



Women in Uniform



Women's Royal Auxiliary Army Corps on Parade.



Forewoman and Private of the WAAC



VADs starting an ambulance.

By late 1916 it had become clear that the army was in need of more men. Conscription had already ensured that most men of military age and fitness were in the forces. Women were needed to take on duties that would release men to fight.

In 1917 a recruitment drive began. *'Women urgently needed for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps: cooks, cleaners, driver-mechanics, waitresses, all kinds of domestic workers'*



WW1 Recruitment Poster for Women's services.



WRNS officer instructs a rating in the use of anti-gas respirators.



Women in the WRAF



Vera Britten in VAD uniform



WRNS recruits.



WAACs tending fat boilers



VADs working on a car in Etaples



WAACs tending graves of the fallen in France.



Matron of Ockbrook Hospital with patients.



VADs on parade: Ockbrook

July 1918
Dear Charley
How are you? I haven't had a letter for some time so I hope you are well and have not had a recurrence of your illnesses.
We have had some tragic news. Do you remember Elspeth who worked with me in the kitchens at the big house? Well, she went to work at the munitions factory at Chilwell in Nottingham. She has an aunt who lived in Beeston so she could stay with her. The wages were amazing but on 1st of this month there was an enormous explosion and Elspeth was killed along with 133 others. They have not found her body - in fact only 32 people could be identified so they have all been buried in a mass grave in Attenborough churchyard. Some are saying it was sabotage but others say it was to do with the very hot weather. We heard the explosion in Derby and they say people up to 20 miles away heard it.
My sister Jane had been trying to work out the transport to work at Chilwell. We are really glad that she couldn't. She is now working at the British Cellulose factory at Spondon making waterproof fabric for aircraft wings. Mother and father have never been so well off with my wage and Jane's plus a small amount from Eleanor who is still working in the big house. It's lovely to see Mother so happy. She does not have to use the Pugin Charity anymore and because the boys are still too young to fight and father is too old the war has been good for our family.
Please write and let me know your news. I miss your letters
Your friend
Alice



Aftermath of munitions explosion at Chilwell July 1st 1918.

Recruitment to the WAACs was not easy. At home women were struggling to keep their families healthy with daily shortages of all the basics and the cost of living rising. Life was miserable with bad news from the war every day. Other organisations such as the Women's Land Army were recruiting too and the thought of more cooking and cleaning was not particularly attractive.

But not everyone agreed with the idea of women soldiers and the women were often *'regarded as scum and that we had been enlisted for the sexual satisfaction of the soldiers'*.

It was not until a WAAC camp in Northern France was bombed and 9 women were killed that the press became more sympathetic, seeing that the women were taking the same risks as the men.

The other uniformed services were smaller than the WAAC. The WRNS and WRAF tended to draw girls from higher social classes than the WAAC.

The WRNS did not go to sea or serve alongside the Royal Navy men but worked in the ports. Over 7,000 women joined.

The Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) began recruiting in 1917 but with few planes ever seen and the men's service still in early days few women were recruited. In early 1918 2,000 women from the WAACs and the WRNS were transferred being attracted by the technical training offered by the WRAF. To train as aero-engine fitters, acetylene welders and magneto repairers and was a huge encouragement.

Despite the service provided by the women in uniform the formation of the WAAC, WRNS and WAF were seen as wartime necessities and they quickly disappeared at the end of the war.

Voluntary Aid Detachment

Those who joined the VADs were regarded as angels, doing the caring work that women should do.

The VADs numbered 9,000 in 1914, 70,000 by the end of the war. With feminine uniforms and training in basic nursing they tended to be the preserve of the middle classes. There was an age limit of 21 for UK based VADs and 23 for those working abroad.

In the UK almost every county had large houses converted into hospitals or convalescent units. The VADs worked under professional nurses doing all the dirty jobs of cleaning, washing and emptying bedpans. The VADs were readily accepted by the wounded men. They read to them, wrote their letters and listened to their stories while the poorly paid professional nurses were hard pressed to carry out their medical duties. VADs were great for propaganda purposes and were photographed by the newspapers.

Female doctors became indispensable. Medical degrees were opened up to women during the war. Some worked in military hospitals in France, others set up their own establishments and did pioneering work and research. In many cases local women acted as volunteers. Local doctors gave their time freely till 1917 when they were given some payment by the Government.

There were over 3000 Auxiliary hospitals in the UK during the war. Locally Aston Hall and the Moravian settlement at Ockbrook were used as military hospitals.



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