

PMM BLOG ARCHIVE

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Women in Service, World War II – Captain Doris Brill Mamolen

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, J. Gleim, Museum Curator)



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This Women's Army Corps (WAC) uniform belonged to Doris Brill Mamolen (b. 1910). The daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants, Doris grew up in Philadelphia and attended Philadelphia Normal School where she trained to be a teacher. She was teaching sixth grade in 1942 when she enlisted in the Women's Army Corps. Women entering the Women's Army Corps were the first women to serve in the military in roles other than nurses. They served in many stateside roles as typists, drivers, radio operators, and electricians, freeing up enlisted men to be sent overseas.

Doris went through basic training in October and November 1942 at Fort Des Moines in Des Moines, Iowa. She recalled that as women, the new WACs faced challenges including a lack of properly fitting uniforms and accusations of receiving special treatment. Because of her experience as a teacher, Doris possessed the leadership skills necessary for good officers. She attended Officer Candidate Training and graduated a First Lieutenant. She was assigned to the US Army Third Air Force. Her first posting was in Des Moines where she served as company commander to one of the first racially integrated WAC units. As company commander, Doris was responsible for ensuring her unit arrived on time for training and duty, supervised their living quarters, and arranged weekend passes and entertainment.



Brill center, Will Rogers Field 1st female air inspectors.jpg

In July 1943, Doris went to Will Rogers Field in Oklahoma, where she activated the first WAC squadron at the 348th Army Air Base. The base was the training ground for personnel learning to fly and maintain B-17 and B-24 bombers. There, WAC personnel served in supporting roles such as weather forecasters and observers, link trainer instructors, control tower specialists, and airplane mechanics.

Despite her many requests to be posted overseas, Doris remained in the United States. In March 1944, she attained the rank of Captain and in September she was reassigned to Gulfport Air Base in Mississippi, as commander of all WAC forces at the base. She remained in Gulfport until May 1945 when she went to Chatham Air Base near Savannah, Georgia again as Commanding Officer of the WAC forces there. On a trip home in between bases Doris met her husband-to-be, Morris Mamolen, on a blind date. She remembers stepping off the train dressed in her uniform and seeing Morris's "eyes pop". Once Doris returned to her base, they spoke on the telephone every night and soon became engaged. Because married women were not permitted to serve in the Women's Army Corps, Doris requested permission to leave the service. She married Morris in November 1945 and left the WAC in December



Brill on left, motor pool training.jpg

Doris recalled her military service with pride in an unpublished memoir written for her grandchildren. In 2003, she was interviewed in Stars and Stripes, a newspaper for the U.S. military. She offered young military women one piece of advice: "Go for it. A woman has the right to do whatever she can, if she's able, at the highest rank she can attain." Doris died, aged 97, in 2008.