Women in World War I: Propaganda, Persuasion, and Patriotism

Catalog of the Exhibition

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Instructor: Valerie Hotchkiss
Graduate School of Library & Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Ann Heinrichs

Women in World War I: Propaganda, Persuasion, and Patriotism

A CENTENNIAL EXHIBITION

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Introduction

At the time of World War I, women in the Western world could not vote, much less serve in their nations' armed forces. Nevertheless, their value in the war effort was tremendous. Wartime propagandists used poster images of women to inspire men to enlist. Other posters urged women to conserve food, make uniforms, join service organizations, and work at men's vacated jobs. In popular culture, sentimental songs coached women in their role as faithful emotional supports. In spite of their absence in the trenches, the women of America truly “went to war.”

The United States remained neutral in the early years of the war. But on 6 April 1917, the U.S. declared war on Germany. Within a week, President Woodrow Wilson organized the Committee on Public Information (CPI). Its job was to gain popular support for the war effort. It did this through a propaganda campaign consisting of community-level speakers (including foreign-language speakers), controlled newspaper releases (there was even a Bureau of Cartoons!), newsreel films, pamphlets, bulletins for schoolchildren, and pro-war posters.

Women were a special target of the CPI's propaganda efforts. As political scientist Robert Wells
observes, “Women were viewed as unpatriotic, selfish, more pacifist than men, and excessively attached to their sons.”

Former president Theodore Roosevelt was one of the most influential voices in browbeating women into supporting the war. In a 1917 newspaper editorial, he declared:

\[
\ldots \text{the women who do not raise their boys to be soldiers when the country needs them are unfit to live in this republic. The women who at this time try to dissuade their husbands or sons} \ldots \text{from entering the army or navy are thoroughly unworthy citizens (Roosevelt, 35).}
\]

Besides their attachment to their loved ones, women were targeted because they were instrumental in food conservation. But even importantly, thousands of women had been active in the peace movement in the run-up to the war. Several prominent women activists had formed the Women's Peace Party (WPP) in 1915, including settlement worker Jane Addams and suffragette Carrie Chapman Catt. The WPP’s swelling membership was a matter of serious concern to the CPI masterminds once the United States entered the war. They made special efforts to combat women’s anti-war sentiments through movies, women’s magazines, and poster campaigns.

These efforts were largely successful, though they had some unforeseen results. For many women, the war was an opportunity to take up active roles as farm and factory workers, nurses, drivers, and other professionals. This newfound empowerment helped pave the way for women's suffrage and a wider participation in national life.
Icons of Inspiration

One way of gaining support for the war effort was through propaganda posters. The CPI's Division of Pictorial Publicity assembled some of the nation's finest artists and illustrators to create the poster art. Among their missions was to persuade men to enlist in the armed forces. And what better way to inspire reluctant men than to use the female figure? Saucy, seductive, boyish, or matronly—whatever type of woman reached a man's heart, there was a poster lady urging him to enlist!


These two posters feature the provocative artistry of Howard Chandler Christy, famous for his Christy Girls magazine illustrations. In item 1 (p. 2), a boyish, playful young lady in a sailor outfit with plunging neckline wishes she could enlist. She seems to challenge men with her androgynous, cross-dressing look and the hint that she might take a military role. This is an effective tactic, according to Pearl James, because, “Posted as a challenge, female ambition incites a male viewer to assert his difference by doing things she cannot, such as enlisting.”

Item 2 (p. 6) appeals to the more worldly man. Here we have a woman of the world, dressed in a form-fitting Navy uniform. Her face seems to pulsate with eroticism, making it clear that “I want you.” As historian Peter Paret observes, “Sexual provocation was the essence of the 'Christy girl' recruiting posters.” (56)

Deeply patriotic, Christy had already illustrated a series of articles on the Revolutionary War for Scribner's Magazine. During the Spanish-American War, he headed to Cuba as an illustrator, met Teddy Roosevelt, and drew a series of Rough Rider illustrations. Back in New York, he became one of the country's most popular illustrators, gracing the covers of The Ladies Home Journal, Harpers, Scribner's, Century, and others, as well as illustrating dozens of classic books.

Christy Girls were somewhat similar to the Gibson Girls created by Charles Dana Gibson, whose illustrations set an idealized standard for the turn-of-the-century American beauty. When the United States entered World War I, the CPI asked Gibson to head up its newly created Division of Pictorial Publicity. He solicited patriotic illustrators such as N. C. Wyeth, James Montgomery Flagg (who created the enduring “Uncle Sam Wants You” poster), Edward Penfield, and Howard Chandler Christy to create more than 1,400 works of poster art—and all for no pay. To this day, their war posters remain among the most striking and memorable images in the national memory.

As for Christy, he jumped at the chance to wed his patriotism with his vision of the feminine. Many styles, approaches, and artistic visions are apparent in the poster artists' work, and Christy's specialty was the female image. He had actually been one of the Gibson Girl illustrators, but his vision of women departed from Gibson's such that he developed his own unique Christy Girl brand. On the one hand, the Gibson Girl radiated virtue and decency, though she remained rather aloof and untouchable.

The Christy Girl, on the other hand, was eminently approachable. Sensuous, alluring, and sometimes playful, she seemed to reach out and invite engagement. For the men of 1917 America, these were the girls who could bring them dashing headlong into the recruitment centers!
Though Christy Girls were enticing, their style of inducement was not every man’s cup of tea. For potential recruits who responded to more dignified inspiration, Vincent Aderente’s poster offers a sword-bearing Columbia holding forth an American flag as her battle standard.

Born in Naples, Aderente sailed to the United States with his parents when he was six years old. The family settled in New York City, where Vincent studied at the Art Student League. At age sixteen, the talented youth began a decades-long working relationship with celebrated muralist Edwin Howland Blashfield. Soon he was helping Blashfield decorate the Waldorf Astoria Hotel Ballroom. In time, Aderente became a successful muralist in his own right, creating murals for St. Matthew’s Cathedral in Washington DC, the Denver Mint, the Detroit Public Library, and other public buildings across the country.

Also a talented book and magazine illustrator, Aderente depicted inspirational, romantic figures, often drawing on classical antiquity for his subjects. This evocative style was eminently suited to his Columbia Calls poster, appealing to a deep-rooted, timeless sense of patriotism in the young men he urged to enlist. At the bottom of the poster is the rousing poem “Columbia Calls: Dedicated to the People of the United States,” by Frances Adams Halsted.

Mrs. Halsted was the “woman behind the woman” in the case of Columbia Calls. And if news reports are any indication, it seems that Mrs. Halsted
garnered most of the credit for the poster. This well-pedigreed socialite wrote the poem, sketched out a poster design, and sent them to the War Department, along with several letters of praise extracted from senators, government officials, and military officers. How could the War Department refuse to produce it? Upon the poster's release, a *New York Times* headline announced: “'Columbia Calls' Is Nation's Poster. Mrs. Halsted's Poem and Picture Used by the War Department. Half a Million Ordered. Proceeds of Its Sale to Go to Home for Orphans of American Soldiers and Sailors.” The ensuing article sings Mrs. Halsted's praises, not once mentioning Aderente.

An interesting detail is the swastika symbol that Mrs. Halsted placed beneath the title of her poem. In the early twentieth century, long before anyone had heard of Hitler, the swastika was a popular symbol for luck. Swastikas appeared as architectural details in public buildings across the country, many of which are now on the National Register of Historic Places. The symbol appeared in several company logos; a few U.S. Army units used swastika insignias during World War I; and *The Ladies' Home Journal* offered swastika membership pins for members of its Girls Club. As the Hitler brand rose to prominence in the 1930s, the swastika fell out of favor in the United States.

Emotional support from the woman back home was vital for a warrior's morale. Her letters, full of affection and news, kept him grounded and sane. But for the woman, the war was devastating. She was losing her loved one, perhaps forever.

Popular music taught women how to feel and behave during this perilous time. A sweetheart should be faithful and wait for her man. A wife, if her husband is killed, should turn to her children to ease her pain. A mother was to feel proud and patriotic as she sent her son off to war. And in a unique twist on the “mother” theme, a woman could play out her maternal instincts by becoming a Red Cross nurse.


Pritzker Military Library. Poster No. 320208.
If you'd like to be a mother someday, why wait for motherhood? This poster invites maternally inclined young women to become Red Cross nurses so they can care for helpless soldiers—just as if they were little babies! The oversized nurse cradles in her arms a wounded, blinded, stretcher-bound soldier, as one might lovingly cradle an infant.

This oft-reprinted image of motherly compassion was highly effective, moving many a girl to give her heart to the nursing service. The American Red Cross recruited more than 29,000 nurses during World War I. The poster was surely comforting to men as well. In discussing how popular media dealt with women's growing power during the 1910s, journalist Carolyn Kitch describes this era as one of gender role reversals, with the mass media humorously offering up visual scenarios in which “domineering women emasculated powerless men.” She cites Foringer's Greatest Mother poster as an example of the “big woman-little man motif”—yet realized in a non-intimidating way:

Depicting a man who was not only tiny, but blinded, helpless in the arms of a woman at least five times his size, this image was one of the most extreme examples of the size-reversal device in American art, yet it was also one of the least threatening to men. This giant woman's power was not sexual; instead, it was altruistic, spiritual (suggested by her upward gaze), and, most of all, maternal.

Like Vincent Aderente, artist Alonzo Earl Foringer studied under muralist Edwin Blashfield and went on to become an accomplished muralist in his
own right. His illustrations appeared in *Scribner's* and other popular magazines of the day. In addition, Foringer was in demand as a designer of banknotes, producing illustrations for banks in the United States, Canada, and Europe.


In this song an African American mother is proud of her war-bound son, whose white friends wouldn't let him play soldier with them when they were children. This popular ballad targeted two groups the U.S. government considered “hard sells” on the war effort: women and African Americans. The cover shows a vignette of Sophie Tucker and, in the background, kids playing soldier and excluding the African American child (who, in the song, is marching off to war).

“Mammy's Chocolate Soldier” is loaded with social and cultural tensions. There is a mother's love for her son versus the call to send him to war. Then there is African Americans' second-class citizenship versus the government's need to recruit as many men as possible, regardless of race. Sophie Tucker's picture makes this contrast even sharper: Only white singers performed “colored songs” at the time.

More than 350,000 African American men served in World War I, in segregated units. Several African American units fought alongside French soldiers in battles against the Germans. France was grateful for their service and awarded 171 African Americans with the French Legion of Honor.

As a footnote: Other Archie Gottler songs of questionable taste were “Hunting the Hun” and “‘Oogie Oogie Wa Wa' Means 'I Wanna Mama' to an Eskimo.”
This is one of many wartime songs aimed at mothers of potential recruits. The message was clear: A mother was to feel proud and patriotic as she sent her son off to war. Accordingly, the song is dedicated to the “Patriotic Mothers of America.” The cover image shows Lady Liberty blowing a horn and wielding a sword, with an endless horde of happy civilians behind her. In the lyrics, the departing sons sing:

I must leave you, Mother dear,
And tho' it grieves your loving heart,
For me to go away,
It's for the glory of the good old U.S.A.

Historian Linda Quiney brings interesting insights to the targeting of mothers for political purposes: “[D]uring the First World War, the ideology of patriotic maternalism was potent propaganda, frequently employed to elicit the voluntary assistance of women for the war effort.”

“My Country's Calling Me” stands in sharp contrast to the anti-war song “I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” (1915). This mother's song was a rallying cry for anti-war groups. It was surprisingly popular and brought many supporters to the pacifist movement.


This song addresses the near-taboo subject of the war dead. The cover shows a mother at the lower left
comforting a little boy in World War I uniform. At the upper right are fighting soldiers enveloped in a cloud, indicating that they are dead.

As with many wartime songs, “Mamma’s Little Daddy” provides a kind of emotional template for women on how to handle their emotions and process their feelings when confronted with the realities of loss. In the storyline, a wife and mother has just received word that her husband was killed in the war. How does she handle this devastating news? She tells her son to put his toys away. Then she changes his position from Mamma's child to Mamma's partner. She tells him he is the father of the family now—Mamma's Little Daddy.

This song is rife with psychological issues surrounding mother-son and father-son relationships—issues addressed across the spectrum from Freud's antiquated Oedipus theory to broader postmodern views. However, the song must not have been very popular or well-known, as the curator has found no commentaries about its subject matter.


This song is addressed to the woman whose sweetheart has gone to war. During wartime, a soldier needed to know that his “girl back home” loved no one but him. This emotional support was vital to his morale. But how could he induce her to endure her loneliness? By promising her what every girl wanted—a wedding!
The lyrics acknowledge that the woman may be tempted to seek comfort elsewhere during the man's absence: “Even though you're lonesome for your soldier boy / While I'm fighting far across the foam . . .”

But the singer urges his sweetheart to be faithful to him while he's gone, with the refrain crooning, “Save all your love and I'll save all of mine / 'Till I come back to you.” As a reward, he promises marriage upon his return, and a patriotic one to boot:

Though we must part while I'm o'er the sea
Down in your heart you'll be proud of me
So light up your face with a smile little girl,
You have no cause to feel blue—
For we'll have a Yankee Doodle wedding
when I come back to you.

The cover provides ample visual cues, showing a uniformed soldier and his sweetheart embracing, with a wedding-bell-shaped cloud in the background. The woman's head is bent back at a right angle, the amorous pose familiar from movie love scenes.

In this letter from a soldier to his fiancée, he makes it clear how important her support is to him: “I don't believe you half realize how much [your letters] mean —or you would write me such a stream of them that I'd be in a con[tin]ual state of excitement. Yours came last night—and I've reread its ten pages a dozen times...”

9 Clay Judson to Sylvia Shaw Judson, [May/June 1918]. Pages 1 and 2 of a 6-page letter.
at least. . . . Good Lord! what wouldn't I give for just one look into those eyes . . .”

What a romantic and well-articulated appeal!

Judson's sentiments were echoed by thousands of soldiers who lived for those letters from home. Stationed with the American Expeditionary Forces in France, Judson did make it home safely. He and Sylvia were married and enjoyed a long and happy life together.

Judson, born in Kentucky in 1892, earned a B.A. at Harvard and a law degree from the University of Chicago. In the early years of World War I he worked with the America First organization, which opposed U.S. entry into the war. Nevertheless, in 1917, he enlisted in the Army and served as a captain in France and Germany. His fiancée, Sylvia, five years younger than he, was a sculptor and a daughter of prominent Chicago architect Howard Van Doren Shaw.
As men went off to fight, most women spent the war years at home. But they had plenty to contribute to the war effort besides emotional support. Hundreds of propaganda posters targeted home-bound women directly, telling them how they could help. They could buy war bonds or knit socks for soldiers. They could stop using wheat, sugar, and other foods the troops needed. Women were also recruited to take men's places in factories, in offices, and on farms. “Women's work” took on a whole new meaning as women boldly stepped into roles they had never imagined possible for them before.


This image depicts a much less glamorous “poster girl” than Christy's, but one who was just as vital to the war effort. It celebrates the woman's role as wartime factory worker and appeals for funds to support
the recruitment, placement, and housing of such women. The poster depicts a woman in a worker's uniform holding a military aircraft in one hand and an artillery shell in the other. Behind her is the blue triangle, the symbol of the YWCA. (A red triangle was the YMCA's symbol.)

Seven organizations banded together to form the United War Work Campaign—the American Library Association, the YMCA, the YWCA, the National Catholic War Council, the Knights of Columbus, the Jewish Welfare Board, and the Salvation Army. They raised and distributed funds for war relief efforts both at home and on the front. As a women's organization, the YWCA raised money to attend to women's and girls' wartime needs. Among the YWCA's many activities was building centers to mobilize young women for farm, factory, or government work.

Thousands of women and girls were recruited to take the place of men who had gone off to war. Others took jobs in camp communities and government offices. Once these women were employed, the YWCA took care of them. The YWCA's War Work Council opened dormitories, “vacation houses,” clubhouses, recreation halls, cafeterias, and hostels around the country for girls and women employed in war-work positions. For the national board of the YWCA, such services were in line with the organization's “great responsibility for helping to safeguard the moral condition of women and girls as affected by the war” (Langland, 679).


This is one of many posters urging women to give up certain foods during the war. In this elaborate montage, a convoy of ships is carrying food, arms, and soldiers to an explosion-ridden European battlefield, where a soldier is crying, “Hurry!” Meanwhile, the ships—relabeled “Sugar”—are being diverted to carry sugar into a soda-fountain beverage a young woman is sipping.
It appears that, by sucking on her straw, the woman is slurping the war-bound ships off their course.

The poster's purpose is to persuade women to forgo sugared drinks—not because the troops need the sugar, but because they need the ships that bring the sugar to sweeten her drink. Additional text on the poster explains the situation: “For your beverages 400 million lbs. of sugar were imported in Ships last year. Every Ship is needed to carry soldiers and supplies now.” A similar poster on the same theme adds, “We are at war. Every spoonful—every sip, means less for a fighter.”

Many citizens responded to this campaign by using honey or molasses to sweeten their drinks instead of sugar. At the time, most U.S. sugar was imported from Caribbean islands such as Cuba and the Dominican Republic. The issue of the availability of military transport ships warrants further research: One would think the War Department could have commandeered whatever transport vehicles it needed.

Artist Ernest Fuhr was a popular illustrator for *The Saturday Evening Post, The Century, Everybody's Magazine*, and others. He continued his patriotic poster work even after the armistice. A Furh poster emerging just after the war showed a triumphant soldier with an American eagle behind him. It declared: “You kept fit and defeated the Hun, Now—set a high standard: A Clean America! Stamp Out Venereal Diseases.” It was designed to combat the wave of venereal diseases that soldiers brought back from their travels.

This romanticized farm scene (p. 32) shows women how happy they would be if they joined the Women's Land Army. The image combines feminine delicacy with gritty labor, portraying an angelic woman wearing boots and a worker's hat as she fills a manger with hay for the horses.

World War II had its Victory Gardens, but women's farming contributions during the first world war are less well known. Both Great Britain and the United States had a Women's Land Army, in which women helped relieve the labor shortage on farms whose male workers had gone to war. This idealized poster image is British, whereas the U.S. counterparts were less romantic.

In Illinois, the Women's Land Army set up a training farm in Libertyville. According to journalist Elaine Weiss, the farm “brought about lasting change in the way farming was done in Illinois and beyond. These Progressive Era women broke stereotypes, won new rights, and laid a foundation for today's sustainable food movement.”
NATIONAL SERVICE
WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

FOOD WILL WIN THE WAR
You came here seeking Freedom
You must now help to preserve it
WHEAT is needed for the allies
Waste nothing

APPLY FOR ENROLMENT FORMS AT YOUR NEAREST POST OFFICE OR
EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE

UNITED STATES FOOD ADMINISTRATION

This poster (p. 33) targeted a special class of women—immigrants. Here an elderly immigrant woman with a basket of food is confronted at New York harbor, in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, by a man who is clearly an immigrant himself. He reminds her why she came to the United States and what her duties are in her new home: She mustn't eat wheat or waste food because the troops need it. This poster was printed in English, Yiddish, Hungarian, Italian, and Spanish (Aubitz and Stern, 83). Picturing the spokesman as an immigrant, rather than a Yankee, provided a patriotic role model for both male and female immigrants.

Enlisting immigrants' support for the war was a special concern of the U.S. government. The CPI even had a Division of Work with the Foreign Born. The foreign-born population of the United States in the early twentieth century was approximately 17 million, when the total U.S. population was 100 million (Wells). Many were not really assimilated into American culture. In addition, many immigrants—especially those from eastern and southern Europe—were suspected of sympathizing with Bolsheviks, socialists, communists, Marxists, Leninists, and other “un-American” groups.

Charles Edward Chambers, who studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and New York's Art Student League, was in demand as both an editorial artist and an advertising illustrator. His advertising clients included Steinway & Sons, Palmolive soap, and Chesterfield cigarettes, with many of his illustrations becoming large, outdoor posters. His artwork also graced the pages of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and books by Pearl Buck and W. Somerset Maugham.


This poster (p. 36) contains no image of a woman, but females are the obvious audience. It shows a knitting basket full of yarn and two knitting needles, with a red cross in the background.

The message: Homebound women need not sit around helplessly during the war. They can knit socks for the troops! Knitting was more than a source of clothing. By calling on women to knit for “our boys,” the government could give women a sense of involvement in a distant war. To rally knitters, the American Red Cross organized a unit called the Production Corps. Its volunteers not only knitted socks, but also made bandages and sewed pajamas. Following Red Cross patterns, the sock knitters made olive drab socks for soldiers and navy blue socks for
sailors. They also knitted specialty items such as the “Walking Cast Toe Sock” and the “Cap for the Bandaged Head.”

Great Britain needed sock-knitting women as well. British knitters worked hard to master the Kitchener stitch, named for British Field Marshall Herbert Kitchener. He actually met with knitters and asked them to solve a problem. Soldiers were complaining about the ridge where the toe of the sock joins the foot of the sock. The hard, lumpy ridge irritated their toes, making it painful to walk. So the knitters developed a technically difficult but amazingly effective stitch—the Kitchener stitch—to make a smooth juncture.


This is an official report of women's wartime work, with data on women working as Red Cross nurses, registering for war service, buying war bonds, replacing men on the job scene, and so on. It presents statistics on not only U.S. women, but also women in Great Britain, France, Belgium, and other Allied countries.

Ms. Packard's report is loaded with dazzling statistics. Compiled in December 1917, only eight
months after the U.S. entered the war, it reports on tens of thousands of women already engaged in war work. Thirty-five states had instituted women's registration programs for war work, and 3,266,377 women had registered in New York alone. Packard noted that, “Woman suffrage did most of the work of registering, because of their splendid organization” (Women's Defense Work, 13).

Of more than 17,000 nurses, 62 percent had registered, and one out of four was a Red Cross nurse. Most New York banks instituted a new policy of hiring women due to the loss of war-bound males. As for future needs, the report estimated that 300,000 women would have to take the places of 250,000 drafted farm workers. Women were also needed to replace 1,000,000 men drafted from industry. Clearly, wartime needs opened up many new work arenas for women.
Women at the Front

Not content to stay home, many adventurous young women found ways to serve “over there.” They could sign up as nurses in the Red Cross, relief workers in the Salvation Army, drivers in the Motor Corps, or switchboard operators for the Army Signal Corps. Some of these jobs were volunteer positions, while others were paid posts in service organizations or the armed forces. Ambitious women journalists took off for Europe as war correspondents. And some women actually did take part in trench warfare. Russia was the only World War I participant to use female combat troops—with surprising results.


This poster is more than an appeal to support the Salvation Army. It’s also a recruiting tool to induce
women to join the Salvation Army and serve overseas. This fetching young “lassie” in uniform carries a plate of doughnuts to hungry troops, to the enthusiastic approval of a soldier.

SA volunteers played a great support role in World War I. They provided hot food and rest stations for America’s fighting men overseas, and their steaming cakes and pies, warm doughnuts, and cool lemonade won them the homesick troops’ affection.

Both women and men volunteers followed the soldiers right to the front. Under Evangeline Booth, National Commander of The Salvation Army, the SA set up about 400 “huts” throughout France, where soldiers could relax, eat, have their clothes mended, and attend song and prayer services.

The SA’s delicious doughnuts came to symbolize the whole organization. Helen Purviance was the SA’s first “doughnut girl.” Arriving in France in 1917, she and fellow worker Margaret Sheldon shaped their dough by hand, rolled it out with a wine bottle, cut it into strips, and gave them a twist. Helen baked seven at a time in a frying pan she stuck into a potbellied, wood-burning stove. Soon hungry soldiers, drawn by the aroma, lined up in the rain and mud outside the hut to get their treats.

Helen and Margaret kept baking late into the night, though they only managed to turn out 150 doughnuts. As they perfected their techniques, they baked as many as 9,000 in a day. SA girls along the trenches took up the practice, and the lassies came to be known as the doughnut girls.

Early SA doughnuts had no hole. Responding to several soldiers' requests, Helen had an elderly French blacksmith make a doughnut cutter from the lid of a condensed milk can and a metal tube. SA girls devised other innovations, such as making the hole with the top of a coffee percolator.


This poster (p. 44) calls on women to join the Motor Corps. As a driver for the corps, women could drive supply trucks and ambulances along the dangerous front lines in France. Here we see the inspiring figure of a tall, slim, uniformed woman standing erect and saluting to her unseen commanding officer. In the background is a Motor Corps vehicle, probably a military ambulance.

Motor vehicles were a growing phenomenon on the American scene, and car companies had begun to market autos to women as well as men. With the advent of war, many women enlisted their driving skills for war service. The Women's Motor Corps, organized by the Red Cross, was one of many organizations that used women drivers to replace men, both at home and in France.
Women drove for several other groups in France, including the American Fund for French Wounded (AFFW, organized by an American woman in Paris), Le Bienêtre (a French-American society for the war wounded), and the American Committee for Devastated France (ACDF). Their drivers brought relief not only to soldiers, but also to war-ravaged peasant civilians in northern France.

According to Kimberly Chuppa-Cornell:

The typical driver was a woman of culture and means who was familiar with both the French language and the intricacies of auto mechanics. Drivers usually performed their own maintenance work, including oil changes, small repairs, and cleaning (468).

Women's heroic performance as drivers helped alter the postwar perception of women. Newspaper and magazine articles noted the women's industriousness, patriotism, and physical and emotional strength—a far cry from the delicate, flighty image of the turn-of-the-century female.


Early in the war, General Pershing observed that men in the Signal Corps were not well suited to switchboard work. They were better out in the field stringing communications cables. Women, Pershing believed, had the patience and perseverance to operate switchboards for long hours. So he issued an appeal for women employees of the Bell Telephone Company to join the U.S. Army Signal Corps. They would serve near the battle lines as communications personnel. The women's telephone greeting earned them the affectionate title of the “Hello Girls.”

Seven hundred women volunteered for switchboard duty. They were sworn into the Army and bound by all Army regulations, including ten extra rules to ensure their moral character. Ten Hello Girls received congressional citations for bravery for their heroism during the battle of St. Mihiel. Their bombed building was on fire, but they insisted on staying at their posts, leaving only under the threat of court-martial and returning after the fire was out.

After the war, the Hello Girls were refused honorary discharges and Army veteran status. They were told they could not have been in the U.S. Army because regulations stated that Army personnel were “men.” (The U.S. Navy, meanwhile, used the word “persons,” which accommodated its Yeomanettes.)

For decades, Hello Girl Merle Egan Anderson led the battle for the women's rightful honors. At last, in 1978, on the sixty-year anniversary of the armistice, a congressional bill granted the Hello Girls their veteran status.
THE WORLD AT MY SHOULDER

cal of her that when she saw me—I must have been a sight—she asked not a single question, only said, "Come in and have a drink!" I never needed anything worse. I found Mower in bed with the flu, which was then raging. He seemed startled, as well he might, but gave me the address I wanted and said he would stand by me in whatever followed.

We then went to the captain's house, where I found him and his sister, who also had the flu, and told them the sorrowful news. They were inexpressibly shocked, and we wept together. I also made the captain promise to protect the driver and to see that nothing was done to him for his kindness of heart. He promised, and he was as good as his word. He sent me home to get some breakfast and dry clothes, but warned me that I must be at the Val de Grev, the big gloomy hospital where such things were attended to, by ten o'clock. It was then a little after eight. At last I could leave the body, for the captain took charge of it.

When I had freshened up I went to the hospital and met the captain. We were ushered into a big circular room where the colonel in command, a big man with a black spade beard and piercing eyes, wearing the uniform of a medical officer, greeted us courteously and asked the captain questions. I said nothing. The colonel was very solicitous, said it was a most regrettable accident and doubtless the first of many—in which he was right—and got out a form on which he took down the particulars. Name of deceased, address, and so on. Then he asked:

"And where did the accident take place?"

"Now it's coming!" said I to myself, and I saw the captain square his shoulders. But he answered quietly, "On the Mont de Biligny."

Then the storm broke. "The Mont de Biligny! But how?

Dieu, the Mont de Biligny is in the war zone!" Yes, it was.

Eunice Tietjens was the Chicago Daily News's first female foreign correspondent and one of the few women accredited as war correspondents by the War Department in World War I. Stationed in Paris, Eunice was supposed to write “women's stories” but preferred gathering story material near the battle lines. This photo (p. 49) in her memoir *The World at My Shoulder* shows Tietjens in an army uniform.

In France Tietjens insisted on traveling to the front, although the harsh realities of war could be overwhelming. On one trip through a debris-strewn battlefield, her guide, a young Frenchwoman, picked up a strange-looking object that turned out to be a grenade. It exploded, killing the young woman instantly. “Mademoiselle's body lay as it had fallen,” Tietjens wrote, “and I looked at it with horrified eyes. . . Her long hair was standing straight up from her head, her body from the waist up was quite naked. Her right hand was missing” (Tietjens, 161, 162).

At great personal risk, Tietjens decided to traverse the war zone and take the body back to Paris. To get past the checkpoints, “I was dressed in a correspondent's uniform, exactly like an officer's and with a Sam Browne belt [distinguished by its diagonal strap], and I suppose they could not resist my assumption of authority” (164).

A Chicago literary figure, Eunice was a poet, novelist, journalist, travel writer, translator, editor, and children's book author. For more than twenty-five years, she was the associate editor of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. According to *Poetry* publisher Harriet Monroe, “Eunice was tall and dark . . . and her olive skin and midnight eyes were emphasized by a heavy mass of dark brown hair” (Monroe, 324).

Eunice is perhaps best known for her relationships with important literary figures of the early twentieth century, such as Edgar Lee Masters, Sara Teasdale, Robert Frost, H. L. Mencken, and Vachel Lindsay. Her first husband, composer Paul Tietjens, wrote the score for the first musical version of *The Wizard of Oz*.


This book is the wartime memoir of Russia's most brilliant female combatant—Maria Bochkareva, best known as Yashka. She organized, trained, and led Russia’s all-female Battalion of Death. In the book (pp. 52–53) we see a portrait of Bochkareva in uniform. Note the title of Chapter XI in the table of contents: “I Organize the Battalion of Death.”
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The women’s battalion itself was a propaganda tool. By 1917, Russia’s male soldiers were worn out from combat; morale and discipline were in a shambles. Many were deserting, arguing with their superiors, and refusing to obey orders.

Meanwhile, Russian women were pushing to play a bigger role in the war. So Yashka, already a combat veteran, suggested organizing an all-female battalion. These women, she argued, could inspire the men or at least shame them into fighting. At a loss for a better solution, the Russian government agreed.

Almost 2,000 women signed up for Yashka’s battalion. Some were peasants, factory workers, or maids. Others were society ladies, university graduates, and even a princess from a noble family. Both Yashka and her recruits were subjected to daily ridicule and sexual harassment. Yet day after day, Yashka sternly trained her troops in the art of warfare.

“As soon as one of them disobeyed an order I quickly removed her uniform and let her go,” she said. “The Battalion had to be a success or I would become the laughing-stock of the country” (168). After training, only about 300 women were left. In July 1917, Yashka’s battalion was ordered to the German front in southwestern Russia.

The night they headed into the trenches, Yashka’s women lined up shoulder-to-shoulder with the men. “The men on our flanks were joking and deriding us,” Yashka remembered. “We gritted our teeth in fury but did not reply” (211, 212).

When the signal was given, only the women charged ahead. They “leaped out of the trenches [and] moved forward against a withering fire of machine guns . . . marching steadily against the hail of bullets” (212). One woman after another was shot down, but they kept advancing. Finally the men swarmed the battlefield, and the Germans eventually retreated deep into the forest. Inspired by Yashka’s women, many more women’s battalions were organized all over Russia.

Enforcing regulations among her women could rise to fatal proportions. During a lull in the battle, Yashka roamed the forested no-man’s-land and came upon one of her women engaged in amorous activity with a male soldier. Enraged, she thrust her bayonet through the woman, killing her on the spot! To be sure, Yashka tolerated no breach of discipline.

Yashka’s battalion persisted through the stormy months of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Afterwards, the victorious Bolshevists suspected her (and rightly so) of sympathizing with the anti-Bolshevik White Army. The Bolshevists arrested her, declared her an enemy of the people, and executed her by firing squad on 16 May 1920. At the age of thirty, the champion of the women’s Battalion of Death slumped to the ground for the last time.
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