

Amazons of Aberdeen



MOST BOMB-BLITZED SPOT in America is at Aberdeen, Md. Buildings tremble for miles around as the Army tries out its new cannons, tanks, and "block-busting" bombs. In the midst of this tumult, 400 calm, grim women test Uncle Sam's weapons of war before they go to the boys at the front. They fire big berthas, drive tanks over shell-torn terrain, toss 60-pound shells around as if they were biscuits.

Tough babies, these gals? Well, hardly. Most of them are housewives, many of them mothers, one is a grandmother. Another used to be a beauty parlor operator before she began operating an ack-ack gun. An ex-nurse took over the field artillery. A girl with a rose-petal complexion who once sold cosmetics is a rifle expert. And an 18-year-old who used to shoot skunks on a Piney Creek, N. C., farm now tests anti-aircraft guns. (If they are accurate she can blast the bull's-eye six times out of seven.)

The ladies first stormed the Ordnance Department last March. Seems that a spunky, redheaded gal named Arlene "Mickey" Leppert, who had studied to be a secretary in Oswego, N. Y., came to Aberdeen, said she wanted to test tanks. Officers listened because too many of their trained men were leaving to shoot Japs and Germans. Mickey

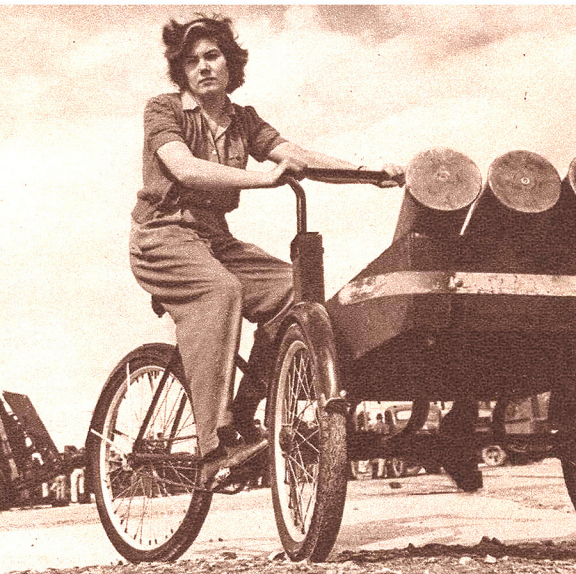
Amazons of Aberdeen



A 40-year-old grandmother, Mrs. Ruby Barnett, of Delta, Pa., tests a .30-caliber machine gun

was the first of the 400 women hired. They get about \$25 a week. Only a couple have been replaced as unfit.

The Army wasn't optimistic at first, feared that women would be rattled by the constant ear-splitting concussions. They were jumpy in the beginning, but now many take rest-period naps under the muzzles of cannons. The other fear was that, being women, they couldn't keep secrets, and there are some big ones at Aberdeen. But never in nine months has one of them been suspected of being loose-lipped. The director of the grounds says they do the toughest tasks "extremely well."



Miss Eva Ford, of Northeast, Md., totes some shells to firing range on a tricycle ammunition cart

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After driving an army truck deep into mud pit, Jean McMullen tests a new winch for towing the truck out again



Feminine crew locks rammer of a 90-mm. anti-aircraft gun. Left to right are, Edna Griffith, Aberdeen; Barbara Farrington, Jefferson, N. C.; Verna Geer, Nottingham, Pa.; Minnie Rinier, Havre de Grace, Md.; Mary Fultz, Lewistown, Pa.; and Elsie Szamborski, Aberdeen

American
 JANUARY, 1943 P. 98

July 11, 1942 : p. 11

•WOMAN'S WORLD•

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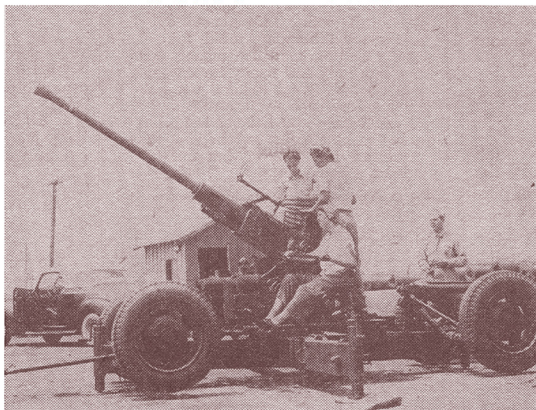
Ready, Aim, Fire!

There is Mrs. Ruby Barnett, a grandmother twice over, who used to shut her eyes when she fired the machine guns. And Mrs. Myrtle Davis, 39, with a son in the Air Force and her husband in ordnance work. She fills shells. Helen Lindamood is only 19 but she can take her place with the best "rootin', shootin' son-of-a-gun" in shooting a rifle from her hip. While that is extra-curricular, it just shows what the more than 1,000 women employed at the Army Ordnance Proving Grounds at Aberdeen, Maryland, are capable of.

In war industry in general about 50 per cent of the women are there for patriotic reasons. Because of the nature of the work at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds where the Army tests its weapons, the percentage is no doubt considerably higher. Since March of this year when the man shortage became acute women of all ages have been hired at the center. Some are in their late 'teens, many are in their forties and fifties; a few have had engineering courses, many have a natural mechanical flair; some are college graduates, as in the ballistics laboratory where expert mathematicians calculate the course of bullet fire. These women have replaced men both in technical positions and on the firing range. They drive heavy Army trucks on the grounds, they fill shells and prime them and even operate man-size cranes assembling the big guns.

Granted Civil Service status without an examination they are subjected to a preliminary training course. Only six have been eliminated after hiring, and then not because of jitters in this dangerous work, but because they lacked the necessary interest in it. On the other hand, a picked few of the women are about to become foremen. Most of those hired come from within 30 to 40 miles of Aberdeen (they do not live on the grounds).

It is on the firing range proper that the sight of the women arouses momentary amazement. But only momentary.



Women Man the Big Guns at Aberdeen Proving Grounds

After watching them go through their paces any doubting Thomas finds himself commending them for equalling the performance of men. Inclined to be just a bit jumpy in the firing areas the first days the women are soon firing big railroad guns without flinching and we have yet to hear of any of them "freezing" at their post. They seem not to have nerves after a time. Light and medium caliber guns are their forte. Four of them are now experts at a new firing apparatus. While there are as yet no women testing tank guns it is more than probable that they will take that in their stride as production of tanks increases. The tanks are rolled into the grounds on railroad cars and are fired from the cars.

All employees are warned not to talk about their work; as yet these warnings have been a matter of form—no woman has shown any inclination to divulge information about the secret weapons with which she works. (Show that to your men.) Anti-aircraft gun crews are composed of six women organized in the Army manner under military discipline. The one in charge blasts twice on a whistle in warning, then gives the order to fire. Another crew member passes up ammunition; still another keeps a record of the firing action for the ordnance chiefs. At the central velocity measuring station, also manned by women, projectiles are fired through ground hoops, velocity checked as the projectile goes through the hoop, flashed back to the central velocity station and recorded.

Besides firing the guns the women are thoroughly grounded in knowledge of their construction and repair. Oiling the various parts and cleaning the bores are routine while taking apart and reassembling carriages of medium caliber cannon is mere child's play. Director of the Proving Grounds William B. Hardigg is more than pleased with his women. He says it is amazing

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what excellent mechanics they are and with what speed they adapt themselves to surroundings so far out of a woman's realm normally. His highest praise for them is that they do the most complicated tasks not only well, but cheerfully.



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