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Mollie Weinstein Schaffer. *Mollie's War: The Letters of a World War II WAC in Europe.* Edited by Cyndee Schaffer. Jefferson: McFarland, 2010. x + 281 pp. $35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-4791-6.

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GI Jane: Both Here and Abroad

On May 20, 1944, in a letter from "somewhere in England," Mollie Weinstein told her brother Jackie that she would title her future book *GI Jane: Both Here and Abroad.* While the title of the work ultimately changed, we are fortunate to have the 350 incredibly rich and eloquently written letters Weinstein wrote home between 1943 and 1945 chronicling her wartime experience.

Weinstein grew up in a Jewish household and community in Detroit, Michigan. When her cousin was killed in the Pacific and two girlfriends joined the Women's Army Corps (WAC), she interrupted her work as a medical transcriber for a Veterans Administration hospital in Dearborn, Michigan, to join the army. Weinstein was one of three hundred thousand women to serve in WAC during WWII. In the introduction to the collection of letters, Leisa Meyer explains that "one of the biggest questions the new women's corps faced was whether women could perform the duties, maintain the discipline and endure the hardships and challenges of a military life" (p. 4). Weinstein's letters prove women could not only endure but also succeed.

The book is divided into five parts, each describing a different phase and location of Weinstein's service. Part 1 describes Weinstein's basic training in Daytona Beach, Florida, and her first assignment in Wilmington, California. Part 2 begins in the spring of 1944 when the army sent Weinstein overseas to London where she served as a medical secretary in the Office of the Chief Surgeon and braved the German doodlebug bombs. In late summer of 1944, part 3, Weinstein camped in the mud of Normandy, France, where she worked on critical post-D-Day logistics. In September 1944, the army transferred her to Paris where she witnessed the armistice parade and VE Day celebrations. Part 4 chronicles her experiences in Frankfurt, Germany, beginning in August 1945. While in Germany, Weinstein witnessed the rededication ceremony of Westend Synagogue on September 7, 1945. In part 5, Weinstein records her departure from Europe and last few months in the army.

As a collection of letters, there is no central argument, but several themes emerge that tell us about Weinstein's–and other women's–wartime experience. Censorship is one prominent theme of the letters. Weinstein was constrained first by the censorship of the army and second by her own desire to shield her family from unpleasant or upsetting information. For example, often she could only communicate the critical nature of her work through the briefest of references, such as "busy as h***" (p. 60). Moreover, careful not to cause her family more concern than they already felt, Weinstein focused on the positive aspects of her service. However, she admits in the preface that "some of my experiences were harrowing: I survived the doodlebug bombs in England and I lived in tents in the mud in France after D-Day" (p. 2). Weinstein lived in dangerous conditions and participated in important work, but often could not disclose either because of censorship.

Because of the army's censorship, Weinstein's letters focused on relationships. She developed many significant friendly and romantic relationships during her tenure as a WAC. In one letter to her sister, Weinstein describes how her girlfriend Johnnie traveled across London to retrieve Mollie's towel and soap and then arranged to meet Weinstein at the Red Cross station–one of the only locations with hot water (pp. 119-120). Examples of close friendships with other army women appear frequently in the letters. Furthermore, Weinstein had many meaningful relationships with men, so many in fact that she began to refer to the many men in her life as her "etc. etc. situation" in confidential letters to her sister. Never in Weinstein's service–even in the mud of Normandy–did she want for dates. These friendships provide testimony to the importance and strength of relationships during wartime.

Maintaining her femininity remained important to Weinstein. She and her fellow WACs proved their abilities in wartime while refusing to relinquish their feminine identity. Weinstein recounts taking a bath out of her helmet in Normandy and then "bracing up a mirror against a tree to put on our make-up and comb our hair" (p. 80). Still, she was very proud of her military service and wrote to her sister that she felt good in her GI clothes (p. 19). Weinstein's letters demonstrate that preserving her femininity in no way meant compromising her abilities as a soldier.

Weinstein did encounter challenges while a WAC. Censorship compelled her to write more about relationships than work and several people at home accused her of only joining WAC to find dates and adventure. Weinstein always did her best to quickly dispel these myths. Still, myths die hard. Her sister's boss, John McNeil Burns, wrote a letter to Weinstein explaining how "some remark was passed about the WACs merely seeking adventure. I produced a copy of your letter and read it to the assembly. There was a hush and then the exclamation that you were a fine girl, different from the ordinary WACs" (p. 166). Burns could accept that Weinstein was different, but not necessarily the majority of WACs. Ultimately, she endured the hardships–from adverse living conditions, bomb threats, and suspicious folks on the home front–and expressed pride and satisfaction in her military service.

Mollie's War is an excellent account of a female soldier's experience during WWII. We are fortunate not only that Weinstein meticulously documented her time in the army, but also that her daughter, Cyndee Schaffer, diligently prepared the letters for publication. Too often men's wartime experiences dominate history and overshadow the work women performed. The one, quite modest, critique I have is that there is no mention of how the letters were edited. Of course editing is mandatory–book lengths must be reasonable–but the curious reader will wonder what the process was for selecting what remained and what was eliminated. Ultimately, however, Weinstein's letters are a joy to read. They give a detailed account of one woman's experience in WAC during WWII and highlight important themes for women's military service.

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