

Critical Events: Métis Servicewomen's WWII Stories with Dorothy Chartrand

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Abstract

Stories of Indigenous women's experiences in the Armed Forces during wartime were critical events in the lives of women in service to their country (Campbell, 1990; Poulin, 2006; 2007a, 2007b) but little is often recorded about their experiences particularly during World War II (WWII). Dorothy Chartrand, as part of an Indigenous Storytelling project, documented her experiences as a member of the Canadian Women's Army Corp in WWII. Dorothy's stories are shared from portions of two recently completed documentary films (Iseke, 2010a, 2010b) and additional recordings of her experiences (see Iseke-Barnes, 2009). Dorothy's stories aid in understanding motivation to enlist in voluntary public service, experiences entering the service, armed forces relocation practices and effects on servicewomen in WWII, women putting their lives at risk, marriage during wartime service, and the impact of and upon servicewomen and their families during armed combat. Conclusions suggest that wartime experiences shaped lives and were critical events in the lives of Indigenous women.

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Telling stories, in both oral traditions and written texts, is a practice in Indigenous cultures which has sustained communities and which validates the experiences of Indigenous peoples and epistemologies. This article examines stories and histories shared by Métis grandmother Dorothy Chartrand about her World War II experiences as a servicewoman and the relationships of her stories to the stories of other Métis servicewomen, Indigenous servicewomen and broader women's experiences during wartime. The analysis focuses on issues of identity, complicating the invisibility of servicewomen's stories and experiences of racial and gender discrimination, understanding women's motivations to enlist, women in combat situations, marrying while in active service, and the impacts upon Indigenous women's lives. The research contributes both to advancing knowledge about the history/herstory of Indigenous women in Canada's participation in WWII, and to research in the fields of Canadian and global Indigenous studies.

This need for women's stories reflects the needs of Métis peoples to hear a more complete account of the lives of Métis peoples, including stories about the lives of Cree and Métis grandmothers who are the foundation of communities. We need these stories if we as Métis peoples are to understand fully ourselves, our culture, and our histories within the cultural, social, and economic history of Métis communities. We especially need these stories if we are to understand Métis women's roles and responsibilities that are less well understood than those of male historical figures. (Iseke-Barnes, 2009, p. 70).

Iseke's article (Iseke-Barnes, 2009) about Dorothy Chartrand's role as a community

historian, geneologist, and community educator, reflects a tradition of family and community histories and biographies (Devine, 2004; Lischke & McNabb, 2007; Tough & McGregor, 2007). Representations of Indigenous women in historical documentation and in literature, particularly during the period of 1939-1945, often reflect mainstream portrayals rather than the reflections and representations of these women themselves.

Researchers of history [find a widely varied documentary record at times rich with records but often limited by](#) scant records and limited sources whether considering popular discourses, academic literature, or media (Iseke-Barnes, 2005; 2009; Ray, 1982; Hourie, 1996; Fooks, 2003; Murphy, 2003; Devine, 2004; [Van](#) Kirk, 1980).

[In a review of literature about Indigenous peoples participation in world wars,](#) Lackenbauer and Sheffield (2007) cite the extant studies that have investigated the roles and experiences of Indigenous women in Canada during WWII (Advancement of Aboriginal Women in Alberta, n.d.; Poulin, 2006; 2007a; 2007b). They propose the need for research studies of Indigenous women and men beyond the stereotypic studies of the ‘forgotten soldier’ and issues of discrimination including research from regional and local perspectives to show the diversity of Indigenous [peoples](#), the significance of WWII to Indigenous peoples and their contributions within the war effort. They document the need for more biographies telling the stories of Indigenous veterans (see also Sheffield, 2004; Stevenson, 1996; Summerby, 1993) and research on the role of Indigenous women (see also Poulin, 2007b). Specifically, there is a need for academic attention to “the role of Aboriginal women during the war years, from paid work to participation in voluntary organizations ...including reasons for voluntary enlistment” (Lackenbauer & Sheffield, 2007, p. 225). This article directly responds to this call [for documenting the significant](#)

roles of Aboriginal women in wartime that often changed their lives and the direction and focus of the lives of their families. These important public roles they undertook need to be documented before their stories are lost.

When Métis and other Indigenous women's lives are discussed their lives are often expressed through the biased assumptions and stereotypic representations reflected in European and Canadian representations of Métis lives (McManus, 2006). Racist assumptions and ideologies produce a discourse in which Métis women are less important than white women, which structures Métis women's experiences, and organizes social norms that inhibit their opportunities and the telling and listening to their stories and experiences (McManus, 2006 drawing on Frankenberg, 1993). Devine (2004), in discussing historical representations of Indigenous peoples further warns "uncritical acceptance of these descriptions has served to reinforce and entrench these stereotypes in the literature where they have persisted to the present day" (p. 2 cited in Iseke-Barnes, 2009, p. 72).

Métis scholar, Maria Campbell (1973) describes lessons from her grandmother to see the beauty of life but also hard lessons about living as a Métis child and woman. Her "grandmother's teachings about oppression and its operation in the lives of Métis" in which she described the role of government to take away "your pride, your dignity, [and] all the things that make you a living soul. When they are sure they have everything, they give you a blanket to cover your shame" (p. 159 cited in Iseke-Barnes, 2009, p. 75). Campbell describes realizing that she had come to wear a blanket but did not know how nor when this had happened and did not know how to throw it away.

Throwing off the colonial blankets requires disrupting oppression and

understanding ourselves as Métis people, and finding ways to take pride in who we are. It means returning to a state of dignity and bolstering our soul as Indigenous peoples. (Iseke-Barnes, 2009, p. 76).

And as Rose Auger, a Cree Elder from Alberta suggests, we “must stop and remember, remember the loving power of their grandmothers and mothers” (Auger in Iseke-Barnes, 2009, p. 76).

In storytelling we acknowledge the lives, histories and communities of Métis women and grandmothers (Anderson, 2000; Iseke, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Iseke-Barnes, 2009; Iseke & Desmoulins, [2011](#); Iseke & Moore, [2011](#)). As Mary Anne Lanigan (1998), Métis educator from Saskatchewan, explains, stories are about connecting essential ideas across generations and requires that the listener interpret meanings and ideas and expand their listening and interpretive thinking so they can view issues from different angles. Further, stories in oral accounts record historical events of Indigenous peoples and weave meanings of life into everyday stories (Kovach, 2009; Byrne & Fouillard, 2000; Smith, 1999) so that the next generation can learn from the stories and take pride in being Métis and express confidence in who they/we are (Ahenakew, 1973). Campbell (1990) suggests in non-standard English “An dah stories you know dats day bes treasure of all to leave your family. Everyting else on dis eart he gets los or wore out. But dah stories dey las forever”(p. 144).

A storytelling research approach recognizes the power of stories and that research is about relationships (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999). In this storytelling research the participants are collaborators who share in the development of new storylines (Bishop, 1996). Sharing oral stories in written texts is complex and requires both attention to

analytic style and focus on the narrative style and experiences as well as understandings of ways stories express relationships (Anderson, 2000; Brant, 1994; Stevenson, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous peoples' experiences are often expressed in stories to complement the oral communication style and reflect the dialogic nature of Indigenous communications (Tupuola, 1994; Iseke, 2011). This research is expressed in a narrative style in respecting Indigenous knowledge, story, and experiences.

Introducing the Researchers and the Storytelling Research Program

I am a Métis woman, researcher, educator, and filmmaker of Métis and N'hiawuk heritage along with European ancestry. I am from St. Albert, Alberta, Canada and a descendent of the Bellerose and Beaudry Métis families that are said to have founded this community although this community is located on lands that have been travelled and inhabited by Indigenous ancestors for millennia.

My research program involves working with Métis Elders from various communities in Canada focusing on Indigenous storytelling. Elders share their stories and expertise through collaborative dialogues. The Elders have given me the responsibility to edit their words and ideas and to share the edited texts back with them, working in a collaborative dialogue towards a series of films, papers, chapters, and books that can be shared with the community and more broadly (Iseke, 2011, p. 312-313).

A large research program has many researchers. A research associate who has spent many hours working with these research texts and thinking through the implications of the storytelling approach and research process is Leisa Desmoulins, a recent PhD graduate from Lakehead University where she and Iseke have worked closely in

developing research stories about Métis women (Iseke & Desmoulins, under review). Desmoulin's work focuses on urban community-based research with Indigenous communities and schools. Iseke, as a Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledge and Research, Lakehead University, has led a large research team in the development of films and scholarly publications that focus on Indigenous storytelling (Iseke & Brennus, 2011; Iseke & Moore, in press; Iseke, 2011; Iseke, 2010). Iseke reflects upon

The film project on which this article is based was developed first to help my own children understand their heritage as Métis people. I know that there are many young people who need to know the stories of their ancestors and communities, and film is one way to reach them through home, community, and school viewing of stories. These stories also counter the silencing of Métis history that has occurred in mainstream society and educational practices (Iseke, 2009) and provide access to Métis stories and histories that will help our children and members of our Nation be proud of who we are. "The state of our nation[s] thus depends on how we rectify the injustices to our children of the past and how we ensure the well-being of the children of the present and future" (Lawrence & Anderson, 2005, p. 6).

One of my five films entitled *Grandmothers of the Métis Nation* (Iseke, 2010a) explores three Métis grandmothers and their respective roles in their communities as historians, leaders, educators, and healers. The intention is not simply to tell the stories of their work as mothers and grandmothers but to explore the larger public roles and responsibilities that they have undertaken. Each grandmother has a particular set of skills and gifts that she shares in the world.

(Iseke, 2011, p. 313).

Dorothy Chartrand is the first grandmother I worked with because she is my great aunt, the youngest sister of my grandmother, as well as a recognized community historian in our community of St. Albert, Alberta, Canada.

Structure of the Article

We begin the next section of the article by sharing the research process. This is followed by introducing Dorothy and how she came to enlist. Then we discuss the context of military service for women in WWII followed by a discussion of Dorothy's motivation to enlist as contextualized within the literature on women's enlistment. We then discuss Dorothy's initial WWII experiences in training and early work. Dorothy's experiences upon entering the male-dominated military workforce are next described followed by a discussion of her relation in within the context of military service. Next we discuss Dorothy's experiences during bombings in London positioned within a broader discussion of women in combat. Dorothy's story of marriage during WWII is next explored within the literature on service and marriage during wartime, followed by a discussion of the impact of women's active duty on families including Dorothy's. We synthesize our understandings in a discussion section followed by a conclusions section documenting that Indigenous women's stories address a more complex understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and experiences of Métis servicewomen's military participation.

Beginning the Métis Storytelling Research with Dorothy Chartrand

In the winter of 2004 I contacted Dorothy Chartrand. I knew from family stories that she had been researching our family for more than 25 years and had done extensive

genealogical and historical research about the family, our extended family, and the history of our many Métis communities stretching from what would later become Quebec Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. I knew that Dorothy had been involved in writing the history of the community of St. Albert, Alberta, in a town history book and that she knew a large amount of history of the family and community. But Dorothy was now in her 80's and I wanted to get some of her knowledge recorded and written down as one never knows how long there is to do this research. As Dorothy told me "once you're 80 all the remaining years are like gravy." So I took a simple tape recorder to her home and she began to tell me about her research, her family, our community, and the history she understood. She showed me a filing cabinet full of photocopies and copious notes taken from primary documents from archives and records from Church and state records as well as from the Hudson's Bay Company. We spent a week together in which she shared for about six hours each day about the history she knew.

She had a series of photo albums she used as references and with each picture she could tell a complete story of the history, the times, and the person in the photo. Each album she had organized by the generations, starting with great-great grandfather and great-great grandmother and then on subsequent pages the names, photos (where available) and dates for each person. As she flipped the pages she told me stories. Later she opened up her war story album and recounted her war story from her life as a young person finding work, to taking up a role as a volunteer and finally to enlisting and her wartime experiences. I went back in the late fall of 2004 with a script based on her stories and asked her to tell me again some of the stories she had told before but this time with a filmmaker and videographer who set up lights, camera, and high quality audio

recordings. The videographer and I spent four days recording Dorothy in her home as well as in a local museum in which Dorothy's war uniform and artifacts as well as family artifacts were located. Following these recording sessions, the videographer and I went to Dorothy's family farm and recorded video of scenes from the farm. Supplementary video was recorded at Fort Edmonton, Fort William Historical Park, and Pioneer Village (Thunder Bay). The original video footage of Dorothy was edited into two films 1) *A Living History of Métis Families as told by Dorothy Chartrand*, and 2) *Grandmothers of the Métis Nation* (both written by Iseke). During the writing process and the production of the films I was in ongoing telephone contact with Dorothy and visited her when I could to share with her what had been produced. In the early parts of the process Dorothy was in good health and able to comprehend what was happening and contribute her opinions and suggestions and to ask questions about the portrayals of the history. In recent years, due to failing health, Dorothy has no longer been able to share her knowledge and expertise and to critique the written work as she once had.

Dorothy Chartrand's Story

We begin Dorothy Chartrand's (nee Bellerose) story in her hometown of St. Albert where she grew up as the youngest daughter of 13 children. Dorothy left her large family and extended Métis family of Bellerose's in St. Albert, Alberta to complete high school in Colinton, Alberta – the site of a second family farm that Dorothy's father had purchased to provide land for Dorothy's brothers to farm as they became adults. She moved to Edmonton where she finished her post-secondary training – a business course that she took through St. Mary's Commercial High School. She finished her courses and returned home to St. Albert where she helped with the farm and looked for work,

applying to a government position in Edmonton. Soon afterwards, she took a competency test for clerical work. A week later she began working as a temporary office clerk on a special project for the Department of Trade and Industry, as the department was then named. When her contract finished, she moved to a position in the Department of Labour. She began as a typist. Eventually she was promoted to the Bookkeeping unit, where she worked during 1939 when the war broke out until she left Edmonton for her basic training when the armed forces began accepting women in 1940.

In 1940, while working for the Department of Labour, Dorothy joined a group of women colleagues who would practice drills and marching in their leisure time and had military-like uniforms. These women were preparing themselves to serve in the army if the chance arose for women to enlist. Within this preparation for service, Dorothy was involved with a group focused on communications where an instructor from the military taught them useful skills such as Morse code, and communicating with flags and lights. Along with a similar group of women in Calgary, these two reservist groups later comprised the Alberta Women's Service Corps (AWSC). Dorothy shares how she came to enlist in the AWSC:

One day in '41 they [the male instructors training the women] said, "The army is ready to take women into the Forces. How many of you would be able to get away within two weeks?" So by hand--up went the arms--and they said, "We'll be in touch. Leave us your phone number--your present phone number--and we'll get in touch with you. You'll have to go through medicals and you will be into basic training very shortly." So I had my medical Thursday of that week, and the following week on the Wednesday we were headed for Calgary. And that's

where we had our basic training with male instructors, in the Armouries – Mewata Armouries. And we were there for five weeks, I guess. And we learned how to march and all that kind of stuff. We knew some of that already.

Dorothy's work experiences in typing and bookkeeping and her reservist training prepared her to join the Armed Forces and for her later experiences as a servicewoman.

Understanding the Context of Military Service for Women in WWII

In 1941 the federal government formed the Canadian Women's Army Corp (CWAC) and the Royal Canadian Naval Service (Gossage, 2001; Thomas, 1978). These WWII formations propelled many more women like Dorothy into the paid work force and particularly the paid work within the military (Herbert, 1998). Most studies of women's military service in WWII focus on gendered experiences (Campbell, 1990; Dienstfrey, 1988; Gossage, 2001; Herbert, 1998; Pierson, 1986; Saywell, 1985; Thomas, 1978) but two studies of Indigenous women's military service also focus on delayed recruitment, and gendered and racialized experiences in the groundbreaking roles of military duty of WWII (Advancement of Aboriginal women in Alberta, n.d; Poulin, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Campbell (1990) highlights the breakthrough of women into traditionally male-dominated military work, considering how women's experiences are different from men's and the way their experiences affected their attitudes. Poulin (2006) and the Advancement of Aboriginal Women in Alberta Study (AAWAS) (n.d.) considered Indigenous servicewomen's voices of experiences and participation and build upon Gaffen's (1985) earlier forgotten/invisible soldier thesis to acknowledge Indigenous servicewomen's contributions to WWII. Both Poulin (2006) and AAWAS (n.d.) used oral history methods via interviews, similar to those used with Dorothy in this study. Poulin

(2006) concludes that Indigenous servicewomen participants had many of the same experiences as Indigenous servicemen and non-Indigenous servicewomen of both race and gender discrimination. Discrimination persisted post-war in the uneven distribution of post-war benefits for Indigenous peoples and particularly Indigenous women (Innis, 2004, Poulin, 2006).

Dorothy's and other Women's Motivation to Join the CWAC

Dorothy was part of a wave of Canadian women entering into active military duty. Dorothy explains that "...when the powers that be in Ottawa said that women could be part of active service, I joined in September 1941". Pierson (1986) elucidates "in 1941-42 Department of Labour officials and economic consultants openly recommended relieving manpower shortages by mobilizing the labour reserve of women" (p. 11). The recommendation was taken up and women entered the service.

Campbell's (1990) participants recalled their motivations for joining the Armed Forces, including: patriotism; try something different; desire for adventure or travel; relative in the service; escape; and, to advance their career goals (p. 255). Poulin (2007a) notes that her Aboriginal participants volunteered "for many of the same reasons as non-Aboriginal women..." Their motivations included: "...a sense of duty; to free men for combat; a chance to leave home; to travel; to further their education; because others in the family or their friends had enlisted; and, most importantly, for economic reasons" (p. 137).

Dorothy was 21 years old when the war broke out. She says, "I got a yen to have an adventure. So I decided to join the Canadian Women's' Army Corps [CWAC]. Prior

to that we had formed a kind of a reserve unit in Edmonton as well as Calgary did and it was called the Alberta Women's Service Corps."

Dorothy's primary motivation for volunteering for service within the Canadian military, a yen for adventure, is reflected by Campbell (1990). She found that 15% of servicewomen presently enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and 25-30% of the veterans she interviewed spoke of the "desire for adventure or travel or the fact that they had a relative in the service" (p. 255).

Dorothy, one of Poulin's (2006) participants, shared motivations similar to other participants. For example, Dorothy shared with her family a concern about the war and an interest to serve. Three of her brothers – George, Harry, and Fred – and many of her cousins enlisted when the war broke out. Thus, another of Dorothy's motivations to enlist, because others in their family had enlisted, echoed Poulin's (2006) other Indigenous servicewomen participants.

Poulin (2007a) notes that 15 of the 18 WWII servicewomen participants in her study joined the Army through the Canadian Women's Army Corp, which reflects the majority of Indigenous recruits who joined the Army typically for its lower educational requirements (p. 139), rather than other branches of the military, the Air Force and Naval Service, which held higher educational requirements to enlist. Dorothy differs from the majority of Poulin's Indigenous women recruits because she did not need to take advantage of the Army's lowered educational requirements as she joined with a trade. She explains "So, I joined up, went in as a typist though I did have some stenography and I started out as a typist."

Beyond educational requirements, Gossage (2001) notes that all of the Canadian military branches set criteria for women's eligibility to enlist. These criteria included minimum requirements for age, height, weight, and education. Women ineligible for military service included two groups: those who had permanent civil service positions or were married with dependent children. Dorothy's contract work with the Department of Labour and her status as a single woman made her eligible to enlist for military service.

Dorothy had a trade needed for the war effort but could have faced the Canadian military's recruitment restrictions – the racial barrier – that existed when she joined. Pierson (1986) writes that Women's Services of the Armed Forces--Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC), Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Women's Division (WD), and the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (Wrens)--originally required that a woman be a "British subject, of white race" (p. 113). Gossage (2001) notes that WWII recruitment officers originally questioned the admissibility of an Indigenous recruit, questioning whether her "Indian nationality" prohibited her enlistment. Of the Women's Services, CWAC officially expanded its racial criteria first, in 1942, to include "citizen of any of [the] United Nations" (Pierson, 1986, p. 113).

Dorothy's sense of adventure and her many relatives who also enlisted (she had [three](#) brothers and many cousins enlisted) motivated her decision to join CWAC. Her contractual work as a bookkeeper for the federal government and her previous volunteer experiences as a reservist positioned her to be invited to enlist. She met all eligibility requirements set by CWAC for women entrants. Her recruitment invitation by the Department of Labour seemingly overlooked the standard application requirements for her to self-identify as a Métis woman. Officials were most concerned that she could pass

a medical examination and be ready for Basic Training within two weeks. She had acquired skills and experiences as a worker and reservist that the Army needed. She came in before [military officials lifted](#) the racial restrictions on women's recruitment.

Unofficially, Dorothy was one of the first Aboriginal women to enlist. Thus she began her military career at the Mewata Armouries in Calgary. Dorothy's training in Calgary represented the first time in her life that she had been south of Edmonton.

Dorothy's initial WWII experiences

Upon entering the service, Dorothy did five or six weeks of Basic Training at the Mewata Armouries in Calgary. She explained "I had never been any further south than 82nd Ave in Edmonton. I had been north to Athabasca and Colinton but I had never been south so it was an adventure just going on the train to Calgary. It was quite exciting".

She expressed her excitement for the new experiences she had once she arrived in Calgary and despite the lack of Army accommodations for housing the new influx of women recruits. She describes the close living conditions in the gym of the YWCA where the women recruits stayed:

That was an experience in its self. We all had single cots and I'm sure there wasn't anymore than a foot between each one. We could just sidle in between the two cots. There were 20 some women of us in that room and our beds were all around the room and then we had some in the centre as well. But we had quite a time there. We had lots of fun together and we were all getting to know one another because there were some girls from Southern points and central Alberta as well.

She notes that the residents who lived upstairs at the YMCA did not always appreciate the temporary new residents in the basement, who came up and joined them in the dining room for meals

When we'd come in for meals, laughing and talking about what had happened on the Parade Square or "do you remember so-and-so wandering by herself on command?" and this sort of thing, and they would look at us as much to say "Oh, what rowdy people (laughs). And I think they had themselves convinced that we had been picked up off the streets of Edmonton and wherever, and had joined the Army because we had nothing else to do. They didn't realize that we all had a trade of some kind. The majority of us were office workers, quite a few from the government, some were store clerks, and some were practical nurses or whatever...so we had a lot of fun.

Dorothy and her colleagues enjoyed their evenings together. They trained outdoors during the day, which added to Dorothy's new experiences. She explains that "We enjoyed that because all of us had been working somewhere, this was out in beautiful weather like this. We just enjoyed it to the fullest".

Beyond the marching drills that the women practiced daily, Dorothy explains other training the women had

And we had First Aid classes and we had lectures on King's Regulations Canada, which was the rules and regulations of the army, how to dress and how not to do things and all the kinds of charges that you could be put up on and all this sort of thing if you misbehaved.

Dorothy and some of the other women completed their Basic Training in four to five weeks. Dorothy explains why she and some of her colleagues moved quickly from Basic Training into their first posting

But those of us who had office work we just went to work, we just fitted right into the office work, we didn't need any training, we were already typists, and stenographers or whatever.

Dorothy had been among the first group of 85 women to enter Basic Training in Calgary. The women were dispersed to various areas—Ordinance, Army Service Corps, District Headquarters, and Medical Corps. Dorothy and 17 other women left the training centre in Calgary for their first posting, in Red Deer, Alberta.

Dorothy Entering the Male-Dominated Military Workforce

At the Red Deer camp the women joined 3000 male troops already stationed there. Dorothy recalls how one of the leaders prepared the male soldiers for the novelty of the women's arrival,

And I guess before we arrived there Colonel Burton Willison, I'll never forget that name, he was the big shot in the Red Deer Camp and he called all of the boys into the big Drill Hall that morning and said, "We are getting ladies into this camp today and you will treat them like sisters. They are not to be molested. Their barrack room is out-of-bounds, if you are found within I-don't-know-how-many feet away - without reason to be there then you'll be in trouble."

The soldiers heeded his words. Dorothy explains, "They [the men] all treated us very well". Dorothy elaborates

When we went into the services, we were replacing these men in offices. They didn't throw out all the men but each girl went to a training office. For instance that would be like a company office and one girl would go in and do the typing for them and they'd replace these two-fingered artists that had been working for them before. They found that the work had got done a little faster and we were soon welcomed and the officers we quite happy to have us working for them.

The role that Dorothy assumed was typical of servicewomen's roles replacing men to free them for duty. Pierson (1986) explains the scope of women's roles within the military, stating "When during WWII the formation of an official women's corps was under consideration in Canada, the only purpose envisioned for it was to supply female labour to the support staff, not to the fighting force" (p. 104).

Dorothy experienced other perks while working in Red Deer. She appreciated the good food she ate and that she never had to cook and clean, like many of the other women who joined CWAC after her:

And we, and one other bunch of men who were mostly on staff, these were not the trainees, ate in this cooking school. And we had good food there, and the cooks were learning how to cook and they did a good job. So we ate very well. And with us going in, in that first group, unless you were designated to general duty in the Barrack Room that you were in, you never washed dishes, you never had to scrub the floors. That's what the General Duty girls did; if they didn't have any particular training then they would likely start out as generally duty and later work into something else. But I never washed a dish all the while I was in the Army in 40 years. And I never scrubbed a floor. And it was pretty good, we

went in pretty good. But later on the girls that came in had to be all those kinds of things and they had to start when they first joined up in training...

Women entering the male-dominated work force also needed military uniforms.

The uniforms had not arrived by the time Dorothy arrived in Red Deer. She explains

Up to that point we were dressed in all kinds of attire. (Laughs.) We from Edmonton had what we called out Alberta Women's Service Core uniform, it was a little grey cotton skirt and jacket, and a shirt – grey coloured shirt, sort of bluish coloured shirt with a black tie and a black tam with the AWSC in the Maple Leaf on our hat.

While at the Red Deer Camp, Dorothy and her colleagues got their official CWAC uniforms. Dorothy explains that after four or five months “that little old skirt got wore down pretty thin”. By the time the CWAC uniforms arrived, “some of us were into different kinds of skirts and blouses”. She shares her pride in getting the new uniforms and describes that the women received skirts, jackets, shirts, caps, ties, hose, shoes, purses, gloves, a coat, and gloves as their “walking out attire. We didn't wear those when we were around the barracks and just in the camp or wherever we were working...And we were pretty smart looking”.

Dorothy had positive experiences entering the Red Deer Camp. The men treated the women well. The men who worked in the offices appreciated the efficiencies the women brought to the typing duties. Military life freed Dorothy from the daily household chores of cooking and cleaning and provided her with a smart uniform that she wore with pride. Overall, Dorothy reflects on her initial experiences with CWAC saying,

So we were all happy in our service. I don't think there were too many of us wanted out after we were in there. There was an odd person that felt they were not suited for it and they got out with a matter of two or three months or something.

Cambell's (1990) study of servicewomen from the [United States of America](#) had similar, positive experiences. She found that "nearly all women surveyed said they would do it again, and would recommend a service career to other women" (p. 266).

Dorothy's Military Relocation within the Context of Service

Dorothy describes her relocation from Red Deer, back to Calgary where she took up duties as the Orderly Room Sergeant. She explains

Back to Calgary and I went to work in the Orderly Room, the CWAC Orderly Room that was looking after the CWAC personnel in the company. We had our CWAC Company that looked after all the girls in the area and then the men had companies too, like they were all divided into companies. But their documents were looked after by the personnel that worked in those places. Well a lot of the girls worked on documents but for the men, whereas I was working on documents for the women because I was in the CWAC administration.

In Calgary Dorothy was among the first women to live in the Currie Barracks, which was renovated to accommodate the influx of CWAC women. Dorothy describes,

Then the [Currie] Barracks out there were complete and we could move in and I moved in to the Barracks out there, and I stayed in the Orderly Room. September '42 to September '43 or there abouts, I was in Currie Barracks. Living in the Barracks and working in the Administration Office.

While she was working in the CWAC Orderly Room a position for a stenographer came available. Dorothy describes applying for the position

A job with the District Education Office downtown in District Headquarters came available; it was a steno job and I applied for it and got it. And I stayed at Currie Barracks, and by this time then had trucks, transport trucks taking us from Currie Barracks down to District Headquarters 'cause it was growing all the time we had so many more girls, and so they had put on transport. And we'd go down every morning to the downtown area, to the various offices down there, and I worked for the District Education Officer for a year.

Dorothy worked with the increasingly large contingent of women in Calgary, as men moved into combat positions overseas and the demand for women grew.

She had worked in Calgary for several years when the call came from London for servicewomen, who were needed to backfill the men working in offices overseas.

While I was there at Currie Barracks already as an Orderly Room Sergeant the first draft went overseas. I don't know how many left from the Alberta group. But I think about 10 or 12 or something like that. They were over there by Christmas of 1942. And then after that they were intermittent over in groups... There were a lot of people who worked in office work because that was their biggest need.

Originally, in February 1942, Canadian military officials in Britain requested Canadian women to replace men as launderers. Headquarters in London deemed that women would best fulfill these "less than vital services." They later recanted, requesting instead women recruits with clerical skills to replace men in these positions. Gossage (2001) notes

“London responded almost instantly with a request for 200 clerks and...the request for clerical help might, in fact, take precedence” (p. 202).

The request for servicewomen to serve in clerical positions overseas continued as the war progressed. Two years later, Dorothy was one of the women working in a clerical position in Canada who was selected for later draft to go overseas. She describes her decision to serve in an overseas posting

And in September of '44 he said to me, “Do you want to go overseas?”

And I said, “I'd love to.”

“Okay,” he says “there's a memo here for a new draft and there's vacancy for Sergeant. I'll see if I can get you on it.”

So off he went, I didn't know...in a few minutes he put on his hat and out he went and when he came back he said, “Well you're on the draft.”

And I said, “I am?”

And he said, “And you're going over with a Sergeant's ---[unclear] .”

And I said, “Good. When do I leave?”

And he said, “Be ready in about two weeks.”

All military personnel going overseas went to the Basic Training Center in Kitchener, Ontario for formation of the draft.

To prepare for their relocation for an overseas posting, Dorothy and six other women from the Alberta division of CWAC had to congregate at a training center. She explained, “All the girls that were going overseas, whether they were from the Maritimes or Quebec or wherever, we all went to this Kitchener area to the barracks there-- training centre.” Poulin (2007a) describes conditions in this Kitchener training facility “where 100 women (one platoon) lived in a hut of two bunks to a room” (p. 143). Military training

for women was limited at these facilities. Poulin (2007b) notes, “Even though there were over fifty trades open to women, most were relegated to office or kitchen duty” (p. 3).

Women recruited for clerical work to replace men in Britain went overseas first, as requested by the British military. Dorothy traveled by troop train from Kitchener, Ontario to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Dorothy notes that after arriving in Halifax the recruits headed to the port and “... we went over seas as a group and we numbered somewhere in the 80s – 85 or such number.” Gossage (2001) calculates “Statistically, aside from those women who served as nursing sisters, approximately one in nine of the women who enlisted in Canada’s armed forces was selected for overseas duty (from a total over 45,000 servicewomen)” (p. 199). From a militaristic perspective, Pierson (1986) suggests that like men, “an overseas posting was the most coveted assignment for members of the Canadian Women’s Army Corps... It gratified the second strongest motivation after patriotism for joining the Corps—the urge for travel and adventure” (p. 111; see also Gossage, 2001). Dorothy explains that they

had several calls saying, “Okay, there’s a ship in, and get yourself together you’ll be going within a matter of 36 hours or 48 hours or something.” And we’d get our medicals through, we’d go on this parade to the doctor and all of this stuff that was necessary and then they’d say, “Sorry. They don’t have the accommodation for women on this boat.” So we’d be postponed again.

Dorothy finally left on November 20, 1944. She recounts her experiences preparing to board the ship for her voyage overseas to join the war effort. She recalls,

There were men as well going over seas and going in the same ship. It was called the Andes. It was waiting for us there – all in camouflage – it was waiting for us at

the ports there. It took a whole day to load everybody on the ship and sometime through the night the ship moved out of harbor and away from the dock.

Dorothy slept as the ship began her journey across the ocean. She recounts,

When we woke up we were out there on that ocean and there was a storm. It was kind of rough. We felt safe, I think, knowing there were numbers. We weren't alone even if it was going to happen...I put on my *grey* coat and cap and went up on deck and then I saw just how stormy it was. Why the ship was rocking so. There were big waves splashing over the bow. The clouds were rolling across the sky- grey big dark clouds. And the wind was blowing but I got my fresh air and I was ok after that. I was a good sailor.

Dorothy's journey overseas took eight days. The Andes landed at a port at Liverpool, on the west coast of England before the end of November. Once the Andes had docked in England, Dorothy retells

They whisked us down to Holding company at Aldershot in Hampshire and we were billeted there until we were posted out to the jobs we were designated out to go to. So a lot of the girls were out and away in couple of day's time in their jobs.

Dorothy did not get the position for which she had gone over to fill. She explains that "we were so long in getting there that some of the people that were already in the Department were promoted and so the vacancy wasn't there any longer, and mine wasn't there when I got to Aldershot". Dorothy stayed on at Canada House, explaining "I had gone over with the rank of Sergeant and they had to find me a different job because someone had already been promoted into the position that had been scheduled for me".

Dorothy stayed at Canada House until February waiting for a position at the rank of Sergeant. Dorothy's experiences in WWII contrast with some of Poulin's (2006, 2007a, 2007b) participants as she entered her position at a higher rank because she had an education that made her valuable to the army. Poulin's participants were often put in low ranking positions because their education was undervalued. Dorothy also speaks about being welcomed once the discrimination against women was overcome. This can be contrasted with Poulin's work in which she speaks about Indigenous women's experiences of racism.

Dorothy relocated for her service from a small community near Edmonton to Canada House in London, England. Dorothy's typing skills and the need identified for clerical workers to replace men in offices for combat made her one of the approximately 11% of Canadian women selected to go overseas to serve during the war. While she worked in London, Dorothy's posting exposed her to combat conditions, despite the official military intentions for Canadian women not to be exposed to combat situations.

Dorothy and Other Women's Lives At Risk

Diensfey (1988) characterizes women's experiences of combat situations based on their exposure to combat or near-combat situations. He includes being stationed in a war zone in his definition (p. 551). He found that nearly 15% of women veterans exposed to combat held clerical positions (p. 552). Most of these women held positions within the Women's Army Corps (p. 553), and the majority (75%) had served in WWII (p. 553).

Using Diensfey's (1988) definition, Dorothy was exposed to combat situations while working at Canada House in Trafalgar Square in London. Dorothy experienced bombings. She states,

The only scary thing about being there was that the rocket Bombs were being catapulted over into London from some spot in Holland. The ones had little motors on them and they could be heard. When they were heard then the air raid sirens would be going off so we would aware that there was something would be coming but then the other V2s were silent and they just came over and Bang! There was a big bang somewhere and we never knew they were on their way over.

She recalls being in bed at night when the air raid sirens sounded. She describes the experience as "...kind of eerie. Kind of scary. We wondered where this bomb was going to land and we would all lie so still we could hear a pin drop I'm sure." Dorothy and her comrades would wait for the explosion to sound: "Once we heard the explosions we knew we were safe and we'd all relax and go back to sleep again, or get up and rush to the bathroom."

Gossage (2001) notes that Canadian servicewomen exposed to combat during their experiences in WWII London occupy a unique position amongst servicewomen. She describes,

There is ... no question that the experience of overseas duty set these particular servicewomen apart from the rest. The "buzz bombs," the never-ending blackouts, the sound of sirens, the endless process of queuing up, became part of their day-to-day existence. As well, they were constantly exposed to the British bulldog spirit: the will to "muddle through" and maintain a sense of humour in the face of virtually any onslaught or adversity. These were, indeed aspects for the war that were the unique experience of a

relatively small number of Canadian servicewomen. They had been given the opportunity to live out the war under circumstances which were less removed from reality; and, almost without exception, they felt privileged and proud to be overseas and playing a part in the real war at closer range. (p. 205)

Thus, Canadian servicewomen put their lives at risk during WWII. Although military officials did not sanction women serving in combat roles, Diensfrey (1988) and Gossage (2001) demonstrate how these women were involved in active combat situations through their work supporting the troops.

Dorothy and Marriage during War

English servicewomen served in combat positions and worked alongside Canadian soldiers and airmen in their daily duties (Saywell, 1985). Canadian women served predominantly in support roles, so they had fewer opportunities to meet Canadian men who were also serving overseas. Campbell (1990) notes that 80% of American servicewomen were single during their wartime service. Only about 7% of the 20% of married servicewomen married after enlisting (p. 253).

Despite these limited opportunities and odds, Dorothy met her first husband, Bob Acheson (as she subsequently remarried after Bob's death and became Dorothy Chartrand) while she was serving overseas. She met him during her first months while she stayed on at Canada House, waiting to move to a posting. He served as

An instructor in first aid, an instructor with the Holding company. He had been with the Fourth Field Ambulance Corp prior to that and had been over in.... on the Italy campaign and had been returned to England... Then while I was there, he was transferred out to a station further on, and we only saw

one another every two or three weeks or something. And when I moved to London, he used to come up or I used to go down close to where his camp was for the day on a Sunday.

Saywell's (1985) participants note that posting men and women who developed relationships to different camps made these relationships more difficult to maintain.

Dorothy and Bob met "every three weeks or so. Not much more than that. Sometimes I would go down to where he was and sometimes he'd come up to London." Dorothy indicates that "in July of 1945 Bob and I were married and he was scheduled to be coming back home and he got on repatriation draft. That's what he was on when we got married, as a matter of a fact." To marry required following army protocols. Dorothy recalls the process, stating,

We had to have permission from the powers and that was the army. So we had to have our permission published. Our first request to get married was published in the Orders and when we had this, our permission was also published. All this is in our pay books. And so I became Sergeant *Acheson* instead of *Bellerose*.

Dorothy's overseas service ended as suddenly as it began. Bob learned that he would be sent home. They married and he left by ship in late August 1945. Once he knew he was leaving, Dorothy chose to return home as well. She says "In the meantime as a married woman I could ask to return as well. So I had asked and they said, 'Well we don't know just when it will be but you'll be going home'."

Cotton and Pinch (1986) explore the difficulties for Canadian married service men and women. They identify two policy-based military deterrents for couples and

issues of career and social management arising with dual-service marriages (p. 247).

Military personnel are sex-segregated and posted based on individual criteria. The individual posting policy creates administrative challenges with married service couples within the Canadian military. Dorothy and Bob's romance endured the stress of separation during their postings and of war. She took the steps to start their marriage together, by following military policies that married women could request to return home.

For married and single women serving during WWII, familial impacts of serving the war effort included having other relatives in the service as well as relatives who remained back home in Canada. Dorothy's stories reflect both of these situations, as she had relatives as service personnel and non-serving family members back home.

Dorothy and the Impact Of Women's Active Duty From/Upon Their Families

Earlier we noted that having other family members in the service motivated women to enlist. Dorothy came from a family with brothers who were also serving during WWII. She relates,

I had brothers in the services, too. Fred and George were in the army. And Harry was in the Navy; he served his time crossing the Atlantic with the convoys...He was a coder. He would receive the messages and he would have to *uncode* (decode) them and get the message and then send the message out and he had to put the message into code and then send it out. So, he had a busy time.

Meadows (2007) lists Indigenous nations whose members served as 'code talkers,' men who passed along military information in code to prevent Nazi forces from intercepting

military intelligence and correspondence. Given Harry's navel work, we can add Métis men to the list of code talkers employed by the military during WWII.

Dorothy also had extended family members, cousins, in the services at home and abroad while she served. She explains,

Uncle Jim's boys, there were five of them that were in the services. I think they were all in the army. I'm not sure just what they did but there were two of them who were involved in the campaign in Italy as well as on the Western front. And they did suffer a bit of problems from their experiences; two of them that were in the campaigns. And I think the other two were overseas but they weren't in the front lines and one never left Canada.

Dorothy later learned that many more relatives and extended family members served in WWII. While researching her family genealogy, Dorothy found "that there were many, many, more Bellerose people that were in the services from other families." Like Dorothy, some of the Indigenous servicewomen in Poulin's (2006) study came from families serving in the military and enrolled with their brothers and cousins.

Although Dorothy had many family members in the service overseas and in Canada, that did not lessen the impact on her mother and father. They had four children overseas on active duty during the war. Dorothy recalls,

Dad died in December of 1942. We were all four in the services at that point. We all attended his funeral. We were still here in Canada and that left mother alone at the farm with Robert and Margaret. So, they were just a small group of people where there had been so many of us.

Dorothy's family included her mother and father and 12 siblings. She also had a large extended family. The Bellerose family shared in the responsibility to serve in WWII through conscripted and voluntary service.

In her study of American servicewomen in WWII, Campbell (1990) found, "While 95% of all the women surveyed had more positive than negative experiences during the war, they also reflected on the undesirable legacies of the war...One fourth said that it was hard on their families (26%)" (p. 261). Of these women participants, Campbell notes that nurses described the impact on families most acutely. She states "Among American servicewomen employed as nurses, nearly half (43%) noted that their war effort produced negative experiences for their family members" (p. 261).

Although it was not discussed openly, Dorothy knew her parents worried for their children. She mused, "Well, I don't think dad was very happy about it and I'm sure mother had her worries but we all came back. So, that was a blessing and she passed away in 1948 after we'd been home for three years."

Discussion

Dorothy's stories of her experiences as a Métis woman serving in WWII illuminate various themes that extend our understandings of Métis women's public roles.

Our analysis focuses on issues of identity, complicating the invisibility of women servicewomen's stories and experiences of racial and gender discrimination, understanding women's motivations to enlist, women in combat situations, marrying while in active service, and the impacts upon Indigenous women's' lives. We also gain a sense of Dorothy's story and how it contributes to the literature WWII in relation to other servicewomen's experiences, particularly other Indigenous servicewomen.

Dorothy's motivations to join the CWAC included her yen for adventure. Dorothy's adventure seeking reflects Poulin's (2006) findings and a commonality with non-Indigenous servicewomen's reasons for enlisting. Another commonality with non-Indigenous counterparts included trepidation upon enlistment, separation from family and friends, and pride in their contributions and uniforms (p. 200).

Distinctly, adventure is part of the Métis existence. Métis peoples have long been a mobile people, with a homeland stretching from Ontario to Alaska, and south to St. Louis, Missouri and beyond (Iseke-Barnes, 2009). That Dorothy had never travelled south of Edmonton is in striking contrast to her forebears who travelled for hunting trips all across the great plains. Women in these trips often had very important roles to play as healers and family leaders so Dorothy comes from a long line of powerful women (Iseke-Barnes, 2009).

That leadership quality is reflected in Dorothy's not waiting for the military to change its policies to allow women to enlist in order to take up service but instead making a choice to not self-identify as Métis in order that she could be accepted into service at a time when the military still only accepted British-descended people in its ranks. Dorothy had to deny both her French and Métis heritage in order to serve her county. Racist ideologies produced a discourse that was negotiated by Métis and all Indigenous women. They also negotiated entry and roles in a male-dominated hierarchical organization and gender discrimination (Gossage, 2001; Herbert, 1998; Pierson, 1986). The racialized and gendered experiences of Indigenous women did impact their experiences and roles they could/would play in the WWII effort. But Dorothy indicates that the situations of overt discrimination was quickly overcome in her

case as women became accepted into the military setting in contrast to the extant literature.

Lackenbauer and Sheffield (2007) critique the literature on Indigenous peoples' participation in and contributions to WWII for a narrow focus on several recurring similarities: a singular thesis of forgotten soldier; a lack of benefits post-war; oral histories of discrimination by government officials and general public; and, an emphasis on documenting at the expense of theorizing and analysis of experiences. These histories include discrimination and misconduct by government officials and public discrimination during service and post war (p. 222). Poulin (2007b) contends that these themes emerged regularly for scholars because they distinguish Indigenous peoples' WWII participation from non-Indigenous veterans' participation (p. 25).

Dorothy complicates the focus on forgotten soldier that Gaffen, 1985 defines as negating Indigenous peoples' participation in Canada's war efforts in favour of a more generic depiction of soldiers focusing on the 'white' experiences as universal. Poulin (2006, 2007b) and the *Advancement of Aboriginal Women in Alberta Study (AAWAS)* (n.d.) take up this theme in a singular way but focus on both the gendered and racial discrimination that Indigenous women faced in war and afterward. Given that Dorothy did not self-identify as Métis (due to racist policies) she disrupts this forgotten soldier motif by becoming engulfed in the mainstream depictions because she was not defined as Métis by the military; yet she is Métis so her story is a Métis story and does not lessen her role and participation as a WWII servicewomen.

Poulin (2006) identified commonalities between Indigenous women and male veterans from other studies such as racial discrimination while serving, unequal treatment

in receiving postwar benefits, and unequal eligibility for later compensation packages. Since Dorothy did not identify as Indigenous when enlisting for service, she was not exposed to the discrimination and unequal treatment for postwar benefits. Indeed upon returning from the war she moved to Saskatchewan and set up a household on a farm and had 4 children but when her husband Bob became ill and died she needed work. As a WWII veteran with ample skills and abilities she was quickly able to find work in an office position requiring her skills. Dorothy remained an active member of the Canadian Legion and continued to represent her regiment at remembrance day services and in recent years to support remembrances on November 11 to commemorate Indigenous servicewomen and men. She was not a forgotten soldier and she aided those who wished to ensure that other Indigenous soldiers were also remembered.

Dorothy was posted overseas through the military relocation practices for women. CWAC needed her skills and her trade as a typist to replace men in offices, and free them for active combat. Dorothy put her life at risk during her overseas posting. Although Canadian women for the most part did not see active duty, the servicewomen in London endured dangerous situations including extensive bombing that made the English people send their own children to the countryside for safety and yet was the necessary work location for these women selected by the military. While Dorothy's motivation initially to go to war may have been to have an adventure, her service brought her into danger both in crossing the Atlantic at a time of many bombings of ships as well as through bombings in London where she could have been killed. Diensfrey (1988) defines these experiences as combat.

Since women have been excluded from hostilities by law, if the same definition of combat [as applied to men] were applied to female veterans, this article would be limited to the experience of those who inadvertently were caught in the midst of hostilities. In order to increase the number of women in the subset, the definition of combat was expanded to include those who were exposed to combat or near-combat situations, ranging from being stationed in a war zone (e.g. England in WWII) to being a prisoner of war. (Dienstfrey, 1988, p. 551)

The Advancement of Aboriginal Women in Alberta Study (n.d.) also overviews the fact that women were for the first time in an area where they could engage in war as they were in England during the bombings. Dorothy endured this experience of war but also met her future husband during this time in London.

As a servicewoman Dorothy experienced the politics of military control on the lives of married servicewomen when she chose to marry and had to get permission to marry while in active service. Given she and her husband were individually positioned, the ability to endure long absences and distances to be together when they could became a part of her life. Few servicewomen married during the war. Her marriage while serving allowed her to return to the relative safety of Canada in a wartime situation. We do not suggest though that she married to avoid duty but rather she married for love and returned to be with her husband when he left active service.

Conclusion

Weshler Segal (1978) critiques the literature on women's participation in WWII for a lack of analysis of women's experiences. By taking up Dorothy Chartrand's wartime stories our research analysis contextualizes her stories within the literature

allowing us to address some of the gaps in the literature while extending that literature and allowing another lens through which to interpret wartime stories.

Dorothy's stories about her service in World War II (WWII) help us understand the context of service for Indigenous women during WWII that are connected to larger understandings of women's experiences entering the male-dominated institution of the military, their rationale for joining, and their experiences while serving. Campbell (1990) asked if U.S. women's military service during WWII was a critical event for them, what experiences they had, and, how their experiences shaped their attitudes about combat. Like Campbell we consider Dorothy's experiences and critical events, and ways attitudes were affected by wartime service.

As Dorothy's great-niece, I knew Dorothy growing up. She was always a very organized person and amply capable of organizing vast amounts of information, filing, organizing ideas, creating charts of information to share what she knew. The skills that she learned in her secretarial training were honed during her position in CWAS organizing the women and then in her increasingly responsible positions eventually as a sergeant – a rank rarely achieved by women in the services and particularly by Indigenous women. After the war she used these skills in gaining employment in offices and as a single parent when Bob died from cancer. Further, she used these skills when she retired and took on research first for a book of history of the city of St. Albert in which she interviewed all the Métis families in the community to ensure their stories were not 'white washed' out of the story of the 'founding' of this Métis-originating community. Further, she spent 25 years in the archives of Canada and the Hudson's Bay Company to uncover the history of her family and community that could be uncovered there (Iseke-

Barnes, 2009). Her research, before the Internet made the records available, led others to follow in her footsteps and uncover the many stories she could tell and the organizing of the large amounts of information she gathered from multiple sources. For example, there were four ancestors, two husband and wife pairs, that each had large families (15-20 children) and the two families were 'mixed up' in the archival records she found as she entered into the process of research. She used her methodical and research skills to 'sort them out' so at the conclusion of her research these two families had full genealogical charts with all the descendents organized and their lineage clearly identified. Military service for Dorothy was a critical event in her life that provided her with knowledge and skills that served her the remainder of her work life and within her community service and work on genealogy. Service was not just in the armed forces but continued throughout her life.

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