

per woman. In 1775 General Washington sponsored a bill that created a hospital department for the Army and allowed it to pay civilian nurses approximately twenty-five cents a day. In time of emergency, civilian women of prominence and reputation continued to nurse the sick, sew, operate canteens, and lend what assistance their skills permitted. However, for a reputable woman to accept such employment was often considered daring in view of the danger of confusion with the more numerous women camp followers, whose ill repute was apt to attach itself to any female employee. In later wars, the employment of women became more common; drill, mascot, and social groups were also organized, complete with uniforms and sometimes rifles.²

There was a very clear distinction in the Army's and the public's minds between such groups and a corps of women with soldiers' legal status, rights, and discipline. Just before the nation's entry into the first World War, the Army stated positively:

No official record has been found in the War Department showing specifically that any woman was ever enlisted in the military service of the United States as a member of any organization of the Regular or Volunteer Army. It is possible, however, that there may have been a few instances of women having served as soldiers for a short time without their sex having been detected, but no record of such cases is known to exist in the official files. Women were often employed as laundresses and as nurses, but they were merely civilians while so engaged and were in no sense in the *military* service of the United States.³

Total War and the Industrial Revolution

Serious consideration of an official women's corps was scarcely possible before the twentieth century. Until then, war

was not organized and mechanized to an extent that required more manpower than a nation could provide from among its men; the great supply systems and fixed headquarters of total war were yet to come. Also, women were skilled in few duties that would have been useful to an army even had it needed manpower, and few women felt it proper to practice even their traditional tasks of cooking and nursing outside the home.

Both reasons were swept away in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the industrial revolution that mechanized men's wars also taught women to work outside the home. Long before the Army began to consider the admittance of women, businesses and factories had employed them and had trained them as clerks, typists, telephone operators, and technicians. Some such fields were in fact taken over by women so completely that by the time of the first World War it was already difficult for the Army to find any number of competent male typists and telephone operators.

Nevertheless, there remained considerable room for doubt as to the value of woman as a military employee. Industry's experience had produced the general impression that women were suited only for work of limited responsibility; that "women won't work for women" and certainly that men would not; that a woman employee was handicapped by a weaker constitution and more frequent ailments. Business surveys as late as 1942 confirmed the fact that women supervisors were unpopular with employees because of alleged

² (1) Sir John William Fortescue, *History of the British Army* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890-1930), Vol. I. (2) Rapid City, S. D., *Daily Journal*, October 21, 1944.

³ Ltr cited n. 1(2).