

Joan Kennedy and the British Columbia Women's Service Corps

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War may not be, for us, a pressing issue. While women of Nicaragua, Namibia, Iran, and Ireland have war as a constant companion, in Canada we are able to relegate it to the category of "not important at this time." But we cannot ignore it to the extent we have done in the recent past. A feminist model for the development of society must include war. To lament the numbers of women trapped by wars, not of their own making, and yet continue to leave the sphere of war to men is hypocritical. We must, at the very least, try to develop some general agreement, as we have done on many other issues that affect women. Should women enter the military arena on the same terms as men? Should women work to be equally represented in such fields as nuclear physics and chemical warfare testing? Should women boycott the military altogether? Should women study war to undermine specious military propaganda? Do we oppose war, or do we actively promote peace? If we choose to promote peace, should we consider *all* war unjustified, regardless of the circumstances? Where do we stand on anything to do with war? War is not a male preserve. Whether we are for armed combat side by side with men, or for the active promotion of peace, war is our business. As the Canadian Women's Army Corps proclaimed, "This is Our Battle, Too."

Whatever agreement we have on war seems to go no further than ridiculing our involvement with it in the past. Some of us scoff at our mothers for falling for male-created wartime propaganda; some of us are ashamed that our relatives proudly marched off to serve the Allied Forces as cooks, clerks, and nurses. Our attitude has led to the neglect of war in women's history. What little has been written on the Corps has focused on "the good old days" (CWAC memoirs), or on the extent to which women were relegated to positions subject to male control. We have yet to examine the relevance of the CWAC for women today from a critical and *positive* approach. Surely, its

relevance goes beyond holding it up as yet another example of the subordination of women.

It is easy to dismiss the CWAC as a "first" for women, because it was not anything of the kind. It was, for the most part, a perpetuation of the old--women's work for women's wages according to men's rules--but that should not obscure what the women did achieve. The CWACs did convince the Canadian public, government, and military authorities that women need not sit at home waiting for their men to return, dead or alive. They overcame the initial unpopularity of women doing "men's work," an attitude harboured by both sexes. And they did form a consensus on woman's role in times of war.

Whether we criticize the CWAC for not going far enough (not engaging in active combat) or for going too far (supporting the destruction of war), the relevance of the CWAC's story lies not in its actions, but in its attitudes. While we ask ourselves "what does war mean to women and how does it affect us?" the CWACs asked themselves "what do women mean to war and how can we affect it?"

The British Columbia Women's Service Corps (BCWSC), a group of women dedicated to service, patriotism, military discipline, and support of the Second World War, struggled to form the Canadian Women's Army Corps. Since I favour the active promotion of peace, I cannot admire the BCWSC. Nor can I bring myself to strongly criticize them; they held their unpopular aims with such conviction of purpose, and worked so hard to see those aims achieved, that part of me cannot help but empathize with them. Because their beliefs and goals differ so radically from my own, I have no intention of portraying the BCWSC as a shining example for women today. My intention is only to illustrate the persistence that ultimately brought them success, and to describe how these women came to assume an active role in the strongest of male preserves--the military.

The story of the BCWSC cannot be told as a simple tale of women fighting for their due, nor do I find it possible to offer an elaborate theory on its place in women's history. The story of the BCWSC must simply stand on its own. This essay is organized chronologically, with a few exceptions. Several quotes from BCWSC records have been included in an attempt to capture the "personality" of the Corps. Essentially, this essay charts the development of the BCWSC from its first days as a small, disorganized group through its growth to a large organization with contacts across the country, an invaluable grasp of pragmatism, and an aggressively persistent manner which ultimately brought it success.

The Munich Crisis of 1938 warned of imminent war. And so the world made ready. Women of Britain, still with the memory of World War One too fresh in their minds, were quick in organizing for the next onslaught. There they formed the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), an officially recognized body of women war-workers, whose main task was to carry out support trades and services to free men for active duty. The ATS was granted Royal Warrant on September 9, 1939.¹

Barely one month later, Victoria, BC, had its own counterpart, seeking similar recognition from the government of Canada. On October 5, 1938, ten

women formed what was to become the BC Women's Service Corps (BCWSC), under its original name, the Women's Auxiliary Driver's Club. It was the first service corps organized in Canada. Despite the "Auxiliary" in its name, the founding members unanimously decided that their club "was definitely to be a military organization."² Though a long three years stood between the club and the Canadian Women's Army Corps, the executive assumed military titles. The President, Mrs. C.H. Rayment, was "Captain" Rayment; Mrs. G.S. Hethy and Miss A. Hooper were listed as "Lieutenants." Miss Marjorie E. Brown accepted the ordinary title of Secretary-Treasurer, and devoid of any title at all were the founding members: Miss E.L. Edwards, Mrs. H.A. Tomalin, Miss I.K. Carey, Miss K. Greer, Miss J. MacLennan, and Mrs. Norman R. (Joan B.) Kennedy. Kennedy who was to become the Corps's President and Provincial Leader, eventually became the head of the Canadian Women's Army Corps.

In retrospect, the BCWSC's initial aim seems surprisingly limited. Its stated goals were to purchase an ambulance, and to have one member on ambulance duty for each week of the year. To fully facilitate this service, they would obtain First Aid certificates and learn basic motor mechanics. Even at this first meeting, however, a bigger objective was discussed, for the women also planned marching drill and even revolver shooting. Their larger, unspoken aim was to become the official Canadian version of Britain's ATS. To help them to this goal, Mrs. Tomalin was delegated to write to Mrs. Lay of the War Office in England for information on clubs similar to their own.

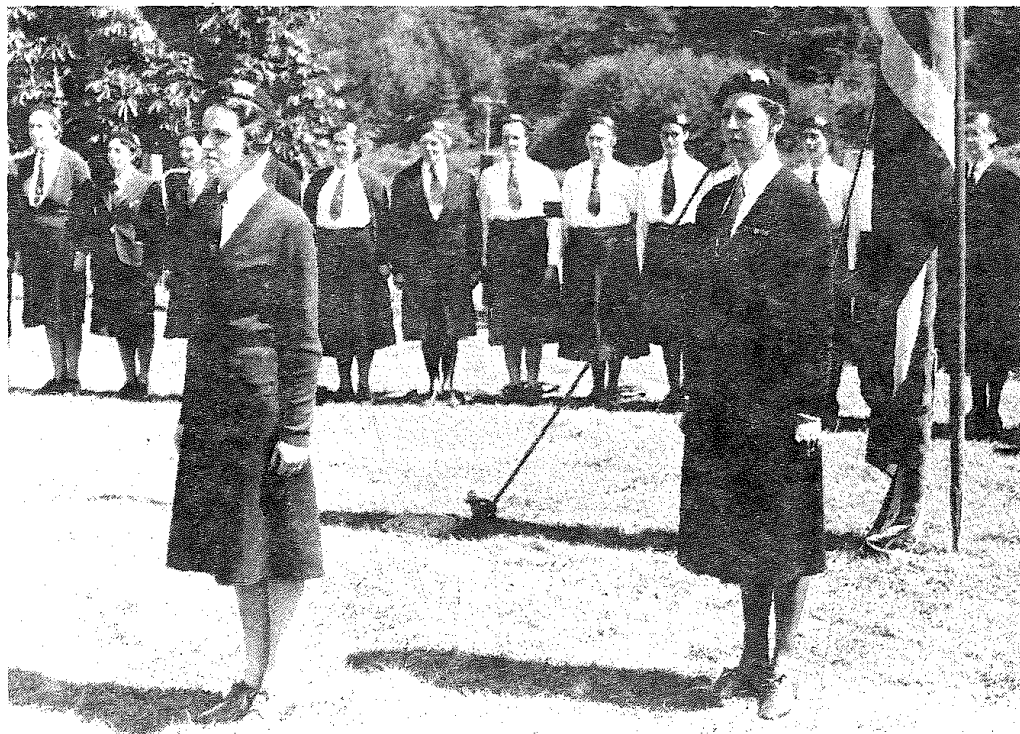
It is difficult to uncover the sources of motivation for the formation of such a club. It was, after all, 1938 in Victoria—a year away from the Declaration of War, and geographically far removed from the threatened action. Even the perceived "threat" of Japanese attacks on the British Columbia coast was three years away; Pearl Harbor and the fear of the Japanese that led to their internment did not occur until 1941. Moreover, the Depression of the 1930s was still very much in evidence. What turned these women's minds to military drill and revolver shooting?

It is possible to offer only some hypothetical suggestions. First, most of these women did not have to contend with the awesome economic problems of the times; of the ten founding members, at least six had addresses in Uplands, the suburb reserved for Victoria's wealthy.³ None of them seemed to hold paying jobs; seven of the ten listed their occupation as "housewife," and three listed their occupation as "spinster."⁴ Second, their time was not consumed by child-rearing; none of the women had school-age children, as this was a condition of membership. Third, several of them had close relatives who had been active in the military, some having fought in World War One. Perhaps because all of the women were old enough to remember World War One, they did not consider war to be outside their jurisdiction. Finally, as their surnames indicate, they were of British background, and most had close ties with England. Kennedy, for example, was born and raised there. This may have created a strong sense of patriotism, as well as provided them with precedents of women working in the war effort. Not only the ATS of World War Two offered inspiration; British women to a greater extent than Canadian women had also done similar work in the First World War.



PABC #96262

Founding members of the BCWSC pose on the steps of the Legislative Buildings after registering as per Societies Act, 1938. Joan B. Kennedy is at far left; first president, Mrs. C.H. Rayment is front row, centre.



PABC #96263

Kennedy, Provincial Commandant, and MacLennan, Commandant of HQ Division, inspect the Victoria detachment.

The founders of the BCWSC did not seem to have a shred of doubt about whether or not World War Two was justified. Nowhere in their records did I find reference to Hitler or the Axis nations, or even to the "legitimate" nature of the war. Their loyalties to King and country defined their participation. While it is possible that they were motivated by a desire to prove that women had a role to play in the struggles of Canada, this certainly was not a primary cause. Their perception of woman's role in time of war was that, while women should do much more than knit, they should stop short of combat duty. They saw themselves as support workers only; their primary objective was to serve their men—not to improve their own representation in a male institution. In short, they were out to fight the Nazis, not the patriarchy. They wanted the Allies to win the war; they were not much interested in winning new status for women.

Their plans for an ambulance were quickly pushed aside in favour of the grander goal. Because they wanted official recognition as Canada's first auxiliary unit, they eagerly assumed training to prove their worthiness. By mid-November, they had taken three lectures in first aid, one lesson in revolver shooting, found a Sergeant Woods of Work Point Barracks to give them a three-month course in map-reading, and changed their name to the more auspicious Auxiliary Canadian Motor Club.⁵ Having received a prospectus from the London War Office, which they adapted to suit Canadian conditions, they sent it off to the Department of National Defence in December of 1938. They asked that an "Auxiliary Militia Service of Canada" be formed, and that their club be recognized as its first unit, "in connection with coastal defense."⁶ Not surprisingly, their proposal was rejected, on the basis that the funds such an Auxiliary would require were more urgently needed for other military concerns. Such rejection was to come often in the next three years, but the women were not easily discouraged.

By January 1939, the founding members were sufficiently confident to open their doors to public membership. Women of Victoria were invited to attend an information meeting on the "Auxiliary Militia Service of Canada" (the group having again changed its name, this time to that proposed to the Department of National Defence). Secretary Brown, now known as "Second Ensign," outlined the club's aims and objectives and listed the strict conditions of acceptance. All members had to be: (1) British subjects, (2) physically fit, (3) between the ages of 21 and 45 (this was later changed to 18 and over 45 with approval of the Board), (4) if married, no ties (separated, husbands overseas, no young children, *etc.*), (5) possess a driver's license; and (6) able to purchase a First Aid book and kit. Members also had to pass the two-month probationary period and pay a two dollar membership fee. These conditions make clear that this was no ordinary club; only members capable of active service were considered for membership. Later, with the actual outbreak of war, conditions of acceptance became even more rigorous.

Those who were interested were invited to register on January 24. Sixty-one women signed up for a club with yet another name: the "Women's Service Club." Six days later, when they drew up their constitution, the prefix "Victoria" was added. The constitution also called the founding members by

new military titles: Rayment was Commandant, and the three executive members were Ensigns. The club now set about more constructive work.

The minutes of February 1939 record the very beginning of "detachments": Women's Service Clubs in communities other than Victoria. Kennedy reported that she had spoken with Mrs. K.M. Alder of Vancouver, presumably a personal friend, to discuss the possibility of forming a club in that city. Kennedy and two fellow officers, Hooper and MacLennan, also spoke to Miss N.C. Denny of Duncan about forming a detachment there. And the Victoria Women's Service Club received a letter from Florence Mitchell, National Regent of the IODE, requesting information; she was interested in starting a similar club in Peterborough, Ontario.⁷ It may be assumed that Kennedy was the driving force behind these energetic attempts at expansion, for later that month, she was to win Rayment's position. The minutes record Rayment's reason for resignation:

After a general discussion concerning the adverse publicity given this club, due to the fact that Rayment and Hethey are rifle shots and crediting them with an ulterior motive for starting this organization, Rayment tendered her resignation as President.... This was accepted with the feeling that it was in the best interests of the club, and Kennedy was elected by acclamation to fill Rayment's position as President.⁸

Kennedy assumed her new post enthusiastically. Any organizations formed in the province with the help of the Victoria club were to become affiliates under Victoria's direction. Thus, in April, the group changed its name once again, to the BC Women's Service Club, and the original club in Victoria became "HQ Division." One year later, the word "Club" became "Corps"; finally, this name stuck.

Though no detachments were as yet officially established, they were clearly on the way, and the founding members were determined to maintain other groups under their own control. This was to result in tension between Victoria and Vancouver later in the year. Kathleen Alder, who led the BCWSC's first detachment in Vancouver, was not made fully aware of Victoria's control when her detachment was established on April 27, 1939.⁹ Problems were not to surface though, until that branch opened for membership in May.

Meanwhile, Victoria was busy consolidating its support and starting to train its new members. The officers wrote to Victoria service clubs, seeking formal support for the BCWSC's objectives. By the end of April, they had gained encouraging words from every organization which they contacted, including the Victoria Unit of the Army and Navy Veterans of Canada, the British Empire Service League and Pro Patricia Branch of the Canadian Legion, the British Imperial Comrades Association, Vancouver Island United Service Institution, St. John's Ambulance, the BC Division of the Red Cross, and the Victoria Chapter of the IODE.¹⁰ An emphasis on veterans' organizations is not surprising; the support of the military old-boys network would be invaluable. Veterans' clubs not only aided the BCWSC with meeting rooms and financial donations, but also provided instructors for drill and

occasionally inspected parades and spoke to general meetings. It is also likely that they aided the BCWSC in obtaining cooperation from the active military establishment.

Kennedy and the executive were also pragmatic in their choice of Honourary Officers. Mrs. Eric W. Hamber, wife of the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia, accepted the role of Honourary President. Mrs. W.C. Nichol, whose husband had been Lieutenant-Governor from 1921 to 1926, and Mrs. R.W. Mayhew, wife of a Liberal Member of Parliament, acted as patrons. These women helped the Corps to gain favourable support in the community, and offered significant financial assistance. Mr. Mayhew was to be particularly useful as their Ottawa contact. Later added to the list of Honourary Officers was the Rt. Rev. Bishop H.E. Sexton, as Honourary Chaplain. Mrs. Alan B. (Frances) Morkill, Provincial Guide Commissioner, was also an early patron of the Corps, but she soon became instead an active member of the executive.

Training of the Corps members was well under way early in 1939. Kennedy believed that formal, militaristic training and drill were essential in achieving disciplined, prepared service workers. In a letter to Mrs. Hamber, she cited the problems faced by British service workers in the First World War, when military discipline had to be learned at the same time as the daily tasks were being carried out. "Unpreparedness," she wrote, "with its inefficiency and waste of time would undoubtedly be inexcusable in any future crises."¹¹ Military discipline is evident in the records of the general meetings, of which the following is a typical example: "8:00 fall in; 20 minute drill; 8:20 roll call; 8:30 lectures - Drill: Tomalin; Motor Regulations: Kennedy; Map Reading: Brown [these groups would rotate each half hour, every woman thereby receiving each lecture]; 10:00 salute the flag, dismissals."¹² Training was by no means restricted to the three areas mentioned above. First aid certificates were obtained through St. John's Ambulance; basic motor mechanics was taught under the direction of Begg Motors (and later the Ford Motor Co.), and significant training in other fields was given by officers of Military District No. 11 (MD11) in Victoria.

By May of 1939, the BCWSC was confident of MD11's cooperation and support. This is illustrated by three requests they made in that month alone: for the use of National Defence property for their summer Field Day, for an inspection of parade by MD11 officers, and for permission to participate in the parade for the upcoming Royal Visit. Each request was granted.

Confidence was also inspired by recent events in Vancouver, where Alder's detachment had just opened to public membership. The *Province* ran this story:

If Canada were to go to war tomorrow there should be no fear in the hearts of the male population...as to how things are going to be carried on at home--if the enthusiasm displayed by the 426 women who registered at the Beatty St. drill hall Friday night for home defence training is any indication. Before 8pm they were packed at the entrance of the old drill hall and when the doors opened, swarmed into the building

to add their names to the membership list of the newly-formed Vancouver detachment of the BCWSC.¹³

About 250 of these women were enrolled as active members; the remainder were left on a reserve list because the available facilities were inadequate to train so many women.



PABC #96264

A new recruit to Company B learns basic motor mechanics from an officer of MD11, Victoria.

At this point, with the new detachment beginning actual operation, the division of power began to create problems. Late in June, Alder met with the Victoria executive to obtain clarification on the relationships between the Vancouver group and Victoria HQ. Kennedy, it seems, was frustrated with what she saw as a petty power struggle. She requested that the following be duly recorded in the minutes:

The object of starting the BCWSC was to make women throughout Canada conscious of the need for some auxiliary service which would be a useful training in citizenship and invaluable in the event of emergency. The idea originated with this Board of Directors, and we have pledged ourselves to work tirelessly, selflessly, and thanklessly--if you will--to achieve government recognition for a Women's Auxiliary Unit.

Only by the strength that comes from unity can we hope to reach our goal...corps here, a service club there, a branch somewhere else means working alone we are helpless, but a united force to contend with means recognition and authorization.

Headquarters remains solely at the point of centralization, and I speak for the Directors when I say, "This idea does not exist for a club in Vancouver, Alberni, or even in Victoria; it is an appeal to the women of BC to unite for a purpose and I urge you to let the beginning we made here in Victoria have no thought of personality or rivalry to obscure our aims."¹⁴

Kennedy was not about to let rivalry stand in her way--incorrectly assuming that her lecture had solved the problem, she busily carried on with other concerns--expansion and recognition.

Three more detachments were formed in July, 1939, at Port Moody, New Westminster, and Cowichan (Duncan), headed by Mrs. R. Gee, Mrs. Beth Curry, and Miss N.C. Denny, respectively. Port Moody and New Westminster opened with approximately sixty members each, and Victoria now claimed 130 members in its own detachment.

Kennedy and her fellow officers, now representing over five hundred women, met with the Minister of National Defence, Ian Mackenzie, in Vancouver in mid-July. They requested that the BCWSC be recognized as the official auxiliary defence force. Kennedy pointed out that the reason the Corps sought national authorization was "not that it yearns to parade in uniform...but that it requires the instruction and equipment which would become available to it through a connection with the militia."¹⁵ Despite their carefully prepared speeches on the value of services, the training already taken, Dominion interest, and even claims that women of British Columbia were looking "to their own Minister of National Defence for help"¹⁶--Mackenzie could do little more than approve of their efforts and take the issue to the Defence Council in Ottawa. Once again the BCWSC's efforts were in vain.

It should be emphasized that while the upper echelons of the Canadian military administration refused to recognize the BCWSC or even to offer assistance with facilities and training, officers of MD11 were extremely cooperative. The Officer Commanding, for example, not only allowed the Corps to use Fort Rodd Hill (Defence property near Victoria), but also provided military equipment to ensure that the August 20th Field Day was a success. Later, they were permitted to use the drill hall of the Bay Street Armories, as well as its swimming pool, tennis courts, and mess hall. Detachments were also to receive similar help; the Officer Commanding MD11, who allowed them the use of drill halls in Vancouver, New Westminster, Vernon, and Prince Rupert, also detailed officers and NCOs to assist with lectures and instruction in drill.¹⁷ Detachments in towns without military units found veterans to act as instructors, and generally used church or community halls for drill. Though the New Westminster detachment was barred access to their Armory after the outbreak of war, because Ottawa had decreed that the New Westminster Armory was to be used only by military men, the Victoria Corps continued to use the Bay Street Armories as they always had done.

MD11 also helped the Victoria group with training in such areas as anti-gas methods, radio and signalling, code deciphering, army cooking, and

officer training. Mrs. Rayment's skill with a rifle, which had earlier brought the Corps some bad publicity, was honoured by MD11; Rayment was invited to be an unofficial representative of that District to the military marksmen's Dominion Meet in Ottawa in August, 1939.

Brigadier Stewart was invaluable on several occasions, helping the Corps to draft proposals for Ottawa, giving advice on military matters, and acting as a supportive liaison. Colonel Hood helped to organize the BCWSC along the lines of the British ATS and according to rules of military administration. This new structure came into effect in the summer of 1939. It divided operations into two streams, one dealing with troops and training (Adjutant-General), the other with administrative matters (Quartermaster-General). These two posts were under the direction of Chief Commandant Kennedy. The members were then divided into four companies, which allowed for more specialized and efficient training: Company A - Clerical, studied army correspondence and bookkeeping, army rules and procedures, ciphers and codes, typing and branch work; Company B - Motor Transport, took instruction in driving, mechanics, map-reading, signals, and radio; Company C - First Aid, earned St. John's certificates and studied stretcher drill, hygiene and sanitation, and medical supplies and bandages; Company D - Commissariat, trained in dietetics, camp cooking, ordering and dispensing supplies, canteen work and camp orderly work. There was also a fifth "company" for new recruits, who had to pass their probationary period before being absorbed into an actual company.

With this regimented organization came uniforms of navy blue skirts and ties, and white shirts. Members bought their own uniforms, but were permitted to wear them only at meetings or on duty. The officers distinguished themselves from the other ranks with sweaters, berets, and armbands, which all members were to wear at a later date. Records of attendance, punctuality and proficiency in training were strictly maintained. Badges were awarded for good performance.

The Declaration of War in September, 1939, had little effect on the operations of the BCWSC. There is no evidence of a special meeting nor any change of plans--the outbreak of war, in fact, is not even mentioned in their records. Having seen war coming, and having spent months preparing for it, its actual occurrence did not catch them off-guard. They continued training, organizing detachments, and seeking recognition.

The war did mean, however, that they had more detachments to organize. Women across the province felt a greater need to be of service once war had actually been declared. By the time the Victoria detachment held its first annual meeting in January 1940, it could report on new detachments in Port Alberni, led by Mrs. M. Hamilton; in Vernon, led by Mrs. B.J. McGusty; in Kelowna, led by Miss M. Elmore; in Courtenay, led by Mrs. L. Clive; and in Prince Rupert, led by Mrs. E. Miller. Victoria's own membership had grown to 160, bringing the provincial total close to seven hundred.¹⁸

Due to the costs of organizing and providing training materials to detachments spread ever-farther across the province, Victoria HQ decided to

charge its affiliates ten percent of their membership fees. Most groups had no hesitation in agreeing to this; for Vancouver, however, it proved to be one more example of the control Victoria held over them. It culminated in Alder's resignation as that detachment's president, and her replacement by Mrs. Bell-Irving. This, unfortunately, did not effect much improvement. Kennedy, MacLennan, Graham, and Rayment went to Vancouver early in December, 1939, to discuss the problems. On their return, MacLennan reported that nothing had been achieved. On the contrary,

Miss MacLennan said she had interpreted Vancouver's attitude as being definitely antagonistic towards Victoria, that they either would not, or could not, see why a Headquarters Division was necessary, and in consequence had point-blank refused to discuss either the amendments to our By-Laws for detachments, or the points in them to which they took exception. They had instead presented to Victoria their plan for reorganization of the Club and implied by their attitude that they had no intention of meeting with us on any grounds other than those suggested by their plan.¹⁹

It was at this point that E. Frances Morkill, BC Provincial Guide Commissioner and one of the patrons, was asked to join the executive as Chief Liaison Officer for Detachments. Having accepted, she assumed the responsibility of easing tensions between Victoria and Vancouver. Though Bell-Irving, like Alder, was also to resign, and the problems never completely disappeared, they vastly improved with Morkill's mediation and the appointment of Mrs. Madeline Nation as the new President.

Kennedy, thus relieved of having to deal with Vancouver, turned her full attention to war work. Most of the BCWSC's efforts focused on auxiliary services; some detachments established canteens for soldiers stationed in their areas, some entertained troops, and all were later involved in the Bundles for Britain campaign which started in February, 1941. The Bundles Caravan was one of the most popular services of the BCWSC; a truck and trailer, donated to the Corps by an anonymous American woman, travelled all over the province collecting clothes and blankets for British air-raid victims. Literally thousands of pounds were collected and packaged off to England. The BCWSC also supplied "comforts" for the ATS in Britain; seeing that so many auxiliaries were already aiding soldiers, sailors, and air-men, they turned their attention to the neglected support workers.

Aside from this auxiliary work, the BCWSC became increasingly involved with the work of MD11, for now the District began to ask for favours in return. Victoria's detachment had been working without pay at MD11 as clerks, drivers, and telephone operators since September, 1939. The Vancouver detachment, under its new leader, Nation, was doing clerical work for the military stationed in Burnaby. New Westminster also had members working as stenographers in the offices of the Westminster Regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel C.J. Loat stated that "the work that these young ladies are doing in these busy days of mobilization is greatly appreciated by all

members of the Westminster Regiment." And, he added, "Their work is done voluntarily and at no cost to the government."²⁰

While the military administration in Ottawa was fully aware that voluntary work was being done by women, they were no closer to granting official recognition. Behind closed doors, politicians, bureaucrats, and the military studied and discussed the matter. While they could see definite advantages to employing women, they hesitated: should they be employed as civilians or military personnel? What changes might be required to military law and regulations? Was the public ready for such a step? Publicly, they said little. The BCWSC's only encouragement came from a few vocally supportive members of the public and from MD11 which continued to supply instructors and facilities.

Kennedy and the Corps were becoming increasingly impatient. Early in 1940, Kennedy gave her position as Victoria Detachment President to MacLennan. She retained her post as provincial Chief Commandant, and devoted more of her time to fighting for recognition. In April, 1940, she sought the advice of Lieutenant-Governor Hamber, the Navy and Air Commodores, Member of Parliament Mayhew, and Brigadier Stockwell, about whether sending a delegation to Ottawa would be a wise decision. It appears that she was encouraged with the plan, for when she reported on these interviews at the next executive meeting, all members, with the exception of Morkill, were in favour of sending representatives to Ottawa.²¹ As Detachment Liaison Officer, Morkill felt that, with problems of dissension continuing in Vancouver, it was not the right time to draw attention to the Corps. Mrs. Tomalin, speaking in favour of the delegation, stated that "we should try to register at Ottawa before the other organization."²²

This "other" organization was the Canadian Women's Territorial Corps (CWTC), another service club that had sprung up after the start of the war. The CWTC had the BCWSC worried; not only was it possible that the CWTC could overshadow their own efforts, but that club was also siphoning off the "good" members of the BCWSC from the troubled Vancouver detachment.²³ Thus, the rivalry that had threatened the BCWSC's success since the beginning of tensions in Vancouver was now compounded by the rival CWTC. The minutes even refer to this other group as "the opposition." It is all too obvious that the BCWSC prided itself on being the first service club in the country and felt that when recognition was finally granted, the credit should be its own. Publicly, of course, they were careful never to criticize groups working toward the same goal, but privately they expressed aggressive opposition.

And so off to Ottawa. Canada's first service corps would also be the first to make a direct appeal for recognition. Money was raised from veterans' clubs, the patrons, and detachments. At the meeting of May 20th, Kennedy read a letter from Mayhew in Ottawa, which stated that he would cable soon to confirm that the necessary meetings had been made. They did not wait for Mayhew's cable; they decided that Kennedy would leave for Ottawa the very next night. They immediately sent a telegram to Mayhew informing him of this, and asking him to "arrange appointments."²⁴

Thus, the delegation of one arrived at the capital. She had to wire home for permission to stay longer than expected because appointments were harder to secure than she had expected. This first delegation could not be described as a resounding success. On her return home in the middle of June, Kennedy reported that the BC Liberal MPs (Mayhew and associates) had given their full support, but that the death of the Minister of National Defence, Norman Rogers, on June 10th had been a blow to their cause, and that she expected the matter to be left in abeyance for the time being.

The Corps was not interested in abeyances. At the same meeting, they decided to inquire about the possibility of affiliating with the British ATS and serving overseas. Ottawa was later to respond that ATS recruits were acceptable and in demand. However, travel of BCWSC members to Britain was impossible due to an Order in Council of June 4, 1940. This stated that, unless people were members of the Armed Forces or Public Service, they were forbidden to leave Canada with the intention of entering the War Zone of the British Isles.²⁵

Interest in war service continued to grow across the country. The BCWSC received a letter from a Mrs. Lyons of Edmonton, who wanted to start her own Corps there. The BCWSC sent her their constitution and proposed she use the name of Alberta Women's Service Corps. The AWSC, which was established in September, 1940, spread to other parts of the province. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, followed suit in December of that year; Peterborough was already well established, and Halifax started the Nova Scotia Women's Service Corps in November, 1940, shortly after Kennedy's visit to that city. These are only the groups which had formed with the assistance of the BCWSC; several others had already been formed and the numbers constantly grew.

In British Columbia, Penticton's detachment started in August, 1940, under Mrs. G.A. Woodward. Much later, in March, 1941, detachments were established in Chilliwack and Sardis, and additional companies were founded in Revelstoke and Terrace. Membership applications in Victoria alone were running between forty and sixty per month by the summer of 1940; many of these women had to be turned away or put on a waiting list.

Despite the increasing number of trained women and the decreasing manpower available for military and essential services, Ottawa was no closer to allowing women to take men's place on the home front. The BCWSC had heard of no advancements since Rogers' death in June so by July, Kennedy was struggling for recognition once again. The Corps's new strategy was to offer its services in helping with the organization of "another branch to be trained as a land army"²⁶--Women's Army Corps. The BCWSC was willing to forego pay and allowances while being trained, but it expected regular rates of pay if it was called out on service. This was a significant departure from previous attempts for recognition, in which it requested to be authorized as the official auxiliary. Now it sought full-fledged military status.

Kennedy consulted with Brigadier Stockwell, Commodores Brodeur and Godfrey, Commissioner Parsons, and Mr. Mayhew, all of whom advised that the BCWSC "stick to the point, repeat the request for recognition, and

not bring up any new issues."²⁷ In all probability, she would have heeded their advice (at least temporarily), had she not made an infuriating discovery one month after meeting with the men. In mid-September, 1940, the new Minister of National Defence, Colonel J.L. Ralston, visited Vancouver where Kennedy obtained an interview. She found that, in spite of all the efforts they had made for recognition, Ralston had never heard of the BCWSC!

The Corps called an emergency meeting of all detachment presidents. They met in Vancouver on September 22, and unanimously voted "to send a delegation to Ottawa, both Victoria and Vancouver to be represented, this delegation to contact the heads of all similar women's organizations across Canada to get their support."²⁸ Now that they sought the formation of an army corps for women, rather than recognition for their own BCWSC, other service clubs became allies instead of opposers. The money was to be raised from one dollar contributions from every BCWSC member in the province, now over 1200 women. Madeline Nation of Vancouver was to accompany Kennedy on the cross-Canada trip, during which they would meet as many women's service groups and Officers Commanding Military Districts as possible. At Ottawa, besides presenting a detailed brief and eager argument to government and military officials, they would also publicize their cause and bolster their own patriotism by a meeting with HRH Princess Alice, former Commander-in-Chief of the Women's Transport Service in Britain.

By early October, Lieutenant-Governor Hamber reported that he had secured an audience for the delegates with Princess Alice, and Ministry of National Defence officials. Mr. Mayhew was once again making appointments, and Kennedy had arranged a Victoria meeting with Adjutant-General Browne of Ottawa. He encouraged her to carry out her planned trip East, claiming that it might speed the process along. (There is evidence to suggest, however, that Browne was, in part, responsible for the lack of progress made so far.²⁹)

Kennedy and Nation set off for Ottawa on October 10, 1940, to assess the level of preparedness and eagerness to serve. They met with representatives of virtually every women's service club in the country, who in turn represented an estimated 6700 women.³⁰ And they met with Officers Commanding (Army) Districts to gauge the extent to which women were needed in specific areas of service. They also met with public figures to garner greater publicity and increase public pressure. Nation, who recorded the trip, remembered:

We worked very hard on that trip--Joan had brought a small typewriter and we spent our evenings working on the brief to put before the Minister. She had the foresight to write to Chief Commander ATS Dame Helen Gwyn-Vaughan and obtain from her the Rules and Regulations governing the ATS. These had to be adjusted to Canadian conditions, and were very detailed, containing proposed pay, age limits, chain of command, leave, uniforms, and all the other things which go into the establishment of an Army Corps.³¹

On the first of November, the two wrote to their Victoria executive; their letter contained more expressions of enthusiasm over their meeting with

Princess Alice than it told of actual progress in the campaign for a women's army corps. Worried about expenses and the delay in Halifax (presumably to consolidate the WSC in that city), the BCWSC sent the following cable to Kennedy on November 4th:

YOUR LETTER FIRST NOVEMBER RECEIVED
EXECUTIVE HELD FINANCIAL STATEMENT
SHOWS NO FUNDS AVAILABLE SUGGEST
YOU FINISH BUSINESS AT ONCE AND
RETURN STOP MAKING ALLOWANCES FOR
CONDITIONS EXPENSES SEEM EXCESSIVE
FOR 26 DAYS HAS ANYTHING BEEN
DEFINITELY ACCOMPLISHED...³²

Kennedy hurriedly replied more fully explaining her progress and seeking permission to remain in Ottawa. The executive responded with this cable on November 9th:

LAST LETTERS HAVE CLARIFIED SITUATION
VERY PLEASED YOU ARE MAKING
NECESSARY CONTACTS IN OTTAWA ASKING
VANCOUVER TO WIRE YOU TWO HUNDRED
CONSIDER BOTH SHOULD STAY BUT THIS
SUM MUST COVER RETURN EXPENSES...³³

Kennedy remained in Ottawa until the end of the month; Nation returned to Vancouver by November 17, no doubt to ease the strain on expenses. At the meeting of December 3rd, Kennedy presented her report to the Victoria executive. This report was summarized in Inter-Office Communication No. 14--a confidential report sent to detachment presidents. Briefly, IOC 14 states that Nation and Kennedy's presentation had received "most serious consideration by all Government authorities" and that Ralston "intends to discuss the matter very thoroughly with British authorities while he is in England with a view to ascertaining how women's groups there are organized...and how effective a contribution they are making." The BCWSC's proposed form of organization for a corps (based on the ATS) was carefully considered, and it was thought that much of it could be adopted if such a corps were established in Canada. IOC 14 also stated that HQ felt this to be a reasonable way of dealing with the question, as it was naturally assumed that "details of policy and administration would be discussed with the British authorities prior to any decision being made by the Canadian government." The communication goes on to say that the cooperation of women's volunteer groups and District Officers across the country

proved invaluable factors in presenting the case to the Government. Your delegates were able to point out exactly where and how the use of women could be employed...advantageously to all branches of the Canadian Active Service forces...The results of this survey [the first of its kind] both from the standpoint of women's organizations and from the Military authorities, proved conclusively the extent to which our undertaking has developed.³⁴

Finally, the communication advised that all detachments quietly await the

return of Ralston, and refer all enquiries to HQ until ordered otherwise.

Waiting for Ralston proved to be a long haul. The BCWSC continued as they had before, working and training, and the executive continued, though quietly, to exert pressure for the formation of a women's corps. They were aided in this by contacts they had made across the country during the journey to Ottawa. Prominent Canadian women actively supported the idea of an army corps for women. Those contacted by the BCWSC included Thérèse Casgrain and Nellie McClung. McClung wrote from Lantern Lane:

My Dear Mrs. Kennedy:

I have written the letter to Mr. King, and I feel sure there will be agreement all along the line.

This morning I heard over the radio, Greek women shovel snow in the mountain passes and carry supplies on their backs to their men. Every paper seems to carry news items of women's activities in new lines...³⁵

Her letter to the Prime Minister demands that women be allowed an active role in the war effort:

We feel that women should be doing more than merely knitting socks and packing parcels for the soldiers...in every Province of the Dominion there are companies of women studying motor mechanics, cooking, nursing, clerical work and many other lines of national service. In BC alone there are 1700 women who have trained themselves at their own expense and are now ready to relieve men for active service....we have come to the place where women must be recognized and allowed to do everything in their power to assist Canada's war effort...I hope there will not be any tedious delay.³⁶

The elaborate nature of King's "no" in response to McClung's letter is quite surprising for the times. It did not succeed, however, in hiding the tedious delay McClung feared.

The whole question of women's work which is a phase of the larger question of the most effective utilization of our human resources is at present receiving careful consideration of the government. You will, I know, appreciate the vital importance of adopting the right procedure if costly errors are not to be made and the effectiveness of our war effort diminished.³⁷

In forwarding King's letter to Kennedy, McClung offered encouragement and another example of war work for women:

...Of course, he cannot say much, but I know it is being worked out. I feel impatient at the delays--women are greatly needed to look after the feeding of the men. The meals are too heavy and wasteful. Think of 1 pound of bread per man per day! The men have plenty of good food, but not balanced meals...³⁸

The 45-day delegation, bringing together the views of women and

Officers across the country, and culminating in a carefully prepared presentation to Ottawa and increased public pressure, was to be the last major endeavour of the BCWSC. While they impatiently waited for word from Ralston, the BCWSC was approached by the Canadian Red Cross Corps (CRCC), to amalgamate to form the CRCC, BC Division. Kennedy, at first, responded with exasperation; still hoping for Ralston to come through with an Army corps for women, she repeatedly told the CRCC, "We cannot make any decision at the present time."³⁹

Ralston had returned from England at the turn of the year, and was in fact working toward the formation of the Canadian Women's Army Corps. But the BCWSC, like the public, was not to be informed of progress. As January wore on into April, Kennedy became aware of the predicament she was in: Ralston had still said nothing, and the Red Cross was increasingly anxious to step up in British Columbia. The CRCC was fully prepared to establish itself without the BCWSC if the Corps chose not to cooperate--and the awaited news from Ralston might never come.

Kennedy decided that her Corps, while it waited for something that might never occur, could not run the risk of becoming completely overshadowed by the nation-wide CRCC. Though not completely happy with the prospect, Kennedy opened negotiations with the Red Cross.

A notable change in her attitude came the following month, May, 1941, when Adjutant-General Browne informed her that the whole question "of a women's Corps in Canada had been turned over to the War Services Department."⁴⁰ The government had passed the buck, and Kennedy was furious. Attempts to find out what War Services proposed to do were in vain. It was, for the BCWSC the last straw. The minutes of May 19, 1941, state that "...in view of the seriousness of the situation it would seem we should either have to consider disbanding or amalgamating with the Red Cross." A meeting to discuss amalgamation with detachment leaders was scheduled for the end of June. HQ, however, had already decided on their own position, and voted unanimously in favour of joining the CRCC.

Yet still they struggled for their initial goal. On May 30, they sent two undiplomatic telegrams to Ottawa. "Is Canada to remain the only Dominion in the Empire whose government refuses to establish a women's auxiliary corps as part of the Defence Force?"⁴¹ one demanded.

By mid-June, Mayhew had responded with a promise that Ralston would make an announcement soon, but the BCWSC no longer trusted such claims. Had they decided to wait just a few more days for Ralston's announcement, the BCWSC probably would have remained intact right up to the formation of the Canadian Women's Army Corps. But they did not wait any longer.

On June 16, the BCWSC executive informed the CRCC that amalgamation had been approved pending approval from detachments and the membership. At the general meeting of June 23, Kennedy argued persuasively in favour of amalgamation. She convinced the membership that the BCWSC was joining practically on their own terms, that their identity and personnel would be retained, and that

If we do not amalgamate, they will form their own corps anyway and it will be yet another organization operating in BC...As the senior corps in Canada, it might be advisable to give way rather than have another corps formed in the Province. Gradually, we would be asked to absorb the better members of the other various volunteer corps. The Red Cross is just as strict about membership as we are...⁴²

The members unanimously approved the amalgamation, provided that the BCWSC could retain the right to seek the establishment of a Canadian Women's Army Corps. A short four days later, this provision was retracted. It had been made redundant with the long-awaited statement. On June 27, 1941, the BCWSC learned along with the rest of the country, that the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) would, in fact, be formed.

How Kennedy must have felt upon hearing the announcement can only be guessed: whether a sense of triumph conquered the irksome irony of having so recently promised to join the CRCC cannot be known. It can only be stated that she was comforted with the knowledge that joining the CRCC did not prevent anyone from eventually joining the CWAC. And it certainly did not stop Joan Kennedy!

The final meeting of the BCWSC was held July 4, 1941. The minutes record nothing of particular interest. It appears, in fact, that everyone present wished to adjourn the meeting as quickly as possible. There are no statements of jobs well done or wishes of good luck for the next venture. They discussed instead the outstanding debts of the old detachments.

By the time the BCWSC formally amalgamated with the CRCC, the members regarded their new Corps as a step up. It was recognized that not all BCWSC women would have been able to join the CWAC, and the Red Cross thus offered similar work on a nation-wide scale. It was a much better option than simply disbanding the BCWSC and joining one of the dreaded "other" service corps.

The CRCC, BC Division, was organized very much like the BCWSC. Applicants chose either "Military" or "Red Cross" service, and within this division, opted for either the "mobile" or "non-mobile" category. Red Cross women were expected to serve in times of war or peace, whereas the military group concentrated directly on war-related tasks. Mobile women could expect to be moved to where they were most urgently needed. The women were further divided into four service areas, similar to the BCWSC's companies: office administration, transport, first aid, and food administration. Subject to the National Council was the Provincial Advisory Board; under this were the Local Advisory Boards.

Most of the Provincial staff were chosen from the executive of the BCWSC. Rayment and Morkill became Assistant Provincial Commandants; Morkill also sat on the Provincial Advisory Board; Miss Phyllis Lee-Wright (a relatively recent addition to the old BCWSC executive) was Adjutant; Officers Commanding of the four service areas included Miss Wiley and Mrs. Tomalin. Miss MacLennan, who had presided over the Victoria detachment of the BCWSC for the past year, became Officer Commanding Victoria

Detachment, CRCC. And needless to say, the title of Provincial Commandant, CRCC, BC Division, was duly handed to Kennedy. She held the post for one short month.

In Ottawa, Elizabeth Smellie, Matron-in-Chief of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, Nursing Service, had been named temporary Officer Commanding of the brand new CWAC, which had been stamped into official existence on August 13, 1941. Smellie's job was to help organize and select CWAC officers until a permanent Officer Commanding could be chosen. One of her first actions in this capacity was to visit MD11, Victoria, where she asked Joan Kennedy to become the very first officer appointed to the Canadian Women's Army Corps. Kennedy was officially appointed CWAC Staff Officer for MD11 on August 28th. Three months later, she had made it right to the top. On November 21, 1941, she became Senior Commander, taking the post to which Smellie had been temporarily assigned. Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy held this position until 1944, when she was replaced by Colonel Margaret Dunn who led the CWAC until it was disbanded in 1946.

Kennedy, aged 37 when she was first appointed to the CWAC, had been born Joan Fensham in Northwood, England, in 1904. At the start of the First World War, she lived in London, where she witnessed the Zeppelin raids. In 1925 her family moved to Victoria, where Joan studied business at St. Ann's Academy, worked as a telephone operator and accountant, and in 1929 married Norman R. Kennedy, a civil engineer. After the disbandment of the CWAC, Kennedy worked in the Department of Veterans' Affairs. She is now deceased.

Phyllis Lee-Wright, who knew Kennedy from the BCWSC and the early days of the CWAC at MD11, described her well.

She was most definitely a leader--rather like a terrier, bright-eyed, alert, intelligent, scrappy and persistent--always in a hurry to get things done...She was sociable, fond of people, got along well with men, except on a few occasions when she thought they were trying to tell her how to run her business...Her early work with the Corps deserved to be remembered, and recognized.⁴³

Regardless of our views on the role of women in the sphere of war it cannot be denied that the work of Joan Kennedy and the BCWSC deserves to be recognized and remembered. Nor can we deny that, in assuming an active role in the sphere of war, these women served far beyond the call of "duty" for women of their time, or indeed, for women of our time. But the question of who, exactly, they ultimately served cannot easily be answered. The BCWSC, in its efforts to serve the Allied Nations as a whole, probably served only the military establishment and the egotism of the BCWSC itself. Others may argue, however, that the Corps served Canada, its men, its women, or the cause of a justified war. The answers derive largely from subjective analysis; we cannot hope to answer according to a common consensus until such a consensus has been developed. The story of the BCWSC provides two examples of what to avoid, and one example of what to emulate. First, a consensus must not be based on conforming assumptions. The BCWSC assumed virtually all its beliefs were valid: they never questioned their loyalty

to Canada or to the British Empire; they never identified possible negative manifestations of their work (having read page after page of their records, for example, I seriously doubt that they ever thought about the harm they might inflict on civilian women and children of the Axis Nations) and they never questioned what would have been the most obvious of concerns: whether women should assume an active role in support of war. Commonly-held unquestioned assumptions may make for a powerful united force, but rigorous questioning of our own beliefs and goals must accompany our own consensus.

Second, on an even more subjective note, I believe that we should promote the eradication of war not because of our role as reproducers and nurturers of the next generation, but because war is wrong. We should promote peace to eradicate the atrocities of war. And when I say "we" here, I mean everyone. Women have no special claim to the love of peace.

Finally, the BCWSC does serve as a useful model in that they took an active role in the sphere of war. They asked themselves "what do women mean to war and how can we affect it?" We must do the same. It is time we reached beyond our question of "what does war mean to women and how does it affect us?" It is now time, more than ever before, to oppose war itself. Their tenacity, persistence, and sheer hard work in achieving goals also serves as a model in struggling for peace.



Footnotes

1. Ruth Roach Pierson, "Jill Canuck: CWAC of all Trades": 108.
2. BCWSC, Minutes, October 5, 1938.
3. CWSC, Registration as per Societies Act, List of Officers.
4. *Ibid.*
5. BCWSC, Minutes, November 18, 1938.
6. Pierson: 110.
7. BCWSC, Minutes, February 18, 1939.
8. *Ibid.*
9. BCWSC, Registration as per Societies Act, Registration of Detachments.
10. BCWSC, Correspondence with Victoria Service Clubs.
11. BCWSC, Correspondence with Patronesses, Kennedy to Mrs. Hamber, April 25, 1939.
12. BCWSC, Minutes, February 21, 1939.
13. "War Service Lures Women," *Province*, May 6, 1939.
14. BCWSC, Minutes, June 28, 1939. Kennedy's use of the word "emergency" is to be interpreted as "war."
15. "Women's Service Club Growing," *Victoria Daily Times*, July 27, 1939.
16. BCWSC, Minutes, July 6, 1939.
17. Pierson: 109.
18. "BCWSC Reviews Year of Progress," *Victoria Daily Times*, n.d. (January, 1940) newsclipping in Photo Album/Scrapbook, Acc. No. 98208-2 PABC.
19. BCWSC, Minutes, December 18, 1939.
20. "Service Club Members Train for Duty," n.p., n.d. (August, 1939?), newsclipping in Photo Album/Scrapbook.
21. BCWSC, Minutes, April 26, 1940.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, May 20, 1940.
25. W. Hugh Conrod, *Athene*: 18.
26. BCWSC, Minutes, July 22, 1940.
27. *Ibid.*, August 14, 1940.
28. *Ibid.*, September 22, 1940.
29. Conrod: Chapter 1.
30. Pierson: 108.
31. Conrod: 19. Morkill was a personal friend of Dame Helen Gwyn-Vaughan, Director-in-Chief of the ATS, Kennedy to Browne, 14 Dec. 1940. Public Archives of Canada. Record Group 24, vol. 2152, Army File HQ 54-27-32-7, vol. 2.
32. BCWSC, Minutes, November 4, 1940.
33. *Ibid.*, November 9, 1940.
34. *Ibid.*, IOC No. 14, December 9, 1940.
35. BCWSC, Correspondence with Victoria Service Clubs, McClung to Kennedy, December 16, 1940.
36. W.L.M. King Papers, McClung to King, December 14, 1940.
37. *Ibid.*, King to McClung, December 23, 1940.
38. BCWSC, Correspondence with Victoria Service Clubs, McClung to Kennedy, January 16, 1941.
39. BCWSC, Minutes, March 24, 1941.
40. *Ibid.*, May 19, 1941.

41. *Ibid.*, May 30, 1941.
42. *Ibid.*, June 23, 1941.
43. Conrod: 54.

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