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Kathlene Ward
University of Denver

Elizabeth Escobedo
University of Denver - Advisor

Susan Schulten
University of Denver - Advisor

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Keywords

Sexuality, Gender, U.S. military, Gay liberation, World War II, Cold War

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Kathlene Ward[1], Elizabeth Escobedo[2], and Susan Schulten[2]
[1]Student Contributor, University of Denver, Denver, CO
[2]Advisor, Department of History, University of Denver, Denver, CO

Abstract

At the inception of World War II, the United States military adapted to include women within its ranks with the creation of the Women's Army Corps. Likewise, psychology's implementation into military procedures legitimized systematic exclusion and removal of queer persons seeking military involvement. Such factors resulted in a particularly unique environment for queer servicewomen. The birth of the Cold War brought about a new wave of heterosexual expectations that forced queer individuals in the U.S. military even further into the closet. This project seeks to uncover how gender and sexuality expectations placed upon queer women serving in the World War II and early Cold War U.S. military influenced them in their lives after service. The conclusion of this research is that the military's clamping down on sexuality, paired with the all-female environment of women's units, encouraged queer women to more boldly assert their sexuality in the years following their service, which propelled the gay liberation movement forward. Their work in the post-service years, while not always manifesting as clear-cut activism, broadened the movement in often unexpected ways.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Late into the night at Walter Reed Army center on September 1, 1962, a woman sits at a desk, isolated. She stares at the blank page of her diary. Having spent the past few months immersed in a sea of beige and green, she is awash with a drowning sensation that has become all too familiar[1]. Finally, she picks up a pen. She writes, "I want to meet some nonmilitary people – crazy people, imaginative idiots, some eccentric individualists, outcasts, gay kids. Oh, I want to see gay kids…" She finishes up her entry for the day before setting the pen back down. Over the past few months of her military service, her diary functioned as an outlet in an environment that had proven to be hostile to people like her: homosexuals. She picks up the pen– this time with a breakable force. She pushes the pen back into the paper before she can fully process what she is doing and begins forming thick and heavy markings, deep enough to indent the paper. Rhythmically, almost as if a force outside her body takes over her, she scratches a singular word underneath her latest entry. Finally, she stares down at the paper. The word stares back up at her in deep blue ink: "No"[1].

United States military veteran, Lilli Vincenz, has a story that bears resemblance to other queer servicewomen who served their country in the Cold War, despite pointed discrimination[2]. The Cold War military environment was unforgiving of anyone who existed outside of gender and sexual norms, which made for a distressing environment for queer women. Nevertheless, despite the societal persecution that Vincenz and other servicewomen like her faced, they persisted.

Vincenz's story reflects the anti-homosexual policies that began back in World War II. During this time, the United States saw homosexuality as a sexual disorder. Simultaneously, the military increased female participation within the military. The place of queer women in the military was particularly unique because, not only were women expected to uphold societal standards of femininity, but they were also expected to maintain an appearance of heterosexuality. World War II and the Cold War posed a series of difficulties for queer servicewomen in ways that were defined by gender stereotypes. In the World War II era, queer female stereotypes combined with traditional gender expectations and resulted in challenges posed to queer women whose appearances or behavior existed outside of traditional standards of femininity. Women in military leadership perceived to be "Butch" presenting were

removed from the military because of physical expressions that existed outside of what was acceptable for a woman, while queer women deemed to be "femme" presenting could enter and serve in secret.

The Cold War military leadership was more forceful in their policies against homosexuality and posed challenges to LGBTQ+ women, regardless of their gender expression. The Cold War gave rise to a unilateral effort to remove queer women, whether they were traditionally feminine or not. Even though government removal efforts were united in the Cold War era, it is clear that their methods of discovery and removal still hinged upon gender expectations that served to define the experience of queer servicewomen. Queer women who were able to maneuver around these hardening heterocentric policies in order to serve still had to exist within a hostile environment.

My thesis fills a gap in past historical scholarship by examining the experiences of LGBTQ+ women who served in the military during World War II and the Cold War in order to unearth the ways in which queer women's military service empowered them to become leading forces in the gay liberation movement. While other scholars have discussed LGBTQ+ women in World War II and the Cold War, they do so in broad brush strokes without specifically highlighting queer servicewomen. Scholars largely discuss LGBTQ+ military women in the context of larger conversations of military life instead. The research that has been presented by historians on the topic often uses the experience of queer women as a framework to diversify the conversation of sexuality that is predominately male focused, or as a way of adding nuance to the experience of women more generally within the military.[3][4] To this end, scholars have yet to fully differentiate the experiences of queer servicewomen from that of other military personnel during the World War II and Cold War era. The military became a solitary place where women could meet other women without the pressure of men. Further, the military's explicitly discriminatory policies created a perfect enemy for queer women to rally against. This discrimination that queer women experienced from within the restrictive military environment inspired them to take on more active roles within the queer community once they left the military. The secret networks that formed within their ranks helped create the post-war networks that served as a partial groundwork for the gay liberation movement.

2 RESEARCH BODY

In order to demonstrate the pushback that queer women expressed when they left the World War II and Cold War environment and rejoined civilian life, it is important to unpack clear examples of women who did so. Pat Bond serves as a great introductory resource as a queer servicewoman who served in World War II. She bore witness to queer purges in the WAC (Women's Army Corps), and went on to write and perform a skit called "Murder in the WAC."[5] In this 1982 skit, she tells the tale of "one of the first lesbian martyrs," Helen Hunt. Military leadership discovered Hunt's sexuality when they went through her mail and found pictures of her kissing other women. Bond described what followed:

> There was a terrible silence as every day one of us went up against the court-martial. And one day Helen, who was 20 years old, went up to the sixth floor where she lived and jumped out the window… And the thing that haunts me still is that her parents will never know why their child died… And finally I went to an officer I trusted, Captain Van, and I said 'Captain Van'– and I can still feel the winter wool when I put my hand on her shoulder and see my tears dripping off her palace of clean emblem she wore on her collar– I said, 'Captain Van they're gonna kill us all. I know they are. What have we done? Why? What have we done? Help me. Help us.' And the next day she was transferred out. And Captain Saxon and Captain Burdges conducted all those summary court-martials. … I mean, at that age when you're just discovering your sexuality, to be told that everything you are is rotten, filthy and dirty does something to you. Well- then everyone was sent home for formal court-martial… Then finally it was over and we were let go… They have not changed and they will not change. And so at least I can say– Captain Martha Saxon, Captain Mildred Burdges, I indict you for murder in the women's army corps[6].

Pat Bond spent the years following her military service trying to deconstruct the military's treatment of queer women within its ranks. She is known as an actress and comedian who tackles sexuality, specifically through her role in the 1977 movie, *The Word is Out*, where she talked in depth about military persecution[7]. In her speech "Murder in the WAC," she eloquently sews together soft comedic elements of the military service with the firm condemnation of how the military treated queer women who served. This is a primary example of post-service military women publicly holding the military accountable for its actions. Her vocalization of her military experiences helped to create a greater understanding of how the military partook in sexual discrimination. Bond serves as a clear example of how queer women worked as activists when they left the World War II and Cold War military environment and rejoined civilian life. Rather than returning to their lives of secrecy, queer women often took the opportunity to

push forward gay liberation efforts, intentionally or not. The methods that the women took were not always as clear-cut as Bond; not all forms of activism look the same. Instead, queer women confronted parts of society that were largely heterosexual and redefined them to be queer-inclusive. The emergence of seemingly unrelated queer-positive facets of society, like LGBTQ+ literature and magazines, or queer public spaces, or even queer-friendly psychological research—turned out to be vital for the creation and later acceptance of the larger gay community in the United States.

2.1 Escaping the Well of Loneliness: Queer Literature

Queer military novels and pulps dispersed during the World War II and Cold War eras helped not only to push along the formation of the queer identity within the military, but also helped strengthen the queer identity for the years after. Literature focusing on LGBTQ+ women, like *The Well of Loneliness* and *Women's Barracks* validated queer women and encouraged the growth of communities in the military.

The closing words of the 1928 novel *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall voiced the feelings of queer servicewomen at the end of World War I. Stephen, a young lesbian, exclaims "Acknowledge us, O God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!"[8]. It is not difficult to see the similarities of Stephen's World War I experiences in the novel to those queer women serving within the World War II United States military. Stephen grows up in a world where she is restricted by gender expectations. She desires to follow in the image of her father and take on more "masculine" habits, but her mother insists that she instead don "soft dresses and sashes, and ribbons"[8]. When her mother finds out about her love for another woman, she banishes her, and Stephen moves on to join the French Army Ambulance Corps during World War I. There she meets Mary, discovers that they share similar identities, and agree to live together as a couple once the war is won. However, the postwar years are not at all what they hoped and the two become increasingly isolated. The book wraps up with Stephen aching to be given the chance to live a life beyond her personal "well of loneliness"[8]. This isolation and suffering stems from societal opposition and othering of not only homosexual individuals, but also those who did not fit within assigned gender categories. The path that Stephen took, joining the military and carrying feelings of sexual isolation, is comparable to the paths that queer military women walked in their service to the United States in the early to mid-19th century.

The themes presented in *The Well of Loneliness* prompted backlash in the United Kingdom, where it was originally published. Hall's semi-autobiographical book was banned in England and not put back into print until 1959[9]. In the United States, however, the book survived attempted bans. Once published in the United States, *The Well of Loneliness* gained particular notoriety among servicewomen during World War II.

As a work of fiction, *The Well of Loneliness* gained popularity within the queer community because it validated homosexuality. It became an under-the-table marker of sexuality that could be circulated safely among one's peers. For many queer women, the book was their first encounter with descriptions of women like themselves. For example, Del Martin, a co-founder of the Daughters of Bilitis—one of the first American lesbian political organizations— explained that *The Well of Loneliness* was "the first time she was able to put a name to what she had been feeling"[10]. Military women particularly saw themselves in the novel. Whether the servicewoman read the novel prior to enlistment, or during her service, the life of protagonist Stephen legitimized queer servicewomen. John D'Emilio, in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* writes that "*The Well of Loneliness*... created an almost magical aura around military life through its description of the experience of Stephen"[10]. He ties this to the later United States Women's Army Corps and argues that readership of this book helped make the World War II WAC a "quintessential lesbian institution"[10]. In other words, the existence of the book solidified stereotypes of the WAC hosting queer women, which only spurred women to want to join the service all the more. As such, *The Well of Loneliness* not only inspired queer women to join the United States military during World War II, but it also normalized the female military queer identity.

Helen Harder, World War II servicewoman veteran, confirms this point in her oral history with scholar Allan Bérubé. She tells Bérubé that a fellow servicewoman showed the book to her and that "I [she] identified as Stephen, absolutely. It was a beautiful, beautiful book and a beautiful sadness"[5]. Mary Crawford, a World War II queer veteran herself, reiterated this sentiment and explained how the book was a way to express oneself in a way that wouldn't draw unwanted attention from military leadership; "I also didn't want to say that I was [queer], but nobody objected to our reading a book"[11]. *The Well of Loneliness* served as a way for queer military women to not only better understand themselves, but also helped them identify with the queer community through the circulation of the novel.

Yet, as much as queer servicewomen favored the book, military leadership feared it. The book itself was dynamic in the way it was understood by people of different backgrounds. Here was a story of a young butch woman, who entered the military and "corrupted" another fine young woman, only to have both of them then leave the war to live out their lesbian fantasy. This kind of story, though set in World War I, fueled the fear that

the World War II WAC environment would encourage homosexual tendencies in women. This fear stemmed from the fact that war was a place where women solely lived with other women and took on a traditionally "male" military role. Such a position would confuse them into behaving like Stephen and Mary in *The Well of Loneliness*. Therefore, to have such a book in the hands of young servicewoman posed a danger. Ownership of the book was a clue of one's sexuality. Crawford, for example, had to steal a copy from a drawer full of medical journals[11]. So while the book offered validation for queer women, they also had to find discreet ways to obtain and share the novel. The United States went on to take a more restrictive stance on thematically similar novels, like *Nightwood*, by redacting large sections, including parts discussing homosexuality within the military, to counteract queerness in the World War II military[12].

After World War Two, the United States experienced a "golden age" of lesbian pulp novels[13]. These novels most often took place in female-only environments. In the years following the mighty World War II, what better setting was there than the female-only environment of women's military regiments? Illustrative of this point is Tereska Torres' 1950 story, *Women's Barracks*. Torres' autobiographical work describes the romantic encounters that Torres and her military friends encountered during World War II[13]. Interwoven with the tales of heterosexual adventures was a cast of sexually diverse characters who did not shy away from same-sex relationships.

Women's Barracks became the most famous lesbian pulp to be published in this era, selling four million copies in the United States alone[14][15]. The success of *Women's Barracks* and others like it demonstrates the popularity of the "military lesbian" trope of the time. Such a trope succeeded because it offered solace to queer servicewomen and helped military queerness take root within the queer community. Within the rising lesbian pulp genre, queer women across the United States could add military-focused narratives to their representative collections.

The literature that came out during this time, with a sexually diverse cast of military women, is important because it demonstrates how queer women focused in on military stories, and how that played a larger role in catalyzing the gay liberation movement in later years. Yvonne Keller validates this in her description of the influences of lesbian pulp fiction:

> [Lesbian pulps] are important to lesbian studies because their truly impressive quantities helped create the largest generation of self-defined lesbians up to that point, a group of women who would go on to make history as they, alongside others of non-dominant sexuality, midwifed the largest gay/lesbian/queer movement in the United States to date[14].

The fact that one of the most popular sections of queer literature centered in on military queerness demonstrates how big of an influence the underground queer military environment had in the years following World War II and leading up to the gay liberation movement.

After World War II, *The Well of Loneliness* circulated more widely. Lillian Faderman argues that *The Well of Loneliness* was "the quintessential lesbian novel … that helped to form self-concepts among the young… some of those who were hungry for any discussion or information about their secret life and could find no other source were very affected by the most obvious literary model"[16]. She describes the book as a force that helped in the formation of the greater lesbian "consciousness" that allowed for the growth of a lesbian community[16]. In this case, *The Well of Loneliness* offered an understanding of sexuality that queer servicewomen struggled to find otherwise with the repressive military leadership.

The repeated appearance of both *The Well of Loneliness* and *Women's Barracks* within popular lesbian magazines also reflects the influence of queer military literature. For example, *The Ladder*, a popular lesbian magazine that ran from 1963 to 1966, frequently discussed *The Well of Loneliness*[17]. In the July 1963 issue, Donald Webster Cory described *The Well of Loneliness* as being "the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of homosexuality... the voice of those who had for years been voiceless"[18]. The comparison here to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is profound, for this novel is often cited as contributing to the Civil War[19]. Likewise, *The Well of Loneliness* was a force in the civil rights movement for queer women and men. Moreover, the first lesbian magazine, *Vice Versa* also reviewed *The Well of Loneliness* in one of its initial issues in 1947. The review by Edythe Eyde praises the book, stating that it " carries a powerful message—a plea against the senseless persecution and intolerance… an incentive not to give way to despair, no matter how bitter the persecution. To read this great novel is a great emotional experience and a stimulus toward leading a better life"[20].

The Ladder also frequently discussed *Women's Barracks*[21]. A significant discussion of Women's Barracks integrates it with *The Well of Loneliness* and other similar novels in the article, "Five Minority Groups in Relation to Contemporary Fiction," by Valerie Taylor. Taylor focuses on the influence of fiction over public opinion. She points out that although "we buy stories to be entertained," the unintended results are that "we learn from them without meaning to"[22]. Notably, she points out the broad political impacts of minority-focused fiction:

> Each of us here is interested in legal and social justice for at least one group of persons, an increasingly articulate group, and books are one means through which the general pub-

> lic can be informed and influenced. There are other and perhaps better ways. Direct political action is one. But some of us happen to be writers, and we must use the tools at hand[22].

Taylor is pointing out that an avenue for political dissent is not always through traditional means of picketing and marching. Writing fiction is powerful in changing the minds of others. She then goes on to bring up *The Well of Loneliness* as another example. Taylor's discussion suggests that queer women of the time considered queer fiction—which often focused on military servicewomen—as solidifying the queer female community and advancing social change.

2.2 Queer Magazines

Lesbian magazines circulating at the time discussed military participation and exclusion outside of the literary realm. Magazines, such as *The Ladder* or *Vice-Versa* disseminated the stories and experiences of queer women to raise a greater consciousness of the queer female identity. Likewise, queer servicewomen themselves, like Edythe Eyde and Lilli Vincenz, got involved directly in the creation of such literature.

A prominent example of the military voice having been circulated was in the November 1965 issue of *The Ladder* that featured queer servicewoman, Jean, on the cover. Printed in the issue was her interview, conducted by both Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin. In the interview, the very first question that Gittings asks of Jean was "how does a girl raised in a small town in Ohio, as you were, find out about gay life?" to which Jean responded, "Well, if she happens to join the service, that's one way!"[23]. Her comment suggests that queer women who joined the military service were secretly able to gain stronger understandings of their own sexuality by doing so.

As the interview progressed, Jean went on to tell stories of fellow women removed for homosexuality and explained the circumstance of her own discharge. Officials discovered her sexuality when a straight woman, who had integrated herself into her largely queer friend group, reported them to the Office of Special Investigations. Because of the accusation, she and her friends were called in and had their belongings searched. In the interview, she explains "The men searched everywhere-even in my mattress and pillow. And then they told me to unlock my locker. So I did. And I handed them the book *The Well of Loneliness* and I said, 'I guess this is what you want, isn't it?'"[23]. Because they could not discharge her just for owning the book, they took her into their office and questioned her for twelve hours. She eventually relented[23]. After her service, she worked as an assistant editor for the *Gayola Gazette*, a newspaper that a group of her friends made together but never officially published. For context, gayola is a term for bribe money paid to the cops by queer individuals in order to avoid arrest. Gittings, late in the interview, asked Jean whether or not she changed people's minds about sexuality, to which Jean responded "Let's say I've opened up new facets of liberalism! Often, they haven't thought much about homosexuality. So their scope has been widened"[23]. Such an articulation is accurate; often it was up to queer women like Jean to bring sexuality into the liberal conversation.

Jean's interview is relevant on several fronts. First, as an individual, Jean symbolizes a life-path that was not uncommon for women entering the military. Women entered the service not knowing what the term "homosexual" meant, and through exposure to other queer individuals and queer literature, they were able to better understand their sexuality. With this in mind, upon leaving the military many went on to "change the opinions of straight persons"[23].

Beyond this, her story also reiterates the importance of *The Well of Loneliness* within the military. If Jean entered the military unaware of her sexuality, she left it with *The Well of Loneliness* hidden in her locker. Meeting other similar women who exposed her to queer literature helped her orient her sexuality. Likewise, when military leadership discovered the novel, it signaled to them that they needed to question Jean further. Alongside this, the way in which Jean talks about *The Well of Loneliness* indicates how well known the book was in the community. She offers no explanation of the book, for she assumed that her readers would know the novel and its relevance. This points yet again to the book having been both important in the solidification of a queer military identity and having later played a role in the solidification of queer military women within what would become the gay liberation movement.

Yet another facet of Jean's story is the very fact that *The Ladder* printed her interview in the issue that they did. This issue hosts three major articles; Jean's interview, "A Brief of Injustices," and "Homosexual Voting Bloc Puts Pizzazz in Politics," all politically salient topics[23]. The general theme across all of these articles was government injustice. As such, printing such an interview had an agenda far larger than simply entertaining readers. The goal of publishing this article, specifically in this issue, was to catch the reader's attention, make them empathize with Jean's experience, and provoke action within the queer community.

The Ladder often discussed homosexual exclusion policies. In the February 1961 issue, psychologist Lee Steiner wrote a harsh response to the article "Frigidity and Femininity," by Dr. Arthur J. Mandy. Mandy's work argued that when women believe that they can take on roles, like being "soldiers in the army", these women end up being "unwilling to become dependent upon their husbands" and that, because of it, "they themselves want

to pursue the sex act. They want to feel as aggressive as men"[24]. Mandy warns against such behavior as encouraging homosexuality. Steiner responded "I, personally, do not agree with this psychiatrist's definition of the role of women... It would seem to me to be simpler to say that femininity is anything that females like to do"[24].

In the end, Steiner reiterates that psychological research like Dr. Mandy's is inconclusive. In doing so, she still recognizes the need for unbiased research on same-sex attraction. To unearth such *real* research for the community, she instead tells queer readers of the magazine that they "are the building blocks upon which such research would be built" and instruct, "you are the ones who must initiate, carry on, and publish such research."[25] Such an article challenged the psychological arguments used to exclude queer Americans from the U.S. military. Steiner contradicts opinions that when women take on non-conformist gender roles, their femininity is threatened, and they become vulnerable to homosexual corruption. She debunks the research that justifies such explanations and challenges the queer community to rise up and conduct their own internal research. She asks queer women to replace the military's definition of homosexuality as undesirable with one that accepts a broader range of sexual identities.

Vice-Versa paid equal attention to queer women in the military. In the September 1947 edition, the magazine ran an article titled "Here to Stay," that focused on the lasting presence of a queer community that will no longer be comfortable being marginalized. Instead, the queer community is "here to stay." The article goes on to bring advocacy to the conversation with the impacts of World War II. "Here to Stay" states that, "the war, by automatically causing segregation of men from female company for long periods of time, has influenced fellows to become more aware of their own kind"[24]. As such, the article suggests that the military community of same-sex cohabitation could impact understandings of sexuality. In the same article, mention of *The Well of Loneliness* is yet again brought up so as to say:

> With such knowledge being disseminated through fact and fiction to the public, homosexuality is becoming less and less a taboo subject, and although still considered by the general public as contemptible... I venture to predict that there will be a time in the future when gay folk will be accepted as part of regular society[24].

Long after *Vice Versa* stopped printing new magazines, *Vice Versa* author, Edythe Eyde, said in an interview that this article in particular was "one of my favorites" because "it has all come to pass...It makes me feel like a fortune teller"[26]. This article, written in 1947, predates the gay liberation movement, so such optimistic thinking about the future of the queer community must come from a person dedicated to fighting for it. In this article, we again see the magazine running other articles with more progressive viewpoints that optimistically envision a brighter future for queer individuals; the author cites *The Well of Loneliness* as at least partially responsible for diminishing the stigma against homosexuality, and describes the military environment as a place that solidified identity for many queer individuals. The September 1947 article in *Vice Versa* validates that the military experience helped in the formation of a community that, in turn, was prepared to take on political activism in the gay liberation movement.

2.3 Edythe Eyde as Lisa Ben

Vice Versa's importance goes far beyond what is held within its pages, and holds relevance within the context of its author. The magazine's creator, Edythe D. Eyde, worked within the military herself at a War Dog training center in 1944[26]. After she left, she worked at RKO studios in 1947, where her boss told her that "You won't have a heck of a lot to do here, but I don't want you to knit or read a book. I want you to look busy"[27]. And so she began to write a magazine for queer women titled *Vice Versa* because "in those days our kind of life was considered a vice. It was the opposite of the lives that were being lived—supposedly—and understood and approved by society. And vice versa means the opposite"[27]. She wrote *Vice Versa* in her free time and delivered the magazines to members of the community, who, in turn, handed the magazines off to others once they had finished reading. Such a process was necessary at the time because the publication and mailing of a lesbian magazine was illegal in California. When talking about her magazine she pointed out that:

> I didn't suppose anything could come out of *Vice Versa* because I knew in those days such magazines could not be sent to the printers and published. So it was just a sort of a gesture of love—of women loving women, and the whole idea of it. It was enthusiasm that boiled over into these printed pages, and I wanted to give them to as many people as possible. It was a way of dividing myself into little bits and pieces and saying, 'Here you are, take me! I love you all!'[27].

As such, we see the level of dedication that it took to get these issues printed. She couldn't officially publish her magazine. She had to hand type every issue while at work; a risk in and of itself given contemporary concerns over homosexuality. She then had to share the issue with those who would take the time to read it and trust that it wouldn't land in the wrong hands as the copies circulated around. Her aim was to encour-

age and commiserate with other queer women and in doing so, helped to create a more unified and vocal community.

Eyde also made a point to get involved in the community outside of the magazine. She worked with Jim Kepner, another queer activist, to author science fiction novels throughout the late-1940s and 1950s with queer undertones. A director of the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives described their science fiction writing as an undercover outlet to spread more liberal rhetoric; "Some of it was clouded some of it's not. Kepner and Lisa Ben (a pseudonym for Eyde) weren't just talking about gay rights, they were talking about feminism, racial equality- the thing is science fiction was a place they could do all that because they were imagining a new world"[28]. During her post-military years, Eyde was able to use science fiction to inform and educate queer individuals through non-traditional methods because it was dangerous to do so in more direct ways.

Eyde also began writing and performing parodies to popular songs and reworked them to focus on same-sex relationships. At the local bars and clubs she frequented, she saw performers make fun of the gay experience. She described feeling frustrated by this and instead wanted to make art that empowered LGBTQ+ women. She created these inclusive parodies then and performed the songs at local California clubs[29]. One of the songs that she sang in an interview with Eric Marcus highlights her understanding of sexual discrimination within the United States but still offers an optimistic view of the future. She sings:

> The world cannot dare to deny us. We've been here since centuries past. And you can be sure our ranks will endure as long as this old world will last. So here's to a fairer tomorrow, when we'll face the world with a smile[30].

In this verse, she makes it clear that the queer community is long-lasting and that the community is determined to fight for a brighter tomorrow. It is unclear if Eyde intended the double entendre of the word "ranks" in her song, so as to make a reference to military involvement, however for other queer veterans listening, the word would not be lost on them. Yet again, we see Eyde going through any and all avenues to get involved with the queer community in her post-military life. In doing so, she helped create a queer movement within the constraints of the Cold War environment.

Once RKO studios shut down, Eyde was unable to continue making *Vice Versa* due to lack of funds and supplies. However, this did not mark the end of her journey within the politically active queer community. Instead, she joined the Daughters of Bilitis, a civil rights organization for lesbians formed in San Francisco in 1955 to educate queer women and to lobby for queer women's rights[31]. While working here she was exposed to *The Ladder*, for which she later ended up writing. In order to hide her identity and protect herself she wanted to take on a fake name. She took on the name Lisa Ben—an anagram for the word "lesbian."[28] She continued her work in the gay liberation movement far past the 1960s and passed away in 2015, almost six months after the monumental U.S. Supreme Court case that recognized same-sex marriages[30].

Eyde's story follows a common trajectory of the time. She didn't know much about homosexuality prior to her time in the military. In an interview, she even tells a story of some women who asked her if she was gay. She misunderstood the question and responded "I try to be as happy as I can be under the circumstances"[27]. Following her military experience in 1944, once she better understood her sexuality, she began working at RKO and writing Science Fiction that subliminally touched on LGBTQ+ topics. While it is impressive that she was the first to tackle topics in the first lesbian magazine printed in the United States, she also was a military trailblazer that made gay rights a priority in the years following.

2.4 Lilli Vincenz and Public Activism

Lilli Vincenz shared a similar trajectory in the years following her Cold War service. Her post-war experience is one of the clearest examples of gay rights activism. Once her roommate outed her to military leadership in 1963 and she was discharged, Vincenz moved towards finding a new community where she could be herself. In an interview with Jack Nichols, Vincenz describes, "After leaving the WAC, I actually felt free to be me and I immediately joined the Mattachine Society of Washington"[27]. The Mattachine Society was the first LGBTQ+ organization of the time, with the core goal to "liberate one of our largest minorities from... social persecution"[16]. Vincenz was the first lesbian member[32].

In turn, the Mattachine Society prioritized queer protection within the military environment. In 1968, Fort Meyer in Virginia and Fort Richie in Maryland were removing queer women from the WAC at rates disproportionate to other bases at the time. The Mattachine Society conducted private seminars for queer WACs to teach them how to protect themselves against military leadership. The organization also printed and handed out pamphlets titled "How to Handle a Federal Investigation" to give to concerned WACs[33]. WACs risked investigation if such pamphlets were found in their possession. To circumvent this, Frank Kameny — another queer veteran — explains that:

> The WACs took about 100 of the leaflets back to the WAC barracks, and late that night they literally plastered the barracks with them. The next morning there were leaflets on bulletin

> boards, on tables in lounges, etc. Each officer in the WAC company found one of the leaflets on her desk when she walked into the Orderly Room that morning. Thus everyone had a perfectly good excuse for having a leaflet in her possession, and the good news received maximum dissemination[33].

In this act, Vincenz became one of the first lesbian members of the Mattachine Society to help queer military women to fight the military's heterosexual standards.

Vincenz also joined the Daughters of Bilitis and worked intimately with the local chapter founder, Barbara Gittings[34]. Through the organization, she worked on *The Ladder* anonymously and went on to become the first lesbian woman to be on the cover of a magazine[25]. Through her involvement both with the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society, Vincenz contributed to the emerging queer culture following her military service.

Vincenz was also actively involved in public protests at the time. She was the first lesbian woman to picket the White House[35]. On April 17, 1965, she was one of ten individuals who picketed outside the White House fence, and was pictured holding signs stating, "100,000 HOMOSEXUAL SOLDIERS DEMAND REVIEW OF ARMY POLICY" and "Sexual Preference is Irrelevant to EMPLOYMENT"[35]. She also went on to work with Barbara Gittings, Frank Kameny and others to take part in the famous Annual Reminders, annual picketing protests against the United States government's treatment of queer individuals[36]. The year following the Stonewall Riots, in 1970, the Annual Reminder marched from Greenwich Village, where the Stonewall bar was located, to Central Park in what became the first ever New York Pride Parade[37]. Vincenz, in an interview, pointed out that these public demonstrations received a significant amount of publicity because of how bold it was to publicly march and "out" yourself[28]. But that was the goal: "to break down barriers of public and private and bring homosexual identity into public view"[32].

In the decade to follow, Vincenz hosted what many call "Lilli's Gay Women's Open House" or the "Gay Woman's Alternative"[32]. Vincenz described the Open House as a place to "accommodate the need for gay and bisexual women, as well as those who thought they might be gay, to meet and talk in a protected social setting. From 1971 to 1978 every Wednesday, rain or shine, our house was open to welcome women"[33]. Vincenz seemingly succeeded in such a pursuit. In a guest book for the open house, one woman wrote, "I'll always be grateful to you and the delightful people I've met here. I've never felt any guilt about being gay, but the Open House has helped me get over my paranoia and loneliness. Thanks!"[32]. Another woman wrote "I was scared shitless. Sat out front for ½ hour before I came in. It was worth the wait! FRIENDS! I feel at home!"[32]. The environment that Vincenz fostered of open queer positivity and female empowerment in these open houses echo what could have been in the military, had it not have been for restrictive policies that condemned queer individuals to secrecy. Vincenz's path of military enlistment to removal, to queer activism, to the creation of these social gatherings is powerful. The military pushed her to become an activist, where she fought both civilian discrimination and military exclusion. She eventually was able to open her living room every weekend to create the open environment that she said she craved during her military enlistment[25].

Another major facet of Vincenz' career was her decision to get involved in psychology. Vincenz, prior to her service, had received a Bachelor's degree in French and German and a Master's in English. At that point she entered the WAC, serving at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where she was able to receive basic medical training. Following her service, she went back to school to get a Master's degree in psychology[37]. Interviewer Jack Nichols asked Vincenz what she wanted to accomplish after leaving the military, to which Vincenz responded that she wanted to "help unmask the lies being told about us, correct the notion of homosexuality as a sickness and present it as it is, a beautiful way to love"[33]. Upon receiving her degree, she conducted research and worked with queer women within the community from an open-minded standpoint. In her interview with Nichols, she explains that "Many of their wounds have been sustained in the pursuit of and validation of who they are and of not wanting to hide their identity or settle for less. I am grateful to be able to help and to witness their empowerment and healing"[33]. Vincenz used her psychology degree to help LGBTQ+ individuals think of their sexuality in a more positive context. By doing so, she combatted the narratives of other psychologists who saw homosexuality to be an illness, many of whom helped formulate military's exclusion policies that she herself was removed for. Thinking back to the words of Dr. Steiner in *The Ladder*—who called for queer women to help create a more inclusive psychological understanding of sexuality—Vincenz was one of those women who answered the call. Vincenz challenged societal understandings of the queer identity in her work as a psychologist. Rather than go by psychology's past processes of undermining a patient's sexuality, she worked to help queer women cope with their identities and gain greater self-acceptance. Vincenz' psychology work in her post-war years helped create research that contradicted the psychology that backed up the homophobic policies that the military subscribed to and validated the LGBTQ+ identity.

2.5 Charlotte Coleman and the Creation of a Queer Female Space

While Vincenz opened up a positive, albeit private, community for women through the creation of Lilli's Gay Women's Open House, queer veteran Charlotte Coleman worked to create more public spaces for queer women. She too shared a similar trajectory as other queer women coming out of the military. Coleman joined the Coast Guard during World War II, where she met Sarah Davis, who told her what "gay" meant[38]. She recalls her time in the service, going around town on her days off so that she could "drink beer... right near the barracks" but when doing so, she was required to wear her uniform[39]. Such an attire was restrictive because it denied them anonymity when going out, which served as a barrier to forming queer relations outside of the barracks. This catalyzed Coleman's decisions after she left the war. She went on to create The Front Beer and Wine Bar, the first lesbian bar in San Francisco[40]. In doing so, she created a space outside of the military for queer women to meet and form a community.

The bar served a direct political purpose. The Daughters of Bilitis founders, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, asked her to use the bar to host various fundraisers for the organization. Coleman agreed[39]. The Front Bar hosted fundraisers until the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control came forward with a list of "morals" charges against the bar, causing her to lose her license[40]. This didn't stop her, however, and she continued to open bars over the years; by the time she retired, Coleman managed 14 LGBTQ+ bars and restaurants[40]. Coleman also helped to create the Gay Olympics and Atlas Savings and Loan, the first LGBTQ+ financial organization in the world[40].

Coleman's determination to make a queer bar scene reflects a pattern found throughout the United States. For example, a case study done by Melissa Ann Gohlke found that military mobilization during World War II served as a catalyst for the creation of gay bars and a greater gay community in San Antonio[40]. Gohlke explains that the May Act, which targeted "the control of prostitution and lewd behaviors around military installations," blocked service members from seeking out areas in San Antonio where queer individuals were rumored to be[40]. This did not prevent service members from seeking out the greater community. In fact, the opposite happened. Gohlke explains that "Queers found niches in San Antonio's downtown where they carved out spaces for communion and forged the tentative bonds of a queer community"[40]. She argues that these spaces are what eventually would become hot spots for LGBTQ+ bars. Allan Bérubé also points to this in *Coming Out Under Fire*, "When they could get away from military bases, they discovered and contributed to the rich gay nightlife"[3]. As such, the formation and growth of gay bars coming from the World War II era was largely born from the efforts of military personnel.

The military unintentionally encouraged bar culture through their policies to keep service men and women away from the pre-established "lewd" night life locations. As a result, queer individuals within the military sought out their own secret meeting spots to interact with other queer individuals in the area surrounding the military base. In the years that followed, women like Coleman took on the responsibility of making established queer bars for women that not only bolstered the sense of community among queer women, but also served as a resource for queer activist groups like the Daughters of Bilitis.

3 CONCLUSION: A TALE OF EXISTENCE AND PERSISTENCE

Queer servicewomen worked to form intentional communities within American society in the years following their military service in the early to mid-to-late-20th century. The communities that formed because of their actions carried the gay liberation movement forward and advanced the rights of queer individuals in America. Queer female veterans did so by taking on different parts of civilian life that were primarily heterosexual. Fictional work, like the *Well of Loneliness* or *Women's Barracks*, united and validated the queer female military community. In the years following their service, queer women laid the groundwork for queer-acceptance through work done in magazines, like *The Ladder* and *Vice-Versa*. Veterans like Lilli Vincenz pushed for sexually inclusive psychologic studies and worked alongside other veterans, like Charlotte Coleman, to redefine heteronormative public and private spaces as queer-positive through Open Houses and the formation of inclusive bars. In doing so, queer servicewomen played a significant role in pushing forward the agenda of the gay liberation movement and forming a cohesive, women-loving-women community.

4 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Dissemination of the stories of these women can pave the road for a more inclusive environment for queer women in the military who still face discrimination, both explicit and implicit. Even with the hard work that queer servicewomen put in, the end of the early Cold War years and the birth of the gay liberation did not end all discriminatory practices towards LGBTQ+ persons in the military. Don't Ask, Don't Tell, a policy that required queer service members to keep their identity hidden if they wanted to serve, lasted until 2011 and, to this day, queer service personnel face discrimination from within the military.[1] Dissemination of the stories of these women can pave the road for a more inclusive

environment for future queer service women. Who is to say how fast this change will come, but in the words of Lilli Vincenz, "there's always hope"[1].

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6 EDITOR'S NOTES

This article was peer reviewed.

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