



WWII Mapping Maidens'

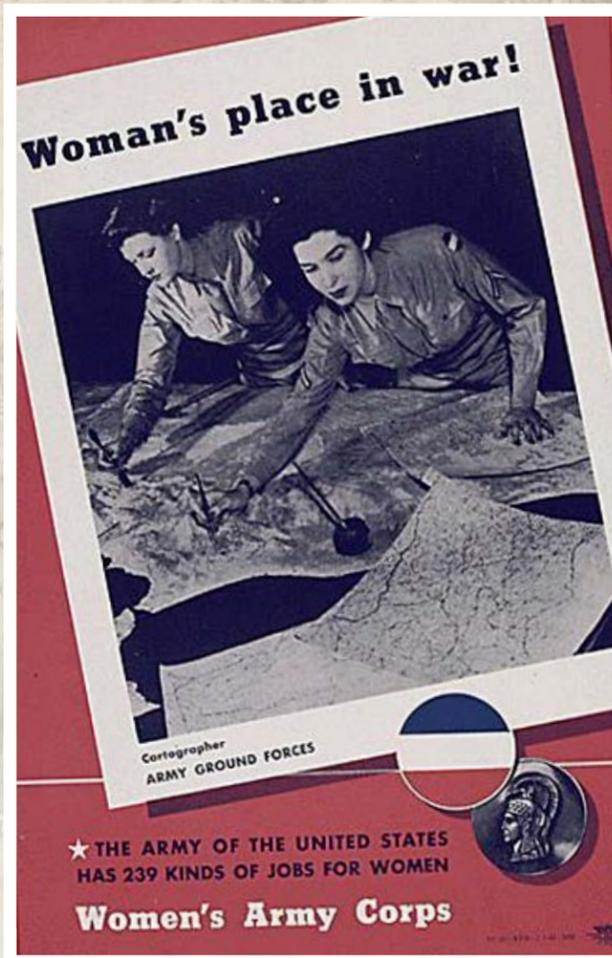
CHART COURSE FOR TODAY'S MAPMAKERS

By Al Anderson, National Geospatial-Intelligence Alumni Association

AS THE DEMAND FOR ITS PRODUCTS ESCALATED EARLY in World War II, the Army Map Service, a heritage organization of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, was losing much of its largely male workforce to the armed forces.

A solution to the urgent need for replacements emerged when the University of Chicago's Geography Department developed a course in military map making and began offering it to women's colleges in the East and Midwest.

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—Bea McPherson

SELECTED schools taught the 60-hour course, which was first offered in 1942. In its inaugural year, 200 women completed the course, said Bea McPherson, who participated in the program. As the program expanded to more colleges, the Army Map Service provided a four-week course that gave recruits further training. AMS leaders began assigning women graduates to various operations, depending on their aptitudes and interests.

“The editor of the magazine, AMS Reference Point, soon coined the name ‘Military Mapping Maidens’ for (us),” said McPherson. “They called us the 3M’s, (and) we thought it was appropriate and rather cute.”

McPherson joined AMS in 1943 after graduating from Ohio’s Kent State University, she said. She was assigned as a drafter and worked in Montgomery County, Md., at the Charles Ruth Building on MacArthur Boulevard. Because of the secret work done there, the building was camouflaged and isolated from other buildings there.

The 3M’s charted strategic locations, churches, schools, land contours, bodies of water and roads. They used foreign maps, aerial photos and other information to create the maps. Some were printed on silk and carried by troops as handkerchiefs and survival tools.

“I (helped) develop various maps for the Battle of the Bulge and initiatives in and around Fiume, Italy,” she said.

She traveled on orders to New York to deliver maps and to Ohio to recruit women from Kent State



Bea McPherson briefs a map in 1943 during her time as a military cartographer. Photo courtesy of Bea McPherson



Bea McPherson meets with Director Letitia Long during a visit to NGA headquarters in Springfield, Va. Photo by Kevin Clark, Office of Corporate Communications

to work at AMS, she said. She received \$6 a day for travel expenses.

The men at AMS treated the women with respect and as part of the team, said McPherson.

“The male employees knew that we answered Uncle Sam’s call to help fill war vacancies,” she said. “There were only two male drafting employees in the project drafting department. We all got along and they did social things with us. Some of the 3M’s dated male employees, and a few of my friends married them and were very happy.”

McPherson and the other 3M’s found time for softball, canoeing,

horseback riding and Saturday afternoon tea dances, she said. They worked well together, though they came from various backgrounds and parts of the country.

“We were there for one common purpose – to make maps for our country’s war effort,” said McPherson, who resigned from AMS shortly after the war ended.

McPherson donated her AMS papers to Kent State University. They are available at <http://www.library.kent.edu/page/16427>. ✨



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