

Andrew Orr. *Women and the French Army during the World Wars, 1914-1940*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017. 222 pp. ISBN 9780253026774.

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While it has become commonplace across many cultures and countries to have women serve in the armed forces, their formal role naturally evolved more slowly than that of men. In *Women and the French Army during the World Wars, 1914-1940*, Andrew Orr tackles the issue for an especially turbulent time in French history, from when women worked as civilians in support of the French Army during World War I (noteworthy is the fact that more than half of these women were fired after the November 1918 armistice) to when they filled much-needed administrative roles during demobilization and were then rehired during a new hiring wave through 1938 as France prepared for yet another war. One would expect, of course, that male officers opposed the idea that women would enlist as soldiers and fight on the front lines, but at the same time Orr explains how these officers both objected to or conveniently failed to recognize proposals that would honor women as long-term employees. Across his introduction, five chapters, and conclusion, Orr explores the Army laws and policies that constrained and hampered the role of women and their advancement in the French Army.

Chapter One, “Weapons of Total War, 1914-1918” provides an intriguing look at how France’s political leaders and army generals struggled with the notion of women being part of the army. In direct opposition to the leaders of other countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia, France would not allow women to enlist. However, its military leaders, especially career officers, did begrudgingly allow women to work as civilian employees. Given previous efforts to separate army and civilian worlds as well as the damaging effects of the Dreyfus Affair, this was no small undertaking. To set the stage for explaining how painful it was for the men of the French army to accept women as civilian employees, Orr provides an overview of the 17th-century *vivandières*, women attached to military regiments as sutlers or canteen keepers:

As Thomas Cardoza has shown, in the late 1600s the French state began to officially license certain individual soldiers to be *vivandiers*. These soldiers continued to fulfill their normal military obligations, but had a

special license to sell supplies to their comrades. In theory[,] they were expected to run their businesses themselves, but in practice they could not fulfill their contracts without help because they also remained soldiers. Among other things, they could not leave camp or depart from the column, which meant it would have been almost impossible for them to procure new supplies while on campaign. As a result, *vivandiers* were always allowed to marry. *Vivandiers'* wives were called *vivandières* and did most of the work, but the contracts technically belonged to their husbands. ... Because the contracts were officially held by their husbands, if a *vivandière's* husband died, whether of natural causes or in battle, she lost the right to sell her goods. (3)

Orr then continues his analysis with 19th-century *cantinières*, defined as women who carried canteens for soldiers:

Vivandières, who became increasingly known as *cantinières* over the course of the nineteenth century, continued to serve with the army after the Bourbon Restoration. ... Despite being the face of the Napoleon III's army, *cantinières* were not officially recognized as soldiers. They worked for and lived with the army, and they were vital to its ability to operate, but legally they remained civilians. As such, their position was often vague, even to themselves. Many honestly believed that they were in the army and would be entitled to a pension when they retired. The Ministry of War's regulations clearly stated that they were not entitled to pensions of their own, though they might be entitled to a widow's pension through their husbands. Their confusion was not unique: most civilians seem to also have assumed that *cantinières* were soldiers (4).

Chapter Two, "The Failure of the Demobilization Purge, 1919-1923" sheds light on how during World War I, the majority of officers "tolerated" women's help because they truly needed it but envisioned that after the war, the status quo would return. Nonetheless the status quo did not return because of the unanticipated heaviness of the workload associated with the demobilization process. Although women had to be re-hired, there was now a significant difference, with drawbacks, including some leftover vestiges from pre-World War I:

This new wave of hiring focused heavily on secretarial, accounting, and other types of office work; As [*sic*] a result it narrowed the scope of women's contributions to the army when compared to their work during the war. It was still, however, governed by a preference system that

avored the widows and orphans of French soldiers, so many of the remaining women had blood ties to the army. (XVI)

Chapter Three, “The 1927 and 1928 Army Laws,” is a hefty chapter on the laws that aimed to establish a better governance structure of military personnel and civilian employees. The main thrust of Chapter Four, “War Clouds, 1929-1938,” is how the Great Depression and Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in Europe obstructed the stabilization of the French Army and what the military leaders had hoped would be a period of peace. Chapter Five, “‘She Remained at Her Post until the Very End’: Women and the Second World War” examines women’s role in the French Army at the time of the fall of the Third Republic.

Despite some minor typographical and punctuation errors that the editors at the University of Indiana Press would do well to correct for future printings and editions of *Women and the French Army during the World Wars, 1914-1940*, Orr has done a fine job of tracing the history of women in the French Army. This chronological study thus provides a foundation for understanding, for example, the role that evolved for women came to play in the Resistance during the World War II Occupation of France.