



FINDING AID

Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Site

WOMEN'S ARMY AUXILIARY CORP & WOMEN'S ARMY CORP COLLECTION

c. 1943 – 1949

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10/25/2023

National Park Service

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HISTORY

The WAC (Women's Army Corp) was the women's branch of the United States Army from 1943 through 1978. This branch was established on May 14, 1942, when Congress passed a bill to create the WAAC (Women's Army Auxiliary Corp). This bill, HR 6293, was introduced by Representative Edith Nourse Rogers, who wanted women to be able to serve in the Army in an official capacity. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill and set a recruitment goal of 25,000 women. So many women volunteered that the Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, authorized the enlistment of 150,000 women.

The WAAC (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) was established in 1942 as the first official women's auxiliary unit in the United States Army. However, it was not until 1943 that the WAAC was converted into the WAC (Women's Army Corp), marking a significant transition in the history of women's military service.

In 1942, the WAAC was created to allow women to serve in non-combat roles during World War II, a move meant to release men for combat duty overseas. The WAAC was led by Director Oveta Culp Hobby and included volunteers who served in various support positions related to clerical work, transportation, and cooking. As the war progressed, it was evident that the contributions of the WAAC were invaluable to the military effort. In July of 1943, the WAC (Women's Army Corp) was authorized as a branch of the US Army.

The establishment of the WAC meant that women in the Army gained benefits and more opportunities. They received military status, allowing them access to benefits like military pay, pensions, and disability compensation. Additionally, women in the WAC were given the chance to serve in a broader range of roles, expanding beyond the administrative positions they initially held in the WAAC.

African American women served in the WAC, making up at least ten percent of the women in the corp. These women often faced discriminated and experienced segregation during their service in the Army. Black women often had to eat in different mess halls and slept in separate barracks than their white counterparts. Despite these challenges, African American WACs were integral to the Army during World War II.

The WAC was set to permanently disband on June 30, 1948, and the House Armed Services Committee did not vote to permanently integrate the WAC into the Army. Representative Margaret Chase Smith proposed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act which allowed women to serve as regular members of the military. The Act was passed on June 2, 1948, and signed into law by President Harry S. Truman on June 12, 1948. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed Law 95-485 which integrated women into the Army and disbanded the WAC.

The creation of the WAC not only provided women with official recognition within the military but also challenged social norms regarding gender roles and paved the way for future advancements in women's rights. The WAC portrayed a vital role in demonstrating women's capabilities in the armed forces, contributing significantly to the broader movement for gender equality in the United States.

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SCOPE AND CONTENT

This curated collection houses over 100 items pertaining to the WAAC (Women's Army Auxiliary Corp) and WAC (Women's Army Corp) stationed at Fort Moultrie, South Carolina. Photographs, photograph copies, magazine articles, song books, oral histories, and uniform pieces are all housed in our collection. These pieces date from 1943 through 1949 and provide a glimpse into life at Fort Moultrie as experienced by WAC personnel.

Much of the collection is comprised of photographs, photograph copies, or negatives. The photographs in this collection depict activities from training to leisure time playing volleyball to drills on the parade ground. WACs are documented in a variety of uniforms and off-duty or civilian clothes. Images show WACs performing a variety of duties, such as medics, motorcade drivers, and even lifeguards. All images are available for viewing at the repository.

Some of the identified women in our collection include the following (titles of rank are omitted for the purposes of this list): Rita VanOverschelde (formerly Rita Cournoyer), Genevieve E. Schanbacher, Alvida Yunke, Emma R. Zimitz, Eleanor M. Graffins, and Barbara John Gorey. It is an ongoing project to continue identifying the WACs who served at Fort Moultrie or in the greater Charleston area.

WAACs and WACs served in multiple locations across Charleston, SC. The purpose of this collection is to document the roles, activities, and experiences of WAAC and WAC women who served at Fort Moultrie from 1942 through 1947. We hope that researchers will use this curated collection to learn more about WAC activities throughout the greater Charleston area.

ARRANGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION

This is a curated collection that has been donated by various peoples and organizations since the park's inception. We have been fortunate to receive donations from Rita VanOvershelde (formerly 1st Sargeant Rita Cournoyer) and Genevieve Schanbacher, both of whom served at Fort Moultrie. Many of our uniform pieces were donated or transferred from various parks and historic sites to help display the history of our sites. The oral histories in our collections are currently in reel-to-reel format and will not be accessible until they have been transcribed and/or digitized.

As this is a curated collection, objects are safely stored with like objects to preserve these pieces for future generations. Negatives, photograph copies, and oral histories are stored within our Park Resource Management Records. Other objects are housed appropriately throughout our collections. Please consult with museum staff to learn more about how you can access this collection.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Related Materials:

Military Women’s Memorial Research Library: [MWM Research Library](#) | [TinyCat \(librarycat.org\)](#)

“Creation of the Women’s Army Corp,” U.S. Army, [Women in the Army | The United States Army](#)

“Women Veterans Historical Project,” UNCG Libraries, Gateway, [Women Veterans Historical Project | Gateway Digital History Collections \(uncg.edu\)](#)

More Information:

Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women’s Army Corp During World War II*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Ed. Paula Nassen Poulos, *A Woman’s War Too: U.S. Women in the Military in World War II*, Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1996.

Judith A. Bellafaire, “The Women’s Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service,” U.S. Army Center of Military History, www.history.army.mil/brochures/WAC/WAC.HTM.

J. Chamberlin, “African American Women in the Military During WWII,” The Unwritten Record, National Archives, March 12, 2020. www.unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2020/03/12/african-aermican-women-in-the-military-during-wwii/.

“The Women’s Army Corps: Female Soldiers in World War II,” National Women’s History Museum, August 26, 2020. www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/womens-army-corps-female-soldiers-wwii.

“It’s Your War, Too: Women in World War II,” The National WWII Museum, March 13, 2020. www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/its-your-war-too-women-world-war-ii.

SUBJECTS:

- Women’s Army Corp – Fort Moultrie
- Women’s Army Corp – training
- Women’s Army Corp – roles
- Women’s Army Corp – medics
- Women’s Army Corp – drivers

MATERIALS:

- Photographs
- Reel to reels
- Uniforms
- Fort Moultrie Defender articles & cartoons
- Photograph copies
- Negatives

OBJECT LIST

Category – Object Type – Object Description

RMR = Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park Resource Management Records

Uniform Pieces

Buttons

- FOSU 5181 – 1 inch brass "U.S." insignia lapel pin for WAC jacket
- FOSU 5182 – Pallas Athene 1 inch brass lapel pin
- FOSU 5183 – Disk button with USA Coat of Arms for WAC jacket
- FOSU 5184 – Disk button with USA Coat of Arms for WAC jacket
- FOSU 5185 – Disk button with USA Coat of Arms for WAC jacket
- FOSU 5186 – Disk button with USA Coat of Arms for WAC jacket
- FOSU 5187 – Disk button with USA Coat of Arms for WAC jacket
- FOSU 5188 – Disk button with USA Coat of Arms for WAC jacket

Clothing

- FOSU 5176 – WAC jacket
- FOSU 5462 – Dress blouse
- FOSU 5463 – Dress blouse
- FOSU 5464 – Dress blouse
- FOSU 5465 – Tropical weight khaki skirt
- FOSU 5466 – Tropical weight khaki skirt
- FOSU 5467 – Tropical weight khaki skirt
- FOSU 5468 – Tropical weight khaki skirt
- FOSU 5469 – Tropical weight khaki skirt
- FOSU 5470 – WAC khaki shirt with 2 patch pockets with flaps & epaulettes
- FOSU 5512 – WAC Officer dark olive wool skirt
- FOSU 5513 – WAC Officer dark wool jacket lined with satin

Shoes

- FOSU 5515 – Brown leather [calfskin?] WAC shoes
- FOSU 5766 – Leather [calfskin?] dress pump shoes
- FOSU 5769 – WAC garrison shoes
- FOSU 5770 – WAC garrison shoes

Accessories

- FOSU 5457 – WAC garrison cap
- FOSU 5459 – WAC necktie of cotton broadcloth in khaki color
- FOSU 5767 – Brown leather purse [calfskin?]
- FOSU 5768 – Brown leather purse [calfskin?]

Paper Materials

Songbooks

- FOSU 3646 – WAC Song Book, 1944

Magazines

- FOSU 6546 – Article about a WAAC bride in the Fort Moultrie Defender
- FOSU 6546 – Cartoon about WAACs in the Fort Moultrie Defender

FOSU 6589 – Article about WACs written by WAC in Fort Moultrie Defender

Audio Visual Material

Reel to Reels/Oral Histories

- FOSU 11932 – Oral interview with 1st Sergeant Rita Cournoyer, 1980
RMR, Box 102, Folder 41
- FOSU 11932 – Oral interview with Shelby Venning, 1975
RMR, Box 102, Folder 42

Photographic Material

Photographs

- FOSU 3561 – WACs in recreation room
- FOSU 3573 – WACs at Post Exchange
- FOSU 3585 – Cake cutting in celebration of WAC anniversary
- FOSU 3587 – WACs and soldiers receiving commendations
- FOSU 3668 – 1st sergeant Rita Cournoyer sitting behind desk
- FOSU 3678 – Snapshot of Fort Moultrie Post Exchange and Bowling Alley
- FOSU 3679 – WAC barrack on Fort Moultrie
- FOSU 3782 – Photo of lifeguard group from Ft. Moultrie
- FOSU 5709 – Identified in FOSU 5710 as WAC barrack
- FOSU 5710 – Classified as same photo as FOSU 5709
- FOSU 5716 – Mixed group of troops assembling on parade
- FOSU 5816 – Photo of hospital staff in front of post hospital
- FOSU 6803 – WAC Detachment with unit flag in center
- FOSU 7518 – WAC sitting on steps in front of unknown building
- FOSU 7519 – WACs sitting in dayroom in WAC barrack
- FOSU 7520 – WACs sitting on bed in barrack
- FOSU 7522 – Photos of Army drivers at Fort Moultrie
- FOSU 7523 – WAC standing on road with beach in background
- FOSU 7524 – WAC formation on the parade ground
- FOSU 7525 – WAC formation on parade ground
- FOSU 7531 – 6 soldiers and 1 WAC awaiting vehicle inspection
- FOSU 7532 – WAC walking in front of station hospital
- FOSU 7533 – Station hospital entrance with WAC or nurse standing on steps
- FOSU 7534A – 2 women standing in front of station hospital
- FOSU 7534B – 2 women standing in front of station hospital
- FOSU 7535 – WACs sitting on tailgate of military truck
- FOSU 7536 – WACs sitting on tailgate of military truck
- FOSU 7537 – WAC standing next to “Green Hornet” sedan
- FOSU 7539 – 2 WACs standing behind an ambulance
- FOSU 7540 – WAC standing behind ambulance
- FOSU 7541A – WAC standing behind ambulance
- FOSU 7541B – Nearly identical to 7541A
- FOSU 7542 – 2 WACs sitting on the steps of the porch of unknown building
- FOSU 7543A – 2 WACs standing next to ambulance
- FOSU 7543B – Nearly identical to 7543A
- FOSU 7544 – 2 WACs standing in front of unknown building

FOSU 7545A – 2 WACs carrying a woman on a stretcher in front of ambulance
FOSU 7545B – Nearly identical to 7545A
FOSU 7546A – WAC and soldier both with one arm around the other's back
FOSU 7546B – Nearly identical to 7546A
FOSU 7547 – WAC leaning against back of ambulance
FOSU 7548 – WAC sitting on running board of ambulance
FOSU 7549 – WAC in driver's seat of Army Jeep
FOSU 7550 – 3 women standing under automotive sign; 1 WAC in work clothes
FOSU 7551 – Similar to image 7550
FOSU 7552 – WAC and soldier posed as couple in front of oleander bushes
FOSU 7559 – 4 WACs standing in front of unknown building
FOSU 7562 – 3 soldiers and 3 WACs standing in front of fort chapel
FOSU 7563A – WACs and soldiers standing inside the chapel
FOSU 7563B – Nearly identical to 7563A

Negatives

FOSU 11932, RMR

Box 151, Folder 3

Neg. 2261 - WAC unit in front of Enlisted Men's Barracks
Neg. 3675 - Wedding for WAC and Coast Guard at Post Chapel
Neg. 3676 – WAC detachment photo
Neg. 3677 - 1st Sgt. Rita Cournoyer sitting behind a desk
Neg. 3678 - 1st Sgt. Rita Cournoyer leaning against steps
Neg. 4278 - 1st Sgt. Rita Cournoyer in off duty WAC dress
Neg. 4282 - WACs at rifle range posing with guns
Neg. 4293 - WACS at rifle range holding guns
Neg. 4295 - 1st Sgt. Rita Cournoyer in field uniform
Neg. 4298 - WACs sitting in day room inside WAC barracks
Neg. 4311 - 2 WACs in fatigue uniforms

Box 151, Folder 4

Neg. 4330 - Capt. Genevieve Schanbacher leads WACs
Neg. 4331 - WACs in training at Fort Moultrie
Neg. 4332 - WACs playing volleyball
Neg. 4333 - WAC barrack building at Fort Moultrie
Neg. 4572 - WAC standing behind ambulance
Neg. 4573 - 2 WAC medics carrying a stretcher
Neg. 4574 - WAC opening back of ambulance
Neg. 4674 – WACs at ease after drill in front of Battery Logan