

NOTE

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"MANPOWER" PROBLEMS OF THE WOMEN'S SERVICES
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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"Manpower" Problems of the Women's Services
During the Second World War

1. This Report discusses, but only in a very general fashion, some of the personnel problems that confronted the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, the Canadian Women's Army Corps and the Royal Canadian Air Force (Women's Division) during the Second World War. Although it has been possible to treat this subject from an inter-service viewpoint, there were definite differences in the manner in which each of the women's services was organized and administered. Moreover, it has proved impossible to obtain exactly comparable statistics. Those appended are merely the best obtainable from War Service Records, Department of Veterans Affairs and the Air Statistical Officer, A.F.H.Q. And, unless otherwise noted, these are the statistics used in the text of this Report.

2. It should further be borne in mind that women doctors and nurses were members of the Medical Services of the Navy, Army or Air Force, rather than their Women's Services. Those serving in the Army belonged to the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and not the Canadian Women's Army Corps.

Formation

3. Women had been employed in various auxiliary capacities during The Great War, 1914-1919 - with the Canadian Corps in France and Belgium; with Canadian troops in the United Kingdom, and in Canada. During 1918 the Militia Council in Ottawa discussed the formation of a Canadian Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (A.H.Q. Report No. 15). No action was taken then, however, nor in the years of peace that followed.

4. Although Women's Corps had been formed for each of the British Services, these had been disbanded after the Great War. However, a certain amount of interest continued. In 1934 this culminated in the creation of a Women's Reserve Sub-committee of the Manpower Sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence. In May 1936 this Sub-committee reported against the formation of a reserve of women in peace time but its view was reversed during the winter of 1937-8, when the problem of augmenting the manpower resources of the United Kingdom became a matter of urgency. On 9 Sep 38 Royal Assent was given a scheme to recruit 20,000 women, between the ages of 18 and 50, into Auxiliary Territorial Service companies of varying size; each to be commanded by a woman officer and affiliated to a unit of the Territorial Army. (1) During April 1939 the Admiralty took steps to create a Women's Royal Naval Service. Then, on 28 Jun 39 a Women's Auxiliary Air Force was formed, initially from A.T.S. companies which had been raised for duty with the Royal Air Force. (2) These organizations initially comprised volunteers only and were auxiliaries to, rather than part of the Armed Forces of the

Crown.*

5. The first voluntary, self-designated corps of Canadian women had been formed in Victoria, B.C. during October 1938. Once war broke out in 1939 more Canadian women showed a desire to emulate the example of British women and unofficial corps mushroomed across the country. Among these were the Canadian Red Cross Corps, the Women's Transport Service Corps, the Alberta Women's Service Corps, the Canadian Auxiliary Territorial Service (Ontario), the Women's Voluntary Reserve Corps (Montreal and Quebec), the Saskatchewan Auxiliary Territorials, the Nova Scotia Women's Service Corps and the British Columbia Women's Service Corps (A.H.Q. Report No. 15).

6. Most of these corps applied for official recognition but this was refused. N.D.H.Q. was alive to the fact that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find suitable men for employment as clerks, cooks, mess waiters, canteen workers and the like but, as the Adjutant-General pointed out in a memorandum circulated to the heads of the other branches on 26 Aug 40:

...Owing to the jealous claims which will undoubtedly be put forward by these organizations if given recognition, it will not be possible to utilize these "Corps" as such, either in whole or in part. The establishment of an entirely new Corps with open recruiting will be the only satisfactory method for some time to come (3).

He suggested that the first step would be to recruit women to replace men in Canada as clerks at N.D.H.Q., Military District Headquarters and training establishments and as cooks, canteen helpers and mess waitresses at training centres. Unless temporary female civil servants wished to enrol they would be replaced by women in uniform.

7. Discussing the question on 3 Sep the Military Members of the Defence Council felt that complications would result from the employment of uniformed women as clerks and that enlistment should be restricted to such categories as drivers, cooks, canteen helpers and waitresses. Since it would take at least 12 months to provide a clothing scale similar to that of the A.T.S. it was decided that the Adjutant-General should calculate how many uniformed women could be absorbed, before a recommendation was submitted to the Minister of National Defence. (4)

8. It was not until 1 Oct, however, that District Officers Commanding were instructed to report, by 17 Oct, on the number of soldiers and civil servants under their command that could be replaced by women. (5) When the returns were all in, it was estimated that the Military Districts

*Although having no connection with the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom during the Second World War, thousands of British women served with the Women's Land Army, Mechanized Transport Corps, Air Transport Auxiliary, National Fire Service, Civil Nursing Reserve, Red Cross Society, St. John's Ambulance Brigade, British Legion and the Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence. Although the Women's Transport Corps (F.A.N.Y.) provided Motor Driver Companies for the A.T.S., it also continued its separate existence throughout.

could use 1888 women as replacements, broken down as follows: (6)

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|----------------------------------|-----|
| clerks, telephone operators etc. | 848 |
| cooks | 639 |
| officers' mess staff | 386 |
| M.T. drivers | 15 |

The Department of National Defence already was employing 593 women as civil servants, of whom 399 were at N.D.H.Q. (7). (By this time, of course, the Navy and Air Force had their own departments and staffs.)

9. During November steps were taken to draft instructions for a Canadian Women's Service Corps, patterned on those of British women's services. (8) In addition to the delays caused by administrative difficulties it was soon realized that far more women would be required for war work in civilian employment. Therefore, on 22 Mar 41, the Adjutant-General proposed that the Department of National War Services "should take on the proposed W.V.S.C. [Women's Volunteer Service Corps] and recognize and organize into one national body the existing organizations". (9) The Army would make demands on National War Services for the women it required: these would wear uniform but need not cease membership in the proposed Women's Volunteer Service Corps.

10. The Department of National War Services already had been introduced to the problem and, under the aegis of H.R.H. Princess Alice (wife of the Governor-General), proposals had been made to create The Women's Voluntary Services of Canada. Such an organization might establish courses across Canada for various phases of war work, including first aid and home nursing, motor mechanics and A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions) training, and also serve as a pool for women who wished to be directed to voluntary war work. (10) However, under existing circumstances, the Minister of National War Services questioned the need for such action.

11. On 2 Apr the personnel heads of the three Services discussed the problem. (11) The Navy did not employ large numbers for administrative duties and did not consider, therefore, that it required the services of uniformed women. Should the situation change an organization similar to the Women's Royal Naval Service could be created. Machinery for raising a Canadian Women's Air Service had been prepared and could be implemented should the R.C.A.F. experience a shortage of manpower and consider that the need had arisen. (This exploratory action seems to have been taken following a British request of 24 Feb 41 that either the W.A.A.F. be allowed to recruit personnel in Canada for service with the R.A.F. transferred schools or the R.C.A.F. form its own women's service.) (12) While the Army could usefully employ women there was the more pressing problem of what to do with the large number of low category men then surplus to all known home war requirements. All were agreed, however, that "should the situation change, making it necessary for women to be employed, it is advisable that such Service come entirely under the Navy, Army and Air Force respectively". (13)

