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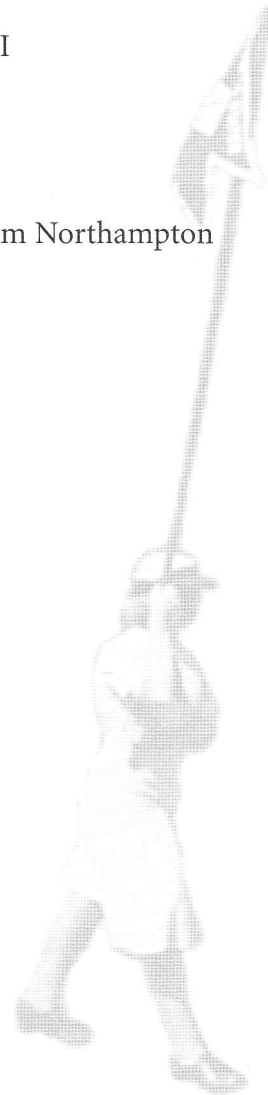
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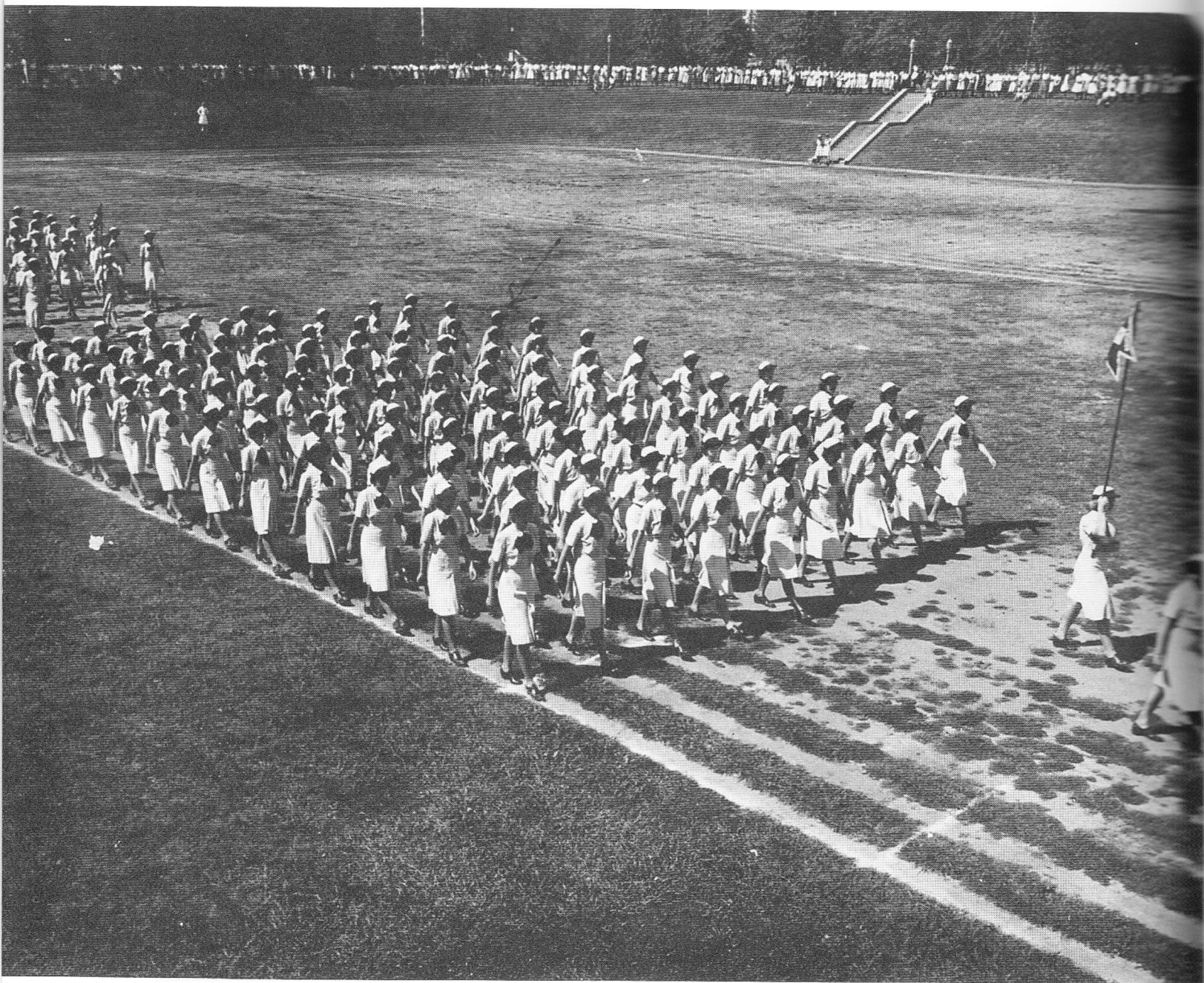
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So Proudly They Served: Rhode Island Waves in World War II

EVELYN M. CHERPAK

The presence of women serving with the United States Navy dates back to 1908, when the Nurse Corps was established. It was not until 19 March 1917, however, that women were temporarily accepted in the U.S. Naval Reserve for general service duties.¹ As World War I approached and the Navy geared up for the coming conflict, it became clear to Rear Adm. Leigh C. Palmer, chief of the Bureau of Navigation, that women would be needed to replace sailors assigned to sea duty. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels applauded the idea and found no impediment to it in the legislation defining the Naval Reserve Force. "It does not say anywhere . . . that a yeoman must be a man," he said.²

Motivated mainly by patriotism, women promptly answered the call. By the time the United States entered the war on 6 April 1917, several hundred had enlisted. They had to be eighteen years old to join, and no commissions were given. The vast majority of enlistees held the rating of yeoman (F), the F standing for female, but other ratings—master-at-arms and mess attendant—were open to them as well. Most of the women held clerical jobs or were translators, recruiters, camouflage designers, or telephone and radio operators. Some were munitions workers at the Naval Torpedo Station in Newport, where they assembled primers.³

Because the Navy was not able to provide training and indoctrination for the new recruits, they went directly to their assignments. Many of these assignments were near their hometowns, since housing was scarce. But the greatest need for yeomen (F)—or yeomanettes, as they were affectionately called—was in Washington, D.C., where over 2,000 were stationed, and where many had difficulty finding housing.⁴

The term of enlistment in the Naval Reserve was four years, and consequently many women remained on duty until 1920 and assisted in the demobilization process. When their enlistments ended, they received an honorable discharge and, if they wished, a temporary civil service appointment. However, they were excluded from future service in the Navy, as the Naval Reserve Act of 1925 stipulated that only males could serve. After a lobbying effort, they received the benefits provided to all World War I veterans under the Adjusted Compensation Act of 1924.⁵

The 11,880 yeomen (F) of World War I were truly pioneers; they performed their duties well, they did not present the Navy with disciplinary problems, and they were proud of their contribution to the war effort. But it was only when another world war was imminent that the Navy once again turned to women to free men for duty at sea.



Evelyn Cherpak is the curator of the Naval Historical Collection at the Naval War College in Newport. This article is based on an oral history project that she began in 1993 to commemorate the role that Navy women played in World War II.

Enlisted Waves, Regiment 39, Company 8821, march in formation in their summer uniforms at the U.S. Naval Training School (WR), Bronx, New York, 1944. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport.

Despite the fact that war in Europe was fast approaching by 1938, the Naval Reserve Act of that year still excluded women. Rear Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, and other bureau chiefs were adamantly opposed to having women in the Navy. By late 1941, however, the world situation had changed. In October 1941 leg-

isolation was introduced in Congress to establish a Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, and the chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Harold R. Stark, supported the establishment of a Women's Reserve. After months of haggling among congressmen, the bureau chiefs, and the president over whether women should serve in the Navy or as an auxiliary with it, Public Law 689, establishing the Women's Reserve, was passed by both houses of Congress and signed into law by Franklin D. Roosevelt on 30 July 1942, almost eight months after war had been declared. Now the question was settled; women would serve *in* the Navy, not *with* it.⁶

Added as Title V to the Naval Reserve Act of 1938, the law defined what the Women's Reserve was to be. Women could serve in both the officer ranks and the enlisted rates. They could join at age twenty, with parental consent; they had to be U.S. citizens; and they would receive the same pay as men in their rate or rank. The women could serve only in the continental United States, and they were restricted to shore duty. No combat roles or ship assignments were envisioned, or even contemplated, for women, nor were they to exercise command over men. Officer ranks were limited to one lieutenant commander, thirty-five lieutenants, lieutenants junior grade numbering 35 percent of the Reserve officers, and ensigns. The women were to serve for the duration of the war plus six months. They were not entitled to pensions or health care benefits, nor would their beneficiaries receive benefits if they were killed on duty.⁷

Mildred McAfee, the forty-two-year-old president of Wellesley College, was named director of the newly established Women's Reserve with the rank of lieutenant commander⁸ (she would receive the rank of captain in 1943). A Vassar College graduate, she was an experienced administrator who held strong beliefs about the importance of women's education and the role of women in society. Asked about the role that women would play in the Navy, she replied that they would do

almost anything which can be done on shore without necessitating sea or combat duty. They [will] serve on all kinds of shore establishments—large bases on the seacoasts, close to ports where vessels and men return for repair after combat. They [will] serve on isolated small stations, far inland. They may work in city office buildings in district headquarters in teeming American cities or in temporary buildings on hastily constructed airfields far from urban centers. They [will] work on college campuses where midshipmen are in training; they [will] learn skilled trades at factory benches and in repair shops. They [will] act as receptionists in admirals' offices and as "grease monkeys" on the line of airports from coast to coast.⁹

McAfee and her staff of five labored arduously and quickly to develop the recruiting and training programs that brought women into the Navy.

Deciding on a name for the newly established branch of the service was the Navy's next task. Dr. Elizabeth Reynard of the Barnard College faculty, who had served on a Women's Advisory Council and as a special assistant to Rear Adm. Randall Jacobs, chief of Naval Personnel, in planning the integration of women into the armed forces, came up with the acronym WAVES—Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service. Emphasizing as it did the voluntary and temporary nature of the women's service, the acronym was acceptable to those admirals who had reservations about the presence of women in the Navy. The name would endure well into the 1960s.¹⁰

The French-born designer Mainbocher was chosen to design a uniform for the new recruits. The result was an attractive yet comfortable uniform consisting of a navy blue wool jacket and skirt, to be worn with a white blouse and tie. Black oxfords, unattractive cotton lisle stockings (because nylon, used as war materiel, was in short supply), a bucket hat, a havelock (a hood that attached to the hat and buttoned at the neck as protection from rain), and black gloves completed the winter uniform. The summer dress white uniform was of lighter-weight material, and the work uniform was of pin-striped

seersucker.¹¹ The Waves were proud of their uniform and thought it much more attractive than the khaki of the Army's Wacs. Some young women in fact joined the Navy because of the uniform.¹²

But most of the officers and enlisted women joined the WAVES for patriotic reasons: they were shocked and appalled by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and wanted to do whatever they could to serve their country. Some were motivated as well by a desire to travel, to escape their humdrum jobs, or to gain new experiences; for others, a beau or a relative in the service was an incentive. Many of the women considered the WAVES more prestigious than the other women's services, for the Navy had a long-standing reputation as an elite branch of the military.

Most of the Waves were supported by their families in their decision to join the Navy. Mary Catherine Keenan Sullivan of Warwick was encouraged to enlist by her mother, who had been a yeomanette in World War I.¹³ However, several Rhode Island women did encounter opposition from parents or siblings who had reservations about the newly established WAVES. Women did not generally leave home in the early 1940s to embark upon new adventures, and joining the military was not commonly thought of as what a "nice girl" did. Eileen O'Connor of Jamestown faced opposition from her brother, an enlisted man in the Navy, but he later changed his mind when he learned more about the work the Waves were doing.¹⁴ Most parents were proud of their daughters and hung a flag in their window to show that they had a family member in the service.



Headquarters of the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (WR) at Smith College, circa 1942. The school's commanding officer, Capt. Herbert Underwood, is at the left. Photograph by Fred C. Chase; courtesy of Smith College Archives.

How and where to train the officers and enlisted women were matters that had to be addressed early on. With colleges viewed as safe and sequestered environments, equipped with the necessary facilities for accommodating large numbers of women, Smith

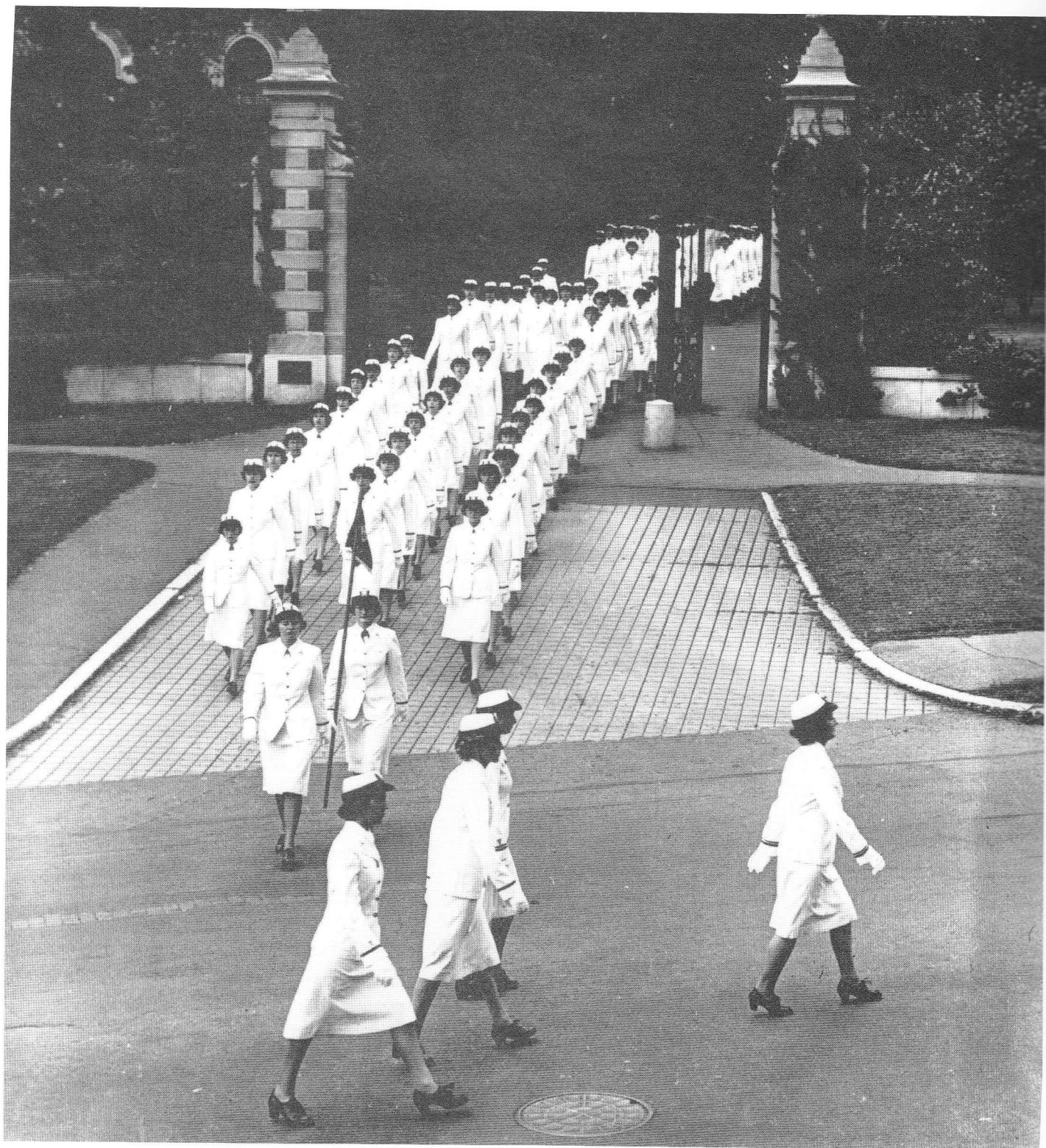
College, in Northampton, Massachusetts, was chosen as the training site for prospective officers. The Navy took over three dormitories and one classroom building and preempted the Northampton Hotel for the newly created U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (WR). Retired Capt. Herbert W. Underwood was recalled to active duty and named the school's commanding officer.¹⁵

The first class of 120 women was enrolled on 28 August 1942. These women were slated to become administrators and instructors, but despite their special status and accelerated period of training (four weeks rather than eight), they followed the same curriculum and regime that their successors at the school would follow. Included in the curriculum were naval history, protocol, organization, law, personnel administration, communication, and ship and aircraft identification. Marching, drilling, and physical education completed the required activities.¹⁶



In order to join the WAVES, officer candidates had to be college graduates, or have at least two years of college and two years of work experience, and thus were about twenty-two years old when they entered the service. They had to be of good moral character, and they had to be in good health. The midshipmen followed a rigid schedule for their eight weeks of training. Up at 6:30 A.M., they attended classes from 8:00 until noon and then were back in the classroom from 1:00 to 5:00. Lights were out at 10:00 P.M. For the

*Waves march through the gates of Smith College.
Courtesy of Smith College Archives.*



dreaded captain's inspection at 10:00 A.M. on Saturday, beds had to be made, closets in order, floors swept, and no dust in sight. After that inspection the women were free from 1:15 until 7:30 Sunday evening.¹⁷

Joining the officer ranks of the WAVES was a natural choice for Jamestown summer resident Barbara Brandt Wood, a Navy officer's daughter and a 1943 graduate of Smith College, where the Waves were a presence on campus. Having enlisted during the fall following her graduation, she enjoyed the marching and drilling and excelled in the course work, so much so that she was selected to remain as an instructor in ship, aircraft, and ordnance identification. She had an active social life, spent summer weekends in Newport, took flying lessons, and earned a pilot's license. Once, returning from a weekend in New York City, she was mistakenly berthed in a Pullman car with German prisoners of war. The train stopped a mile out of Springfield, Massachusetts, and she had to walk back to the station, find transportation, and explain to the administration why she had missed her Monday morning class. In December 1944, one month before the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (WR) closed, Wood was assigned to the Hydrographic Office in Suitland, Maryland, where she spent the remainder of the war.¹⁸

Mary Maguire of Providence was hesitant about joining the WAVES at first, but her father, the president of the Charles Maguire Engineering Company, was enthusiastic about the opportunity and encouraged her to sign up. She reported to "USS Northampton," as the Midshipmen's School was nicknamed, in January 1943. The Navy needed communicators, and she was slated for a billet at the Eastern Sea Frontier, a communications station in New York City, as a courier. Among the qualifications for that posting was a typing speed of sixty words per minute, a challenge she subsequently met. Before she received her commission at graduation, her company had the honor of passing in review before Eleanor Roosevelt.¹⁹

Not all the WAVES officers received their training on the Smith College campus. To handle an overflow from Smith, the Navy began officer training also at nearby Mount Holyoke College, in South Hadley, Massachusetts, in November 1942. A year later Mount Holyoke was used solely for communications training. Both Jean Lett McDonald of Bristol and Dorothy Council of Newport attended this facility. Council was in a class of "five-week wonders" at Holyoke in late 1942 and was then assigned as a personnel officer in the Communications section of the Navy Department.²⁰ McDonald reported to Mount Holyoke in August 1943 and was chagrined to find a lack of privacy in the dormitories there. She called her parents, declaring that she wanted to leave the Navy, but after several days she changed her mind and decided to stay. After her class finished its training on the Smith College campus, McDonald went on to become a successful WAVES recruiter in Connecticut.²¹



Once the WAVES officers finished their basic training, they were assigned to a variety of billets nationwide. Rhode Island women were recruiters, instructors, communicators, personnel specialists, cryptographers, aviation physiologists, and occupational therapists. In 1944 Mary Hawthorne of Providence was assigned as an aviation physiologist to the Hospital Corps in Pensacola, Florida, where she operated a low-pressure chamber in the training of aviators in survival techniques. Later she was sent to the U.S. Naval Training School (WR) in the Bronx to organize the Rehabilitation Training Center that provided assistance to health care personnel in Navy hospitals.²² June Nesbitt Gibbs of Middletown, a Wellesley College mathematics major, joined the WAVES after graduation and was stationed as a cryptographer at the Naval Communications Annex in



Naval officers of the Naval Communications Annex, Washington, D.C., socialize together, 1944. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport.

Washington, D.C., where she helped to break a German code. Courses in cryptology were then being offered at Wellesley to prepare students to enter the WAVES, and of course President McAfee's appointment as the WAVES director was a further incentive for students to join.²³ Mary Winter Murphy of Jamestown, educated as an occupational therapist in Boston, joined the WAVES in May 1945. She was assigned to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois, and then to the U.S. Naval Hospital in Sampson, New York, where she worked with tuberculosis patients.²⁴ L. Jane Potter of Newport headed the Navy Relief Office at Newport's Naval Operating Base during the war, while another Newporter, Mary Lynch McCoy, worked in that city's communications command.²⁵

If their state quota for officer billets had been met, college graduates had the option

to enter the WAVES as enlisted personnel, and many of them did. Later, if there were openings, they could transfer into the officer ranks. One who made this transition was Emily Stone Cocroft, a Vassar graduate from Providence. After a course in radio operations at the radio school at the University of Wisconsin and an assignment to the Naval Air Station at North Island, San Diego, she was selected to attend the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School for officer training and indoctrination. She was then assigned to the decoding office at the Twelfth Naval District, San Francisco.²⁶

BB Freeman Davis of Providence, a Smith College graduate, followed a similar route. She planned to join the officer corps immediately after her graduation, but a hand injury forced her to postpone her enlistment for three months, and by then Rhode Island's quota for officer candidates had been filled. Enlisting as a seaman instead, she joined the first group of women trained as radio operators at the University of Wisconsin in 1942, and then, in January 1943, she became a member of the first contingent of Waves stationed at the Naval Air Station at Corpus Christi, Texas. A highlight of her tour there was her selection as a chauffeur during President Roosevelt's visit to the base, when she had the opportunity to meet the president and his dog, Fala. Davis spent nearly nine months in Texas before reporting to Northampton for officer training. From there she went first to the communications school at Mount Holyoke College and then to the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, Florida, where she put her skills to work decoding messages. Shortly after V-E Day she arrived at the Naval Air Station at Honolulu, Hawaii, for her last wartime assignment, during which she had the opportunity to fly over the Hawaiian Islands with Adm. William "Bull" Halsey in his private plane.²⁷



While there were 8,000 women in the officer corps at its peak in 1945, there were 78,000 women serving in the enlisted rates. In order to join the enlisted rates, a woman had to be between twenty and thirty-six years old, a high school graduate, five feet tall and ninety-five pounds, in good health, and of good moral character. The first enlisted Waves were accepted for training on 11 September 1942, and on 9 October they reported



Waves at the U.S. Naval Training School (WR) in the Bronx, New York, 1943. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport.

WE'LL LOOK LIKE WAVES

(To the tune of "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition")

*Lift your chin and keep your steps in rhythm.
Dress your lines and hold the right position.
Guide to right and keep your distance even,
And we'll look like Waves!*

*Clutch your thumbs with grim determination.
Eyes ahead, you're under observation.
Take your stance and stay for the duration,
And we'll look like Waves!*

*When Miss Myer shouts "Attention!"
Click your heels with real intention,
For a competent company commander is she!*

*Shouting, "Close your ranks and keep your steps together."
Just ignore the brisk New England weather.
For our flag, the Stars and Stripes forever,
We will look like WAVES!*

These anonymous lyrics are in the papers of Elizabeth Gallup Myer at the Rhode Island Historical Society. Ms. Myer, a Rhode Islander, was a WAVES lieutenant during World War II.

to the three universities that the Navy had contracted with for training sites: the University of Wisconsin, Indiana University, and Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical University. Service leaders soon realized, however, that the Navy needed more than the 10,000 enlisted women they had originally planned for, and that if their training was to be efficient, it had to be conducted at one site. Iowa State Teachers College, in Cedar Falls, Iowa, was originally slated to be a yeoman school, but in December 1942 it instead became the first boot camp for enlisted women. The course was five weeks long, and Donna Beebe de Wildt of Charlestown remembered how cold it was marching and drilling during that winter in Iowa.²⁸

By the spring of 1943 the Iowa school reverted to its original purpose as a yeoman training center, as Hunter College, in the Bronx, New York, became the new training site for enlisted women. There the Navy took over four college buildings, at a rental of \$200,000 per year, and seventeen apartment buildings, which it refurbished and furnished for the incoming recruits. The Navy was also able to use the nearby Eighth Regiment Armory for drill parades and regimental reviews and the auditorium at Walton High School for assemblies. With its central location and facilities to accommodate 5,000 women at a time (women Marines and Spars were trained there as well until their own schools were established later in 1943), the U.S. Naval Training School (WR) proved to be a nearly ideal site for the largest boot camp in the country. Capt. William Amsden (who would later retire to Peace Dale, Rhode Island) was named its head. The school's first class reported on 8 February 1943, and thereafter, until October 1945, over 1,600 women arrived for training every two weeks. The training period ran from six to eight weeks, depending on the Navy's need for personnel, though it

was shortened to four weeks for a time in 1943, when the pressure for wartime personnel was increasing.²⁹

At "USS Hunter" the women received their indoctrination into the Navy and the newly established WAVES. They were issued uniforms, attended classes on ship and aircraft identification and naval history, protocol, customs, procedure, and terminology, and underwent physical exams and psychological and aptitude tests that helped to determine their future assignments. They marched to class and to the mess hall, where they ate Spam and macaroni on tin trays; they endured calisthenics; and they drilled with their regiments on Saturdays when "pass in reviews" were held. White-glove inspections of their rooms were a weekly event as well. Like the officer candidates, the enlistees were kept to a rigid schedule: reveille at 6:00 A.M., breakfast at 7:00, classes from 8:00 to noon, lunch, afternoon classes from 1:00 to 5:00, free time from 5:00 to 5:45, supper, and lights out at 10:00 P.M. From 12:00 noon to 11:30 P.M. on Saturdays and from noon to 7:30 P.M. on Sundays the women had liberty, when many saw the sights of New York for the first time. Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish services were available for the recruits on weekends.³⁰

Enlisted Waves attending yeoman school at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, march in formation, 1944. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport.



day. Esther Fritz Villeneuve of Pawtucket heard Kate Smith sing.³¹ Jimmy Durante, the Sammy Kaye band, and Hildegarde treated the Waves to shows as well.

Although their training period was short, the Waves were given opportunities to participate in various extracurricular activities. Edith LePage Smith of Woonsocket was a member of a singing platoon that was organized in 1944, under the direction of Ray Charles, to entertain the recruits. The group was selected to sing on the Perry Como radio show, and it also cut a record.³² Arlene Linne Chilson of East Greenwich was on the staff of *The Conning Tower*, the Naval Training School's newspaper, which was published once every six weeks by a different regiment. Chilson contributed an article to the paper using song titles to express her impressions of boot camp.³³

Enlistees at the Naval Training School were addressed by a number of distinguished visitors, including Eleanor Roosevelt and Capt. Mildred McAfee, who came to celebrate the first anniversary of the establishment of the WAVES. Madame Chiang Kai-shek, a Wellesley College graduate and a personality in her own right, cut a glamorous figure in slacks on her visit to the school in 1943. President Franklin D. Roosevelt reviewed the regiments on 21 October 1944.³⁴

Rhode Island Waves remember their days at the Naval Training School as hectic but exciting. For many, it was their first time away from home and their first time in New York City. They enjoyed meeting women from all over the United States, and they cheerfully endured living in close quarters, four to six to a room, sleeping in bunks, accommodating to military customs, and learning Navy jargon. Mary Catherine Keenan Sullivan recalled that the Waves had great team spirit and sang while they marched. Rita Callanan Trenn of North Kingstown remembered the fire drills in the middle of the night, while Mollie Cooley Decker of Charlestown disliked the long chow lines.³⁵ Since the training period was so short and most of the women were sent to different duty stations, few lifelong friendships were made at the school. All in all, however, the experience was a positive one for the Rhode Island recruits, and they eagerly awaited their advanced training or their new assignments.



Initially the Navy planned to use the Waves in work that was traditionally performed by women, slating the enlisted Waves for billets as yeomen, storekeepers, and radio operators. But as the war progressed and more men were sent to sea and combat, women were assigned to what had formerly been all-male occupations, and thus Waves also became aviation machinists, air traffic controllers, and Link trainer and gunnery instructors.

Both the traditional and nontraditional jobs required advanced schooling. Eileen O'Connor was sent to yeoman school at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma, for three months of training in shorthand, typing, and Navy filing systems. The daily schedule there, including marching and drilling, was much the same as it was at Hunter College. Promoted to yeoman third class upon graduation, O'Connor was assigned to the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Arlington, Virginia. Mary Catherine Keenan Sullivan spent two months at yeoman school at Iowa State Teachers College in 1944 and was then assigned to the Quonset Point Naval Air Station in Rhode Island. Those who were to become storekeepers, responsible for payrolls and disbursing, were trained at Georgia State College for Women in Milledgeville, Georgia, or at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. Tina Toselli McNeil of Smithfield spent twelve weeks at the Georgia facility, where she received instruction in Navy payroll procedures; then she was assigned, as a storekeeper third class, to the armed guard school in Gulfport, Mississippi, where she calculated the pay of sailors whose ships were in port.³⁶

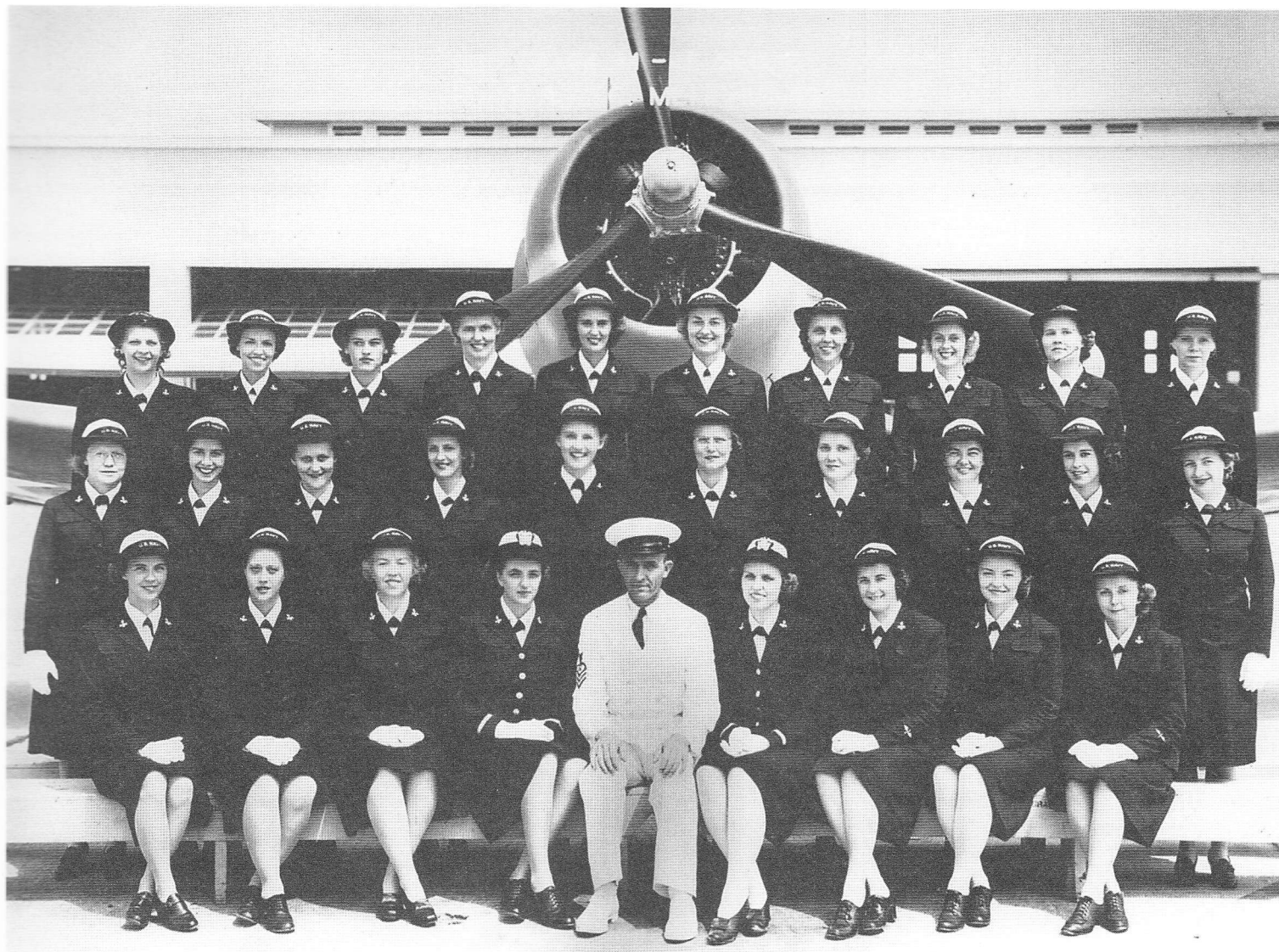




Waves at storekeepers school, Milledgeville, Georgia, 1943. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport.

The Bureau of Aeronautics, which was relatively new and not as tradition-bound as the older Navy bureaus, especially welcomed the Waves. Arlene Linne Chilson trained at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida, as an instructor in fixed gunnery on 50-millimeter guns. Luisa Costagliola White of Providence and Benny Lyons received instruction at the Naval Air Station in Atlanta as Link trainer instructors, who supervised pilots practicing instrument flying with that flight simulation device.³⁷ Donna Beebe de Wildt trained as an aviation machinist's mate at the Naval Air Station in Memphis. Parachute riggers were sent to Lakehurst, New Jersey, for instruction. Over 25,000 Waves served in aviation billets during the war.

The Hospital Corps needed women to fill billets as occupational and physical therapists, pharmacist's mates, and technicians in naval hospitals throughout the country. Doris McKersie O'Toole of Newport was trained as a pharmacist's mate at Camp Lejeune Hospital in North Carolina; then she was stationed at the Charleston, South Carolina, Naval Base, where she worked in the dispensary, instructing corpsmen and treating Marine Corps servicemen and civilian personnel from the shipyard. She also helped in the inoculation of Charleston residents during a smallpox scare in the city. After she was discharged, she attended the Rutgers College of Pharmacy and then the University of Colorado, where she received a master's degree in pharmacy. Later she worked as a



Aviation machinist mates, Naval Air Station, Memphis, Tennessee, 1943. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport.

research scientist for the Pfizer Pharmaceutical Company in Groton, Connecticut.³⁸ Dr. Mary Silverman Ravin of East Greenwich was a pharmacist's mate at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. After her discharge she graduated from Tufts University Medical School and practiced as an internist. Both of these women chose their future professions based on their WAVES assignments during the war.³⁹

Some 600 enlisted Waves were involved in top secret work at the National Cash Register Corporation in Dayton, Ohio, where NCR engineers were cooperating with Naval Intelligence in an effort to break the Germans' Enigma code. Selected at the Naval Training School (WR) for this assignment, the women spent two weeks in Washington, D.C., undergoing background checks, and then were sent to Dayton to assist in assembling the high-speed electronic code-breaking machine, or NCR Bombe, as it was called. They lived at Sugar Camp, a training site for NCR salesman in the city, where they were assigned to log cabins, eight to a room. Every day they marched down Main Street to NCR Building 26, where they wired, soldered, and assembled different parts of the decoding machine. The work was tedious and exacting, and the Waves had no idea of its significance or how it contributed to the saving of lives and ultimate victory.⁴⁰ Janet Coit Petrucci of Pawtucket soldered wires at NCR during the summer of 1943. In September she reported to the Naval Intelligence site on Nebraska Avenue in Washington, D.C.,

where she fed disks into a decoding machine. Promoted to a supervisory position, she remained in Washington until the war ended.⁴¹

All in all, there were twenty advanced training schools for enlisted women and over thirty-eight ratings open to them. However, it was wartime expediency that dictated that women take on nontraditional jobs. Even after the Women's Armed Service Integration Act was passed in 1948, making it possible for women to enter the regular Navy and the Naval Reserve, Navy women faced a long and hard struggle to win placement in previously all-male billets. It has been only in the last thirty years that women have been accepted as pilots, served on ships, been given command of vessels and bases, and been accepted in combat units.



WAVES director Capt. Mildred McAfee (center) at a tour of inspection in Hawaii, 1945. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport.

The WAVES was an all-white service until 1944. That changed after Mildred McAfee met with black female leaders and then exerted her influence on President Roosevelt and



Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal to induct black women into the WAVES. In 1944 Harriet Ida Pickens and Frances Wills were sworn in in New York City as the first black WAVES officers. In addition to Pickens and Wills, by 1945 there were seventy-two black enlisted women in the WAVES.⁴² Recruiter Jean Lett McDonald had previously been sent to Harlem, ostensibly to encourage women in that black community to join the Navy, but that was a mere pretense; the Navy rejected all of the candidates for lack of qualifications or for physical reasons. But “when the Navy changed their policy,” she said, “it was completely across the board, and there was no more discrimination.” Margaret Hall Pease of Jamestown had charge of a contingent of black Waves who were traveling to boot camp at the U.S. Naval Training School (WR) in 1945.⁴³

In December 1944 Public Law 441 allowed Waves to serve outside the continental United States on a voluntary basis, and some subsequently accepted assignments in the U.S. territories of Hawaii, Alaska, and Puerto Rico. The late Capt. Winifred Love of Newport was in charge of the first contingent of Waves sent to Hawaii in December 1944. They left on the SS *Matsonia*, a troop transport, for the long and rough sea voyage from San Francisco to Seattle and then to Honolulu.⁴⁴ Ultimately over 5,000 Waves served in Hawaii.

Housing or billeting arrangements for Waves depended on rate and rank. Officers were usually allowed to live off base, and they rented apartments or houses and “lived on the economy.” This was especially difficult in wartime Washington, D.C., where housing was at a premium, but June Nesbitt Gibbs managed to find accommodations in McLean Gardens, a housing project in northwest Washington. Later she rented a house in that part of Washington with friends, as did Barbara Brandt Wood. Jane Rembowski Scheck of Newport had a room at McLean Gardens not far from Nebraska Avenue, where she worked in communications.⁴⁵

Enlisted women were required to live in Navy quarters. For those stationed in Washington, the Navy provided housing at Arlington Farms, Potomac Park, and Nebraska Avenue. There the women shared rooms with bunk beds in buildings that also contained dining facilities and recreation rooms. Dorothy Ronald Midgley of Riverside, Barbara Gale Wheeler, formerly of Scituate, and Doris McKersie O’Toole of Newport all lived in the Noisette Creek Barracks at the Charleston, South Carolina, Naval Base. The wooden barracks there were hot in the summer, and visited by rats and roaches, but a nearby facility, called WAVE Haven, provided a refuge for entertaining and relaxing.⁴⁶

Most of the Waves felt that they were treated well by the male naval officers and enlisted men with whom they served. There were instances, however, when men reacted negatively to the presence of women in what had previously been an all-male force, and they treated the women unfairly. Emily Stone Cocroft and other Waves in the San Diego communications office were assigned demeaning tasks by a Navy chief, who had them wash the floors. To some men, Waves posed a threat because they were taking traditionally male jobs and doing them well. Donna Beebe de Wildt, an aviation machinist’s mate, remembered that she and other Waves were teased and harassed by sailors unable to admit that women could do competent aviation repair work. Resentment against the Waves stemmed also from the fact that the sailors they replaced were sent to sea, where they faced danger and possible death in battle. Women officers as well as enlisted rates sometimes faced discrimination in their work assignments; WAVES officers in communications billets, for instance, were often given typing to do, while men took messages and conducted research.

Civilians—both those in the Navy Department and others—almost always responded positively to women in the service and frequently expressed appreciation for their good work. CBS president William Paley and his socialite wife, “Babe,” invited DeEtte Unruh

Ellis of Newport and her friends to their apartment in New York as an expression of gratitude for their patriotism and volunteerism.⁴⁷ Other Waves remember being stopped on the street or invited to dinner by grateful civilians.

The Waves were dedicated and hard workers, but they had time for recreation and socialization too. Depending on their assignments, they used their weekends off to travel to Cuba, Mexico, or Florida on Navy flights, or return to their hometowns for quick visits. They went to museums, theaters, and restaurants; they participated in sports, with base teams competing against each other in swimming, baseball, and basketball; they sang with Navy choral groups or bands; they danced at USO canteens; and they dated military men. Many of the women met their husbands while in the service, and if their husbands made the Navy a career, they became Navy wives, continuing their affiliation in that way.

Most of the women who joined the WAVES were single, but if they wanted to marry while in the service, they might encounter the Navy's restrictive policies on marriage. Initially, a Wave could not marry during her training and indoctrination period, but she could marry after it was completed, provided the man was not in the armed forces. By

Noisette Creek Barracks for Waves, Charleston Naval Base, Charleston, South Carolina, 1945. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport.





Yeoman Edith LePage, 1944. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport.

late 1942 a Wave could marry any serviceman except one in the Navy. Policy changed again in 1943, when Waves were allowed to marry anyone of their choice, regardless of his service affiliation, but those who did marry while on duty, like Arlene Bedell Fetter of Kingston, had to obtain permission to wear a wedding gown.⁴⁸



On 15 August 1945, after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the war ended. V-J Day was memorable for all the men and women who served in this last great patriotic war of the twentieth century, and Waves celebrated along with the civilian population. Edith LePage Smith, who was stationed at the Naval Torpedo Station on Goat Island, Newport, remembered that Newport's streets were filled with jubilant crowds and that churches were packed. Both she and her husband went to church to pray and give thanks for the end of the war. The mood was much the same in cities across the United States. Barbara Brandt Wood went to the White House, while June Nesbitt Gibbs noted that toilet paper decorated the trees of the nation's capital. Mary Catherine Keenan Sullivan at Quonset Point Naval Air Station and Arlene Linne Chilson at Corpus Christi Naval Air Station remained on base, where the celebrations were joyous but more restrained.

The end of the war meant that most of the Waves would be discharged soon. They were mustered out at separation centers in New York City, San Francisco, Chicago, Memphis, and Washington, D.C., where during a three-day period they filled out the necessary paperwork, had a physical examination, received indoctrination on returning to civilian life, and were given a ticket home. They were also given a pin representing their service ("the ruptured duck"),⁴⁹ a letter of appreciation from Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, a citation from President Harry S. Truman, and words of praise from the chief of Naval Operations, Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, who said, "It's a pleasure to report that in addition to their excellent reputation as a part of the Navy, they have become an inspiration to all hands in Naval uniform."⁵⁰ Waves were eligible for the American Campaign Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, and the Victory Medal. While many of the women were sad to leave the Navy and the friends they had made, others were looking forward to marriage and family or returning to jobs in their hometown. Many returned to civilian life with mixed emotions.

While the vast majority of Waves were discharged, the Navy still needed to retain some in certain key areas. Storekeepers who paid returning sailors were vital while the large-scale demobilization of military personnel was under way. With the Navy continuing to train pilots, Jean Teresino Yarnall of East Greenwich, a Link trainer instructor during the war, was assigned to the Quonset Point Naval Air Station, where she continued instructing aviators as well as supervising the station's Link trainer unit. She was promoted to chief petty officer in 1947, married an enlisted man, and remained in the Navy until 1950.⁵¹ Yeoman Eileen O'Connor worked for the Chaplains Corps in Washington, D.C., until 1948. Yeoman Mary Catherine Keenan Sullivan was assigned to the Department of the Interior's Coal Mines Administration when the Navy took over the management of the mines during a coal miners' strike. She remained on duty until 1947. Working with John L. Lewis, the president of the United Mine Workers of America, was an unforgettable experience for her.



The Waves of World War II continued to value their wartime service long after their return to civilian life. Jane Rembowski Scheck believed that the experience had enriched her life; Jean Teresino Yarnall felt that it contributed to her future success and profes-

sional development. "We realized we could do things that we didn't know we could do before," said Barbara Brandt Wood. "I think it made me a better person," said Doris Dawson Bergquist of Cranston. "I loved it . . . every minute of it. I think of it all the time, . . . and it's never left me."⁵² Serving in the WAVES was a confidence-building experience, one that fostered a spirit of independence and self-reliance. The women learned to get along with others, to accept responsibility, and to take orders. The vast majority agreed that their decision to join the Navy was a good one, and that their service was a valuable and fulfilling time in their lives. Moreover, they had been pioneers, for they had paved the way for the full and unrestricted acceptance of women in the military in 1948.

There was a feeling of great camaraderie among the Waves, a cooperative and select group that worked together for Allied victory in World War II. Many of the friendships made during that time have endured over the years, with women remaining in contact either on their own or through WAVES National and its state affiliate, the Ocean State WAVES. Rhode Island Waves were among those who attended the dedication of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, Museum, and Archive in Arlington, Virginia, in 1997. Today, members of the Ocean State WAVES are major supporters of the memorial to Rhode Island women veterans that is to be erected at the Veterans Cemetery in Exeter.

Notes

1. Federal legislation established the United States Naval Reserve Force in 1915. The Reserve force consists of officers and enlisted personnel who are professionally trained and called to active duty, usually in wartime, when the regular Navy needs to be brought up to full combat strength. In World War I and World War II, the Yeomen (F) and Waves were in the Naval Reserve.
2. Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1993), 5.
3. *Ibid.*, 7, 10, 12.
4. *Ibid.*, 10, 11.
5. *Ibid.*, 15, 17, 19.
6. *Ibid.*, 27, 28, 30, 35.
7. *Ibid.*, 36, 37. Like all veterans, those who had served in the WAVES became eligible for educational benefits under the G.I. Bill, and many took advantage of those benefits to attend college or graduate school after the war.
8. *Ibid.*, 32.
9. Mildred McAfee, speech, 28 April 1945, Iowa State Teachers' College, Cedar Falls, Iowa, in *The WAVES: Records of the Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Women, 1942-1972*, microfilm reel 11, Naval War College Library, Newport.
10. Susan H. Godson, "The WAVES in World War II," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 107 (December 1981): 46.
11. Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 43.
12. Virginia Copeland Smith, interview by the author, Esmond, R.I., 20 Jan. 1995. Tapes and transcriptions of this and other cited interviews are in the Naval Historical Collection of the Naval War College in Newport.
13. Mary Catherine Keenan Sullivan, interview by the author, Warwick, 10 Jan. 1996.
14. Eileen O'Connor, interview by the author, Jamestown, 24 Feb. 1993.
15. Godson, "WAVES in World War II," 48, 49.
16. Winifred Quick Collins, *More Than a Uniform: A Navy Woman in a Navy Man's World* (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 1997), 46-49.
17. Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 50.
18. Barbara Brandt Wood, interview by the author, Newport, 13 Aug. 1997.
19. Mary Maguire, interview by the author, Little Compton, 1 Dec. 1995.
20. Dorothy Council, interview by the author, Newport, 6 May 1993.
21. Jean Lett McDonald, interview by the author, Bristol, 22 Aug. 1996.
22. Mary Hawthorne, interview by the author, Middletown, 24 Aug. 1994.
23. June Nesbitt Gibbs, interview by the author, Middletown, 26 Mar. 1996.
24. Mary Winter Murphy, interview by the author, Jamestown, 5 June 1998.
25. L. Jane Potter, interview by the author, Newport, 18 June 1997; Mary Lynch McCoy, interview by the author, Newport, 2 Aug. 1995.
26. Emily Stone Cocroft, interview by the author, Wakefield, 24 Sept. 1996.
27. BB Freeman Davis, interview by the author, Bristol, 7 Aug. 1996.
28. Donna Beebe de Wildt, interview by the author, Newport, 8 July 1996.
29. Janet Butler Munch, "Making WAVES in the Bronx: The Story of the U.S. Naval Training School (WR) at Hunter College," *Bronx County Historical Society Journal* 30 (Spring 1993): 2-5.
30. *Ibid.*, 7.
31. Benny Lyons, interview by the author, Newport, 25 Jan. 1996; Esther Fritz Villeneuve, interview by the author, Pawtucket, 2 Nov. 1995.
32. Edith LePage Smith, interview by the author, Newport, 23 May 1995.
33. Arlene Linne Chilson, interview by the author, Newport, 22 Mar. 1995.
34. Munch, "Making WAVES," 9.
35. Rita Callanan Trenn, interview by the author, North Kingstown, 16 May 1997; Mollie Cooley Decker, interview by the author, Newport, 1 May 1997.
36. Tina Toselli McNeil, interview by the author, Smithfield, 25 Oct. 1994.
37. Luisa Costagliola White, interview by the author, Newport, 6 Nov. 1996.
38. Doris McKersie O'Toole, interview by the author, Newport, 9 Mar. 1995.
39. Mary Silverman Ravin, interview by the author, Newport, 29 June 1999.
40. "NCR and WWII: The Untold Story," *Dayton (Ohio) Daily News*, 26 Mar. 2001, 6.
41. Janet Coit Petrucci, interview by the author, Pawtucket, 20 Mar. 1998.
42. Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 86.
43. Margaret Hall Pease, interview by the author, Newport, 21 Aug. 1998.
44. Winifred Love, interview by the author, Newport, 20 Aug. 1993.
45. Jane Rembowski Scheck, interview by the author, Newport, 23 May 1996.
46. Dorothy Ronald Midgley, interview by the author, Riverside, 7 Feb. 1995; Barbara Gale Wheeler, interview by the author, Brooklyn, Conn., 3 Aug. 2001.
47. DeEtte Unruh Ellis, interview by the author, Newport, 14 Oct. 1998.
48. Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 82; Arlene Bedell Fetter, interview by the author, Kingston, 14 Mar. 1997.
49. Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 93, 94.
50. Public Relations Office, U.S. Naval Training School, comp., *Navy Service: A Short History of the United States Naval Training School (WR)*, Bronx, NY (New York: USNTS Public Relations Office, [ca. 1944]), 8.
51. Jean Teresino Yarnall, interview by the author, Newport, 20 Apr. 1995.
52. Doris Dawson Bergquist, interview by the author, Newport, 11 Sept. 1998.



FROM THE COLLECTIONS

“We Are in the NAVY!”: A Letter from Northampton

N. T. S.—Northampton
Capen House, Room , Deck
Northampton, Massachusetts

Dear

(This letter is a cooperative effort by all the girls of our company to give you an idea of what our training in the Women's Naval Reserve is like and why we don't write individually every day.) . . .

We are in the NAVY!—we are members of the Women's Naval Reserve. That was our first lesson, but we learn fast. We didn't sign the roll—we were logged in. Our billets are on second or third deck, so we went up the ladder topside to our cabin, which we found after following a long passageway, bumping our duffle against the bulkheads. That wasn't all—the mate of the deck inspected our cabins to find all shipshape, bunks made up smooth, and lockers neat. . . . We mess with the other battalions in two groups, for there are too many of us for single mess.

Three times a day sick call is rung; then we take our sore throats and blisters to sick bay, and if we're really under the weather we report to the officer of the watch, and the doctor places our names on the binnacle list until we're well again. We all get occasional liberty to go shopping, and we can hope for a few days' leave when our training is over. The officers may parade their new stripes and crowns, and we might even be invited to board ship if we know port from starboard, bow from stern, and keel from bridge. But we mustn't forget to face aft and salute the quarterdeck before we go below.

Bear a hand, get out your naval dictionaries, and stand by!

There are two battalions of us, of three companies each, with each company divided into three platoons. The Northampton Battalion, Companies 1, 2, and 3, are V-9's, quartered at the Northampton Inn, where we mess—they're three-quarters of a mile nearer food than we. The Campus Battalions are quartered in Smith College dormitories: Company 4 in Gillett, Company 5 in Northrop. We are Company 6, at Capen House. Our quarters were originally a private home, a beautiful colonial house with wide halls, spacious rooms, and charming staircases. It was taken over by Smith College and new wings added, until now it is almost fourth dimensional. Those of us who love puzzles can spend our time sleuthing for room numbers, which do not follow any recognized mathematical system. . . .

Roommates in the Navy, like relatives, we do not choose for ourselves; and the consecutive assignments of girls to rooms as they arrived has resulted in some fearsome foursomes. Each roommate represents a possibility in divergent personality and interests, and certainly there are 120 different kinds of persons here, from the sweater-and-saddle-oxford type just out of college to the dignified professional woman or technician. They vary, also, from the exuberant enthusiast who bounds out of bed in the chilly dawn to the methodical

This is a condensed version of a letter apparently meant to be sent to family members and friends of Waves at the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (WR) at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. The letter is in the papers of Elizabeth Gallup Myer, a Rhode Island librarian who served as a WAVES lieutenant during World War II.

A color guard of the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (WR) at Smith College stands at attention during an Armistice Day observance, 1942. Courtesy of Smith College Archives.

cal precisian who arrives at the sound of the bell and the reluctant sleepyhead who crawls out as the mate of the deck inspects. There's the question, too, of the neat and the not-so-neat, although captain's inspection takes care of much of that.

Geographically speaking, we're a mixed bunch. One room may contain a sailorette from the Maine coast, a Georgia peach, a California sunbeam, and an Oregon rose; another, a New York city slicker, a Texas Bluebonnet, a Wisconsin farmer, and a Tennessee hill-billy. But we're all Americans, and we like comparing our homes and interests from all parts of the country. Our civilian professions are even more various—we have lawyers, chemists, accountants, teachers, personnel workers, psychologists, secretaries, deans of women, editors, statisticians, and engineers. . . .

You want to know how we live and what we do, of course. We have a very active program, but it's surprising how much can be accomplished in one day if one follows a schedule. We follow one, strenuously, from 0635, when we respond to reveille, till 2200, when we gratefully turn out the lights and turn in. We leap into action at the sound of two bells, ready to march off to class, to mess, or occasionally to liberty. Of course, up to now, we have been having so many inoculations, uniform fittings, and special meetings that we haven't had time to keep a schedule, but we begin regular classes immediately.

Our first problem is time, for we're in the Navy now, and everything is on the 24-hour basis. We are learning to say "Drill at 1400" instead of 2 p.m., and we remember gladly that dinner is at 1845, not 6:45. Our day is divided among classes, drill, study, and mess. In the morning, we have an hour after breakfast for study, and then we begin to learn about the Navy, with classes and lectures in Naval History, Naval Personnel (from John Paul Jones on up), Organization of the Navy, and Naval Ships and Aircraft. We form and march to classes in companies and remain standing until our instructors tell us to sit, and we take copious notes—and try to remember everything in them. Afternoons, we drill—and concentrate on straight lines and which way is left. In the evening we study, if we can keep awake, with half an hour for baths and getting ready for bed. It is, as you can see, a long day, and it leaves us full of knowledge, naval tradition, sore muscles, and a sense of achievement.

In such a strictly feminine community, the sight of a male is a pleasant addition to a rigorous schedule. The Navy has done well by us by assigning instructors who are smart, snappy, true naval officers—a welcome masculine note. If they seem at times rather baffled by so many females, they manage very well by falling back on naval etiquette and a sound knowledge of naval affairs. We appreciate their devotion to the naval service as much as we enjoy their Navy stories. They're all tall and handsome—and married. . . .

We have our uniforms, and we think they're beautiful, but the outfitting of the company was a striking example of sublimation of the individual to group discipline. Imagine the frustrations to be smoothed over when 120 women were marched in double quick time through a garage to be given the clothes they will wear for the duration. Picture the internal agony of the proverbial shopper who spends three months looking for just her hat, and the internal satisfaction of the clerks who could hand out the hat or coat and have the proverbial shopper, on the "hup—2—3—4!" take it and like it. We all got our uniforms and came out hugging our prized possessions in our arms, feeling like real Navy, although we still have to be fitted and the usual adjustments made in overlong sleeves and too large waistlines before we can appear in full dress. We're eager to start wearing them, but we fervently hope that they won't be as hard to break in as our shoes have been.

Speaking of shoes—feet are the biggest things here. No matter what size they were before we arrived at Capen House, they are now at least two sizes larger than our shoes.

Our own feet are strangers; we don't recognize them in the new neat black oxfords (heels not to exceed one and a half inches); they don't behave properly when given a command; and by the end of the day we wonder whether they will ever be physically qualified for military drill. The sick call always finds plenty of blisters, corns, and tender spots. We may go to the medical officer expecting sympathy, but he snips off the blisters, swabs on something even more painful, and suggests that we cut our toenails or get larger shoes. When we hopefully ask what day we may return to drill, he tells us to report to our platoon leaders immediately. On the drill field, we try to save the worse foot and find we aren't keeping step. We are elated to learn that there is no drill tomorrow, only inoculations. Well, anyway, we don't have to stand on our arms. . . .

From our comments, it may seem that we do nothing but drill, and at first drill has certainly been the most obvious and demanding item on our program. We almost feel that all we have seen since arriving in N. T. S.—Northampton is the back of the head of the girl in front, or the little of the immediate landscape we can see from the corners of our eyes. Actually, we drill only about two hours a day, besides marching to classes and mess—but it feels like much more. . . .

Three times a day we line up in the driveway to march down to the hotel for our meals. Everyone is always on time for these formation drills, and we set off in not too bad style, considering the length of our marching experience. The streets of Northampton resound to our "hup—hup—hup!"; children stare open mouthed; urchins add their orders to those of our leaders; and the inevitable dog trots at our heels. Approaching motorists turn hurriedly aside, cross traffic halts to let us pass, and we swing out with our heads high. We're the Navy, and we're going to eat!

WAVES midshipmen in their room at the Northampton Hotel, November 1942. Photograph by N. J. Benjamin; courtesy of Smith College Archives.



Food is terribly important to us. Next to getting the *Probationary* changed to *Special* on our commissions and receiving our daily quota of mail, food ranks highest. The three-quarters of a mile we have to walk to mess is usually devoted to mental speculation on prospects for the coming meal. Some items are fairly constant, but we still round the corner approaching the steam table with conjecturing eye, as we line up cafeteria style with our trays.

We are really very well fed. Breakfast, at 7:40, varies, but delicious blueberry muffins are a specialty, and there is excellent coffee. Our lunches seem to be "health promoters," with generous helpings of vegetables, fruit, and milk. Evening dinners are satisfyingly ample, as you can see from a sample menu: Grapefruit, turkey, mashed potatoes, carrots, cranberry sauce, rolls, tapioca pudding, and coffee; and there are seconds for those who want them. We get plenty of vitamins and minerals and a generous amount of calories (we hope our drill will keep us from gaining too much weight). Our company almost fills one or two of the big hotel dining rooms. We sit at rather close quarters, but that helps us get acquainted and makes every meal an enjoyable social occasion.

We like Northampton, too. Weather is a military secret, so we can only say that as yet we have not had to wear raincoats for drill, although we find rubbers useful in the early morning dew. We need coats for our march to breakfast and to dinner, but by drill time we are glad to change into light-weight dresses

and shed our jackets or sweaters. When we're marching with eyes front, we get merely a glimpse of the brilliant foil foliage of Northampton and the Smith College campus. We have a fine, if limited, view of the Smith athletic field as we drill, and equally brief glances at Northampton's interesting houses and colonial buildings. The town is charming, with its lovely trees and background of Berkshire Hills that some of us will explore on our weekend "liberty." . . .

No account of our life would be complete without a description of our Saturday morning captain's inspection—after a frantic straightening-up period. . . . Our first inspection was training for a war of nerves, but now we know what it is like, we expect to take the next one with more calm. The first time, however—our lines "prepared for inspection" with a noticeable tremor. Everyone stiffens to attention, tries to keep her feet adjusted to the proper 45-degree angle, hopes that her stocking seams are straight, and holds her breath while the officers approach. There's a flash of gold buttons and braid as the commanding officer goes down the line, and an almost inaudible sigh as each one is passed. At last the ordeal is over and we receive the welcome "Dismiss"—and dash for our quarters to repeat the process at room inspection.

This part of inspection is more harrowing than dress parade, for it involves a longer wait while the captain inspects the lower decks. Floors that were spotless show a mysterious florescence of dust and lint, beds are suddenly rumpled looking, and carefully adjusted windowshades flap maddeningly. There are a few frantic moments of tugging at spreads and picking up bits of dust, a breath of subdued nervous conversation, and we snap to attention as the inspecting party approaches. At the commanding officer's "Good morning" in the doorway, we answer in respectful chorus. A searching look at our blankets folded on the bed, our carefully aligned suitcases, and our (we hope) neat lockers, and it is over. "At ease," says the escorting ensign, appearing momentarily in the doorway again, but the house is so silent no one would guess it contained 120 women, until we hear the shout from below: "It's all over—you can relax now!" We sit down and compare notes, relieved to find out that we have been found very neat but need to hold our shoulders back better. (Inspection is followed, immediately and fortunately, by weekend leave.)

Ah, yes—liberty. We have some every day, according to our schedule. Liberty is supposed to be a leave of less than forty-eight hours, but we have a new definition. It's less than one hour, sometimes less than nothing. As one girl says: "Now we know what they meant when they said, 'Give me liberty or give me death!'" Don't misunderstand—we really don't mind. We get enough exercise during the day so that we don't actually need the additional amount we'd get by walking downtown—and our feet hurt, anyway. But when we do have an hour off, it's exciting to renew acquaintance with such aspects of civilian life as cokes and sundaes, and maybe take time to buy some footpowder or notebook paper.

We've had one distinguished caller. One would think that girls would be overjoyed by a visit from a male, but the contrary was true the other night. About 2030 the ladies engaged in evening study were surprised by the presence of a male (not a gentleman) in formal attire, who announced his arrival not by a gentle knock at the front door or a pressure of the bell, but in a rather unusual way. When the atmosphere suddenly became decidedly unpleasant, an investigation disclosed that a Mr. Skunk had come to call.

We're having a wonderful time; we're leaning lots; and we think the Navy is wonderful. . . . And there's the old saying: "Every third wave (or is it seventh?) is a big one,"—or "goes farthest,"—or "washes up on the beach." We leave it to you, dear friend; our motto is "Long may we Wave!"

Yours, for the Navy,

Rhode Island History
110 Benevolent Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906-3152

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*Enlisted Waves march in formation at the U.S.
Naval Training School (WR), Bronx, New York,
1944. Courtesy of the Naval Historical Collection,
Naval War College, Newport.*