

# Margaret Hastings, the “Shangri-La WAC”

## Education Material

### Background

This episode will tell the story of Cpl. Margaret Hastings, a member of the Women’s Army (WAC) during World War II who was stationed as a secretary in Hollandia, New Guinea. Hastings was involved in an airplane crash in which 21 of the 24 passengers were killed and she spent a total of 47 days surviving in the remote jungle. When she was finally rescued, she returned to her hometown of Owego a famous hero and went on to give over 200 speeches on behalf of Victory Bonds.

Marker of focus: World War II Home of “SHANGRI-LA WAC.” Tioga County.

### NYS Social Studies Standards

**8.6 WORLD WAR II:** The aggression of the Axis powers threatened United States security and led to its entry into World War II. The nature and consequences of warfare during World War II transformed the United States and the global community. The damage from total warfare and atrocities such as the Holocaust led to a call for international efforts to protect human rights and prevent future wars.

- 8.6b From 1939 to 1941, the United States government tried to maintain neutrality while providing aid to Britain but was drawn into the war by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The United States fought a war on multiple fronts. At home, the economy was converted to war production, and essential resources were rationed to ensure adequate supplies for military use.
  - Students will investigate the effects of the war on the American economy and day-to-day life.
  - Student will examine the role of New Yorkers in World War II

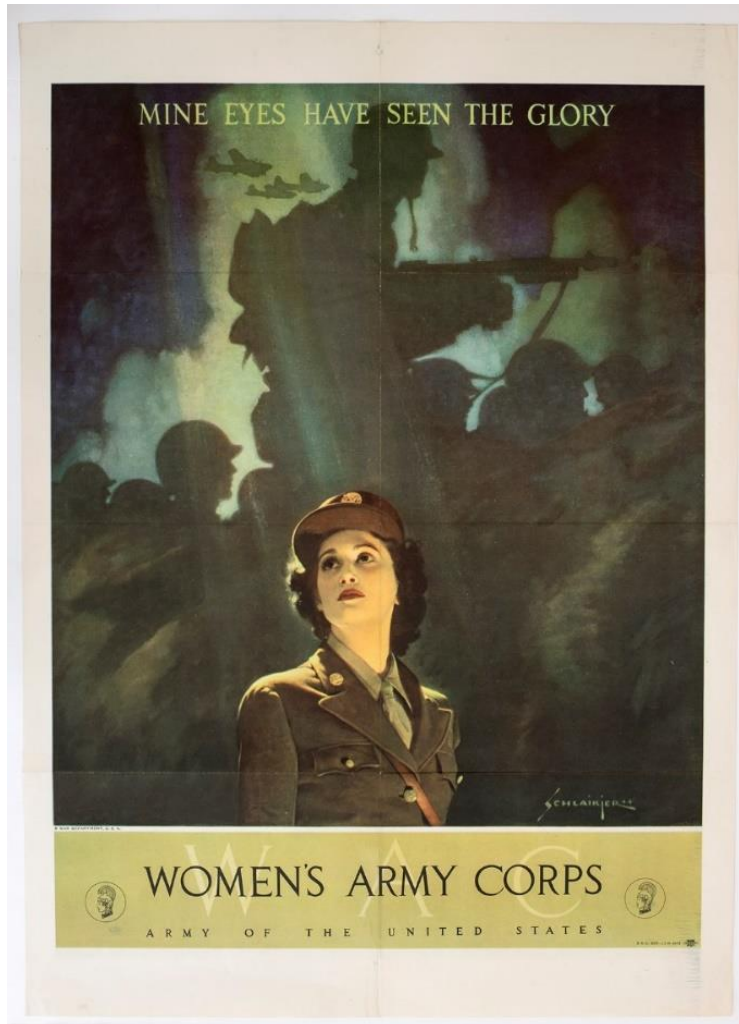
**11.8. WORLD WAR II (1935 – 1945):** The participation of the United States in World War II was a transformative event for the nation and its role in the world. (Standards: 1, 2; Themes: TCC, GOV, CIV, TECH)

- 11.8 a As situations overseas deteriorated, President Roosevelt’s leadership helped to move the nation from a policy of neutrality to a pro-Allied position and, ultimately, direct involvement in the war.
  - Students will examine how technological advancements altered the nature of war and the extent of its devastation, including the use of air power over civilian targets and President Truman’s decision to use the atomic bomb against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- 11.8 b United States entry into World War II had a significant impact on American society.
  - Students will examine United States mobilization efforts and wartime production and their effects on unemployment rates.
  - Students will examine the contributions of women, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican workers, and Mexican Americans to the war effort, as well as the discrimination that they experienced in the military and workforce.

### Activity

Review the sources below and answer the associated questions:

**Primary Source: WAC Poster**



Poster, 1940. New York State Museum, H-1976.31.3

What does "W.A.C." stand for? \_\_\_\_\_

In all theaters of WWII, WACs contributed to the war effort by serving in noncombat positions. Even though WACs did not serve in combat roles, do you think these servicewomen ever faced dangerous conditions? Why or why not?

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How did the contributions of women during WWII advance the cause of gender equality in the United States?

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**Primary Source: Military Uniform- Tropical Worsted WAC Enlisted Uniform**

Meritorious Unit Commendation Patch- a gold embroidered laurel wreath on the lower right sleeve awarded for exceptional conduct and outstanding service in direct support of combat operations.

US Army Rank Insignia Patch- T-5 chevrons on the upper arm signifying Technical Corporal.

Honorable Service "Ruptured Duck" Patch- over the right pocket signifying honorable discharge of WWII servicemembers.

US and Signal Corps Brass Collar Disks- "crossed flags" pin on the left uniform coat collar signifying those responsible for military communication.



*Military Uniform. New York State Museum, H-1975.153.1 A-E*

What can this uniform and insignia tell us about the servicemember who it belonged to?

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**Secondary Source: A New York Minute in History Podcast- *Margaret Hastings, the “Shangri-La WAC”***



Listen here: <https://wamcpodcasts.org/a-new-york-minute-in-history/>

Margaret Hastings, the “Shangri-La WAC”. *A New York Minute in History*. podcast episode.

Why was Corporal Margaret Hastings in New Guinea in 1945?

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What conditions did the crash survivors face in the remote region of New Guinea?

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What role did the US Army 1st Filipino Regiment volunteers play in the rescue?

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What technological advancement assisted in the rescue of the crash survivors?

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# Additional Resources

- Primary Source newspaper media coverage



Hastings, Margaret. "Faced Death in 'Paradise'" Detroit Times. July 24, 1945. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

[https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/data/batches/mimtpc\\_inkster\\_ver01/data/sn88063294/00340588939/1945072401/1034.pdf](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/data/batches/mimtpc_inkster_ver01/data/sn88063294/00340588939/1945072401/1034.pdf) (left)

St. George, Ozzie. "Rescue from Shangri-La." *YANK The Army Weekly* 4, no. 9, August 17, 1945. <https://archive.org/details/1945-08-17YankMagazine-nsia/page/n5/mode/1up>. (middle)

Hastings, Margaret. "A Jovial Giant Paratroop Head." *Detroit Evening Times*. (Detroit, Mich), August 08, 1945. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88063294/1945-08-08/ed-1/seq-11/> (right)

- To learn more about the CG-4 Waco Glider visit the Air Mobility Command Museum website: <https://amcmuseum.org/at-the-museum/aircraft/cg-4a/>
- To learn more about Mitchell Zuckoff author of the book *Lost in Shangri-La* visit: <https://www.mitchellzuckoff.com/lostinshangrila> . Website includes video footage of the rescue effort taken in 1945 by filmmaker Alexander Cann.
- The November 1945 Volume XLVII of *The Readers Digest* condensed permanent booklet of "A WAC in Shangri-La" written by Corporal Margaret Hastings in collaboration with Inez Robb can be found at the New York State Library. <https://www.nysl.nysed.gov/>