

VETERANKE DRUGE SVETOVNE VOJNE

WOMEN VETERANS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Povzetek Druga svetovna vojna je bila obdobje, ko so bile ženske prvič v zgodovini v velikem obsegu vključene v vojaško službo. Zavezniki so jih vključevali v vojaške aktivnosti že vse od začetka vojne, tako v civilnem kot v vojaškem sektorju. Sovjetska zveza je za vojaško službo mobilizirala največji odstotek ženske populacije, Združene države Amerike pa so oblikovale homogene ženske vojaške enote. Ženske so bile aktivne tudi v partizanskih vojskah v Evropi. Borke so pokazale izjemne sposobnosti, bile so dragocene za vojaško moč svoje države, vendar so bile množično demobilizirane, ko se je vojna končala. Veteranke so bile večinoma prisiljene sprejeti tradicionalne ženske družbene vloge in pozabiti na svoja medvojna junaštva.

Ključne besede *Ženske v vojski, veteranke, druga svetovna vojna, demobilizacija, reintegracija v družbo.*

Abstract World War II was the first time in history that women were called upon for military service to a great extent. The Allied military forces utilized women from the beginning of the war in both the civilian and military sectors. The Soviet Union mobilized the largest percent of female population to perform military tasks. The United States formed the all-female military units. Women were active in partisan armies all over Europe. Women soldiers proved themselves to be of great value for their countries, but when the war was over, they were demobilized en masse. As women veterans they were mostly forced to accept traditional feminine social roles and to forget about their inter-war bravery.

Key words *Women in the military, women veterans, Second World War, demobilization, reintegration into society.*

Introduction

During the Second World War, the role of women in society changed dramatically. Most countries needed women to support the war effort more directly: to perform tasks usually performed by men at home, to perform jobs that had traditionally been held by men, and even to serve in the military. Women mostly enthusiastically embraced their new roles and responsibilities and many of them wanted to play an active role in the war and lobbied the government to form military organizations for women. They proved that the idea of women being too soft-hearted and too weak to kill was false and without any truthful fundamentals. Women engaged themselves in combat as regular soldiers in uniform and as resistance fighters or guerrillas. Mixed-gender units were formed and they mostly performed better than all-male units. Within these military units, women lived like men, fought like men and some of them died like men.

The mobilization of women was the most effective in the Soviet Union where women were mobilized extensively into military tasks. This country was the first in World War II to use women in combat with regular armed forces. The key factors that had opened the door for Soviet women in combat were desperation, total militarization of society, and a communist ideology that promoted women's participation outside of traditional feminine roles. The Soviet system expected the soviet women to equally participate in, understand, and defend its regime (Vajskop, 2008, p. 3). Women participated in combat in large numbers, and their participation added to the Soviet Union's military strength. The Soviet case showed that women can be organized into effective large-scale military units and that the mobilization of a substantial minority of women soldiers increased the state's military power.

In World War II, in addition to the Soviet partisans, women participated in the **partisan forces** of other occupied countries as well – including Yugoslavia, Poland, Italy, Greece, and France. Female participation within the Partisan movements in the occupied Europe was significant. The communists officially declared women to be equal with men and that was the basis for the mobilization of women into partisan units. Women took part in street fighting, carried out assassinations, and performed intelligence missions.

The **United Kingdom**, in 1941, became one of the very first countries to conscript women. British women actively defended the nation against Hitler's Luftwaffe (often in anti-aircraft or non-combat roles), and there were even female officers in command of male soldiers (Vajskop, 2008, p. 3).

American women were not sent into combat and making women soldiers was a special task of the American government. The all-female units were formed to handle clerical and administrative jobs for the military (Campbell, 1993, p. 302). The all-female military units were formed in the U.S. and in Canada, which created its own women's forces. Women were able, for the first time in history, to serve the U.S. and Canada in uniform (Canada remembers Women at War, online).

On the other side there were countries much less conducive to the participation of women in war, countries that did not allow women into regular military forces. For instance, **Germany** faced chronic shortages of manpower. However, the Nazi ideology promoted gender division, with women assigned to the home and the production of German children. Therefore, Germany went into war with a different gender ideology than the Soviet Union and German women were neither trained in the use of arms nor were they allowed, under any conditions, to use them. They were aimed to guarantee the survival of the Aryan race. The only way in which Hitler utilized women before or during WWII was in industry, and only then of sheer desperation. The Nazis opposed weapons training for women auxiliaries until the final months of the war. In February, 1945, finding himself in an increasing desperate situation, Hitler created an experimental women's infantry battalion (Hershiser, 2003, p. 97). When the war was over, Albert Speer, Hitler's weapons production chief, regretted the fact that Germany had not brought its women into the military as other countries had. In his opinion, one of the biggest reasons Allied forces won the war was because of the use of their women (Permeswaran, 2008, p. 99).

The aim of this article is to present key facts and arguments about historical experiences with including women into military environment, with demobilization of women and with their integration into society. The main issue is to compare different historical approaches and models of integration of ex-female soldiers into society and to present social circumstances within which specific models of integration were implemented. The main methodological approach was to collect the information, find interpretation and compare the situation and models within different countries.

1 MOBILIZATION OF WOMEN

Prior to World War II, women had not served in the military in great numbers or in official units. Their role in the military in the World War I was very limited and their participation was on a very small scale. Because of the brutality and the totality of the Second World War military leaders of many invaded countries realized the necessity of utilizing women in the armed services. Women were mostly not drafted, but they were given the opportunity to voluntarily enter the army – “one of the last bastions of male exclusivity” (Scrivener, 1999, p. 361). The extent to which the country used its women for the militaries varied in accordance with the extent to which the country was immersed in the war. The degree to which the countries utilized their female population in military service varied enormously. The Soviet Union allowed the most extensive integration of women in the military and the United States utilized women in a limited role. Given that the U.S. did not have the battlefield in its own backyard, the pressure and the need to put women in combatant role did not exist. Unlike their Allied counterparts, the Russians had a long history of women serving the military, culminating with the Civil War (Hershiser, 2003, pp. 1-4).

Women who joined the army were mostly volunteers, but in Britain the conscription began in 1941 for all single women between the age of eighteen and thirty for the

auxiliary forces. There were over 640,000 women in the Britain's armed forces, including the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) and the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), plus many more who flew unarmed aircraft, drove ambulances, served as nurses and worked behind enemy lines in the European resistance in the Special Operations Executive. By the end of the war, nearly a half-million women served in the military comprising 12 percent of Britain's military strength and over 3,000 of them died in the line of duty. On the other hand the U.S. women's military was an all-volunteer force. (Hershiser, 2003, p. 4)

Women joined the resistance movements in Europe massively, but there were not so many female partisan fighters among them. The percentage of women partisan soldiers was high in Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, but in France there was only a small number of women among the *maquis* (Diamond, 1999, pp. 112-124). In Italy, women joined mixed gender partisan units called *Gruppi di Azione Patriottica* and *Squadre di Azione Patriottica* (Slaughter, 1997).

1.1 Mobilization of women in Slovenia

Slovenia was occupied by the Axis powers in April 1941. Very soon afterwards, the national liberation movement emerged, its leaders being mostly communists. During the war years, women became significant members of the National Liberation Movement and participated in all aspects of the anti-fascist resistance in Slovenia - at that time part of Yugoslavia. Most women were engaged in mass resistance to Nazi and Fascist occupation in traditionally feminine support roles, but also the combat positions were opened for them. Nonetheless, in Slovenia just over 4 percent of the soldiers in the National Liberation Army were women. They were all volunteers. The official communist ideology declared them equivalent to men. They received the same kinds of minimal basic training as men, but first aid or medical training more often than men. In practice, women tended to remain at low ranks and to be concentrated in medical tasks. The role of medic became feminized. If there was a single woman in the unit, she would be designated the medic. But medics were usually fighters too and casualty rates were roughly equivalent between medics and fighters. Women partisans led the same life as men – they slept in same quarters, ate the same food, and wore the same clothes. The partisan army authorities severely discouraged sexual relations in the ranks, although arrangements were made for married couples (Bernik, 2002, pp. 106-126).

Women had participated in combat with good results. They had added to the military strength of their units, and sometimes fought even with greater skill and bravery than their male comrades. Accounts of the effectiveness of the women soldiers suggest that women made an important contribution overall. Though women proved themselves as politically and economically capable within the Partisan movement, a chauvinistic attitude maintained. Double standards were rampant and women were mostly concentrated in traditionally female roles (Ibid.).

1.2 Mobilization of women in the Soviet Union

The most substantial participation of women in combat has occurred in the Soviet Union during World War II. For Russia involvement of women in combat roles wasn't something new. At the height of the Russian Civil War in 1920 nearly 66,000 women were serving in the Red Army. The women's battalions were quite effective and successful. The involvement of women in Russian armed forces was therefore not a new concept. According to Marxist doctrine, women were equal citizens in their rights and responsibilities (Vajskop, 2008, pp. 12-13). State ideology said that Soviet women and men were no different and both were expected to be contributing citizens. In the USSR equality meant equal obligations, which also explains the willingness of Soviet women to fight in the Eastern Front in 1941. In this regard, however, the Soviet state in addition took priority over women (Nazemroaya, 2014). However, despite this historical pattern, women were not immediately accepted into combat in WW II, as war was an activity that was considered to be outside the scope of women's affairs.

Following a rapid, forced industrialization of the Soviet economy in the 1930s under Stalin, in which women were drawn into non-traditional labour roles, the Soviet Union faced a dire emergency when it was invaded by Nazi Germany in 1941. Over the next three years, the Soviets would count tens of millions of war dead, and large parts of their country would be left in ruins. The country was invaded, occupied, its cities decimated and besieged, its people starving. In this extreme situation, the Soviet Union mobilized every possible resource for the war effort. They mobilized over 90 percent of men and, eventually they allowed women to serve in the Combat zone. About 800,000 women served in the Red Army during World War II, and over half of these were in front-line duty units. There were additionally about 200,000 women in partisan (irregular) forces. Most of these women fought at the front. Women within the Red Army and the partisan units constituted about 8 percent of all combatants. Between 100,000 and 150,000 of them were decorated during the war (Campbell, 1993k, p. 318 - 320). Women made up 8 percent of all combatants and that percentage does not include the hundreds of thousands of additional women who served in non-combatant roles in the Soviet military. Furthermore, women of the home front worked in munitions factories, enrolled as air-raid wardens, marched in the labour squads conscripted to dig anti-tank ditches, and improvised mass evacuations eastward (Hershiser, 2003, p. 93).

In the first year of the war, women were mobilized into industrial and other support tasks. Early in 1942 the Central Committee of the Communist party agreed to allow women to join the fighting forces. Roughly 500,000 women were drafted to replace men in noncombat positions, tens of thousands of women were trained as combatants for mixed and all-women units. The first major presence women had in Soviet fighting was in the medical field. The Soviet government drafted female medical students and sent them to the front line, where they entered the battlefield under heavy fire in order to retrieve wounded men. They carried their own weapons and casualties among them were high. All nurses and over 40 percent of doctors in

the Soviet military were women. Medical support tasks in the Soviet military were integrated with combat to an unusual degree. Doctors and nurses served at the front lines under intense fire (Vajskop, 2008, p. 15).

By the end of 1943, 1943 women reached their peak level of participation throughout the Soviet military. There were areas of involvement, which became a feminized military specialty, such as nursing and air defence forces units (Engel Alpern, 1999). The women serving in the soviet Air Force were most recognized among all Soviet women that served. Women constituted up to 24 percent of the total Soviet Air Defence Forces. Already 1941 three all-female regiments were formed within the Soviet Air Force, where the whole of the personnel was female: pilots, navigators, mechanics, and ground crews. These three regiments were active until the end of war, one of fighter pilots (the 586th Fighter Regiment) one of bombers (the 587th), and the most famous, the 588th Night Bombers who proved so effective at hitting their targets that they were nicknamed by the Germans the Night Witches (*Nachthexen*) (Hershiser, 2003, p. 65). They flew a combined total of over 30,000 combat sorties. The Germans could not believe that the most destructive Soviet airmen were in fact fearless women. Women were engaged also in other gender mixed units and in some cases, they formed 80 or more percent of anti-aircraft personnel. They were active in famous battles as in the Battle of Kursk, where they engaged in some of the heaviest combat operations in history (Vajskop, 2008, pp. 16-18).

Women engaged in many military duties. Many of them were officially non-combatants such as medics, radio operators, or truck drivers, on the other hand many of them fought as partisans, snipers, tank drivers, combat pilots, junior commanding officers, political officers (Krylova, 2010). Thousands more fought the Germans as rank-and-file soldiers, as machine gunners, as snipers, as sappers, and as driver-mechanics in tank units. A few female officers led battalions of men into battle. The Soviet experience is an important historic case of large-scale women's participation in combat. Women performed very well in military duties and at least as well if not better than the average male comrades. They performed their duties with unusual physical strength and endurance, and they evoked tremendous respect from men around them. Women performed a very wide range of combat tasks and proved themselves, eventually gaining the acceptance and even admiration of Soviet military men who had been initially sceptical or hostile. On the other hand women encountered huge difficulties with sexual harassment from their superiors (Vajskop, 2008, pp. 19-20).

Women served in gender - integrated infantry units. Several hundred thousand received training in firing mortars, machine-guns, and rifles. A special school was established in 1943 which trained hundreds of women snipers. Soviet women snipers were a huge factor in the Soviet Union's success. They are credited with having killed or wounded thousands of *Wehrmacht* officers and soldiers. They hunted the German forces in all weather, risking bombardment and death under heavy fire. The most successful of them was Lyudmila Pavlichenko. She had been credited with

309 kills and regarded as one of the top military snipers of all time and the deadliest female sniper in history. The press called her *Lady Death* (Vajskop, 2008, p. 20).

Soviet women proved of equal military competence as men and they performed a wide variety of combat tasks effectively. Nevertheless male responses to female soldiers varied at first from rejection to acceptance, but with time female combatants became conceivable and feasible not just for the Soviet government, but also for male soldiers at the front. Male combat soldiers accepted women as comrades in arms (Krylova, 2010). Additionally female soldiers were often placed in a highly ambiguous situation, in which the Komsomol, which had recruited large numbers of young women into the army, promoted sexual abstinence, while the Party and Army agreed to the desire of commanders to take lovers from among their subordinates. Female soldiers faced sexual harassment on a large scale (Schechter, 2016). In some way they were waging two wars: one against the Germans and the second to defend themselves from the harassment of their male superior commanders. There were no problems with their male comrades in arms – they accepted them as their sisters and an incest taboo dominated the relationships between them. Their male comrades actually called woman soldier sister – *sestreichka*. But there were significant problems with superior military personnel, who often abused their positions (Engel Alpern, 1999, pp. 138-159).

Unlike in the Soviet Union, women in the West were not viewed as authentic soldiers. When Soviet women were fighting as tankers, snipers, and pilots to defend Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and the entire Soviet Union, from Sevastopol to Stalingrad, they essentially had no Western counter-parts. The visit of famous Soviet female sniper, Lyudmila Pavlichenko, to the United States is very telling about the gap. After fighting to defend the Crimea from the Germans, Pavlichenko was shocked by Western perceptions about how women soldiers in the frontlines should act. While visiting the U.S. to lobby for the opening of a Western Front in Europe to relieve the Soviets from doing most the fighting against Germany, Pavlichenko was shocked to see that American society was more interested to know if female Soviet soldiers wore makeup instead of being interested in what role Soviet women played in resisting the Nazis (Nazemroaya, 2014).

1.3 Mobilization of women in the United States

In the USA the mobilization of women in the military was different from the Soviet one, and the all-female military units were organized, as most male soldiers were strongly opposed to the idea of women soldiers. Popular opinion was, that men protect their country and women stay at home. Many people in America didn't want women to work in, with, or near the army. One group that strongly opposed the idea was the Catholic Church. Because of conflict over whether women should serve in the army, Congress delayed creating the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). Women themselves were split on the issue. Some women's groups expressed opposition to the idea, but others were enthusiastic about the chance to serve their country (Permeswaran, 2008, pp. 95-96).

In 1941-42 the military created its own women's forces. The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was formed early in 1942, soon after Pearl Harbour. In July of 1943 it became a regular part of the Army, as the Women's Army Corps (WAC) (Campbell, 1993, p. 303). Within the US Army, the incorporation of so many women was an unprecedented development. More than 150,000 women served in the Army during WWII (Permeswaran, 2008, pp. 99). The WAC encountered serious obstacles in recruiting American women, and it faced continual bureaucratic attacks from the War Department, the Surgeon General, and others. The WACs were never assigned to combat and rarely got near it. In performance of their duties the WACs showed even more diligence as men soldiers. WACs were often better than men at communications and clerical work, especially in listening to Morse code for long hours. But there were false and hostile rumours that WACs were sexual extremists (either promiscuous or lesbian). The rumours chilled recruitment and froze the Corps far below its intended size. The public opinion in the USA thought, that there was no place for women in the Combat Zone and the public opinion was stronger and more influential than the success of women serving in the military (Campbell, 1993, pp. 320-323).

With the United States more deeply mobilized for war and over a longer period, women's participation in the military increased dramatically, to about 3 percent of US forces at the peak. But America didn't allow sending women into battle zones. Women were encouraged to work in factories and to accept stereotypical low level jobs in the armed forces (Vajskop, 2008, p. 3). Particularly at the beginning of the war, women were typists, switchboard operators, stenographers, and file clerks. They were not allowed to wear arms (Fenner, 1998). As the war dragged on, however, women were frequently used in more "masculine" fields; for example, they served as truck drivers, airplane mechanics, gunner instructors, radio operators, repairmen, and parachute riggers (Scrivener, 1999, pp. 365-366). However, the right to command men was not given to women in any sector of the American Armed forces before or during WWII (Wilson, 2016).

Military women during World War II performed their duties across the United States and overseas, in the air, on the ground, and aboard ships. Over 5,000 of the 100,000 WACs who served in World War II were assigned to the Southwest Pacific in such jobs as postal clerks, intelligence analysts, cryptographers, and teletype operators. Another 40,000 WACs were assigned to Army Air Force commands throughout the United States and overseas. Women in the Marine Reserves served stateside as clerks, cooks, mechanics, and drivers. The Coast Guard Women's Reserves, called SPARs (Semper Paratus Always Ready), were assigned to such stateside jobs as clerks, storekeepers, photographers, cooks, and pharmacist's mates. In the Navy, thousands of Women accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES) performed a wider range of jobs than had the Yeomen of World War I. They worked in aviation, medical professions, communications, intelligence, science, and technology (Trowell-Harris (ed.), 2011). The Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) worked in ferrying planes and as test pilots. About 1,000 women took part, and 38 died in the line

of duty. Women of the WASP piloted aircraft to destinations across the country. They also flew as low-target pilots in training missions, flew cargo and top secret weapons, and were test pilots. Although WASPs were subject to the discipline and training of military service, they were civil service employees (Scrivener, 1999, pp. 365-366). The Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) participated in air traffic control, naval air navigation, and communications, starting in 1942. There was a Marine Corps Women's Reserve. At its peak in 1945, the WAC had 100,000 members (Goldstein, online).

Although soldiers and officers who worked with US military women in World War II adjusted to them and came to value their contributions, public opinion lagged behind. There was a "slander campaign" against WACs in 1943. The campaign promoted the idea that WACs were really prostitutes, or women with low morals. Leaders had to spend great energy trying to counteract this campaign both through public advertising and through attention to the women's appearance (feminine uniforms, skirts, long hair) and their actual morals, which were generally upstanding. Despite efforts to counteract the slander campaign, a survey of Army men in 1945 found that about half of asked men thought it was bad for a girl's reputation to be a WAC. Some men also worried that women would become too powerful after returning to civilian life (Goldstein, online).

American military women were often the targets of sexual harassment. The women's morals were questioned in the press, and rumours of sexual promiscuity were rampant. Women who joined the military were thought to be unfeminine, loose, or unable to find work or a husband. This gossip intensified when WAACs were sent overseas in early 1943. Morale and discipline were high among the military women, but gossip, jokes, slander, and obscenity about military women spread anyway. The investigations had revealed that male military personnel were the primary source of rumour. From the men, rumours had spread to their wives and girlfriends and then to the rest of the population (Scrivener, 1999, p. 365).

By the war's end, thousands of women had successfully contributed to the war effort by releasing men to fight in combat: 150,000 women had served in the WAAC/WAC (including 8,000 in Europe and 5,500 in the Pacific), 100,000 in the WAVES, 23,000 in the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, and 10,000 in the Coast Guard SPARS (The United States Coast Guard Women's Reserve), and 75,000 as officer-nurses (Goldstein, online and Scrivener, 1999, p. 366).

2 THE PROCESS OF DEMOBILIZATION OF WOMEN VETERANS

At the end of the Second World War the demobilization of mass armies had begun. Armies which included women as military personnel mostly urged quick demobilization of female soldiers. In all cases the women were summarily dismissed from the military after the war was over. Demobilization of women became top priority of military authorities. Many women left industrial work and military service

and readjusted back to home life. With the men returning home to their jobs, the need for women's labour and for women's military jobs diminished.

U.S military was faced with releasing 85 percent of its force. They were also faced with the task of caring for and rehabilitating large numbers of wounded soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. As result, In January of 1946, several military bureaus and offices requested that they be allowed to keep their female reservists and nurses. Despite this need, however, by September the demobilization of the women's reserve forces were largely completed (Hershiser, 2003, p. 42).

In Slovenia and in the Soviet Union all women partisans were demobilized. The extent of women's unprecedented participation in the Allied war effort was forgotten until nearly half a century when literature began to emerge depicting their invaluable contribution (Hershiser, 2003, p. 1).

3 THE PROCESS OF REINTEGRATION OF WOMEN VETERANS INTO THE SOCIETY

The reintegration of ex-women-combatants to civilian life started just after the demobilization and was quite different from that of men. Only when women returned home the real troubles truly began, for many of them. After years of combat and trauma, it was difficult for ex-combatants to return to a "normal" lifestyle and many of them felt that their interwar sacrifice was not awarded enough. Women veterans faced lack of social support. When the war was over, women's contributions during the interwar period rarely received recognition, one reason being that the needs and priorities of a post-war society were very different from those of a society at war: whereas men and women were encouraged to act out similar roles as fellow soldiers in armies and guerrilla movements, post-war societies encouraged difference between the genders. This had important consequences for ex-women soldiers and for their sense of identity. In many cases, female ex-soldiers preferred to conceal their military past rather than risk social disapproval.

3.1 The reintegration of Slovenian women veterans

When World War II ended, newly communist Slovenia quickly barred women from military service. Yugoslav military authorities wanted for women members of the (ex) partisan army to return home promptly to reknit family life and their civilian careers. Women in Slovenia were mostly not allowed to enter military until 1983, when the first women military recruits after the end of World War II, joined Yugoslav People's Army voluntarily (Garb, 2002, pp. 127-137). But women were allowed to work as medics and two of them (Slava Blažević and Roza Papo) hold the rank of major general of Yugoslav People's Army (Vojna enciklopedija).

Women Veterans of the Second World War were highly respected in Slovenian society. They were praised for their military effectiveness and efficiency in the

period of war. Women who gained important positions in the partisan army or in the civil part of resistance movement in Slovenia were able to make successful careers in the time of peace. Demobilization awoke concern only to those who found army life more interesting, mobile, and satisfying than the civilian careers. The communist party organized the Antifascist Front of Women as a national organization in order to reintegrate women into post-war society. The communists promoted gender equality and women gained the right to vote in federal elections in 1945.

For Slovenian women we can say that they were brutalized by World War II but for many of them it meant social freedom and liberation. Their participation in the partisan army and in the resistance movement gave them sense of fulfilment they had not known before. The popular view in the post-war period dominated, that Slovenian women contributed a lot for the efforts of war and they were recognized as important part of society.

3.2 The reintegration of American women veterans

In the post war period female veterans were forced to get back in civilian lives, but civilian jobs were given with first priority to returning male veterans and commercial airlines would not even accept female pilots (Hershiser, 2003, p. 43). Official propaganda wanted women to become mothers and to serve their homes and their families (Michel, 1987).

After World War II the number of women in the US military dropped drastically, but never back to zero, because of female veterans. After the war was over, they began a massive letter writing campaign to persuade the congress to form women military units. This campaign proved successful and in 1948 the Women's Armed Services Integration Act was passed. Unfortunately little recognition had been given to these women who, without realizing the magnitude of what they had accomplished, changed the face of the American military forever (Hershiser, 2003, pp. 42-43). Thanks to them women did not live the military and in 1950, 2 percent of American military forces were female (Permeswaran, 2008, pp. 99).

The World War II experience remained a valuable benchmark of women's potentials as soldiers, which informed the later integration of women in the US military. Most women veterans of World War II benefited personally from their military experiences (Meyer, 1996). In spite of the harassment they faced, a majority of women deemed their time in the military as wonderful and believed "it gave them a broader perspective, made them more independent, and provided them with rewarding memories and lifelong friends" (Scrivener, 1999, p. 366).

It was not until 1948 that women became permanent part of U.S. military. After the war, Congress debated whether to make women a permanent part of the regular military. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, who had led the allied forces in Europe, favored this. "The women of America," he said, "must share the responsibility for the security of this country in a future emergency as the women of England did in World War

II.” President Harry Truman signed the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act in June 1948. This authorized the enlistment of women and commissioning of female officers in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and newly formed Air Force. The separate Women’s Army Corps and female reserves of the other armed services continued for a while, but eventually were phased out. The integration of women finally put them fully “in” the regular armed forces—but with restrictions. Women could make up no more than 2 percent of the total military force. The number of female officers and the rank they could achieve were capped. Woman officers could hold no command authority over men. Nor could women be assigned to military aircraft and most Navy ships. Finally, women were prohibited from serving in combat (Constitutional Rights Foundation, online).

In the USA women organized the Women's Army Corps Veterans' Association in 1947 as a national organization. They associate volunteers to serve in Hospitals and Nursing Homes where veterans are patients. For the American women veterans nursing was the most honourable front-line role.

Women acquired more confidence, and opportunities for leadership within their military experience, but the additional responsibility came without any decrease in the demands of their traditional roles which was re-enforced by the containment policy in Post WWII America. They wanted to live a family life, with a husband, home and babies, and to do this their war service would have to remain in the past. Containment was the key to security and they would conform or be marginalized, stigmatized and just possibly disadvantaged as a result (Wilson, 2016). Only in the recent period the interest for interwar women's military history became more evident and there are many researches currently available about the U.S. military women in the period of WWII.

3.3 The reintegration of Soviet women veterans

As soon as Germany was defeated, most Soviet women were immediately discharged from service, and their military contributions were largely ignored. Although they received many thousands of military decorations and suffered proportionately higher losses than their male colleagues, Soviet women veterans were forgotten and their interwar bravery lost in the fray. Instead, they came home to official policies demanding their fast return to a steady, full – time civilian job, childbearing and nurturing, shopping, cooking, laundering and cleaning. Except for celebrations of Victory Day on May 9, when women veterans traditionally emerged, medal-bedecked, most official histories and commemorations bypassed them (Bliss Eaton, 2004). The soviet authorities forgot about war heroines and started to worship **the hero mothers** instead. The heroine Mother became an honorary title to all mothers bearing and raising 10 or more children. The idea of motherhood and working in the home was overwhelmingly emphasized by the state. Women gained extra money from the state for bearing more children. Women were encouraged to be softer, more feminine, and traditional. Women veterans and heroines rarely occupied positions of political power or any sort of strategic party positions (Vajskop, 2008, p. 28). Soviet

female veterans were almost completely invisible during the entire post-war period up to collapse of the Soviet Union. Many of them were hoping to lead a normal life and marry, but internally they lived with persistent traumas. The post-war Soviet official position on the matter proclaimed that women are physiologically unsuitable for becoming military or even civilian pilots (Hershiser, 2003, pp. 90-91).

The pure Marxist state that views everyone equally and expects an equal contribution from everyone, was forgotten and Stalin forced women back into traditional gender roles. Women veterans were subject to great amounts of criticism and distrust, even among allegedly good comrades of the Motherland. They were suspected of sexual misconduct in the military and women who wore military medals were said to have received them for sexual service (Vajskop, 2008, p. 26). Soviet women veterans were treated as immoral and promiscuous because of their military experiences. They were ashamed to wear their decorations and uniforms in public, as the pressure of public opinion was so hard. Although close to a million Russian women served with Stalin's armies, including 92 who became heroes of the Soviet Union, the experience of post-war public opinion was frustrating (Bliss Eaton, 2004).

Although the morale and discipline were very high among military women, in the post-war period the non-formal discourse emerged that disrespected female fighters as sexually immoral. The erasure of women's wartime achievements contributed to a radical popular derogation of women's role at the front. That hostile treatment developed independently of any official impetus. Allusions to women's sexual reputation played no role whatever in official commemoration of the war, but they dominated popular discourse. Despite the iconographic emphasis on women's purity and courageous self-sacrifice and the absence of sexualized public images, despite women's extraordinary achievements, their collections of medals and awards for bravery, and heroic action under fire, popular opinion in the Soviet Union insisted on stereotyping and stigmatizing women who served at the front as front-line whores. The acronym for *Polevaia Pokhodnaia Zhena - PPZhe* (mobile field wife) circulated widely in the post-war period, always with a derogatory meaning (Dombrowski, 1999). Women veterans as a group had to grapple with their reputation. Some persisted in affirming their wartime record; others became "as silent as fish." Most of the women decided to tell nobody they wore the uniform. They didn't want to say that they had been at the front in order not to be stigmatized as "the husband hunters" or PPZhe. These feminine soldiers felt guilty for something they hadn't done. They wanted to become ordinary girls once again, to get married and to have children. For women it was painful to be excluded from the celebrations of wartime achievements in the decades following the war (Engel Alpern, 1999, pp. 138-159). Women mostly wanted to prove to the society to be able to be good mothers and wives. The most important goal for young veterans was to forget the war, to get married, to have children, and to achieve standard of normality (Bliss Eaton, 2004). Discussing the interwar experiences became the forbidden theme for women in the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the soviet state some memories were published, but still not much is written about the post-war life of women veterans: the official pressure to

return to family and working life; the stigma of the PPZhe; or the fate of women invalids, physically or psychologically crippled, or those not recognized as heroes. Instead, most memoirs conclude by focusing on subsequent family life, careers — almost invariably made outside the military — or the camaraderie of veterans' life (Markwick, 2008, pp. 403-420).

During the war many Soviet female soldiers faced pregnancy in the military and that meant demobilization for them. Some Komsomol organizers in the Red Navy even treated pregnancy as a form of self-mutilation to escape duty. Pregnancy was generally a one way ticket out of the army. But there were two sides of the same coin: returning home, many faced serious stigma. Many female soldiers who were pregnant suffered from depression. Some were angry at the fathers of their unborn children, who they felt had used and betrayed them. Others refused to go home to their parents, fearing the shame of single motherhood. Many requested not to return home after demobilization, as they feared censure from family. Still others sought abortions, which had been illegal since 1936. Pregnancy outside of marriage was seen as shameful. But the government did have understanding for single mothers and pronatal laws in 1944 created the new legal category of "single mother" which was aimed to support and legitimize the status of women with children. These laws made it a crime to insult single women and shifted responsibility (in the form of alimony payments) for children out of wedlock from fathers to the state. This was a conscious policy aimed at offsetting the demographic crises that resulted from the war (Schechter, 2016).

Not until the 1960s did the soviet military once again recruit large numbers of women specialists. In the late 1980s there were several thousand women in the armed forces, in medical, communications, and administrative jobs; most held the low rank of warrant officers (Bliss Eaton, 2004).

In the post-war era most of the soviet women veterans decided to tell nobody they wore the uniform. They hoped their life would be back to normal again and they met a lack of understanding of what they really did during the war. But there were some veteran organizations trying to keep the memory alive and collect memories when the Soviet period was over (Porteret, 2006). Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the delegitimation of the Communist party, women were free to speak about their war experiences, to criticize the Soviet conduct of war and to emphasize the human cost of war, the price that people paid for victory. They exposed the abuses of power and privilege made by men and criticized the popular opinion about women fighters. They clearly stated that women who served at the front don't deserve to be called whores. There were actually very, very few promiscuous women among fighters. Women mostly lived honourably and fought honourably on the frontlines of war. Without Soviet women contribution to war activities the war would have ended with an entirely different outcome for the Soviet Union (Engel Alpern, 1999, pp. 138-159).

Conclusion

The utilization of women in Allied forces during the Second World War was huge. Women were incorporated into military units in many different ways, depending on military necessity that emerged in each of individual countries. Women were mobilized in the army on large scale in the Soviet Union and in the United Kingdom. In the U.S. women were utilized in non-combatant jobs and the army's auxiliary women's forces were followed by establishment of women's branches of each of the armed services. In contrast to the British and the Russians, however, the U.S. women's military was an all-volunteer force. Additionally, the U.S. never utilized women in combat roles, as the public opinion strongly opposed to the idea that women would shoot men. In Europe, women volunteers joined partisan armies, as the case of Slovenia shows. Women partisans and Soviet female members of the Red Army have shown their abilities to perform military tasks with the same efficiency as the men do. They denied the idea that women are too soft-hearted to kill as they had shown that they can fight and they can kill as effectively as their male comrades can. They earned many medals and many of them were declared to be War Heroes. Gender roles were cast aside for fear of the lack of sufficient manpower needed to fight the Axis powers. But when the war was over all of that was forgotten. Countries wanted their women to become soft and feminine again in order to accommodate to new peaceful circumstances. Governments wanted for women to get many children in order to make the devastated population grow again. They also wanted the men to get into the factories and women to leave the jobs they occupied in the war period. The relevance of women to the outcome of the war was forgotten and women veterans did not have enough courage to publicly reveal their war experiences as they risked to be exposed to hostile rumours. Public opinion in the post-war period has shown military women as promiscuous and of bad morals. That same thing happened in the Soviet Union and in the U.S. Slovenian women veterans on the other hand did not face such a pressure and women veterans did become important positions within the Communist party.

The evidence shows that women who proved themselves as combatants in the period of the Second World War mostly did not gain much social support and acknowledgement as military veterans when the war was over and their contributions to the war effort were largely forgotten. On overall they met a lack of understanding of what they really did during the war. The societies expected from them to become housewives and mothers and to leave military jobs to men. For that purpose women were demobilized "en masse". In Slovenia and Yugoslavia women did gain the recognition for their war efforts, but were equally demobilized and forcibly pushed out of army, as in the Soviet Union and the United States.

Because of negative attitude of public opinion towards women veterans of the Second World War, they never tried to persuade the public about their huge contribution to the outcome of the war. Despite the numerous commendations these women received, the skills they demonstrated in the armed forces, the role of women in the military post WWII was nearly eradicated. Without their huge involvement in military actions the results of war would be different.

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