To what extent did female involvement in American Intelligence change from the American Civil War to World War II?

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Part A

This investigation examines the question “To what extent did female involvement in American intelligence change from the American Civil War to World War II?”. To answer this, secondary, academic sources have to be used due to the insular nature of espionage, so collections of stories must be examined.

Elizabeth McIntosh’s *The Role on Women in Intelligence* is a pamphlet published and sponsored by the Association of Former Intelligence Officers for educational purposes. A limitation can be found in its publisher, since retired intelligence officers may be inclined to portray their former career favorably, and pressure might have been applied to censor material that cast the agency or career in a bad light. Likewise, McIntosh’s biases as a former female spy for the OSS during WWII might detract from the legitimacy of her work and therefore the evidence in my investigation by curating the information to show only favorable aspects of spy work or notable women in the field. As a value, McIntosh has been employed with several other high-ranking organizations such as the state department, CIA, and UN, so she is well versed in the topic; having first-hand experience in the industry gives her insight into an inherently secretive world. The content has detailed stories of foreign female spies working with the OSS and supplemental information about technical positions in WWII, adding significantly to the changes in intelligence I identified. However, the work contains few facts and figures, relying almost entirely on anecdotes of espionage or loose references to early letters and reports in and Civil War. Though intelligence work is by nature secretive, there is a weakness in relying solely on anecdotal evidence for a research paper.

Rachel Sapp has a BA and MA in history and wrote *Armed with Intelligence: Women Spies of the American Civil War*. As an article was written for the Journal of the Epsilon Mu Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta - a nationally recognized historical fraternity - and the Eastern Illinois University History Department, the origin adds to its credibility. Each paper published through the organization is peer-reviewed, with all members applying to join and write for the chapter, while the history department ensures the quality of its publications. Additionally, as an independent researcher rather than an insider, Sapp can examine the impact of female operatives on the Civil War without biasing the information she presents, and writing about an event hundreds

of years ago allows her to track the long-term effects of Civil War espionage, which is important for determining the extent of change in the field. Intended as educational material for the historical society, it is valuable that her writing is out of personal interest rather than occupational obligation. The article's content focuses specifically on spies in the American Civil War, giving comprehensive examples of outstanding women on both sides of the conflict. Sapp's writing has a more detailed description of the chosen female spies, giving insight into specific events they were involved in allowing me to make broader connections between the work they did, but even so, the content lacks primary sources and has little analysis, focusing on singular stories to tell the history of all civil war spies.

Part B

Even as the United States was only an idea to be fought for, women were already influencing history through intelligence gathering and transmission. Espionage and reconnaissance, which can be defined as "using spies to obtain information about the plans and activities especially of a foreign government" and "a preliminary survey to gain information," have been key parts of military conflicts for centuries (Merriam Webster). Though the number of women formally employed in the Intelligence Community had increased and more technical jobs had been taken on from the Civil War to World War II, female spies in WWII ultimately collected information and participated in fieldwork using the same methods as their peers in the American Civil War.

Due to the establishment of a centralized intelligence organization and increased educational attainment for women, formal employment within the intelligence community had sharply increased by World War II from its Civil War numbers. Few records of women being formally employed for intelligence on either side of the Mason-Dixon line in the American Civil War exist. Neither side was keen on hiring women in their fledgling intelligence units due to negative gender stereotypes of weakness and untrustworthiness, but there are cases of female operatives existing in formal chains of command. Rose O'Neal Greenhow, a secessionist and widow of a state department official, mixed with Washington DC's elite and passed the information she garnered from her peers on to Confederate generals (Sapp 129). She was recruited by the Virginia Governor and became one of the most infamous names of Confederate espionage for the deception of Union admirers. However Greenhow was the exception; spy work positions were very rare, and little to no evidence of monetary or other compensation has been found. Conversely, at its peak during WWII, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) had a staff of 13,000 people, 35 percent of whom were women, and about 7,500 of which, both men and women, served overseas (National World War II Museum). These women typically acted as general employees, filing secret reports, coding and decoding messages, mailing paychecks, and keeping records. General Donovan called them the "invisible apron strings" of the OSS, who did the necessary tasks that kept the incredibly large intelligence agency running, stating "upon the discretion of their performances, depended the security of the organization" (McIntosh 29).

No evidence was found of women working in technical positions during the Civil War, but by World War II, these positions were what most drove female employment in centralized intelligence. Because gathering or sending information was the only form of espionage accessible to women in the Civil War, they capitalized on positions around areas of conflict to eavesdrop on unsuspecting enemies and carry information behind enemy lines, using their unassuming appearance and the dim expectations of men to feign innocence without suspicion. However valuable these positions were, World War II offered women a new type of technical work that didn't require them to be field agents. For example, some operatives held executive positions managing cryptography sections, while women like Jeannie Rousseau and Rachel Griese both used research and analysis reporting to compile detailed information about German defenses and weapons. French women with the OSS were often liaisons and used for language skills, organizing the movement of foreign intelligence agents. British Women with the OSS had detailed knowledge of the terrain and provided daily reports, officer briefs, and updated front-line maps (McIntosh 34). During WWII thousands of women joined the military or worked as civilians for the military as intercept operators, telephone operators, drivers, and as "code breakers and linguists, women helped to advance the use of electronic messaging technologies by enhancing security" (Martin 100). Many levels of work in the OSS became available to women as a result of growing feminism and women right's campaigns, egged on by growing desperation from the United States government to fill positions in intelligence when many of the capable men were being sent to war.

One of the most important and common ways that women participated in intelligence during both conflicts was as couriers and information gatherers. Cultural norms of the Civil War era meant women were especially valuable in collecting and passing on information, as they were typically resigned to household positions and thought incapable of difficult or dangerous work due to their 'delicate,' 'fragile' natures. Some exceptional women became amateur spies due to their strong belief in their cause rather than formal recruitment. Mary Touvestre, a freed slave working for one of the Confederate engineers who was repairing a US Navy ship, discovered its significance as a weapon against the northern blockade. Traveling at great risk with a stolen set of plans, she determinedly presented officials in the Department of the Navy with the

information (Allen 27). Like their Civil War-era counterparts, women in the OSS hid messages in their clothing, used disguises to conceal identities, and evaded enemy capture through quick wit. Wayne Nelson, a former head OSS operative, wrote about 'Jeannette,' a French volunteer, in his memoir (Historynet.com). She secured valuable information about enemy activities in the area ahead of Nelson's stronghold and the city nearest it and escaped capture and grueling interrogation by the Gestapo after faking a head injury (ibid). She returned through enemy territory under fake identification papers to report on enemy dispositions and movements. Such risk of life and limb has been the standard price for couriers since the beginning of intelligence gathering.

Fieldwork within intelligence gathering has also stayed much the same across periods and conflicts. Elizabeth Van Lew, a socialite spinster living in the southern capital, led a remarkable spy ring by the end of the war, checking defenses, eavesdropping on military conversations, sending coded messages to Union posts, and hiding northern prisoners in her estate. Working for the Union, she brought supplies to captive Union soldiers, and Confederate officers, thinking her nothing more than a harmless woman providing food and clothing to bedraggled prisoners, left her be (Sapp 134). However, Van Lee used this trust against them, smuggling Union soldiers from jail to safety, and in return, learning vital information on Confederate army movements which she passed on to Union Generals (ibid 134). The nature of gathering intelligence covertly and under assumed identities stayed much the same. Virginia Hall played a crucial role in organizing and maintaining a large network of resistance fighters in Nazi-occupied France. Legendary for her daring feats, she "broke 12 of her fellow agents out of an internment camp, evaded the treachery of a double-crossing priest and, once her pursuers began to close in, made an arduous trek over the Pyrenees into Spain—only to return to France to resume the fight for its freedom" (Katz). Other unnamed OSS operatives operated escape lines through which allied airmen, soldiers, and Jewish refugees were freed. Fieldwork has stayed a vital part of the intelligence organizations who sponsor it, but as technological advances have created new positions for women in intelligence, it has become a much smaller part of overall reconnaissance.

Female work in intelligence has had many changes in the jobs accessible to women, but the core work of its operatives has stayed the same. As the workforce was integrated rapidly in WWII, women were allowed to

take on managerial tasks like secretarial work and filing, as well as academic positions as linguists, research analysts, and cryptologists. Formalized employment in World War II also dramatically increased the number of women participating in the intelligence community as a whole and allowed women to take on more and stronger leadership roles within the OSS hierarchy. Over time, female operatives received greater recognition and compensation for their tremendous efforts, overcoming workplace discrimination and using sexist attitudes against their opponents to become more successful agents. Even though new types of espionage and reconnaissance were added, the core positions of couriers and field agents have stayed very similar in the work demanded, the risk taken, and the methods used.

Part C

Many historians face challenges in establishing credibility in their research when topics aren't well documented or have few first-hand accounts. Some of the difficulties I faced in my research pertained to the secretive nature of my topic, espionage, and the further limited selection of sources that dealt with specifically female involvement in the intelligence community. Primary sources were difficult to come by and I was limited in my ability to analyze specific events or trends due to my lack of factual knowledge. Irrespective of gaps in first-hand knowledge, the sources I did find proved to be very reliable, with authors of educational backgrounds and peer-reviewed information. Since a majority of my research came from anecdotal evidence and secondary sources in which mere summaries of female intelligence were given - like Allen's useful but limited "Intelligence in the Civil War" - my exploration lacks a certain level of detail that would have helped its overall legitimacy.

History establishes fact in the same way as many other areas of knowledge - by comparing evidence among professionals and coming to a near consensus - but it is much more often called into question and challenged. This may have to do with the social nature of collecting stories and testimonies, but it does lead to a weaker claim to legitimacy than other subjects enjoy. My methodology was much the same as other historians, gathering evidence to build a fuller picture, but I had to rely on anecdotal evidence from available, previously done research to understand how American female intelligence changed between the Civil War and World War II. The knowledge provided was reputable and detailed, but there was more narration of events than discussion or analysis. I would have found it more interesting and helpful to my investigation to compare differences in sources. However, all of my authors benefited from hindsight in their writing, and only a few sources had ties to the intelligence community, which allowed me to have a less biased view of the events. I overcame my lack of primary information by collecting a wide variety of academic papers and relying on their agreement to conclude credibility.

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