

California State University Northridge

Breaking Through the Camouflage Ceiling:
The Untold Story

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By

Alexandra Aimee Smith

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The Thesis of Alexandra Aimee Smith is approved:

Miriam Neirick, Ph.D.

Date

Merry A. Ovnick, Ph.D.

Date

Thomas W. Devine, Ph.D.

Date

California State University, Northridge

Dedication

To the wonderful community of Professors at CSUN who truly take an interest in their students. To my husband for distracting me every time I needed a break, Macaroni for giving the fuzziest hugs ever, and Peter Parker Puppy for being content to warm my lap for hours on end. And, to my grandmother Betty, for the financial planning that left me with a college fund. Without it, my education would not have been possible.

Table of Contents

Signature Page	ii
Dedication	iii
Abstract	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Curious Case of the Misallocated Credit	
Chapter 2	7
Dr. McGee and the Army Nurse Corps	
Chapter 3	19
The Navy, the Pragmatist, and the Forward Thinker	
Chapter 4	32
The Marine Corps' "Free a Man to Fight"	
Conclusion	39
Bibliography	41

ABSTRACT

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Much work has been done by scholars on the subject of women's role in the American military during World War II. Meanwhile, the official entrance of women into the United States military on the eve of World War I has gone virtually ignored. As a result, misinformation about the process that brought women into the American military has flourished. The problem is most acute in sources dedicated to women's military history. In such works scholars often over-emphasized the challenges women faced by highlighting members of the military who did not believe in women's service, while devoting little attention to those who did. In the cases of both the Army and the Navy this has led to the wrong person receiving credit for calling for and enacting the integration of women into the branch. In the case of the Marines, no one has been credited with working to admit women. As a result, the overall body of work centered on women's military history has suffered.

Introduction: The Curious Case of the Misallocated Credit

Women's military histories written in the 1990's consistently credit the wrong actors with both calling for and facilitating the entrance of women into the American armed forces during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In their search for villains scholars have overlooked the heroes. A desire to focus on the great struggles women faced when entering the American military has led to the inadvertent exclusion of specific pieces of evidence that indicated that the situation might not have been entirely grim. As a result, the body of work focused on women's military history has suffered. Secondary source information pertaining to the official entrance of women into the military is scant, and what can be found is riddled with outright inaccuracies and subtle misrepresentations. Acknowledging those who actively called for or facilitated the entrance of women into the military should not be seen as a minimization of the challenges faced by the women who answered the call, regardless of who was championing the progress. Presenting a clear analysis of the entrance of women into the armed forces that acknowledges both those who worked for and against the cause will benefit the body of work dedicated to women's military history.

Many scholars have devoted numerous volumes to exploring the role women played in the American military during World War II. This vibrant subject has proved fertile ground for analysis, and the large amount of work that has been produced has left little room for continued debate surrounding basic facts such as key actors and their roles in the advancement of military women in the 1940's. The general facts surrounding

women in the military during World War II have been debated sufficiently for many solid conclusions to be drawn. Yet, World War II did not mark the first occasion on which American women served their country.

It is rather curious that authors who wish to write on the subject of women's military history have consistently chosen to begin their deep analysis in the 1940's when the first American women served in the Army a full 40 years before the bombing of the US Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor. The information provided in women's military histories about the early years of women's service is miniscule compared to that provided about women in World War II. The minimal amount of attention the official entrance of women into the American military has received has resulted in a critical lack of scholarly debate on the subject. As a direct result, inaccurate information has been able to find enough of a foothold that it is often repeated from book to book. Authors who write women's military history have consistently given credit for initiating the admittance of women to both the Army and the Navy the wrong person, and the majority of scholarly works across all fields of military history do not mention any of the actors involved in the entrance of women into the United States Marine Corps. As a result, our knowledge base on the topic of women in the American military is incomplete.

One must ask why the 1940's has been selected as the starting point for deep analysis of women's role in the American military. The presence of female nurses in war zones was not new in the years leading up to the outbreak of World War I. They had served the United States army as contract employees long before the official establishment of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps in 1901. Female civilian contract nurses were present in military hospitals in every US war from the Revolution, through the Civil

War, into the Spanish American war of 1898. In the latter, over 1,500 nurses signed contracts, and more than 1,000 nurses actually deployed to serve in the field.¹ Yet, since the women always maintained their status as civilians, it makes sense that their service would not be emphasized in works that wish to focus on the experiences of American military women. After all, while their aid to the military was crucial to its overall success, they were outsiders.

The transition of women from contract employees to official members of the military began on June 20 1899, when the Nurse Corps Division was established within the Surgeon General of the Army's office. This unit was tasked with coordinating the efforts of individual civilian groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Red Cross that were active in providing trained contract nurses to the US military during wartime. This Nurse Corps division served as a middleman of sorts between women and the military. It represented the first step toward the eventual official inclusion for women into the American forces.

In 1901 the Nurse Corps Division transitioned from acting as a middleman between the Army and civilian nurses, to being an exclusively female unit made up of trained nurses. This move brought women into the United States military for the first time in American history. In the decade that followed its creation the Army Nurse Corp would experience slow but steady growth, and the Navy would create its own Nurse Corps. By the eve of World War I the Army and Navy each boasted several hundred female nurses. Two weeks and two days before American forces entered the European conflict women were granted admittance to the Navy in order to fill yeomen positions right alongside

¹ U.S. Army Medical Department Office of Medical History, "The Army Nurse Corps."

male yeomen. They received equal pay and equal rank to that of their male counterparts, and were eventually granted equal veterans' benefits. By the war's end women would be serving in the Marines as yeomen too. And, the number of female nurses employed by the military would have boomed from several hundred to over ten thousand.²

Clearly, women played a significant role in the American military in the lead up to and during World War I. Yet their participation in the conflict has received very little attention from women's military historians. The reason that women's military histories place so little emphasis on the service of civilian contract nurses is clear. The nurses were not officially members of the military. The reason they downplay the role of women in World War I remains opaque. Female Nursing Corps members held quasi-military status, and female yeomen held rank, title, and pay rates identical to those of male yeomen. The systemic and political changes that took place to allow for this were significant. The attention they require is overdue.

The majority of women's military histories penned in the 1990's shared a single perspective on the conditions new military women were encountering. In *Gender Camouflage: Women and the U.S. Military* Francine D'Amico and Laurie Lee Weinstein write, "When American women enter the United States Military institution, they enter hostile territory."³ The sentiment that women were not welcome in the military is taken even farther by Evelyn Monahan, author of *A Few Good Women: America's Military Women from World War I to the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*. She writes, "The

² Ibid.

³ Francine D'Amico, and Laurie Weinstein, *Gender Camouflage: Women and the U.S. Military*, (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 5.

population as a whole and particularly those in power saw the very idea [of women in the military] as a threat to America and an abomination to the “natural order” that was the foundation of American society.”⁴ The impression created by such narratives is a grim one, featuring courageous women, and the powerful men and large organizations that overtly worked against them.

Yet, many of the experiences women had in World War I would indicate that while female service member did face significant challenges, they were often highly regarded. Sometimes, as in the case of female Marines, they were held up as national symbols of pride, and often treated as celebrities during parades and rallies. These stories are likely to go overlooked by scholars seeking to find evidence that supports the idea that female service members were a maligned group. Likewise, featuring prominent men like the Chief of the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Presley Marion Rixey, and Major General Commandant of the Marines, George Barnett, who both actively worked toward the admittance of women into their respective branches would not serve the creation of such a study of women’s military hardships.

A more balanced and inclusive picture is painted by organizations that seek to create branch-specific military history than by scholars who write with an eye toward women’s issues. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps historians, as well as Nurse Corps historians and general World War I historians, have all devoted energy to discovering who deserves credit for initiating and facilitating the entrance of women into the American military. In the case of the Army, a strong, determined woman was behind the

⁴ Evelyn Monahan, *A Few Good Women: America's Military Women from World War I to the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: Knopf, 2010), Nook Edition, 1.

gender march forward. Yet, she did not meet with fierce resistance or heavy discrimination. This is perhaps part of the reason her story is not emphasized in women's military histories. In the cases of both the Navy Nurse Corps and the Marines the inclusion of women was called for by powerful men near the top of the chain of command. These men have both been entirely excluded from women's military histories, despite their advocacy. Meanwhile, women's military histories have been quick to highlight men who facilitated the advancement of women to fulfill clearly practical motives like Josephus Daniels and Surgeon General Sternberg. Their inclusion helps to support the idea that women were unwelcome in the military, since their motives were clearly un-feminist. This selective inclusion of information has created a dramatic picture, but it is one that is inaccurate.

It should be stated that the first women to enter the American military met great challenges, and often found themselves unsupported by the military as a whole. But, when comparing the evidence presented in women's military histories to that found in Nurse Corps, military branch, or World War I specific histories that do not seek to write from a gendered perspective, it becomes clear that the women's military histories often under-emphasize the allies women had in the armed forces. Removing this bias and telling a balanced story does not have to mean making the challenges women faced less significant. It simply means giving credit where it is due and acknowledging the complexity of gender issues in the early twentieth century.

Chapter 2: Dr. McGee and the Army Nurse Corps

With the creation of the Nurse Corps in 1901, the Army became the first branch of the United States military to incorporate women into its forces in an official capacity. Although the Army had employed women to work as nurses during past wars, they were always handled as civilian contractors. The Army Nurse Corps' creation deserves scholarly attention because it allowed women to serve within the United States military for the first time in history. Scholarly works focused on women's military history generally credit this giant step forward to Brigadier General George Miller Sternberg, the 18th U.S. Army surgeon general.⁵ Both women's military histories and institutional, biographical, and military branch-specific sources portray him as a reluctant hero at best. Many sources even portray him an outright opponent to the process of gender advancement. Highlighting him supports the ideas that women were unwelcome in the American military. Yet, a thorough evaluation of primary sources, organizational histories, and military branch-specific histories reveals that credit for the unit's creation should be given to Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee. Secondary sources focused on women's military history either mention McGee briefly as an assistant to the general, or not at all. Dr. McGee deserves to be highlighted as the true hero of the Army Nurse Corps, but her clear feminist motives, and the embrace she was given by the Army complicate a narrative that seeks to portray military women as unwelcome intruders.

In *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* Dr. McGee is only mentioned once in connection to the creation of the Army Nurse Corps: "So, at his

⁵ Monahan, *A Few Good Women*, 24.

[General Sternberg's] request, Dr. McGee (then acting Assistant Surgeon General in charge of the newly established Nurse Corps Division) drafted the legislation necessary to give nurses quasi-military status."⁶ Very similar phrasing is used in Evelyn Monahan's *A Few Good Women: America's Military Women from World War I to the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*: "In 1899 Surgeon General George M. Sternberg... asked the vice president of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee, to write a federal bill for the establishment of a permanent, exclusively female U.S. Army Nurse Corps."⁷ In *Gender Camouflage: Women in the US Military* Dr. McGee is mentioned only in connection to her role recruiting contract nurses during the Spanish American War, and not all in relation to the 1901 legislation creating the United States Army Nurse Corps.⁸ The narrative presented by women's military historians effectively strips Dr. McGee of much of her achievement.

Scholarly works focused on women's military history seem altogether conflicted as to what role Dr. McGee played. The only thing they agree on is that her part in the civil rights process that took place on the eve of the First World War was minor. Institutional histories focused on the Army Nurse Corps are clear on the matter: The United States National Library of Medicine calls Dr. McGee "the founder of the Army

⁶ Maj. Gen. Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*, (Novato: Presido Press, 1992), 9.

⁷ Monahan, *A Few Good Women*, 24.

⁸ D'Amico and Weinstein, *Gender Camouflage*, 17.

Nurse Corps”⁹ while the United States Army Medical Department features a whole section of its website dedicated to Dr. McGee under the bold-font heading, “Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee: Founder of the Army Nurse Corps.”¹⁰ In order to determine which set of sources is correct it is necessary to consult biographies and organization-specific sources that give detailed information on the lives, behaviors, and motivations of both Surgeon General Sternberg and Dr. McGee.

A team of scholars working for the National Library of Medicine has assembled a comprehensive and thorough biography of Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee. According to National Library of Medicine scholar Marion Hunt, Dr. McGee was born Anita Newcomb on November 4, 1864. Science was something of a family tradition for the Newcombs, as Anita Newcomb McGee’s father was a noted astronomer and mathematician, and her mother, Mary Caroline Hassler, was the granddaughter of Ferdinand Rudolph Hassler, the founder and first superintendent of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey.¹¹ Her family placed great emphasis on educating their daughter. She was instructed in a multitude of subjects including the hard sciences, which were not normally emphasized for women in the Victorian era. On Valentine’s Day 1888, Ms. Anita Newcomb married Geologist-in-Charge of the Atlantic Coastal Plain Division

⁹ Hunt, Marion. National Library of Medicine, "Biography: Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee." Accessed August 19, 2012. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/changingthefaceofmedicine/physicians/biography_216.html.

¹⁰ U.S. Army Medical Department Office of Medical History, "Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee: Founder of the Army Nurse Corps." Last modified 07/09/2009. Accessed August 19, 2012. <http://history.amedd.army.mil/ancwebsite/McGeeWHMSpecial/mcgee.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

of the U.S. Geological Survey, Dr. William John McGee.¹² Shortly after, Dr. W. J. McGee supported his wife in her desire to attend medical school, which in it self was a radical act of support for women's equality.¹³

Mrs. McGee chose to attend Colombian University. Columbian's medical school was one of the few in the country that accepted women, although the policy granting them admittance was quite new. The first woman attended Colombian University Medical School in 1884.¹⁴ Early in her medical education Mrs. McGee established herself as a champion of women's equality. She found herself surrounded by controversy when Columbian University announced its intention to end co-education of men and women. The university planned to stop enrolling new female students immediately and place women who were currently enrolled on a separate training path from their male counterparts. The university's desire to enact change was a response to vulgar actions committed against cadavers by some of the male students. The male students were not simply being boisterous. Their goal was to shock and upset current female students in hopes of getting them to drop out of the program. Mrs. McGee, however, was not easy to intimidate.¹⁵

Rather than abandoning her medical ambitions Dr. McGee launched a full-scale political campaign to change Colombian's plan to end co-education. Ultimately her

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hunt, *Biography*.

¹⁴ The George Washington University, "History: GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences." Accessed May 5, 2013. <http://smhs.gwu.edu/about/history>.

¹⁵ Hunt, *Biography*.

efforts failed, and the school placed her and her female colleagues into separate women-only classes, but they were able to graduate with full medical degrees. Despite her failure to alter the school's decision, Dr. McGee's courage and determination did not go unnoticed by the scientific community as a whole.¹⁶ She was gaining admiration that would help her to achieve goals later in life. In 1892 Mrs. McGee became one of the last women to graduate from Columbian University with a degree in medicine. The school's ban on women was short lived. In 1904 Columbian University was renamed George Washington University, and by that point it had already begun accepting female medical students again. Dr. McGee went on to complete additional specialty training in gynecology at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and continued to focus her energies on the advancement of women.

Virtually all of the scholarly work focused on women's military history, including the previously mentioned passages from *Women in the Military* and *A Few Good Women*, claim that the Surgeon General reached out to Dr. McGee and requested that she draft the 1901 legislation that would grant women admittance to the army. According to several biographers who have focused on Dr. McGee, including Cindy Gurney, COL, AN, and Marian Hunt, it was Dr. McGee who did the reaching out.¹⁷ Further, by the time the legislation to create the ANC was passed, the Surgeon General and Dr. McGee had already been working together for several years. When, in 1898, Dr. McGee heard that the Surgeon General intended to allow female contract nurses to work at select base

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ U.S. Army Medical Department Office of Medical History, *Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee: Founder of the Army Nurse Corps*, <http://history.amedd.army.mil/ancwebsite/McGeeWHMSpecial/mcgee.html>., Hunt, *Biography*.

hospitals for the first time since the Civil War she initiated a petition requesting that he permit only fully qualified nurses to serve. She was concerned that if the Army used lax standards to judge female nursing applicants the advancement of women could be set back. Her intent was to make sure the Army had rigorous guidelines that would allow for the selection of female candidates who would excel. She then showed the determination and follow-through that would become her trademark and delivered her petition to the Surgeon General by hand.¹⁸ He granted her an audience, and heard her case. This began a working relationship between the Surgeon General and Dr. McGee that would last for nearly a decade. Dr. McGee's initial meeting with the Surgeon General predated the 1901 legislation that created the Army Nurse Corps by three years, making the idea that the Surgeon General reached out to Dr. McGee for the first time in 1901 appear less credible.

Despite Dr. McGee's personal appeal in 1898, Surgeon General Sternberg was not initially convinced of the need for a thorough vetting of nurses. He did not see nursing as a particularly critical area of focus for the Army. Dr. McGee was not easily daunted. She took initiative and began to assemble guidelines for the vetting of female nurses on her own. She then created a special committee of the Daughters of the American Revolution to screen nurse-applicants using her newly created standards.¹⁹ She offered the ready-made committee's service to the Surgeon General free of charge. He accepted. Once the qualified nurses had been selected, Dr. McGee did not abandon the cause. During the Spanish-American War she drafted the first manual for women on the subject of American military nursing so that they could continue to be integrated

¹⁸ Hunt, *Biography*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

seamlessly. Dr. McGee's independent actions that allowed for the selection of trained female nurses is completely ignored by scholarly works focused on women's military history, but it is a key factor that allowed the use of female nurses in the Spanish American War to succeed.

By the end of the Spanish American War Dr. McGee's handpicked and specially trained nurses had delivered results that proved their worth. As a result, the Surgeon General conceded that she had been correct about the high value of properly trained female nurses and allowed her to draft the legislation to create the United States Army Nurse Corps.²⁰ Bringing women into the Army officially would allow the regulations Dr. McGee had created through the Daughters of the American Revolution to be standardized and codified. This new task required military authority, so Dr. McGee was commissioned to serve as acting assistant Surgeon General of the Army, becoming the first woman in American history to wear an officer's uniform as an official member of the American military.²¹

Any attempt to portray Dr. McGee as a side-note in the history of the entrance of women into the American military is not a balanced representation of the events that occurred. Worse is underplaying her achievements in order to highlight Surgeon General Sternberg's skepticism. In a biography written by his own wife the Surgeon General is portrayed as trying to fill army nurse positions with men pulled from every available source, even if they were not properly trained, in order to avoid having to resort to the use of female nurses. He attempted to fill nurse positions with men like, "medical student,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

pharmacists, and young graduate students of medicine.”²² It was only when he failed to bring in enough under-qualified men that he began to consider the possibility of female nurses as a last resort of sorts. In the biography by his wife he is quoted as having written, “The number of men enlisted and transferred to the hospital corps was approximately 6,000, but owing to the limited appropriation the body of trained hospital corps men was not sufficiently large, and this necessitated the detail of enlisted men from the regiments of hospital duty in several of the camps, and the employment of trained female nurses in general hospitals.”²³ Sternberg’s motives for the eventual admittance of women were clearly practical. Further, Sternberg was vocal about concerns that women would not be able to cope with the stresses of military life. Judith Stiehm’s women’s military history points out that the Surgeon General worried that women might require the army to provide them with such frivolous luxuries as bureaus and rocking chairs.²⁴ Unlike civilian doctors, the Surgeon General’s lifetime in the military had not exposed him to trained female nurses. This left him with a viewpoint on them that would have been considered out of date by many in the medical field. In the civilian sector, the use of female nurses was a settled matter. Female doctors were begging to become more common, and they were the new source of controversy.²⁵

²² Martha L. Sternberg, *George Miller Sternberg: A Biography*, (Ithica: Cornell University Library, 2009), 167.

²³ *Ibid*, 168.

²⁴ Judith Stiehm, *It's Our Military Too: Women and the U.S Military*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 89.

²⁵ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), XIV.

Initially the first women to serve in the Army Nurse Corps were up against tremendous challenges created by an administration that did not take nursing seriously. These challenges included often-lethally unsanitary conditions and the lack of proper equipment. The Surgeon General's untrained male nursing staff had left many of the facilities they had served in in a state of chaos.²⁶ Not only did the Army not provide the women with the rocking chairs and bureaus the surgeon general had been concerned about, but they also were often not given things like proper shelter, clean water, and sanitary kitchens.²⁷ Regardless, the nurses pushed on and, by the time the Army Nurse Corps was officially founded in 1901, all doubts about female nurses' capability had been put to rest in the surgeon general's mind. He did ultimately become a supporter of female nurses, however without the help of Dr. McGee his change of heart would have been unlikely. The success of the entire endeavor may not have been possible without Dr. McGee, since it was she who created the standards that allowed the Army to recruit high quality nurses.

The official Nurse Corps that was created in 1901 consisted of 202 charter members, including its first superintendent, Dita H. Kinney.²⁸ Over the years leading up to World War I, half of the women were let go. The task before them was not easy, leading to high drop out rates, and the Army was not yet fully convinced of the women's worth, making female nurses the first thing to go when budgets needed to be cut. Recruitment became a priority again when war hit and the need for nurses became acute.

²⁶ Stiehm, *It's Our Military Too*, 89.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Nurses were signed on quickly during the war. The size of Army Nurse Corps increased from just over 100 women at the outbreak of the conflict to over 21,000 members by the war's close.²⁹

Yet, according to the Army Medical Department, Dr. McGee was not directly involved in the Army by the time war hit. Her husband, Dr. W. J. McGee, who had served as such a strong support system for her, was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1911. Dr. McGee left her military duties in order to return to his side. Unable to remain entirely idle, she began lecturing and organizing groups that supported both civilian and military nurses. Her husband passed away less than a year later, in 1912.³⁰ Committed to honoring his legacy, she submerged herself into the education of their son with her trademark vigor and determination, but this time it would not be enough to turn around a difficult situation. Her son, Eric McGee, had great admiration and love for his mother, as demonstrated in his letters to her, but he failed miserably in all of his academic endeavors.³¹ Dr. McGee was forced to give up even her reduced organizing and lecturing duties in order to devote herself to the lost cause of her son's future. Yet Eric never became the great thinker his family legacy implied he could be. In 1930 Eric was killed in an accident, at the age of 28.³² Dr. McGee never recovered from the shock, and lived a

²⁹ U.S. Army Medical Department Office of Medical History, *Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee: Founder of the Army Nurse Corps*.

³⁰ U.S. Army Medical Department Office of Medical History, "Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee (1864-1940) — A Brief Biography."

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

quiet life until her death in 1940. She was buried in Arlington National Cemetery next to her father.³³

Without Dr. McGee's efforts it is unlikely that the use of female nurses in the Spanish American War would have been as successful as it was. First, her screening committee allowed the right candidates to be selected. Then, her manual on women's military nursing allowed the transition to be smooth and standardized. It is entirely possible that the Army may have resorted to the use of female nurses during World War I as a response to the dramatic increase in required manpower. But without the legislation that Dr. McGee drafted in 1901 it may have been impossible to bring women in quickly. The Army attempted to pass legislation that would allow in female yeomen after the Navy began accepting them, but the altering of regulations proved to be too slow and arduous to make the task achievable before the war's end. Female nurses could have been prevented from joining the Army for the same reason if not for Dr. McGee's early efforts. Even if the regulations had been changed during war, without the procedures that Dr. McGee set in place the boom that took the Army Nurse Corps from a group of several hundred women to over 21,000 in less than a decade would likely have been chaotic, and could have served to bolster the case made by those who believed women had no place in the Army.

Why Dr. McGee has been ignored by so many scholars who set out to write women's military history is unclear. Clearly Dr. McGee's contributions were significant, yet she is generally only briefly mentioned as an assistant to the Surgeon General. After examining the facts presented in institutional histories, as well as primary sources and

³³ Ibid.

biographies, it would be difficult not to feel that when discussing the Army Nurse Corps the Surgeon General is the one who should be briefly mentioned, perhaps as a mere assistant to Dr. McGee.

Chapter 3: The Navy, the Pragmatist, and the Forward Thinker

The sole person credited with bringing women into the navy by women's military histories is former Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. While it is true that in 1917 Daniels became the first person to bring women into enlisted positions that placed them alongside men, rather than special nursing units created exclusively for them, it is noteworthy that female nurses were present in the Navy from 1908 on. This predates Daniels's call for the enlistment of women by nine full years, yet virtually none of the actors involved in the initial introduction of women into the Navy are named, discussed, or studied in scholarly works, institutional works, or biographies. Often, women's military histories vaguely mention the introduction of women into the Navy as nurses alongside Daniels' name, leading the less critical reader to assume that Daniels was responsible for their admission. Phrasing like, "Secretary Daniels had crossed the Rubicon, and had taken the nation's future with him", would leave many surprised to learn he did not admit the first women to the Navy.³⁴

Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels may have risen to one of the highest offices in the land, but he was not born into prestige or wealth. He was the son of North Carolina shipbuilder Josephus Cleves Daniels, who was struck down in his youth in the conflict between the North and the South. The younger Daniels witnessed firsthand the devastation the Civil War brought to the South, and his own family. His widowed mother, Mary Daniels, struggled to raise him and his two siblings by herself, ultimately choosing to uproot the family from their home in Washington, North Carolina, and move

³⁴ Monahan, *A Few Good Women*, 20.

to Wilson, North Carolina. It was here that Daniels' passion for journalism began. At the age of fourteen he took the position of editor for an amateur paper, the *Cornucopia*.³⁵ This position qualified him for membership in The Fossils, a prestigious organization for promising young journalists. At the age of eighteen Daniels became the editor of the *Wilson Advance*. By twenty-two he had established the *Kinston Free Press* and become part owner and editor of the *Rocky Mountain Reporter*. While climbing the editorial ladder Daniels also completed a law degree and was admitted to the bar, although he never practiced. He later credited the critical thinking skills he gained in law school with his success in journalism.³⁶ In 1894 Daniels oversaw the consolidation of three newspapers: the *Raleigh State Chronicle*, the *North Carolinian*, and the *News and Observer*. Over the next several years the newly formed entity, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, would grow to be one of the most influential papers in the state under Daniels carefully calculated cultivation.³⁷ By 1898 control of the news entity had become an extremely powerful tool that Daniels could wield politically.

Newly influential, Daniels became active in politics, using his press's influence to give Democratic candidates an advantage. It was at this critical point in his career, in 1898, that Daniels became a leading force behind the newly designed "White Supremacy" campaign. As part of a coordinated effort with other Democrats, Daniels used his newspapers to advance anti-black sentiment. He took a leading role in furthering

³⁵ "Josephus Daniels Dies at the Age of 85: Secretary of Navy in Wilson War Cabinet Named Envoy to Mexico...." the *New York Times*, January 16, 1948.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

the morally questionable tactic of using racial tension to win elections on behalf of the Democratic Party. Daniels' son, Jonathan Worth Daniels, recounts, "Shortly before I was born, my father had been the man chosen by the Democratic Party in North Carolina to go all over the South and devise the best, and hopefully the most constitutional, system to disenfranchise the illiterate blacks while not disenfranchising the illiterate whites."³⁸ The effectiveness of this campaign drew Daniels deep into the inner circles of the Democratic Party, but later in life he would come to regret his involvement in it. It is notable that the time frame of Daniels' work creating the White Power movement lines up with Dr. McGee's efforts to bring women into the military in an official capacity. So, while the first steps were being taken to bring women into the United States military, Daniels, the man who is often credited with bringing women into the Navy, was not only absent from the civil rights march forward, but he was actively working against a different kind of equality.

Daniels became one of the earliest supporters of former Princeton University President Woodrow Wilson's bid for the White House. Wilson, who hailed from North Carolina, was tied to Daniels through their prominent positions in the Democratic Party. Daniels threw his newspapers and their powerful influence behind his friend, ultimately providing critical support to the future president in the early days when he needed it the most. In turn, once elected, Wilson appointed his long-time supporter to a cabinet position. This is how a newspaperman with virtually no prior military involvement

³⁸ Jonathan Worth Daniels, interview by Charles Eagles, "Josephus Daniels's role in North Carolina's 1898 white supremacist campaign," *Record*, March 11th, 1977, August 19, 2012, http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/A-0313/excerpts/excerpt_5864.html.

became the United States Secretary of the Navy who would lead our sea fleets throughout World War I.

After his appointment, Daniels became a steady proponent of equality among men within the Navy. He took a great interest in furthering the careers of enlisted men, much to the chagrin of officers. In his early years as secretary he set up service schools, where officers instructed enlisted men on basic subjects that would aid their advancement.³⁹ Yet, here is where Daniels quest for civil rights seems to stop. In the many volumes written on him, and even those written by him, virtually no space is dedicated to his thoughts on the equality of women, or feminism. In his own cabinet diaries for the date of Wednesday, March 21 1917, after listing a series of mundane meetings and telegraphs, Daniels unceremoniously describes his large role in the advancement of women by simply writing, “Women to be enlisted in the reserves for certain duties. First time in history of women enlisted in the Navy.”⁴⁰ Although Daniels was correct that this entry marked the first time women could enlist alongside men, there were already women serving officially in the Navy as nurses when he was writing.

The narrative provided in women’s military histories fills in select details on Daniels’ involvement in bringing women into yeomen positions in 1917, while leaving blank most of the details surrounding the first women to be incorporated into the Navy: female nurses. In May 1908, following the lead of Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee and George Miller Sternberg in the Army, the Navy proposed a bill that passed through

³⁹“ *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1948.

⁴⁰ Josephus Daniels, *The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 119.

Congress and established the Navy Nurse Corps. This is where the naval narrative ends, not picking back up again until Daniels sets a new precedent for the enlistment of women as yeomen.⁴¹

Closer analysis of histories focused on the Navy Nurse Corps, such as those found on the official Navy History and Heritage website and in Navy press releases, reveals that twenty nurses were appointed to the Nurse Corps in 1908.⁴² These twenty women were the first to officially serve as members of the United States Navy. In October of the same year, these women reported for duty at the Naval Medical School Hospital in Washington D.C., which is now home of the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.⁴³ In actuality, the initial driving force behind the movement to bring women into the Navy was not Daniels at all. Rather, it was a man almost completely ignored by history: Presley Marion Rixey, the United States Navy's Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery from the years 1902 to 1910.⁴⁴

Rixey is virtually absent from the history of the United States Navy Nurse Corps across all types of secondary sources, despite being its only initial high-ranking lobbyist and advocate. One of the few sources to acknowledge the role he played appears on the Navy's History and Heritage website, and it does not mention Rixey by name. The short

⁴¹ Monahan, *A Few Good Women*, D'Amico and Weinstein, *Gender Camouflage*.

⁴² The United States Navy History and Heritage Command, "*Nurses and the U.S. Navy Overview and Special Image Selection*."

⁴³ Tela, Janet. "Navy surgeon general commemorates Nurse Corps 104th birthday." *Navy and Marine Corps Medical News*, May 2012.

⁴⁴ Presely M. Rixey, William C. Braisted, and William H. Bell, *The Life Story Of Presley Marion Rixey, Surgeon General, U.S. Navy 1902-1910: Biography And Autobiography*, (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 385

document simply reads, "After several years' advocacy by the Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Congress authorized the establishment of a female Nurse Corps within the United States Navy."⁴⁵ The reasons behind Rixey's advocacy for female nurses can only be speculated, as he never wrote directly on the subject of his motives. It is likely that direct field exposure to female nurses removed his theoretical views on the issue, whatever they may have been, and left him with a clear stance on the practical realities. He had worked with female contract and civilian hospital nurses on many occasions and found their skills to be admirable.⁴⁶ It also seems that the issue held little political controversy among the men Rixey counted as close friends. Dr. Mitchell, a friend of Rixey's, recounts discussing the prospect of female Navy nurses with Rixey and reminding him "of an expression our good friend Mr. Dooly used again and again: If doctors had a little more Christianity, and Christian Science had a little more science, it wouldn't matter which (sex) you called in, just so you had a good nurse."⁴⁷

Opposite to Daniels in many ways, Rixey was a University of Virginia-trained physician and career Navy man, rather than a lawyer and newspaperman thrust into the Navy by powerful friends. Rixey's commission as an assistant to a Navy surgeon began on January 28 1874, and from that point on he slowly rose through the Navy's ranks.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The United States Navy History and Heritage Command, "*Nurses and the U.S. Navy Overview and Special Image Selection*."

⁴⁶ Rixey, Braisted, and Bell, *The Life Story Of Presley Marion Rixey*, 385.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 417.

⁴⁸ " Students of the University of Virginia, 1825-1874." Last modified May 3, 2011. Accessed August 19, 2012. <http://uvastudents.wordpress.com/2011/05/03/presley-marion-rixey-14-july-1852-17-june-1928/>.

On February 5 1902 President Roosevelt appointed Rixey to the position of Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery within the Navy. The reasons behind his appointment were decidedly cleaner than those behind the appointment of Daniels. His placement in the position was a credit to his devoted medical service to President McKinley during McKinley's final days.⁴⁹ It was from his elevated position as Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery that Rixey began to lobby for female nurses in the Navy.⁵⁰

For Rixey, allowing female nurses to serve in the Navy was a response to the lack of adequate navy medical department staff, much as it had been for Surgeon General Sternberg in the Army. Yet, unlike Sternberg, Rixey had no reluctance towards the issue. His confidence in the ability of women to serve was strong and had been buoyed by the success of the Army's Nurse Corps. In his own memoirs Rixey writes, "I asked him (Roosevelt) if he had any special instruction to give me as to the conduct of the bureau. He replied, 'The Navy is our first line of defense and must be prepared to fight at the drop of a hat. Your most important duty will be to see that its personnel is physically fit and kept fit for any emergency.'"⁵¹ Rixey goes on to assess the ten most critical difficulties he saw facing the current Navy medical system.

The first issue on his list is a lack of available officers. The sixth item on the list declares that the Navy must: "Train nurses, men for ships and women for hospital."⁵² He goes on to state that he expects one of his strongest allies in achieving these goals to be

⁴⁹ *Macon Telegraph*, sec. P.4, January 25, 1902.

⁵⁰ Rixey, Braisted, and Bell, *The Life Story Of Presley Marion Rixey*, 386.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 293.

⁵² *Ibid*, 294.

then-Secretary of the Navy John Davis Long, whom he calls “My patient and friend, than whom there was never a more loyal or abler one.”⁵³ However, perhaps indicating that unlike Daniels Rixey was not an exceptionally skilled politician, it was not ultimately under Secretary Long that women were admitted to the Navy. It would not be until six years and four Naval secretaries after the end of Mr. Long’s tenure that Rixey’s goal would be achieved under Secretary Victor H. Metcalf. Implementation would take place under yet another Naval Secretary, Truman H. Newberry.⁵⁴ None of the Naval Secretaries to hold the office during Rixey’s tenure placed importance on the admittance of women into the Navy, making the steadfast driving force behind the charge Rixey himself. Highlighting the patient pull for women’s admittance to the navy of a powerful man like Rixey’s would not serve to enhance the idea that women were not welcome in the American military. This is perhaps why there is no mention of him in women’s military histories.

Despite the official success of Rixey’s battle to bring women into the Navy being won, the fight for women to serve was not over on May 13, 1908, when Congressional approval of the creation of a Navy Nurse Corps was granted. A great deal more struggle was ahead. The Navy appointed twenty nurses, and over time their dedication and capability in the face of tribulation would earn them the name “The Sacred Twenty.”⁵⁵ The group consisted of a superintendent, Esther Voorhees Hasson, a nursing chief, and

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ The United States Navy, "Secretaries of the Navy." Accessed August 19, 2012. <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/people/secnav/secnavs.html>.

⁵⁵ Julia Anna Muraresku, *White Task Force*, (Unknown : Unknown) <http://www.scribd.com/doc/63672595/White-Task-Force> (accessed August 19, 2012).

eighteen other nurses. They were dispatched to the Naval Medical School Hospital in Washington D.C. for specialized training, though unlike other trainees, no provisions were made for their room, board, or meals.⁵⁶ The nurses, being determined, pooled a portion of their salaries to rent a large house that they shared. At that time, they received less pay than men, for whom the Navy provided housing. The women then set up their own system of preparing and sharing meals.⁵⁷ Despite the lack of support the women received from the Navy, they thrived. This display of hardiness put to rest fears that women in war zones would require a costly high standard of living. As a result of their success more nurses were sent to the Naval hospitals in Annapolis and Brooklyn in 1909.⁵⁸ By the outbreak of World War I the Navy Nurse Corps had grown from twenty to 106 women.⁵⁹

Despite Daniels' controversial background, especially compared to the transparent and admirable motives that governed Rixey, Daniels deserves credit for playing a significant role in the eventual total incorporation of women into the Navy's ranks. It was on his watch that the Navy began allowing women to fill enlistee yeomen positions, taking on clerical duties such as typing, record keeping, and switchboard operation. His motives, however, were far from feminist. On the eve of the outbreak of World War I, Daniels was bitterly opposed to cabinet officials who insisted that America would need to institute a draft for a war abroad. In his official cabinet diaries Daniels

⁵⁶ Sterner, *In & Out of Harm's Way*, 76.

⁵⁷ Muraresku, *White Task Force*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Sterner, *In & Out of Harm's Way*, 12.

writes, “Council of National Defense met at 10 am. Advisory Commission urged compulsory military service of boys between 19 & 24. Nearly all favored it. Baker, Wilson & I had objection. I said it should be resorted to only as the last resource to protect American liberty—it was un-American.”⁶⁰ This strong anti-draft sentiment is echoed in many of Daniels’ writings from the pre-war period. On March 24, 1917, when speaking of the draft, he exclaims, “Why introduce Prussianism to fight Prussianism?”⁶¹

Author Evelyn Monahan attributes Daniels decision to allow women to enlist as yeomen to a letter written to him by Charlotte L. Barry.⁶² Yet this letter went unanswered. According to Monahan’s source, the only evidence that Barry could have influenced Secretary Daniels is that he wrote in a ledger that he once met with her over a year after the letter’s writing.⁶³ It seems unlikely that the driving force behind his call for female yeomen was this single meeting with undocumented content, rather than the urgent need for manpower he was facing, coupled with his strong anti-draft sentiments. More evidence of the influence Barry may have had on Daniels is needed to draw a solid conclusion.

⁶⁰ Joseph L. Morrison, *Josephus Daniels Says ...: An Editor's Political Odyssey from Bryan to Wilson and F.D.R., 1894-1913*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 120.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Monahan, *A Few Good Women*, 20.

⁶³ Frederick N, Rasmussen. "Last female WWI veteran dies" *the Baltimore Sun*. Last modified March 23, 2007. Accessed May 4, 2013.

In order to prove that there was no immediate necessity of a draft, Daniels began looking for volunteers outside of the Navy's normal selection pool. Just days after he began investigating the idea of allowing women to fill yeomen positions Daniels also began to consider enlisting men outside of the Navy's normal age range to fight. He writes, "Why should not men of 30 fight as well as boys of 21?"⁶⁴ Clearly, by referring to thirty-year-olds as men and twenty-one-year-olds as boys, Daniels is writing in a calculated manner meant to convince the reader, rather than just conveying information. This type of writing was something of a trademark for Daniels, the newspaperman and ardent politician.

In addition to his personal public relations campaign for loosening enlistment requirements, Daniels also spared no effort on recruitment. On March 25, 1917, he writes, "President had last night signed an order increasing naval enlistment to 57,000 men. I decided to send telegram to every editor in America asking him to emphasize the need of this number and told Palmer to telegraph every recruiting station to increase their force and engage doctors to examine applicants so there would be no delay."⁶⁵ Daniels' acceptance of women into the Navy as yeomen appears not to be motivated by a desire for equality or a belief in their competence, in light of his feverish effort to increase enlistment. These practical motives, rather than a true belief in women's abilities, have mistakenly won Daniels a place in women's military histories. He poses no threat to the idea that women were an unwelcome necessity.

⁶⁴ Morrison, *Josephus Daniels says ...*, 120.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 121.

Yet, some evidence does make it appear that Daniels had feminist goals. When he called for the enlistment of women he publically stated: “Enroll women in the Naval Reserve as yeomen and we will have the best clerical assistance the country can provide.”⁶⁶ In his more private writings Daniels and the rest of the cabinet were more skeptical of the endeavor. In his diaries he writes, “Shall we have a body of women? How will we select them and shape their work. W said unless what they did was mapped out there wd [*sic*] be trouble.”⁶⁷ Another factor that can cause Daniels to initially appear to hold feminist sentiments was his involvement in the prohibition movement. Prohibition was clearly tied to the women’s movement of the time, yet it seems Daniels was not particularly invested in that movement either. While he did encourage it, his attitude towards it, much like towards the admittance of women, is rather unimpassioned. When considering prohibition for Navy men he simply writes, “Prohibition—up to the President.”⁶⁸ Daniels is sometimes heralded as a women’s advocate by woman’s military histories because he offered women, for the first time, equal rank and pay to the men serving beside them.⁶⁹ This too, however, loses its moralistic luster when viewed as the actions of a man desperate to recruit. The best single term to describe Daniels throughout his long political career is “pragmatic.” In fact, Daniels was such a political shape-shifter,

⁶⁶ Air Force Sergeants Association, "Glendale "Bugler - 60 Years for WAVES." Last modified 2012. Accessed August 19, 2012. <http://www.afsa858.org/information/glendale/60yearsofWAVES.htm>.

⁶⁷ Daniels, *The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels*, 137.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 138.

⁶⁹ Monahan, *A Few Good Women*, 22.

always changing positions on issues to suit his current goals and ambitions, that an entire scholarly work is dedicated to un-tangling his conflicting statements.⁷⁰

The majority of women's military histories paint a misty and vaguely inaccurate picture of the entrance of women into the United States Navy. A pragmatist, Daniels, is remembered increasingly, as a man who quietly pushed for the cause for years, Rixey, is entirely forgotten. Further, the remarkable first twenty Navy nurses whose determination turned a difficult and unjust start into a memorable and door-opening success are rarely mentioned at all, and never by name. Women's military histories would do the subject more justice by devoting less attention to men like Daniels who called for the admittance of women with ulterior motives, and more to those who truly believed women had a place in the American military, like Rixey.

⁷⁰ Morrison, *Josephus Daniels Says...*, 172.

Chapter 4: The Marine Corps “Free a Man to Fight”

No details are given in the World War I sections of *Gender Camouflage* or *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* about female marines. In *A Few Good Women*, female marines are briefly mentioned, but none of the actors involved in bringing women into the corps are named. This is puzzling, since women entered the Marines on August 12, 1918. And, like the Navy before them, the Marine Corps allowed women to participate in a variety of duties right alongside men. They received equal pay to their male counterparts and held equal rank with them. The case of the recorded history of women in the Marines is unique from that of the Army and Navy because even Marine Corps-specific sources lack details about the actors involved in the entrance of women. The same three pieces of information are presented on multiple Marine Corps webpages, in press releases, and in military-produced publications. According to one such press release found on marines.mil, on August 12, 1918, women were admitted to the Marine Corps, and 305 female reservists were initially accepted.⁷¹ Another source repeats the same two pieces of information, while adding that the first of these new female marines was Opha Mae Johnson.⁷² No background information is provided on how or why the Marine Corps began to admit women. Linda L. Hewitt’s manuscript titled *Women*

⁷¹ M. Nelson, United States Marine Corps, "DOD Observance of Woman’s History Month." Last modified February 1st, 2010. Accessed August 19, 2012. <http://www.marines.mil/news/messages/Pages/MARADMIN057-10.aspx>.

⁷² Marine Corps, "History and Heritage Timeline." Last modified 2013. Accessed May 5, 2013. <http://www.marines.com/history-heritage/timeline>.

Marines in World War I fills in many of the details that the vast majority of other sources lack.

The Marine Corps is the only branch of the military for which women's military histories do not credit a powerful man with ulterior motives with the entrance of women into the branch. It is also the only branch of the military where fair credit could be given exclusively to a powerful man. In the case of the Army, the admittance of women was brought about through the initiative of an outside actor, Dr. McGee. Yet, Surgeon General Sternberg is given credit by women's military histories. Officer Rixy called for the admittance of women into the Navy, yet he is ultimately forgotten in favor of Secretary Daniels. Unlike the previous two examples the impetus of change in the Marines came from the man at the very top of the chain of command.

Upon discovering in 1918 that many battle-ready Marines were being used to carry out clerical work Major General Commandant George Barnett began petitioning the offices of the Quartermaster, Paymaster, and Adjustments and Inspections to assess their willingness to utilize female clerical staff. In all three cases his query was met with resistance.⁷³ Each office identified work that could be carried out by women, but expressed concerns that it would require multiple women to do the work of one man, and that their training would be slow and difficult.⁷⁴ He was strongly advised by the director's of each office that if he chose to make the change it should be done slowly, to provide ample time for training the women above what it would take to train a man.

⁷³ Linda L. Hewitt, *Woman Marines in World War I*. (Manuscript, History and Museum Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1974).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Despite the resistance from below, the Major General Commandant was facing a more serious issue: a shortage in Marine manpower overseas. So, on August 2, 1918, he wrote to Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. Daniels' Navy position put him in charge of overseeing the Marines. Barnett requested that he be permitted to admit women into certain clerical positions. His motives are clearly stated. He wanted to "enroll women in the Marine Corps Reserve for clerical duty at Headquarters Marine Corps and at other Marine Corps offices in the United States where their service might be utilized to replace men who may be qualified for active field service."⁷⁵ Daniels responded within the week, granting the request.⁷⁶

Considerably less work has been done on the life of Major General Commandant George Barnett than on Daniels, McGee, Sternberg, or even Rixy. His Arlington Cemetery record fills in basic information: He was born in rural Wisconsin, and initially set his sights on a naval career.⁷⁷ After graduating the U.S. Naval Academy in 1881 he took a position in the Navy, but he was transferred to the Marine Corps shortly after, on July 1, 1883.⁷⁸ His climb up the Marine Corps ladder was slow and steady, with a new promotion being granted to him every few years. Yet, the scant paper trail seems to hint at Barnett being a great man who did great things. He supervised the Marine Corps during a period of unprecedented expansion and stayed on after the war to supervise the

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ United States Marine Corps, "George Barnett Major General, United States Marine Corps." Last modified April 24, 2004. <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/gbarnett.htm>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

following contraction. For these accomplishments he was awarded a Navy Distinguished Service Medal in 1920.⁷⁹

Barnett's 1918 call for qualified women to join the Marines in was met with unbounded enthusiasm. Tens of thousands of women lined up at recruiting stations across the country.⁸⁰ Recruiters were instructed to admit only women between the ages of eighteen and forty, but in special cases younger women were allowed to enlist with parental consent. Recruits were required to be, "of excellent character and neat appearance, with experience as stenographers, bookkeepers, accountants, and typists, and with training in correspondence and general office work."⁸¹ Any potential applicant had to submit multiple character references and letters of recommendation. The competition was intense, and a very small percentage of the applicants were selected.⁸² Applicants were weeded out by tightly timed skill set tests, and only those who excelled well above the rest were passed on to a thorough physical exam.

The physical exam portion of the process presented problems though, as the current Marine Corps guidelines were designed to test the health of men, not women.⁸³ Entirely new standards for measurements, weight, and general health had to be drafted.

⁷⁹ Military Times, "Hall of Valor." Last modified 2013. Accessed April 3rd, 2013. <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=16375>.

⁸⁰ Hewitt, *Woman Marines in World War I*.

⁸¹ Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I: They Also Served*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006), chap. 3.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

Yet medical officers still proved hesitant to physically examine women. On August 14 an internal memo was sent out to examining medical officers instructing them that women should be handled with care, but, regrettably, corsets should be removed during the examination for the sake of thoroughness.⁸⁴

The first woman to pass the rigorous recruiting process was Opha Mae Johnson, admitted in Washington D.C. on August 13, 1918. She was initially assigned to work as a clerk in the office of the Quartermaster, and by the end of the war she had risen through the ranks to become a sergeant. All female recruits were first brought in as “Marine Reservists (f),” with the initial rank of private. They were given equal pay, rank and discipline to new male recruits. Private Elizabeth Shoemaker recalls being given a deck court-martial for failing to return from leave on time. Although the experience was upsetting to her, she remembers being embraced by her fellow marines, both male and female, after the event. She recalls, “When I came out of the Colonel’s office there was a crowd of enlisted men waiting to congratulate me. They told me ‘Now you’re a real Marine!’”⁸⁵

Private Shoemaker’s experience would indicate that the lack of enthusiasm for female Marines expressed by the departments Barnett initially consulted did not carry down to the troops. In fact, the female marines were often treated as celebrities. Sergeant Johnson reports that she received so much welcome interest from male marines that she once booked herself for seven dates on the same night without realizing her mistake. At a loss for what to do, she invited all the men to the women’s quarters, where a party of

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

sorts broke out.⁸⁶ The *Leatherneck* newspaper also reports that the women were greeted in Quantico with loud cheers of enthusiastic approval.⁸⁷

The slogan “Free a Marine to Fight” became a popular recruitment sentiment during the war, and everyone rallied around the female marines. By all accounts, they were successful. Nevertheless, the war’s end brought manpower needs down dramatically. In 1919 the female reservists were unceremoniously dismissed.⁸⁸ The tenure of their service was less than a year in length. It would not be until 1943 that women would again be allowed to join.

Barnett is more often blamed for removing women from the Marine corps than he is credited with bringing them in.⁸⁹ When Barnett’s actions toward female Marines are viewed on the whole, it appears that he pragmatically admitted them in order to rectify a problem, then removed them once the problem no longer existed. When only Barnett’s involvement in the removal of women is cited by sources it makes his actions appear to be decidedly prejudiced. It is disappointing that in the only case where the positive change was brought about by the man at the top of the chain of command credit is still not given where fairly due. When it comes to properly allocating credit for calling for and

⁸⁶ Linda L. Hewitt, *Woman Marines in World War I*.

⁸⁷ "Marines Welcome to Arlington." *Leatherneck Newspaper*, November 21, 1918.

⁸⁸ Hunter Keeter, *The U.S. Marine Corps*, (New York: Gareth Stevens, 1996), 5.

⁸⁹ Cpl. Mike Rogers, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, "Woman Marines." Last modified November 03, 2000. Accessed April 23, 2013. <http://www.lejeune.marines.mil/PublicAffairs/News/ArticleView/tabid/1108/Article/3149/from-mans-corps-to-the-marine-corps.aspx>; Bookside Press, "Marine Corps Women." Accessed April 23, 2013. [http://www.brooksidepress.org/Products/ed2/Instructions/Marine Corps Instructions/Women.htm](http://www.brooksidepress.org/Products/ed2/Instructions/Marine%20Corps%20Instructions/Women.htm).

implementing the integration of women into our armed forces, women's military histories consistently report inaccurate information in the case of the Army, Navy, and the Marine Corps.

Conclusion

In their zeal to demonstrate the barriers America's first military women faced, women's military historians are often quick to highlight powerful men with ulterior motives, while letting those who truly believed women capable of service in the armed forces go forgotten. This unbalanced approach has created a dramatic picture, but it is not an accurate one. The narrative should be given an update that allows it to truly reflect the multi-dimensional situation that existed. Gender relations in the early twentieth century were complex, and no single woman's experience can be identified as a norm. Likewise, no single societal or institutional perspective on women existed.

When the history of women in the Army is addressed, Dr. McGee should be credited for the bold steps she took both independently and as the first woman to become part of the American armed forces and wear an officer's uniform. Her accomplishments should not be downplayed in order to showcase Surgeon General Sternberg's hesitance toward the idea of bringing women into the Army. Both stories can be told without compromising the idea that early Army Nurse Corps members faced great challenges.

When women's Naval history is examined, the Navy Nurse Corps should not be overlooked. Nor should its steadfast proponent, Presley Marian Rixey. Secretary Daniels was a charismatic and interesting figure and his work to grant women access to Naval yeomen positions is worthy of scholarly attention. Yet, those who wish to ascribe motives to him should tread with extreme caution, trusting his actions before his constantly evolving words. Through and through, Daniels should be regarded as a pragmatist, and a consummate politician.

Finally, women's military historians who wish to write on the entrance of women into the Marine Corps simply should. There is far too little secondary source information available on the subject. While women served in the Marines for less than a year during World War I, they were eventually granted full military pensions, and their service was noteworthy.

Further study on the issue of women in the military in the first three decades of the twentieth century is greatly needed. While the roles women filled were limited, precedents were being set and great progress was being made. Without understanding those precedents and the factors that brought about the progress it is difficult to truly understand the nature of women's military service in the twentieth century.

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