The Ship's Not Sinking!

by Bill Miller

I'm dying, Dorothy Conner remembered thinking to herself. Unable to resist the pull that seemed to be taking her to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, she had given up. Just a half-hour before, Conner had been enjoying lunch with her brother-in-law, Dr. Howard Fisher. It was May 7, 1915, and the two were sailing first class aboard the elegant British Cunard ocean liner Lusitania. The ship was six days out from New York harbor, and was due to arrive in Liverpool, England, the next day, where Conner would join an English unit of the Red Cross and travel to Belgium as a volunteer nurse. With the voyage so uneventful and the weather so beautiful, it was difficult to believe that war had engulfed much of Europe.¹

As Conner waited for Fisher to finish his meal, their conversation was broken by an explosion—caused by a German torpedo—that sent a shudder from the bowels of the ship. Instantly the vessel began to list to the right and Conner and Fisher joined the frantic crowd struggling up three flights of stairs to the main deck. With Conner waiting on the high side of the deck, Fisher went below and found two life jackets floating in a flooded passageway. When he returned, they stood in line and watched in horror as two lifeboats, filled with passengers, struck the water and overturned. Then, one of the crew shouted, "The ship's not sinking! There is no danger!" With those words barely spoken, the Lusitania rolled over, and Conner was thrown into the sea. Now she was struggling underwater, tangled in ropes and debris, being sucked deeper along with the sinking ship. Hope turned to resignation. She was going to die, she later remembered thinking, and lost consciousness.²

Word of the sinking reached Medford in time for the afternoon newspapers. In a futile attempt to keep the news from Conner's mother, friends took her to lunch at the Medford Hotel. The widow Katherine Conner had brought Dorothy to the Rogue Valley in 1913 and built a house on fifty-five acres of land northeast of Jacksonville. They joined Katherine's son, Boudinot Conner, who had already purchased a 200-acre orchard near Lower Table Rock. The Conners were members of the colony of wealthy easterners who came to the valley early in the century, seeking to increase their fortunes by becoming orchardists. Family members seldom made news, and for the most part, quietly participated within their social circle.³

As the chaos of the sinking unfolded around her, Dorothy Conner felt a firm pull on her arms. She was barely conscious, but thought she heard a kindly voice say, "How can I make room for you little lady?" Strangers placed her in the middle of an overturned inflatable raft and picked the seaweed from her hair and wiped ship's oil from her face. She drifted in and out of consciousness for the next few hours as she was hauled from boat to boat. Finally a minesweeper took her to Kinsale, Ireland, where late in the evening, she wired her mother in Medford that she was alive. The next morning she was reunited with Fisher. Conner returned to Medford later that year, and even cohosted a Christmas Day party with her mother. In August 1917, her brother Boudinot left Medford to serve as a first lieutenant in the Army. Dorothy married a captain in the Navy, and friends lost track of her while she was living at Coronado Naval Station near San Diego, California. By 1925, Katherine Conner had returned to Washington, D.C., selling her Jackson County property to Archibald Livingston and his sister, Anna.⁴

The German torpedo that struck the Lusitania had taken the lives of 1,198 people—128 of them Americans—and edged the United States closer to war. But history is more than numbers, dates and consequences. It's also the daily life of everyday people. For the Conners, two of their family were still alive, and for them, little else mattered. ²

Bill Miller is a library assistant with the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

ENDNOTES
1. Medford Mail Tribune, 7 May 1915, p. 1:7; Medford Sun, 8 May 1915, p. 6:5.
2. Medford Sun, 1 June 1915, p. 6:3; 23 June 1915, p. 2:3.
FEATURE:
Women at Camp White
Women at the Dom.

by Doug Foster ....... p. 8

FROM THE COLLECTIONS
The Fabric of History
by Bill Alley
p. 5

ON THE COVER
Wild poppies that sprang up over the graves and killing fields of France and Belgium in World War I have become a symbol of remembrance of the sacrifices of war.

EDITORIAL GUIDELINES
Feature articles average 3,000 to 4,000 (pre-edited) words. Other materials range from 500 to 1,000 words. Electronic submissions are accepted on 3-1/2 inch disks and should be accompanied by a hard-copy printout. Citations of professional, unpublished photographs and/or line art should accompany submission—black-and-white or color. The Southern Oregon Historical Society reserves the right to use Society images in place of submitted material. All material should be labeled with author's name, mailing address, and telephone number. Manuscripts will be retained if accompanied by a self-addressed envelope stamped with sufficient postage. Authors should provide a brief autobiographical note at the end of manuscripts.

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For almost eighty years, wearing a paper poppy on Veterans Day has signaled respect for the soldiers who suffered through the wars of the twentieth century. The corn poppy (Papaver rhoeas) represented the wildflowers—daisies, poppies and bachelor's buttons—that grew in the cratered French battlefields and muddy cemeteries where the bodies of millions of European and American soldiers rested after the first modern war.

During World War I, Col. John McCrae, a Canadian medical officer, treated casualties after the carnage of the second battle of Ypres. Horrified by the slaughter, McCrae wrote a short poem linking the brief lives of the young men to the brief lives of the wild annual poppies that sprang up on their graves. He sent his poem, "In Flanders Fields," to the British publication Punch, which printed it anonymously in 1915. This poignant poem from the front received worldwide attention. It so touched a young American YMCA worker in Georgia that she vowed to wear a poppy each day in honor of the soldiers cut down in the war.

In 1921, the British Legion was formed to assist veterans disabled by the Great War. Casting about for fund-raising ideas, the Legion heard about the American woman's use of the poppy as an emblem honoring veterans and saw samples of artificial poppies made by her friends. The Legion decided to sell artificial poppies on Armistice Day—November 11. That first year, they took in more than £100,000 from poppy sales. Canadian and American veterans' organizations took up poppy sales, and the scarlet poppy became a symbol of remembrance.

However, Papaver rhoeas has more ancient human associations with sacrifice and rebirth. In Egypt, archaeologists have found it mixed with barley seed dating to more than 4,500 years ago. The first neolithic farmers who brought agriculture to Europe also brought corn poppy seeds mixed with their grain. In British folk culture, the blood-red poppy, which sprang up wild in grain fields only to be cut down at harvest and yet grew again in spring, became a symbol of fertility, death and rebirth.

Ironically, World War II almost proved locally fatal to the flower that England adopted as a symbol of the veterans of World War I. The desperate demand for food in besieged Britain led to cultivation of waste places where corn poppies flourished, as well as the indiscriminate use of herbicides fatal to the plants. Fortunately, British conservation organizations stepped in during the 1980s to rescue wildflowers.

The late twentieth century vogue for the French Impressionist painters helped create an American market for Papaver rhoeas, as the Impressionists, including Monet, Cassatt, Renoir, and Van Gogh, painted the poppy more than any other flower, and many gardeners wish to brighten their gardens with plants that Monet and Renoir chose for their own estates.

Today, corn poppies are a common component of wildflower mixes sold in the United States, and are usually of the “Shirley” variety bred by the Reverend William Wilkes of Shirley in Surrey, England, in 1880. Shirley poppies represent a palette of colors from white to pink to red to mauve. Other popular scarlet poppy varieties with dramatic black hearts, “Flanders Field” and “American Legion,” derive from the wild coquelicot of France and are closer to the bright flowers that sprang up on soldiers' graves.

In some areas, peace workers wear the white Shirley poppies on Armistice Day to show their respect for veterans while expressing the active hope that the world will not suffer war again.

Anthropologist Nan Hannon and ethnobotanist Donn L. Todt garden in Ashland.

ENDNOTES

“Mr. Ashland,” Clarence Lane, shows community support for local veterans, circa 1950.
A small piece of fabric in the collections of the Southern Oregon Historical Society tells a tale of triumph and tragedy during the golden age of aviation. In the decades after the end of the First World War, the country was obsessed with all aspects of flight. What captured the public's fancy the most, however, were the giant rigid airships known as dirigibles.

In 1919 Congress appropriated $1.5 million for the construction of an airship for the navy, designated the ZR-1. When launched on August 20, 1923, the ZR-1 was an impressive sight. She measured 680 feet in length and was buoyed by 2,115,174 cubic feet of helium. The purpose of this new airship was to serve as a long-range patrol craft for the navy, extending the eyes of the fleet in the days before radar. After her successful trials, the ZR-1 was officially commissioned as a vessel in the United States Navy and given the name Shenandoah.

From the moment she entered the fleet, however, controversy and politics dogged the giant airship. Reverting to peacetime "normalcy," the country saw little need of maintaining a large military. The recent Washington Disarmament Conference in 1921-22 (treaty signed in 1922) had slashed the size of the world's fleets, and appropriations for military spending were reduced. Under such circumstances, the navy saw the immense excitement generated by this new giant airship as a public relations bonanza.

Instead of seeing duty with the fleet, the Shenandoah embarked on a series of "county fair flights." In 1924 she flew across the country, on a schedule that ensured overflights of most major cities and towns along her route. Influential civilians and members of Congress were given rides, all in an effort to ensure continued military appropriations.

Unfortunately, dirigibles were ill-suited to overland flight; they were designed for service over the open oceans. In the summer of 1925 the Shenandoah was ordered on a Midwest tour, taking her from her home base in Lakehurst, New Jersey, to Detroit and back. The commanding officer of the Shenandoah, Lt. Cmdr. Zachary Landsdowne, argued vehemently against this trip. A Midwesterner himself, he well knew of the dangers posed by summer thunderstorms over the region.

On September 3, 1925, near Ava, Ohio, the Shenandoah encountered a massive thunderstorm. The force of the storm was more than the dirigible could handle and she broke up, the two main sections coming to ground twelve miles apart. Fourteen men, including Landsdowne, were killed. Within hours of the tragedy, the sites of the crash had drawn countless gawkers, and many began to collect souvenirs from the wreckage. It is just one such piece of the Shenandoah's outer fabric, that is now preserved in the collections of the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

Bill Alley is historian/archivist with the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

Endnotes
2. Ibid., p. 75.
3. Ibid., p. 114.
4. Ibid., p. 104.
5. Ibid., p. 108.
Things To Do in November

Programs: (see listings below for complete descriptions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>November Craft of the Month</th>
<th>DATE &amp; TIME</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Museum hours</td>
<td>CHILDREN'S MUSEUM</td>
<td>Corncob Critters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documenting Quilts &amp; Caring for Your Family Heirlooms</td>
<td>Sat., Nov. 18, 9am - noon, 12:30 - 3:30 (as scheduled)</td>
<td>HISTORY CENTER</td>
<td>Two-part workshop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Program Details

For times and locations, see schedule above.

November Craft of the Month

Corncob Critters

Create a corn cob critter magnet to take home and decorate your refrigerator or holiday place settings. Families. 50¢.

Documenting Quilts and Baby Shoes, Hats, Clothing—Caring for Your Family Heirlooms

Join us for this two-part workshop at the History Center. From 9:00 a.m. to noon, preservation consultant Janette Merriman will discuss various factors that affect the preservation of fabric heirlooms and demonstrate the proper storage and display of these treasures. Up to 20 participants will create a padded hanger, stuff hats and shoes for proper storage, and learn how to properly fold doilies and hand clothing and quilts.

After a break for lunch (bring a sack lunch if you plan to participate in the afternoon), quilt appraiser Carol Hazeltine will meet with individuals wanting to know more about a family quilt. Space is available for seven participants to each schedule a 30-minute appointment to ask questions about their quilt and will receive written documentation from the process. No monetary values will be provided; this is solely for identification purposes.

Fee for this two-part workshop is $10 for Society members; $15 for non-members. Preregistration and prepayment required by November 15 due to the limited number of appointments available.

Annual Contributors Fund 2000

Society members and friends will be receiving a letter requesting a contribution to the Ninth Annual Contributors Fund. Although the past year’s reduction in funding from Jackson County government meant open hours and staffing cutbacks, the Society is facing its challenges head on. Programs, exhibits, special events, and workshops all will continue with help from YOU!

Membership dues cannot fully cover the costs incurred to preserve the region’s past and educate today’s youth about the value of their heritage. Small and large contributions will provide the Society with operating support to help care for over 12 structures (70,000 square feet of which are OWNED by the County and MAINTAINED by the Society), approximately 81,000 artifacts and over 750,000 historic images. With help from members and friends, the ever popular Children’s Heritage Fair, looked forward to and enjoyed by over 2,500 Jackson County fourth graders, and many special events held during the Christmas holiday, will continue to bring the meaning of the past to the present.

Please take a moment to fill out and return the contribution card enclosed with your letter and consider how much your contribution will assist in making a difference in your community while ensuring the Society’s continued success. The Society Board of Trustees, Society staff, and the Society Foundation Board of Directors all thank you for assisting in bringing the meaningfulness of the past into our present lives.
EXHIBITS: (see listings below for complete descriptions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXHIBIT DETAILS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CENTURY OF PHOTOGRAPHY: 1856-1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights the work of two area photographers, Peter Britt and James Verne Shangle, with cameras from the Society's collection.</td>
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<tr>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>MUSEUM HOURS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HISTORY CENTER</td>
<td>Mon.- Fri., 9:00am - 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<th>HIGH WATER: LOCAL FLOODING</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dramatic photographs of local Jackson County floods of the last 150 years will be on display through fall 2000.</td>
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<tr>
<th>MINER, BAKER, FURNITURE MAKER</th>
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<tr>
<td>Explores the development of the Rogue Valley and the impact the industrial revolution had on the settlement of Oregon.</td>
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<tr>
<th>THE SHAPE OF FASHION: 1900-1925</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women's fashion changed dramatically during the early years of the 20th century, reflecting the changing role of women in society. On display through December is a selection of daywear, evening gowns, and undergarments.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>JACKSONVILLE: Boom Town to Home Town</th>
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<tr>
<td>Traces the development of Jacksonville.</td>
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<tr>
<th>POLITICS OF CULTURE: Collecting the Native American Experience</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural history of local tribes and discussion of contemporary collecting issues.</td>
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<tr>
<th>HALL OF JUSTICE</th>
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<tr>
<td>History of the former Jackson County Courthouse.</td>
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<tr>
<th>CHILDREN'S MUSEUM</th>
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<tr>
<td>Explore home and occupational settings from the 1850s to the 1930s through &quot;hands-on-history.&quot;</td>
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SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY SITES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHONE: (541) 773-6536</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fax (541) 776-7994</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email <a href="mailto:info@sohs.org">info@sohs.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website <a href="http://www.sohs.org">www.sohs.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<th>HISTORY CENTER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>106 N. Central, Medford Mon - Fri, 9:00am to 5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH LIBRARY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106 N. Central, Medford Tues - Fri, 1:00 to 5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM &amp; CHILDREN'S MUSEUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed - Sat, 10:00am to 5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun, noon to 5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. HOTEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd and California, Jacksonville Upstairs room available for rent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JACKSONVILLE HISTORY STORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed - Sat, 10:00am to 5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun, noon to 5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIRD STREET ARTISAN STUDIO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd and California, Jacksonville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat, 11:00am to 4:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANLEY FARM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1053 Hanley Road (open by special appointment) (541) 773-2675.</td>
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Mystery Object of the Month

August's Mystery Object was a yarn feeder. Yarn was stored inside and pulled out through the hole, keeping the yarn tidy and away from the cat! Congratulations to Jackie Bettis of Medford, for guessing correctly!

November Mystery Object:

This item was part of a set. Do you have any bright ideas what it held?

Send your answer on a postcard with your name, address, and phone number to: News & Notes Mystery Object, SOHS, 106 N. Central Ave., Medford, OR 97501, or by email to info@sohs.org.
omen played a vital role at Camp White during World War II. While the huge wartime army “cantonment” camp near Medford is best remembered as the training ground where thousands of men were transformed from civilians into soldiers of the Ninety-first Infantry before going overseas, it was also an army nurses training center where many hundreds of women, all of them graduates of civilian nursing schools, were trained in military procedures before going overseas to care for wounded soldiers. Moreover, women – members of the Women’s Army Corps and the Army Nurse Corps, civilian employees and community volunteers – helped run Camp White.

The former Camp White hospital buildings in White City now house the Department of Veterans Affairs Domiciliary, where women once again play a vital role. While the “Dom” is often thought of as a male institution – as a rehabilitation center for veterans where more than 700 male patients reside – about half of the Dom’s 370 civilian employees are women, many of whom are also veterans of the armed services. Moreover, the number of women patients at the Dom is growing, reflecting the growing number of women serving in the American military.

Above, U.S. Army 2d Lts. Helen Brennan, left, and Grace Evory, right, sit in front of the Camp White station hospital in early 1943, wearing their army-issue nurses’ “whites” – very much like the uniforms civilian nurses used to wear.

Below, the sprawling hospital took up only a small portion of Camp White’s 43,000 acres during World War II. A maze of interconnected buildings with miles of hallways, the hospital was laid out in a series of “H” configurations to confine damage in the event of fire or enemy attack.
West White station hospital had more than volunteer and an officer. A second was then
This area was patrolled by military police and was stricdy

The nurses learned military etiquette, endured morning exercises, marched in formation and trained in the field.

The Seventy-ninth General Hospital formed a winning regimental dances on post. That's where

Ed Zander, a military policeman who patrolled Camp White by motorcycle, estimates that there were more than 500 army nurses at Camp White at a time--with new medical units arriving for training as other units left for overseas duty. However, Roy Erickson, also an M.P. at the camp, remembers fewer nurses.

Because so many medical units were training there, the Camp White staff improvised a basic training program for the officers of the Army Nurse Corps to orient civilian nurses to military life. The nurses learned military etiquette, endured morning exercises, marched in formation and trained in the field. Evory remembers marching to Eagle Point and back; shooting at the firing range; going through gas mask drills and braving the Camp White tear-gas chamber; and surviving the Ninety-first Division's infiltration course: belly-crawling beneath barbed wire while bullets flew overhead.

Camp White had offered field training to many hundreds of army nurses for a year before the army opened its first "official" basic training program for nurses in September of 1943 at Fort Meade, Maryland.

When nurses drilled at Camp White, their male "drill sergeant" was actually an army captain: since army nurses all held at least the "relative rank" of second lieutenant, they had to be drilled by someone senior in rank. Relative rank meant that army nurses then had an officer's title and wore the same insignia, but since they were appointed and not commissioned, they did not have the full rights, privileges, and comparable pay of a male commissioned officer.

About a month after Evory arrived at Camp White, though, Congress granted army nurses pay comparable to male commissioned officers. Before the end of the war, Congress would grant army nurses temporary commissions and, later, full commissions.

All of the nurses of the Seventy-ninth General Hospital were placed on temporary assignment at the Camp White station hospital, which served as both a training hospital and as the primary care facility for military personnel at the camp. When caring for soldiers who got sick or injured during basic training, Evory worked with doctors from her own medical unit. Army nurses also received training in the operation of a military hospital; and, in turn, some nurses trained enlisted personnel from their own medical units to be orderlies.

On March 1, 1943, classes started at the station hospital to train 460 enlisted men at a time to function as medical technicians in all branches of army hospital work; in addition, sixty enlisted men a month were trained in field sanitation.

Army nurses got one day off a week at Camp White. The nurses of the Seventy-ninth General Hospital formed a winning softball team, defeating the Camp White civilian women's team. (The medical technicians developed their own competitive events, including the 200-yard dash with litter; the ambulance loading race; shelter tent pitching and the 200-yard fireman's carry.)

On her time off, Evory liked to go to regimental dances on post. That's where she met 1st Lt. (later Captain) Ray Stewart in January of 1943; four months later they were married at the Camp White chapel.
Three months later, all personnel of the Seventy-ninth General Hospital left Camp White by train, en route to their next duty station in Northern Ireland. Grace didn't see her husband again until March of 1945 when he was a patient at Walter Reed Army Hospital. While fighting in Italy with the Ninety-first Division he received a bullet wound that left him a paraplegic. Grace cared for him for many years, until his death.15

THE WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS (WAC)

Months before the first WACs arrived on post, Camp White headquarters issued an announcement that warned against regarding women soldiers "lightly" or underestimating "their potential usefulness to the victory effort," and which cautioned servicemen that WAC officers "will be shown the same courtesies and greeted as all other officers of the army."16

When World War II broke out, the only women in the U.S. Army were nurses. Founded in 1903, the Army Nurse Corps was a small, but well-established part of the army by 1941; and nursing was then an accepted career for women in America. While the American public expected women who were civilian nurses to serve their country as military nurses, Americans were less anxious for women to serve in the military in non-medical roles. Finally, a manpower shortage and growing political pressure by women's groups led Congress to pass legislation establishing the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in May of 1942; sixteen months later, it was integrated into the army as the Women's Army Corps.

While army nurses entered military service as career professionals and were all officers, WACs had a wide variety of skills and educational backgrounds and were organized along combat lines with officers and enlisted women. Initially, the federal government supported the Women's Army Corps by saying that a WAC could "replace a man for combat." Still, many women faced family and public opposition when they became WACs, since it was then generally considered an unconventional role for women.17

In August of 1943, the month Grace Evory Stewart's medical unit shipped out, the first WACs arrived at Camp White: three officers and fifteen enlisted personnel. According to the August 12, 1943, Medford Mail Tribune, they were "sent to relieve service men for more strenuous duties." These WACs, both officer candidates and enlisted, had already completed basic training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

Charlie Milam, who was a military policeman at Camp White, remembers that WACs drove trucks for the Quartermaster Corps, everything from pickups to "six-by-six trucks"—big trucks with six wheels and a six-wheel drive. The WACs worked as dispatchers, typists, clerks and drivers at Camp White; they kept records, helped mechanics in the motor pool, checked out tools, did inventory and repairs, worked in supply rooms, the seamstress shop and the post office. Zander estimates there were well over a hundred WACs at Camp White, yet none of them served in the military police then; in fact, the Camp White brig didn't have facilities for women.19

Second Lt. Vivian Smith, a native of Billings, Montana, who joined the WACs after finishing college, was the Camp White postmaster. She also worked with the mayor of Medford, J.C. Collins, to locate off-post rental housing for army wives. In June of 1945, the mayor's son, 2nd Lt. Hugh Collins, returned from the South Pacific for a month's leave in Medford, and the mayor introduced his son to Smith. Hugh and Vivian later married; Hugh worked as a lawyer and Vivian taught junior high school. They lived in Medford for the next fifty-three years, until Vivian's death in 1998.20

The WACs and army nurses at Camp White were among 350,000 women who served in the armed forces during the war (about 60,000 as army nurses). Women enlisted in such large numbers and served in so many job assignments that their acceptance as a permanent part of the post-World War II military was assured.21
Army nurses take machine gun practice at the Camp White firing range in 1943.

Army nurses in fatigues, including leggings and steel helmets, pause during field training at Camp White.

A world War II recruiting poster urges women to join the new Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, formed in May of 1942. Before the WAAC, the only women in the army were nurses.

Army nurses in fatigues, including leggings and steel helmets, pause during field training at Camp White.
CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES AND WOMEN VOLUNTEERS

The nation’s symbol of patriotic womanhood during World War II was “Rosie the Riveter,” who was portrayed on posters as a strong, competent woman dressed in overalls with a bandanna around her head. These posters—inspired by Rose Will Monroe, a riveter who helped build B-29 and B-24 bombers at an aircraft factory in Ypsilanti, Michigan—were designed to encourage American women to join the work force and help the war effort. In the Rogue Valley, many women did join the civilian work force at Camp White.22

The Camp White laundry, which was reportedly one of the largest on the West Coast, employed 400 civilians, mostly women. Many local women, as well as some German prisoners of war, worked at the Clothing and Equipment Shop, where canvas tents and uniforms were repaired. When Myrtle Newton heard that the Army wanted “mature women” to work on post, she applied and was hired to make sandwiches and salads at the Post Exchange.23 More than 200 local women worked at the twenty-two separate branches of the Camp White Post Exchange, each of which ran two shifts and had a cafe that served sandwiches and soup.24

Women volunteers also helped. “To build up the morale of convalescent soldiers,” women from the local Red Cross sponsored entertainment programs for patients at the Camp White hospital. The January 24, 1943, Mail Tribune carried a story requesting service clubs to donate homemade cakes and cookies for the patients. Historian George Kramer called Ginger Rogers the “brightest star related with Camp White.” Rogers, the dancer and movie star, helped raise funds for the war effort in Medford; she also allowed Army nurses training at Camp White to set up their pup tents and bivouac overnight on her Shady Cove Ranch.25

Blanche Frisbie and another Jackson County public health nurse volunteered to be on call during the night to drive pregnant army wives from their homes in town to the Camp White station hospital if labor started. Frisbie made the drive many times; Camp White soldiers and their wives were parents of more than half the babies born in Jackson County during the camp’s first year of operation.26

Members of the domiciliary cafeteria’s “morning crew” pose with veterans in 1955. After the war, Camp White was transformed into a facility designed to accommodate veterans needs.

Women employees at the Dom contribute to the homey atmosphere in the cafeteria in an effort to brighten patients’ days with Christmas carols during the holiday season in 1955.
The Domiciliary

The Domiciliary at White City opened in 1949 and is now by far the largest domiciliary in the Veterans Affairs system, and the only domiciliary not attached to a V.A. hospital. It is housed in sixty-two buildings on 142 acres of the former Camp White. The heart of the Dom is the former veterans. 27 veterans living in nearby areas used the facility. When ten former servicewomen moved into the White station hospital, a sprawling mass of brick buildings interlaced with a bewildering maze of hallways—seven miles of hallways as a matter of fact!

It is a small, self-contained city with its own fire department, police force, thirty-bed infirmary, dental clinic, pharmacy, church, newspaper, golf course, bowling alley, theater, canteen store, barber shop, cafeteria, and library. Rogue Community College has a branch there, offering forty classroom courses. All low-income veterans with a satisfactory discharge who have a medical diagnosis or who are homeless are eligible for admission to the domiciliary. Currently, 755 patients live there, including twenty-five women; their average age is fifty.

All patients at the Dom must submit to nightly bed checks and testing for substance abuse. They are also expected, if able, to participate in "incentive therapy." More than 60 percent of Dom patients participate, working in every department from the security force to the front office; they are paid a modest wage for these jobs, which provide skills, training and an important service.

Besides providing care for resident patients, the Dom offers outpatient services to eligible veterans, including health and dental care, counseling, rehabilitation, and a women's wellness program. Last year more than 5,500 veterans living in nearby areas used the Dom's outpatient services, including a small but growing number of female veterans.27

**WOMEN AS INPATIENTS**

The December 14, 1976, Mail Tribune reported that the Dom had gone coed when ten former service women moved into "bright pink quarters" in a new wing set aside for women. One of the first women patients at the Dom, Phyllis Winians, a 43-year-old former army clerk-typist, said on her first day there, "I get along with men OK, but if some guy tells me I'm just a woman I'll tell him off. You have to hold your own ground."

Why is it that the Dom operated for twenty-seven years before the first women veterans used its services? Joan A. Furey, director of the V.A. Center for Women Veterans in Washington, D. C., said that historically, women vets were not high users of V.A. services because the V.A. wasn't prepared to treat women, and frequently women's experiences of V.A. treatment were so bad that word got around. It's only been in the last fifteen years that V.A. services for women have greatly improved.

Furey, a former army nurse, explained that historically women represented only a small percentage of the military—before the army switched to an all-volunteer force. In 1970, women comprised only 2 percent of the active duty force. By the time of the Gulf War, the figure was 11 percent; today it is 16 percent and growing. An upsurge in surname women veterans living in nearby areas used the facility. When ten former servicewomen moved into the White station hospital, a sprawling mass of brick buildings interlaced with a bewildering maze of hallways—seven miles of hallways as a matter of fact!

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**OUTPATIENTS**

Karen Delugach, who has lived in Medford for twenty-three years, is one of more than 100 women veterans living in the Rogue Valley who use the Dom's health services as outpatients. She has ongoing health problems connected to her military service during the Vietnam War,
when she was an army nurse at an evacuation hospital in Pleiku. Before the
Dom started a Women’s Wellness Program
staffed by a female nurse practitioner,
Delugach had to drive to the V.A. hospital
in Roseburg for help with women’s health
issues. She learned about the Dom through
her church and says, “I don’t know where
I’d be today, where my family would be,
without the Dom. It’s really helped.” Like
many female veterans she says she greatly
appreciates the option of having a female
counselor, and describes her counselor at
the Dom, Lynda Spangler, as a life saver.33

FEMALE EMPLOYEES

The more than 180 women who work at
the Dom hold a wide variety of jobs: as
psychologists, secretaries, nurse practitioners,
counselors, and doctors. Six of the Dom’s
sixteen doctors are women. Women also
hold management positions including chief
of food and nutrition, director of community
resource development, and chief nurse.34

Many women employees are veterans.
Jean Keen, who has worked at the Dom
for more than nine years as a program
support assistant doing budget analysis and
bookkeeping, served for three years in the
Air Force as an aircraft mechanic on C-141A
Starlifter cargo jets. She went to college on
the GI bill to learn computers; her job at
the Dom holds a wide variety of jobs: as
resource development, and chief

spends most of her time in hour-long
counseling sessions with outpatients.
For two years, Spangler helped co-lead
the Dom’s “ropes course.” This course—
which takes two hours a day for the first
week and three hours a day for the second
week—teaches self-confidence and
teamwork in a challenging setting.
Participants learn how to delay each other
high in the air using ropes and overhead
wires. They learn to walk along a two-wire
bridge that is nearly twenty feet above the
ground, while wearing safety harnesses.
The ropes course is now an integral part
of the Dom’s alcohol rehabilitation program,
and is also available to other inpatients.
When a woman patient goes through the
course, the Dom tries to ensure that one of
the two leaders is a woman.38

One complication Spangler faced when
leading the ropes course was that “men
liked to be protective of me. Most of
the men have traditional backgrounds. It was
unusual for many of them to see a woman
in the role of a teacher for something
outdoors that’s athletic and physically
challenging.”39

WOMEN VOLUNTEERS

Women have been very active as
volunteers since the Dom opened. In the
early 1960s, twenty-one Gray Ladies from
the Red Cross spent mornings visiting
patients at the Dom infirmary, writing
letters for them and doing errands. Other
women volunteers, including members of
the Blue Star Mothers, spent several days a
month at the Dom, mending, stitching,
putting up curtains and making bed
covers. More than ten years later, in the
early 1970s, women of the V.A. Volunteer
Service came four times a month to the
Dom’s sewing room to mend and iron
cloths for handicapped or infirm veterans
unable to do their own mending.
Women’s active and effective roles at the
Dom, both as volunteers and as employees,
should have surprised no one. According to
the V.A. Information Service in Washington,
D.C., it was primarily women who, during
and after the Civil War, organized
community shelters for disabled veterans
who had no place to stay—which led to
President Lincoln’s establishment of
federal homes for soldiers—which, in turn,
to today’s V.A. domiciliaries.31

Doug Foster is a writer and historian living in
Ashland.

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Main Antique Mall, Medford

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Leaving a Legacy

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We invite you to become a member!

Join now! Our goal is 2,000 members by June 30, 2001.

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Your membership will support: preservation of Southern Oregon's rich history; Society exhibits and educational events; outreach to schools; workshops for adults and children; living history programs; and tours and demonstrations at historic Hanley Farm.

Members receive Southern Oregon Heritage Today, the Society's monthly magazine with newsletter, providing a view into the past and keeping you up-to-date on services provided by the Society.

For membership information, call Susan Smith at 773-6536.
In 1992, the Veterans Affairs Domiciliary in White City celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the building of Camp White by dedicating the lower hallway of Building 200 as Memorial Hall. On display are photographs, posters, and maps depicting the construction of Camp White in 1942 and life at the camp during the war years.

The Camp White Historical Association got its start as the result of many people in the area meeting over coffee to discuss ways to preserve the history of Camp White. Finally, an organized effort was made to gather all interested persons at one meeting. More than 100 people attended, many of whom had helped to build the camp or had trained there during World War II.

On July 9, 1994, the group formally organized itself as the Camp White Historical Association and elected officers. Annual membership dues were set at $12. With a collection at the meeting of $38.85, the association opened a bank account. In August 1994, the association gained status from the state as a non-profit corporation.

The association's first goal was to refurbish a monument that had been erected in front of the Ninety-first Infantry Division headquarters in 1942 when the camp opened. Some years after the war, the monument was vandalized and the bronze plaque stolen. The refurbishing was completed in 1994, and the monument can be seen at Ajax and Maple streets, its original location in what is now White City.

In November 1997, the association accomplished its biggest project. The Camp White Military Museum opened on Veterans Day in the upstairs hallway of Building 200 at the Veterans Affairs Domiciliary. The museum displays many images, uniforms, flags, field kits, a Browning machine gun, medals, and other memorabilia. The Domiciliary donates the space for the museum and four other rooms where the association stores its collections.

The museum is open from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Call 826-2111, ext. 3674, for further information.

Mel Cotton and Carolyn Sharrock are members of the Camp White Historical Association.