

# Essay on women and the great war

[Countries](#), [England](#)



## **Introduction**

War has been used as a solution to many problems, either within a nation or beyond borders. War can be defined as convincing the opponent abides to your terms and conditions by the use of force and thus has been termed to be a masculine action. With this perspective many people have associated war to be conducted by men with women waiting for the resolutions of the war. However in many wars that have occurred throughout the world, women have been seen to operate to take part in different and very vital parts of the war. Therefore it can be accustomed that without the influence of women war cannot be successful. Moreover, war outcomes have been seen to affect ladies more than men and thus it calls for them to fully participate to affect their foreseen benefits.

Before the Great War, the world was men dominated and the position of women set as manning family chores in addition to bearing children. Critical decisions were made by men including when to fight and what to fight for. During this war in 1914 women stood and revealed to men that they were equally capable and could fully participate in war. Women's major function was to supply ammunition to the soldiers and any other commodity that they may require. In addition to nursing, other masculine activities that men had left in joining soldiers were taken by women.

## **Roles of women**

### **Nursing**

In nursing, women took care of their soldiers and were always in the war zone. Their core duties include treating the wounded, cooking, domestic

servants as well as laundry workers. During the First World War women volunteered to take part in these actions and fully support their soldiers to win and have a lead in the war. Through the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), and the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) women played a vital role in the success of the First World War. Through their medical skills these women treated the wounded soldiers making them ready to go back to the battle. With aspirin and morphine as the only pain killer, and were found in tabular form, the VAD had to prepare a syrup and inject near the soldiers wound. This was to be done systematically with a lot of intelligent as well as care and willingness to effect the results. Given that some of the soldiers were not cooperating to their healing in fear of going back to the battle field, the nurses had a hard time in performing their duties perfectly. The outcomes that ladies expected motivated their actions as they were not paid and did a voluntary job with some women such as Mrs. Warren going against the wishes of their family to serve as a clinical officer. The fact that these women were not paid did not demotivate them and they followed the orders given by the sisters and matrons. Matrons and sisters received petty payments as a motivation to give clear instructions, with the ruled taking these positively and not a form of discrimination. Others such as Antonia Gamwel who was a member of the FANY was an ambulance driver that ferried injured soldiers and to some extent could be used to eliminate dead bodies from the hospital. These required great voluntary action and elimination of morals. Women are seen to be careful and react quickly to emotions but with the war in session, they had no option but to surrender their emotional feelings and act as men and definitely perform these hard

duties. Contrary to the great efforts made by these ladies, some of the injured soldiers complicated their healing by dirtying their wounds to avoid going back to war. Women therefore could be seen as being more courageous than these male soldiers.

## **Food provision**

Apart from women participation in activities subsidiary to the war, some women joined the army and were recruited as soldiers to actively participate in the war. During World War I, being involved in fighting was not that common for women. However through the Women's Land Army (WLA), women worked hard to sustain food supply in Britain. This organization was formed after a severe food shortage was speculated. Many men had fled away from the country as soldiers, and many submarines that were used to transport food from America to Britain were frequently sinking. Volunteers, who joined the WLA, were uniformed and issued with boots and hat and made ready to cultivate the Britain land in an effort to raise food. Although they were paid, the work they did was more of a volunteer and managed to raise enough food to sustain both the soldiers and natives. Tilling land, planting and harvesting crop had recently been associated with men but these ladies acted to their best to not only ensure great yield but also sustain adequate supply that catered for the existing demand. These ladies proved masculinity by planting and harvesting using hand and not machinery. All these were aimed at saving oil that had become a scarce commodity and was in high demand for the war effort. Ladies with great vision rose up and joined WLA with the aim that after the war they would maintain the position that women were capable of doing every activity and

the fame that the success of the war was through their effort. Due to high demand of laborers, scrutinizing of laborers was not that necessary and Patricia Vernon became a hero by joining the WLA at fourteen years of age and fully performing her duties, despite that she had to lie about her age to be recruited.

## **Women in military**

In addition to the subsidiary services, all the three services in the military were open for women. Women joined army, air force as well as navy. However their functioning was still limited but with progress of the war, women were allowed to take up more chores. During the start, women who had joined the army performed minor chores such as cleaning, driving and as hotel cateress and cooks. Although their dressing resembled the men counterparts in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), these women were not allowed to fire the AA gun. Despite that there were these discrimination, many women continued to join the army and were later allowed to performed more functions such as welding, carpentry and making electronic repairs.

In the air force, women had similar duties as those of the ATS. However in these section, there was freedom to participate in more pleasing jobs such as being pilots, manning the radio system as well as directing planes on where , when and how to land. Although women performed very well in every department that was allocated to them, as a matter of facts many aircraft crushes were reported for men pilots that their female counterpart, their action was still limited. Women could only fly new planes as they were delivered to the airfields but not allowed to go into battles. All these male

chauvinism did not de motivate these ladies and they continued acting to their most capability, partly because their position at the moment was better than previous.

## **Working in industries**

War involves mass killing through violence and the Great War was of no exception. Many young men who had joined the military were killed and these called upon replacement by others. Recruitment of soldiers, both during the first lot and the replacement of killed soldiers deprived factories many employees. Ammunition was at high demand during the war session and given that the supply of men was lo, women took their place and were employed in these industries. Working conditions were really harsh but these women strived to satisfy the ammunition demand. Working with sulphur, a dangerous chemical, their hands and any other open skin turned yellow due to impregnation of the sulphur into their skin.

The name ‘ canaries’ was given to the girls working in the ammunition firm as their exposed skin had turned yellow. In lay man’s understanding these was supposed to be an abuse, but the ladies took it positive, first with the aim that they would retain their positions even after the war. Secondly the war was seen to come up with other benefits, such as gender equity, the praise that women and made the war prosper, as well as general appreciation of the ladies by men and especially those in authority. All these kept these women in action and even made them proud of their job making them work harder and maintain constant supply of ammunition.

. Secret agents and Entertainment

Women were also involved in risky projects that were undertaken by Special

Operation Executive (SOE). as secret agents women were sent to the enemy's dwellings to investigate on the enemy's plans of action. Violette Szabo and Odette Churchill evicted as heroes for these dangerous acts. On this dangerous mission of interacting with the enemy, any blunder would result to torture by the enemy as well as death as it happened to Violette when she was captured by the Secret state police of Germany. Women played a vital role in entertainment. Although these did not have a direct link to the success of the war, women entertainers resettled happiness in Europe. They acted as monotony brokers of the existing mourning situation.

## **War aftermath**

After the end of World War I, there was an instant change on the treatment of women. Men chauvinism reduced significantly with women given chance to work in several workplaces and above all in the political arena. The main achievement that women in many countries such as United States, Britain, and Germany among many others achieved was the right to vote that gave them a right in participating in critical decision making.

The reduced male chauvinism could be seen as a reward for the great job portrayed by women during the war. However the fact that some countries never admitted these change leaves these argument to be just an assumption. Some governments just granted the right in fear of how the women, after proving that they were capable, would react to the denial. For instance, in Britain there had been claims for women's right to vote be backdated to 1910 just before the war started. There had been several violent actions by suffrages who strived for the right to vote. Attacking politicians, vandalizing properties including several bomb blasts. The

national unrest in Britain had drastically ceased on the onset of war in 1914 as the women involved had joined factories, and other job positions to replace workers who had joined the military. In the fear of that these ladies had been equipped with adverse knowledge on production of ammunition, war skills and if not satisfied could easily do mass damage, the British government awarded the right to vote. Moreover, no one was ready to stand any violence in Britain after the torture of this war. The lack of prewar protests in countries such as France and Italy caused women not be awarded these rights, despite having equally performed in the war as their counterparts in Britain.

The Russian revolution is seen as another contributing factor to proper treatment of women after the war. Russia was one of the losers of the war and after a period of war, where many soldiers were killed and the non-participating group suffering from hunger. Russians were not ready to retain the old ruling system by the royal family and therefore protested violently. Finally the supporters of the royal family surrendered and the communist took over. Therefore in 1918, many countries Britain included feared that these would happen to them and thus took action before the rise of national unrest. After the war, male soldiers returned to their job positions replacing the ladies who had been recruited during the time of war. These forced these ladies to move back to their initial job position, but took the demotion on alight note as the male soldiers deserved appreciation for their performance in the war. The only way to compensate the ladies was thus award the suffragettes what they had fought for before the war.

As much as the war brought about inclusion of women in political matters,



women still maintained a lower position in politics. The 1918 act passed by Britain to allow women to vote contained many restrictions that made quite a number of ladies not able to vote. Men at the age of 21 were allowed to vote but a woman was considered to mature at 30 according to the act. Therefore many young ladies who had played a vital role in the war were still underage to vote. Moreover one had town property in order to vote, this eliminated the working class who had settled in their work place of which the suffragettes played a great role.

## **Conclusion**

In the great word war, women played a vital role and proved to be equally capable as men. It's evident that if it were not for the objections set by the governments, women would have improved the standard of the war. Involvement in the so called masculine activities did not make ladies evade their family responsibility. All the chores that women were entitled, such as taking care of the children ran concurrently with the new duty. The caring and high concentration character of ladies proved that in some occasion's ladies can act better. However the treatment after the war, although showed some improvement still showed men chauvinism as well gender discrimination.

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