

How 4 valiant Jewish women served their country during World War II

★ Marcia Brooks Lewis, Judith Sepper Bronstein, Bessie Maas Rothstein ★ and Pearl Maas were among the many who volunteered in U.S. armed forces

By JUDY TURPIE

The formation of the very first veterans' organization, the Jewish War Veterans, was the proud refutation of a Union general's aspersion that no Jews ever served in the U.S. military. Jews have always served the republic—men and women alike.

Four Jewish women who volunteered their services in the U.S. armed forces in World War II were Marcia Brooks, Judith Sepper and twins Pearl and Bessie Maas.

Pearl and Bessie Maas joined the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (later called the Women's Army Corps) in April 1943. Their basic training was taken in Louisiana from where Pearl was sent to Alamogordo, N.M., for six months. Bessie was stationed in New York, where Pearl later joined her.

Both women said that they adjusted to the regulations, barracks and 3-4 women to a room more easily than their fellow WAACS because they had grown up in the Jewish Children's Home in New Orleans.

The twins celebrated VJ [Victory

over Japan] Day in Berlin where they spent eight months with the Army of Occupation. "My first knowledge of what had gone on in Germany (the Holocaust) was when the Nuremberg Trials started," Pearl stated, when she was

asked how she felt about going to Germany.

"The only newspaper that we saw was *Stars and Stripes*," added Bessie. "No one ever discussed

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Corporals Pearl (left) and Bessie Maas – Berlin, Germany, 1946. □

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religion, and we really had no idea of what had happened. There was no social contact with the German people, even those that worked in the Army offices. We were told to stay in groups on the street, but no one ever told us anything."

Pearl and Bessie had two furloughs from their duty in Germany. The first was to Switzerland, and the second, to the French Riviera. "There were 6-8 of us on the trip to the Riviera, but we 'took the wrong train' and spent a day in Paris," Bessie recalled. "We were really surprised that we didn't get into trouble because we were a day late getting back to Berlin. They just wrote it off to language problems," laughed Bessie. The Maas twins were discharged in early 1946.

Would they join again if they were the same age and knew all that they would go through? Both women replied, "We wouldn't go through it again, but we are glad we did it." Bessie Maas married Benjamin Rothstein in 1953 and has two children and one granddaughter.