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Gender, Duty and Change: An Oral History of the Women's Royal Army Corps (1949-1992)

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ABSTRACT

Founded in 1949, the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) was the first permanent peacetime corps for women, yet little has been written about it. As part of its mission to uncover unexplored chapters in British military history, the charity Legasee Educational Trust interviewed thirty women who served in the WRAC. Their personal stories now form part of Legasee's video archive. This article seeks to use these interviews to explore the WRAC's value and unique qualities. To consider the opportunities it gave, the constraints it imposed, and the impact of disbandment in 1992, when this women-only corps was consigned to history.

Introduction

'In those days it was very, very difficult for a woman to prove herself. But I did'.¹

These are the words of Warrant Officer Class 1 Patricia Rosewell, reflecting on her long, rewarding and varied career in the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC). In a similar vein, when considering what defines a veteran, Sergeant Jane Fountain tells, 'I take pride in the fact that even though I wasn't called to pay the ultimate sacrifice, I was there, and it could have happened and I put myself forward for that'.² Indeed, it is

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DOI: [10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1959](https://doi.org/10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1959)

¹Patricia Rosewell, 'A Veteran Interview with Patricia 'Budgie' Rosewell', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 30 January 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/patricia-budgie-rosewell/>. Accessed 24 March 2025.

²Jane Fountain, 'A Veteran Interview with Jane Fountain', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 4 October 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/jane-fountain/>. Accessed 25 March 2025.

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important to remember that fifty-nine members of the WRAC died in service.³ Yet, a leading journalist described them as 'a genteel outfit' whose members led 'an uneventful life being useful and supportive' having no desire to 'be side by side with men in the front line'.⁴ Moreover, the Corps motto, *Suaviter in Modo, Fortiter in Re* (Gentle in Manner, Resolute in Deed), which suggests an assertive, but tactful and diplomatic attitude, clearly differentiated them from male forces.⁵ Proposed by Dr Edgar Feuchtwanger, who lectured at both the WRAC School of Instruction (at Liphook) and the WRAC College (at Camberley) for many years, it was felt to be 'an appropriate reminder of the aim and spirit of our Corps'.⁶ So, what was the reality? What was it really like to serve in the first permanent peacetime corps for women, and why is it important that we remember the WRAC?

In 2024, with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the charity Legasee Educational Trust, whose aim is to uncover unexplored chapters of military history, filmed interviews with thirty women who served in the WRAC. Their voices and personal stories are now preserved as part of a major addition to Legasee's video archive. As Colonel Ali Brown states, while writers have focused on the work of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) in the Second World War, 'hardly anything on the WRAC existed for a long time, and nobody really on a broader stage knows about them'.⁷ This oral history project sought to change that. By capturing details of the women's lived experiences that would otherwise be lost, an invaluable archive of new material providing unique insights into life in the WRAC has been created. Each interview captures a chronological record of service, book-ended with questions about early life, family, and post-military transition. This format enables service experiences to be compared. Further questions probe individual roles with a focus on personal experiences. This article seeks to use these interviews to explore the value and unique qualities of this female only corps. It considers the opportunities it opened up, as well as the constraints it imposed. In addition, it draws on the results of a veteran's survey carried out by Legasee at the WRAC Association's Grand Reunion, held in Cardiff in March 2025. This Likert scale survey was devised to gauge the women's views on issues including weapons training, disbandment and the WRAC's

³National Army Museum, 'Breaking Boundaries'

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/breaking-boundaries>. Accessed 12 March 2025.

⁴Kate Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004), pp. 215, pp. 231-2.

⁵Editor, 'Corps Motto, Suaviter in Modo, Fortiter in Re', *The Lioness*, February 1975, p. 20.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ali Brown, 'A Veteran Interview with Ali Brown', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 17 December 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/ali-brown/?t=2197>. Accessed 25 March 2025.

legacy. The article concludes by examining how the women felt when the corps disbanded in 1992, at which time, while still largely restricted to support and medical positions, women were absorbed into the rest of the Army.⁸

The WRAC was founded on 1 February 1949, under the Army Act 1948, 'to provide replacements for officers and men in such employment as may be specified by the Army Council from time to time'.⁹ During the Second World War, the ATS 'proved that women were an invaluable resource to the British Army', and prompted by the contributions women had made, the WRAC was formed.¹⁰ The jobs it initially offered were mainly administrative, with women employed in roles including drivers, cooks, store women and stewardesses. They were completely excluded from combatant positions, with no weapons or field training.¹¹ As Lance Corporal Judy Hasnip who served in the mid-1960s recalls, the trades available to women were 'very very restricted'.¹² Indeed, from the start, Major General Richard Hull, Director of Staff at the War Office, made the distinction plain. Asserting that 'it would be psychologically unsound and an expensive waste of equipment, ammunition and training time to train women in the use of personal arms' and that 'it is still the soldier's duty to protect womenfolk whatever they are wearing', Major General Hull clearly regarded WRAC members first and foremost as women, not military personnel.¹³ The recruitment poster below from 1968 (Figure 1), with images of women in support, administration and driving roles, alludes to the limitations on women's trades in the British Army at that time. Yet, with its pictures of yachting and leisure activities in the sunshine, it also hints at offering more opportunity than a typical office role. Something that, as we shall see, many WRAC recruits relished.

⁸National Army Museum, 'A Timeline of Women in the Army'

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/timeline-women-army>. Accessed 7 October 2025.

⁹WRAC Association, 'History' <https://wraca.org.uk/history/>. Accessed 10 June 2025.

¹⁰National Army Museum, 'Auxiliary Territorial Service'

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/auxiliary-territorial-service>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

¹¹Christopher Dandeker and Mary Wechsler Segal, 'Gender Integration in Armed Forces', *Armed Forces & Society*, 23, 1 (Fall 1996), pp. 29-47, p. 31.

¹²Judy Hasnip, 'A Veteran Interview with Judy Hasnip', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 20 November 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/judy-hasnip/>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

¹³Kathleen Sherit, *Women on the Frontline*, (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2020), pp. 54-55.

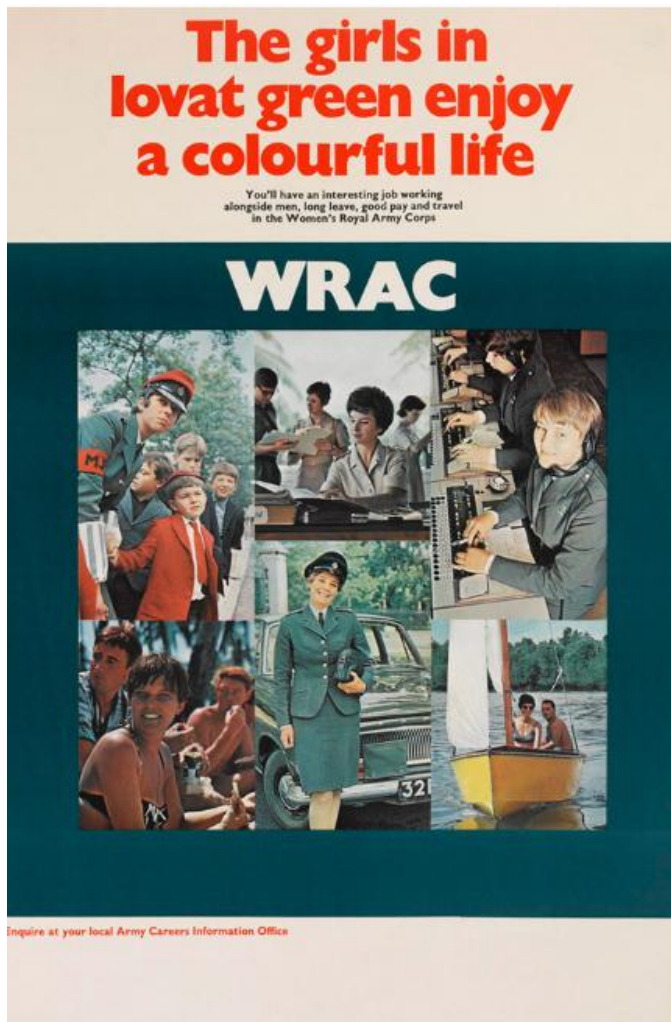


Figure 1: WRAC Recruiting poster, 1968¹⁴

Beginnings, Opportunities and Limitations

Despite the limited range of roles open to them, the corps offered women their first opportunity to join the regular army in peacetime. It was a necessary first step and enabled them to serve in a range of capacities that had previously been closed. Widely accepted social norms in the mid-twentieth century determined that women could

¹⁴Crown Copyright, National Army Museum, Study Collection.

not, and indeed should not be deployed in combat, so any acceptance of women serving in the forces was always going to be qualified. Moreover, most women who served at this time did not want the same roles as men. As Corporal Pat Pressler, an experimental assistant in gunnery between 1957 and 1960, explains, 'I don't think I would have joined had it been today's circumstances ... we didn't train with the men. We were treated as women and had concessions, you know, to our physical capability'.¹⁵ And speaking of how different life in the army is for women today, Private Jenny Wing, who served in the early 1970s, recognises 'I couldn't do what they do like handling a rifle, I've done rifle shooting but not actually to go on exercises'.¹⁶ In the early years women generally accepted and indeed, often wanted the constraints. They were primarily looking for something new and exciting, and the army offered this.

Women often saw joining the army as a way to escape the humdrum lives they saw other women living, to learn new skills, and to push the boundaries. Sergeant Sandy Acathan, who joined in 1958, described the 'adventure' the WRAC offered, and Lance Corporal Lieann Andrew, who joined thirty years later, wanted to 'get out there' because she had 'a zest for life'.¹⁷ The WRAC offered a chance to escape cultural expectations. To travel, to belong, and to do something different from the path many women traditionally followed. Whilst many remained in Britain, Judy Hasnip had the opportunity to serve overseas. She was posted to Aden in Yemen during the 'Aden Emergency' of the 1960s and witnessed first-hand the reality of a combat zone. Despite only serving for three years, she reflects on how different her life may have been had she not enlisted, and the lasting impact the WRAC had

I would have met a local lad, we'd gone on the council housing list, and probably had two point four children, probably never left the town except to go on holiday. So, when you compare that to what I did just in that short space of time and the repercussions it's had in my life, all for the good.¹⁸

¹⁵Pat Pressler, 'A Veteran Interview with Pat Pressler', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 20 November 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/pat-pressler/?t=2342>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

¹⁶Jenny Wing, 'A Veteran Interview with Jenny Wing', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 29 April 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/jenny-wing/>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

¹⁷Sandy Acathan, 'A Veteran Interview with Sandy Acathan', interview by Martin Bisiker. Legasee, 15 August 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/sandy-acathan/>. Accessed March 26, 2025; Lieann Andrew, 'A Veteran Interview with Lieann Andrew', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 3 October 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/lieann-andrew/>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

¹⁸Interview with Judy Hasnip

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Many interviewees spoke of the pride they felt at their passing out parades, their sentiments summed up by Major Janet Brodie-Murphy who reflected, 'it's amazing, you feel part of something really big, something important'.¹⁹ Lance Corporal Dorothy Apps, who played cornet in the WRAC Staff Band from 1956 to 1961, describes regularly playing at passing out parades, as well as having the opportunity to travel to Holland, Germany, Cyprus and Libya with the band, something unimaginable in civilian life.²⁰ The Army gave women confidence, and self-belief. Lance Corporal Margaret Lee, who served in the 1970s, reflects, 'I didn't realise at the time I was doing things a lot of people don't experience. And the confidence it gave me, it changed my outlook on life'.²¹

Members of the WRAC were primarily based in the UK or with the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR). BAOR was the military force that occupied and administered the British Zone of Germany from 1945 to 1955, when the Federal Republic of Germany came into existence, and the British land force tasked with defending the North German Plain from the armies of the Warsaw Pact.²² Some, however, despite the non-combatant policy, were given the opportunity to serve in locations across the globe. Ali Brown stresses the importance of telling these stories to challenge the perception that 'the moment things became 'interesting', the women were left behind'.²³ As she explains, 'there are lots of WRAC soldiers and officers who had really interesting times and at a time of the Aden emergency, the Cyprus emergency, world events, all the world events there were WRAC there, and those are the stories that just haven't been told'.²⁴ Colonel Audrey Smith recounts her posting to Singapore, where, as a staff officer, she was involved in writing 'three withdrawal plans' and working with locally enlisted personnel from the Singapore Malay Regiment.²⁵ She also served in

¹⁹Janet Brodie-Murphy, 'A Veteran Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 14 February 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/janet-brodie-murphy/>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

²⁰Dorothy Apps, 'A Veteran Interview with Dorothy Apps', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 2 October 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/dorothy-apps/>. Accessed 24 March 2025.

²¹Margaret Lee, 'A Veteran Interview with Margaret Lee', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 19 November 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/margaret-lee/>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

²²*The Women's Royal Army Corps, 1949-1992*, (Winchester: WRAC Association, 2009), p. 27.

²³Interview with Ali Brown; Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage*, p. 231.

²⁴Interview with Ali Brown.

²⁵Audrey Smith, 'A Veteran Interview with Audrey Smith', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 27 November 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/audrey-smith/>. Accessed 27 March 2025.

Cyprus in the 1970s following the Turkish invasion. Lieann Andrew, who was attached to the Royal Corps of Signals, volunteered to go to the Falkland Islands in 1990, where she spent four months, and in early 1991 she was posted to Cyprus where she worked at a listening post.²⁶ There were also some rather unusual postings. In 1981, Major Rowena Patrick travelled to Brunei, where she spent almost three years.²⁷ The Sultan, looking to promote the recruitment of women into the Brunei army, sought support from the British Army, and Patrick was part of a small team, funded by the Sultan, who founded the Women's Army in Brunei and trained new recruits.²⁸ In contrast to the perception of life in the WRAC being banal and dull, for some, the army opened up exciting opportunities and unique experiences that would not have been available to women in civilian employment.

However, as society began to change around them in the 1970s, the army was slow to adapt. Well-educated women were attracted to the WRAC but left when it failed to offer the opportunities they wanted and, indeed, expected. As Kathleen Sherit explains in her book *Women on the Front Line*, the problem was that unlike men, 'women's mainstream employment was as a woman in a female corps, rather than in specialist work'.²⁹ An organisation that had offered freedom and excitement, was, for many, now imposing barriers. When the WRAC was founded, a non-combatant policy was central to its philosophy. This meant that women could not be employed in theatres of war, postings overseas were limited, and as a result, 'the best jobs were closed to women'.³⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Sue Westlake, who as commander of 29 Company in Rheindahlen Germany received an overseas posting, recalls that even in the mid-1980s, despite there being 27 trades open to women, restrictions on postings still existed.³¹ Furthermore, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, designed to 'eradicate discrimination against women in the workplace and other areas of life', excluded the Armed Forces altogether (s. 85(4)), only changing to exclusion on the basis of 'combat effectiveness' in 1994.³² Recognising that change was needed, a report was

²⁶Interview with Lieann Andrew.

²⁷Rowena Patrick, 'A Veteran Interview with Rowena Patrick', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 27 December 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/rowena-patrick/?t=0>. Accessed 22 April 2025.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Sherit, *Frontline*, p. 50.

³⁰Ibid., p. 60.

³¹Sue Westlake, 'A Veteran Interview with Sue Westlake', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 9 May 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/sue-westlake/>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

³²The University of Edinburgh, 'Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the creation of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC)'

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commissioned in the 1970s to consider the future of the WRAC. It proposed two employment pathways: one for women working solely in the WRAC, and another for women, who whilst still cap-badged to the WRAC, were able to work in other parts of the army where they could compete with men.³³ However, even those women who served with other corps were still excluded from any role that could come into direct contact with the enemy, those whose primary purpose was to kill, or those which demanded physical work.³⁴ For the women of the WRAC, significant constraints remained.

Careers and Operational Experience

Despite the non-combatant policy, the army was forced to accept that there were some tasks in operational areas that could not be carried out by men. In these circumstances it suited them to deploy women, and they deviated from their principles. However, significant constraints remained, and women's ability to operate effectively was severely hampered by army policies. In 1972, during the 'Troubles', 181 Provost Company WRAC was formed, and women began to be deployed to Northern Ireland to assist in searching females at checkpoints (Figure 2) and during house searches to prevent accusations of inappropriate behaviour against male personnel.³⁵ They worked alongside women from the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), who became known as the 'Greenfinches'. In contrast to the WRAC, Greenfinches were fully integrated into the UDR from the start.³⁶ Nevertheless, whether a Greenfinch or a member of the WRAC, all women were excluded from carrying weapons. As Rowena Patrick, who joined the WRAC in 1969, explains, the policy brought about 'nonsensical' situations, where, for example, a Provost Non-commissioned Officer (NCO) could be out on patrol and 'the man she was with had a weapon and she didn't'.³⁷ In her article 'Of hockey sticks and Sten guns: British auxiliaries and their weapons in the Second World War', Corinna Peniston-Bird reveals the idiocy of unarmed women serving alongside armed men was nothing new.³⁸ She refers to the testimonies of women who, armed only with a pick-axe handle and a whistle, stood

<https://www.genderequalitiesat50.ed.ac.uk/timeline/sex-discrimination-act-1975/>.

Accessed 22 January 2025.

³³Sherit, *Frontline*, p. 147.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Women's Royal Army Corps, 1949-1992*, pp. 30-31.

³⁶National Army Museum, 'The Ulster Defence Regiment'

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/ulster-defence-regiment>. Accessed 18 February 2025.

³⁷Interview with Rowena Patrick.

³⁸Peniston-Bird, Corinna, 'Of Hockey Sticks and Sten Guns: British Auxiliaries and their Weapons in the Second World War', *Women's History Magazine*, 76 (2014), pp. 13-22, p. 18.

guard alongside men armed with rifles, while others had their weapons removed when the male soldiers left their post.³⁹



Figure 2: WRAC Corporal Searching Shoppers – Londonderry 1973.⁴⁰

The restriction on carrying weapons fulfilled a perceived need to satisfy societal demands to keep women safe, and, as Hannah West explains, maintain a ‘negotiated gender order’, which sustained women as ‘compliant and controlled but also tolerates their limited agency and resistance, in order to satisfy a military need for servicewomen’s war labour on the ‘front line’.⁴¹ In practical terms, it resulted in

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰© Crown copyright reproduced under delegated authority from The Keeper of Public Records. Image: IWM (MH 30544).

⁴¹Hannah West, ‘A Negotiated Gender Order: British Army Control of Servicewomen in ‘Front Line’ Counterinsurgency, 1948–2014’ *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 16 (2) (2023), pp. 163–85, p. 164.

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women being subordinated to male colleagues and created the need for them to be constantly escorted, a situation which led to acrimonious relationships. Sergeant Diane Pratt recalls a particularly unpleasant incident when she realised the 'dog' being talked about was her because the male soldiers resented having to escort her every time she went beyond the gate.⁴² Pratt retaliated and was subsequently accepted, but she recalls that 'women got a lot of stick inside, and outside the camp'.⁴³ Based on the belief that, unlike a man, a woman would not be openly attacked, women were also required to wear their standard A-line skirts, which in theory made it easier to distinguish them from men. Yet as Pratt observed, 'nobody told the IRA that, they did shoot at us'.⁴⁴ Indeed, Margaret Lee, a hairdresser by trade, recalls a lucky escape, when she was covered in 'all this grey debris', when the buildings behind where she was buying supplies were blown up.⁴⁵ Her story illustrates how, regardless of trade, all WRAC members were first and foremost soldiers. Women carried out dangerous and demanding work in Northern Ireland including tasks that male soldiers were unable to do. They were an integral part of the 'front-line' force, representing the British government's agenda. Yet, through no fault of their own, gendered army policies meant they were seen as a liability, were put at unnecessary personal risk, and indeed, also put their male colleagues in potentially dangerous situations.

In 1981, the Secretary for Defence announced a significant change in policy. It had been decided to bring the WRAC in line with other NATO forces, and allow women to train in, carry and use firearms.⁴⁶ Some inroads into challenging the 'combat taboo', a deep-seated cultural, social and ideological resistance to women serving in direct combat roles, had finally been made. Initially weapons training was provided on an individual basis in areas it was deemed necessary, and in 1984 weapons training was introduced into the student officers and officer cadets programme at Sandhurst.⁴⁷ In his book *Women in Khaki*, Roy Terry comments that the policy received a mixed reception. Some senior WRAC officers protested, others praised the move.⁴⁸ The Legasee interviewees gave examples of some level of objection to the policy, but on balance it seems that it was generally accepted in a positive light. Sue Westlake, who received her weapon training in 1981 in Berlin, ten years after her commissioning,

⁴²Diane Pratt, 'A Veteran Interview with Diane Pratt', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 13 March 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/diane-pratt/>. Accessed 27 March 2025.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Interview with Margaret Lee.

⁴⁶Roy Terry, *Women in Khaki: the story of the British woman soldier*, (London: Columbus Books, 1988), p. 217.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 218.

⁴⁸Ibid.

states, 'I wasn't bothered whether I was weapon trained or not, but the younger girls were very keen, very keen [to do it]'.⁴⁹ Even after women were weapons trained in the 1980s the 'no weapons' policy in Northern Ireland remained in place. Driver Katherine McMullin, who was posted to Northern Ireland in the early 1990s tells, 'even though I was weapons trained I would have to go out every day and do my job without a weapon'.⁵⁰ Asked whether most women would have liked to carry weapons early in their careers, Rowena Patrick cited a friend who refused to carry weapons, saying 'that's not what I signed up for'.⁵¹ However, she went on to say that most women thought the non-combatant policy held them back, and consequently they welcomed the change.⁵² This view is backed up by a survey carried out at the WRAC Grand Reunion in which over seventy percent of those who responded agreed that weapon training was a positive development.⁵³

Whilst things were changing, and opportunities were increasing, for some the wheels continued to move frustratingly slowly. Crucially, postings to combat zones were still restricted. Ali Brown recalls being 'eternally grateful' to the Commander who challenged the rules and allowed her to be deployed to the First Gulf War in 1990 in the role of Staff Officer Grade 3 Artillery Logistics with the rest of HQ 1 Armoured Division.⁵⁴ Warrant Officer Class 2 Karen Mallion, who served between 1984 and 2006 (transferring to the Royal Logistic Corps when the WRAC disbanded in 1992, and going on to serve in Iraq, Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo) tells how the WRAC failed to give her the opportunities she wanted, remarking 'there was just so much more that I wanted to do, but the WRAC didn't have that'.⁵⁵ She goes on to explain the 'massive learning curve' she was on when she joined the Royal Logistic Corps due to what she describes as 'years lost being WRAC' and a lack of infantry tactics.⁵⁶ It was not until 2018, twenty-six years after the WRAC disbanded, that all army roles including infantry and special forces units were finally opened up to women.⁵⁷

⁴⁹Interview with Sue Westlake.

⁵⁰Katherine McMullin, 'Veteran Interview with Katherine McMullin', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 22 March 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/katherine-mcmullin/>. Accessed 28 March 2025.

⁵¹Interview with Rowena Patrick.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³WRAC Veteran's Survey, Grand Reunion 2025, Cardiff. Survey by Martin Bisiker.

⁵⁴Interview with Ali Brown.

⁵⁵Karen Mallion, 'A Veteran Interview with Karen Mallion', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 18 April 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/karen-mallion/>. Accessed 28 March 2025.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷National Army Museum 'Women's Royal Army Corps' <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/womens-royal-army-corps>. Accessed 22 January 2025.
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A Man's World

WRAC experiences in Northern Ireland ably illustrate that the military was, and in many ways still is, a male dominated world. In her book *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex*, Lucy Noakes highlights the difficulties that women entering the army faced both before and after the Second World War.⁵⁸ Indeed, as one reviewer of Noakes's work observes, her book establishes how 'male members of the military hierarchy never fully accepted women's trespass into the male preserve of military service', a view that is supported by the deeply ingrained misogynistic attitudes many of the interviewees encountered.⁵⁹ Janet Brodie-Murphy, who worked in welfare, tells how an 'old school' male clerk who, because he disagreed with women being in the army, 'went out of his way to ensure I didn't see the mail, that I was not told of things'.⁶⁰ As a consequence, this posting was particularly difficult for her. Lieutenant Colonel Mary Woollard explains that male officers 'weren't so much anti-women, they were anti-women in the Army. They didn't think we had a role, they didn't think we were needed, [that] we were as good as them'.⁶¹ As a consequence, many women felt undermined by male colleagues, and under pressure to prove their worth. There was a perception that they represented women as a whole, and if one failed, then all women failed. Groom Lance Corporal Lorraine Patrick states, 'we had to be better than the men to be as good as the men, there was always that. May not have been absolutely true, but we felt it was. So, we had to work harder, do better'.⁶² Indeed, Patrick describes taking on the 'most dangerous, awkward, spooky, aggressive' horses to prove she could do as well as the men.⁶³ These attitudes persisted after the WRAC disbanded. When Karen Mallion joined the Royal Logistic Corps she faced men who would 'do anything they possibly could to see you fail [...] they didn't want it to work'.⁶⁴ For Mallion, her sheer determination ensured 'there was no way that they could get rid of me', yet, the environment she experienced endures.⁶⁵ As a House of

⁵⁸Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁹Nicoletta F. Gullace, 'Review of *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948*, by L. Noakes', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 44(3) (July 2009), p. 550.

⁶⁰Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy.

⁶¹Mary Woollard, 'A Veteran Interview with Mary Woollard', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 16 August 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/mary-woollard/>. Accessed 28 March 2025.

⁶²Lorraine Patrick, 'A Veteran Interview with Lorraine Patrick', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 16 August 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/loraine-patrick/>. Accessed 28 March 2025.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Interview with Karen Mallion.

⁶⁵Ibid.

Commons Defence Committee report (2022) states, despite attempts to integrate women and attract more into the service, women still need to 'conform to 'typically masculine' ways of working to succeed'.⁶⁶ Indeed, the report concludes, 'within the military culture of the Armed Forces and the MOD [Ministry of Defence], it is still a man's world'.⁶⁷ Ali Brown corroborates this conclusion, stating that, as a minority, women are a 'victim of the culture', and sharing the mindset she adopted during her service she tells, 'I chose to be tough and professional and ambitious to the cost of my personal life'.⁶⁸ For many women dealing with misogyny was an ongoing challenge. To succeed they were forced to constantly prove themselves and often adopt typically male traits. As we shall see, one of the WRAC's undoubted strengths was the support and camaraderie it provided, something that many believe has been lost in today's armed forces. Indeed, in the survey undertaken at the WRAC reunion event, an overwhelming ninety percent of respondents agreed with the statement that 'something important was lost with the disbandment of the WRAC'.⁶⁹

The army's male centric culture also impacted more practical issues including pay. Women in the WRAC were paid less than their male colleagues. Introduced in 1970, the men had a 'X-Factor' applied to their basic military pay, an additional percentage intended to recognise the special conditions of military life, as compared with civilian employment.⁷⁰ The women did not receive this uplift. The historic justification for this gendered pay differential was that 'while every man was potentially deployable, women were not'.⁷¹ In her book *Service with the Army*, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, Chief Controller of the ATS during the Second World War, explains, 'in the last resort, the soldier clerk or cook was a potential reinforcement, the woman was not'.⁷² Janet Brodie-Murphy complains, 'I'd lived with the X Factor all my life in the Army, not being given the same rates of pay as the men but doing the same job'.⁷³ Moreover, as an infuriated Diane Pratt bemoans, this policy was not amended when women served in operational areas, 'what did we do in Northern Ireland if that wasn't on the front line, if getting beaten up wasn't on the front lines? And the male clerk that sat opposite me

⁶⁶House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Protecting those who protect us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life', Second Report of Session 2021–22, p. 41.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁸Interview with Ali Brown.

⁶⁹WRAC Veteran's Survey.

⁷⁰Incomes Data Services, *A Review of the X-Factor Components*, February 2014, p. 1.

⁷¹'Of Hockey Sticks', p. 13.

⁷²Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service with the Army*, (London, Hutchinson & Company Ltd, 1942), P. 111.

⁷³Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy.

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did exactly the same job as me, but he got a lot more money than me'.⁷⁴ By excluding military personnel from the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the army was legally allowed to pay women less than men, thus reinforcing a gendered order and the belief that they were secondary to their male colleagues.

The uniform and a lack of protective equipment designed to fit women, further reinforced this stance, and again left women unprotected and more vulnerable to harm than male counterparts. The No. 1 dress, introduced in 1950, was designed by Royal dressmaker, Sir Norman Hartnell, fashioned in lovat green.⁷⁵ It reflected the army's desire to retain an element of femininity within the WRAC. As Lance Corporal Julia Crockett, who served in intelligence in the 1970s explains, 'it was very chic, it was very stylish, but I now know that in terms of being a soldier, it was kind of ridiculous. It was office clothing essentially'.⁷⁶ She goes on to describe the absurd situation during practice invasions in the former West Germany when 'the women had not a tin hat between us', and being put in locations to be observers, but having 'no kit at all to protect us'.⁷⁷ Moreover, despite the obvious issues, measures were not introduced to rectify them and the problem persisted. As Ali Brown explains, throughout her service and even after the WRAC disbanded, she 'wore body armour the whole time that never fitted', and 'had to buy [her] own boots because you couldn't get small sizes'.⁷⁸ She concludes, 'there's a lot more work to be done on that side to make serving better for women', a statement confirmed by the House of Commons Defence Committee report (2022), which reveals that, 'more than three-quarters of the currently serving female personnel who engaged in this inquiry told us about inappropriate, ill-fitting uniform and body armour, which placed them at greater risk of harm in combat'.⁷⁹

Relationships and Children

Combining army life and a relationship is challenging. For the women of the WRAC it was especially complicated, and many were forced to make difficult decisions, often being forced to choose between their career and a relationship. Marriage, becoming pregnant or having a gay relationship could all bring a career to an abrupt end. Whilst there was never a restriction on married women serving in the army, it was generally accepted that 'if you married you left', an injustice not experienced by their male

⁷⁴Interview with Diane Pratt.

⁷⁵*Women's Royal Army Corps, 1949-1992*, p. 24.

⁷⁶Julia Crockett, 'A Veteran Interview with Julia Crockett', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 13 March 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/julia-m-crockett/>. Accessed 31 March 2025.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Interview with Ali Brown.

⁷⁹Interview with Ali Brown; 'Protecting those who protect us', p. 4.

counterparts or most women in civilian careers.⁸⁰ As Jenny Wing, who served in the early 1970s explains, this led to resentment and lost opportunities,

you couldn't stay in the army and be married at the time. I wish we could've stayed on ... it cut your career short. I would have liked to have done other things, and I never had the opportunity.⁸¹

Corporal Roxanne Lawton vividly describes her anguish and feeling like her heart had been ripped out when she was forced to leave the career she loved and excelled at.⁸² She goes on to explain that the army was 'her world', and despite securing a good civilian role it could not replace the opportunity and sense of belonging the army gave her.⁸³ At the same time, Audrey Smith made the difficult decision to turn down a marriage proposal when she was offered the role of commandant of the new Duchess of Kent Barracks in Aldershot if she agreed not to leave the army for two years.⁸⁴ Twenty years later, when Sergeant Sharon Broderick married in 1990, serving in the army was still not compatible with married life. The army offered little support and continued the practice of posting spouses to different locations, and in many cases different countries. Despite being desperate to retain both her career and her husband, another serving member of the armed forces, the army failed to post them somewhere together, and as a consequence they both resigned.⁸⁵ For most women there was a clear choice, career or marriage.

Whilst there was no definitive restriction on married women in the army, if you were pregnant, you were given a 'right of retirement'. Officers were required to resign their commissions, and servicewomen were discharged after four months of pregnancy.⁸⁶ Lance Corporal Cheryl Woon describes the struggles she faced, and her determination to make things work, after being 'dumped at four months pregnant'

⁸⁰Terry, *Women in Khaki*, p. 221.

⁸¹Interview with Jenny Wing.

⁸²Roxanne Lawton, 'A Veteran Interview with Roxanne Lawton', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 2 July 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/roxanne-lawton/>. Accessed 31 March 2025.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Interview with Audrey Smith.

⁸⁵Sharon Broderick. 'A Veteran Interview with Sharon Broderick', Interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 2 October 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/sharon-broderick/>. Accessed 31 March 2025.

⁸⁶Terry, *Women in Khaki*, p. 222.

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with no help, or maternity pay.⁸⁷ In rare cases there was a right to rejoin after six months, but it seldom happened, and if they did, unlike men, women were required to demonstrate that adequate provision had been made for the child.⁸⁸ Whilst women in civilian careers who were protected by the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 which, prohibited dismissal on grounds of pregnancy and granted maternity leave, thus protecting women from workplace discrimination, those serving in the WRAC were excluded from the act and therefore received no such protection.⁸⁹ Margaret Lee remembers the reality of what she describes as this 'cruel' policy, 'it was like my career was there one day, next day it was gone'.⁹⁰ And Private Pauline Milnes believes 'they lost many a good person, soldier, female soldier because of that'.⁹¹ It was not until August 1990, fifteen years after the Sex Discrimination Act was passed, that the MOD finally revised their policy and pregnant service women were no longer required to leave the service.⁹² However, this was not the end of the matter. As Janet Brodie-Murphy explains, there were senior officers who were hostile to the ideas of pregnant women working in their offices, one making the comparison with a civilian worker going on maternity leave by saying, 'that's different, she's a civilian, she's not a soldier'.⁹³ There were practical issues too. Diane Pratt, who was one of the first pregnant women not to have to leave, tells how 'they didn't have a pregnancy uniform. I just got bigger sizes until the QM [Quartermaster] said, "sorry Di, no more"'.⁹⁴ Women who want a career in the army are often faced with a difficult decision, as Ali Brown states, 'it was a deliberate decision of mine not to have children because I knew I couldn't have a career and have children'.⁹⁵ The impact of this choice was often felt later in life. Audrey Smith reflects that the only thing the women who chose a career in the army regret

⁸⁷Cheryl Woon, 'A Veteran Interview with Cheryl Woon', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 9 May 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/cheryl-woon/>. Accessed 31 March 2025.

⁸⁸Terry, *Women in Khaki*, p. 222.

⁸⁹Sex Discrimination Act 1975, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1975/65/enacted>. Accessed 14 March 2025.

⁹⁰Interview with Margaret Lee.

⁹¹Pauline Milnes, 'A Veteran Interview with Pauline Milnes', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 30 January 2024, <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/pauline-milnes/>. Accessed 31 March 2025.

⁹²UK Armed Forces Maternity Report, 'Annual Statistics 2012, MOD', 16 October 2014, p. 3

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7d713bed915d2d2ac08fc3/maternity_report_2012_final.pdf. Accessed 15 March 2025.

⁹³Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy.

⁹⁴Interview with Diane Pratt.

⁹⁵Interview with Ali Brown.

is that they do not have children and grandchildren.⁹⁶ Even in today's army, 'among mid-ranking Officers, 90% of men have children, compared to 10% of women'.⁹⁷

Being dismissed on the grounds of sexual orientation also brought an abrupt, and often traumatic, end to a career. As Emma Vickers explains, during the Second World War, policy had been dictated by the demands of war, and 'women suspected of being lesbians [were] largely ignored'.⁹⁸ This changed in the 1950s when policies were tightened, and same-sex relationships were no longer tolerated.⁹⁹ Unlike men, however, no woman was court-martialled. Instead, whilst subject to the same, often traumatising, Special Investigation Branch (SIB) interrogations and inquiries, they were dismissed and told to leave.¹⁰⁰ Warrant Officer Class 2 Wendy Hooton reflects on the toll this took on mental health and how overnight these women 'lost what they loved dearly'.¹⁰¹ Warrant Officer Class 2 Bernadette Dolan, who worked in the postal service, describes the SIB investigators who arrived unannounced, interviewing those suspected of lesbianism for many hours, and who spent a significant amount of resources on sad 'witch hunting', which resulted in them 'disposing of some very good soldiers, being highly trained as well'.¹⁰² Being gay herself, she explains, 'I didn't worry about it constantly, but it was always there in the back of your mind'.¹⁰³ Most heterosexual women 'turned a blind eye', Karen Mallion recalls, 'there was no problem with it, different matter with the guys, but with the girls it was just accepted really'.¹⁰⁴ However, Rowena Patrick emphasises getting the balance right, and the importance of curtailing lesbian activity, without calling on the SIB to intervene, when it impinged on the lives and living quarters of the other women.¹⁰⁵ It was not until January 2000, following a lengthy legal battle in the European Court of Human Rights, that the British government finally announced that it would lift the ban on gay people serving in the

⁹⁶Interview with Audrey Smith.

⁹⁷'Protecting those who protect us', p. 4.

⁹⁸Emma Vickers, *Infantile Desires and Perverted Practices: Disciplining Lesbianism in the WAAF and the ATS during the Second World War*, *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 13(4) 2009, pp. 431–441, p. 439.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰Interview with Ali Brown.

¹⁰¹Wendy Hooton, 'A Veteran Interview with Wendy Hooton', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 17 April 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/wendy-hooton/>. Accessed 31 March 2025.

¹⁰²Bernadette Dolan, 'A Veteran Interview with Bernadette Dolan', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 22 March 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/bernadette-dolan/>. Accessed 31 March 2025.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴Interview with Karen Mallion.

¹⁰⁵Interview with Rowena Patrick.

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Armed Forces.¹⁰⁶ SIB investigations were overwhelmingly regarded as a horrendous waste of resources. Time, money and effort was wasted, and well-trained women were needlessly lost. Nevertheless, rightly or wrongly, lesbianism was banned in the British Army, and as Bernadette Dolan reflects, 'it was against the law, and you knew that. If you got caught and you got kicked out, ... that's the risk you took'.¹⁰⁷

Support and Camaraderie

Despite the frustrations, obstacles, and limitations, for many women the WRAC provided a supportive environment, with those in senior positions understanding the additional challenges facing women in the army. As Lieutenant Colonel Ishbel Thomson remarks, she felt 'secure in the WRAC'.¹⁰⁸ Bernadette Dolan explains her concerns that once the corps disbanded then bullying and sexual harassment would increase and in line with many others, she feared there would be 'no protection for them anymore' against this kind of behaviour.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, for some, including those who were looking for more than the WRAC could offer them, the supportive environment the WRAC provided was only fully appreciated after disbandment. Ali Brown reflects, 'the support that women give to women is invaluable, and I think one of the true strengths of the WRAC was that women gave women support ... I think it was probably essential, and I probably didn't realise at the time'.¹¹⁰ Sue Westlake highlights an important part of her role as Commander of the 250 soldiers of 29 Company in Rheindahlen Germany, was to be 'there for them [to] sort out whatever difficulties or challenges they were facing'. Something she feels has been lost in today's army.¹¹¹ Echoing these sentiments, Julia Crockett commented that although she is pleased women 'may take on being in the tanks or infantry', she suspects there is a need 'to bring back in some way a safe hub of some kind just for women'.¹¹² And indeed, these views are borne out in the House of Commons Defence Committee report (2022), which raises what it calls grave concerns over bullying, harassment and discrimination, and how 'the MOD and Services are failing to help female personnel achieve their full

¹⁰⁶Imperial War Museum, '25th Anniversary of the Lifting of the LGBT Ban in the Armed Forces' <https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/lifting-the-ban>. Accessed 14 March 2025.

¹⁰⁷Interview with Bernadette Dolan.

¹⁰⁸Ishbel Thomson, 'A Veteran Interview with Ishbel Thomson', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 31 May 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/ishbel-thomson/>. Accessed 31 March 2025.

¹⁰⁹Interview with Bernadette Dolan.

¹¹⁰Interview with Ali Brown.

¹¹¹Interview with Sue Westlake

¹¹²Interview with Julia Crockett.

potential'.¹¹³ How women in the army are protected from bullying and harassment is clearly a real and current issue that the army is yet to resolve.

The WRAC also fostered an enduring sense of camaraderie. Remembering her basic training at the barracks in Guildford in the 1970s, Corporal Sylvia Adams tells, 'you had companionship with the other girls, and it was nice because you didn't have to worry about wearing something different to anybody else because you all wore the same thing'.¹¹⁴ This view of the WRAC was shared by those who joined later and went on to serve after disbandment in 1992. Military training instructor, Karen Mallion, commented, 'there was a camaraderie that I never had further in my career, ... the girls would look after each other', and Ali Brown observed that when the WRAC disbanded, 'you lost that camaraderie ... women, I think, are brilliant at sorting other people's problems'.¹¹⁵ One area in which this camaraderie came to the fore was in team sport, something else that was lost on disbandment. Mary Woollard comments, 'I played a lot of unit sports, and the biggest loss for me when the WRAC went, was sport stopped overnight for women ... we'd have inter-divisional competitions, that died overnight, which was a huge shame'.¹¹⁶ The WRAC created a strong sense of belonging and a feeling of togetherness that has since been lost. As Sharon Broderick says, 'I know women now who have served post-WRAC in the army, and I feel sorry for them that they didn't have those bonds. If I had needed them, they were there, and I think it's so important that this story is told'.¹¹⁷

Disbandment

In 1990, the Army board decided to move away from the concept of an all-female corps. As Rowena Patrick explains, 'you were beginning to get women at a higher level who had been trained along with their male counterparts and who were doing the type of jobs that the men were doing', and as a result, 'more and more of our women [were] beginning to go into employments that were changing and opening up for them'.¹¹⁸ In her book chapter 'Infantrywomen - An Ethical Dilemma?', Georgina Natzio states, 'it is clear from this country's broadest experience of war ... that servicemen and women have, can, and do work excellently together', going on to assert that society had become more accepting of women playing a more prominent role in the

¹¹³'Protecting those who protect us', p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Sylvia Adams, 'A Veteran Interview with Sylvia Adams', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 12 March 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/sylvia-adams/>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

¹¹⁵Interview with Karen Mallion; Interview with Ali Brown.

¹¹⁶Interview with Mary Woollard.

¹¹⁷Interview with Sharon Broderick.

¹¹⁸Interview with Rowena Patrick.

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Army.¹¹⁹ On disbandment, any women deployed to other corps were permanently transferred to them, while those who remained in a WRAC specific function were transferred to a new Adjutant General's Corps, created to undertake the general administration of the British Army.¹²⁰ On 6 April 1992 this new corps was founded, and a female only corps ceased to exist.¹²¹ On hearing that the WRAC was to be disbanded, the emotions of those serving were diverse, ranging from 'devastated' to 'delighted'.¹²² Those who were not cap-badged to their employing regiment or corps and had stayed in WRAC specific roles were hardest hit by the change. Sue Westlake explains that these women 'just couldn't imagine how it would be' after the WRAC went. Due to the concept of corps based on gender rather than specialist functions, they had no specific trade and so whilst they were resigned to accepting disbandment as the way forward, for many it was a 'great personal issue'.¹²³ In a similar vein, Ishbel Thomson explains for those working with other corps 'it was a great transfer', but 'for those who were in generalist WRAC, it was a bit of a "what's going on?"'¹²⁴ Indeed, many of those already cap-badged to other regiments or corps relished the opportunities disbandment created. After seeing service in Iraq, Ali Brown remembers looking forward to seeing the WRAC go because they had tried to stop her deploying.¹²⁵ She describes losing faith in the WRAC because they would not let her do her job, and 'just waiting for them to disband'.¹²⁶ Whether devastated or delighted, it was clear that in the same way women's aspirations and expectations had changed in civilian careers, the role of women in the army had also changed beyond recognition. As Mary Woollard explains, 'the opportunities were coming, and you could see that you couldn't really understand how a female-only corps would survive'.¹²⁷

What Makes a Veteran?

Many women who served in the WRAC do not consider themselves veterans. They take the view that to be a veteran you need combat experience, something most of them lack. Lieann Andrew sums this up when she states, 'I don't think I'm a soldier, I think of a veteran as a World War I, World War II [soldier]. My husband's been out

¹¹⁹Georgina Natzio, 'Infantrywomen - An Ethical Dilemma?', in Teri McConfile and Richard Holmes (eds.), *Defence Management in Uncertain Times*, (Oxford; Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), pp. 186-210.

¹²⁰*Women's Royal Army Corps, 1949-1992*, p. 37.

¹²¹*Ibid.*

¹²²Interview with Sue Westlake; Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy.

¹²³Interview with Sue Westlake.

¹²⁴Interview with Ishbel Thomson.

¹²⁵Interview with Ali Brown.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

¹²⁷Interview with Mary Woollard.

to Afghanistan, he's got medals, that to me, is a war veteran or an army veteran'.¹²⁸ Others think of veterans as men, not women. For them, veterans are 'old men, who stand in a bar and drink beer, and get to go on Remembrance Parade'.¹²⁹ Increasingly, however, as women join local branches of the WRAC Association, whose aim is to 'both celebrate and support' female veterans, and society in general increasingly values veterans' contributions, their thoughts are changing.¹³⁰ Sergeant Marion Prescott was in the Horse and Groom in Guildford in 1974 when the IRA detonated the first of two bombs in town centre pubs. She reflects that recent events, including the 2022 inquest, and particularly the fiftieth anniversary memorial service, have helped her achieve closure, and as a consequence feel proud to be a veteran.¹³¹ As Wendy Hooton comments, all service people are ready to go to war if that need arises, and consequently, all those who served should consider themselves veterans.¹³²

Conclusion

The WRAC formed 'the basis for women, modern women in the army', yet their story is often overshadowed by the wartime exploits of women in the ATS.¹³³ Speaking of women in today's army, Rowena Patrick conveys with some passion that the WRAC was the foundation for 'where they all are today', and consequently it is important that their story is told.¹³⁴ It was the first step for women to serve in peacetime, paving the way for the women who serve today. There were significant constraints and obstacles that often made it difficult for the women to function effectively, and the army was slow to adapt to societal changes. Yet, the women of the WRAC shared a determination to succeed, to exceed expectations and to overcome barriers their male colleagues did not have to face. There was a genuine sense of camaraderie, and some had opportunities and experiences unavailable to women in civilian life. The army instilled a sense of pride, they were doing something worthwhile. This belief shaped the lives of those who served, and is aptly summed up by Mary Woollard, who reflected, 'to this day, when I march at the Cenotaph, as soon as you've got your beret on and your neck in the back of your coat, and the band goes, you just feel immensely proud'.¹³⁵

¹²⁸Interview with Lieann Andrew.

¹²⁹Interview with Sharon Broderick.

¹³⁰WRAC Association, 'Our Work' <https://wraca.org.uk/our-work/>. Accessed 26 March 2025.

¹³¹Marion Prescott, 'A Veteran Interview with Marion Prescott', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 19 November 2024 <https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/marion-prescott/>. Accessed 1 April 2025.

¹³²Interview with Wendy Hooton.

¹³³Interview with Rowena Parick.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Interview with Mary Woollard.

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Reacting to Kate Adie's assessment that the women of the WRAC would not want to sit on the frontline, Audrey Smith said, 'I don't understand it. If I had to sit on the front line with a man, I would, ... as far as I was concerned all through my career, I was a soldier, and they were a soldier, and we were doing a job'.¹³⁶ Ali Brown adds, 'it's a very unintelligent comment because it's too generalist, I don't think she bothered to find out what women can actually do', she goes on to point out, 'there will be women who would hate the idea of doing that, but there will also be men who hate the idea. I don't think it's a gender thing'.¹³⁷ By the late 1980s it was clear that a women-only corps was no longer viable. However, integration has not been without issue, and the army clearly has unresolved problems regarding bullying, harassment and misogyny. As Audrey Smith states, 'it was an evolution that had to happen, and I do feel that perhaps now women should look out more for other women and make sure that things are going on all right'.¹³⁸

¹³⁶Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage*, p. 232; Interview with Audrey Smith.

¹³⁷Interview with Ali Brown.

¹³⁸Interview with Audrey Smith.