

*Source 1***WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY SERVICES
for CIVIL DEFENCE**41 Tothill Street,
London, S.W.1.

CCE.L.S.1/41

30th October, 1941.

DEMAND FOR WOMEN IN WAR WORKW.V.S. co-operation on Publicity.

An appeal has been made by the Ministry of Labour to national women's organisations to help to make known the urgent need for women. The part W.V.S. can play is important. Where, therefore, the W.V.S. is asked to assist locally they should do all that they can, provided that the Local Authority concurs. It will, of course, be realised that the claims of Civil Defence come first.

Because of the increasing demands on man-power for the armed forces, the enrolment of women in industry and in the Women's Auxiliary Services has become a vital necessity. The war's successful end depends more and more upon the immediate enrolment of women in the national effort. No healthy woman, whether she be of registration age or not, is any longer justified in holding back unless her family responsibilities are so heavy that she cannot leave them. Many women are still under the impression that their own individual contribution is not a matter of vital moment to the country; some feel that if the Government really wants them they can call them up; some are willing to be fetched but not to go. Women in the main do not realise how serious is the problem. Women must release men and take men's jobs. Older women can release younger women for service with the auxiliary forces or the more strenuous work and they must do all this NOW.

Letter to WVS organisers explaining why they should recruit more women to help with the war effort, 1941



WOMEN AT WAR

What did the WVS do?

Source 2

"When I hear of some of the tasks these women have undertaken it seems to me there is a touch of genius about them. Take for instance the pie scheme. Under this scheme the W.V.S. are helping to distribute a million pies and snacks each week to agricultural workers in some 2,750 villages. Then there is the sock-darning for the Army. I understand the W.V.S. now darn about 38,000 pairs of socks a week for our soldiers and have lately undertaken the mending of American socks too. 65,000 members are working voluntarily in canteens and British Restaurants. Over 350 depots are making camouflage netting, garnishing about 3,500 nets for the Army each week. Hundreds of thousands of yards of cloth - hundreds of pounds of wool - hundreds of tons of comforts received from overseas - have been handled by the W.V.S.

"Anyone who wants an idea of the versatility of W.V.S. members might consider their records for gallantry. A B.E.M. awarded to a member 'for capturing a German airman on her farm;' a B.E.M. awarded to another member 'for going from house to house cheering people who were trapped, crawling through an aperture too small to admit a man and rescuing a baby and three other people' - these are just two items from a very long list of awards for outstanding service, a list which includes 5 George Medals and 78 Empire Awards.

"I think if I were asked to try to sum up the achievement of the W.V.S., I would say that they consist of a million magnificent women who are simply applying the principles of good housekeeping to the job of helping to run their country in its hour of need. They have done that - they are doing it - in every possible way; and they are doing it under the problematic, sometimes heart-breaking, conditions of total war. That is their distinctive and womanly contribution to victory. It is something no man could do, and something that the whole nation will not forget. We can see their good works. We can see them in every town, in almost every village street. The W.V.S. is making a notable contribution to our welfare in all sorts of ways, and I regard it above all as an indispensable part of our Civil Defence organisation."

Ministry of Home Security.

18th June, 1943.

Press statement by Herbert Morrison praising the work of the WVS, 1943

*Source 3*

Reprinted from
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THURSDAY, MAY 25, 1944

The FOURTH WOMEN'S SERVICE

W.V.S.—How it Works and What it Does

DURING this war a new feminine army has come into being. It has

no conscripts, no ranks, no pay; if the members want to wear the uniform they must buy it themselves. A year before war was declared the Home Secretary felt the need of some women's organisation to encourage training for Civil Defence. He asked Lady Reading, widow of the brilliant lawyer and Viceroy, to organise this work, and W.V.S. was born.

Its primary task is still that described in its full title, "Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence." Although its members now undertake work for 20 Government Departments, they still regard Civil Defence as their first and most important job. The Minister of Home Security has described them as "occupying, vis-à-vis my Department and Local Authorities, the same relationship as that of the Women's Auxiliary Services to the Armed Forces of the Crown."

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W.V.S. is responsible to local authorities in many places for staffing rest centres and casualty bureaux, and members also work at incident inquiry points, control centres and in Queen's Messenger food convoys and mobile kitchens. They will guide bombed-out people to the rest centres, feed and clothe the homeless, sit with invalids or expectant mothers during a raid, or help to save belongings from the shattered homes when it is over.

During the worst nights of fires and bombs W.V.S. has been on duty, and many members have lost their lives. They are a pool of voluntary workers whose boast is that no job is too difficult, too dangerous, too small, or too dirty—if it must be done they will do it.

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But their work is not limited to A.R.P. and post-raid work. At the outbreak of war local authorities were notified that W.V.S. was "at their disposal to undertake any work for which the services of women volunteers were required in their own locality." At that time there were 335,924 members. To-day there are 1,000,000. They are everywhere—in every town, village and street of Great Britain.

Newspaper article about the work of the WVS, 1944