, *Word Is Out*, DVD, Interview of Pat bond (1977; New York; New Yorker Films), Film.

friend” and “the sweetest girl in the world.” One soldier stated, “Your personality is morale building!” She was known as “giggling Gore” around base, and her laughter became a characteristic for which she received much ribbing. A fellow soldier stated, “I’m sure when the Japs or Germans hear that giggle of yours-they’ll start running the other way.” Another stated, “When you get over there and let out a “Gore” laugh-All the enemy will turn their heels & run home.”⁵⁹

This ribbing was a common characteristic of the female friendships Gore made in the WAC. While Gore knew some of the WACS who had enlisted from New York, she also made many new friends while serving.⁶⁰ Dorothee and her friends reveled in Army life. These friendships exhibited many of the same characteristics that seemed to be common in the depiction of male bonding from WWII. One of the ways this is true, is the way these friendships revolved around alcohol and women. Gore, herself, was described as a person who could “keep any party alive.”⁶¹ In her autograph book, a fellow soldier left her a poem that read:

Here’s to the girl in high heel shoes
She’ll spend your money and drink your “booze”
Take you to bed and squeeze you tight
Cross her legs and say nightie night⁶²

A mailing list was set up for a group of her friends (the names included other lesbian friends of Dorothee) through which they exchanged details of their lives. The first such transcript, written by a soldier by the name of Ashley, relished all of these characteristics of military bonding.

⁵⁹ A Soldiers Diary, WAC autograph book, 1944, Box 3, Folder 12, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

⁶⁰ Letter, Dotsy to Dorothee, November 25, 1944, (Box 1, Folder 6, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.)

⁶¹ A Soldiers Diary, WAC autograph book, 1944, Box 3, Folder 12, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

⁶² A Soldiers Diary, WAC autograph book, 1944, Box 3, Folder 12, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Alcohol was referenced often. Ashley asked that any responses be accompanied “by the tops of two beer bottles. One second thought, just send the beer.” She referenced beer and scotch throughout her letter. She also claims to walk the corridors with “a pin up girl under my arm.” All of the recipients are listed under silly nicknames such as “Shoot Scoop Arkansas,” “Annie Oakley,” and “Sleepy Coleman.”⁶³ These female military friendships exhibited what was considered by the WWII generation as masculine bonding. In many ways, the manner in which Dorothee and her friends interacted resembled male units, but because they were soldiers, this socialization seemed a result of military culture instead of queer culture. This idea of respectability again served as a cover in which to explore their queer identity.

Letters between Dorothee and other soldiers reveal that while they were comfortable with displaying their queerness with each other, they had to use a certain level of precaution in order to avoid any consequences doled out by the military. Marge pointed out the fact that Dorothee’s telegrams were susceptible to being read by her superiors and she wondered if the content would matter to her lieutenant if read. She surmised that “It probably wouldn’t.” And, throughout their letters and telegrams, women referred to her through pet names such as “baby”, “darling chick”, and “pet.”⁶⁴ They also felt free to express their affection in pretty clear terms. Dotsy wrote to Dorothee that she is “thinking hard about [her] and wondering where [she] is.”⁶⁵ While the letters

⁶³ Ashley’s Abberation, Transmittal of Manuscript, 1944, Box 1, Folder 6, , MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “baby”, Letter, Dotsy to Dorothee, December 6, 1944, Box 1, Folder 6, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “darling chick” Letter, From Dotsy to Dorothy, January, 19, 1945, Box 1, Folder 7 , MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “pet” Letter, From Dotsy to Dorothy, January, 19, 1945, Box 1, Folder 7 , MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

⁶⁵ Letter, From Dotsy to Dorothee, Christmas Day, Box 1, Folder 7 , MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

between Dorothee and her lovers expressed affection in mild, yet clear terms. Other soldiers wrote more explicit letters to each other. One such exchange is what set off an investigation into lesbian activity at Fort Oglethorpe in the first place. Dorothee and her friends were all stationed at Ft. Oglethorpe at one point in their military careers, and while Dorothee was not stationed at the base at the time of the investigation, the investigation would have been known to her and to her friends as some were located at Ft. Oglethorpe at the time. In letters exchanged between two soldiers at Fort Oglethorpe, Sgt. Loos and Pvt. Churchill, they wrote in coded, but explicit language about sexual fantasies that were steeped in gender role-playing. Sgt. Loos wrote: “Darling last [nite] I had wee wee out & the more I squeeze the bigger he gets and boy you should see it now.”⁶⁶ In the letter, Sgt. Loos used coded language to imagine that she has an erect penis. They also used coded messages to speak about the female anatomy. For instance, they used the name “Rosemary” to refer to a vagina and the words “blueberry tarts” to refer to breasts. Sgt. Loos wrote, in one letter, “I can’t stand Oglethorpe anymore without you. Baby please be real good and don’t give anyone else my kisses or you or Rosemary or any part of you. I will wear you out when I see you.”⁶⁷ In a letter dated April 28, 1944, Sgt. Loos wrote, “Honey If I had you here now I would just take you in my arms & love you and kiss you until you fell flat on my bed, then I would get rosemary & wear the hell out of her.”⁶⁸

While some of the language was coded, much of it was overt such as the line “I wish I could be in that bed with you to keep you warm & I know I could get you plenty hot right

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Office of the Inspector General, War Department, Investigation of Conditions in the 3d WAC Training Center, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1944), 6.

⁶⁷ Office of the Inspector General, War Department, Investigation of Conditions in the 3d WAC Training Center, 6.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 6.

now.”⁶⁹ In another letter she states, “Honey, I’m almost glad to be away from that room of mine. It holds so many memories of you that it hurts my heart to go into it & not find my precious pet asleep, so I could kiss her & wake her up.”⁷⁰ In a letter dated May 4, 1944 Sgt. Loos wrote, “Darling, I miss you so terribly, I need you & want you so much. My whole body aches for the want of you.”⁷¹ The military’s own investigation into lesbian activity makes it clear that it was prevalent, and that while the military was aware of it, it did not always seek to discipline those who displayed queer tendencies. This investigation began in 1944 after the discovery of the letters between Sgt. Loos and Pvt. Churchill. Private Churchill’s mother, Josephine Churchill, wrote, “I am writing to you to inform you of some of the things at Ft. Oglethorpe that are a disgrace to the U.S. Army. It is no wonder women are afraid to enlist. It is full of homosexuals and sex maniacs.”⁷²

Mrs. Churchill went on to complain that her daughter was the victim of a predatory lesbian while stationed at Ft. Oglethorpe, a WAC training center. She learned of the relationship when she found “some of the most shocking letters I have ever read in my life” while her daughter visited her on her furlough. These allegations led to an investigation of lesbian activity in which seven women were personally investigated and the army investigated the social culture at large.⁷³ Dorothee and her friends were more than likely aware of the investigation and its implications for their own lives. During the investigation, the army relied heavily on testimony of Captain Alice E. Rost. Captain Rost was the chief of Neuropsychiatric Services at Fort

⁶⁹ Ibid. 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 7.

⁷¹ Office of the Inspector General, War Department, Investigation of Conditions in the 3d WAC Training Center, 7.

⁷² Ibid. 1.

⁷³ Office of the Inspector General, War Department, Investigation of Conditions in the 3d WAC Training Center, 1.

Oglethorpe. Captain Rost based her testimony on psychiatric examinations of those accused and any letters presented as evidence.⁷⁴ Thus, many lesbians in the military, and one can assume Dorothee and her friends, became cautious about their letters and interactions with each other.

Coded language was important to lesbians as it gave them plausible deniability when challenged. Dorothee, herself, used coded language when writing letters to friends and lovers. The coded language and fantasy found throughout the letters helped both Sgt. Loos and Pvt. Churchill deny that any actual sexual relationship took place. Fort Oglethorpe's subsequent investigation found that the letters did little to prove a sexual relationship occurred. The report states:

Clearly the language and references in the letters are vulgar and obscene. However, it should be noted that under all the facts and circumstances developed by this investigation, questions are raised as to the extent to which the letters furnish evidence that in fact, they engaged in homosexual practices. In part, the language used is considered to be expression of grotesque and fanciful imagination.⁷⁵

Marge hinted in one of her letters that perhaps Dorothee was under investigation at one point in her Army career and feared that she would be thrown out. She warned Dorothee to stay calm:

You'll never know how surprised I was to get the news in your telegram this morning. And sorry too. I know how fond one can be of the life in the army, being so fond of it myself, and I don't think I am any more fond of it than you. You sound, in your wire, as though you are keeping cool and sensible about it. Please do, Ducky. Getting excited and going off the deep end because of it will not help matters in the least.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 13.

⁷⁵ Office of the Inspector General, War Department, Investigation of Conditions in the 3d WAC Training Center, 8.

The investigation highlights that the line between what was acceptable and what was not was a constant source of contention for queer soldiers. It also shows that queer soldiers and the military were adept at navigating military culture and those who might be uncomfortable with its influence on the women serving in its ranks. The use of coded language by queer soldiers and the reliance by the military on a psychological evaluation instead of a legal one helped both the soldiers and the military maintain a respectable image to the public.

The Military and Respectability

It was not only queer women who successfully navigated the idea of respectability during the war. The military became adept at it as well. While they were aware that homosexuality was prevalent within the WAC, they possessed little desire to root it out. Like the queer women in its rank, the military also had to maintain an image of respectability, and often times this resulted in a lackluster vigilance of its own policies. Pat Bond, a lesbian WAC veteran who spoke about her experiences in her later years to scholars, said she was shocked at the disregard for potential harassment or rejection displayed by other potential enlistees when she attempted to enlist at the Black Hawk Hotel in Davenport, Iowa. She explained that lesbians showed up “wearing men’s clothes, wearing argyle socks and pin-striped suits and their hair cut just like a man’s with sideburns shaved over the ears-the whole bit.” These women were admitted to the WAC despite their appearance as long as they replied that they had never been in love with another women during the screening process.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 32-33.

The WAC investigation also makes clear that lesbians were a part of WAC life. Mrs. Churchill claims that “some of the Lt. and Sgt. are the ring leaders there” and that her daughter has “told me many others who are practicing this terrible vice.” She goes on to name known lesbians at Ft. Oglethorpe. However the report claims:

The allegations that other persons mentioned in the letter participated in homosexual acts are without support in evidence except by rumor, surmise, and suspicion, which furnish no factual support of such allegations sufficient to warrant inclusion within this report.⁷⁷

Mrs. Churchill’s plethora of names points to the fact that discourse about who was and was not a lesbian was prevalent on the base, but the investigators lack of concern about these rumored women also shows that the army did not feel the need to investigate unless it was a threat to morale.

The openness with which these relationships were carried out is evident in the testimony. Witnesses noted that the relationship between Sgt. Loos and Pvt. Churchill was common knowledge. They claim that Pvt. Churchill followed Sgt. Loos “like a sick puppy” and that “Churchill was in love with Loos.” The report claimed that according to the witnesses:

Pvt. Churchill appeared to be a willing participant with Sgt. Loos and that they fondled each other in public and “carried on much more intimately than I think girls should.” One witness at Patterson Field, Ohio testified to having noticed them to be “too chummy. They were always hugging one another; always had their arms around one another. They didn’t care who was around.”⁷⁸

While the relationship between the two women was common knowledge, their reputations as soldiers was exceptional which points to the fact that the benefits of good soldiers took

⁷⁷ Office of the Inspector General, War Department, Investigation of Conditions in the 3d WAC Training Center, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1944), 3.

⁷⁸ Office of the Inspector General, War Department, Investigation of Conditions in the 3d WAC Training Center, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1944), 4.

precedence over the threat of lesbians. The report spelled out the popularity of Sgt. Loos while also attesting to the capabilities of Pvt. Churchill. It states:

Witnesses testified that Sgt. Loos “has a way of being friendly with us and she has a heart of gold”; she is a “fine worker and is friendly with everybody”; “Sergeant Loos was a friend to all of us, everybody, she was a grand person and she did much for the girls and did everything to boost our morale and that is what we all needed, she was a friend of all the girls.”...Sergeant Loos has the sort of personality that draws one to her. She had a very gay sense of humor and she would display it frequently and she always had a laugh and we needed laughs in basic training. She was the most popular sergeant there and we were glad she was over the second platoon.”...Also, Pvt. Churchill’s company commander at Patterson Field testified that she has had opportunity to observe her conduct and demeanor at Patterson Field and that it has been good.⁷⁹

The reputation as a good soldier, a patriot, and moral booster gave those accused the respectability they needed to overshadow any accusations of sexual perversion. Dorothee Gore, herself a well liked and respected soldier, evaded any charges of homosexuality, and went on to serve in Papua New Guinea before leaving the army.⁸⁰

Masculinity in the WAC

Life on base blurred the lines between femininity and masculinity for all women, and this made it an environment that both helped to hide queer proclivities as well as nourish them. Dorothee’s time at Fort Oglethorpe would be remembered fondly for the rest of her life. This is in large part due to the unique circumstances she found herself in as a queer woman. She operated in a system

⁷⁹ Ibid. 5.

⁸⁰ In her poem entitled “New Guinea Lament”, Dorothee calls being stationed there a “pity” while describing the challenges for soldiers. She ends it with a wish to return stateside. (“New Guinea Lament,” Poem by Dorothee Gore, Box 3, Folder 2, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.)

and culture largely devoid of men. The dichotomy between male and female was much less stringent on the WAC bases, and it was a very welcoming environment for a queer woman. One of Dorothee's own lovers had to re-assure her that she had not fallen prey to the temptation around her at base. She states:

I haven't done anything since you left except go to the movies twice and have one bottle of beer. I do, yes, I went to Chattanooga one afternoon with Scammel to have my shoes fixed. We left around 10:30 am and came back at 1:30 pm so you know we didn't "cat around" any while we were there.⁸¹

Once women had enlisted and were sent to bootcamp, their space was a predominantly female one. Ethel Starbird, a former WAC member, described her experiences showering in the barracks, "With our ages ranging from 20-50 years (the WAC's allowable limits) and shapes reflecting similar diversity, mob showering in multi-fauceted rooms about the size of a single horse stall certainly put us in touch with each other-the surface scrubbed was often not our own."⁸²

Life on base (without men around) made romantic relationships between women more prevalent. Many women were close, and the line of what was considered "abnormal" shifted. Often times, women who were more masculine adopted the "butch" role. Straight women would even flirt with them in an effort to gain attention. The psychiatrist at Ft. Oglethorpe explained that it was natural for women, when men were absent, to express a "hero worship affectionate engagement" with stronger females.⁸³ This psychiatric analysis further proves that social norms were being dictated by the needs and constraints of a nation at war.

⁸¹ Letter, From Marge to Dorothee, April 14, 1943, Box I, Folder 5, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.)

⁸² Ethel Starbird, *When Women First Wore Army Shoes, A First Person Account of Service as a Member of the Women's Army Corps During WWII* (Bloomington: iuniverse, 2010) Chapter 2.

⁸³ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 43-44.

Women's masculinity or lack thereof was essential to the analysis by psychiatrists. When those who had engaged in lesbian affairs were more feminine, they were thought to be the victims of seduction. More masculine lesbians were seen as predatory.⁸⁴ Gender was used by the Fort Oglethorpe psychiatrist, Captain Rost, to explain the relationship between Sgt. Loos and Pvt. Churchill. Captain Rost claimed that "Sgt. Loos took the male role and although never satisfied, was pleased to be the generous giver."⁸⁵

This ideal of masculinity was pervasive in the US military at the time, and it touched not only males, but females serving the military as well. This led to a lesbian subculture that itself adopted this masculine ideal. This began from the moment recruits had their first contact with the army. Pat Bond, a former WAC member, elaborates, "It was just sort of a man's role being in the army...and uh...and it attracted a lot of women I knew who came down for their interviews in drag...wearing men's clothes"⁸⁶ When discussing her own clothing habits, Bond expanded on the pressure to conform to a masculine ideal by stating,

One short period when I was first in the army, I tried it, and I looked so weird. I just don't...I'm not shaped like a man...you know? Yeah, there was a lot of pressure that you should look butch if you were...and of course, you wanted to because you wanted to be identified you know as a dyke. But it was frightening because if you weren't really like that you knew you were acting all the time. And there was no way to counter it so you could really be yourself."⁸⁷

Beyond just dressing like men, lesbians also adopted masculine mannerisms. Bond states

I would...you know...affect how I stood. I learned to walk...so you try to learn to walk like a man...sort of like...(she demonstrates the walk)...you know...with a grim look on your face. Cause that also suggested somehow maleness to

⁸⁴ Hampf, *Release a Man for Combat*, 267.

⁸⁵ Office of the Inspector General, War Department, *Investigation of Conditions in the 3d WAC Training Center, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia*. (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1944), 13.

⁸⁶ Peter Adair, *Word Is Out*.

⁸⁷ Peter Adair, *Word Is Out*.

you...being grim. And I remember you had to learn to stand...And you always stood if possible with one foot up like this [she demonstrates]. And I remember sneaking into the bathroom and putting on cologne because you were allowed to wear old spice after shave lotion. And you had to wear men's jockey shorts which never fit me...it was terrible. So you were always adjusting the damn thing.

This idea of masculinity was noticed as much by the WAC authorities as by the corps members themselves. Lesbians were described as women with male body shapes, male voices, or a male demeanor. One WAC authority stated,

There is always one who acts, walks, and pays attention to the other, the same as a devoted male...for instance, a girl spills a little bit of water on her skirt, and the other is patting her knees, and so forth; lighting her cigarette...just acting like a man.⁸⁸

While the military used “mannish” attributes to categorize lesbians, the lesbians appropriated these images themselves. Women cut their hair to resemble male haircuts as an overt act to attract other women. Lesbians in the military adopted male cultural norms such as clothing, grooming habits, their walk, and the habit of paying when on dates. These lesbians formed the base of the emerging lesbian community.⁸⁹ These women were known as “butches,” and while they faced some harassment, they were still higher in the social hierarchy than effeminate men⁹⁰ showing that masculinity was a more valuable commodity within the military than femininity. Within the WAC, butches were more likely to be leaders and NCOs, and they were also often the object of admiration and hero worship.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Hampf, *Release a Man From Combat*, 264.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁹⁰ Hampf, *Release a Man From Combat*, 268.

⁹¹ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 56.

THE UNIFORM

This masculine perspective was especially tied to the uniform. Michaela Hampf claims that the new “discursive categories for lesbianism in the 1940s were not sodomy, but instead gender disguise and cross dressing.”⁹² This gender analysis of lesbianism is quite common. The first known lesbians in military history were women who served in Missouri’s 15th regiment during the Civil War and dressed as men.⁹³

The WAC uniform was designed by a committee made up of men, and according to WACs such as Ethel Starbird, they “looked it”.⁹⁴ They even used the same pattern for male and female GIs according to Starbird:

Fabricated of the same depressing shade, the blouse (jacket) had for months defied corrective surgery from despairing supply-room seamstresses who snipped and tucked without achieving a proper fit. Shapely occupants, once buttoned in, could barely bend. The maker, as it developed, was still working from patterns proportioned for guy GIs.⁹⁵

⁹² Hampf, *Release a Man From Combat*, 262.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁹⁴ Starbird, *When Women First Wore Army Shoes*, Chapter 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*



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(Pictured are Dorothee Gore and a fellow male soldier in almost identical uniforms. Dorothee is smiling and seems to be very happy and at ease in her attire.)

Beyond just the uniform, women's appearance was not to be overly feminine. They were expected to resemble the masculine ideal from head to toe. Their hair was not allowed to be long as it was required to fall above the collar. Jewelry was discouraged and there was to be no adornment of the saluting hand. Acceptable jewelry was left to wedding sets, a wristwatch, and

⁹⁶ Dorothee with a male soldier wearing similar uniforms. Dorothee Gore papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

dog tags.⁹⁷ These were all jewelry that you would find on men as well as women. Women were treated as the male soldiers in other aspects as well. One such area was nutrition. Starbird states:

Physical demands might have slimmed down a few of our weightier members, had someone somewhere realized that women did not need the same rations as men-3,000 calories a day. By the time this was reduced to 2,000 calories, many had acquired add-on poundage that would remain in place for years to come.⁹⁸

Dorothee Gore and her friends embodied this masculine ideal in many ways. Her images from her time in the WAC depict women who relish the chance to wear what would be traditionally considered masculine clothes. They appear in coats and ties in their military uniform, and they wear their hair short. When they wear civilian clothes, they wear slacks, vests, and button up shirts that you would find men of the time wearing.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Dorothee Gore papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Photographs, Undated, Box 6, Folder 1-4, 6-7, 9, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.



(Dorothee and her fellow WACs pose for a picture. Some are wearing skirts. Some are wearing dresses. A few of the women pose close and display a certain intimacy between themselves. The picture evidences the camaraderie between female soldiers.)



(The picture on the left shows a female soldier wearing military style pantsuit with her hair in a short style. She poses with a baseball bat. Her dress, her interest, and her demeanor of confidence displays her comfort with her perceived masculinity. The ladies on the left also wear a traditional military pantuit and pose confidently.)



(These pictures depict some of the leisure wear worn by the Dorothee and her friends. They are found in slacks, button up shirts, vests, and hats. Their hair is styled short. The close proximity with which they stand and embrace each other is evidence of their physical comfort with one another. The women in both pictures pose in a very masculine manner for the time, and they seem very comfortable in both their attire and their demeanor.)

POST WAR QUEER LIFE

Without the cover of respectability afforded through their participation in the war effort, queer women struggled with life after the war. World War II helped to change the public

¹⁰⁰ Pictures of Dorothee and friends from the WAC. Dorothee Gore papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

discussion of homosexuality. The psychiatric model used by the military gave the war generation both language and concepts by which to define the “homosexual” and his or her personality. The large population transfers to urban areas and the network of gay social life born of the war helped to proliferate gay bars in post war America. The idea that homosexuals constituted a minority population within the United States began to be discussed.¹⁰¹ This growth and visibility offered hope to gay Americans, but this visibility also brought them to the attention of the military, the government, and the media.¹⁰²

After the war, America turned to the ideas of conformity and the nuclear family in order to return to normalcy. Marriages increased 50% the first full year following the war and continued at a 20% increase from prewar levels for the next 10 years. This time also ushered in the “baby boom” in which over 40 million babies were born during the 1950s in the US. America had emerged from WWII as an economic superpower. Jobs were plentiful, and white middle class families owned houses and cars. The nuclear family was thriving in post war America.¹⁰³

While the war abroad had ended, and Americans were brought home, the idea of the enemy changed. It was no longer found in foreign militaries in Europe and Asia. The enemies that Americans feared were believed to be among them. The enemies were those who attempted to subvert the American way of life from within its own society. The greatest threat was seen as Communism as it was a direct challenge to the capitalist American way of life. Soon, homosexuality was tied to communism, for as surely as communism was believed to upend the economic structure of society, homosexuality would be seen as upending the family structure. While the psychiatric community had been instrumental during the war years in helping to shape

¹⁰¹ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 256-257.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 257.

¹⁰³ Jane Mersky Leder, *Thanks for the Memories: Love, Sex, and World War II* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2006) 156.

the homosexual identity, they had also shown reluctance for punitive measures. This changed after the war, as psychiatry became one of the harshest critics of gay Americans. With the help of the medical community, twenty-one states enacted laws that punished homosexuality as a sexual psychopathic condition from 1947 to 1955. These laws allowed states to institutionalize homosexuals based solely on their sexual identity without any crimes having been committed.¹⁰⁴ In 1952, the psychiatric community officially classified homosexuality as a sociopathic personality disorder.¹⁰⁵ Post-war gay society “considered psychiatrists to be the enemy rather than allies.” Thus, both the medical and psychiatric community became a focus for the emerging homosexual movement as it sought change and acceptance.¹⁰⁶ The media began to portray lesbian women as seducers and recruiters of young women into their lifestyle.¹⁰⁷ Society cast them as sexual perverts intent on destroying the American family unit.

Following the war, all the branches of the military were consolidated under the Department of Defense (DOD), and the DOD sought to create a uniform policy for dealing with homosexuals now that they were not hindered by the needs of war. The policy stated, “homosexual, personnel, irrespective of sex, should not be permitted to serve in any branch of the Armed Forces in any capacity, and prompt separation of known homosexuals from the Armed Forces is mandatory.”¹⁰⁸ This led to an increased rate of discharge of homosexual personnel. Following the war, the rate of discharge more than tripled what it had been during the

¹⁰⁴ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 258.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 259.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 259.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 259.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 260-261.

war. This rate continued throughout the 1950's except in the sharp decrease during the Korean War in which the military once again placed military expediency above social mores.¹⁰⁹

This post war life was particularly brutal for lesbians. Following the war, women who had entered the work force in vast numbers were encouraged to return to the home and to their families. Unmarried women who chose to remain in the military during peacetime stood out as deviant and were targeted by being stereotyped as lesbians. Navy officials admitted in the 1950s that the discharge rate for lesbians was much higher than that of gay males.¹¹⁰ In the 1950s, all the major American institutions came out as vocally and virulently opposed to homosexuality. These institutions included the military, the government, the medical community, and houses of faith.

DOROTHEE AFTER THE WAR

Following her deployment to Dutch New Guinea, Dorothee left the WAC. Her transition did not come easy. Both her deployment and her return to civilian life cut her off from lovers, friends, and the over all support system she found in the WAC. This was a common theme both in her own writings and letters she received. Her friend Betty described her own difficulty at being separated from her lover Smitty when she stated, "Forgive the brevity, Dorothy. Physically, I'm fine, but mentally, oh so low. Smitty has left for overseas & I feel as though an essential portion of me has gone too. You just don't even realize it at first."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 262.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 262-263.

¹¹¹ Letter, From Betty to Dorothy, May 12, 1945, Box 1, Folder 7, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Dorothee's own writings focused greatly on the past. Her own poem, "Echo of a Song," spoke to a love that she can only find in memories. It reads:

Why should I not cling to the exquisite beauty/ Of enchanted dreams that slipped so quietly/ Down the hallways of time, heeding not the uncertain/ Horde of years creeping up the ladder of Eternity?

You came in the brief beauty of an Autumn day/ Eons and eons ago/ I held you close to my breast/ Many,...oh, many an hour/ The hours slipped by and the long days followed/ Then the weeks and the months tumbled past/ Time flew on: O, How could I know/ There would be a turning!

I found you in the hush and beauty of Fall/ and Lost you to the whirlwinds of Spring!/ Gentle is the memory of years that have flown/Tender my thoughts, still...of you.

In the quiet beauty of Fall/ You were the glory and the essence of Spring/ You were the unfettered laughter/ That sprang from my startled lips/ The golden hours I spent with you were precious gems/ In days long past/ You are the echo of a song, dear/ Once I sang from my heart/ You are the immortal image of a dream/ Hung on the walls of time!¹¹²

She ended up developing a problem with alcohol soon after returning to civilian life. She began to write a lot during this time, and her writings expressed a longing for the past and happier times. She seemed depressed and often described herself as lonely. She also exhibited some reluctance about her sexuality at different points in her later life.

She kept in touch with some of her friends from the WAC, and attended WAC alumni events throughout her life. Much of her correspondence after the war was with a woman by the name of Jan. Jan, a married woman who often wrote on stationary personalized with "Mrs. John Lorenzen,"¹¹³ and Dorothee both expressed their love and devotion for each other for many, many years. While, they accepted that they would never be able to live a life together, they

¹¹² "Echo of a Song," Poem by Dorothee Gore, Box 3, Folder 1, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹¹³ Letter, From Jan to Dorothee, January 28, 1954, Box 1, Folder 11, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

found a deep relationship in their exchange of letters and newspaper clippings. In a letter from 1954, Jan stated:

Darling,

Yes, they were precious hours...to hold...and to cherish...until we meet again! And they have been precious years...too! Today, my heart is heavy... This is just to say “Hi-there”! And to welcome you to your new one...and to wish you and my four beloved little friends joyous healthy, happiness, love...all the good things life has to offer. I believe you will have them all...now. The door has opened upon a new ‘era’.. a new, and I am sure, happier way-of-life for you. For this...I, too, am happy in the midst of my utter, desolate loneliness...because a good and true friend has gone a little too far away to reach very often and or very fast. With visits, I mean...of course... This carries all of your love, dear, for always...and always!
Jan...How much can the heart stand?¹¹⁴

In another letter from the same year she stated:

How much loneliness and longing can the heart take, and still continue to beat?...Well, Hal Boyle is right in saying, “In a gray universe it is foolish to yearn for perfect pleasures, untainted happiness. Wisdom comes with the realization that every Hell has its ounce of heaven, every heaven its pound of hell.” The truth of it tears at my soul!... If only I could write all that is my heart...¹¹⁵

Dorothee returns Jan’s affections and described herself as “lost without [her].” She commented on the time and place they found each other when she stated in a poem dedicated to Jan, “In this world that has no song to sing!/ In this wild and mad confusion/ So alien to all we knew...and loved/ The darts of madness, my soul will sting/ And, oh...the sad illusion.”¹¹⁶

Once they returned to civilian life, queer soldiers continued to be vigilant about what was found in letters exchanged. However, the consequences from family and friends could often be more severe than from the military, which added an extra stress to both romantic and platonic

¹¹⁴ Letter, From Jan to Dorothee, January 28, 1954, Box 1, Folder 11, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹¹⁵ Letter, From Jan to Dorothee, September 11, 1954, Box 1 Folder 11, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹¹⁶ “To J.R.L,” Poem by Dorothee Gore, 1975, Box 3, Folder 1, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

queer relationships. In a letter from 1960 addressed to Dorothee from her WAC friend Smitty, Smitty warned that her letters are susceptible to being read by her mother and that the consequences of incriminating evidence were troubling. She stated:

So much for that! Mom has been sort of bitchy with me since your last visit. She expects me to read every line of your letters. It isn't easy-as you know. If I don't tear them up as soon as I'm finished I know she'll be going through every 'looking' place there is in the room the minute I'm gone. And the letters you've been writing recently are not to be sneezed at! To say the least! I just tell her it's the same old crap-and tear them up! Let's face it-I have to tell her something-so I blame it all on Dawn, not the basic facts, of course, but the over all situation with Jan & John. Mom also made the nasty crack-"I wonder what you do to these women that they're so crazy about you"! I told her she should wash her mind out with soap.... P.S. next time you write please don't mention anything I said in this episode. Will write again soon, Smitty"¹¹⁷

Smitty also made it clear in her letter that alcohol was a large part of lesbian life after the war. She wrote:

Gladys sent me a few buck of course. I'm drinking it up. Went out last night and got drunk-and started early again today. In fact I'm not quite sober right now.... You didn't mention your sore head in the first two letters you sent. Mom was worried about it. I figured it was more from drinking than from falling. All I remember is hearing a noise and seeing you on the floor with your head against the wall. I tried to help you up but you said you were all right and could make it yourself. Hope you're feeling better by now. You must have gone out for the wine. I never buy quarts-for some obscure reason!¹¹⁸

Like before the war, after the war, the only spaces for lesbians to publicly congregate and express their sexuality were in gay bars. This led to a social scene that was highly dependent on alcohol, and has long been seen as a cause of alcoholism in gay and lesbian Americans. The trauma of oppression and living in the closet also led to a high rate of alcoholism within the lesbian community.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Letter, from Smitty to Dorothee, Box 1, Folder 13, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ AA and the Gay and Lesbian Alcoholic, http://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/P-32_AAandtheGayLesbianAlcoholic.pdf, accessed February 24, 2015.

Even though the letter is sent 15 years after Dorothee ended her service in the WAC, it made clear that it is still through these relationships that Dorothee sought to find love and happiness. Smitty has to rebuke Dorothee's efforts at a romantic relationship because she loves another woman from their WAC days (Gladys).¹²⁰ While the war had ended for some time, the security and companionship these women found during this time still lived on and created lasting queer ties and communities.

During the 1960's, it seems that Dorothee began to struggle some with her sexuality. She exchanged letters with a religious friend, which suggested that Dorothee was trying to avoid lesbian relationships. Her friend, S.M. Lurana, chastised her for the fact that she was "grieved" to learn that Dorothee had "weakened when in New Jersey." She also voiced frustration that she had been lied to about Dorothee's presence with another woman. She encouraged Dorothee to "Keep up your faith and courage now, and no more slips, dear." And she thanked Dorothee for her confessions over her relapses while reminding her that she let down God. She signed her letters "in J.C." The J.C. stands for Jesus Christ, and this friendship was obviously one built upon religious faith, which was an important part of Dorothee's life in her later years.¹²¹ This faith, while strong, also seemed to be a point of contention for her as she ages. She went on to look into the treatment of sexual dysfunction¹²². It was not clear that she ever takes steps to "cure" or "treat" her homosexuality, but she was aware of those who saw homosexual tendencies as a psychological disorder that they could fix.

¹²⁰ Letter, from Smitty to Dorothee, Box 1, Folder 13, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹²¹ Letters, From S.M. Lurana to Dorothee, 1963, Box I, Folder 13, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹²² Pamphlet, Treatment of Sexual Dysfunction, Undated, Box 4, Folder 5, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Dorothee not only struggled with her sexuality, she also struggled with alcohol after leaving the WAC. In one journal entry, she made it clear that her alcoholism impeded her life.

She wrote:

I took the wrong road in April 1945-and have never been able to put myself off of it. I did not mind so much- until I realized I had also lost you- you and I- as we once were. When I came back from overseas-not only had I changed- but you had also- and try as hard as I could to reach you- t- try to make you understand I could not- and in failing to reach you- I first did not give a good damn about living-and so I turned more and more to drink- and with ugly memories all messed up inside of me- I became an ugly –vile drinker and get in one damn kind of mess after another... I will fight my way back up. It will be hard. But I can and will do it. It is just the first and foremost I must bury all of the past-not first part of it- but all of it. And start from here- from now and look forward-my eyes-and mind-forever-on-tomorrow!¹²³

Dorothee never married, and she never settled down with another woman to share her life. She became a devoted aunt and eventually came out to her niece who preserved and donated her writings, letters, and memorabilia. Although, this was the only family member she ever confided in about her homosexuality. She worked as an employee of the Department of Motor Vehicles until she retired.¹²⁴ She became an animal lover, and spent much time advocating for animal rights and collecting newspaper clippings about cats and dogs. For a time, she investigated the possibilities of UFO sightings¹²⁵. Throughout the rest of her life, her experiences in the WAC stayed with her. She collected newspaper articles on the WAC in the years to come and followed its progress. She attended reunions and was a member of the alumni association. She collected newspaper clippings of Greta Garbo and other famous actresses, and she took great

¹²³ Journal Entry, By Dorothee Gore, Box 3, Folder 4, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹²⁴ “Dorothee Gore Collection Finding Aid,” The New York Public Library, accessed November 15, 2014, http://archives.nypl.org/uploads/collection/pdf_finding_aid/gore.pdf.

¹²⁵ Scrapbook, Dorothee Gore’s Scrapbook, Undated, Box 8, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

pride in women who existed in male dominated spheres such as golf, tennis, and judgeships. Her journals were full of clippings of the accomplishments of other women, and her interest in them pointed to a continued attention to women who broke down the barriers of society. She seemed to identify in some way with these women. It became clear when analyzing her letters, journals, and scrapbooks that serving in the WAC stood as the formative experience of her life. She looked back on it fondly and as a special and unique time in her life that was filled with romance and friendship. The access to other women, particularly queer women, was the greatest of her life. And, it seems to be the time at which she most felt like she belonged. She took that sense of belonging with her for the rest of her life both through involvement in reunions as well as through her memories. Her Obituary lists her as Dorothee “Sarge” Elizabeth Gore¹²⁶, and she was buried with full military honors.¹²⁷

CONCLUSION

Dorothee, and others lesbians like her, had their lesbian identity greatly shaped by the war. World War II was a brief respite from the harsh realities of what it meant to be an American lesbian in mid 20th century. Lesbians, like Dorothee Gore, found a safe haven in the WAC during WWII. Not only did it allow them a chance to explore the idea of masculinity and sexuality, it also gave them the cover of respectability to do these things. Wearing masculine

¹²⁶ Obituary, For Dorothee Elizabeth Gore, Undated newspaper clipping, Box 4, Folder 1, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹²⁷ Dorothee Gore Collection Finding Aid,” The New York Public Library, accessed November 15, 2014, http://archives.nypl.org/uploads/collection/pdf_finding_aid/gore.pdf.

clothing, working instead of being a housewife, and surrounding themselves with women instead of men were seen as part of the fabric of American life at the time since they were helping the Americans defeat the enemy abroad. They were being patriotic, not subversive. This cover of respectability was aided by the fact that women, both gay and straight, were participating both in the WAC and in similar war efforts across the United States. This made it more difficult to single out, stereotype, and stigmatize lesbians. This also gave lesbians greater access to spaces in which to perform these explorations and greater access to individuals like themselves and those who supported and understood them.

Dorothee Gore lived from 1908 until 1982.¹²⁸ She died before homosexuals enjoyed many of the privileges that accompany modern queer life. She could not serve openly in the military without fear of being kicked out. She could not marry another woman. When she turned on the television, queer characters were either nonexistent or highly stereotyped.

However, her service in the WAC gave her a sense of a thriving queer life that was also a part of the American mainstream war effort. It was during this time of her life when she experienced a great sense of belonging and possibility. She was surrounded by other women, and she formed romantic and platonic friendships. Dorothee romanticized this time for the rest of her life. Looking back in one journal entry, she recalls one night with another woman that almost could have resulted in her dismissal. She remembers the story:

And darling-the night-you left me-thinking I had fallen asleep and when I awoke(I WAS asleep but your going awakened me-I felt the lonely emptiness of the room-without you!) I went looking for you-because- I was so afraid you would not get back to camp in time- and the M.P.s picked me up- and all I could talk about was- if you had gotten safely back to camp. That was all I was worried about!! Dear Captain S. really was a swell egg! Could have thrown the whole book at me!! But Captain S. understood. I will never forget-and will be forever grateful. So much has-too much has come between us- you and

¹²⁸ Dorothee Gore Collection Finding Aid,” The New York Public Library, accessed November 15, 2014, http://archives.nypl.org/uploads/collection/pdf_finding_aid/gore.pdf.

I, but once again- once again I hope: I shall never forget you. Never. Never escape your memory woven about the beautiful things of life.”¹²⁹

This entry sums up what made that time special and unique for Dorothee. She spent a romantic night with another woman, and when someone in authority found out, they “understood” her and accepted her. Life, then, went on as normal.

¹²⁹ Journal Entry, By Dorothee Gore, Box 3, Folder 4, MssCol 4799, Dorothee Gore Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

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