

# Women in Cleveland in World War II: Fighting For Freedom and For Themselves

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*“Sweetie, I want to make sure I make myself clear about how I’ve changed. I want you to know now that you are not married to a girl that’s interested solely in a home- I shall definitely have to work all my life- I get emotional satisfaction out of working; and I don’t doubt that many a night you will cook the supper while I’m at a meeting. Also, dearest- I shall never wash and iron- there are laundries for that! Do you think you’ll be able to bear living with me?”* –Edith Sokol, a social worker and Cleveland, Ohio, resident, in a letter to her military husband, November 9, 1945<sup>1</sup>

Times of war have historically been eras of change and development. For America, World War II was no exception. Advances in weaponry, medicine, and technology were just a few of these notable changes. One of the most poignant changes, however, was the societal role of women. Ladies of all races and walks of life were affected; African American maids, Japanese American store owners, and Caucasian housewives all were faced with new and often intimidating experiences. Cleveland, Ohio and its surrounding suburbs were home to many women who were involved in the war effort, quite a few of whom assumed new roles they would not have been allowed to fill if their husbands, sons, and male relatives had not been sent to fight in foreign lands. Women in Cleveland, like women elsewhere in America, were experiencing radical changes in their lives, both personally and socially. However, despite the tumultuous nature of the war years, Cleveland women were able to rise to meet the challenges that faced them in a hard and often unfair world.

A large number of women throughout the United States were left at home, nervously and eagerly waiting for news from the men they had sent to war. As increasing numbers of men enlisted or were drafted into military service, women were left in tense situations, often without a source of steady income, sometimes with children to take care of by themselves. 160,000 Cleveland men served in the military during World War II,

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<sup>1</sup> Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith. Since You Went Away. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 157

4,000 of whom would never return.<sup>2</sup> Women had to deal with the stress and worry while waiting for news of their husbands, boyfriends, sons, or friends.

One Cleveland woman who knew about waiting for a loved one was Jane Wdowiak, a young woman from the west side. She met her sweetheart, Sigmund Wojcik, at a picnic before the war even began. The pair dated casually before Sigmund joined the United States Navy in 1941. Upon Sigmund's departure from Cleveland to New Jersey for military training, Jane mentioned that she would write to him; he promised to keep up the correspondence. He stayed true to his word, not only writing her as often as possible, but visiting her every time he came back to Cleveland on leave. Waiting for Sigmund was sure to be agonizing; the time between visits could be as short as a few months, or as long as a year. "We were allowed thirty days [leave] after the war broke out a year to come back home," Sigmund recalled. "We didn't have aboard my ship thirty days [leave] in five years!"<sup>3</sup> Though the ship Wojcik was stationed on was primarily a transportation vessel, cruising the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans during a time of war had its hazards. Reports from the Pacific theatre of Kamikaze pilots, bombings, and tense fighting were sure to leave Jane worrying for her sweetheart's safety.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the danger, in 1943, Sigmund Wojcik asked Jane Wdowiak to be his wife. At first he was hesitant, saying to her " 'I don't think that we should get married until after this thing is over with because I don't want to see you hung up with a married guy that is dead.'"<sup>5</sup> Obviously, his sentiment changed; while stationed in Norfolk, Virginia,

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<sup>2</sup> "World War II". March 27 1998. The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History. 26 July 2007 <<http://ech.case.edu/ech-cgi/article.pl?id=WWII>>

<sup>3</sup> James S. Wojcik., ed. "A Call to Duty- The Oral History of Two Cleveland Sailors in World War II". 2006. Sigmund H. Wojcik and Mike A. Ruby Collection. MS 4980. Container 1. Western Reserve Historical Society. 1-36.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1-34 – 1-36.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1-36.

he called to ask if he could come to visit her over the weekend so that they could get engaged. The pair were married hastily on October 10, 1943, and then headed off to a quick honeymoon in New Jersey. Such impulsive, low-preparation weddings were common between soldiers going off to war and the girls they were to leave behind. In 1942, the first full year of fighting, over 1.8 million marriages were performed in the United States, a drastic increase from 1941's statistic.<sup>6</sup> GOOD Some were doomed for failure, whether through the immaturity of the couple involved, or because the husband was among one of the many casualties of war. The Wojcik's marriage, though, had a happy ending; Sigmund safely returned from the war at the close of 1945, and the two are still happily married.<sup>7</sup>

Some women, after their husbands or lovers had been sent off to war, were not content to sit at home and wait for letters. Women began to have a more prominent place in the workforce as able-bodied men became increasingly scarce. Those with menial jobs moved on to better paying jobs when no one else was available to fill the gap. More than that, housewives were now considering that they had another option besides being tied to the home. Many who left the home while their husbands were away tried to find more feminine or female-related jobs. Nursing, social work, and child care were fields that many women seemed to find more suited to their lifestyles than going to work in a factory or manufacturing plant.

Edith Sokol was another Cleveland area war bride. The Shaker Heights native married Victor Speert a mere month before he was drafted into the military in June of 1942. After following him across the United States for a little over two years, she

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<sup>6</sup> Emily Yellin. Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II. (New York: Free Press, 2004) 5

<sup>7</sup> Wojcik. "A Call to Duty." 1-36

returned to Cleveland when he was deployed for Europe in September of 1944. A graduate of Ohio State University, Edith was not content to sit at home at her parents' house in Cleveland and wait for her husband to return. After the passing of the Lanham Act of 1942, the first day cares were established across the country to cater to the growing need for childcare when fathers were at war and mothers had to find a job to make ends meet.<sup>8</sup> When the True Sisters Day Care Center was set up in Cleveland, Edith put her social administration degree to use by going to work as a social worker. She soon became director of the entire center, the youngest female director in Cleveland.<sup>9</sup>

In her half of the 1300 letters the married couple sent to each other, Edith described aspects of her experience at the day cares to her husband. She saw what she was doing as an essential part of the war effort, helping to keep the home front fully functioning while the war raged overseas. She described the challenging aspects of the job, such as turning one house used as a day care from a slum to a flourishing home tending to 35 children. She constantly emphasized her longing for Victor to return, wishing wistfully that, after the surrender of Japan, "...if only you could come home now- right now! I love you so very much. Do you think that this may speed up you??? homecoming?"<sup>10</sup> Despite her fervent wishes to be reunited with her lover, Edith was enjoying her new sense of responsibility and accomplishment. "I must admit I'm not exactly the same girl you left- I'm twice as independent... more and more I've been living exactly as *I* want to... I do as I damn please."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Yellin. *Our Mothers' War*. 60

<sup>9</sup> Litoff and Smith. *Since You Went Away*. 152-154

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 155

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 157

Though Edith may have been a bit atypical, with such brazenness and disregard for her social role, she was in some ways representative of the new attitudes women were feeling about themselves and their capabilities. Such a sense of accomplishment and self-respect was well deserved among the thousands of women who ventured outside their homes to join the workforce in the World War II years. Though some, like Edith, joined professions that seemed distinctly feminine in nature- nursing, childcare, etc. - some women went to work at places society had never before been able to picture them. Female factory workers in World War II were not entirely uncommon; factories, suffering from a lack of male workers, needed someone to do the jobs manufacturing the necessary equipment of war. Recruitment was nationally directed first at unmarried women, those who had no home to keep tidy for a returning husband, who had no children that should have been their first priority. Still, the need for workers grew enough so that wives and mothers were convinced that going to work at a steel mill or manufacturing company was an essential part of the war effort. However, many factory workers operated under the attitude, held by most of the nation at the time, that as soon as the war was over and the men could go back to work, the women were expected to settle down and go back to their families and kitchens.<sup>12</sup>

Some women, however, were more like Edith Sokol in their determination to get out of the house and make a living for themselves. The women who went to work in the rubber factories of Akron in World War II were prime examples of the experience of factory working females at the time. Akron, home of the Goodyear and Firestone companies, among several others, was a great center of rubber production for the United States. These factories produced “everything from gas masks to barrage balloons, from

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<sup>12</sup> Yellin. Our Mothers' War. 39-40

deicers to bullet-resisting gas tanks, from bicycle tires to car tires.”<sup>13</sup> Parts for airplanes such as B-29s and FG-1 fighter planes came from several factories in the area, used to help assemble the thousands of aircraft used for bombing and reconnaissance.<sup>14</sup> After many of the rubber working men were called off to fight for their country, it was their wives and relatives who were asked to pick up the slack and produce the very things that would protect the men on the battlefield.

Recruiting these women was topic of debate, since employers often wanted to target specific classes of women at a time. The Akron rubber factories, like many other companies, decided to approach potential workers through family networks first, finding women who may have been somewhat familiar with the plants and their operations through male relatives. Wives or sisters of plant workers who had gone to war were sometimes contacted by the companies, encouraged to patriotically fill in for their loved ones who were doing their duty elsewhere. Women who had worked in the plants before the war began, often in more menial, lower paying positions, were not only sometimes promoted to more strenuous work, they were asked to tell their friends about the need for more workers.<sup>15</sup>

There were several additional reasons for appealing for a more close-to-home workforce. Firstly, these women had ties to the company through the family; the companies had done a service by hiring their men in the past, so the women may have felt as if they owed the plant their services, especially after all it had done for them. They were aware of the income and treatment they would receive at the plants, as well as

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<sup>13</sup> Kathleen L. Endres. Rosie the Rubber Worker: Women Workers in Akron's Rubber Factories During World War II. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press. 2000. 78

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 78

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 53

knowing other workers and perhaps even the foremen. Also, these women were relatively easy to recruit; social networks that ran through Akron and its suburbs were easy enough to spread word through. By searching for employees by word of mouth, that not only saved the rubber plants??? money by avoiding additional advertising and recruiting, but ensured a tight knit workforce that lead to a more stable working environment. Also, recruiting personally struck a chord with women that was deeper than simply a patriotic appeal; workers would know women who needed financial stability. Katherine Endres believes that “money was an important consideration, perhaps the most important one. These women saw an opportunity to make more money than they had ever earned before.”<sup>16</sup> Women who were already employed would most likely know women who wanted, or needed, to earn their keep while they had no one else to help provide for them.<sup>17</sup>

The working world was not a very easy one for women, though, especially in factories, where dangerous chemicals, machinery, and conditions were fairly common. Just in the relatively small world of Akron’s rubber factories, a plethora of workplace hazards awaited unsuspecting women. Some, of course, had seen their male relatives injured on the job, but they were about to find out about the dangers firsthand. For example, a problem that women had that was not often experienced by men was the danger of getting long hair caught in the machinery. One rubber factory employee, Mary Wagner, was working on a bulkhead when her drill slipped, fell, and twisted itself around a few hairs that had escaped from her cap. After a visit to the infirmary, she thought she had just lost a few hairs and a small friction burn. Going home that night, she took the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 53, 77

hair pins out, which came away with a two inch wide section of hair that had been anchored only by the clips. Mary escaped relatively lucky, with only a blow to her vanity, but the possibilities for serious injury were there.<sup>18</sup>

Other women had less trouble with the machinery and were more concerned with the wide variety of chemicals used to produce, cure, and manufacture rubber and the associated products. Some women had the task of joining rubberized fabric together, lining the seams with soapstone. That, along with other chemicals used in the cementing process, gave worker Margaret Cooney such a bad rash on her arms that it would not go away and she was ultimately forced to move into a different department. Making balloons at the Goodyear factory was another unhealthy activity. Going inside the balloons to check their cementing, some women would get lightheaded, nauseous, or drugged from the reaction of all of the different chemicals mixing in the stale, enclosed air. Cecilia Foore, a Goodyear employee, recalled that “sometimes we were partially drunk from the fumes. We acted that way as our heads were spinning, and it was difficult sometimes to walk straight.”<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, difficulties working at the Akron rubber factories and elsewhere across the United States were, for women, not limited to only physical dangers. For a generation of women that had rarely ventured outside of the home for gainful employment, coping with the stress and responsibilities of being employed, as well as trying to tend to a baby at home and a husband in danger of being killed in war, was a novel kind of experience. Questions abounded on how to balance a working and family life, how to deal with male workers who could be condescending and doubtful, and the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 90

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 82

correct way to manage and distribute their own earnings. These issues were ones not often faced by men. They left the children with their wife; they didn't have to worry about cooking or cleaning or maintaining their physical appearance (at least to the same extent as women); they had been trained to enter the workforce and to take care of a family's finances. For the 6.5 million women who joined the workforce in World War II, issues with employment and the proper managing of one's finances could be seemingly endless.<sup>20</sup>

Thelma S. Ostrow, a southern woman who would eventually make her home in Cleveland, spent her war years in San Diego, California, helping to effectively manage those problems. She was initially hired by Convair, an aircraft manufacturer, as an industrial relations staff assistant, but was driven to help less experienced and more burdened women adjust to the working world.<sup>21</sup> Convair, which employed 7500 women in the war years, had been having problems with some of the female workers.<sup>22</sup> There were often calls that a woman could not come into work because a suitable sitter could not be found for her child; mothers also loathed leaving a sick child at home. After organizing a study that showed women's absenteeism "was not because women were less responsible than men, but because their home and family problems were more extensive," Ostrow helped design a counseling service targeted especially at women.<sup>23</sup> Ostrow, as Director of Counseling, interviewed and oversaw a team of forty female counselors, all employees at Convair who had been selected for training based on qualities such as their

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<sup>20</sup> Yellin. Our Mothers' War. 47

<sup>21</sup> "Consolidated News Bulletin". Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation. 6 July 1944. Alexander L. and Thelma S. Ostrow Papers, 1939-1960. MS 4349. Container 3. Western Reserve Historical Society. 1

<sup>22</sup> "Convair's New Service Cuts Down Women's Absenteeism". The Fort Worth Press. 23 March 1945. Alexander L. and Thelma S. Ostrow Papers, 1939-1960. MS 4349. Container 3. Western Reserve Historical Society. 1

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

compassion, tolerance, tact, and analytical talent. The counselors were assigned groups of about 350 female employees to oversee and communicate with.<sup>24</sup>

These counselors served two functions. First, they were to help the women with problems reconciling their work and family lives. A woman was expected to let her counselor know when she was facing a difficult situation; the counselor would then help the woman take the appropriate steps to make sure the family was taken care of, without affecting the woman's work attendance. Counselors contacted and provided the numbers of local day care centers, even asking employees with the day off to volunteer to watch the child if there was no other option. They checked in with whoever was tending to a sick child for the mother while she was working, making timely reports to the woman on the health status of her daughter or son. They assisted, visited, and talked to women who received a notice from the front concerning a wounded, or worse, husband or sweetheart. They pointed the way to financial organization, social service agencies, and lending and housing organizations.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, aside from their duty of working directly with the women, the counselors worked to ease the relationship between the female employees and the administration itself. Male foremen were often mistrusting or wary of the large amount of women coming to work in harsh factory conditions. Many believed that women were incapable of work, and blamed absenteeism, often the result of inadequate childcare, on pure laziness and inability. Ostrow worked to rectify that relationship, first by facing the foremen with the facts; "90,000 employees out of an approximately 200,000 in the

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<sup>24</sup> Thelma S. Ostrow. "Organizing A Women's Counseling Department." Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, San Diego, CA. No date. Alexander L. and Thelma S. Ostrow Papers, 1939-1960. MS 4349. Container 3. Western Reserve Historical Society. 2-6

<sup>25</sup> "Convair's New Service Cuts Down on Women's Absenteeism". 1

aircraft industry were draft-vulnerable men.”<sup>26</sup> The need for women was therefore necessary, if only temporary. Ostrow then made sure the foremen were aware of the “complicated adjustments required by the workers in their personal lives under war conditions, both within and outside the plant.”<sup>27</sup> While Ostrow did not expect the men to be altogether sympathetic and easygoing on the women, she did emphasize that the counselors were there to deal with any problems that might arise. The counselors therefore served as the liaison between the old-fashioned, strictly masculine workmen and the emerging, feminine class of new workers. This was, if not necessary, than certainly helpful in a world where two different cultures, based on gender, were being thrown together quickly and a bit haphazardly.<sup>28</sup>

There was more than one culture divide in America at this time, and one that occurred between women had to do with wealth and class. Many middle aged, upper crust women didn't have to deal with issues such as going to work, losing their husbands, and raising babies on their own. They didn't challenge their gender roles in the way the working class women did, by trying to gain a place for themselves in the factory. However, that doesn't mean that these upper class women were not fighting for their rights as well. During the first half of the twentieth century, it was still fairly rare for a woman to be college educated; even if they did graduate from college, many still kept to the housewife standard, not getting a chance to put their skills and knowledge to use. However, these women did not want to spend all of their time around the house, sometimes without companionship or intellectual conversation, and so women's clubs developed in many cities across the nation. Cleveland was no exception, with their

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<sup>26</sup> Ostrow. “Organizing a Women’s Counseling Department”. 5

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 5-6

premier women's group being the College Club of Cleveland, an organization open only to women who held degrees from four-year universities.

The College Club was mostly focused on being a social and philanthropic society. The Club included many different committees, groups, and organizations within itself that the women could join, according to their interests or tastes. These groups ranged anywhere from cooking clubs to book groups to stock investment committees. True to their devotion to philanthropic acts, the members felt the need to form a sub-group devoted to helping the Allied cause in World War II. The War Activities Committee, which met for the first time in October of 1942, had a "policy whereby the Club could best meet the ever increasing needs in the community for the war services of college trained women."<sup>29</sup>

These women did not work in factories or get their hands dirty, but were more focused on fundraising and producing more homespun articles for use in the war. For example, the Committee included a sewers group, which logged 500 hours in 1942 alone, producing "twenty afghans for use in hospitals."<sup>30</sup> Other groups knitted sweaters and hats for use in the European cold, and some stitched together gauze bandages and dressings for wounds. The Garden Club donated their efforts to the cause by growing victory gardens and making it their mission to teach their neighbors and others how to make their own.<sup>31</sup> The women put together gift stockings to send to soldiers on Christmas, including gifts like mittens, woolen socks, and quilts. One part of the group

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<sup>29</sup> "College Club War Activities Committee, 1942-1943". The College Club of Cleveland Records. MS 4983. Container 13. Western Reserve Historical Society. 1

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>31</sup> "War Activities of the College Club". The College Club of Cleveland Records. MS 4983. Container 13. Western Reserve Historical Society. 1

was even dedicated to assembling stuffed animals for British children suffering because of the bombings in England.<sup>32</sup>

Aside from assembling gifts and blankets, the women of the College Club made it their mission to raise as much money as possible. They did this through similarly homemade methods; bake sales and the selling of hand-crafted goods were two money makers. They often held auctions and white elephant sales where they would auction off their crafts, along with other various items like war bonds and magazine subscriptions.<sup>33</sup> It may have seem like a quaint homespun operation, but the results were impressive. In the 1943-1944 fiscal year alone, the women raised \$60,000, which they used to purchase 33 fully equipped field ambulances, solely through the sale of war bonds.<sup>34</sup> They followed the next year with an additional \$25,000.<sup>35</sup> Through the combined effort of bake sales and auctions alone, they were able to raise \$945 in 1946.<sup>36</sup> They also prided themselves on organizing blood drives, and boasted at least forty repeat donors that gave as often as possible, as well as other, maybe more squeamish, donors.<sup>37</sup>

Though the efforts of the College Club members may seem small when compared to the women who changed their whole ways of living to go to work in factories, the contribution of these women was still laudable. The class divide made it next to impossible for a wealthy, college educated woman to drop her sewing and run to the rubber plant; frankly, not all women had the drive or desire to challenge their societal

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<sup>32</sup> “Activities Committee, 1944-1945”. The College Club of Cleveland Records. MS 4983. Container 13. Western Reserve Historical Society. 1

<sup>33</sup> “Report of the Activities Committee, 1943-1944”. The College Club of Cleveland Records. MS 4983. Container 13. 1

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>35</sup> “Activities Committee, 1944-1945”. 2

<sup>36</sup> “1946 Financial Report”. The College Club of Cleveland Records. MS 4983. Container 13. Western Reserve Historical Society. 1

<sup>37</sup> “Report of the Activities Committee, 1943-1944”. 3

roles in such a way. That makes the role of the College Club women no less important or dedicated. They were simply trying to help the war effort in a more familiar and acceptable way, perhaps the only way they could, utilizing their talents for organization and knitting to their full advantage.

Other women who used their skills the best way they could were female performers, actresses and entertainers. Many soldiers didn't have wives or girlfriends at home and needed some inspiration, some image of quaint femininity that needed protecting from the evils of the Axis powers. Even men who did have significant others didn't mind going to a USO show to watch some seemingly hometown girl laugh and sing and bat their eyelashes, giving them a refreshing reminder of the way things were at home. These girls were not only pretty to look at, but they worked hard to support the troops. Famous actresses such as Lana Turner, Bette Davis, and the German-born Marlene Dietrich were ruthless in their effort to sell war bonds, touring the country, charging upwards of a thousand dollars for a kiss, and trading their autographs for valuable pledges.<sup>38</sup>

Though many of these women worked tirelessly as fundraisers as well as entertainers, many just wanted to help the soldiers relax and unwind, even if it was only for a few hours. Female performers in America soon came together to work in what were called stage door canteens, a kind of wholesome, military endorsed entertainment club for men. Actresses and dancers would not only put on little plays and shows for the men, but they would take the time to talk to the soldiers, many of whom were waiting on an American military base until they were shipped across the Atlantic or Pacific. Many of the men were nervous, homesick, or just plain terrified; having a friendly, enticing face to

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<sup>38</sup> Yellin. Our Mothers' War. 79-80

talk to would be just the thing to help calm the nerves. The first stage door canteen was opened by Broadway playwright Rachel Crothers in New York City, but sprang up in important cities throughout the United States, as well as in Allied cities abroad like London and a liberated Paris.<sup>39</sup>

Cleveland had its own stage door canteen, located just a few blocks east of downtown in Playhouse Square, a site of several famous vaudevillian theatres. This canteen was similar to all the rest, staffed by pretty actresses trying to do their part to help the war effort by entertaining the soldiers getting ready to depart. One of the main attractions at Cleveland's stage door canteen was getting a portrait done by one of the eighteen female artists working at the theatre. Working with chalk, paint, oil crayons, and pencils, the women would charge a minimal fee in exchange for sketching a neatly done side-view portrait of a soldier.<sup>40</sup> They were obviously an attraction; in the two years of 1944 and 1945 alone, at least 4,316 portraits were made.<sup>41</sup> The canteen was surely a hit with the military crowd, to have drawn in so many customers, even at the end of the war.

Some women did not find it enough to be helping the American troops; raising money, taking care of their home lives, or drawing pictures would not be enough for some. There were indeed women who wanted to be on the front lines, to see the action and face the enemy themselves. Women who wanted to be a part of the military most often got involved by joining the Red Cross or the Army or Navy Nurse Corps. Those who joined the latter two groups were even given some kind of military status, though it

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 82-83

<sup>40</sup> Stage Door Canteen Photographs. PG 366. Container 1. Western Reserve Historical Society. Sketch Collection.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Ledger Book 2

was not equal to the privileges given to men of the same rank. These women were often kept in camps under strict watch, often not allowed to leave after dark and not permitted to have any outside contact with men. Especially in the Pacific theatre of war, they suffered from diseases like malaria and “jungle rot”, and had to tend to the horrendous injuries inflicted upon the soldiers. However, many of the women claimed it was the most rewarding thing they could have possibly done; they were on the front lines, helping to preserve their freedom.<sup>42</sup>

Ruth Jacobs was born and raised in Euclid, Ohio, and had wanted to be a nurse since high school. Not many other options were open to women, she recalled, and she felt that it was at least a useful one. She trained at a hospital in Cleveland for three years, staying in a dorm on the hospital grounds and devoting much of her time to learning what she could as quickly as possible; the first year was spent in lectures, the second working throughout the hospital, and the third in specialty wards, such as geriatrics or pediatrics. Work and classes sometimes conflicted and she found herself working or studying most hours of the day, sometimes not getting a chance to sleep for more than a few hours. She graduated in 1943 and applied straightaway to the U.S. Army Nurses Corps before she was waylaid by an appendectomy. When she finally did join the ANC in April of 1944, she had to train in Indianapolis before she could see her first action overseas.<sup>43</sup>

After a five month stay working in an army hospital in West Virginia, Jacobs and her regiment headed to New Jersey to catch a ship bound for Scotland. Their skills were obviously needed closer to the front however; their stay in the British Isles was short, and they were soon off to France. Landing at Omaha Beach, Jacobs and her troop moved

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<sup>42</sup> Yellin. *Our Mothers' War*. 127, 131

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Jacobs. “Veteran’s History Project, Female Narrators.” July 5 2006. Idaho State Historical Society. 26 July 2007. <[http://www.idahohistory.net/women\\_vets.html](http://www.idahohistory.net/women_vets.html)> 1-1 -1-3

through Normandy to the 196<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Carentan, a small town outside of Cherbourg. Once at the hospital, Jacobs had to experience the real woes of life near the front. All nursing shifts were twelve hours long; they were usually extremely busy, with no downtime during all of those long hours. She never had any leave, and did not even get a break, or a chance to celebrate, during the Christmas season. She saw brutally wounded soldiers, many of whom would die or go through life permanently maimed. In 1945, the Hospital began treating German POWs, which was sure to stir up a conflict of feelings. Jacobs herself had a cousin in Germany, about her age, whom she checked for every day, whom she never found.<sup>44</sup>

Jacobs did not stay in France a very long time, only through the winter and spring of 1944 and 1945, but her experience was still a good representation of the typical life of a nurse in the European theatre of war.<sup>45</sup> She endured hardship, separation from family, long hours, and a long, arduous training process. Nurses, however, were not the only women coping with the rigors and demands of military life. There were other women who were not satisfied to be assigned to the typically female scripture of nurse. Some women wanted to be an actual member of the army or navy, to be an honest soldier fighting on the front lines to fight the Axis. The enemy these women spent the most time fighting, however, was their own government. The thought of opening such a masculine profession to women whom they believed were better off sewing blankets and cooking at home galled not only the military officials, but most of society as well. As one congressman scoffed, “Take the women into the armed service... who will do the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1-3 – 1-4, 2-1 – 2-2

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 2-3

cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself; who will rear and nurture the children?"<sup>46</sup>

However, women like Edith Sokol were proof that not every woman was so devoted to sewing and baking as society wanted them to be. So many women were protesting, and military needs ran so high, that in February of 1942, Army Chief of Staff George Marshall deemed it prudent to set up the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs). Though the organization met with protests, mainly from religious groups, lobbyists, and conservative Americans, it successfully paved the way for other groups to be formed. The navy established the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services (WAVES), the Coast Guard formed the Semper Paratus, Always Ready (SPAR), and the Airforce finally followed in late 1943 with the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs).<sup>47</sup>

While most of the women's branches of the services served on the home front, including the WAVES, SPARs, WASPs and Marines, the WAACs would sometimes see overseas action. In 1943, the WAACs number 60,000, and General Marshall thought it was time to send them away from the United States.<sup>48</sup> They were dispatched first to Algiers to work with the General's office in the North African campaign towards Europe. They soon came to Britain, and, with the successes in North Africa, moved through the underbelly of Europe up into Italy and Germany with the rest of the troops. One of these intrepid women was a young Ohio native named Patricia Rand McGalliard, who was in France mere weeks after the invasion at Normandy. Writing in August of 1944, just two months after the invasion, McGalliard described the brutal conditions of war, including

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<sup>46</sup> Yellin. Our Mothers' War. 114

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 114-115

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 12

the ravaging of the French countryside, the wounded men, and the harsh “field conditions” of living in cramped tents with up to three other women. However, McGalliard and her compatriots were not the type of women to complain; they had fought for the right to defend their country, and would not be found complaining or showing weakness.<sup>49</sup> “It is definitely on the rough side,” she comments in one letter home, “but none of us mind very much. We are getting pretty used to accepting whatever comes our way.”<sup>50</sup>

The WAACs served in every theatre of war by the end of World War II, from Europe to Africa to Asia. Sixteen women were awarded Purple Hearts; all women had to deal with some kind of ostracism from their family, friends, or religious or government leaders.<sup>51</sup> They sacrificed much to do their part in the war effort, but they were far from being the only American women to fight valiantly for the Allied cause. The women of the College Club were doing their best to raise much needed funds within the tight constraints their social pressures put on them. The workers in the Akron rubber plants braved hazardous conditions and social stigma to produce life saving gas masks and parachutes. Thelma Ostrow made working in the aviation industry a little easier for the thousands of women tended to by her team of supportive counselors. The determined and brassy Edith Sokol cared for the children of war-occupied parents, all while expressing the attitudes of thousands of women like her who found a new identity working outside of the home.

Women all over the United States were doing their part to keep the home front stable while war was ripping the world apart. Some women even put the home front

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 125

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 125

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 133

behind them to serve as nurses or soldiers where they were needed most in foreign lands. Cleveland was no exception, boasting brave, hardworking, enterprising, intelligent, and irrepressible women who did their best to contribute to the war effort. While these women did vastly different things, from fundraising to talking with homesick soldiers to working in factories to fighting overseas, they all had one thing in common: they not only believed in the American cause, but they believed in themselves. No one without dignity and self-respect could challenge the defined social roles of their day and emerge as victorious and self-reliable as these women did. Through their different forms of courage and talent, they were all able to extend their boundaries, to stand up in a world at war and set the stage for the changing role of women in the years and decades to come.

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