

“WHEN FLAGS FLEW HIGH”: PROPAGANDA,  
MEMORY, AND ORAL HISTORY FOR  
WORLD WAR II FEMALE  
VETERANS

by

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HISTORY FOR WORLD WAR II FEMALE VETERANS

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During World War II, U.S. women responded to a call: "Free a man to fight." It was the first time women were officially welcomed as members of the military reserves, serving for the duration of the war plus six months before returning to their civilian lives. This dissertation fuses oral history interviews with a cultural studies analysis of media messages to understand the experiences and motivations of the women who served. It focuses on those who volunteered for the Navy (known as WAVES) and Coast Guard (referred to as SPARs). By investigating the women's memories alongside the government's intents, the dissertation, in effect, tests Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and

decoding. The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard engaged in a conscious pattern of encoding using various media messages, both civilian and government-sponsored, to construct a specific identity for female recruits. The women were consistently positioned in the media as more elite and refined than their counterparts in other service branches. The foundation of this construction was the couture-designed uniform, which the women often saved and recall in great detail. For their part, the women decoded these messages in often surprising ways. On one hand they affirmed the importance of their jobs and the elite nature of their service branch; conversely, “I didn’t do anything important” is a common refrain. By looking at specific media sources (newsreels, recruitment posters, feature films, magazine photo essays), one can reach an understanding of the consistent and coordinated message the women received. Oral history, meanwhile, offers not only a platform to interrogate the women’s memories of the era, but also provides the women with a way to reevaluate and reconsider their past. As a result, this dissertation not only investigates the effects of propaganda in the mid-20th century, but also casts a spotlight on a facet of the war largely ignored by mainstream historians.

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For my husband (who knows why) and for my mother, for her inspiration.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: MY MOTHER'S WAR

*SEVEN UP! -- Her six brothers are serving in the armed forces, but Mary Marovich, 22 . . . decided that wasn't enough. Enlisting in the WAVES she takes the oath from Lt. Margaret Harding Cecil.*

Chicago *Times*, (no date) 1943

*FEMININE FIRSTS . . . An information operator, Mary Marovich, topped the service star list of the Illinois Bell Telephone company. She has been wearing two three star pins for her six brothers in the service and recently joined the WAVES.*

Chicago *Tribune*, September 24, 1943

In 1943, a young woman from Chicago followed her brothers into the military, signing up for the Navy's new women's branch, the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). Military service would take her far from her south side home. She first shipped off to the Bronx, New York. There she got a health checkup, took aptitude tests and the began basic training. She also received a snazzy uniform created by the New York haute couture designer Mainbocher. Next stop was three thousand miles away in Oakland, California, where she received specialist training

before moving again, this time to her “permanent” post in San Francisco. The young woman was my mother, and her experiences as a Naval reservist during World War II were both unique and at the same time universal, echoing the experiences of the more than one hundred thousand women who served in the Navy during World War II. This was a full two percent of their force.

My mother’s notice of separation from the WAVES tracks her time in the service, from July, 1943 through November, 1945. The notice shows, among other things, where she served and what positions she held (see *Figure 1*). Her “ratings held” is an alphabet soup of designations: AS, HA2c, HA1c, PhM3c, PhM2c. She began as an Apprentice Seaman (pay schedule of \$50 biweekly) and was gradually promoted through the ranks, eventually becoming a Hospital Aide Second Class, a Hospital Aide First Class and a Pharmacist’s Mate Third Class. Her last job was among the highest an enlisted woman could achieve in her division: Pharmacist’s Mate Second Class, which paid the princely sum of \$96 a month (with food and living quarters allowances, the figure rose to \$187.50 monthly). The rate was the same as that of a Naval man.<sup>1</sup>

Looking at this notice of separation enabled me to piece together some of my mother’s military service; nonetheless, much of her experiences remain a mystery to me. I knew her military service was important to her: she asked that when she died, her tombstone be the military marker to which she was entitled as a World War II veteran. But while she was alive, she rarely discussed the details of her years in the Navy. It wasn’t until I began working on this project that my sister unearthed long-forgotten

**NOTICE OF SEPARATION FROM THE U. S. NAVAL SERVICE**  
NAVPERS-331 (Rev. 5-45)

1. SERIAL OR FILE NO.		2. NAME (LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE)		3. RATE AND CLASS OR RANK AND CLASSIFICATION		4. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES		5. PLACE OF SEPARATION	
764 11 59		RYAN, Mary Marovich		PhM2c V-10		184 DuBois St., Newburgh, New York		USN ESU Balboa Park San Francisco, California	
6. CHARACTER OF SEPARATION								Discharged - Honorable	
7. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT								Same as #4	
8. RACE		9. SEX		10. MARITAL STATUS		11. U. S. CITIZEN (YES OR NO)		12. DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH	
W		F		Married		Yes		3-8-21 Chicago, Illinois	
13. REGISTERED								14. SELECTIVE SERVICE BOARD OF REGISTRATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO									
15. MEANS OF ENTRY (INDICATE BY CHECK IN APPROPRIATE BOX)				17. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE		18. NET SERVICE (FOR PAY PURPOSES) (YRS, MOS, DAYS)			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENLISTED <input type="checkbox"/> INDUCTED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMISSIONED				7-15-43		2 Y 4 M 4 D			
16. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE				19. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE					
DATE 6-19-43 DATE DATE DATE				Chicago, Illinois					
20. QUALIFICATIONS, CERTIFICATE, FIELD, ETC.				21. RATINGS HELD		22. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE WORLD WAR II			
Those of rate				AS HA2c HALc PhM3c PhM2c		<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO			
23. SERVICE SCHOOLS COMPLETED				24. SERVICE (VESSELS AND STATIONS SERVED ON)					
USNHCS Oakland, California				4 NTS (WR) Bronx, New York MTC Treasure Island California ComNavTra Dist Cen. S.F., Cal.					
IMPORTANT! IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTOR'S SUBDIVISION VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.									
25. KIND OF INSURANCE		26. EFFECTIVE MONTH OF ADJUSTED DISCONTINUANCE		27. MONTH NEXT PREMIUM DUE		28. AMOUNT OF PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH		29. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO CONTINUE INSURANCE	
NSI		Nov 1945		Dec 1945		\$ 6.60		Yes	
30. TOTAL PAYMENT UPON DISCHARGE		31. TRAVEL OR RELEASE ALLOWANCE INCLUDING TOTAL PAYMENT		32. INITIAL RECEIPTS OR PAY		33. NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER			
\$ 267.40		\$ 432.57		\$ 100.00		M. T. BENNETT			
34. REMARKS				35. SIGNATURE (BY DIRECTION OF COMMANDING OFFICER)					
COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE Dispensary Record Office duty.  JUL 21 11 18 AM 1947				<i>Corde May Hanson</i> Corde May HANSON, Lt. (JG) USNR					
36. NAME AND ADDRESS OF LAST EMPLOYER				37. DATES OF LAST EMPLOYMENT		38. MAIN CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND O. S. T. NO.			
RICHMOND COUNTY Illinois Bell Telephone Co. Chicago, Illinois				FROM: Mar 1940 TO: May 1943		Telephone Operator 1-42.31			
39. JOB PREFERENCE (LIST TYPE, LOCALITY, AND GENERAL AREA)				40. PREFERENCE FOR ADDITIONAL TRAINING (TYPE OF TRAINING)					
None at present				Interior Decorating-Commercial Art					
41. NON-SERVICE EDUCATION (YEARS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED)				42. DEGREE		43. MAJOR COURSE OR FIELD			
8 YRS 4				—		Acad.			
44. RIGHT INDEX FINGERPRINT				45. OFF DUTY EDUCATIONAL COURSES COMPLETED					
46. DATE OF SEPARATION				47. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED					
18 Nov 1945				<i>Charles F. Pallister</i> Charles F. Pallister, County Clerk					

Figure 1: Mary Marovich Ryan Notice of Separation from the United States Navy, 1945 (From the personal collection of Mary M. Ryan, courtesy of the author).

newspaper clippings and photographs toted cross country multiple times as my mother moved from Chicago to San Francisco to New York to Los Angeles.

The tiny personal archive revealed tantalizing snippets of a portion of my mother's life, an experience which she didn't share with either of her daughters. My mother only revealed the "official" family history: how she and my father (a dashing Army Air Corps pilot) met and married in San Francisco. They later celebrated VJ Day together, meeting celebrated photographer Joe Rosenthal at a local pub; he was handing out copies of his Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima to veterans. The yellowed print is still in my family.

But other details were ignored. My mother never spoke about the young, jaunty woman who told once told a Chicago reporter, "I'd really like to wear a six-star pin (for her six brothers in the service), but I can't find a store that sells them!" (see *Figure 2*). I never heard about the dinner and dance celebrating the "birthday" of the WAVES, commemorated in a program she kept (see *Figure 3*). She never talked about her friends Pat, Gin or Bette, whose portraits she held on to for fifty years; never reminisced about the champagne party at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco with a group of fellow WAVES and boyish sailors; never pointed out where she was in the picture of WAVES standing in formation at Hunter College (see *Figures 4-8*). Seeing the photographs, memorabilia, and articles made me wonder about other things. Was the collection of white gloves she had stashed in her top bureau drawer over the years the only remnant of her WAVE uniform she kept? Why didn't she tell me, her media-crazed (and media-

Figure 2: "What 'Telephone Family' Has the Most Men in Uniform?" unidentified newspaper, c. August, 1943 (from the personal collection of Mary M. Ryan, courtesy of the author).

### What "Telephone Family" Has the Most Men in Uniform?

JUST ASK Mary Marovich, or Louis Smith, or Mary King, or Ernie Jones, or Ben Schumacher if the war seems close to them!

Their answer would be an emphatic "Yes!"—and justly so, for none of these telephone people has less than four men from his family in the armed forces. Perhaps other employees have as many, or even more. But these men and women are typical members of many American families broken up by war and now fighting on both battle front and home front.

Topping our service star lists is Mary Marovich, information operator, Wabash Office, Chicago. Mary wears two three-star pins, for her six brothers in the service. "I'd really like to wear a six-star pin, but I can't find a store that sells them!" she said. Two of Mary's brothers are first class petty officers in the Coast Guard. Four of her brothers are in the Army, one overseas with an infantry unit. (Last month Mary went into Uncle Sam's service herself, as a Wave.)

Figure 3: WAVES Anniversary Celebration program, July 1945 (from the personal collection of Mary M. Ryan, courtesy of the author).

**Waves**  
U. S. Naval Training and Distribution Center  
Commodore R. W. CARY — Commanding Officer



**Birthday Dance**

Administration Building — Treasure Island  
Monday 30 July 1945 2000-2400





Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

Clockwise from top left: "Pat," "Gin," and "Bette," c. 1943 (All from the personal collection of Mary M. Ryan, courtesy of the author).



*Figure 7: Fairmont Hotel, San Francisco, California, February 18, 1945. My mother is second from the right (from the personal collection of Mary M. Ryan, courtesy of the author).*



*Figure 8: Hunter College, Bronx, New York, U.S. Navy, c. August, 1943 (official U.S. Navy photograph, from the personal collection of Mary M. Ryan).*

employed) daughter that the Chicago *Times* ran a story and photograph about her enlistment in 1943? Who *was* this sultry WAVE with blood-red lips staring out at me from a creased but still-glamorous portrait (*Figure 9*)? <sup>2</sup>

I also began to wonder if my mother was the *only* woman who kept the details of her World War II military service quiet. I wanted to hear stories from other women, oral histories about their military service which I hoped would also help me unravel some of the mystery of my family history. I initially naively believed that the oral history process was akin to the in-depth journalistic interview; as an academic methodology it would also utilize my 18-plus years of professional journalistic experience interviewing people. But I learned that oral history is a richer and more complex practice than journalistic-driven questioning. My desire to recover history through storytelling and my insistence that the only way to really learn history is to listen to those who lived it meshes thoroughly with the theoretical tenets of oral history. In oral history, the telling of a story, the complexities of memory, and the ordinary person's life experiences are all recognized as historically important and relevant to academic scholarship. My practical considerations brought me to a theory of history and communication where the non-academic individual is not only respected, but considered a partner in the creation of the historical record.

While my mother's service record initially led me to the WAVES, I decided to also incorporate the service of another group into this project, the Coast Guard SPARs (from the Coast Guard motto "*Semper Paratus -- Always Ready*"). I have three primary reasons for studying these two groups. To begin, the WAVES were the first group of





*Figure 11:* Mary Marovich WAVES portrait, c. 1943. (From the personal collection of Mary M. Ryan, courtesy of the author).

women accepted into the service at the same rank and pay scale as men. SPARs fell under the Navy's jurisdiction during wartime and so followed with a similar policy; the group was initially staffed by former WAVES. Second, while some attention in contemporary literature has been paid to the roles of the Army female forces (who were allowed to serve overseas) and the female World War II-era domestic pilots (the WASP), little attention has been given to the roles of the WAVES and SPARs. Finally, both groups shared an important marker of their military identity: a uniform designed by the haute couture clothier Mainbocher.

In this dissertation, I will focus on the military service of two branches of women: those in the Navy and those who served in the Coast Guard. The dissertation draws from both oral history and cultural studies, and utilizes the clues as revealed through the oral histories of fifty-one women who served. It will interrogate both memory and the cultural meanings of specific media sources. Media sources have been selected for analysis based upon ideas or specific details mentioned by the women themselves. The oral history interviews examine the effects the media messages and war experiences had on this group of women who served.

The dissertation will begin with a discussion of the historical context of the era, so readers can understand how these women came to what was considered by many as a "non-traditional" job choice: military service (Chapter Two). Next, I shall review appropriate literature on the topic, both historiographical and theoretical, and introduce my research questions (Chapter Three). Chapter Four will explain the methodology used to analyze the research questions, drawing from both oral history as well as textual

analysis and visual studies. The next five chapters will present oral history interviews and analysis of cultural texts in order to answer Research Questions 1 (Chapters Five and Six), 2 (Chapters Seven and Eight) and 3 (Chapter Nine). Finally, in the conclusion, I will summarize my findings and make recommendations for future research.

One significant note: as an oral historian, I am also an active part of the interviewing and theorizing process. As such, I bring my own biases and interests to this research. If another person were to conduct oral history interviews with the same fifty-one women at the same point in history, he might get a different set of answers. Likewise, another scholar reading at the transcripts from my interviews or listening to those audio and video recordings might come to alternate conclusions or find links and connections that I have overlooked. This doesn't mean that I would disregard the findings of those scholars, or that my scholarship is somehow lacking. It points to the complexity and beauty of oral history: because it ultimately deals with communication between two individuals, with all of its potential for misrepresentations and omissions, it directly challenges the notion that there is a single historical "truth." Rather, history, like the world around us, is constantly open to reconsideration and interpretation. It a story continually in the process of telling, retelling, editing and amending, bringing a fuller understanding to our collective and individual experiences.

*Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Wilson Ross, *The WAVES, the Story of the Girls in Blue* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1943), 196.

<sup>2</sup> A note about word choice and usage. The term “WAVES” is a acronym. However, in conversations with women who served in the military as well as in personal letters, diaries, memoirs, etc., they use the term only to refer to a group of women in the Navy. Individual women are referred to as a “WAVE.” I will follow their usage in this dissertation.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*You had the stars in your window and, well just everybody wanted to do something. Every able-bodied person wanted to do something. I call it the period when flags flew high because they did. Everybody wanted to do something.*

Margaret Anderson (Thorngate), World War II WAVE

A mere five months after the United States entered World War II, something unprecedented began happening in the military: women were allowed to enter the service as emergency workers. First came the Army, with an auxiliary female corp. A month later, the Navy welcomed women, as full, not auxiliary members. The Coast Guard and Marines soon followed suit.

Across the country, women were being asked to act in a patriotic manner, from planting “victory gardens” to working in factories as “Rosie the Riveter.” But why would women choose to join the military rather than explore the options which may have been offered by more traditional work or by war-industry jobs located closer to home? And how did they find out about the opportunities available to women in the military? In this chapter I will outline the changing character of “women’s work,” how women’s

employment shifted from 1929 through 1946, and the opening of military service to women during World War II. In order to understand how radical it was for women to be accepted for regular work in the military during World War II, it is important to know the specific struggles women faced finding work during the Depression and the types of jobs that were open to female workers.

### *The Notion of “Women’s Work”*

The issue of what historically has been considered “proper” work for women is complicated. Far from one normal life trajectory, a woman’s role was often dependent on such things as social class, race, family economics and geographic location.<sup>1</sup> For example, Alice Kessler-Harris found that in Colonial America, work by both men and women was valued and considered essential to survival: “women’s assigned work was equally a calling with men’s. As carpenters and masons were respected, so was the goodwife.”<sup>2</sup> Robert Wiebe argues that in nineteenth century pre-industrialized America, women had a specific “sphere of competence”, caring for the home, which at that time was the center of both individual and community life.<sup>3</sup> A woman’s role was to shape the family’s moral character and identity, a key job in the isolated communities where rural Americans (the bulk of the population) lived and worked. “Women more than men managed the community’s internal security system.”<sup>4</sup> Women also did paid work inside the home to assist with family finances, such as weaving and sewing. However, as Kessler-Harris notes, “It would be a mistake . . . not to acknowledge that domestic work fell low on any hierarchical scale”<sup>5</sup> which at least initially may have been due to women’s status as citizens with few legal rights.

But women weren't limited to those "traditional" inside-the-home jobs. Far from working solely in the unpaid roles of wife and mother, women struggled for recognition in artisan trade organizations after the Revolutionary War, were considered part of the production unit in textile-based trades like weaving in eighteenth century England, and worked in nineteenth century New England textile mills.<sup>6</sup>

Societal changes that came with industrialization may have been a contributing factor to the lack of valuation for work inside the home. America itself had shifted, from the "island communities" and home focus of the pre-industrial country to a work-centric focus that marginalized the importance of the home.<sup>7</sup> Wiebe argues that work was where the (male) employee spent the bulk of his time and what shaped his identity, away from the feminized, less valued space of the home. Additionally, when women attempted to enter the workforce, they were regarded with suspicion. "They were expected to divest themselves of all ostensibly feminine characteristics, to blend as indistinguishably as possible with the male colleagues on exclusively masculine terms."<sup>8</sup>

The home-based work that women did was not just devalued, it was also increasingly being rendered obsolete. By the 1800s, mechanization meant that weaving and other crafts done inside the home were now less efficient and more expensive than factory fabric mills.<sup>9</sup> This had an impact not only on women working inside the homes for extra pay, but also on the need for female labor to provide for the household. Young, unmarried women had little choice but to work outside the home, in order to support their families and/or themselves before marriage.

This, at least, was true for less-affluent women. Those whose families had financial resources could afford to remain at home and practice the financially frivolous household arts such as weaving, embroidery or sewing without pay until married.<sup>10</sup> The less affluent were forced into the work force for at least the period of time from adolescence until they married and had children of their own. “Those who needed an income could soften the division between themselves and the better off if they worked at relatively genteel jobs such as teaching and writing, or if they worked at home.”<sup>11</sup>

The impersonalization of industrialization and the gender integration of the workforce held the promise to some (including Marx and Weber) that the notions of “women’s” and “men’s” work might be eliminated.<sup>12</sup> However, the opposite became the case. Anna Clark traces how a “rhetoric of domesticity” emerged in working class Great Britain by the mid-nineteenth century as part of union arguments to justify increased worker wages.<sup>13</sup> If men were paid higher wages, the argument went, women would be freed to leave the workforce and stay home with children, who would in turn benefit from the greater parental attention and supervision. Far from “traditional,” the stay-at-home wife and mother is instead a relatively recent development as Western nations industrialized, with working class women emulating the actions of the the more affluent.

By the late nineteenth century, economic historian Thorstein Veblen sharply criticized the “conspicuous consumption” of what he dubbed the new “leisure class”, a group which included women whose sole purpose was to look nice and shop. Rather than “a simple manifestation of idleness and indolence” the leisure class wife’s “job” demonstrated that “she does not and need not occupy herself with anything that is gainful



or that is of substantial use.”<sup>14</sup> She was the public personification of her husband’s wealth (who, according to Veblen, was quite the consumeristic peacock as well). This lifestyle was enabled by a group of working-class women, who held positions in both domestic employment (maids, housekeepers) as well as sales jobs in stores. Other upper and middle class women of this era, discontent with both the leisure and employment options open to them, began working in charitable/social aid projects such as Hull House or lobbied for women’s suffrage.<sup>15</sup>

The early part of the twentieth century seemed a golden age of sorts for women: women finally won the right to suffrage, Margaret Sanger began the birth control movement, and an equal rights amendment was proposed by Alice Paul.<sup>16</sup> But as Nancy F. Cott notes, though winning the right to vote helped the women’s cause, it wasn’t enough. “By the 1910s the nineteenth century woman’s movement had gained entry to, although no transformation of, many avenues of social, economic and political power from which women had felt excluded.”<sup>17</sup> However, the access was only for some women, who were tokens but not representative of the whole population. Their concept of feminism included equal citizenship but also economic independence and rights in sexuality.

Gradually, women began moving into new and different types of work, aided by two factors: industrialization and World War I.<sup>18</sup> Women began working as teachers, nurses, librarians or social workers due to supply and demand: there were too many of these positions available for only men to fill.<sup>19</sup> By 1910, thirty-six percent of the workers in electrical manufacturing plants were women, a percentage which remained relatively

steady through the Depression.<sup>20</sup> Because of the war, women also were able to move into positions previously held by men, such as middle management.<sup>21</sup> But these gains weren't universally positive. As Ruth Milkman notes, "Once a job is labeled 'male' or 'female,' the demand for labor to fill it is sex-specific, barring disruptions of labor supply or a restructuring of the labor process. Once sex-typing takes root in an industry or occupation, it is extremely difficult to dislodge."<sup>22</sup> In other words, jobs in some industries became a female ghetto.

As the 1920s began to roar, a new symbol of the independent woman emerged: the flapper, with bobbed hair and short skirts who, as Sheila Rowbotham notes, found: new kinds of employment were opening up in banking, real estate, retail sales, administrative and clerical work . . . The number of "white collar" women were growing. There was also an expansion in glamorous but unorganized jobs which were part of the growing leisure industry -- everything from bowling alleys to the ultimate dream of the cinema.<sup>23</sup>

Scholars are at odds as to just who these newly working women were. Kessler-Harris contends both single and married women found roles in the workforce, because women's work during wartime opened their eyes to the possibility that marriage and work weren't mutually exclusive. David Kennedy acknowledges that while more women were working (twenty-two percent of all workers by 1930), "the typical woman worker was single and under the age of twenty-five. Once she married, as almost every woman did, typically before the age of twenty-two, she was unlikely to work again for wages, particularly while she had children at home. Only one mother in ten worked outside the

household.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Lois Scharf argues that women were only accepted as workers with the assumption that they would move back into the home after marriage.

But by the 1920s, maintaining a standard of living became difficult for less-affluent Americans due to a redefinition of “need.” Veblen’s notion of conspicuous consumption had migrated from the leisure class to working Americans.<sup>25</sup> Technological innovations, such as the radio or the automobile, became family essentials.<sup>26</sup> “Need” became defined not as basics such as food, clothing or shelter, but what a family was unwilling to go without.<sup>27</sup>

Critics said these women were merely working for “pin money.”<sup>28</sup> and portrayed them as selfish or frivolous. Winifred Wandersee disagrees that these women were motivated by consumeristic reasons:

As the household economy lost its productive role and increased its consumption of purchased goods, additional income beyond the principal wage-earned became more important rather than less. There was a basic dilemma in this need for additional wage-earners at a time when the role of women and children in the home was glorified, and when women’s domestic role, with respect both to housekeeping and to child care was greatly intensified. Economic needs and social values came into direct conflict for the family that aspired to middle-class standards in both spheres.<sup>29</sup>

In this construction, outside work had little to do with the desire for income or nonessentials. Instead, women with children and employed husbands worked because

they were committed to family values. Work was a way for women to improve living conditions for their families.

### *The Depression and World War II*

The Depression challenged this notion of financial independence and of the necessity of married women working. But it is also impossible to paint American experience during the 1930s with a broad brush. In the early part of the twentieth century, America experienced phenomenal growth due to an influx of immigrants. The country's population doubled from the 1890s to the 1920s, with the bulk of the immigrants coming from "non-traditional" areas, such as Eastern or Southern Europe, who often settled in Northern cities.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, a severe urban and rural technological divide emerged. While urban Americans had such modern conveniences as electricity, indoor plumbing and automobiles, their rural brethren:

Still moved between birth and death to the ancient rhythms of sun and season. More than forty-five million of them had no indoor plumbing in 1930, and almost none had electricity. They relieved themselves in chamber pots and outdoor latrines, cooked and heated with wood stoves, and lit their smoky houses with oil lamps.<sup>31</sup>

Not only did they lack modern conveniences: they also lacked the financial wherewithal of urban dwellers. Farmers' economic troubles began far before October of 1929, actually starting with post-World War I surpluses, which sent food and grain prices plummeting.<sup>32</sup> While industrial workers' wages increased in the 1920s by twenty-five percent, farmer's real wages had eroded during the same time period.<sup>33</sup>

The stock market crash of October 1929 may not have “caused” the Depression,<sup>34</sup> but nonetheless it was a visible signal of the economic problems in American society. For at least half of the population, the Depression brought no great deprivation, though they were certainly aware of the hardships others faced.<sup>35</sup> By 1932, unemployment had reached twenty percent, with a third of those who were working only working part-time.<sup>36</sup> Families moved in together to save money and brought food to less fortunate relatives, strengthening “kinship ties.”<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, the federal government, in a mind-boggling display of bureaucratic spin, advocated the notion that women actually felt less strain due to the Depression than men.

The chief of the Federal Bureau of Home Economics argued that homemaking could and should be esteemed because it was the “only occupation engaging a significant number which gives economic security to its workers.” None of the nation’s twenty-eight million housewives lost their jobs because of the economic crisis.<sup>38</sup>

The government of course ignored exactly *how* unpaid work inside the home offered the women any economic security. Nonetheless, the government’s awkward praise is an example of the difficult negotiations during the era to determine exactly what service provides a “contribution” to society and should be protected by governmental assistance.<sup>39</sup>

It wasn’t just the federal government who had difficulty determining if, or how, women were impacted by the Depression. Scholars disagree as to its exact impact on

women; it either solidified their positions as workers,<sup>40</sup> forced them out of the professional workforce and into less professional jobs,<sup>41</sup> or re-awoke “antagonism to married women working.”<sup>42</sup> As Scharf notes, “The professional progress of women during the previous decades, even within this feminized field (teaching) came to a halt -- a Depression decade legacy for women that continued beyond the 1930s.”<sup>43</sup> Married women especially faced scorn for working in these sorts of jobs and were viewed as “bad” role models for children.

Nonetheless, women did work. Kessler-Harris argues that because women were not allowed into certain jobs, there were paradoxically protected from layoffs as the Depression worsened:

The Depression that should have driven women back to the home instead solidified their positions as workers. It emphasized the feeling, already planted in the twenties, that under some conditions women could carry out family function as effectively outside the home as inside it.<sup>44</sup>

Women made up 24.3 percent of workers in 1930; that number rose 25.1 percent of workers by 1940.<sup>45</sup>

In a period of economic uncertainty, some scholars argue Americans retreated from the social revolution of the 1920s.<sup>46</sup> As Scharf notes:

The Great Depression exacted a special toll from women: intensified labor at home, growing work force participation but diminished economic status, and destruction of an already enfeebled women’s movement which

tried to protect working women by wrapping them in traditional familial roles and values.<sup>47</sup>

The encouraging trends of the 1920s, that women could, and should, work in varied jobs, came to a halt. “The Depression . . . fostered the domestic climate in which marriage and family were regarded as total commitment for women.”<sup>48</sup>

Women often got little encouragement to pursue careers or professional jobs. For instance, the New York City Bar Association excluded women from its membership until 1937; beginning in 1925 through 1945, United States medical schools placed a five-percent quota on female applicants.<sup>49</sup> Young high school women were directed into less prestigious skills-based jobs, such as transcribing, billing and bookkeeping machinery operators.<sup>50</sup> The jobs were assumed to be temporary and held only until a woman married.

Women didn’t necessarily chafe at these restrictions. “The married woman often felt herself in a far better social and economic position than her unmarried sister.”<sup>51</sup> McElvaine notes that work by women, especially married women, was driven solely by economic necessity:

More women who sought employment, before as well as during the Depression, did so because the economic realities of American life obliged them to work . . . When the Depression hit, even those families that did not need the wife’s extra income, needed it if they were to stay close to the standard that they had enjoyed during prosperity.<sup>52</sup>

He argues this tendency placed a stigma upon women in the post-Depression years.

Working women, especially working wives, became associated with economic bad times.

Initially, the government took little direct action to assist those who lost their jobs, male or female. President Herbert Hoover's plans included aid to farmers and encouraging businesses not to lower wages for workers.<sup>53</sup> This was to little avail; by late 1932, thirty-eight states had no or virtually no banks open, with tightly limited withdrawals in those open in other states.<sup>54</sup> When President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933, he took drastic steps to move the country back to work and into economic recovery. His inaugural address ("the only thing we have to fear is fear itself") and fireside chats demonstrated the new president was perhaps more adept at improving morale than actual living conditions for the average American.<sup>55</sup>

Many of the programs that shaped the New Deal's reputation were put into action during Roosevelt's first one hundred days in office, including aid to farmers, Public Works Administration (public works projects), Tennessee Valley Authority (power), Agriculture Adjustment Administration (farmers), National Industrial Recovery Act (industry), Home Owners' Loan Corporation (home financing), Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (guaranteeing banks' money), and the WPA (Works Progress Administration). Most of these agencies were directed toward helping men get back to work; in fact women were often adversely impacted by the Federal Economy Act, which prohibited two members of the same family from holding federal jobs. A number of states enacted similar legislation, pushing women out of well-paying professional jobs at both the local and federal levels.<sup>56</sup>



Rowbotham notes “the New Deal fostered values which took the edge off the harsh competitive ethic and validated social and cultural initiatives.”<sup>57</sup> A handful of women did find employment in the New Deal projects. These projects provided work for the unemployed, but also emphasized work as a type of public service. The Civilian Conservation Corps had a branch for women, but hired only six thousand, a miniscule fraction of its overall workforce. Dorothea Lange and Marion Post were among the photographers working for the Farm Security Administration. The director of the project, Roy Stryker, says “*We introduced Americans to America . . .* The full effect of this team’s work was that it helped connect one generation’s image of itself with the reality of its own time in history” (emphasis included).<sup>58</sup> New Deal projects like this were defining to the country what it meant to be an American. These sorts of projects also laid the groundwork for the mobilization of World War II in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

On January 13, 1942, the U.S. government established a new department: the Office of War Information (OWI). Jerome Braverman notes the agency’s mission was simple: to spread propaganda throughout the country, improving morale during World War II.<sup>59</sup> Propaganda, it is important to note, is not by definition, negative. Webster’s Dictionary defines propaganda as “any organization or movement working for the propagation of particular ideas, doctrines, practices, etc.”<sup>60</sup> Ongoing government projects soon fell under the OWI umbrella. One example is the Farm Security Administration photography project, which shifted its focus from America’s small towns and rural farms to factory and munitions workers.<sup>61</sup> The photographs would be released to newspapers

and magazines around the country. The purpose, according to Braverman, was to “formulate and carry out information programming to increase an understanding of the war by using the press, radio and motion pictures.”<sup>62</sup>

The mass media was a willing participant, creating an image during the war years of what it is to be an American:

The identification of certain values as particularly American was a significant contribution . . . to home front morale and resolve. Role models of “real” or “true” Americans were created by advertisers, movie makers and songwriters -- and the rank and file followed their lead cheerfully, for the most part.<sup>63</sup>

In every aspect of the media, from books to newspapers to newsreels to films to radio programs to advertisements to books, the war was front and center.<sup>64</sup> Some media messages were directed at men, such as those encouraging enlistment. But others targeted women, including messages to buy war bonds, plant victory gardens or enter into work in war industries or the military.<sup>65</sup>

Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor the war helped stimulate the economy. By mid-1941, the United States shook off the last vestiges of the Depression as the war in Europe spread.<sup>66</sup> As U.S. military needs grew, however, it quickly became evident that a male-dominant workforce would not be sufficient. Milkman notes:

The economic mobilization for World War II dramatically transformed women’s relationship to the labor market. They poured by the millions into jobs previously done only by men. As military conscription reduced

the ranks of available workers and war production generated rapid economic expansion, the labor surplus of the 1930s was quickly replaced by a labor shortage -- especially a shortage of male labor. Suddenly there was deep uncertainty about where the boundaries between “men’s” and “women’s” work should be drawn.<sup>67</sup>

Initially, women who were already in the workforce took over these jobs, but gradually married women also began working.<sup>68</sup>

The war allowed women to enter into the job market without apology. Working as “Rosie the Riveter” was framed by the government in posters and other propaganda as a patriotic duty.<sup>69</sup> Maureen Honey observes, “War work became a vehicle for women to shoulder their civic and moral responsibilities as good citizens, rather than a way to become more dependent and powerful.”<sup>70</sup> But she also cautions it would be simplistic to think that women only entered the workforce to somehow do right by their country. Women also saw wartime employment as giving them a chance to reenter a job force they may have been forced out of due to the Depression, or to enter the labor market for the first time.

The labor shortage lessened businesses’ Depression-era resistance to hiring married women<sup>71</sup>. Women, however, didn’t necessarily flock to traditionally-male jobs. Sherna Berger Gluck argues left to their own devices, most women would have avoided war-related businesses like shipyards or production plants in favor of clerical work, which was seen as both cleaner and more respectable.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless they did apply for, and begin working in, factory jobs. Factories, meanwhile, didn’t rush to make things

easier for their female workers. The plants were often staffed twenty-four hours a day, but offered little to assist working mothers, such as child care. The government attempted to make working non-traditional shifts easier by expanding federal child care programs.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, the propaganda campaign to get women into the workforce “concentrated on two things: providing women with encouragement for entering the labor force, especially in male jobs, and convincing the public that traditional prejudices against working women were inaccurate and destructive to the nation’s welfare.”<sup>74</sup>

In 1944 surveys, seventy-five to eighty percent of women working in wartime areas said they planned to remain in the labor force after the war ended.<sup>75</sup> The government had a different idea. Women were to move back into the home at war’s end. Because the work was conceived of as only a temporary disruption of “traditional” female roles, Scharf and others argue that World War II offered little in the way of real or substantial change for female workers. Susan Hartmann says three conditions set limits on social change via wartime roles: the jobs were only “for the duration,” women would retain their “femininity” despite doing “male” work, and the media emphasized “feminine” motives for women deciding to work outside the home such as serving the family.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, she notes, “The conservative forces of war, the antifeminist backlash, and a general desire for ‘normalcy’ denied by depression and war undermined the war’s potential for challenging sex-role behavior and attitudes.”<sup>77</sup> Others believe the women’s wartime experiences may have helped set the stage for social change in subsequent generations.<sup>78</sup> As Gluck observes, while “the majority of women continued to define themselves primarily as wives and mothers . . . these individual (war work)

changes were not merely ephemeral. For it is the changes that individual experience that both push for and support social transformation.”<sup>79</sup> War work planted the seeds for a movement that would germinate in subsequent generations.

*The History of Women in the Navy*

Women have had a long, if unheralded, history of military service in the United States, beginning with the Revolutionary War, assisting men or dressing as men and serving as battlefield soldiers. D’Ann Campbell notes that about twenty thousand women served during the American Revolution as “Women of the Army.” The semiofficial auxiliary members were subject to discipline and received half the pay of men; their chief combat duty was to carry water to the artillery. Other women dressed as men to serve in both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War.<sup>80</sup> For the most part, however, women who served were limited to the Army or Navy Nurse Corps, which was established as part of the regular military during the Spanish American War.<sup>81</sup> But during World War I, Navy leaders found a loophole which enabled women to serve alongside men in jobs other than nursing.

The women became known as “yeomanettes.” Lorette Prevectus Walsh was the first to enlist in the U.S. Naval Reserve, on March 21, 1917. Nearly twelve thousand women served in all during World War I, due to a creative interpretation of the Naval Act of 1916 by Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels. The Navy was already using women as civil service clerks. Daniels, a long supporter of suffragists, noted the Naval Act was vague, saying only that “all *persons* who may be capable of performing specific useful service for coastal defense” could serve in the Naval Reserve. “Daniels triumphantly

announced to his advisors, 'It does not say . . . anywhere that a yeoman must be a man.' To (Rear Admiral L. C.) Palmer he wrote, 'Nothing can be found which would prohibit the enrollment of women.'"<sup>82</sup> The women's nickname (yeomanette) derived from how their classification of "Yeoman (F)," as in Yeoman, female, sounded when spoken aloud. By the war's end, the women were placed on inactive duty, and by 1925, the Senate closed the Yeoman (F) loophole, limiting reserve service to "male citizens of the United States."

The successful integration of the yeomanettes into the military served as a template when the Navy looked to ease a similar personnel crisis during World War II. But some in the Navy, particularly Rear Admiral Chester Nimitz, objected to letting women back into the service in any form. Nimitz headed the Navy's Bureau of Personnel, and thought that civil service workers would be able to handle any staff crunches due to overseas service.<sup>83</sup>

Meanwhile, the Army jumped to the forefront, pushing Congress to approve the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). The bill was first introduced in October of 1941, and was passed by Congress in May of the following year. Not everyone accepted the idea of women in the Army. As Leisa Meyer notes, "The public debate during World War II focused on concerns that the creation of a corps of 'female soldiers' would lead women to abdicate their responsibilities within the home and usurp the male duty of protecting and defending home and country."<sup>84</sup> The women weren't given full status in the Army, but instead were only an auxiliary to the "regular" male corps.

Those in the Navy who supported a woman's corps pushed to avoid this sort of divide.<sup>85</sup> By the time Japanese fighters attacked Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, the increased need for forces to fight a war on two fronts made it clear even to detractors like Nimitz that the Navy would need to accept women in uniform.<sup>86</sup> Secretary of Navy Frank Knox recommended establishing a women's "reserve as a branch of the Naval Reserve, appointments and enlistments . . . would be made only in time of war and were to expire no later than six months after the war's end."<sup>87</sup>

This opened another round of bitter wrangling within the Navy and the Senate. At issue was the women's fully integrated status within the Navy; objectors wanted women to be an auxiliary, like the WAAC.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, the Navy began proceeding on the assumption that women would soon begin work. An advisory council, headed by Barnard College Dean Virginia Gildersleeve, began lobbying members of Congress (and President Roosevelt via his wife Eleanor) about the women's reserve, emphasizing the security and discipline the women would have.<sup>89</sup> Mildred McAfee, president of Wellesley College, was appointed to lead the new Naval Branch. Finally, Navy and Congressional detractors relented. President Roosevelt signed the bill establishing the Naval Women's Reserve into law on July 30, 1942. The women became known as WAVES, a far more acceptable nickname to others being bandied about in the press like "gobettes" or "sailorettes."<sup>90</sup>

The women's reserve of the U.S. Coast Guard was the next branch established, on November 23, 1942. Former WAVE officer Dorothy Stratton was named as SPAR Director. Stratton, like McAfee, had strong ties to the academic community; before

joining the Navy she had worked for Dean of Women at Purdue University.<sup>91</sup> Like McAfee, she helped the SPARs avoid an unwieldy nickname. The Coast Guard initially proposed naming the new branch the Women's Reserve of the Coast Guard, or WORCOGs for short; SPARs eventually won out.<sup>92</sup> While the SPARs fell under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Navy, they trained in separate facilities and were assigned different duties (male Coast Guard members were also under Naval jurisdiction during wartime). By the end of the war, approximately one hundred thousand served in the WAVES, with another thirteen thousand as SPARs.<sup>93</sup>

On August 9, 1943, the WAAC was replaced by the WAC (Women's Army Corps), a reserve force, which like the WAVES, was fully integrated into the Army. The Marine Corps Women's Reserve was founded on February 13, 1943. Unlike the other branches, the WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots) remained a quasi-military organization and never received full military status. In all, more than 350,000 women served in World War II, including 140,000 WACs, twenty-three thousand Women Marines and eighteen-hundred WASP.<sup>94</sup> Seventy-six thousand women served as military nurses.<sup>95</sup>

The Navy initially established a training center for WAVES officers at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Enlisted women were to be trained at colleges around the country where they would learn specialized skills. However, it quickly became evident that a centralized training facility was needed to acclimate women into the Navy way of doing things. Hunter College in the Bronx, New York volunteered its facilities for the service. The first class arrived in February, 1943.<sup>96</sup> SPARs at first trained



alongside the WAVES. Later, they received their own boot camp, first in Palm Beach, Florida, and later in Manhattan Beach, New York.<sup>97</sup> The last class of WAVES and SPARS was in boot camp in 1945, as the war ended.

The Navy didn't segregate women by race in the units. However, scholars agree the number of minority women in the Navy and Coast Guard was low.<sup>98</sup> Asian and Hispanic women were allowed to join from the beginning, but African-American women were barred from serving in the Navy and Coast Guard until late 1944.<sup>99</sup> This was perhaps due to a somewhat literal reading of the missive that women were "freeing a man to fight." Since African American *men* worked largely in the mess hall or the laundry and were not sent to the front lines, the rationale was that African American women would not be needed to fulfill that duty. It took extensive lobbying by the McAfee and Stratton, as well as by Eleanor Roosevelt, to get the Navy to change its racist policy.<sup>100</sup> By war's end, five black women had enlisted in the Coast Guard.<sup>101</sup> More served in the WAVES, including three as officers.<sup>102</sup>

Women enlisted "for the duration plus six months."<sup>103</sup> Unlike the Army, the Navy and Coast Guard women were banned from overseas duty. It wasn't until 1945 that they were permitted to serve "abroad" in Alaska, Hawaii, the West Indies and Panama; the largest number of women served in Hawaii.<sup>104</sup> By 1945, Mildred McAfee resigned from active duty and returned to her position as Wellesley College, to be replaced as WAVES commander first by Jean Palmer and then by former yeomanette Joy Bright Hancock.<sup>105</sup>

But as the war ended and the Navy was decommissioning its forces, male and female, it ran into a problem which becomes obvious with hindsight: there weren't

enough active duty personnel to keep the Navy operational. Leaders, including the now-supportive Captain Nimitz, were impressed by the competence of the WAVES during wartime. They recommended that women be made a permanent part of the Navy.<sup>106</sup> Similar arguments were being made for the Army and the Marines.<sup>107</sup>

Congress braced for another bitter battle. At one point Congressman Dewey Short insinuated that Navy women who left military service due to pregnancy were bearing children out of wedlock. Hancock was testifying at the time, but it was Congressman James E. Van Zandt who “leaped to his feet and admonished his colleague, ‘I do think the Captain should have an apology for that implication, if that’s what you’re implying!’ No further questions arose on the issue.”<sup>108</sup>

Once again, the Navy leadership eventually prevailed. The Women’s Reserve became a permanent part of the Navy on July 30, 1948.<sup>109</sup> The Women’s Armed Services Integration Act placed severe limitations on the numbers of women in all branches of the service, limiting ranks and potential for advancement. Nonetheless, as Jean Ebbert and Mary Beth Hall note, “The act represented a remarkable advancement for Navy women. Now they could capitalize on what the WAVES had won: a career in the peacetime Navy.”<sup>110</sup> The total female force was initially limited at about five hundred officers and six thousand enlisted personnel, far fewer than the eighty-six thousand women the Navy claimed during World War II. The first six of those enlisted women to be accepted into the regular Navy were sworn in on July 7, 1948. All had served as World War II WAVES.<sup>111</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See: Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work : A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Times Books, 1984); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Segmented Society: An Introduction to the Meaning of America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Wiebe, *The Segmented Society*, 54.

<sup>4</sup> Wiebe, *The Segmented Society*, 54.

<sup>5</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> See: Joan Acker, *Class Questions: Feminist Answers* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006); Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jonathan Prude, "The Social System of Early New England Textile Mills: A Case Study, 1812-1840," in *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society*, ed. Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 1-36; Sean Wilentz, "Artisan Republican Festivals and the Rise of Class Conflict in New York City, 1788-1837," in *Working-Class America*, 37-77.

<sup>7</sup> See: McElvaine, *The Great Depression*; Wiebe, *The Segmented Society*.

<sup>8</sup> Wiebe, *The Segmented Society*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> See: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*.

<sup>10</sup> See: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*.

<sup>11</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> See: Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987),

<sup>13</sup> Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*, 203.

<sup>14</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 51.

<sup>15</sup> See: Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House, With Autobiographical Notes* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1910); Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Viking, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> See: David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear the American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, (New York, Oxford University Press: 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 7.

<sup>18</sup> See: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*; Milkman, *Gender at Work*; Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> See: Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*.

<sup>20</sup> Milkman, *Gender at Work*, 13.

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<sup>21</sup> See: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*.

<sup>22</sup> Milkman, *Gender at Work*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, 157.

<sup>24</sup> Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> See: McElvaine, *The Great Depression*.

<sup>26</sup> For example, an estimated 4,428,000 radio sets were sold in 1929; forty percent of U.S. households had radio in 1930, which increased to eighty percent by 1940. Edward Bliss, *Now the News: The Story of Broadcast Journalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 483; Wm. David Sloan, *The Media in America, a History* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2008), 356.

<sup>27</sup> See: Winifred D. Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values, 1920-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> See: Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*; McElvaine, *The Great Depression*; Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*.

<sup>29</sup> Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*, 53.

<sup>30</sup> See: Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 16.

<sup>32</sup> See: Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*; McElvaine, *The Great Depression*.

<sup>33</sup> See: Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*.

<sup>34</sup> Scholars are divided as to the actual cause of the Depression, but seem unified in the idea that the crash was merely a symptom of economic problems which already existed in society, see Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*; McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, for a full accounting of the Depression's causes.

<sup>35</sup> See: Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*.

<sup>36</sup> See: Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*.

<sup>37</sup> Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*, 157.

<sup>39</sup> See: Colin Gordon, ed., *Major Problems in American History, 1920-1945: Documents and Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> See: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*.

<sup>41</sup> See: Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*.

<sup>42</sup> Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, 203.

<sup>43</sup> Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*, 85.

<sup>44</sup> Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 272.

<sup>45</sup> McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 182.

<sup>46</sup> See: McElvaine, *The Great Depression*; Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*; Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*.

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- <sup>47</sup> Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*, 165.
- <sup>48</sup> Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*, 117.
- <sup>49</sup> See: Mary V. Stremlow, "Women as Veterans: Historical Perspective and Expectations," in *A Woman's War Too: U.S. Women in the Military in World War II*, ed. Pauline N. Poulos & United States. National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1996), 355-366.
- <sup>50</sup> See: Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*.
- <sup>51</sup> Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*, 121.
- <sup>52</sup> McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 182.
- <sup>53</sup> See: Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*; McElvaine, *The Great Depression*.
- <sup>54</sup> See: Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*.
- <sup>55</sup> See: McElvaine, *The Great Depression*.
- <sup>56</sup> See: Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*.
- <sup>57</sup> Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, 211.
- <sup>58</sup> Roy E. Stryker & Nancy C. Wood, *In this Proud Land: America, 1935-1943, as Seen in the FSA Photographs* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973), 9.
- <sup>59</sup> Jerome Braverman, *To Hasten the Homecoming: How Americans Fought World War II through the Media* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1996), 50.
- <sup>60</sup> "Propaganda," *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, ed. Jean L. McKechnie (Cleveland: Dorset & Baber, 1983), 1442.
- <sup>61</sup> See: Paul Hendrickson, *Bound for Glory: America in color, 1939-43* (New York/Washington, DC: H.N. Abrams in association with the Library of Congress, 2004); Stryker and Wood, *In this Proud Land*.
- <sup>62</sup> Braverman, *To Hasten the Homecoming*, 51.
- <sup>63</sup> Sue Hart, "Madison Avenue Goes to War: Patriotism in Advertising During World War II," in *Visions of War: World War II in Popular Literature and Culture*, ed. M. Paul Holsinger and Mary Ann Schofield (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992), 119.
- <sup>64</sup> See Braverman, *To Hasten the Homecoming*.
- <sup>65</sup> Prints and Photographs Reading Room, "Prints and Photographs Online Catalog," Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html> (accessed December 12, 2007).
- <sup>66</sup> See: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*.
- <sup>67</sup> Milkman, *Gender at Work*, 49.
- <sup>68</sup> See: Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987).
- <sup>69</sup> See: Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*.
- <sup>70</sup> Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 6.

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<sup>71</sup> See: Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

<sup>72</sup> See: Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited*.

<sup>73</sup> See: Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*.

<sup>74</sup> Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 47.

<sup>75</sup> See: Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited*; Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*.

<sup>76</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 23.

<sup>77</sup> Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 216.

<sup>78</sup> See: Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited*; Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*; Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*.

<sup>79</sup> Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited*, 269.

<sup>80</sup> See: Linda Grant De Pauw, "Women in Combat: the Revolutionary War Experience." *Armed Forces and Society* 7 (Winter 1981), 209-226; Mary Massey, *Bonnet Brigades* (New York: Knopf, 1966).

<sup>81</sup> See: D'Ann Campbell, "Servicewomen and the American Military Experiment," in *A Woman's War Too* (see Note 49), 15-25. For a detailed account, see Major General Jeanne Holm's (ret., USAF) *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), recognized as the definitive history of women's service in all branches of the United States' military.

<sup>82</sup> Jean Ebbert and Mary Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1993), 5.

<sup>83</sup> See: Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*; Joy Bright Hancock, *Lady in the Navy: A Personal Reminiscence* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1972).

<sup>84</sup> Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 29.

<sup>85</sup> See: Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*; Virginia C. Gildersleeve, *Many a Good Crusade: Memoirs* (New York: Macmillan, 1954).

<sup>86</sup> Nimitz eventually became a staunch supporter of women in the Navy, see: Winifred Quick Collins, *More Than a Uniform* (Denton, TX, University of North Texas Press, 1997); Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*; Mildred McAfee Horton and Helene K. Sargeant. "Reminiscences of Mildred McAfee Horton: Oral History" (Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 1982), 237 leaves.

<sup>87</sup> Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 30.

<sup>88</sup> See: Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*; Gildersleeve, *Many a Good Crusade*.

<sup>89</sup> See: Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*; Gildersleeve, *Many a Good Crusade*.

<sup>90</sup> The press coverage and Navy-sponsored propaganda will be discussed in detail later in this this dissertation.

<sup>91</sup> See: Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*.

<sup>92</sup> See: Dorothy Jeanne Gleason, "My experiences as a SPAR during World War II (February 1943-June 1946)," in *A Woman's War Too* (see Note 49). 115-127.

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<sup>93</sup>The Navy's official tally is only eighty-six thousand WAVES, however in subsequent years many scholars have determined that at least one hundred thousand served.

<sup>94</sup> See: Holm, *Women in the Military*.

<sup>95</sup> Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, "The Wartime History of the WAVES, SPARs, Women Marines, Army and Navy Nurses, and WASPs," in *A Woman's War Too* (see Note 49), 48.

<sup>96</sup> See: Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*.

<sup>97</sup> Robin J. Thomson, "SPARs: The Coast Guard & the Women's Reserve," U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office, [http://www.uscg.mil/history/h\\_wmnres.html](http://www.uscg.mil/history/h_wmnres.html) (accessed November 13, 2007).

<sup>98</sup> See: Regina T. Akers, "Doing Their Part: The WAVES in World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2000); Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, "Securing the 'Double V': African-American and Japanese-American Women in the Military During World War II," in *A Woman's War Too* (see Note 49). 327-354.

<sup>99</sup> See: Akers, "Doing Their Part;" John Cha, *Willow Tree Shade: The Susan Ahn Cuddy Story* (Seattle: Korean American Heritage Foundation, 2002); Neverdon-Morton, "Securing the 'Double V.'"

<sup>100</sup> See: Akers, "Doing Their Part;" Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*.

<sup>101</sup> See: Neverdon-Morton, "Securing the 'Double V.'"

<sup>102</sup> See: Akers, "Doing Their Part."

<sup>103</sup> See: Campbell, "Servicewomen and the American Military Experiment."

<sup>104</sup> See: Collins, *More Than a Uniform*; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*.

<sup>105</sup> See: Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*.

<sup>106</sup> See: Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*.

<sup>107</sup> The Coast Guard, because of its non-military status outside of wartime, did not face a personnel crunch and so did not admit women into active duty on non-reserve status until the 1970s (Thomson, "SPARs").

<sup>108</sup> Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 110.

<sup>109</sup> Department of the Navy, "Women in the U.S. Navy," Naval Historical Center, <http://www.history.navy.mil/> (accessed December 3, 2006).

<sup>110</sup> Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 114.

<sup>111</sup> See: Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*.

**CHAPTER III**  
**THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

*You know I'm glad you're doing this because, they had on PBS a whole long story about the war and they never mentioned the women once. They talked about Rosie the Riveter. The women have not gotten the credit for what they did, you know?*

Pat Connelly, World War II WAVE

Because this dissertation is conceived as using oral history interviews as a way to help understand the impact of World War II media messages on women, literature and theory will fall under two broad categories: cultural studies and oral history. I will begin this chapter by outlining the cultural studies theorists whom I believe best suit the needs of this project before discussing the link between cultural studies and propaganda. Oral history likewise has theoretical ties to cultural studies. After I give an overview of the discipline's theoretical base, I will discuss feminist perspectives on storytelling and memory. Finally, I will review the historiography, cultural studies analyses and oral histories of the World War II-era.



*Cultural Studies*

Cultural studies theory allows one to more fully interrogate the question of what is propaganda and how to “read” it. It also accounts for individual agency in the interpretation of and success or failure of the propaganda message. Cultural studies offers an effective template for analysis of the media offered to women during the war years, as well as the unspoken and culturally understood underlying message. The problem is there is no one definition of the concept of cultural studies; instead, contrasting schools of thought (loosely based on the geographic location of the scholar) have emerged.

However, all schools of thought related to the mass media trace their genesis to mid-twentieth century critiques of communication scholarship, and specifically, to Harold Lasswell’s 1948 theory of who says what in which channel to whom with what effect.<sup>1</sup> The critics were perturbed because Laswell ignored what to them seemed the most important element of the paradigm: the why.

The Frankfurt School scholars were initially the most vocal critics.<sup>2</sup> This group of German, Jewish scholars were for the most part European emigrants who fled as Hitler’s power was spreading in the inter-war years; having experienced how a fascist state utilized mass media, they were concerned with its potential power and impact on society. Many of the scholars settled in the United States, and specifically Los Angeles, for the war years. The Frankfurt School utilized a creative interpretation of Marxist concepts of mode of production and power relations to apply to cultural production.

Walter Benjamin was perhaps the most optimistic of the group, and ironically, was the one who remained in Europe as war spread. He committed suicide in 1940. His work bridges literature, philosophy of history and media studies; his writings also offer a link between oral history and cultural studies.<sup>3</sup> Benjamin's landmark 1936 tract "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction," discusses the aesthetic and artistic validity of reproduced media such as film and photography. By removing the "aura," or deification of the art object, mechanical reproduction brought art into individuals' homes, a process he believed allowed for greater access and would encourage more critical consideration of artworks.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno took a very pessimistic view of the mass media's effects (from the sunny clime of Southern California). They considered mass production of cultural products to create a narcotizing impact on society due to formulaic and repetitive styles and shoddy quality.<sup>5</sup> They held an almost nostalgic view of "high" and folk art, which I believe romanticizes its value.

Emerging from the same era, but writing in isolation, was Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, imprisoned for much of his life.<sup>6</sup> While in prison, he wrote prolifically. Gramsci upended the base/superstructure construct of Marxist theory, challenging the primacy of mode of production and economics by the addition of the social structure to the mix. He developed the concept of hegemony as an explanation for how modern society functions. According to Gramsci, hegemony is all pervasive and largely invisible. It is an informal "contract" of sorts between those in power and those who do not hold power. Hegemony allows society to function smoothly.<sup>7</sup> Gramsci's theory allowed for

the potential of individual agency through counter-hegemony, oppositional forces that arise to challenge the hegemony, eventually causing it to be transformed.

These various theories began to coalesce in cultural studies. Durham and Kellner explain cultural studies as being concerned with how the individual uses and interprets texts, in the context of social, political and economic concerns. Their definition offers an acknowledgment of power/economic differences between producers and audience, but also allows for audience agency and individual interpretations, which may be limited by the same socio-political factors.<sup>8</sup> Ioan Davies says that through cultural studies, the concept of “text” has been expanded beyond the traditional modes. Text now can be shopping, driving a car, or watching a ball game.<sup>9</sup> Cultural studies concerns are how the societal and the individual interact.

Three distinct trends or schools of thought have emerged in regards to cultural studies. The North American tradition is relatively depoliticized in relation to other cultural studies traditions, concerned with the effects and impacts of the media on the individual.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the British tradition is highly politicized, with thought shaped by the now-defunct Birmingham Centre and influenced by the Frankfurt School and Marxist concerns about modes of production. It attempts to link an individual’s usage and interpretation of text to issues of production, concerning itself with the intersection between the two.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in the French tradition, scholars are less concerned about modes of production and more with how society constructs meaning and how governments maintain power.<sup>12</sup>

John Hartley contends cultural studies has been absorbed and used by a variety of different fields, such as art history, sociology, geography, communication, literary theory, etc. It is relevant anywhere culture, the individual and power relations are in play.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Roland Barthes looks at the notion of culturally understood myths to explain how meaning is both formed and transformed. A photograph is used to show how the myth of “Frenchness” is understood through the clothing a person is wearing (a military uniform), the French flag, and the individual’s salute to the flag. But since myths do not have stable meaning, they are constantly shifting and changing as society shifts and changes. So in the photograph, the fact that the person is a young African boy expands the myth of “Frenchness.”<sup>14</sup>

Another effective tool for media analysis emerging from cultural studies is Stuart Hall’s notion of encoding and decoding of media texts. In this model, the creator encodes texts with certain messages in mind, usually culturally understood mores. The audience receives the text and then decodes it using these cultural conventions. Hall’s model allows for audience readings that accept the dominant position (i.e. the intent of the media creator), produce an oppositional position to contest the dominant ideology, and negotiate a middle position, accepting some elements of the dominant reading and resisting others.<sup>15</sup>

One area where cultural studies has been particularly useful is in feminist thought. Feminists use cultural studies-influenced readings to help explain why women and men often do not see things the same way.<sup>16</sup> Feminism helps enrich our readings of text. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir contended that women were constructed as the

“other” (different from the norm, which is men), which would mean that gender differences are a social construction.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Judith Butler considers gender to be a social construct and, as such, is open to oppositional readings.<sup>18</sup>

The tricky part of this project is the very nature of the mass media output created during the war years, which offered deep aesthetic enjoyment as well as significant intended messages. An appreciation of the beauty found in the individual text is essential to understanding its meaning. Using visual communication to inform cultural studies is especially useful in this arena. Susan Sontag, an American scholar who builds intellectual bridges between the various schools of cultural studies thought, offers deceptively simple recommendations for looking at cultural artifacts, be it a piece of art or a piece of kitsch. She calls for scholars to consider the artifact first and foremost as an aesthetic expression of its creator. She warns against discarding the visceral pleasure in a poster, film or photograph in the search for deeper “meaning”:

Interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art. Even more, it is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world -- in order to set up a shadow world of "meanings." It is to turn the world into *this* world. ("This world"! As if there were any other.) The world, our world, is depleted, impoverished enough.<sup>19</sup>

In her desire to look at something, be it a photograph, a book or an illness, for what it is first and foremost, Sontag attempts to strip away the trappings of pretense from intellectualism and its rhetoric.

Other visual communication scholars argue that audiences perceive the visual at a different and more basic level than language.<sup>20</sup> Anne Marie Barry explains that the mind neurologically processes events and experiences (including media messages) as mental images; “the ability to hold the image over time, a process described as ‘working memory,’ is ultimately the bases of extended consciousness.”<sup>21</sup> Rosalind Krauss and Jonathan Crary argue that the introduction of mediated seeing, through film, photography and other technology, forever changed that mental process.<sup>22</sup> But nonetheless, as Barthes observes, the mediated image contains something which burns that image in one’s memory. He describes this afterimage as the *punctum*: “I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at, as if direct visions oriented its language wrongly, engaging it in an effort of description which will always miss its part of effect, the *punctum*.”<sup>23</sup>

Daniel Chandler notes that metaphors are firmly entrenched within a culture, which imbues them with meaning and significance. Metaphors can be visual or verbal, easily understood or difficult to parse. Chandler observes:

Whilst metaphors may require an imaginative leap in their initial use (such as in aesthetic uses in poetry or the visual arts) many metaphors become so habitually employed that they are no longer perceived as being metaphors at all.<sup>24</sup>

This notion of invisibility, of a cultural shorthand so to speak, becomes critical when considering how propaganda helped develop and maintain national unity during wartime.

### *The Propaganda Model*

Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell define propaganda as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”<sup>25</sup> It has three forms: *black* propaganda, dedicated to intentionally misleading through lies, deceptions and made up stories; *white* propaganda, with a readily identified source and accurate information; and *gray* propaganda, which blends characteristics of both the white and black models.<sup>26</sup>

Propaganda as a term developed around WWI, with the advance of mass media, but the concept existed far earlier. As Jowett and O'Donnell note, the ancient Greeks such as Aristotle and Plato were the first to consider the ethics of persuasion. Their concern was that a crafty speaker could sway an individual to either good or evil. Renaissance-era political theorist Machiavelli didn't see anything wrong with using persuasion for one's individual benefit. In his model, the ends justified the means.<sup>27</sup> By the mid-twentieth century, the rhetoric of propaganda had shifted, from the notion of propaganda as a value-neutral persuasive interaction to an idea that propagandistic persuasion was somehow forced upon a powerless audience. Propaganda, fraught with negative associations, was replaced by more neutral terms such as “information,” “communication” or “persuasion.”<sup>28</sup>

This shift in propaganda rhetoric began in the years following World War I, when social scientists, concerned about the persuasive power of the newly emerging mass media, studied the phenomena. They had witnessed (and some had participated in) the

Committee on Public Information (CPI), which produced pro-American propaganda for both domestic and international consumption during the war. Jay Black notes:

At that time, the forces of propaganda, public relations, and psychological warfare had become inextricably intertwined in the public's mind. Social scientists and propaganda analysts, strongly influenced by models of behaviorism, tended to depict a gullible public readily manipulated by forces over which it had little control. This depiction offended humanists and progressives, who feared propaganda as a threat to democracy and saw public enlightenment through education as the best defense against the inevitability of propaganda.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note that many of the first major theories in communication effects emerged out of these studies of propaganda.

George Creel was the first member of the CPI to consider how America had used propaganda successfully during World War I. Basically a cheerleader, he saw the CPI as "selling the war to Americans."<sup>30</sup> Others weren't so sanguine, arguing that propaganda caused a chilling effect on the electoral process, or that propaganda messages were "shot" into the brains of an unsuspecting and gullible audience, influencing their actions.<sup>31</sup> Edward Bernays offered a three-step outline for campaigns to manipulate or shift public opinion with a caveat: public opinion campaigns must benefit society and the individual.<sup>32</sup> Other scholars considered the influence and ethics of social psychology, dissected the role of mass persuasion, and offered a model to determine if one had been influenced by propaganda.<sup>33</sup> The Institute for Propaganda Analysis was founded at



Columbia University in New York during this time. The Institute defined propaganda as “opinion expressed for the purpose of influencing actions of individuals or groups.”<sup>34</sup>

This notion that the individual may be able to mitigate the effects of propaganda opened the door for the idea that propaganda may not be as all-powerful as it was originally thought. During this era, Gordon Allport introduced the concept of attitude, which people can hold with more or less conviction. The ability for an outside force to shift an individual’s attitude is dependent upon strength of conviction (either for or against).<sup>35</sup> This concept led to measures of attitude such as the Likert scale. It also was to have an impact on how scholars considered propaganda.

In 1933, Frederick Lumley theorized that social and cultural conditions that shape society can also be used (for good or evil) in shaping effective propaganda. He considered propaganda to be potentially dangerous, saying it sought to change an individual’s opinion and cause action. But he also recognized that same social and cultural conditions could limit reception of the propaganda message. A propaganda message, no matter how persuasive, could have limited effects because it didn’t ring true for the audience, because the timing of the message was off, or even because the audience was just too stupid to understand the propaganda.<sup>36</sup>

These studies, when combined with cultural studies, laid the groundwork for modern scholars to develop a notion of propaganda deeply intertwined with concepts of culture. John Hartley contends that it is a dialogic form of persuasive communication, which transforms signs into common sense and causes a reaction that is a planned part of the dialogue.<sup>37</sup> Don Trent Jacobs notes that while propaganda can be effective:

this does not mean persuasive language can always overcome reason, nor convince someone to do something against his or her will. It can reduce critical thinking, but it does not eliminate it entirely. Persuasive language does trigger mental processes that have more to do with memory, imagery, and emotion than with analytical thought. In extreme cases, especially, the right combination of factors can result in deadly persuasion.<sup>38</sup>

Black adds that it is up to the individual to be “a sophisticated consumer of propaganda, remaining aware of how propaganda is structured, and knowing how to respond to its various truth-claims.”<sup>39</sup>

Jowett and O’Donnell work from a propaganda model based equally in media reception and cultural studies. Concepts of myths and metaphor,<sup>40</sup> dominant and negotiated readings of media messages via Stuart Hall,<sup>41</sup> and the idea of collective memory of a group or community<sup>42</sup> all contribute to Jowett and O’Donnell’s reading of propaganda. When discussing media messages in his seminal essay “Encoding/Decoding,” Hall seems to describe how propaganda seeks to operate within a society. He notes in certain cultures, codes become “so widely distributed . . . that they appear not to be constructed -- the effect of an articulation between sign and referent -- but to be ‘naturally’ given . . . This does not mean that no codes have intervened; rather, that the codes have been profoundly *naturalized*” (emphasis included).<sup>43</sup> It is evident that understanding a culture (and its cultural products) is crucial to understanding how, or if, propaganda will work.

But a problem within this theory is the *opinions* of those who receive the propaganda are largely ignored. Jacques Ellul says measuring the effectiveness of propaganda is difficult at best, because contemporary propaganda is part and parcel of contemporary culture. He says propaganda is much like hegemony: almost invisible and naturalized within a society. “Propaganda forms culture and to a certain sense is culture.”<sup>44</sup> Not only must the state articulate its messages clearly, but the intended audiences must be primed to hear the propaganda messages (needing to hear the messages in a sense) for them to be effective. This is far from the idea that the evil propagandist foisted his ideas onto an unsuspecting and unwilling public.

How the United States government encoded the propaganda messages from World War II will be evident when analyzing the texts. But what do the intended targets of the propaganda have to say about the messages they see and hear? Personal interviews, and in particular the unstructured, narrator-driven interviews of oral history, can be an especially effective way to open a window into the thoughts of the intended propaganda targets. But what becomes intriguing about this idea for the oral historian is the role memory plays in the interpretation and recollection of persuasive messages. If, as Ellul contends, propaganda is akin to hegemony (inextricable from culture), would the women I have interviewed from this era be able to distinguish anything out of the ordinary about propaganda messages they may have received? Or would they only “remember” them after seeing present-day reproductions? Far from being a textbook case of encoding and decoding, the oral history interview allows the scholar to understand decoding at two

levels: what an individual remembers from a given time and how she interprets it through the prism of historical hindsight.

*Oral History Theory*

Oral history in a sense is conversation at its finest: the act of an individual telling his or her life story aloud to somebody else to be remembered for posterity. It's also a way of looking at the past that makes immediate sense to the non-historian; what is history if not the telling of tales? Ronald J. Grele, former Director of the Columbia Oral History Institute notes, "Oral history in social history had always been a part of historical studies."<sup>45</sup> Storytelling and history seem to work hand in hand.

Most early oral history interviews in the United States were the stories of "great men."<sup>46</sup> Interviews weren't used to gather the stories of ordinary people and instead focused on those who had held powerful positions and witnessed important historical events; those people were usually male. Gradually, oral history interviews shifted from stories of the great men to stories of average people.<sup>47</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro describes oral history as "not only a tool or method for recovering history; it is also a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that history must be written."<sup>48</sup>

Contemporary practitioners from around the globe, from Grele to Alessandro Portelli, Paul Thompson to Sherna Berger Gluck (and others), argue that oral history is more than mere methodology: it is a valid theoretical discipline. Drawing from diverse areas such as folklore, psychology, narrative medicine, anthropology, communication studies, sociology, literature and history, they have developed theory to support the oral

history practice. Further, they have taken oral history's presumed weaknesses (the fragility of memory, the uniqueness of an individual story), and transformed them into theoretical strengths, an unavoidable and necessary characteristic of the process of telling. Oral history theory offers a way to explain the unique relationship which evolves as a narrator tells his or her life story to an interviewer and how the act of telling transforms a story into a life history.

The 1980s saw the rise to prominence of a number of theoretically based oral historians (including Grele, Portelli and Thompson) who

Speculated the interviews -- and their construction -- *themselves* represent history: compiled within a historical frame negotiated by the interviewer and the narrator within contemporary trends, within certain definable conventions of language and cultural interaction.<sup>49</sup>

Oral historians began looking to other disciplines to gain insights. Anthropology was one prime area of influence due to the practice of interviewing across social and cultural boundaries, but other areas also offered explanations:

The fields of speech communication and linguistics helped us recognize the importance of analysis of women's speech patterns and of the interview as a linguistic event; folklore emphasized narration as a type of performance. From psychology we gained an awareness of the more subtle dynamics of the interview process and the importance of subjectivity and memory in shaping narratives. . . Contemporary literary theory -- challenging the older historian's tendency to see oral history as a

transparent representation of experience -- made us aware that the typical product of an interview is a text, not a reproduction of reality, and that models of textual analysis were therefore needed.”<sup>50</sup>

Sociology and history also are cited by Gluck and Daphne Patai as useful. Women’s and gender studies embraced oral history as a way of telling the stories of the dispossessed.

Grele notes that deeper issues were also being considered as oral history evolved and matured:

These issues merged with a New Left concern with questions of subjectivity -- not only the subjective areas of mental life, such as ideology, memory, consciousness, and myth expressed by both the interviewer and interviewee in the interview, but also the question of how the subject is formed in history, the structured and structuring of consciousness.<sup>51</sup>

Rather than an individual event, with a neutral researcher sitting in a corner and listening, oral history came to be seen as highly collaborative, with active participation by both the interviewer and the narrator.

Portelli describes oral history as “history-telling.”<sup>52</sup> So it seems only natural that one of the prime areas of oral history theory is found within the act of telling: the interview itself. Grele defines three theoretical structures within the oral history interview. The first is linguistic, looking at the words as meaningful behavior. The second deals with the intersubjectivity of the social situation (opening up oral history to disciplines like medicine, science, etc.). The third theoretical structure deals with the

performance aspects of the interview, or how the individual speaks to a larger audience through the interview process and “talks” to the world. These three structures, he says, are at the heart of the oral history story.<sup>53</sup>

Mary Chamberlain notes the individual creates versions of his/her own life, remembered internally and sometimes told to others:

The relationship between language and thought, language and experience, and necessarily, language and memory has long been recognized in ethnographic and anthropological research. Furthermore, the symbolic structures integral to a culture are both reflected and embedded in the language used.<sup>54</sup>

One telling element for oral historians is how women and men, especially those in older generations, use pronouns when speaking of their lives. Thompson found that men often talk of individual stories and use the pronoun “I.” Women, on the other hand, talk of relationships and use the pronoun “we” or avoid pronouns altogether for the more generic and inclusive “one.”<sup>55</sup>

Interviews offer other linguistic modes. Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet says a speaker will repeat key phrases within the life story, such as “it was natural” or “we were forced to,” as linguistic markers within the narrative. Chanfrault-Duchet calls this the “key pattern” of the narrative. “Aiming to dramatize the self, this pattern reproduces throughout the narrative a recognizable matrix of behavior that imposes a coherence on the speaker’s life experience, the coherence of self,” she notes.<sup>56</sup> Using this pattern, the

researcher can then identify the narrative structure (or sometimes structures) within the life story.

Equally important to what is said during the interview, is what the interviewee doesn't mention or refuses to talk about. Luisa Passerini calls silences the clues to understanding a topic, saying they can be intentional (discursive) or unintentional (psychological).<sup>57</sup> Diana Gittins believes silences are found both within the interview as well as in the official record. I would go one step further and add the interviewer's silences to the list. Which questions weren't asked and why? Was it a conscious omission, an avoidance of a touchy topic, or an oversight?

“Silences, when it is possible to explore some of them retrospectively, can reveal an enormous amount about the more hidden but often central, aspects of an institution's (and indeed an individual's) history,” Gittins says, adding silences can reveal patterns of power and control. “Apparent silences are not always silences at all, *once you learn to decode them*” [emphasis included].<sup>58</sup>

Looking at an interview linguistically is much akin to critically analyzing a media message. Chamberlain and Thompson observe:

Whether in words or images or both, they speak in forms, genres, which carry implicit meanings, expectations and associations; and at the same time their significance, meaning and impact are mediated and transformed by the values, predispositions and social world of the receivers themselves.<sup>59</sup>



Much like Hall's lessons of coding and decoding media messages, within the interview there is an implicit, culturally understood meaning in words and gestures used by the interviewee. The interviewee assumes this will be immediately comprehended by the interviewer.<sup>60</sup>

This concept leads directly to the next theoretical base of the interview: the social situation. Eva McMahon believes conversation analysis has much to offer oral historians. She says the oral history interview is like a hermeneutical conversation, equally weighted between both parties, with each considering the other's opinion.<sup>61</sup> But the oral history interview has another element. It is an "official," rather than casual, conversation. "Even though oral history interviews are not exclusively concerned with such public figures, my contention is that since the interview is institutional talk *for the record*, there is an element of public notoriety attached," McMahon notes.<sup>62</sup>

Passerini calls the oral history interview a "specific type of intersubjectivity."<sup>63</sup> For Portelli, failed interviews, where the subject refuses to answer questions, are at least as interesting as successful ones because they actively demonstrate the negotiation process between interviewer and interviewee.<sup>64</sup> He says the difficult interviews and evaded questions illustrate the need to move from the questionnaire to thick dialogue: "Of course, interviewees *will* talk about really irrelevant private matters, but we should listen and wait before we judge. For the oral historian, an interview is always a learning experience."<sup>65</sup>

### *Feminism and Oral History*

Theoretically, oral history's move away from only telling the stories of "great men" works hand in hand with feminist concerns.<sup>66</sup> It is directly related to the move by post-World War II, Marxist-influenced historians to what was dubbed "history from below": the move away from history as told through the viewpoint of political leaders and the economic elite "in favor of the social histories of workers, servants, and the poor."<sup>67</sup> Passerini talks about "deafening silences" which occur when historiography doesn't "allow" certain voices to speak.<sup>68</sup> Oral history gives scholars a method to "ground theory contextually in the concrete reality of women's everyday lives".<sup>69</sup>

This approach squares firmly with the theoretical basis of feminist pragmatism. Shannon Sullivan says pragmatist feminism is based in the "concrete particularities of the ordinary."<sup>70</sup> It demands that the research begin in women's experience and places the researcher on the same intellectual level as that of the research subject; there is no neutral observer.<sup>71</sup> As a result, both the research and research subject hold equal authority in interpretation and analysis: the narrator of an interview has standing.

This melding of oral history and feminist pragmatism allows the scholar to focus on the role of myth and memory in women's storytelling. Jane Addams was one of the early feminist scholars to look at this relationship in *The Long Road of Woman's Memory*, first published in 1916 and based on her observations of working class women at Hull House. Addams writes of the importance of false stories such as folk morality tales for working class women and of her belief that women remember things differently than men. She eloquently argues that the act of storytelling can itself change reality. Not only

does the story assert the teller's importance, but it has the potential for transformation. The telling of a story can establish a reconstructed world.

This isn't to deny the verifiable reality of specific historical event, but rather to adopt a new standard for what can be considered a historical truth. "Truths are beliefs confirmed in the course of experience and are therefore fallible, subject to further revision."<sup>72</sup> Joan Sangster says it is important to read a woman's memory on various levels, including *how* an event is remembered. "Listening to women's words," she writes, "will help us to see how women understood, negotiated and sometimes challenged . . . ideals."<sup>73</sup> bell hooks believes the life story process is one of reclaiming not just a part of one's life, but also what can be considered a "living memory," informing and impacting the present.<sup>74</sup>

The claim that telling a story can change reality may initially seem fairly grandiose for a simple interpersonal act. However, this claim does square with contemporary communication theory. Robert T. Craig's eight part constitutive metamodel is "a device for thinking about the field as a whole with respect to practical lifework,"<sup>75</sup> seeing communication as a social practice with potentially transformative powers, especially in areas such as the public sphere. One of the tenets of this metamodel is pragmatism. Craig says pragmatism allows the researcher to consider communication as a pluralistic community and to coordinate practical activities through discourse and reflexive inquiry.<sup>76</sup> Chris Russill says a pragmatist approach opens up communication to four basic ideas: actions as the object of study, an emphasis on meaning from the actor's perspective, the importance of action/meaning in the construction of reality, and an

acceptance of the idea that there is no underlying order to things.<sup>77</sup> For Russill, a pragmatist approach allows communication scholars a way of addressing cultural concerns raised by Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams without resorting to the Gramscian concept of hegemony.<sup>78</sup>

This theory of communication becomes useful when applied to the interpersonal oral history interview, which itself is a communicative process of culturally understood encoding and decoding. Consider the struggle Ann Cvetkovich underwent while writing *An Archive of Feelings*: the need to both adequately and faithfully represent the emotional context of the interview sometimes clashed with her own acknowledged agenda to use the interviews as a history of the ephemeral emotions of a particular era (ACT UP/AIDS activists in the early 1990s).<sup>79</sup> Her resulting text, almost equally balanced between interviews and analysis, rejects the “god’s eye” point of view and instead exhibits what Ron Grele calls a “shared authority.”<sup>80</sup> This demonstrates the oral history interview as a textbook example of pragmatist, and pragmatist feminist, theory in action.

Pragmatist feminism embraces the shared authority of the oral history interview, via Sullivan’s concept of transactional bodies. As Sullivan explains, no one person can claim to have absolute knowledge of her experience and may in fact require the input of others for understanding.<sup>81</sup> In the oral history interview, the narrator is engaged in an active process of what has been described as “re-membering.”<sup>82</sup> Re-membering is not only an affirmation of one’s personal history, but also a reminding or recovering of that same history through the storytelling process. Ann K. Clark says re-membering consists of “recomposing practical details into a story which is then fused into a whole of

meaning.”<sup>83</sup> Re-membering can be used to explain how the World War II women I’ve interviewed actively reconsider their lives within the oral history process and how they position themselves in relation to the historical meta-narrative.

For Donna Haraway, recognizing the narrator’s ability to consider her own story allows the interviewer to avoid the “god trick”:

Situated knowledge requires that the object of knowledge is pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as a ‘slave’ to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge ... Indeed, coming to terms with the agency of the ‘objects’ studied is the only way to avoid gross error and false knowledge.<sup>84</sup>

One could argue that this agency accorded to “objects studied” produces knowledge which isn’t particularly interesting or relevant. These were the sorts of arguments which consumed oral historians as the discipline moved from telling the stories of “great men” and established history to the notion of “history from below.” The debate came to a head at the Fourth International Conference on Oral History in Aix-en-Provence, France.<sup>85</sup>

The heated discussion only reinforced oral history’s move to intersubjectivity. “Data was interpretation. Gone was the objective observer, and politics was to be understood as the process by which plays of power and knowledge constitute identity and experience.”<sup>86</sup>

Sandra Harding argues standpoint theory is a way to avoid false knowledge and embrace the subjectivity of the narrator. Standpoint theory encompasses both a scientific and political struggle. It considers the need for critical study of the dominant framework

when making decisions which impact and effect those marginalized: “Standpoint theories argue that it is certainly the case that each groups social situation enables and sets limits on what it can know.”<sup>87</sup> For Harding, it offers a way to understand an individual’s seemingly contradictory statements or behavior. What seems contradictory to an outsider makes complete sense to the insider.

Historical truths must also be considered via individual filters. Selma Leydesdorf, Passerini and Thompson contend:

Memories *are* gendered, and [the] gendering of memory makes a strong impact on the shaping of social spaces and expressive forms . . . In order to understand how memory becomes gendered we need to take detours through the realm of gendered experience and gendered language. The categories of experience and language are formulated within the frames of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.”<sup>88</sup>

But Joan Scott cautions against historicizing “experience,” advocating an approach which:

Takes all categories of analysis as contextual, contested, and contingent. How have categories of representation and analysis -- such as class, race, gender, relations of production, biology, identity, subjectivity, agency, experience, even culture -- achieved their foundational status? . . . The history of these concepts (understood to be contested and contradictory) then becomes the evidence by which “experience” can be grasped and by

which the historian's relationship to the past she writes about can be articulated.<sup>89</sup>

To borrow from the pop rock sage Bob Geldof, "The final truth is -- there is no truth."<sup>90</sup> This is not to say that there is no verifiable reality, but rather that no single story or interpretation can explain the complexities of reality. Truth is constantly filtered through the lenses of both the oral historian and the narrator.

### *Historiography, Cultural Studies and Oral History*

Numerous scholars have put World War II media messages through the cultural studies lens. The problem, for a project like this combining an analysis of propaganda and media messages directed toward female military recruitment, is that few scholars consider the issue of propagandistic messages in military recruitment, or look at propaganda directed toward women through the media. Several books examine how various types of 1940s culture approached and reflected the war, including *The War in American Culture*, *Visions of War* and *Why We Fought*. Each look at culture as a whole and offer few pages specifically on either messages directed specifically at women or military recruitment.

Film studies, art history and communication/media studies all offer analysis of the cultural artifacts from the era. Allan M. Winkler contends the Office of War Information (OWI) struggled with two seemingly contradictory messages: "to convey the serious side of the war . . . (and) to maintain the morale of the public they served."<sup>91</sup> He argues the very success of the OWI-developed American propaganda became a double-edged sword. The oftentimes idealistic messages promoted a view of America holding the moral high

ground, assisting allies who held similar beliefs. By war's end, "Americans held on to their image of a powerful and righteous nation. Efforts to deal with other states in the years that followed were sometimes complicated by an unfortunate American sense of superiority."<sup>92</sup>

Many of these messages came through films and photographs released during the war. Edward Steichen, who was commissioned as an officer with the U.S. Naval Reserve at age sixty-three, curated several wartime exhibitions at New York's Museum of Modern Art. This use of "photojournalism to symbolize the unifying themes of American patriotism, strength and spirit makes clear that World War II photographers and curators alike understood that it was the symbolic aspects of photographs more than their descriptive potential that gave them power."<sup>93</sup> The role of photographs in creating the Navy's World War II image, how the use of color can impact photographic interpretation of FSA and OWI images, and the symbolic meaning of Lee Miller's war photographs in *Vogue* have all come into focus under a cultural studies lens.<sup>94</sup>

Meanwhile, the films were designed not only to portray a seemingly accurate *image* of America and American military during wartime, but also to help those at home accept the sacrifices required of war.<sup>95</sup> As Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black note:

The home front had the stuff of drama. Hollywood found there a rich lode in the altered lives of its customers. OWI saw there a vital story of democracy mobilized for war . . . Thus the studios and the propaganda agency turned to the home front in their quest, one for profits, and the



other for propaganda messages. If there was one subject the Hollywood moguls were convinced they knew, it was America. Their success was based on their ability to intuit the subliminal wishes of the vast public.<sup>96</sup>

A notion permeated the films that it was everybody's war, requiring sacrifice and dedication from all.<sup>97</sup>

Hollywood turned the events of the war into "a mythic history that transcends and obscures what really happened."<sup>98</sup> Film scholars have parsed that mythic history, looking at the editing techniques director Frank Capra utilized to heighten the propagandistic message of the *Why We Fight* series, the reemergence of the musical as a powerful storytelling force, and the unstated messages in women's war films.<sup>99</sup> Thomas Doherty contends that because women made up the bulk of the wartime box office, Hollywood responded by offering films which simultaneously reaffirmed women's new roles in the workforce and traditional ones in the home.<sup>100</sup>

Hollywood wasn't the only media force called into action in the OWI's campaign to reach wartime women. Posters preached frugality, encouraging women to conserve food and resources and buy war bonds, reminding them "This is my fight too!"<sup>101</sup> A mixture of self-sacrifice and empowerment emerged in "woman-power" propaganda through advertising and articles in women's magazines.<sup>102</sup> But, as Bilge Yesil notes, this image was complicated:

Although they seemed to challenge traditional gender roles and disrupt social definitions of woman's 'proper role', these images successfully contained any potential emancipation women would elicit from their

participation in the workforce. Propaganda and advertising messages urged women to demonstrate their physical strength and mechanical competence while they told them to be feminine, attractive and dependent on men, and idealized the notions of domesticity, home and family.<sup>103</sup>

Honey found the image represented was also dependent upon the social class of the presumed audience, with middle and upper class publications portraying a far more egalitarian image of women war workers than those aimed at a working class audience.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile, Maria Elena Buszek argues that the pin-up, an image style popularized through men's magazines such as *Esquire*, was embraced by women of the era "as an icon of the new, wartime ideals of women's sexuality."<sup>105</sup> Not only did women read the magazine (as evidenced through letters to to editor *Esquire* published), but they also created do-it-yourself pinups via cheesecake snapshots. The pin-ups "gave women a language for . . . sexual self-expression."<sup>106</sup>

The author of the book *Wearing Propaganda* brings up an especially intriguing train of thought: the use of fashion as a means to build identity and national unity.<sup>107</sup> Given that the Navy during this era was actively promoting its designer uniform as a recruitment ploy, considering the role of fashion for women is crucial to understanding why women enlisted and the satisfaction they derived from service. Other scholars have looked at the impact of World War II on fashion choices, how military service was interpreted as camp or "dandyism" by a certain group of British men, or the social language of uniforms.<sup>108</sup>

The writings of Elizabeth Hawes, who herself was influenced by Veblen, offer a window into the role fashion played in the lives of women in the 1940s. Hawes argues that the act of selecting a dress is one main way a woman can make a visible statement about herself and her place in the world, and that a woman is obligated to seek out clothing not because it is fashionable, but because it makes her feel empowered and comfortable (Hawes, a designer, was writing in the 1930s and '40s).<sup>109</sup> Contemporary cultural studies researchers build off of this idea, “reading” clothing as a “text” to reveal class, social status, and individuality.<sup>110</sup> Far from being frivolous, fashion in the case of the WAVES and the SPARs, helped the women construct a uniform identity.

But what was that identity? It is difficult to tell from books geared to either a popular or a scholarly audience. Admittedly, there is a plethora of World War II material, from Studs Terkel’s 1984 book *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II* to Tom Brokaw’s *The Greatest Generation* to Ken Burns’ recent PBS opus *The War*. However, each of these efforts illustrate two problems with much material about World War II geared to a general audience: little critical analysis and a focus on the experiences of men. Terkel talks with just six women in his book; Brokaw offers a single chapter about women’s experiences in the two books in his series. Burns virtually ignores the experiences of military women.

General audience material focusing on oral histories of women’s experiences often takes the form of self-published or small press paperbacks, such as *Old Waves Tales*, “*Okay, Girls -- Man Your Bunks!*” or *Never Salute with a Broken Garter*.<sup>111</sup> While useful in the oral history process, to get a sense of how women write their stories, these

tales are edited, often fractured, and ultimately incomplete. Memoirs can also be of some value. Josette Dermody Wingo's book *Mother was a Gunner's Mate* is rich with what anthropologist Clifford Geertz has called "thick description"<sup>112</sup> about Wingo's time in the military. Likewise, Frances Thorpe's posthumously published memoir offers an insight into the experiences of one of the few African American WAVE officers in World War II.<sup>113</sup>

The mass market material is voluminous when compared to academic texts, where few authors have gathered and analyzed women's experiences. There are several valuable historiographic resources on women's military and war work, including *A Women's War Too* (edited by Paula Nassen Poulos), Emily Yellin's *Our Mothers' War*, Jeanne Holm's *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*, and D'Ann Campbell's contributions in both books and journal articles, but none focus solely on oral history or the WAVES/SPARs. Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall's *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* gives a historic primer, but no oral history interviews. It is valuable for the insights it offers into how the Navy developed its recruitment campaigns and enlistment requirements, seeking to identify the women as more elite or refined than other branches. In order to enlist in WAVES or SPARs, a woman had to be at least twenty years old, have attended two years of college or trade school and be of "good moral character,"<sup>114</sup> Each historiographic book also discusses the uniqueness of the WAVES/SPARs uniform; no other branch of the military had a uniform designed by a well-known haute couture designer (the American-born Mainbocher).

These books are helpful because they offer me a sense of how the Navy and Coast Guard women compared to those in other services.

It is in recent unpublished dissertations that one begins to see oral history of World War II-era women used for academic analysis. Dissertations have looked at the personal recollections of African American women who served in the WAC, the experiences of World War II female veterans analyzed through psychology and postmodernist theory, the role of USO hostesses, and the testimonies of women, including military nurses, who were interned by the Japanese during the war.<sup>115</sup> Each use oral history in connection with research in another field, be it women's studies, social psychology, history, or American studies. The unpublished dissertation from Regina Teresa Akers, a historical analysis which uses both oral histories and archival sources to consider why the Navy admitted women into the reserve, offers a historical investigation into recruitment, training, utilization, promotion, and demobilization. Her dissertation also analyzes the Navy's decision to admit African American women into the WAVES. Unfortunately, she only uses oral histories for background information and includes no extended quotes or analysis.<sup>116</sup>

Other work is considerably more on target. Jon Savage uses oral histories, newspaper accounts from the era, and textual artifacts such as clothing, magazines and films to analyze how the identity of the "teenager" developed; his research spans the years 1875 to 1945. Especially useful is his account of World War II "Victory Girls": highly sexualized girls under the age of 18 (some as young as 12) who engaged in premarital sex with young soldiers.<sup>117</sup> Suter et al offer an analysis of how a regional

WAVES National unit constructs and maintains identity developed during military service through a community of practice.<sup>118</sup> They work with both personal interviews and an analysis of video and audio oral history interviews conducted by others to draw their conclusions. Gluck collected the memories of civilian women war workers in *Rosie the Riveter Revisited*, introducing the theory that war work profoundly changed their lives. The women were “both molded by events and, in turn, influenced them.”<sup>119</sup> In *Creating G.I. Jane*, Leisa Meyer uses oral histories and cultural studies analysis of popular media to look at the impact and meaning military service held for women who served in in the WAC. The book was a reworking of Meyer’s Ph.D. dissertation in U.S. History/Women’s Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. One point of extended discussion is the slander campaign against the WAAC during the early months of the war, which identified the women as either camp followers (aka prostitutes) or lesbians, and how that adversely impacted recruitment.<sup>120</sup> Each of these offers a template for this dissertation’s synthesis of cultural studies and oral history research.

### *Research Questions*

It is difficult for a present-day American like myself to grasp the pervasiveness of the single, consistent media message during World War II. Writing in 1942, Margaret Culkin Banning noted:

Total war is something this country has never yet experienced. Now we are to find out, along with the rest of the world, that total war recognizes no limitations of battlefields . . . Civilian morale did not matter so much in the past. Now it is increasingly important, both because of the coverage of

modern war and because communication between the (armed) service and civilian population is highly developed, so that the spirit and mood of one affect the other.<sup>121</sup>

In every aspect of the media, from books to newspapers to newsreels to films to radio programs to advertisements (and many others not listed), the war was front and center.

Part of my intent in this dissertation is an attempt to understand the all-pervasive nature of the government's media messages during the World War II-era. I will argue that all of the government's messages about military women during this era (and specifically WAVES and SPARs) are a form of propaganda, i.e. persuasive messages designed to spur action. In a sense, I am attempting to reclaim propaganda's "good" name, seeing how it can be used as a reinforcement for beliefs people already hold.

But I am also conducting a project that is oral history-based, meaning I must look to the interviewees for theories about their lives and experiences. To a degree, the oral history process is related to anthropology's grounded theory, allowing the events observed to drive theorizing and conclusions. As discussed previously, the oral history interview can be seen as an individual actively theorizing about her life and experiences. As a researcher, it is important that I remain open to and respect the women's own thoughts about their experiences.

In this project, I will compare the women's memories with what the government intended. In a sense, I can use the oral history project as a way to test Stuart Hall's concept of encoding and decoding. Of course, this decoding is being done from the 20/20 perspective of historical hindsight -- I have no way of knowing if the women

interpreted the media messages in World War II-era the same way they are interpreting them now. However, for oral history this potential complication isn't problematic. Oral history considers the role of memory, and the interpretations allowed by memory, as part of the process. With this in mind, I have developed three research questions.

- *Research Question 1:* How do women World War II veterans from the Navy and Coast Guard remember their motivations to serve in the military and how does this compare with the government's recruitment techniques?

The government looked to the media to convey specific propaganda goals through the OWI and, in the case of the Navy, the Naval public relations office. This research question is directed specifically at how the government utilized selected media messages to recruit for the WAVES and SPARs, positioning the women as "different" from other military recruits (due to the focus on the uniform and the education requirements, unique among the military). This question will enable me to interrogate the women's memories, remaining open to and respecting their opinions and theories about their decisions. To answer this question, I will also analyze oral histories I didn't gather personally, particularly those from officers who were involved in the establishment of the WAVES and SPARs.

- *Research Question 2:* How do the women describe their experiences in the military and how does this compare with media representations from the era?

As in the first research question, for this question I will be investigating how the women remember their military service. I shall also analyze pertinent oral histories I did not gather personally, as well as memoirs addressing how the Navy chose to represent



military service. These memories and books will be compared and contrasted with selected media representations from the era to determine divergences and intersections.

As in research question one, this question will enable me to interrogate the women's memories, remaining open to and respecting their opinions and theories about their experiences. In essence, how do they remember what happened when, in the parlance of the military, they worked in order to "free a man to fight"?

- *Research Question 3*: In what ways do the women choose to add the stories of their Navy and Coast Guard service during World War II into the historical record? Do the stories change depending upon the medium used?

Women have not simply told me their oral stories in this project. Many have also provided me with the *written* version of their life history. This final question allows me to analyze the ways they tell their stories, both oral and written. Looking at the differences within the stories told, I can begin to understand the importance of their military service and why it is important for it to become a part of historiography.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See: Harold Dwight Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," in *The Communication of Ideas*, ed. Lyman Bryson (New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1948), 84-99.

<sup>2</sup> John Durham Peters and Peter Simonson's essay introductions in *Mass Communication and American Social Thought: Key Texts 1919-1968* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004) paint a vivid portrait of the intellectual sniping that took place among scholars of the era; see also Charles Harrison and Paul J. Wood's *Art in Theory: 1900-1990* (Oxford, UK, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> *Illuminations* is frequently cited in text and references by scholars of oral history, including Portelli, Passerini, and Clark.

<sup>4</sup> See: Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, and Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> See: Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944) in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) 71-101.

<sup>6</sup> His writings had little impact on the intellectual discussions of this era, as they were not published until well after his death in 1937.

<sup>7</sup> See: Antonio Gramsci, "(I) History of the Subaltern Classes; (II) the Concept Of "Ideology; (III) Cultural Themes: Ideological Material" (1929-1935), in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (see Note 5), 43-47.

<sup>8</sup> See: Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, "Adventures in Media and Cultural Studies: Introducing the Key Works," in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (see Note 5), 1-29.

<sup>9</sup> See: Ioan Davies, *Cultural Studies and Beyond: Fragments of Empire* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> See: Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "Administrative and Critical Communication Research," in *Mass Communication and American Social Thought* (see note 2), 166-173; Marshall McLuhan, "Sight, Sound, and Fury," in *Mass Communication and American Social Thought* (see note 2), 353-357; Robert K. Merton, "The Social and Cultural Context," in *Mass Communication and American Social Thought* (see note 2), 215-217.

<sup>11</sup> See: Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (see Note 5), 166-176; Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (see Note 4), 152-165; Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> See: Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Art in Theory* (see Note 2), 928-936; Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972); Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> John Hartley et al, *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2002), 50.

<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

<sup>15</sup> Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 174-176.

- <sup>16</sup> See: Christine Gledhill, "Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera." in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices; Culture, Media and Identities*, ed. Stuart Hall (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 337-384; Janice A. Radaway, "Reading 'Reading the Romance,'" in *Approaches to Media : A Reader*, Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Chris Newbold (London; New York: E. Arnold; St. Martin's Press, 1995). 512-517; Tania Modleski, "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas," in *Representation*, 385.
- <sup>17</sup> See: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
- <sup>18</sup> See: Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1999), 340-353.
- <sup>19</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Pacador Books, 2001), 7.
- <sup>20</sup> See: Ann Marie Barry, (2005). "Perception Theory." in *Handbook of Visual Communication Research : Theory, Methods, and Media*, ed. Ken Smith et al (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum, 2005), 45-62; Rick Williams, "Cognitive Theory." in *Handbook of Visual Communication*, 193-210; Rick Williams and Julie Newton, *Visual Communication: Integrating Media, Art, and Science* (Mahweh, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007).
- <sup>21</sup> Barry, "Perception Theory," 51.
- <sup>22</sup> See: Jonathan Crary, *The Technique of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); Rosalind Krauss, "The Im/pulse to See," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press. 1988), 51-76.
- <sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 53.
- <sup>24</sup> Daniel Chandler, "Rhetorical Tropes," Semiotics for Beginners, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html> (accessed December 3, 2006).
- <sup>25</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1999), 6.
- <sup>26</sup> See: Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*.
- <sup>27</sup> See: Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*.
- <sup>28</sup> See: Leonard W. Doob, *Public Opinion and Propaganda* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1966).
- <sup>29</sup> Jay Black, "Semantics and the Ethics of Propaganda," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 16 2-3 (2001), 122.
- <sup>30</sup> See: George Creel, *How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information That Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe* (New York; London: Harper and Brothers), 1920.
- <sup>31</sup> This became known as the "hypodermic needle" or "magic bullet" theory. Lasswell later condemned it as being too impressionistic, see "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," in *The Communication of Ideas*, ed. Lyman T. Bryson (New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1948), 84-99. See also: Harold D. Lasswell, "The Results of Propaganda," in *Mass Communication and American Social Thought* (See note 2), 47-50; Walter Lippman, "The Disenchanted Man," in *Mass Communication and American Social Thought* (See note 2), 36-41.
- <sup>32</sup> See: Edward L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: H. Liveright, 1928).
- <sup>33</sup> See: Floyd H. Allport, *Social Psychology* (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924); Alfred McClung Lee and Elizabeth Briant Lee, "From *The Fine Art of Propaganda*," in *Mass Communication and American Social Thought* (See note 2), 124-127; Robert K. Merton, "The Social and Cultural Context." in *Mass Communication and American Social Thought* (See note 2), 215-217.

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- <sup>34</sup> Lee and Lee, "From *The Fine Art of Propaganda*," in *Mass Communication and American Social Thought* (See note 2). 126.
- <sup>35</sup> See: Gordon W. Allport, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Rusell and Russell, 1947/1965).
- <sup>36</sup> See: Frederick E. Lumley, *The Propaganda Menace* (New York; London: The Century Co., 1933)
- <sup>37</sup> Hartley et al, *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies*, 187-188.
- <sup>38</sup> Don Trent Jacobs, (1995). "The Red Flags of Persuasion," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 52- 4 (1995), 375.
- <sup>39</sup> Black, "Semantics and the Ethics of Propagandism," 132.
- <sup>40</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 325.
- <sup>41</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 198.
- <sup>42</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 199.
- <sup>43</sup> Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 170.
- <sup>44</sup> Jaçques Ellul, *Propaganda : The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 110
- <sup>45</sup> See: Ron Grele, "Oral History as Evidence," in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton et al, (Lanham, MD:Altamira Press, 2006), 46-69.
- <sup>46</sup> See: Alice Kessler-Harris, "Introduction." in *Envelopes of Sound: Six Practitioners Discuss the Method, Theory, and Practice of Oral History and Oral Testimony*, ed. Ron Grele (Chicago: Precedent Pub., 1975), 1-9.
- <sup>47</sup> See: Kay Schaeffer and Sidonie Smith, "Conjunctions: Life Narratives in the Field of Human Rights," *Biography* 27-1 (2004), 1-24.
- <sup>48</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed.. David King Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1996), 209.
- <sup>49</sup> David King Dunaway, "Introduction," in *Oral history: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (see Note 43), 8.
- <sup>50</sup> Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words : The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.
- <sup>51</sup> Ron Grele, "Oral History as Evidence," 59.
- <sup>52</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," in *Narrative and Genre*, ed. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Richard Thompson (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 25.
- <sup>53</sup> Ronald Grele et al, "Oral History as a Discipline: The Globalization of a Field and a Movement," (roundtable discussion, "Women's Narratives, Women's Lives," Columbia University, New York, 7 June 2006).
- <sup>54</sup> Mary Chamberlain, "Narrative Theory," in *Handbook of Oral History* (see Note 45), 394.
- <sup>55</sup> See: Paul Richard Thompson, *The Voice of the Past : Oral History* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 155-156.
- <sup>56</sup> Marie Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story," in *Women's Words* (see Note 50), 80.
- <sup>57</sup> Luisa Passerini, "Is Gender Still a Useful Category for Oral History?" (lecture, "Women's Narratives, Women's Lives," Columbia University, New York, 6 June 6 2006).

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- <sup>58</sup> Diana Gittins, "Silences: The Case of a Psychiatric Hospital," in *Narrative and Genre* (see Note 52), 54.
- <sup>59</sup> Chamberlain and Thompson, *Narrative and Genre*, 13.
- <sup>60</sup> These various assumptions place a great deal of responsibility upon the oral historian to make sure that the spoken conversation, conversational shortcuts, as well as silences and evasions are interpreted correctly. Methodological protocol, which I have established to do my best to elicit proper meaning, will be outlined in Chapter Four.
- <sup>61</sup> Eva M. McMahan, "A Conversational Approach to Oral history Interviewing," in *Handbook of Oral History* (see Note 45), 338.
- <sup>62</sup> McMahan, "A Conversational Approach to Oral history Interviewing," 350.
- <sup>63</sup> Passerini, "Is Gender Still a Useful Category for Oral History?"
- <sup>64</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "The Fosse Ardeatine: A Massacre of Men; a Women's Narrative" lecture, "Women's Narratives, Women's Lives," Columbia University, New York, 7 June 7 2006).
- <sup>65</sup> Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," 30.
- <sup>66</sup> The theme for Columbia University's Summer Institute on Oral History in June 2006 was "Women's Narratives, Women's Lives: Intersections of Gender and Memory."
- <sup>67</sup> Joyce Appleby et al, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1994), 80.
- <sup>68</sup> Grele et al, "Oral History as a Discipline."
- <sup>69</sup> Judith Stacey, "Can There be a Feminist Ethnography?," in *Women's Words* (see Note 50), 111.
- <sup>70</sup> Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 4.
- <sup>71</sup> See: Jane Addams, *The Long road of Woman's Memory*, ed. Charlene Haddock Seigfried (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Lorraine Code, "Ecological Naturalism: Epistemic Responsibility and the Politics of Knowledge," *Dialogue and Universalism* 5-6 (2005), 87-101; Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- <sup>72</sup> Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism*, 7.
- <sup>73</sup> Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 91.
- <sup>74</sup> bell hooks, "Writing Autobiography," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 431.
- <sup>75</sup> Robert T. Craig, "Pragmatism in the Field of Communication Theory," *Communication Theory* 17-2 (2007): 143.
- <sup>76</sup> Craig, "Pragmatism in the Field," 136.
- <sup>77</sup> See: Chris Russill, "The Road Not Taken: William James's Radical Empiricism and Communication Theory," *The Communication Review*, 8 (2005): 292-293.
- <sup>78</sup> Russill, "The Road Not Taken," 298.
- <sup>79</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 167.

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<sup>80</sup> Ronald Grele, "Oral History as Evidence," in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. by Thomas L. Charlton et al (MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 85.

<sup>81</sup> Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). 143.

<sup>82</sup> See: Ann K. Clark, "Memory, Housecleaning and Love: Addams' *Long Road of Women's Memory*" (paper presented at "Exploring Jane Addams, the 29th Annual Richard R. Baker Philosophy Colloquium," Dayton, OH, 7 November 2002); Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity, Latin America Otherwise*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Barbara Meyerhoff, *Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling, and Growing Older* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

<sup>83</sup> Ann K. Clark, "Memory, Housecleaning and Love."

<sup>84</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14-3 (1988), 592-3.

<sup>85</sup> Grele, "Oral History as Evidence," 64.

<sup>86</sup> Grele, "Oral History as Evidence," 64.

<sup>87</sup> Sandra Harding, *Is Science Multicultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 151.

<sup>88</sup> Selma Leydesdorf et al, *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 14.

<sup>89</sup> Joan Scott, "Experience," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (see Note 74), 68.

<sup>90</sup> Bob Geldof, "Nice and Neat," *The Fine Art of Surfacing*, The Boomtown Rats, Mercury Records, 33 rpm.

<sup>91</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 57.

<sup>92</sup> Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 157.

<sup>93</sup> Michael Griffin, "The Great War Photographs: Constructing Myths of History and Photojournalism," in *Picturing the Past: Media, History and Photography*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanna Hardt (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 143.

<sup>94</sup> See: Paul Hendrickson et al, *Bound for Glory: America in Color, 1939-43* (New York, Washington, D.C.: H.N. Abrams; in association with the Library of Congress, 2004); Mame Warren, "Focal Point of the Fleet: U.S. Navy photographic activities in World War II," *The Journal of Military History* 69 (October 2005): 1045-1080; Annalisa Zox-Weaver, "When the War Was in Vogue: Lee Miller's War Reports," *Women's Studies* 32-2 (2003): 131-164.

<sup>95</sup> See: Robert Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994); David E. Meerse, "To Reassure a Nation: Hollywood Presents World War II," *Film and History* 6-4 (1976), 79-98.

<sup>96</sup> Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 143.

<sup>97</sup> See: Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*.

<sup>98</sup> Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry. (2006). *We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema During World War II* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 25.

<sup>99</sup> See: Kathleen M. German, "Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* Series and the American Audience," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (Spring 1990), 237-248; Michael Renov, *Hollywood's Wartime Woman: Representation and Ideology* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988); Allen L. Woll, *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1983).

<sup>100</sup> See: Thomas P. Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>101</sup> Other posters were aimed at a more general audience, see Lester C. Olson's deep rhetorical analysis of the "Four Freedoms" campaign: "Portraits in Praise of a People: A Rhetorical Analysis of Norman Rockwell's Icons in Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'Four Freedoms' Campaign," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983), 15-24. See also: Mark Leff, "The Politics of Sacrifice on the American Home Front in World War II," *Journal of American History* March (1991), 1296-1318; T. H. Widowski, "World War II Poster Campaigns: Preaching Frugality to American Consumers," *Journal of Advertising* 32-1 (2003), 69-82.

<sup>102</sup> See: Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Bilge Yesil, "'Who Said this is a Man's War?': Propaganda, Advertising Discourse and the Representation of the Woman War Worker During the Second World War," *Media History* 10-2 (2004), 103-117.

<sup>103</sup> Yesil, "'Who Said this is a Man's War?'," 108.

<sup>104</sup> See: Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*.

<sup>105</sup> Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 208.

<sup>106</sup> Buszek, *Pin-up Grrrls*, 207

<sup>107</sup> See: Jacqueline M. Atkins, *Wearing Propaganda: Textiles on the Home Front in Japan, Britain, and the United States, 1931-1945* (New Haven: Published for the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture by Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>108</sup> See: Phillip Hoare, "I Love a Man in a Uniform: The Dandy Esprit de Corps," *Fashion Theory* 9-3 (2005), 263-282; Peter McNeil, "'Put Your Best Face Forward': The Impact of the Second World War on British Dress" *Journal of Design History* 6-4 (1993), 283-299; Ruth P. Rubenstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture* (Boulder, CO; Oxford: Westview Press (2001).

<sup>109</sup> See: Elizabeth Hawes, *Why is a Dress? Who? What? When? Where?* (New York: Viking Press, 1942).

<sup>110</sup> See: Fred Davis, "Clothing and Fashion as Communication," in *The Psychology of Fashion*, ed. Michael R. Solomon (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985), 15-28.; Joan Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000); Blackwell Publishers.; Dick Hebdige, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979); Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Viking Press 1978); Claudia Brush Kidwell and Valerie Steele, *Men and Women; Dressing the Part* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); Rubenstein, *Dress Codes*.

<sup>111</sup> See: Marie B. Alsmeyer, *Old WAVES Tales* (Conway, AR: Hamba Books, 1982); Helen Gilbert, "Okay, Girls --Man Your Bunks!" (Toledo, OH: Pedestrian Press, 2006); Margaret (Peggy) Lutz, *Never Salute with a Broken Garter: WWII with an Oregon WAVE* (Prineville, OR: Margaret P. Lutz, 2003). Other self-published books on the roles of the WAVES in World War II include Billye Grymwade's *The Human Heart: Stories of Love and Life* (Ventura, CA: Puma Press, 2004), Grace Skagen Lander's *Wave Goodbye: A Navy WAVE's Memoir* (Edina, MN: Beaver Pond Press, 2003), Grymwade's *MATS and Me: WAVES Flight Attendants on Military Aircraft* (Ventura, CA: Puma Press, 2003), Betty G. Yarouch's *Cleared for Takeoff* (Atlanta: Wings Publishers, 2000), and Lutz's *It's Hard to Salute Standing in a Wall Locker: A Collection of WWII Memories "In Their Own Words"* (Prineville, OR: ORWAVE Publishing, 2005).

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<sup>112</sup> See: Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in *Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings*, ed. Robert M. Emerson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 37-59

<sup>113</sup> Frances E. Thorpe, "Memoirs Frances E. Thorpe -- First Black Officer of the WAVES," AFC2001/001/37683 (MS01), Frances Thorpe Papers, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Other published memoirs relevant to this project are those by former Navy Captains Joy Bright Hancock and Winifred Quick Collins, as well as that of Virginia Gildersleeve, the Barnard College president who was instrumental in the organization/formation of the WAVES. I will also refer to a number of unpublished memoirs, including that of Elizabeth Reynard, another WAVES commander. John Cha's *Willow Tree Shade* (Seattle: Korean American Heritage Foundation, 2002), a biography of the first Korean-American WAVE officer, has also been consulted.

<sup>114</sup> See: Jean Ebbert and Mary Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1993).

<sup>115</sup> See: Robin M. Beringer, "Looking Over vs. Overlooking Historic Contributions: Women Veterans' Experiences of WWII (World War II)," (Ph.D. dissertation, California School of Professional Psychology, 1997); Audrey Maurer, "No One Asked: Testimonies of American Women Interned by the Japanese in World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1999); Janet L. Sims-Wood, "'We Served America too!': Personal Recollections of African American in the Women's Army Corps during World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation: United States Army, The Union Institute, 1994); Meghan K. Winchell, "Good Food, Good Fun and Good Girls; USO Hostesses and World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 2003).

<sup>116</sup> Regina T. Akers, "Doing Their Part: The WAVES in World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2000).

<sup>117</sup> See: Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking, 2007).

<sup>118</sup> WAVES National is an organization for female sea service veterans of all eras and as such is not limited solely to World War II women. See: Elizabeth A. Suter et al, "Female Veterans' Identity Construction, Maintenance, and Reproduction." *Women and Language* 29-1 (2006), 10-15.

<sup>119</sup> Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), xiii.

<sup>120</sup> See: Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>121</sup> Margaret Culkin Banning, M. C. (1942). "Women for Defense," in *American Women in a World at War: Contemporary Accounts from World War II*, ed. Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith (Wilmington: SR Books, 1997), 5.



## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

*I applaud your interest in the WAVES of WWII, and think this is a good subject for a dissertation. I have good feelings about my service years, and additional education on the G.I. Bill, helped shape the rest of my life . . . If you could come here for an interview, I would be happy to do it.*

Janette Shaffer (Alpaugh), World War II WAVE  
in a letter to the author

In this section I will outline the three-step methodological approach to analyzing texts of this dissertation. Oral history methodology will be used to gather and analyze the interviews with the women. A cultural studies analysis of visual communication will be used to investigate specific messages from the government's propaganda campaign (uniform, film, newsreels, posters, magazines) as identified through the interviews of the women who served. Finally, a combination of textual and discourse analysis will be used to address the methods women use to insert themselves into the historical record.

While I shall describe each method separately, in answering each research question in Chapters Five through Nine, I will employ a format which is heavily indebted to oral historian and gender studies scholar Ann Cvekovitch. In her *Archive of Feelings*

project, she intentionally jettisoned the quote/analysis structure for a format which she felt more accurately reflected the flow of conversation: extended quotes with oral history narrators placed back to back.<sup>1</sup> Analysis followed a grouping of quotes; textual analysis helped ground the interviews and relate them to a specific point in time. I shall use a similar structure in this project. I have also chosen to begin each chapter with a quote from one woman to encapsulate the ideas and focus of that chapter. These quotes stand alone without analysis.

#### *Methodology of the Oral History Interview*

The oral history interviews for this project were gathered over a period of one-and-a-half years, beginning in March, 2006 and ending in October, 2007; I have gathered more than three days of recorded interviews (seventy-five hours and forty-nine minutes). I initially made contact with the national group for female Naval veterans of all eras, WAVES National, in January 2006. Through their national organization, I was then put in contact with four Oregon chapters as well as an auxiliary ad-hoc group of women World War II veterans who meet for lunches monthly in Florence, Oregon. The interviewees included a member of the first WAVES recruiting class (who is now eighty-nine years old) as well as a woman who was the youngest in her boot camp class in 1945 when the war ended. In addition, WAVES National published a call for interviews in their quarterly newsletter. I included a call for the national organization so that I could have women representing other areas than Oregon, allowing for regional differences in perceptions.

I have conducted interviews with fifty-one women. The vast majority of my interviews come from the four Oregon chapters; thirty-four were affiliated with Oregon groups, including two who lived out of the area, in northern California and Montana. Two Oregon women were not affiliated with WAVES National, but were introduced to me by a woman who is on active duty with the Coast Guard. The other fifteen women were scattered across the country. Though the bulk of the women currently reside in Oregon, they originally came from all regions of the country and a variety of socio-economic groups.

For Oregon women, I attended meetings of three WAVES National groups, the Cascade Seafarers (Eugene/Springfield area), the Columbia Ripples (Portland area) and the Rogue Webfoot (Grant Pass/Medford area).<sup>2</sup> I also met women at the monthly meeting of the group of Florence-area veterans in February 2006 and a luncheon in summer 2006 for women from all Oregon chapters. In addition, I attended the WAVES National convention in September 2006, meeting and interviewing a dozen veterans who lived outside of Oregon.<sup>3</sup> In April 2007, I attended the WAVES Northwest Regional convention, held in Seaside, Oregon. While no interviews were conducted at this convention, I did meet a number of women who were later interviewed for this project.

Because at its heart this dissertation is an oral history project, it is important to understand the evolution of the tradition of oral history. At its simplest form, oral history is gathering the spoken recollections of another person, usually by tape recorded interview. However, as Louis Starr points out, gathering information from others began well before the evolution of modern technology. Oral history is, he says,:

as old as history itself. On the premise that it stems from the oral tradition (that body of lore by which one tribe or family knows of its past through stories repeated from one generation to the next), some scholars would argue, indeed, that it predates history.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this tradition, most practitioners believe oral history as a formal, named, organized activity dates to 1948.<sup>5</sup> That's when Allan Nevins launched "The Oral History Project" at Columbia University in New York. Nevins' project was the first time that collected reminiscences had been called "oral history" and were stored in a single archive. Other institutions followed suit. First the Ford Archives in Dearborn, Michigan, opened in late 1948, then the Texas History Center in 1952 and University of California, Berkeley's Regional Oral History Office in 1954.<sup>6</sup> Other national and regional institutions subsequently opened. A key component of each of these projects was the collection of audio-taped interviews. But equally important were the transcripts of those interviews, stored where other scholars could access the material.

For an interview to be considered an "oral history," it undergoes a multistep process. Interviews are conducted over a period of hours or days and then transcribed. Next, an audit-edit is conducted, listening to the tape while reading the transcript for accuracy. A copy of the transcript is given to the interviewee for fact-checking, and, when the corrected version is returned, the interview is then placed within a historical archive.<sup>7</sup> The storage in an archive, accessible to scholars and the general public, is what made oral history interviews more "official" than simple recollections. The interviewee was willing to have his or her words recorded for posterity.

Sometimes, the interviewee may know better than the interviewer how to negotiate the rocky emotional ground uncovered within an oral history encounter. Mary Marshall Clark tells of an instance when a man recalling his Holocaust experiences realized:

the importance of having two interviewers present during the interview.

He was very clear about the purpose, which was to support the lead interviewer and help prevent him or her from being drawn too far into the abyss of trauma with the narrator.<sup>8</sup>

Clark says this experience (and the skill with which the interviewee negotiated it) “is a model for both oral history and narrative medicine, for it locates the boundaries of telling in the shared space of the interview encounter.”<sup>9</sup>

This shared space is also a space of performance. Alessandro Portelli describes the first element of performance as that between narrator and researcher:

What is spoken in a typical oral history interview has usually never been told *in that form* before. Most personal or family tales are told in pieces and episodes, when the occasion arises; we learn even the lives of our closest relatives by fragments, repetitions, hearsay. Many stories or anecdotes may have been told many times within a narrator's immediate circle, but the whole story has hardly ever been told in sequence as a coherent and organized whole.<sup>10</sup>

Like a jazz improvisation, the oral history narrator is “playing” to the audience (in this case the interviewer), seeing what works and what doesn’t and adjusting on the spot.

Because the oral history interview is in essence a narrative performance, Katherine Borland says it becomes a “storytelling event”:

The performance of a personal narrative is a fundamental means by which people comprehend their own lives and present a “self” to their audience . . . The narrator’s commentary on and interpretation of a story can contribute greatly to the researcher’s understanding of it.<sup>11</sup>

The interviewee is not just creating a private performance for the researcher. Within the oral history performance come the recognition of a bigger picture. This story is meant to become a part of the historical record.

But Borland warns that the researcher must be careful in this process. “Our scholarly representations of those performances, if not sensitively presented, may constitute an attack on our collaborators’ carefully constructed sense of self,” she writes.<sup>12</sup> Since researchers are the conduit through which the interviewee’s life story reaches the public, it is crucial that the story accurately reflects the theories of the individual as well as those of the researcher.

According to the oral history project at Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation (WIMSA), “Oral history is vital to the creation of a more nuanced social history . . . Oral history weaves the individual experience into a diverse, collective American tapestry.”<sup>13</sup> Based on this guideline, soliciting the histories of women who served militarily during World War II is ideal for an oral history project. The problem for a researcher is to determine what are the “rules” of the oral history interview. Oral historian Michael Riordon says, “I contend that oral history is far more an art than a

science. No technique nor approach can be called definitive. They all illustrate how and why each person makes particular choices in particular contexts.”<sup>14</sup> This indicates to me a researcher must be flexible and sensitive to the situation at hand.

As an oral historian, my role is to be a facilitator of sorts, the conduit through which women tell their life stories.<sup>15</sup> As a result, for me the process of making the women comfortable with telling their stories is as important as the oral history itself. I began by allowing women to “self-select” to share their histories, using informal snowball sampling techniques. In each new group situation, I began with one woman, who introduced me to others, who in turn introduced still others. This seems the most effective way to find willing interview subjects. While convenience samples can at times offer only limited results (such as a homogenous sample), I believe in this case it is effective because “specific variations in the population have little effect on the phenomenon under study.”<sup>16</sup> At the heart of the research is personal stories; I am making no attempts to generalize these women’s experiences to those of women veterans as a whole.

I also wanted to make sure I had a chance to contact women who either weren’t healthy or active enough to attend monthly, regional or national meetings. Each Oregon group shared a copy of its membership roster with me; this provided not only names and addresses, but also the era each woman served. From these rosters, I sent introductory letters to women who served during World War II (see *Appendix A*). Women who indicated they wished to do an interview contacted me by either letter, telephone or e-mail. When we set up an interview date and time, I also sent them a list of potential

topics for discussion, phrased as questions (see *Appendix B*). In the letter, I cautioned each woman that she should not consider this a checklist but rather a list of general topics for potential discussion. I invited her to discuss other topics as she saw fit, and warned her that during the interview I was unlikely to ask her questions worded in the exact same way or in the order listed in the letter. For women who contacted me via the WAVES National Newsletter announcement (see *Appendix C*), I followed a similar protocol. This protocol was approved by the University of Oregon's Office for Protection of Human Subjects.

On the cruise, I took a slightly different tack. Since I didn't have a chance to contact each woman before the event (I had no way of knowing who would attend), I relied on an announcement during the first general membership meeting aboard ship about my project by WAVES National President Barbara Turner. She pointed me out in the audience, and told the World War II veterans in attendance that if they were interested in sharing their stories with me, they should contact me directly. Twelve women contacted me aboard ship and asked to share their oral histories. I interviewed eight on the cruise. Two women were from the Portland area and we agreed that they would be interviewed after we got back into the United States. The remaining two women spoke with me on the last day of the trip; we arranged for the interviews to take place in August, 2007, when I was scheduled to be in southern California (one woman later declined to be interviewed). Each woman interviewed, both on the cruise and off, signed a release form approved by the University of Oregon's Office for the Protection of Human Subjects.



The form stated that she was allowing her interview and name to be used for the dissertation (see *Appendix D*); only one woman asked to remain anonymous.

But an individual's willingness to tell her story isn't the only factor affecting personal comfort. An oral history narrative style interview requires I "find the most comfortable grounds for people to tell their stories."<sup>17</sup> This refers not only to the location of the interview but also its timing. For this project, it is less important to rush and get an interview done by an arbitrary deadline than to have the women determine the scheduling in order to feel most comfortable telling their histories.

It is also important that the women are comfortable telling their life stories to *me*. So I have developed a protocol, after a woman has agreed to be interviewed. For the most part, I have interviewed the women in their homes. The exceptions were the eight interviews I recorded on the cruise and one woman who was interviewed jointly at the home of her friend.<sup>18</sup> I have recorded at least one conversation with each woman via digital audio recordings. Several women were interviewed twice; for six of those women the second interview was recorded using video cameras. While audio recordings have been the traditional method for oral histories, due to the expense and intrusion of traditional video crews, the field currently is considering how digital video can be used in the oral history process.<sup>19</sup> For this project, video recordings allow me an insight not only into the words of the women, but also into the performative quality of the interview.

I initially intended to record as many of the women as possible using video cameras. However, logistical concerns outweighed my good intentions. While I brought a camera to the WAVES National Convention and to several of the initial meetings I

attended, I found the women were often reluctant to talk on camera in a public setting. Audio didn't present the same discomfort; half of the cruise ship interviews were either recorded in a public lounge or in my cabin instead of the individual's.

There was also a selfish factor in my decision making process. Because I interviewed fifty-one women over twenty months, and was a solo interviewer, I made the decision that it would be a better use of my time to forego videotaped interviews. It takes at least a half hour to set up and then break down the lights and other gear associated with a videotaped interview; an audio recording only takes a couple of minutes. This allowed me more time to spend with the individual women, ultimately gathering more detailed interviews. Having more people involved in this project may have led me to a different decision. As it ended up, the six women video and audio taped were the first six women I interviewed for the dissertation. Other women also expressed interest in doing on-camera interviews, although some women did tell me they would not do an interview if it were videotaped. Had I expanded the video portion of the project, I would have respected those decisions.

For the most part, I have recorded the women alone. However there have been some exceptions. In several of the interviews, the woman's husband was in an adjacent room and was occasionally asked questions by the woman as she tried to remember her story. Three interviews took place in the company of the women's daughters. Three other interviews had a fellow female veteran present. Finally, one interview was done jointly with two women; I had arrived thinking I was interviewing only one woman, and she had invited a friend to participate as well.

Each interview has been personally transcribed, a process that averaged an hour for every fifteen to twenty minutes of interview time. I found that I could transcribe most effectively (and quickly) if I limited myself to two to three hours a day. As a result, the transcription took from mid-August through December 2007. The transcript was then returned to each woman for editing and clarification; she was provided two copies of the transcript and was asked to return an edited copy of the transcript to me (see *Appendix E*). Each woman was encouraged to not make significant changes to the transcript, but rather only fix sections of misspeaking or remove information she prefers remain confidential. One woman asked that she remain anonymous after reading the transcript.

While in some forms of ethnographic research it may not be necessary to fully transcribe interviews, the minutiae and linguistic repetition uncovered during the oral history interview is part of the process, and an important element of storytelling. In order to be honest to the oral history tradition, I can't just skim through interviews and translate only the "highlights" or parts which are directly relevant to this project. I must transcribe the entire interview, digressions and all.<sup>20</sup> For me, the digressions illustrate the richness of the oral history material.

I have consciously limited my analysis in this dissertation to a fairly narrow range of materials, looking at my research questions as illustrated by the interviews and certain nationally-available media sources. However, there are a number of other equally valid observations about the nature of women's work, the roles of women in society, the changing role of the military, the varied experiences of the Depression, the contributions of one small town in World War II (Monroe, Oregon, where two of my interviewees were

raised, has a population of less than one thousand), and many others not listed, which I am intentionally not pursuing in this dissertation. At this point in time, for the purposes of this project, it is wisest to focus on my narrow range of inquiry. Other research questions can be answered at another point in time, perhaps by another scholar.

After the project is finished, I will then complete its final aspect: storage of the tapes and transcripts in an archive accessible to other scholars. WIMSA has a large archive of oral history interviews. The women I have spoken with have all requested that their interviews be placed in the WIMSA archives; WIMSA representatives welcome this donation.

The only problem with the oral history process as designed for this dissertation is that I have been forced to place somewhat arbitrary constraints on the number of interviews I have gathered. I'm limited by financial resources, time and the age of the women involved.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, I have interviewed fifty-one women who represent a wide social, economic, racial and regional spectrum. Women grew up in large cities (New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles) and tiny towns. Some came from well-to-do families (including a woman whose father belonged to socially-elite New Orleans krewes) and others were less economically blessed (another woman talked of making clothing from feed sacks). While only one woman was minority (African American), others identified themselves as part of specific ethnic groups (especially Eastern and Southern European), which during the era may not have been as readily assimilated as others.<sup>22</sup>

I also found as I was completing my forty-ninth interview in North Bend, Oregon, that I realized I had reached a point in the process where I felt I didn't "need" to gather any more interviews. It wasn't that the women weren't each adding something interesting, but that I had gathered enough information to be ready to move on to the next point in this process. My feeling was likely partially based on my knowledge that I would be conducting archival research to fill in the obvious blanks: the experiences of the women who were instrumental in organizing and forming the WAVES and SPARs. I completed the final two interviews, and did follow up interviews with three women, but I was comfortable knowing that I was "done" with this portion of the project.

Nonetheless, the oral history interviews found in archives have been helpful to supplement my sources on several fronts. First, they allowed me access to the memories of women who have passed away, but who are important to represent in my sample. The majority of women enlisting in the WAVES and SPARs were white; there were a limited number of African American, Hispanic and Asian American women who served.<sup>23</sup> Other oral histories can offer context to the interviews I collect personally. While I may not directly quote these sources, by reading transcripts and listening tapes of other interviews I have gotten a sense that the women I've interviewed are not some aberrant sub-set of the population, or are somehow influenced by my interviewing style. Their stories in many ways are remarkably similar to those of other women who served.

Collections are scattered across the country. In Summer of 2007, I reviewed archival transcripts and interviews in the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress (oral histories of officers and enlisted women), interviews collected by

Radcliffe University's Schlesinger Library (oral histories with officers), and the U.S. Naval Institute's collection of oral histories with female World War II officers. I also visited the exhibitions at WIMSA, which contained artifacts and video oral histories with some women. The University of North Carolina Greensboro's archives of women's military history includes a number of oral history transcripts with WAVES; I used these transcripts as background information and a point of comparison.

The interviews have directly led me to material selected for analysis, as described in the next section. After reviewing the material, I compared my observations with the women's own words in order to assess how they interpreted the media messages and how those interpretations contrasted with the intent of the propaganda. This has helped me to understand Hall's concept of how the messages became so naturalized within their society as to be largely invisible and to explain why women would be willing to break out of the expected norms for their gender and generation. Why did these women want to work and did it profoundly change them? Only by analyzing both the messages, and those who received those messages, can I begin to tease out the answer to this question.

#### *Cultural Studies Analysis of Visual Communication*

During the war, the federal government coordinated all aspects of the propaganda campaign. My analysis will compare the government directives, published by the Navy and the Office of War Information, with the numerous media messages published by commercial outlets during the war era. This could be an overwhelming task, but limiting the texts to visual images, such as those found in films or recruitment posters, offers a logical constraint that works well with a memory-based oral history project. I looked to

the women's words and memories (including saved memorabilia) for suggestions as to which visual messages to select, and consider those messages as part of an overall (and consistent) campaign.

One media message in particular was mentioned consistently in both archival interviews and those I personally conducted. The Mainbocher-designed uniform became a powerful marker of identity used by the Navy and adopted (and remembered) by the women. The uniform also becomes a key visual text in any work about the WAVES and SPARs. Art historian Anne Hollander, who focuses on costume design and history, writes: "individual appearances in clothes are not 'statements,' as they are often called, but more like public readings of literary works in different genres of which the rules are generally understood."<sup>24</sup> By first conducting a visual analysis of the uniform, and then conducting a visual analysis of other nationally produced media messages (recruitment posters, magazine photo-essays, films/newsreels) I can get a sense of the image presented to the public of the WAVES and SPARs. Limiting the research to nationally available sources avoids potential differences between local or regional media messages; it presents texts that all women had an equal chance to encounter.

These texts (recruitment posters, magazine pictorial essays, films/newsreels) were selected because each category was either mentioned by multiple women in interviews, saved by individuals as personal memorabilia, or donated by the women to archives (Library of Congress, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Smith College, Wellesley College, Women in Military Service for America Memorial). Specifically, I plan to analyze four recruitment posters (two WAVES and two SPARs),

four magazines (*LIFE*, *LOOK*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Bazaar*) and three feature films. Two films were made about the WAVES in World War II: *The Navy Way* and *Here Come the WAVES*; one features the SPARs (*Tars and SPARs*). Limited analysis of newsreels will also be included. For the printed texts (magazines, posters), extensive notes were taken on each while visiting archives. Computer j-pegs of each image were also obtained for further analysis. The film media is available on DVD.

An archive trip to the east coast in Summer 2007 was helpful to uncover media messages deemed by female Navy and Coast Guard officers as important media artifacts from the era. Special collections at Radcliffe, Smith and Wellesley Colleges included the personal memorabilia of many women who were in positions of authority in the WAVES and SPARs; their collections led me to the specific magazine essays chosen for analysis. I chose these archives because of their connection to either women's history or the history of the WAVES. Smith College was selected by the Navy as a training facility for officers in the Women's Reserve. Its archives hold a vast variety of material about the facility, which I reviewed over three days. Among the collections are those of Frances Rich, a Smith College alumnae who headed public relations for the training facility. Wellesley College is home to the files of Mildred McAfee Horton, the former director of the WAVES who was also once a president of Wellesley. Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University is renowned for its women's history collection. As a result, many of the women who were military officers deposited their memorabilia there, including Winifred Quick Collins (directed the WAVES in Hawaii), Elizabeth Reynard (senior woman's officer at the Hunter College training facility for



enlisted women), and Jane Barton, a former New York public relations professional who spearheaded promotional campaigns for the WAVES. The files gave me a sense of the sheer volume of media messages produced about the WAVES and SPARs during this era, and the role of women in producing these messages during an era when public relations was virtually a male-only domain. I have selected the specific magazine photo essays for analysis (*LIFE* March 1943, *Harper's Bazaar* July 1943 and November 1943, and *Vogue* July 1, 1943 and December 1, 1943) because the essays were saved by more than one woman in more than one collection. The *LOOK* magazine cover from September 1944 is the final piece for analysis; it was selected because the magazine was a competitor to *LIFE* and is the only mass market publication of its ilk which I have been able to find to include any publicity for the SPARs.

I turned to the Naval Historical Center in the Naval Yard in Washington, DC to review recruitment posters for analysis. The Center's website shows a portion of its collection, but being able to look through the vast variety of original posters was invaluable. It is also to a degree overwhelming; it would be possible to do significant research simply on the recruitment posters for the Navy WAVES. The posters I selected to analyze in detail (two from each branch of service) demonstrate two varieties of image campaigns the Navy and Coast Guard used to encourage recruits. One of the posters selected has been mentioned by more than one woman; another contains the "free a man to fight" motto that several women remember and quote. The two others were selected because they are of a similar style to the other two, but represent a different branch of service. Since most of the women mention recruitment posters in general, but few can

remember specific posters, the four samples will give an sense of the scope of the campaign. Several other posters will be described in less detail in order to provide context of the overall campaign.

The three films are, to the best I of my knowledge, the sum total of Hollywood's fictional output about WAVES and SPARs. Two of the movies, *Here Come the WAVES* and *Tars and SPARs*, were directly mentioned by multiple women in the interviews. All three films were discussed in the oral history interviews with WAVES and SPARs officers, conducted by the Naval Historical Center. The Motion Picture and Television Reading Room at the Library of Congress contained background and publicity information about these films. The information included an analysis by the Office of War Information on each film and also the complete publicity package provided to both newspapers and theater owners (the films themselves are each available on DVD).

I will supplement my discussion of feature films with a brief discussion of newsreel footage. This footage is problematic on several fronts. Pathé, a main distributor, makes available downloads of selected newsreels online. A collection of Universal newsreels as well as a selection of promotional films made by the Navy and Coast Guard and distributed to movie theaters are both available on DVD.<sup>25</sup> However, unlike the feature films which had specific theatrical release dates, there is no way of knowing if, or when, these specific pieces of film aired. In addition, the collections in question are all edited by other archivists and/or producers; the selections do not reflect the full scope of newsreels released to the public by any means. However, as with the recruitment posters, a detailed analysis of military newsreels is itself a topic for significant research. For the

purposes of this project, it is not necessary to view every newsreel made. Each was filmed only with the complete cooperation of the Navy and Coast Guard; as a result, the message was carefully controlled. The three sources above can be used to discuss in general the *type* of footage which was being presented by the Navy about the women. I viewed each of the contemporary collections with these concerns in mind.

Interestingly, accessibility to uniforms has become one of the easiest elements of this project. Many veterans saved their uniforms as “souvenirs” of their war service; during the WAVES National convention one woman wore her original navy blue blazer and skirt to all functions. I’ve seen caps, cap inserts (white, seersucker and blue), hats, gloves, purses, overcoats, raincoats, shirts (short sleeve light blue, short sleeve navy blue, long sleeve navy blue, white), shoes, ties, a wide variety of stripes and rating patches, and the winter havelock (a hood women wore in inclement weather) as well as the three official uniform styles (navy blue gabardine, white dress and grey summer seersucker).<sup>26</sup> More importantly, in every visual image produced of the WAVES and SPARs, the Mainbocher-designed uniform is front and center.

*Discourse and Textual Analysis of Interviews, Memoirs and Fiction*

Both discourse and textual analysis are frequently used in conjunction with cultural studies research. Discourse analysis is “concerned not only with complex utterances by one speaker, but more frequently with the turn tak(ing) interaction between two or more, and with the linguistics rules and conventions that are taken to be in play and governing such discourses in their given context.”<sup>27</sup> Discourse analysis is often associated with power relationships. Textual analysis, on the other hand, “is central to the

work of media and cultural studies . . . interested in the cultural and political implications of representations, not only in how meaning is constructed.”<sup>28</sup> Discourse analysis will be utilized to look at the negotiation between interviewer/narrator within the oral history interview process, and textual analysis will enable me to interrogate the memoirs, fictional books and unpublished manuscripts the women have written about their experiences.

A majority of the women interviewed, either by myself or by others, have in some way recorded their military experiences outside of the oral history process.<sup>29</sup> These texts range from an unpublished, eight hundred plus page fictional opus (which inspired the title of this dissertation) to a brisk memoir published by the U.S. Navy Institute Press, from a slickly-produced segment on a cable news show to a handwritten autobiography submitted to the Library of Congress. Comparing and contrasting these texts will give me a fuller understanding of the historical storytelling process.

#### *Limitations/Concerns of Methodology*

I have already mentioned specific limitations due to my methodological choices. However, it is also important to raise some general concerns regarding qualitative and historical research.

My first concern is in regards to my influence on this project. As a qualitative researcher, I am the sole conduit for analysis and interpretation; as mentioned earlier, I have consciously chosen to ignore certain paths of investigation in both the interviews and media texts in favor of the narrow scope of this dissertation. Another researcher may find a path which differs from mine more intriguing and intellectually challenging.

However, what is potentially more troubling to me is that the individual women themselves might think that I am ignoring important elements of their stories in favor of less interesting or valuable trains of thought. My rationale is that since I am the one constant in this process (as opposed to the fifty-one individual voices of the narrators), I must make choices as to what to focus upon and what to ignore, while at the same time respecting and considering the wishes of the women. I am also giving the women a chance to edit their individual transcripts, in effect, “correcting” their life story. This allows them to ensure that important information is included and less relevant information deleted. The oral history negotiation, as Katherine Borland has noted, can be fraught with tension and the potential for disagreement. This editing process will ideally help to mitigate that tension.

My second concern deals with my interpretation of the material gathered for this dissertation. Our present has the potential to influence and color our past, imbuing those who went before with a naive simplicity which directly helped us develop our sophisticated and complicated present. In the case of historical projects dealing with World War II, the danger of engaging in this type of presentism looms large. After all, conventional wisdom argues that the notions of “good” and “evil” were clearer than in the modern era, and those involved were, in the words of Studs Terkell, fighting “the good war” (in stark contrast to morally ambiguous conflicts such as Vietnam or the current Iraq War).<sup>30</sup> Equally important is the shift in the notion of a “woman’s role” from the 1940s to the early twenty-first century; again, presentism could lead one to conclude

that the women in the World War II era were somehow taken advantage of or not fully formed as “legitimate” feminists.

David Hackett Fisher picturesquely describes presentism as a form of overactive historical pruning, where scholars include only trains of thought that blossom fully in contemporary society. He argues that a preferable method looks at details that may or may not be directly linked to the present because “it not merely provides a more satisfactory sense of the configuration of past events, but also a more enlightening perspective upon the present.”<sup>31</sup> In this project, however, between interviewing with the women, pouring over magazines, and viewing the films/newsreels, the research experience has been oddly disorienting. Donning headsets and listening to the women speak not only reveals stories of the past, but it also in a sense transports me to the complications and moral ambiguities of that place and time. After a two to four hour stretch of logging, I find myself oddly out of sorts. The past seems more present to me than the twenty-first century.

Finally, a project such as this directly confronts the tricky notion of a single interpretation of a historical truth. The women’s stories sometimes contradict one another; they often misremember dates, names and locations or ignore the traditional stories of the war, such as major offensives or political negotiations. But to disregard their memories because of slips of the mind would be shortsighted on our part. Their acts of oral history are a move to reclaim a piece of the historical record which has heretofore largely ignored them. By telling their stories, they are challenging the notion that there is

a one historical metanarrative. The telling insists that there is, to paraphrase Gary Okihiro, an alternative truth and that truth must be told.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See: Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings : Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> I did not attend meetings of the smallest chapter in the state, the North Bend group, but, nonetheless, I did interview three women from that area.

<sup>3</sup> The WAVES National convention in 2006 was held during a Caribbean cruise to Jamaica, the Grand Caymans and Cozumel, Mexico. Most of the interviews were conducted while we were sailing in international waters in the Gulf of Mexico.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Starr, "Oral History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press 1996), 40.

<sup>5</sup> For a complete history, see Starr, "Oral History."

<sup>6</sup> Starr, "Oral History," 45.

<sup>7</sup> Descriptions of the oral history interview and transcribing process were obtained over several days during the Columbia University Summer Institute on Oral History in June 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Marshall Clark, "Holocaust Video Testimony, Oral History and Narrative Medicine: The Struggle Against Indifference," *Literature and Medicine* 24-2 (2005), 274.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, "Holocaust Video Testimony," 274.

<sup>10</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," in *Narrative and Genre*, ed. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Katherine Borland, "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretative Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 72.

<sup>12</sup> Borland, "'That's Not What I Said,'" 72.

<sup>13</sup> Office of History and Collections, "Oral History, Collecting Oral History," Women in Military Service for America Memorial, [http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/Oral\\_History/ohhowto.html](http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/Oral_History/ohhowto.html) (accessed December 3, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Michael Riordon, M. (2004). *An Unauthorized Biography of the World: Oral History on the Front Lines* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2004), 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Handbook of Oral History* offers several chapters on the interview process and the role of the interviewer in oral history; see: Thomas L. Charlton et al, eds., *Handbook of Oral History* (Lanham, MD:Altamira Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Stephen L. Schensul et al, *Essential Ethnographic Methods : Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaires* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999), 233.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 181.

<sup>18</sup> All convention interviews were either conducted in in the women's individual cabins, in my cabin or in general purpose rooms aboard ship.



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<sup>19</sup> In October, 2007, I was part of a panel at the Oral History Association Annual Convention where I discussed the pros and cons of video and audio recording processes.

<sup>20</sup> While the interviews are intact in the transcription, I did make a conscious choice to remove excessive verbal ticks of the interview, such as excessive uhms and ahs, or every occurrence of habitual phrases such as “you know.”

<sup>21</sup> For instance, in September 2006 the leader of the SPARs during World War II, Dorothy Stratton, died at 105 (Los Angeles Times). Another woman who I spoke with on the cruise told me she has had significant memory loss after a major operation last year; she only remembers that she can’t remember most details about her years in the service.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of how various ethnic groups underwent a transition from “non-white” to “white” in twentieth century America, see: David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (London: Verso 1991).

<sup>23</sup> The Navy and Coast Guard didn’t record exact numbers or sort women by race, so it is difficult to determine the exact number of ethnic and racial minorities enlisting in the WAVES and SPARs. See Chapter 1 for further discussion.

<sup>24</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), xv.

<sup>25</sup> Other newsreel archives are less easily accessible, due to location or the fragility of the film in question. Many newsreels in archives are original prints and haven’t been dubbed for researchers to analyze, including films at the National Archives and at Smith College. One of the most significant collections of newsreel footage in the country is the Newsfilm Library at the University of South Carolina. While it is possible to peruse the University’s catalog on-line, it is necessary to visit the library in person in order to view specific films. A similar situation exists for newsreels at the National Archives in College Park, MD.

<sup>26</sup> A private museum in Oregon has a collection of women’s military uniforms from all eras. In addition, WIMSA offers a collection of World War II-era uniforms and materials.

<sup>27</sup> John Hartley et al, *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2002), 73.

<sup>28</sup> Hartley et al, *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies*, 227.

<sup>29</sup> So many women have contributed their written memoirs in some way, that I am surprised if a woman *hasn’t* written a short recollection of her military experience. For instance, the WAVES National units in Portland, Corvallis and Idaho each made looseleaf books containing the experiences of members. National legislation establishing the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress in 2000 may be the reason for much of this memory gathering, see <http://www.loc.gov/vets/about.html>.

<sup>30</sup> See: Studs Terkel, *“The Good War”’: An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> David Harper Fisher, *Historians Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 136.

**CHAPTER V**  
**IDENTITY AND MOTIVATIONS**

*I think that had something to do with this patriotism blast we were on. All the civilians said, "Oh! You're in the military!" You know, they were glad to see us and they were appreciative of what we were trying to do. Sometimes the men would make a remark and say something about all this. "You're replacing a man to go over an be cannon fodder." [laughs] But that was mostly tongue in cheek because they realized that everybody had to go. Everybody had to fight.*

- Lois Fish (Sherwood), World War II WAVE<sup>1</sup>

The World War II generation lived through extraordinary times during their formative years, experiencing significant cultural shifts. The women interviewed were born in the late 1910s to early 1920s. As young children, they experienced the "roar" of the 1920s. By the time they hit adolescence, the country was in the midst of a Depression. As young adults, they were bombarded with the propaganda messages of World War II. Understanding how they remember these times is crucial to understanding why they decided to join the military (and specifically the Navy and Coast Guard) during World War II.

This chapter will trace the women's memories of the Depression and their childhood goals, how they recall learning about the military and why they joined. It will also discuss the overall tenor of the times, which may have primed the women to receive certain messages. Finally, the chapter will demonstrate how the Navy, through the government and the Office of War Information (OWI), developed a specific campaign to combat one of the most pernicious rumors to emerge during the World War II era about military women.

### *Growing Up*

The group of women interviewed for this dissertation seem to a degree to be vastly different from the stereotypical portrait of a Depression-era American woman as seen in FSA photographs like Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*. These women talk of having aspirations to attend college (and, in some cases, of family expectations they would attend college) in a time when high school graduation was often difficult.<sup>2</sup> They describe the difficulties of non-traditional families, created due to parental death, separation or divorce. They express a restlessness with the "expectations" for their lives.

Understanding how their life experiences were similar to, and differed from, those of the average American can also lead to an understanding of why they may have made the choices they did during World War II. They Navy and Coast Guard's recruitment campaigns obviously didn't appeal to every American woman. Family history may offer clues as to why military service appealed to the women who *did* enlist.

*Well, I grew up during the Depression and I thought that because we were living on a farm, my dad was a farmer, that's why we didn't have any*

*money. I realize now the whole nation was suffering like that. But our communications weren't like they are now, and I didn't have any idea. And I thought, "I'm not going to have anything to do with a farm. If I stay around here you end up marrying a farmer. I'm going to get a long ways away and I'm going see this world."*

- Jane Ashcraft (Fisher). World War II SPAR

*It was literally the wrong side of the tracks. And it was a very, what you call, multicultural neighborhood. Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, Greek, I was different, I was Swiss Mennonite. Caucasian. It was neighborhood where we didn't lock doors. The houses were close together. We had a shared drive between the two houses. You could look in the one house and see what they were fixing for supper and the other side and see what they were eating. Dining room and kitchen, you know. And it was usually people would knock on the door and holler and come in. I mean, they didn't wait to come in. It was just a safe neighborhood. Never worried about things being stolen and things like that. We never felt poor because everybody was in the same boat in those days. People would help each other out.*

- Eileen Horner (Blakely), World War II WAVE

*Everyone sort of banded together and got through the Depression. But I didn't ever feel as though we were being deprived of anything because how can you feel deprived of something you haven't experienced? You*

*know, you can't miss it, because you don't -- you have nothing to compare it with because everybody was facing the same problems.*

- Violet Strom (Kloth), World War II WAVE

*[My family] grew strawberries in season and I went down and picked strawberries for my grandfather and grandma for two cents a quart . . . Oh, I thought I was rich! Oh yes! They didn't pay me each day I picked. They kept track of it on a punchcard. And at the end of the season, my uncle came down to our house and said, "Here's your money for picking strawberries." I got the sum total of three dollars and thought I was in hog heaven [laughs].*

- Myrtle Bean (Reese), World War II WAVE

*I wanted to go to college when I graduated out of high school but couldn't afford to go to college. So I went to Salem [Oregon] and stayed with my friend there and worked for the State Liquor Control Commission, which they don't have now. You used to have to buy a license to buy liquor. I worked there for three or four months and then I started working for the telephone company in Salem.*

- Dotty Anderson (McDowell), World War II WAVE

*I think at that point in time I was thinking about the jobs so I could eat. It was after the Depression and we were looking for jobs with money so we could make some money so we could live. I had to take the bus. Of*

*course, I didn't have a car. It was a different world. It was just a job that I got because of my typing and shorthand.*

- Helen Edgar (Gilbert), World War II WAVE

*In a factory town, it was kind of hard to come up with something visionary. I pretty much figured I would not marry a factory man, [laughs] because it was dullsville in a factory town. I wanted to get out of town. The Navy was my opportunity.*

- Billye Grymwade, World War II WAVE

The women's recollections of growing up during the Depression years vividly bring to life the time described by historians studying the era. Kinship ties, the difficulty of life on a farm, and an inability to find satisfactory work are all evident in the women's stories. Violet Strom talks about how everyone "banded together," Jane Ashcraft recalls how as a child she blamed their economic woes on farm life, Helen Edgar and Dotty Anderson talk about moving directly into office work after high school because their families didn't have the money to send them to college. With the benefit of hindsight, they attribute many of these things to the Depression, but they don't recall being aware of the difficulties at the time.

By twenty-first century standards, many of the women's families were poor. But they rarely acknowledge this directly. Instead, like Eileen Horner, they talk about living on "the wrong side of the tracks" in a house so close to its neighbors that you could see the food on the dining room table next door through the windows. But when Horner uses the phrase "the wrong side of the tracks," she isn't using it as a code for poverty or a

rough neighborhood. She instead describes living in a house that was so close to the railroad line that pictures on the walls would tilt when the trains would come by. The “wrong side” was due to proximity: in that neighborhood the houses were directly next to the train line whereas on the other side homes weren’t so close to the tracks. When asked if she ever felt deprived as a child, she tosses off casually that “everyone was in the same boat” before mentioning her mother and grandmother giving food to strangers who would come to their back porch. For her, it is important to note that there were others worse off financially than her family.

Many of the women, like Horner, come from what would have been described at the time as “broken homes.” In Horner’s case her father and mother were separated but not divorced. Other women talk of divorce, desertion by one parent, or death as breaking their families apart. In most of these cases, the women were raised by their mother alone, or by their mother with assistance from grandparents. Two of the women were raised by family members after both their parents died. One woman was adopted at age two; her adoptive father died when she was a young girl and her mother later remarried. In families where the parental marriage remained intact, some of the women describe the death of a non-infant sibling.<sup>3</sup> Several others, who came from more traditional “intact” families, lived for a portion of their childhood with single, female relatives, such as a grandmother or an aunt.

The life expectancy in the Depression era was fifty-seven years for men and fifty-nine years for women.<sup>4</sup> So to experience the death of a family member as a child would not be terribly unusual for this generation. Kinship ties could explain why women may

have been shipped off to live with family members, to temporarily ease the strain of Depression-era finances. However, divorce was unusual during the Depression. Divorce rates for U.S. women in the 1930s hovered around eight per thousand.<sup>5</sup> Of the fifty-one women I interviewed, two came from divorced homes, a rate higher than the national average for the era.

These patterns within the home, the usual and unusual, may offer a clue as to why the women took the action they did during the war. June Sochen found many successful female movie stars of the 1920s, '30s and '40s likewise came from broken homes. She argues being raised by a single, female parent may have enabled the women to succeed.

The model for adult womanhood was that of a woman supporting her family and making decisions. The spunk and initiative later demonstrated by these actresses was a combination of inborn instinct and learned behavior. From their mothers, they learned how to be autonomous women. The role modeling that occurred enabled them to pursue the line of work they wished for themselves.<sup>6</sup>

This could help explain why some of this group of women may have felt it was acceptable to pursue a non-traditional mode of employment during the war, i.e, joining the military. Their role models were strong women, acting independently of men to ensure their families' survival.

Other patterns also emerge. Billye Grymwade's family moved from rural southeast Missouri to industrialized Flint, Michigan after her family lost their farm during the Depression. Other women describe moving from New York to California, from



Nebraska to Oregon, from Washington state to Alberta, Canada and then back again. The vast migration which took place in the United States during the Depression (perhaps most famously due to farm devastation in the Dust Bowl) is evident in this group of women. However, they rarely attribute moving directly to the Depression. Families moved for better weather conditions or because they didn't like where they lived. In Grymwade's story, her family moved because the town's mayor opened a dairy which undercut prices charged by her father's dairy. She recalls in detail the circumstances surrounding the family's move, but then notes she was only three years old and doesn't "remember any of it." Even if other factors contributed to the move and her father's search for steady employment in the auto industry, she was too young to know any of it.

Instead, she is recalling a well-trod *family* history as way to provide an understanding of her *personal* history. This sort of structure isn't uncommon in the oral history process; Alessandro Portelli found some narrators not only tell stories about their early childhood but about ancestors who died before they were born.<sup>7</sup> Grymwade is signaling to the interviewer (and audience) that in order to understand her life choices we must understand her family's situation. In her case, she uses the move to set up for the listener her sense of being out of place in the new community, and her desire to leave for someplace where she could be more at home.

This becomes clear when Grymwade describes an itching to see something other than the factory town where she lived, which she describes as "dullsville." Again, this is a recurrent theme in the women interviewed. Even those who didn't move as children or who grew up in "intact" homes describe a desire to see something beyond where they

grew up. They talk of chafing against expectations, wanting to experience something different before moving on to the next, preordained stage of their lives.

*You have to realize, back in the '40s, you have to remember, men ruled the world. Women, they were good to have children, do secretarial work. Things like that. But not, not other things.*

- Dot Forbes (Enes), World War II

*I was not going to work in an office. I was not going to be a nun. All the sisters wanted me to be a nun [laughs] . . . Seemed like the end of the road for life. When I was growing up, the subculture I grew up in the only thing girls could be was a mother with a dozen kids and probably a drunken husband, at least that's how it looked to me, a teacher, a nurse or a nun. That was it.*

- Josette Dermody (Wingo), World War II WAVE

*Women could do about three different things at that time . . . If you went to college you could become a teacher, maybe a nurse. You could become office work, waitress. Those were the only professions . . . I was an adventurist. I wanted to do something different. I wanted to excel. You read books and things and people do things and I would have liked to do something different. For instance, to be a lawyer, today everybody's girl goes out to become a lawyer. In those days, if you wanted to become a lawyer, like a friend of mine really aspired to be a lawyer, everybody was*

*against her. Thought it was masculine trade. It didn't matter what she wanted.*

- Margaret Anderson (Thorngate), World War II WAVE

*[A profession] wasn't the right thing for a girl to do. It was men's work. And in those days men did their work and women did their work. Mostly their work was getting married on graduation night and having children. That's all they were good for, they thought.*

- Irean Gartman (Bednekoff), World War II WAVE

*[My father] treated both my sister and I -- I never have figured out how he knew it was alright to do it, because a lot of families didn't. He treated us just like boys. We did farm work that any boy our age would have done. He needed the help. I don't doubt that. But I know my best girlfriend, now her father just thought that girls should be in the house and help the mother.*

- Janette Shaffer (Alpaugh), World War II WAVE

*I really wanted to work for Reader's Digest. But there were very few women working. You were just expected to get married.*

- Jane Ashcraft (Fisher), World War II SPAR

*I was not interested in getting married so I didn't -- you had to go to work. You couldn't just sit around and live off your family then. Most of the gals [who] went to work in Depression days, for the women you went to be a sales clerk. Of course, that was the thing for women before. Teachers or*

*sales clerk. Sales clerk or bank tellers or insurance companies. A lot of insurance companies needed, they had low paying jobs. They were low paying jobs but you could get them.*

- Margaret Gay, World War II WAVE

When talking about their goals the women position themselves, through either their desires or through their family's actions, as somehow different from others at the time. Margaret Gay didn't want to get married, so she went out into the workforce. Jane Ashcraft wanted to get off of her family's Nebraska farm and work for a publication like *Reader's Digest*. Margaret Anderson also wanted to be a journalist, but, like Ashcraft, was unsure as to how to go about it. The women all talk about wanting to do something other than what was "allowed" for women at that time.

Most of the women were in a sense "programmed" into a certain line of work and future. They took typing, bookkeeping and home economics courses in high school. Many went on to what was known at the time as "business college" -- a two to six month post-high school program teaching advanced business skills such as stenography, accounting or the use of office machinery such as the addressograph (a mechanized system for addressing envelopes). They expected the jobs to be temporary and then to move into their next role: motherhood. With one exception, the women say they anticipated getting married and having children. Only one woman (Margaret Gay) didn't want to get married and never did.

The simple explanation to all of this is that women were marginalized and denied access to options, such as alternative work choices or higher education, which may have

offered them more personal and professional fulfillment. They were directed (by either their parents, school counsellors, or some other authority source) to behave in a certain way and did. These women seem to be living examples of Scharf's contention that high school girls were directed into less-prestigious, skill-based, temporary jobs.<sup>8</sup> But this simple explanation ignores the complexities of lived experience. It fails to explain why Gay would choose to ignore the "normal" direction and instead choose a path that led her away from wife and motherhood. It fails to explain why the women openly chafed at the (limited) options they saw open to them. It fails to explain why the women chose to serve.

"I was an adverturist," Margaret Anderson proclaims. The statement demands that the researcher recognize "the continuum of experience, knowledge, values and praxis."<sup>9</sup> Though by contemporary standards she lived a "traditional" life for a woman of her time (she came from a two parent home, married, raised children and was not her family's primary breadwinner), Anderson nonetheless considered herself as someone always striving for the different, as operating against the grain. She, like other women interviewed, felt she challenged the norm. It is the responsibility of the oral historian to look outside the conventional standards in an attempt to understand why.

*When I said to my dad that I wanted to go on in school, he said, "Well, I think the only one of you I can help is our only son. You'll wind up boiling baby bottles."*

- Mary Ferry (Bingham), World War II WAVE

*In those days when you turned eighteen you either got a job and paid board at home or you left home. Well, my father said, "If you go to college, I'll let you live at home board free." And that was a big concession for him.*

- Joyce Fish (Sherwood), World War II WAVE

*I can remember talking to my father about goals . . . They both were determined that all three of us were going to go to college. And we just knew that, that's something you grew up knowing that that's the way it was going to be. He said, "Well, think about it Betty," he said, "it's important you know what you're going to do and that you're happy in doing it." But he said, "About 98 percent of the women get married and you probably will get married somewhere along the way too. That's going to be, that's definitely going to be your life work."*

- Betty Bernard (Daly), World War II WAVE

*My father's big big dream was that all of us graduate from college. He had, he was bright in the mathematical way and I have all his papers, his graduation from grade school, high school, college, master's degree and so on. It was just important. He always said, "That's what we can give you that they can't take away from you."*

- Laura Patton, World War II WAVE

*Everybody said, "Why are you sending her to college? She'll just get married." And my mother said, "Every woman needs to be educated."*

*When my mother said, "Every woman needs to be educated," you knew you didn't argue with Louise! [laughs]*

- Roberta Moore (Hockett), World War II SPAR

A number of the women didn't attend business college after high school, but instead opted for two- or four-year university programs. Most were studying to be teachers; in rural states such as Oregon, an individual could qualify for a teaching credential after attending a two-year collegiate program. Others attended four-year colleges, including prestigious schools such as the University of California, Los Angeles, Purdue University and Newcomb College (the woman's college affiliated with Tulane University). According to Census Bureau data, this was an unusual choice for the era: in 1940, twenty-seven percent of eighteen to nineteen year-old women were attending school (this number would include high school students as well as those attending business college), while only five percent of twenty to twenty-four year-old women were enrolled.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, not everyone agreed with the notion that women needed higher education. Roberta Moore describes "everybody" (other than her mother) thinking college was a waste of time. Mary Ferry's father was even more direct, refusing to pay for higher education because her future job would be taking care of her children (and boiling their baby bottles). But other women were openly encouraged to go to school. One woman talked about being left money in her mother's estate to pay for college. Jean Byrd says her family assumed she would go to college because as an African American

woman it was the only way she could earn a competitive wage. Laura Patton's father told her a collegiate education "is something they can't take away from you."

The statement indicates an awareness of the economic precariousness of the times; an individual might not be able to find or keep well paying jobs, but would forever have an education. College was expensive: Janette Shaffer's family took out a loan on the farm to pay for her tuition at Purdue. But the push for higher education by some families (including those from less-than-affluent homes), indicates that, for some, there was an understanding that the cost of a college education would be offset by other benefits (higher earning potential, a better lifestyle). It complicates the notion that women were "programmed" into certain roles. Granted, most of the women expected to become teachers after receiving their collegiate degrees. But a number went to college just because their families thought they "should," with no real career direction in mind.

Two interesting points emerge from the conversations. First, while some of the women talk about others who went to college to get an "MRS." degree, none of the women I spoke with say they attended school to find a husband. They were fascinated by math (Dorothy Turnbull), wanted to teach (Liane Rose, who was then forced unwillingly into a home economics major), or hoped to develop academically (Laura Patton). Second, many of the women who attended business college or moved directly into the work force expressed a desired to attend a two or four year school. Those who were college graduates talked about wanting to go on to graduate school (a number of women did, and have their Master's degree).



The women know that the interviews were being conducted as part of a Ph.D. dissertation, so it is possible the women voiced these educational desires as a way to ingratiate themselves with me. They could have thought I would “want” to hear that they hoped to attend school. As Wendy Rickard has observed, “I am aware that my oral history interviews would have turned out very differently” if she were not the person doing the interviewing.<sup>11</sup> The oral history interview is based upon a relationship between the narrator and interviewer, with topics pursued due to the interests of both participants.

However, I believe in this instance the women’s mention of attending college (or a desire to attend college) goes deeper than merely wanting to “please” me as an interviewer. The women who talked about college often brought up their desires unprompted, when asked about goals they had after high school. In addition, I’ve seen mentions of college attendance (or the regret that they didn’t utilize the academic benefits in the G.I. Bill) in other oral histories. It seems likely that the WAVES (and later the SPARs), with its collegiate campus training and leadership drawn from prestigious women’s colleges, may have drawn women who were intrigued by the idea of attending a university. The knowledge of the benefits of a collegiate education became tied up in the identity of the WAVES.

### *The Beginning of the War*

While the women talk about familial concerns -- if they were getting married or not, what jobs they hoped to get, the frustrations of feeling limited to certain roles -- in the military world preparations were underway for the United States’ eventual entrance into World War II. The first Industrial Mobilization Plan appeared in 1931, the results of

negotiations between the War Department Planning Branch and the Army and Navy Munitions Board. Rather than anticipate any specific conflict, it was instead a 17-year work in progress after the end of World War I. The plan was revised three times. A final version was hammered out in the summer of 1939; war broke out in Europe in September of that year.<sup>12</sup> The plan included an outline for recruitment of (male) military personnel. Eventually, government planners also addressed the changing production needs of a wartime economy, i.e. shifting industry from consumer durable goods to production of military needs. Pre-war estimates were that two million new workers would be needed in the labor market, and, because of the military draft for men, the assumption was that most of those new workers would be women.<sup>13</sup> By December of 1941, with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the plan was put fully into action.<sup>14</sup>

*Everybody always talks about the different things that happened. A girlfriend and I had gone -- this was a Sunday afternoon -- had gone to a movie in Covington [Indiana], I guess. This was a town south of there. And we came back from the movie and I was driving and stopped to leave her off. Her father -- she was going to go home and her father came running out of the house and said, "We've been attacked at Pearl Harbor." We said, "What?" We thought it was kind of a joke, because you could start out that way and carry on with something other to finish it on a joke angle. "Oh no," he said, "it's not a joke. We've been attacked and so tomorrow we'll be at war."*

- Janette Shaffer (Alpaugh), World War II WAVE

*I was with friends, friends who were going to be affected by it. Male friends. Well, we just, it was such a shocking thing. That's all we did: talk talk talk. Talk talk talk. We didn't know what we were saying because we were just trying to surmise how we were going to fit into this. And oh, of course, you're thinking pretty hard about all those boys who are going to be affected.*

- Violet Strom (Kloth), World War II WAVE

*[High school friends thought] that the war wasn't going to last six months and they'd better get in the service real quick or they wouldn't have a chance to fight. They thought for sure it would only be a few months, six months to a year at the longest. But none of the kids -- all of the kids did finish school, the seniors. Then they enlisted in the service . . . We thought the U.S. was invincible. We had those Japanese on the pftth and that was it.*

- Mickey Griffin (Kalinauskas), World War II WAVE

*[The world turned] upside down. All the war rallies, "V for Victory," We were in fear. We were in confusion and not ready for a war. If the Japanese hadn't been drinking tea and sucking teeth, they could have taken us easy. We were vulnerable. All they would have had to do is come over. But they didn't know that. Thank god.*

- Helen Edgar (Gilbert), World War II WAVE

*We were so eager to do something, we didn't recognize what was being thrown at us. Finally, in the schools they began to say, "You've got to watch who you're talking to" and whatnot. So we were going by a newsstand or something. It had all the papers out about the communists doing so-and-so. I don't know how I got the nerve to do it, but I "accidentally" on purpose bumped the newsstand and the papers went all over the ground. We all started to run. I said, "Well, you know I did my bit," laughingly. The world definitely changed.*

- Dorothy Riley (Dempsey), World War II SPAR

The bombing of Pearl Harbor is a signature event for this generation. Unlike the end of the war, where many women can't recall where they were or what they did, memories about the bombing of Pearl Harbor are all about specifics. The stories are long and detailed. One woman talked about being at boarding school and having the word of the bombing read aloud at dinner. She recalls the color of the dress the girl reading the announcement wore (white), her gasp of reaction to the news, and the stunned pall that fell on the room afterwards. Another woman talks about a neighbor running over to her house, yelling for them to turn on the radio to hear the news. Still another talked of working in a soda shop and how hearing the news changed the atmosphere of the place.

It was also an event that, in their memories, immediately and irrevocably changed their world. Young people moved from thinking of the future to thinking about the war. They may have been, in a sense, primed for patriotism. This is a generation who grew up not only with the knowledge of extensive government work projects (many women talk

about relatives who worked for the CCC or other government programs), but also seeing the United States as framed through the well-published FSA photography program (“*We introduced Americans to America*”<sup>15</sup>). James Guimond argues the FSA program helped to shape a national identity during the 1930s and ‘40s.<sup>16</sup> The interviews give evidence of this, and evidence that when this identity was threatened (through an attack on Pearl Harbor), young Americans felt an *obligation* to spring into action. Their love of country (patriotism as a feeling) morphed into the need to stand up for one’s country (patriotism as an action).

In these discussions the women also reveal how deeply ingrained the anti-Axis propaganda had become. Helen Edgar is not the only woman I’ve spoken with who, in twenty-first century parlance, is “politically incorrect” when talking about Japanese during wartime. She is perhaps the most colorful; her stereotypical description of the enemy “drinking tea and sucking teeth” brings to life the cartoonish imagery found in a mass market publication like *LIFE* magazine. In a 1943 Philco Corporation advertisement, artist John Maxwell draws Emperor Hirohito of Japan as a buck toothed, squinty-eyed menace, with hunched shoulders and tightly grasping a knife dripping blood in his left hand. His lips are drawn back, as if, in the words of Edgar, he is “sucking teeth.”

Other women use the word “Jap” almost casually. They also fail to ever acknowledge that the word could be considered by some as offensive. This would be understandable given their generation (who, after all, did experience firsthand the shock of an attack on their country), but for the fact that other sensitive racial and ethnic issues

are addressed, minus racial or ethnic slurs. The white women talk about the shoddy treatment African Americans received during the era and their shame at doing little personally to stop it. They talk about meeting Jewish women (none of the women interviewed told me they were of the Jewish faith) and how the experience broadened their limited horizons. One woman expresses regret in not having friends of different racial backgrounds.

But only Edgar, who early in her interview casually tosses off the phrase “drinking tea and sucking teeth,” later addresses the insidious nature of the propaganda they received. Though she knows better, she remembers when living in Japan in the 1960s of being struck by an irrational fear that the people there were going to do something to her. “I was *terrified*,” she says “because I was so brainwashed during the war.” Thus she rationalizes both her post-war fear and her earlier use of “politically incorrect” language in the interview. She was “brainwashed.”

Dorothy Riley doesn’t call it “brainwashing,” but she too uses her present day knowledge to let her past self off the hook for knocking a stand full of pro-communist newspapers to the ground. She ignores the fact that communist countries (Russia, China) were at the time *allies* of the United States, instead merging World War II-era patriotic propaganda with the political East/West divide of the Cold War. This merger of concurrent and post- World War II ideology allows her to rationalize what at the time might have been considered inappropriate behavior. “We didn’t recognize what was being thrown at us,” she says. In her recollection, it is almost as if she had no say in the matter, but was

rather forced to act due to the conditions of the times. Anyone in the same situation would have acted the same way.<sup>17</sup>

In the women's oral histories fear and patriotism combine, prompting them to behave in a manner that now might cause them shame or regret. But given the time (in the months and years immediately following an attack on the country), they frame their racist or knee jerk reactions as the only possible choice they could make. In their minds, they had to do something. This need would eventually lead to their decisions to enlist in the military.

*There was the total difference. Whether you were wearing a uniform or you were Rosie the Riveter. Or you were taking care of your grandchildren, or taking care of helping neighbor's children because their father was in war. Something like this. It was helping, sharing and getting along. And not having to be petrified every time you didn't lock your door. You didn't get nasty phone calls. Part of it is culture and society, not just the war. But it was different. People helped in many ways by just being themselves and helping. And rationing was a big thing.*

- Anna Fogelman, World War II WAVE

*The whole country was into saving frying iron, frying pans. I remember the margarine, oleo was white and we had to mix color into it. Everything was for the war effort. It was -- our country was more united during*

*World War II than it's ever been. Ever since it's been fragmented as it is today.*

- Helen Edgar (Gilbert), World War II WAVE

*Most states started some kind of a . . . physical fitness program for young people, because they knew various young people would be in service. So somewhere or another I got appointed as physical fitness director in that area . . . So you jumped into calisthenics and strength training and obstacle course training and things of that kind. Track and field, in order to get young people, because they knew high school people would be going to service. All through that time, obviously, women were never even mentioned in articles or anything. It was that men would be drafted.*

- Janette Shaffer (Alpaugh), World War II WAVE

*There were no boys around, which was quite a shift. Everybody was for supporting the boys. I mean, mothers hung stars in their windows and girls folded bandages and started knitting warm scarves for them. It was all let's do what we can. It was amazing how busy people became. And of course people began moving around because if your father or so were drafted sometimes you moved to the town where they were as long as they were in this country. There was a lot of shifting and people were -- they*



*were not downcast, they were doing it willingly and hopefully. Everybody was behind the effort.*

- Virginia Gillmore, World War II WAVE

Like many Americans of that era, the women interviewed participated in various ways. Some worked as civilians for the military. Some went to work as a “Rosie the Riveter” in a war production plant. Others volunteered as neighborhood safety marshals, wrapped bandages for the Red Cross, or attended dances held at the local USO, which had sprouted up in even tiny communities. Those who already had jobs began volunteer efforts, or left those jobs to go to work at a war production plant. Those who were in school volunteered and planned what they would do once they got out on their own.

Virginia Gillmore says there were “no boys” around, but she is one of four women in this group to get married before enlisting in the WAVES. Gillmore says she was swept off her feet when her husband-to-be came home in his Marine uniform. “He looked so handsome,” she says before telling me that it was just what you did at that time. Jean Clark was also married, and at one point sneaked onto a military base to bid her husband farewell. “I stood there thinking, ‘Boy, I feel like I’m in a movie,’ but I felt like I wasn’t a part of it. I was watching the whole thing,” she says, describing how he left with his unit on a train in early 1942.

Neal Gabler discusses how real life has been consumed by entertainment and how modern Americans perceive ourselves as if we were performing on screen.<sup>18</sup> Gillmore and Clark describe this phenomenon in their memories. Not only are they acting outside

of their “normal” behavior, but they also describe themselves as at the time being aware of “watching” how they were acting. They are the stars of their own life story.

*When the war broke out and I came home from college that summer, [my aunt] went to work at the shipyard. She got a job at the personnel office or whatever the heck it was through her graphotype and addressograph work. Things were going pretty fast, so she needed a helper and so she asked if her niece could come. It might be temporary. “Well, yeah, we need somebody right now.”*

- Virginia Benvenuto (Matich), World War II WAVE

*When the third year of college was starting and the family had moved, the dean of women called me in. Her name was Margaret Hargrove. She became quite high in the Red Cross as the war years went on. She knew I was having [financial] trouble and they were recruiting, Curtiss-Wright Corporation was recruiting for college women to go to universities around the country for training in aeronautical engineering and then go on to as pseudo engineers to replace the men who had gone off to war . . . We started in February of 1943 and finished in December -- it was a ten-month, it was eight hours of classes and it was intensive.*

- Mary (Ferry) Bingham, World War II WAVE

*I used to get to go to the bank and bring back thousands of dollars of bonds to be printed. They were just blank things to be brought back. And armed officer went with me because they were worth so much. We went*

*down in a car and he came with his gun and everything. I signed for all these bonds and came back to the office. It was so much fun. I just waited on people at the window. And this was an eye opener. Some of the people who came to work at the shipyard, they couldn't sign for their bond. They'd just put an x, you know. They could barely speak English or barely speak. Some of the people, the poor, poor people from the south or poor people from New York. It was a real eye opener to me because I had been so isolated in Portland all my life. But it was a good eye opener because then that helped me in the service, because you met all kinds of people in the service. You met all kinds of people there.*

- Virginia Benvenuto (Matich), World War II WAVE

It took the Pearl Harbor attack for the military to begin to officially assess how, or if, women could be used as something other than civilian workers. Unofficially, deans at women's colleges began considering how their schools might assist in the war effort. On January 13, 1942, Barnard's Virginia Gildersleeve gave the address "How Barnard Can Help Win the War," which directly addressed how women would be used in the military, specifically the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, the Women's Auxiliary Air Corps, and the Navy Auxiliary:

Are they really going to use women for 'trained personnel'? Yes, they are.

They have begun to realize that the 'man power' of the country includes also the woman power, and that the government and industry will be

forced to use women for nearly every kind of work except the front-line military and naval fighting.<sup>19</sup>

This address, just a month after the Pearl Harbor attacks, was well before Congress had given any official blessing to the establishment of women's forces. But Gildersleeve believed not only that women would be utilized, but that women college graduates would be officers in the new female services.

That same month, Barnard English professor Elizabeth Reynard took a temporary leave of absence to work as Special Assistant to the Chief of Naval Personnel. Her job was to help figure how how the Navy could incorporate women into the services.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, at the Naval Bureau of Aeronautics (BuAer), Joy Bright Hancock was engaged in a bit of lobbying of her own. She had continued to work for the Navy as a civilian after serving as a Yeomanette in World War I and knew that women would be a necessity in World War II.

Admiral Radford [the head of BuAer] wrote a letter to BuPers [Naval Bureau of Personnel] and asked what were their plans including women? You know what his answer was. "We have no plans, and we have no intention of using them." And Capt. Radford said, "There we go again. No looking ahead by the black shoe boys." Then began the struggle to get legislation introduced under the counter, which we did. And that put BuPers on the spot. They were really forced to take affirmative action.<sup>21</sup>

It appears from Hancock's oral history that while Reynard was working for BuPers, the "black shoe boys" in the division weren't entirely on board, or even aware of, her actions.

It may also be that since Reynard was an outsider, her activities went unnoticed by those more entrenched in the Navy. Other women in the military describe Reynard as artistic, creative and somewhat dramatic;<sup>22</sup> it seems likely that Hancock's long work in the Naval world would have helped her lobbying be more effective.

Reynard, meanwhile, sought help from the world outside the Navy. With the assistance of Gildersleeve, she organized the Advisory Education Council. The group was made up of representatives from around the country, drawn mostly from academia, including Meta Glass (Sweetbriar College/American Association of University Women), Ada Comstock (Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University), Emma Barton Brewster Gates (wife of University of Pennsylvania president Thomas Gates), Dean Harriet Wiseman Elliott (University of North Carolina, later replaced by Alice Baldwin of Duke University), Alice Lloyd (University of Michigan), and Ethel Gladys Graham (wife of UCLA political science professor Malbone Graham).<sup>23</sup> The Council was unofficially charged with giving advice about and helping promote the idea of women in the Navy. They acted as a liaison of sorts between the Navy and the community. Their existence linked the Navy, in the minds of the public at least, with collegiate education, i.e. respectability. They were a powerful public relations tool, reassuring the public that the Navy was a "safe" place for women in the military.<sup>24</sup>

This contrasted with the WAAC, which was headed by Texas newspaper woman and socialite Oveta Culp Hobby. "Hobby cultivated and maintained a cooperative relationship with prominent women's groups throughout the war,"<sup>25</sup> but she didn't have the connections to higher education that the Navy was establishing. As a result, as Leisa

Meyer notes, “although women’s entrance into the Army in some way paralleled women’s movement into non-traditional jobs in the civilian labor force, it was also more threatening because of the military’s cultural function as one of the rites of passage to manhood.”<sup>26</sup> Because women’s involvement in the Navy was so tightly associated with higher education, through the Advisory Council and eventual WAVES leadership, the women recruits themselves became linked to a different cultural function: college attendance as a rite of passage to adulthood. Many recruits picked up on this, describing the WAVES as like a sorority or similar to going away to school. The fact that the women were initially trained and housed on college campuses only served to further this illusion.

Gildersleeve approached the board of trustees at Wellesley to see if they would loan Dean Mildred McAfee to head the new women’s division. Initially they demurred, but then finally agreed to give McAfee a leave of absence for a period of one year.<sup>27</sup> As with the Advisory Council, who were a group of university-affiliated women who knew each other, the selection of Mildred McAfee was a case of the “old girls’ network” at work. A small, elite group of highly-educated women, many of whom had connections to the “Seven Sisters” colleges,<sup>28</sup> were helping to influence the future course for Navy recruits.

At this point the Navy women didn’t have a name or a uniform. The group wasn’t even officially sanctioned by the Navy. Elizabeth Reynard is credited for coming up with the acronym “WAVES,” saying they wanted “something nautical, suitable, fool-proof,

and attractive.”<sup>29</sup> As recounted in Gildersleeve’s memoirs, Reynard knew she had to somehow indicate that it was a volunteer service for women:

“So I played with those two letters [*w and v*] and the idea of the sea and finally came up with ‘Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service’ -- W.A.V.E.S. I figure the word ‘Emergency’ will comfort the older admirals, because it implies that we’re only a temporary crisis and won’t be around for keeps” . . . The name was accepted with considerable enthusiasm by a majority of the naval officers involved and it caught on with the public immediately.<sup>30</sup>

By all accounts, the selection of Mildred McAfee to lead the group was equally successful. The daughter of a pastor, McAfee was intelligent and respected in her field, she easily found her way around the Navy way of doing things, and was comparatively young (forty-two-years old).<sup>31</sup> Gildersleeve’s comments in her biography are typical of the praise McAfee received:

Her position as head of a distinguished college for women gave prestige to the WAVES, attracted many young women of good quality to join us, and made their families willing to entrust them to this service. She thus provided much that we needed to get the new Women’s Reserve launched.<sup>32</sup>

She was also still single at the time, meeting and marrying her husband during the war.<sup>33</sup>

McAfee helped the Navy establish high standards in order to attract high quality women. Officers were required to have, at a minimum, two years of college and two

years professional work; many women had four year degrees and significantly more work experience.<sup>34</sup> Enlisted women needed to have had some college or work experience. Women had to be at least twenty years old to volunteer; enlisted women could be no older than age thirty-six and officers no older than forty-nine at time of entry.<sup>35</sup> The Navy believed “such requirements would insure the Navy of trainees of reasonable intelligence and a reasonably well-developed sense of responsibility.”<sup>36</sup> The training facility had to reflect an equally high standard.

It was decided that the campus of a large women’s college would be the most suitable training center for women officers because of the dignity and prestige of an academic atmosphere. This was in line with the Navy’s practice of establishing training centers for male officers at leading men’s colleges and universities.<sup>37</sup>

By mid-July, 1942, the Navy reached an agreement with Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, to use the facilities to train officers. Enlisted training schools were set up at several other colleges around the country.

McAfee suggested another former academic, Dorothy Stratton, to head up the SPARs when the Coast Guard was starting its branch of a woman’s reserve in late 1942. Stratton was former Dean of Women at Purdue University and at the time was heading up the Navy’s Radar School for women in Madison, Wisconsin. She had been in the first class of WAVE officers at Smith College in September of that year. The two decided that the Coast Guard women would wear a variation of the WAVE uniform and should



initially train alongside the WAVES. Later, the Coast Guard women got their own training facility.<sup>38</sup>

But it was McAfee, with her built in prestige and knack for positive publicity, that was of most initial assistance to the Navy. She recalls:

The theory definitely was that in appointing anybody to be the head of this, they wanted to assure the parents and boy friends of girls that they would be looked after in the Navy. That this was not going to be a wild show, but it would be respectable, and the president of a woman's college -- the reason they chose that category to begin with, was the thought that somebody who had been accustomed to dealing with girls and was in a position which had respect attached to it would enhance getting the right kind of person into the service.<sup>39</sup>

However, in order to get women to enlist, she would have to address the rumors running rampant about service women.

### *The Rumor Mill*

"Loose lips sink ships" a prominent poster proclaimed during World War II. But despite the warning, rumors abounded during the war years. Combatting the rumors became a project of the OWI. The agency offered guidelines on identifying rumors:

A rumor is a specific type of information, ordinarily orally transmitted.

Ideally, a rumor has three major aspects: (1) it is offered as a fact, not an opinion. (2) it carries the implications of a private, reliable source of information, one not available to the general public. (3) it has specific

rather than a general reference. These three features distinguish rumors from all other forms of orally transmitted materials.<sup>40</sup>

The OWI began a Division of Propaganda Research, establishing Rumor Clinics around the country.

The OWI launched appeals to the populace, such as this one from the *Reader's Digest*:

Send in your rumors! What wild morale-eroding rumors similar to those described in this article are current in your community? Readers who wish to help the Boston Rumor Clinic, and to further the organization of similar clinics, are urged to put such stories in writing and send them to Robert H. Knapp, Division of Propaganda Research, 18 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass.<sup>41</sup>

In September of 1942 the Division received more than one thousand rumors, mostly from the midwest, on a wide variety of subjects.

Rumors about military women mostly focused on the WAAC. While, as Meyer observes, “the whispering campaign against the women’s corps gained momentum at the precise moment that the WAAC was trading its marginal status for full membership in the Army,”<sup>42</sup> in mid-1943, the campaign was virulent enough shortly after the WAAC was established in 1942 for the Navy to be concerned about that the rumors might hamper *their* female recruitment efforts. In many ways the Navy learned from the Army’s early mistakes. In this case, they were trying to prevent similar whispers from attaching to Naval women.

*The women, WAACs, that was a bad name. They were pretty much considered like camp followers or that type of reputation. Not that they earned it, but that was the perception that people had of them. So WAACs were -- oohh, you didn't want to be involved with them,*

- Barbara Stroda (Wright), World War II SPAR

*Previous to the war, the Army really wasn't in good repute. You know? It seemed before the war the young men that went into the Army were a lot of them kids that couldn't make it in high school. This sounds really snobby and I don't mean it to be, but the Army didn't have quite the reputation that the Navy did, as far as I was concerned. I was probably all wet.*

- Virginia Benvenuto (Matich), World War II WAVE

*The WAACs were giving the Army a bad name. Dating and drinking and carousing around. They didn't want the WAVES to get the same name the WAACs were getting.*

- Doris Mansfield (Leichliter), World War II WAVE

*I was in the Navy and the Navy and Army are different. So I don't know when I really became aware. I certainly, for the people I did know in the Navy, as far as being what I would call quote unquote "loose women," I didn't seem to be around it, that crowd, somehow. So I don't know how it sorted itself out. That I was protected from them or what. I never worried about it.*

- Eileen Horner (Blakely), World War II WAVE

*To tell the truth, I never considered joining the Army, the WACs. You know, the women in the Army did not have a good name . . . I don't know if the Army took them without a high school education, or whether they had to pass the tests that we did in the Navy. The Navy turned down a lot of people. They really did. I don't know. It's just, it's hard to say. They were just tough. They were - the women I met in the Navy -- I mean now\things are different these days, this may sound stupid -- but they were more refined. A gentler class of women, maybe.*

- Ali McLaughlin (McConnell), World War II WAVE

*I can understand even WAACs, they too were put in a new place. There were thousands of them and nothing to do. So they had to do -- if one did anything wrong, then they were all tarred with the same brush. Whether the rest of them had done anything or not. So I supposed that's kind of how the reputation got started.*

- Barbara Stroda (Wright), World War II SPAR

The Library of Congress's rumor file backs up the women's assertions that the WAAC had a "bad name." One New Yorker told the interviewer, "Those WAACs were hired so as to give the men in the Army women they wouldn't have to pay for. Each squad of men will get one woman."<sup>43</sup> An Iowa woman said, "There are a lot of dirty jokes about the WAACs."<sup>44</sup> A business woman told rumor investigators, "I understand they caught three WAACs and three men officers out on the parade grounds at the Fort one night and they say the officers are to be demoted, but don't know what they are doing

to the WAACs.”<sup>45</sup> Another informant wrote, “There are innumerable jokes about the WAACs traveling about the state, most of them definitely on the smutty side. As put by one observer, ‘We haven’t had a swell topic like this for years and everyone is really going to town on it. I could go on for hours and not run out.’”<sup>46</sup>

McAfee noted that people “had a stereotype of attractive women. I mean that if they were attractive, then they were out to get their man.”<sup>47</sup> But the WAAC rumors went deeper than just a pretty woman out to snag a man in marriage. They were demeaning and nasty. WAACs supposedly were being issued contraceptives during basic training. They either had loose morals and were government-provided prostitutes, or they were being taken advantage of by their male colleagues. Meyer reported one rumor that the Army would “make things uncomfortable” for women who wouldn’t agree to be sexual playthings for Army men.<sup>48</sup>

Some of these rumors played out in the press; in June, 1943, John O’Donnell reported the contraceptive rumor in his syndicated column “Capitol Stuff.”<sup>49</sup> But the true whisper campaign, which was rarely discussed in the press, surrounded the sexual orientation of Army women. The issue was either framed in one of two ways. On the one hand, rumors discussed the “mannishness” of women coming into the Army, a code for homosexuality. On the other, the whisper campaign said that innocent women who went into the Army would be perverted and become lesbians.<sup>50</sup>

WAVE and SPAR leaders and recruiters never discuss these specific allegations about the Army. In one interview, Mildred McAfee says, “Many mothers really worried about the reputation of the sailor man as being people they did not want their daughters to

associate with,”<sup>51</sup> alluding to the notion that the sailor had a woman in every port.

Another WAVE officer, Louise (Billy) Wilde says, “We learned a few things from the Army. There was some terribly unpleasant stories about the WAC, probably totally unfounded but of course there were always rumors about women in the service.”<sup>52</sup> This indicates the leadership was fully aware of the whisper campaign against the Army women and was doing everything possible to erase it in the Navy and Coast Guard.

*There were people that thought we only went in for reasons not nice.*

*Sexual reasons and all. That was one of the things I was concerned, I guess, that my dad would be upset about that. I had one friend who signed up for the SPARs. When she found out she had to have a vaginal exam, she dropped out. She didn't want it. That's the way we were in those days, I guess.*

- Pat Connelly, World War II WAVE

*We went to [rent an apartment] and the woman said, “I don't have any vacancies.” Second one we went to the woman came out. “What do you want?!” “We are looking for an apartment for four girls.” She drew back like this. She said, “Well! Why don't you ask those men who support you to rent you an apartment!” “What are you talking about?” “Well,” she said, “why are you in the service other than to be available for the officers?” And you know you're going like this, “What is she talking about?” She gave us [laughs] an education about what people thought*

*about women in the service. This is shocking .. I had heard this vaguely about the Army. But WE were immune to that kind of stuff.*

- Roberta Moore (Hockett), World War II SPAR

*Sailors who I encountered who had not had any relationships with the WAVES regarded them as prostitutes or something . . . One time my roommate and I were on a train to go to New York, I guess it was. Anyway, we encountered this sailor and he was practically telling us that. But he was a nice kid. We said, "Have you ever dated one? Do you know one?" Well, no. Well the following summer he got engaged to a girl, a WAVE, and we giggled about it to ourselves. But I think that, yes, they kind of resented us maybe, some of them.*

- name withheld, World War II WAVE

*He said, "You know, I always thought that WAVES were --" and then this stereotype . . . Loose morals. Not very refined. It was mostly loose morals. Of course, I wasn't like that! . . . Back then, your ideas of sexual freedom were different from today. So very different. I was brought up to be a good little girl [laughs]. There were a lot of them that hadn't been brought up like that. I never -- well, I have this philosophy that you are treated the way you expect to be treated. And I really have never been disappointed in it. Once in awhile I've had to scurry back, but [laughs]. I really believe*

*they treat you the way you expect them to treat you. And if you treat them that way too.*

- Betty Bernard (Daly), World War II WAVE

To combat rumors, the OWI advised avoiding denials or corrections, but instead recommended using “counteracting statements” that would eliminate the rumor entirely.<sup>53</sup> The WAVES used what the OWI would consider indirect counteraction in attempting to diffuse potential rumors. Indirect counteraction “recognizes that rumors are often born of malevolent intention but that they always breed on ignorance, curiosity and confusion. Thus this approach hopes to correct, or prevent, rumors by attacking the condition which lead to their diffusion.”<sup>54</sup> For the WAVES and SPARs, this method included focusing on the idea that by joining the Navy and Coast Guard, women would not lose their femininity, but would instead enhance it. As WAVE recruiter Dorothy Turnbull noted, “You had to show their families were behind them. That they were still young ladies even though they had the uniform on. They weren’t going to be different from their sisters.” This was emphasized both in direct communication with the public as well as in various propaganda efforts.

As the women indicate in their interviews, however, the attempts were not entirely successful. The rumors which dogged the WAAC (and later the WAC) also followed the WAVES and SPARs. Roberta Moore not only talks about being refused rental to an apartment because the landlady “knew” they were mistresses for officers, but she also talks about a prostitute chasing her down the street, shouting that the military women had taken all her clients. Likewise, several women talk about meeting up with sailors or



soldiers who assumed that all military women were sexual playthings. Others talk about people thinking they “weren’t nice” or “weren’t ladylike.”

But only two women would talk on the record about lesbianism in the military. Others avoided the term altogether, or talked about the subject of heterosexual camp followers rather than confronting issues of sexual orientation. While all the women but one had been married, I doubt that this reticence to talk about sexual identity means that there were few lesbians in the World War II Navy and Coast Guard. Rather, I think it is indicative of a powerful taboo for this generation. Even if the women were friends with lesbians, or were lesbian themselves, this wasn’t a topic for discussion with me or for their oral history. It had no place in the story they were telling.

*I do know they had fairly strict rules. You were in barracks. You had to be in at a certain time. Lights were out at a certain time. It was a military. Men were only allowed in certain areas. But I never ran afoul of anything like that. I didn't see any propaganda to counter that. Of course, the image they put out to the public was true blue and almost a halo. [laughs]*

- Betty Bernard (Daly), World War II WAVE

*They were starting. They wanted to do it right. They had some good leadership, like Miss McAfee and they did the best they could. And officers are screened more heavily than enlisted people.*

- Laura Patton, World WAR II WAVE

*Of course, a lot of people thought, you were in the service, you were going to start doing this, start doing things you normally wouldn't do. I just did things I normally did.*

- Lois Jeannie Linder (McCabe), World War II WAVE

*When people said, "You're going in there to heh-heh meet with the guys" and I said, "Are you kidding?" As strict as they were? Brrr!*

- Betty Bruns (Lord), World War II WAVE

*I was just amazed. I learned a lot. That's when I learned a lot about life. In fact, one of my bunk mates, after I got out of boot camp, one of my bunk mates who slept above me, she was more or less a prostitute. I didn't know it. She used to take me out late at night, stay out, charge money and whatnot. I didn't know what was going on, but I learned later that's what she was doing. So you met all kinds.*

- Doris Cain (Marquez), World War II WAVE

*We had one little girl, she was so pitiful. She was a little girl from the south. And she would, she was a real prostitute. Everybody knew that. She would be out nights and she'd come in in the morning and she'd be a mess. And I think, it seems to me because she was at the hospital and I left before they made any decisions on her - I think eventually they took some steps with her because it was a bad situation and other girls were getting upset with it. But there sure were all kinds, kiddo. There were all kinds.*

*We had the cutest prettiest well educated twins from Alabama. Talk about southern ladies!*

- Virginia Benvenuto (Match), World War II WAVE

*People who were in, girls I was in the service with were exactly what they were before they went in. They didn't become anything different or loose morals or anything else simply because they were free. They were simply what they were to begin with. I think after that period of time, the other girls from this area had been in on leave and my folks and other people from this area found out we weren't any different from when we left. We were still just the same moral people that we were, you know? It kind of vindicated us. I'm sure there were still probably some people who had some reservations about what we were like. I never saw any promiscuity, anything like that.*

- Barbara Stroda (Wright), World War II SPAR

Even sixty years after leaving the Navy and Coast Guard, the women still wear the “halo” that Betty Bernard describes. They discuss “others” who may have behaved inappropriately, but rarely ascribe “indecent” behavior to themselves. Again and again I heard women talking about keeping the same values, remaining moral, continuing to act as they “normally” did. One woman alluded to premarital sex, telling me she had to leave the military because she was married and pregnant (her daughter was born five months later). Another openly talked about her sexual escapades, saying, among other

things, that she became a member of the “mile high club” while serving as a WAVE.<sup>55</sup>

These were the only two exceptions.

Part of this may be a generational issue. As Ali McLaughlin observes, “Things are different these days.” Twenty-first century Americans have far different standards for talking about sexuality than people did in the 1940s. But the women may also be continuing to protect themselves, and their military service, from the rumor campaign.

It could also be that the rumors of rampant sexual promiscuity were just that.

Mildred McAfee said:

There was a kind of control over the girl in the Navy which she never had in a factory, for instance. If she was going to go into war work in a factory, she was really on her own, but there were standards of conduct and behavior which were watched for in the Navy and which she had clearly explained to her and expressed for her. I never had the feeling that a girl was going to be thrown with such bad characters that it was going to hurt her reputation, and I think this is really true that they weeded out the bad actors pretty quickly.<sup>56</sup>

It could be that the halo was firmly in place and the WAVES and SPARs were genuinely “true blue.” The women may have entered these branches of service because they embraced the feminine and sophisticated identity the military was constructing to diffuse the rumor campaign. That identity was manifest in the uniforms the women would wear and in the posters used to recruit them into military service.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> A note about name usage: when excerpts from the interviews are quoted at length, the woman's enlisted name is used. If applicable, her married name follows in parentheses. When a woman is referred to in text, her enlisted name is used. In the bibliography, the women are listed alphabetically by their married names; with their enlisted name, if different, also listed.

<sup>2</sup> Sixty-nine percent of U.S. women sixteen to seventeen years old were enrolled in school in 1940; those numbers were slightly higher for urban women and slightly lower for rural and farm women. See: U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment of the Civilian Population: October 1946* (September 5, 1947), <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/p20-001.html> (accessed January 17, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> My mother also was a part of this trend. Both of her parents died before she reached adulthood.

<sup>4</sup> The Centers for Disease Control charts life expectancy over selective years from 1900-1999. From 1919-21 the life expectancy for men was 55.5 years and for women 57.4 years. By 1929-31 that figure had increased to 57.71 for men and 60.9 for women. See: *National Vital Statistics Reports* 54, no. 14 (April 19, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Health Statistics, *Monthly Vital Statistics Report, Final Divorce Statistics 1975* 26, no. 2 (May 19, 1977), <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/mvsvr/mvsvr.htm> (downloaded January 17, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> June Sochen, *From Mae to Madonna: Women Entertainers in Twentieth Century America* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 91

<sup>7</sup> See: Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle for Valle Giulia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> See: Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 260.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment of the Civilian Population*.

<sup>11</sup> Wendy Rickard, "Oral History - 'More Dangerous than Therapy?': Interviewees' Reflections on Recording Traumatic or Taboo Issues," *The Journal of the Oral History Society* 26-2 (1998): 40.

<sup>12</sup> Bureau of Demobilization, Civilian Production Administration, *Industrial Mobilization for War: History of the War Production Board and Predecessor Agencies 1940-1945, Volume I Program and Administration* (Washington, DC: Superintendent of Documents, 1947), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Thelma McKelvey, *Women in War Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, c. 1942), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Bureau of Demobilization, *Industrial Mobilization for War*, 197.

<sup>15</sup> Roy E. Stryker & Nancy C. Wood, *In this Proud Land: America, 1935-1943, as Seen in the FSA Photographs* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973), 9.

<sup>16</sup> See: James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> As she tells the story, the communist papers are a part of the "enemy" (Germany, Italy, Japan), though two communist countries were U.S. allies during the war (Russia, China).

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- <sup>18</sup> See: Neal Gabler, *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality* (New York: Vantage, 2000).
- <sup>19</sup> Virginia Gildersleeve, "How Barnard Can Help Win the War," Address Presented to Barnard College Assembly, 13 January 1942, Ms Coll Gildersleeve, Box 60, Columbia University Libraries.
- <sup>20</sup> Virginia Gildersleeve, *Many a Good Crusade: Memoirs* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 268.
- <sup>21</sup> Joy Bright Hancock, "Oral History," in *Recollections of Women Officers who served in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard in World War II, including WAVES Director Mildred McAfee, Joy B. Hancock, Jean Palmer, Dorothy Stratton, Elizabeth Crandall, Etta Belle Kitchen, Frances Rich, Eleanor Rigby, Louise Wilde, Tova Wiley and Senator Margaret C. Smith*, eds. John Mason and Etta Belle Kitchen (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1979), 50.
- <sup>22</sup> See: Mildred McAfee Horton, "Oral History," in *Recollections of Woman Officers*.
- <sup>23</sup> Reports are conflicting if Mildred McAfee was a member of this group; it seems unlikely as the group was supposed to only have one representative from each Naval District region and Ada Comstock was already representing the Boston area. See: Gildersleeve, *Crusade* and "History of the Naval Reserve Midshipman's School (WR) Northampton MA" in *The History of Representative Field Activities of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, World War II*, Operational Archives of the Department of Navy (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, n.d.), Sophia Smith Collection, 12.WS Box 2 16G3 180.1, General: Naval Records 1945, Smith College Archives.
- <sup>24</sup> See: Horton, "Oral History," in *Recollections of Woman Officers*.
- <sup>25</sup> Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps during World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 18.
- <sup>26</sup> Meyer, *GI Jane*, 12.
- <sup>27</sup> See: Gildersleeve, *Crusade*; Horton, "Oral History" in *Recollections of Woman Officers*; and Mildred McAfee Horton and Helen K. Sargeant, "Reminiscences of Mildred McAfee Horton: Oral History" (Cambridge, MA: Schlessinger Library on the History of Women in America, 1982).
- <sup>28</sup> Historically, the Seven Sisters Colleges were the women's higher education counterpart of the Ivy League. The institutions were: Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College, Mt. Holyoke College, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Smith College, Vassar College and Wellesley College. See: "The Historic Seven Sisters," Seven Sisters Colleges.org, <http://eclipse.barnard.columbia.edu/~sga/seven/members.html> (accessed April 5, 2008).
- <sup>29</sup> Gildersleeve, *Crusade* 272.
- <sup>30</sup> Gildersleeve, *Crusade*, 273.
- <sup>31</sup> Winifred Quick Collins, *More Than a Uniform* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1997), 8.
- <sup>32</sup> Gildersleeve, *Crusade*, 274.
- <sup>33</sup> See Horton and Sargeant, "Reminiscences."
- <sup>34</sup> The U.S. Naval Institute's Oral History project cites many examples of the extensive experience WAVE officers had before going into the service; Winifred Quick Collins, for example, had taken post-baccalaureate classes at Harvard University and had a college instructor for several years before enlisting. Other women had similar experience.
- <sup>35</sup> This contrasts with the WAAC whose minimum age for enlistment was only eighteen. Ebbert and Hall theorize that younger women may have been a source of some of the problems in the Army. See: Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (Washington: Brassey's, 1993), 37.

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- <sup>36</sup> “History of the Naval Reserve Midshipman’s School,” 3.
- <sup>37</sup> “History of Naval Reserve Midshipman’s School,” 4.
- <sup>38</sup> See: Horton, “Oral History” in *Recollections of Women Officers*, and Horton and Sargeant, “Reminiscences.”
- <sup>39</sup> Horton, “Oral History” in *Recollections of Women Officers*, 6.
- <sup>40</sup> The World War II Rumor Project Collection, The American Folklife Center, 1945-001, Folder 1, The Library of Congress, The American Folklife Center. Hereafter referred to AFC 1945-001.
- <sup>41</sup> AFC 1945-001, Folder 1.
- <sup>42</sup> Meyer, *GI Jane*, 38
- <sup>43</sup> AFC 1945-001, New York, 6 August 1942, Folder 4.
- <sup>44</sup> AFC 1945-001, Iowa, 4 August 1942, Folder 4.
- <sup>45</sup> AFC 1945-001, Iowa, 7 August 1942, Folder 4.
- <sup>46</sup> AFC 1945-001, Iowa, 8 August 1942, Folder 4.
- <sup>47</sup> Horton and Sargeant, “Reminiscences,” 87.
- <sup>48</sup> Meyer *GI Jane*, 39.
- <sup>49</sup> Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Jane Barton Collection papers MC542 Box 2, Folder 2.12 (photocopy of #7F+B.2 - 7F+B.12].
- <sup>50</sup> For a detailed discussion of the issue of sexuality in the Army, see Meyer’s *Creating GI Jane*.
- <sup>51</sup> Horton and Sargeant, “Reminiscences,” 88.
- <sup>52</sup> Louise K. Wilde, “Oral History” in *Recollections of Women Officers*, 42.
- <sup>53</sup> AFC 1945-001, Folder 1.
- <sup>54</sup> AFC 1945-001, “What is a Rumor?” n. d., Folder 1.
- <sup>55</sup> The “mile high club” is a term for people who have sex in an aloft airplane.
- <sup>56</sup> Horton, “Oral History” in *Recollections of Women Officers*, 81-82.

## CHAPTER VI

### UNIFORM IDENTITY

*They were showing the audience that we had gotten together. They were showing how the women in the Navy were still women. And ladies. The whole thing was to let society know that our girls were their girls . . . They were daughters and sisters.*

- Dorothy Turnbull (Stewart), World War II WAVE Recruiter

Even before the first boot camp class, military brass in the Navy and Coast Guard were discussing the uniform the women would eventually wear. There were high expectations; it was commonly known, as many of the women comment, that the Navy man's uniform was the "smartest" in the service. The uniform would, after all, become the public face of the WAVES and SPARs, communicating both the image and the identity of the female volunteers. It would also become the focal point of the Navy's public relations campaigns, seen in posters, photographs and film. As a result, before analyzing those campaigns, it is first necessary to understand the powerful image presented by the uniform, and what that uniform meant to volunteers.

This chapter will continue answering the first research question by considering how the Navy and Coast Guard initially set about constructing an identity for their



recruits in order to entice women to enlist. In it, I will analyze two of the earliest propaganda devices in the campaign: the uniform and recruitment posters. The campaign was developed not only to lure recruits, but also to try to shift overall public perceptions about military women, including those spread through slander campaigns directed at the WAAC. Finally, the chapter will assess the success of the Navy and Coast Guard campaigns, and why the women say they enlisted in their respective service branches.

### *Uniform Matters*

McAfee recalls having little to do initially with selecting the WAVE uniform design. The first uniform presented was a deep navy blue, with a bit of patriotic braiding on the shoulder, “a red, white and blue stripe . . . it looked just like a chorus girl, you know. And I was simply struck, and I said, ‘We cannot do it.’”<sup>1</sup> The braid was changed to blue. McAfee also successfully argued that the women would be more comfortable wearing flesh toned, rather than black, stockings.

McAfee immediately understood, much more than the men running the Navy, the importance of appearance for young women. Hence, a seemingly insignificant design element like braided trim, for women can be the difference between a refined image or that of a “chorus girl.” Elizabeth Hawes has discussed part of the appeal of clothing, noting, “It is not very difficult for a designer to understand the motives of wearing clothes for physical protection. The hard thing is to grasp how important it is to many people to get *psychological* protection from their clothes.”<sup>2</sup> Part of that psychic protection would include the confidence that comes from looking good (or chic). Elegant clothing could,

in essence, give the wearer the authority to act in a certain way. Hawes believes people wear clothes for self-satisfaction, but also to project an image to others.

For the WAVES, the uniform helped project the image that the women were “high class” and “refined.” It’s an image that was internalized by the recruits. The women I’ve spoken with acknowledge that the WAVES (and later SPARs) were somehow different or more selective than other branches of the service. Margaret Anderson told me they “thought that the WAVES were the elite branch of the service.” This message was conveyed through the couture-designed uniform.

*The most important thing it was designed by Mainbocher. And that was the top designer at that time. The enlisted had the blue buttons. The officers had gold. And then we had the work uniform. . . That was the seersucker. The first ones had the inserted belt, so it was nothing to slip the dress on and fasten it. You were on your way.*

- Dorothy Sudomir (Budacki), World War II WAVE

*A famous designer designed them for us and they fit beautifully. And you felt so comfortable. It was probably the most expensive thing any of us had ever had. Well made. Beautiful material. And besides, it had two pockets just inside where you could put Kleenex and look better [motions and laughs].*

- Virginia Gillmore, World War II WAVE

*Mainbocher. M-A-I-N-B-O-C-H-E-R was a well-known dress designer at the time. And I knew I would never have designer clothes, so there was my*

*opportunity. So when someone says, "Why did you join the Navy?" I say, "Well, number one, blue is my color." [laughs] I don't look that great in khaki or green. Olive green or whatever the color was. But I have blue eyes so that helped that. And it was a nice looking uniform.*

- Eileen Horner (Blakely), World War II WAVE

*The uniforms were so well designed. They were Mainbocher. That was a famous French designer. The others looked so much more military than the blues did. . . . Very good material. And the lines were good. Of course, we had topcoats, too, for wintertime. And I wore that topcoat after I got out of the service for several years. Because it was so nice in the Oklahoma winters.*

- Dot Bougie (Soules), World War II WAVE

*It was put out by Mainbochers, which was the company that made all the designs for the movie stars. And I'm sure if you talk to very many military women who were in the Coast Guard or the WAVES, the one thing they remember about their uniform is it's Mainbochers.*

- Jane Ashcraft (Fisher), World War II SPAR video

Each woman with whom I've spoken not only mentioned the uniform, but was aware of its couture provenance. The uniform was designed by Mainbocher, a Chicago-born, New York-trained and Paris-refined fashion designer. Mainbocher was editor of Paris *Vogue* before starting his own fashion house in 1929. He brought an almost messianic view to fashion, saying, "I don't believe that dressmaking is an art but I do

think that dresses are an important part of the art of living, just as important as food, surroundings, work and play.”<sup>3</sup> His fashions drew a sophisticated, self-assured clientele:

Mainbocher’s order book read like a history of the thirties. Film stars bought his dresses, but the duchesses, the countesses, the very rich were his most faithful customers. His trousseau for (American divorcee) Wallis Simpson for her marriage to the former King Edward VIII marked the end of an epoch dominated by socially legislated “good taste” and the beginning of a commanding new individuality.<sup>4</sup>

As the war came to Europe, Mainbocher shifted his base of operations to New York.

American socialites were instrumental in getting him to design the WAVES and SPARs uniforms, especially Josephine Forrester.<sup>5</sup> The former *Vogue* writer was married to the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrester, and had close personal ties to Mainbocher. But her fashion sense presented a problem in the uniform design: she was thinking of high style and not of how the uniforms would actually be used. McAfee recalls the initial blouse design was “simply impossible to iron,” useful for a socialite with a personal maid, but not so for women expected to work and iron their own clothing.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the personal connection of a Navy wife gave the Navy women entrée into a new fashion world.

McAfee recalls going to Mainbocher’s New York salon to be fitted for her uniform. As she tells the story, she was a bit out of place.

When I went in, I will never forget it, because I remember it so vividly, the awful gabardine tan suit which I had worn on the Wellesley campus

with a big box pleat on the front and back, and a very casual blouse. I had taken it to Washington, knowing it would be hot, but as my only suit because I knew that I was going into uniform pretty soon. I walked into Mainbocher's studio with black shoes, a tan gabardine box pleat skirt with a funny looking little jacket, and a silly little black hat. I had never been in such a salon. The carpets were such thick velvet that you sank into them up to your ankles, and these wonderful looking women, selling, wore beautiful, gorgeous black gowns. It was so awful that it was positively funny, it was ridiculous. Mainbocher was very nice, and they were too, to this waif off the street who thereafter was dressed properly in the blue uniform. He made my last uniform, too. <sup>7</sup>

While she was aware that women would want a stylish uniform, she admittedly was a bit oblivious to the importance of fashion to those outside of the military. During a press conference in New York to announce the uniform, a journalist asked who was the designer. When McAfee blithely announced it was Mainbocher, "Almost at once, everybody shot out of the room to report that Mainbocher had designed the uniform."<sup>8</sup>

*I had seen pictures. Yes, because, at that time it was fairly well established. And it was Mainbocher that had designed it. It looked pretty spiffy to me.*

- Virginia Benvenuto (Matich), World War II WAVE

*Oh my god, they were gorgeous. They were a navy blue serge made by Handmocher, a well known designer back then. Those uniforms, you*

*could do anything in them and they took it. Even -- I fell in the Corpus Christi bay one night and [laughs] it was dry off and go home. They were nice looking and we felt -- they made us feel good. They made us feel worthy and like really distinguished women . . . Magnificent uniforms. They made us stand better, walk better and feel prouder. They really know how to do it [laughs].*

- Helen Edgar (Gilbert), World War II WAVE

*It was designed by Mainbocher or Main-bocker. It was navy blue. It was plain, but it was well designed. Skirt, jacket. We had two colors. White shirt and blue shirts. And the blue shirts were working shirts and the white was for dress. So, pretty soon we were into those and we were marching.*

- Laura Patton, World War II WAVE

*Made by Handmocher. And Handmocher at that time was a pretty famous designer and we thought it was very smart that we had that type of a uniform. And it was very smart. But in Seattle most of us went into the store and got a fitted uniform, because we had changed size a little bit and needed a different uniform. But we still got the Handmocher uniform. But it was fitted to us then. It was right.*

- Edna Jean Clark, World War II WAVE

The women almost universally mispronounce or change the name of the designer, turning it into the French sounding “Man-boo-shay” over the Dutch pronunciation “Main-back-er” which the designer preferred. When women do use the hard “a” for the

second syllable of the designer's name, they change the first syllable, transforming the name to "Handmocher." Most insist the designer wasn't American at all, but was rather of French descent. Only one woman interviewed accurately pronounced the name; another hedged her bets, calling him both "Man-boo-shay" and "Main-back-er."

As Portelli points out, errors in memory are interesting to oral historians because of how they challenge and transform the notion of historical truths. Errors can be useful in understanding the meaning of an experience to participants. For the women who served, the transformation of the Chicago-native Mainbocher to the sophisticated Parisian "Man-boo-shay" was to a degree inevitable. Even though New York was the center of American fashion, Paris still held allure. As Hawes wrote in 1942, "For years and years American women labored under the shadow of what 'they' were wearing in France."<sup>9</sup> French design equaled style. Since the WAVES and SPARs viewed their uniform as stylish (McConathy notes, "The Mainbocher suit became the trademark of subdued elegance in the forties"<sup>10</sup>), it is logical that many of the woman would have "known" that Mainbocher was French. The fact that Mainbocher spent many years in Paris only served to strengthen that knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to remember that this group of women was venturing into new territory, entering the previously male arena of the military. Ruth Rubinstein observes that uniforms are traditional images of authority in clothing, with a connotation of power over other, non-uniform wearers.<sup>12</sup> The WAVES and SPARs had little or no actual power either inside or outside of the service. However, the uniforms offered them *social* power over other women, including other military women, due to the couture design. The

advantages of the Army (women could travel overseas) was offset by the stylistic advantages offered by the Navy and Coast Guard uniform. The mispronunciation of Mainbocher's name may be a move on the part of the women to solidify their own roles as part of the Naval "elite." As Winifred Quick Collins recalled, the Navy wanted a "classy" image to reflect a special group of educated, prestigious women. The result was a uniform which was closely identified with the traditional Navy and yet was feminine as well."<sup>13</sup> The Mainbocher uniform branded the women as something different and apart from the other services. They were fashionable simply by donning the uniform.

*There was just something about the Navy uniform, I guess I was attracted to, so that was Navy for me.*

- Phyllis Jensen (Ankeney), World War II WAVE

*We went into the WAVES because we liked uniform best [laughs]. My father had been in the Army, but the WAVE uniform was much better looking . . . In the first place it was blue which was more flattering. We were both blondes. It was trimmer. It was just nicer [laughs]. Anyway, we liked it.*

- Betty Bernard (Daly), World War II WAVE

*I was a blonde. I don't know, my hair instead of turning grey turned brown, but I was a blonde. Naturally, I looked far better in navy blue than I ever would in khaki . . . It was a French designer, a well-known and respected designer designed the uniform.*

- name withheld, World War II WAVE



*It was just attractive on everybody. Well, it was attractive on me because of my coloring. Because I had the almost blonde hair, and I have very fair skin. And the navy blue and -- they're just, the style of them. That's the style of clothes I always wore. Very classical. Things that to this day, most of the time, my clothes I can wear for years because I don't go for faddish things. And these are just very classic and look nice. The WACs, I would have looked horrible in their uniforms. Because that's one of the colors I can't wear. It brings out the yellow in my skin.*

- Dot Forbes (Enes), World War II WAVE

*People said, "Why did you choose the Navy?" I said, "'Cause I figured I'd look better in navy blue and white than I would in the other colors" and that's the truth [laughs]. Absolute truth.*

- Phyllis Roberts (Koch), World War II WAVE

*I'll be honest with you. I looked at the snappy uniforms. I mean those, those Army they still are, they're so drab and so dull. [laughs]. That old khaki brown plain. I don't know. It just didn't turn me on.*

- Jane Ashcraft (Fisher), World War II SPAR

*At that time in my life, those things were important . . . I thought they were a lot [laughs] better than the Army. So I guess that's really the reason. Which is a pretty shallow reason for going in. But it made me decide which way to go.*

- Betty Peterson, World War II WAVE

*I don't know if I saw the posters or even a recruiter came through the factory or something. I don't remember. The only reason I joined the Navy was I liked the uniforms . . . Well, it was the navy blue, serge or -- a regular suit, you know. You just looked good. I decided I wanted to go. I can't remember when I decided, but I went to the recruiting office,*

- Vera Goode (Waycott), World War II WAVE

The women I've interviewed seem almost embarrassed to admit the smart navy blue uniforms were a draw over the Army's more drab khaki clothes. It was almost as if each of them was sharing a deep, dark secret with me. For instance, Margaret Anderson insisted she joined the WAVES because she was patriotic. Then she added, conspiratorially, "Besides that, one of my boyfriends said I would look good in navy blue." She also mentioned several times getting a special dispensation to purchase something she could never have justified buying during wartime rationing: black leather pumps. Being part of the Navy enabled her to be "different" for others in a time of rationing, allowing her access to a coveted item.

Thorstein Veblen may have criticized the "conspicuous consumption" of the fashionable woman,<sup>14</sup> but as Hawes and others have argued, fashion can be a powerful way to establish and confirm identity. Hillary Radner goes one step further, arguing that fashion is itself a form of authority, a way for a woman to "establish and maintain her position within the social hierarchy."<sup>15</sup> In other words, it is through fashion, specifically clothing which is well-made and well-designed, that women can express power. The Mainbocher uniform, with its flattering color, fabric, and design, subtly communicated

authority (see *Figures 10-12*) . It allowed this group of women, many who came from working class or farming families, to be held in the same esteem as the elite: movie stars, socialites, and even royalty.

The Navy used the uniform liberally in its own recruitment efforts. Promotional and recruitment booklets pointed out specifics of the design as well as its couture pedigree, and was directed at both the recruit as well as the audience back home. For instance, one photo booklet, *A Letter From Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (WR) Northampton, MA*, was designed to be mailed by a WAVE officer candidate to family and friends. While pictures of the WAVES in action (and, by extension, the uniform) are scattered throughout, five of the thirty-two pages in the booklet are devoted just to describing what the women wore. Mainbocher's name is mentioned twice. The uniform, "of which we are so proud," is described as "soft but trim" with "extremely glamorous lines."<sup>16</sup>

But the Navy also seemed to want to be cautious not to place too much emphasis on the uniform. Again, the Navy learned from early mistakes by the Army. When the WAAC uniform was announced, newspaper writers focused as much on the Army-issued girdles as the uniform the recruits would wear. By contrast, the WAVES didn't discuss undergarments and attempted to present a dignified image.<sup>17</sup> In a September, 1942 radio interview, WAVES Public Relations office Louise Wilde mentioned the "deep respect and pride" Navy women would feel about their uniform, but she also cautioned, "If I may make bold to speak for all my fellow officers it's the work to be done and not the martial



*Figure 10:* “Where Did You Get That Hat?” Naval Air Station New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S. Navy, c. 1944-1945 (80-G-K-3292, Naval Historical Center, National Archives). WAVES try on the Overseas Cap. They are (left to right) Yeoman 2nd Class Bernice Elliot, Yeoman 3rd Class Martha Dietlin, Seaman 1st Class Kay Magee.



*Figure 11:* Mildred McAfee Receives her Promotion to Captain, Washington, D.C., U.S. Navy, 13 November 1943 (80-G-43752, Naval Historical Center, National Archives).



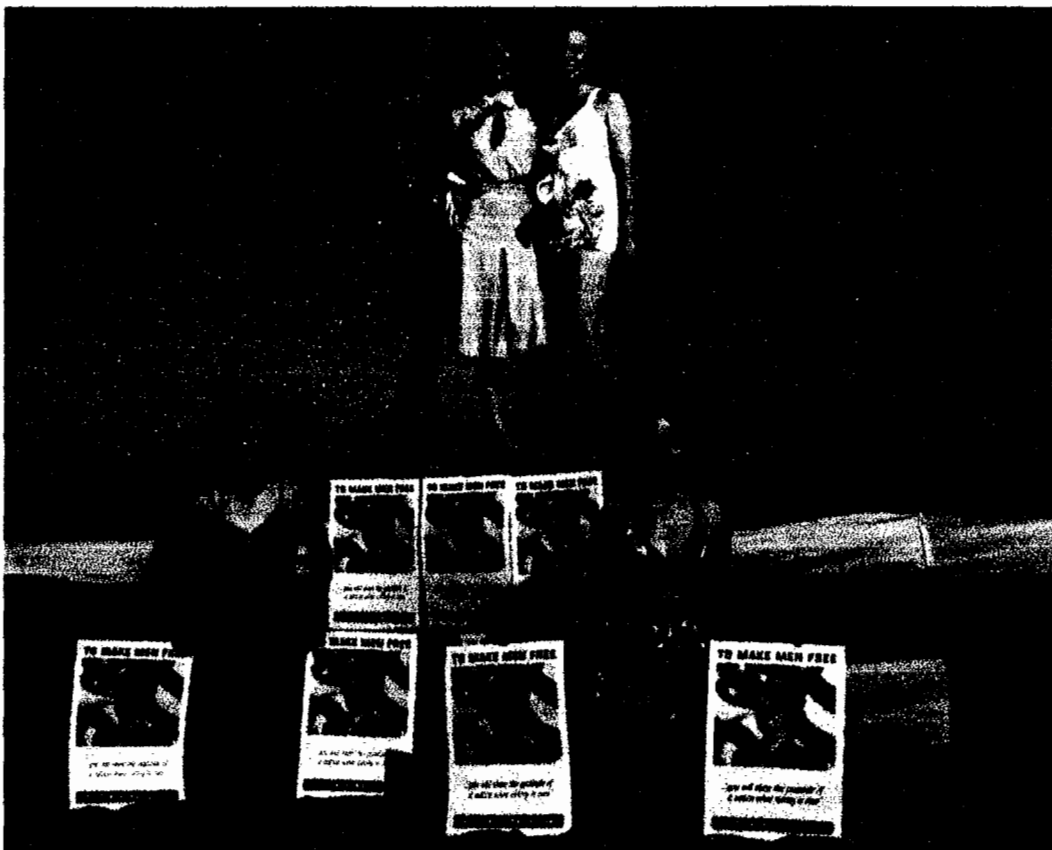
*Figure 12:* Dorothy “Dot” Forbes with Two Friends, Atlanta, GA, 1945 (from the personal collection of Dorothy Enes). Forbes and her friends were out shopping one Sunday while in training to become LINK instructors. She said since they were a blonde, brunette and redhead they were “the personification of the poster that shows all things.” Dorothy Forbes is in the middle, wearing the summer seersucker uniform; all three were wearing the “bucket” or cloche hat with a contrasting inset.

airs that count with them.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, the work was far more important than the women’s military training or accouterments.

While the Navy may not have talked about underwear, the women do remember this as a benefit of the Navy uniform. They talk of wearing brightly colored slips or fancy brassieres underneath their military uniform or of wearing shortie pajamas or fancy nightgowns to bed. This bit of individuality offered another “perk” of the uniform. Even though they might look the same on the outside, being a WAVE or SPAR afforded the women the opportunity to be unique underneath or in their own quarters.

It was assumed the uniforms would garner attention. One recruiter described one of her job duties as walking around downtown areas in her uniform and simply talking to people who asked about it. Recruiters also made pitches at schools, college campuses, the local YWCA or even the beach. One event included WAVES in modest, but fashionable, bathing suits, with the recruiter alongside in her crisp summer seersucker uniform (see *Figure 13*). Mary Ada Cox (Gage) Dunham remembers of another promotional event, “A darling girl came out in her WAVE uniform, a little blonde, cute as she could be. She was a recruiter. I think I made up my mind that minute that that is the way to go.”<sup>19</sup>

For many of the women, the uniform offered a taste of glamour after the hard times they experienced during the Depression. Jane Ashcraft remembers wearing clothes made out of feed sacks. While she says she always had the latest fashions made from patterns, she also proudly remembers the first “town” dress she bought. Doris Mansfield



*Figure 13:* WAVES Recruitment Drive, Galveston Beach, Texas, U.S. Navy, c. 1944 (Official U.S. Navy photograph, from the personal collection of Dorothy Stewart). Dorothy Turnbull (Stewart) is at top center with various unidentified WAVES.



and Phyllis Jensen recall wearing hand-me-down clothes. Edna Clark describes buying a used fur coat with her first full salary as a teacher in late years of the Depression. By entering the Navy or Coast Guard, the women not only were able to “free a man to fight,” but they were expected to wear new, personally fitted, designer clothes.

*They said we paid for our uniforms. But what they did, they gave us the money. And so that when we were measured and everything, we paid for it ourselves. We didn't have to buy the uniforms, per se, but were had to take care of any alterations. We were given two hundred dollars. Some people really had to have a lot of alterations. I didn't. So I came out ahead of the game. [laughs].*

- Dot Forbes (Enes), World War II WAVE

*I don't know if the other services were as fussy, but we were tailor made. When I went into the Navy, at Hunter, they fitted us for our uniforms. And most of the people were more or less the same size. After all, we were all very young. But they made sure that the waist fit right and the shoulders and what have you. So we had -- you know, when you got your uniform it fit you as if it were made to order. They were. We always looked nice.*

- Ali McLaughlin (McConnell), World War II WAVE

*The uniform was wonderful. We had navy blue pants, skirts, and jacket to match. And a drill cap, just plain navy blue. Then for summer we had seersucker dresses. We had a little cloche-like hat, and it was navy blue and had a white top. Oh, god, when I first went in, we had to wear*

*energetic shoes, those old Mother Hubbard shoes they sell. Little black heels, I'm sure the other girls have told you that, and cotton lisle stockings. They didn't -- they had run out of uniforms. I had, I thought it was the most gorgeous coat in the world. I had bought in San Francisco a pale blue wool coat with a pale fox fur collar. If I didn't look funny in those energetic shoes and cotton stockings, my parade cap and a fur trimmed coat! [laughs] With energetics! I'm eighty-two years old now [laughs] -- I wouldn't even look at them today! They were horrible.*

- Irean Gartman (Bednekoff), World War II WAVE

*The caps they had us wear, the round caps, but had an insert that was in white. Well since we just were starting out, we were boots and all that, we had to wear a navy blue insert. So they could, everybody could see us on the street and tell we were just recruits, just starting out, and to treat us differently [laughs]. So we had to wear our hats all the time.*

- Dot Bougie (Soules), World War II WAVE

*We used to call those "go to hell hats." They were like a bonnet. Nobody liked them. We couldn't wear the overseas hats at that time.*

- Lois Jeannie McCabe (Linder)

*When I was in Norman we used to go into Oklahoma City when we had liberty. We'd stay in a Y -- YWCA. And we'd have service women from the other branches were there. And they had all their [laughs] old Army and*

*military-issued underwear. We got to wear our own things. That really meant a lot to me.*

- Dot Bougie (Soules), World War II WAVE

*We bought the fanciest things we could find. We didn't have to spend money on clothes just lingerie. And we had a wonderful time. The other thing we had were gloves. We sort of loved our white gloves after we got used to them. And we had to wash them out every night. And it became standard for people to ask us, "How do you keep your gloves so white?" It was easy. Just wash them.*

- Virginia Gillmore, World War II WAVE

*We also could wear our own robes and nightwear. We had to wear regulation lisle hose in boot camp. And before I went in I went to the ration board and got a pair of shoes. Regulation pumps that you could wear. Because the shoes that they issued in New York were very good walking shoes but they had no class.*

- Margaret Anderson (Thorngate), World War II WAVE

The uniform was not only a chance for the women to wear designer clothing, but it also offered a readily recognizable group identity to the women, allowing them to stand out from the crowd. The uniform provided women with what Entwistle defines as two markers of class identity. 'Quality' can be one marker, through well-tailored and crafted clothing made with elegant fabric and fine details such as good seams, lining and buttons. But identity requires a second element. "How one wears these things, indeed how one

“wears” the body, are equally important. The body is the bearer of social status not just in how it is dressed, but in how it is held, how it moves, how it walks and talks.”<sup>20</sup> For the WAVES and SPARs, it was as important to be different from other members of society as it was to be identified as part of a larger group.

For women reservists, like the WAVES and SPARs, the military uniform can offer a sense of validation. “By wearing uniforms as members of voluntary organizations, women identified themselves with the same principles of military order and discipline as men.”<sup>21</sup> Women became part of something larger within the war effort, more identifiable than “Rosie the Riveter” due to their uniforms. In a study of uniforms, Paul Fussell says he has found:

All but universal pride in a uniform of any kind . . . The uniform, no matter how lowly, assures its audiences that the wearer *has* a job, one likely not to be merely temporary and one extorting a degree of respect for being associated with a successful enterprise. The uniform attaches one to success.<sup>22</sup>

For the WAVES and SPARs, pride didn’t just mean that you looked good as an individual, but also as a group. Dot Forbes remembers, “It was just attractive on everybody.” “Your uniform it fit you as if it were made to order.” says Ali McLaughlin. Helen Edgar calls the uniform “gorgeous.” Jane Ashcraft describes the “snappy uniform.” The Navy and Coast Guard encouraged the women to identify with the uniform, as a means of building group identity and morale.

But that uniform identity can also be taken away. Virginia Gillmore remembers being called to assembly one morning with a large group of young women; as they watched another young woman was marched to the front of the group, her shiny brass buttons with the Navy's insignia (the "fouled anchor") were cut off and she was escorted out of the assembly. Gillmore isn't sure if the event was staged for their benefit or not, but she says psychologically, it helped the remaining women to bond together as a unit. She's the only woman in this group to remember something like this happening (a similar discharge is described in a book). She compared the incident to the combat training young male soldiers need to go through to be able to kill the enemy. For a WAVE, nothing could be worse than losing the uniform.

The designer uniform was well publicized in mass market books of the time. Books not only featured the uniform on book jackets, but also made a point of repeatedly mentioning that the uniform was designed by Mainbocher. In one book, author Nancy Wilson Ross notes "the Navy announced its jurisdiction only extended over 'anything that shows,' and upon this announcement newspapers headlined excitedly: *May Choose Own Underwear*" before listing the complete uniform in detail, worth noting because it "represent(s) the essentials of a busy woman's wardrobe in the 1940s."<sup>23</sup>

The uniform became desirable not only to recruits, but to women outside of the military. By September of 1942, just weeks after the uniform was announced, the *New York Times* reported women who wore clothes copying the WAVE uniform would be subject to a three hundred dollar fine and six months in jail.<sup>24</sup> In 1943, the WAVES

(along with other women in uniform), were named as *Vogue's* "Best Dressed Women in the World Today."<sup>25</sup>

Looking at the Mainbocher uniform today, it's easy to understand why it engendered such passion in the women who served. To contemporary eyes, it's a fairly conservative style. But even sixty plus years after the uniforms were made, the quality is evident. Though the women would have worn the blue serge nearly every day, I have yet to see one which has become shiny and worn as happens in cheaper fabrics. The seams are generous. The lining is soft and made from a durable silk. The color is flattering. The summer whites show equal quality.

Nearly every woman saved at least one item from her uniform and made a point of showing it to me. I met one woman at the WAVES National Convention who wore her uniform daily to every function. Because of illness her memory has faded, but she still glows with pride when talking about the outfit. Others still wear their hats, or keep their uniforms protected in garment bags. Merrilee Hewitt has multiple uniforms (blue, dress white, three summer seersucker) plus the raincoat, numerous gloves, several shirts and two hats (the bucket or "go to hell" hat and the overseas cap). Virginia Gillmore still has her Navy-issued handbag. Jane Ashcraft, who served as a SPAR, proudly slipped into her Mainbocher uniform, including the heavy wool topcoat, for me. It's just a little bit snug (she couldn't button the top button of the skirt). Ashcraft is eighty-two years old.

*My WAVE uniform was the best piece of clothing I think I ever had*

*because it felt so comfortable. The fabric itself was wonderful. Smooth.*

*The color was great. And then it fit so well. I had never had something*

*specially tailored to fit. In fact, they encouraged us to really be, take pride in our uniform, which we did. We kept everything really clean. . . They encouraged us, they told us where we could go have them specially tailored to have them fit. They wanted us to look very nice. I think we did. The clothes felt good on. They looked good on all of us. They were good designs.*

- Virginia Gillmore, World War II WAVE

*They were blue skirts and jackets . . . You felt real sharp. You wore gloves. When you went outside you had on your gloves.*

- Mickey Griffin (Kalinauskas), World War II WAVE

*We could wear inch heels, no spike heels or anything. And we'd go, and we'd be you know, really military. You know, you'd put your heel up for her to check your heel, to make sure you had the right size. And your gloves, everything, just had to be so. Your purse shined. Everybody looked really nice. Well dressed.*

- Ali McLaughlin (McConnell), World War II WAVE

The memories demonstrate how effective the military was at using the designer uniform to establish group identity. Individually, the women were proud of how their uniforms made them feel. They were proud of how their units looked as a whole. This identity was so entrenched, that losing the uniform would be one of the worst things the women could imagine experiencing. Mainbocher may have provided the “fashion” in the uniform, from material to design, skirt length to shoulder braiding. But it was the

individual WAVES and SPARs, such as Virginia, Jane and Ann who provided the style. The women and the fashion joined together for a uniform purpose: to demonstrate that they were the elite who served in the World War II effort, clothing and citizens who were a cut above.

Joan Angel wrote of the uniform in 1942:

I looked at myself in the long mirror. By heavens, I *did* look impressive.

The suit was beautifully cut, trim and efficient-looking without being stiff and masculine. It was the kind of tailored outfit I might have bought in civilian life--but in navy blue, with the fouled-anchor embroidery on the collar and black regulation buttons, it gave me the bearing of a woman in whom great responsibilities were vested. Unconsciously, I straightened and got a look of fire in my eyes.<sup>26</sup>

That fire was evident sixty years later, at the WAVES National Convention. During the last day at sea, the women posed for a group picture. More than two hundred veterans, from World War II through the Gulf War, crowded into the cruise ship's atrium; each World War II veteran was wearing a piece of her uniform. As they gazed upwards toward the camera, posture perfect, the women broke into spontaneous song, first singing *God Bless America* and then a song sung by the women during World War II: *And when you come home you'll find ashore your man-sized chore was done by a Navy WAVE*.

### *Poster Girls*

Posters were a major part of the overall propaganda effort during World War II, coordinated by the Office of War Information [OWI]. The designs ranged from small



table-top displays to roadside billboards (a recruitment billboard spurs a woman to enlist in the film *Here Come the WAVES*). Robert Ellis observes, “The OWI realized that posters had to be placed in street-level windows of every store, office, restaurant, and ‘service establishment of every kind’ in the United States in order to reach the greatest number of people.”<sup>27</sup> Most designs were short-lived, being on display only a week or two.

Posters played a major role in the “constant battle for the hearts and minds of the American citizenry . . . that helped to sustain the war effort throughout the world-shaking events of World War II.”<sup>28</sup> The OWI coordinated with various organizations to get the message out quickly and effectively, from outdoor advertisers (who distributed a quarter of a million OWI billboard posters each month) to the railroads (rotating posters inside thirty-five thousand trains).<sup>29</sup> A National Archives exhibition in 1994 to 1995 divided World War II poster output into two general themes: those that convey American strength and those that confront the viewer with the human and emotional costs of war.

Like the uniform, posters were a potent recruitment tool. The Navy and Coast Guard posters were designed to not only garner recruits, but also to convince fathers, mothers, husbands and brothers that serving in the WAVES and SPARs was an honorable job for a young woman. While images of women were used as emotional devices in posters conveying the costs of war, World War II recruitment posters almost universally celebrated American strength and fortitude. Patriotic colors of red, white and blue dominated, national symbols and heroic-looking characters fill the poster’s space.<sup>30</sup> This was true in posters appealing to men as well as those directed at women. The

government needed to convince women, especially those who weren't in the workforce, that moving into non-traditional work was not only appealing, but a duty. The OWI's plan was straightforward: "These jobs will have to be glorified as a patriotic war service if American women are to be persuaded to take them and stick to them. Their importance to a nation engaged in total war must be convincingly presented."<sup>31</sup>

*They had posters all over. In fact, back there in my office I have a whole sheet of posters that we had. Of course, "Uncle Sam Needs You!" . . . It was just a total thing. Everything was going on around you I think. It was total.*

- Margaret Anderson (Thorngate), World War II WAVE video

*Have you seen the WAVES propaganda? . . . It was everywhere. They did a really great job convincing the parents of America to let their daughters go . . . You couldn't go down the street without seeing it. It was all over. They really blanketed the country to recruit.*

- Josette Dermody (Wingo), World War II WAVE

*I saw so many posters, and a lot of the posters said, "Uncle Sam Wants You." Then I saw one that said something . . . about "let a sailor go to sea." And I thought, "Gosh, I'd like to do that. Let a sailor go to sea. I could do the work that he's doing." And that's exactly how it turned out. I walked in to the office where I was a leave, liberty and watch yeoman, and I walked in and the sailor stood up, and he said, "Oh, you're here at last." And he left and I stayed. I met him later in Philadelphia, and he*

*was assigned to a destroyer. And that made my day. He was happy and I was pleased.*

- Ali McLaughlin (McConnell), World War II WAVE

Arguably the most dominant image of working women during World War II in contemporary society is the famous “We Can Do It!” poster by J. Howard Miller, which portrays a factory woman with a raised fist.<sup>32</sup> But during wartime, a wide variety of posters was published with the mission of motivating women to enter the workforce. Women in these posters were presented as strong and completely capable of taking on any job.

Each branch of the military produced individual posters targeted at women, and occasionally different branches shared campaigns. Posters subtly contradicted the smear of the rumors about the nature of military women:

Poster and film images glorified and glamorized the roles of working women and suggested that a woman`s femininity need not be sacrificed. Whether fulfilling their duty in the home, factory, office, or military, women were portrayed as attractive, confident, and resolved to do their part to win the war.<sup>33</sup>

Dozens of images were produced to recruit women during the war years by the Navy alone.

A full census of all the Navy and Coast Guard posters may be impossible to gather.<sup>34</sup> But within the Naval Historical Society collection, nonetheless, patterns emerge. The Navy and Coast Guard had the same goals (gaining female recruits), but

their recruitment imagery differed substantially. The WAVES portrayed an idealized version of the woman you could aspire to become (and would become by enlisting). The SPARs portrayed an idealized version of the woman you actually were. This was accomplished in the text messages in the posters, but also in the choices of artists to design the work, including John Falter for the WAVES and Antonio Vargas for the SPARs.

*It was everywhere. It was on every poster. I was in high school at the time. I would have been in the WAVES earlier, but I didn't graduate from high school until '42. And I went to California thinking I would go to school at Berkeley and live with my sister . . . Of course in San Francisco, I saw nothing but Navy, Navy, Navy, Navy, Navy. And so I wanted to join the WAVES. I had two girlfriends join the Army, the Marines, but my mother said, "Well, you can remain a lady if you join the Navy."*

- Irean Gartman (Bendekoff), World War II WAVE

*They had posters all over, you know. Of course, there was a recruiting office in Salem [Oregon]. And I trotted right down there to hear all about it. Because, as I told you, I always wanted to be a sailor. I was very unhappy because I was a girl and couldn't join the Navy. Because I would have joined the Navy as soon as I could after getting out of high school. So, boy the minute I saw that I went down there and got all of my information . . . Some of the stores would even put posters in their*

*windows. But that wasn't why I joined, kid. The posters didn't have to do that for me. I was there [laughs].*

- Dotty Anderson (McDowell), World War II WAVE

*I was [in] the [WAVE] class with two of my friends. We had met at Hunter College . . . The girl from New York had red hair. The girl from Rhode Island had brunette, dark brunette, and I was a blonde . . . We said we were the only three who portrayed the posters the way they showed them.*

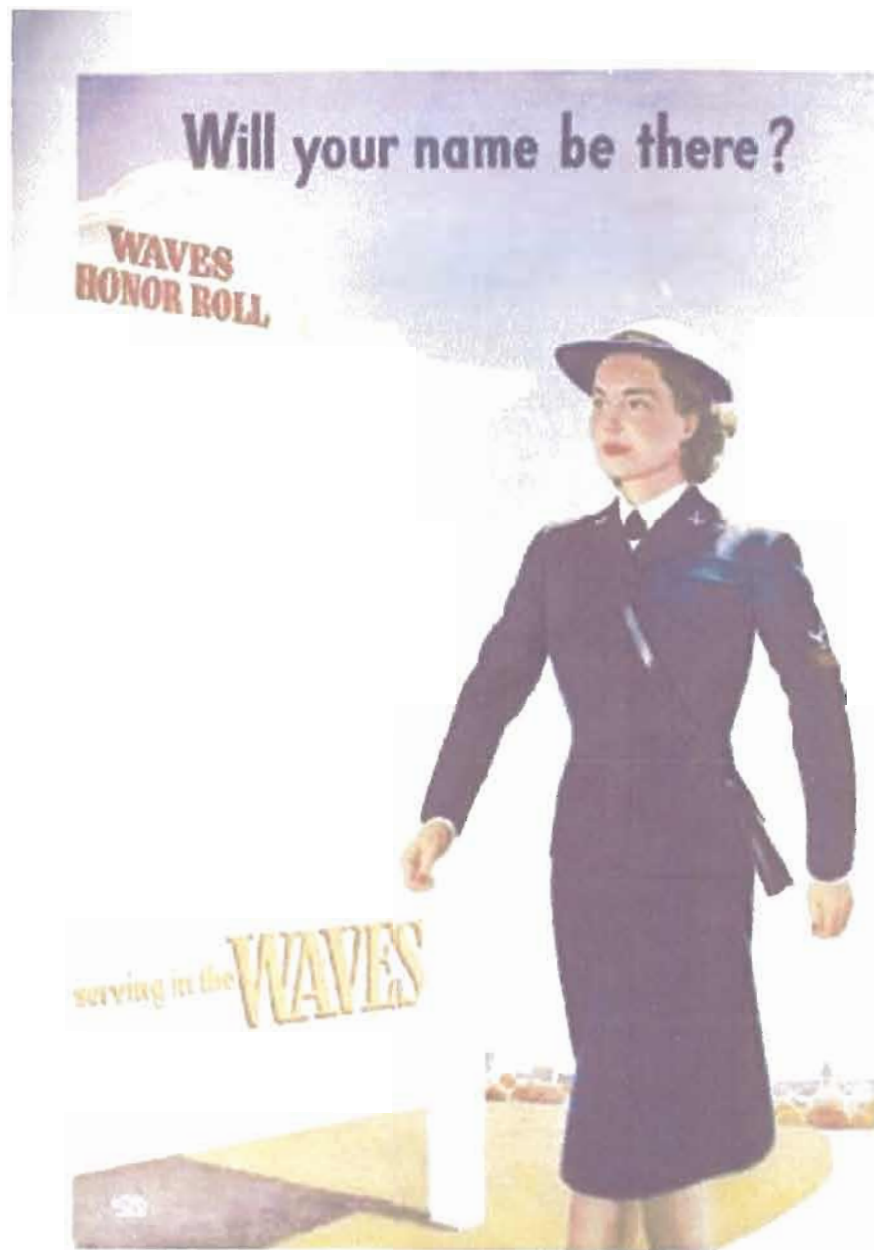
- Dot Forbes (Enes), World War II WAVE

The Navy's poster production unit's output was varied. Images were derived from either photographs or paintings. Most of the images were created by John Falter, a painter and illustrator whose work was inspired by Norman Rockwell.<sup>35</sup> Posters showed women at work in air traffic control towers, rigging parachutes or as a radio operator. Others showed women's motivations for joining, such as a loved one was missing in action or the desire for a boyfriend to come home sooner. A particularly engaging Falter Navy poster asks "Will Your Name Be There?" It is derived from a painting, featuring a woman in a WAVE uniform walking along a village green and passing a "WAVES Honor Roll" memorial. Names are listed on the honor roll in alphabetical order and represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds (including Mitchell, Orlofsky, Valenti, Von Rein, Steinberg, Olsen, O'Brien, Lombardi, and Smyth). The WAVE wears a pleasant and proud expression on her face. Her entire body is surrounded by a halo effect, which cause her figure to stand out from the background and almost glow (see *Figure 14*). The poster is a

literal representation of Betty Bernard's belief that "the image they put out to the public was true blue and almost a halo."

Another common theme was the pride of the family members that they had of a female relative in the Navy. "Proud, I'll Say," says one father in a Falter poster. "Dad" sits at a desk holding a photograph of his daughter in a WAVE uniform. A small flag is waving nearby. In another, a pigtailed little girl gazes longingly at a picture of a smiling young woman in a WAVE uniform. "Wish I could join too!" she is thinking. The poster's strong red, white and blue color pattern echoes the United States flag. The reminder to "Serve your country in the WAVES" is in white type over a dark blue background. The little girl wears a white shirt with lines from a pinafore's red suspenders overlaying it (see *Figure 15*).

But the most frequent message in military posters was to directly appeal to the women's sense of patriotism. One didn't focus on an individual branch of service, but rather showed four women in different uniforms (a non-Falter design, see *Figure 16*). The women are shown in profile facing right, looking off into an unseen horizon. The Army WAC is on the left, the Navy WAVE is next, followed by the Woman Marine and finally, at far right, the Coast Guard SPAR. Each has a solemn expression on her face appearing both determined and proud. Each is also classically feminine with full red lips, deep set eyes, curled hair and lightly rouged (but prominent) cheek bones. All of the women are white, but nonetheless they represent a type of diversity. The WAC has blonde hair and blue eyes, the WAVE red hair and green eyes. The Woman Marine is a dark eyed



*Figure 14:* John Falter, "Will Your Name Be There?",  
U. S. Navy, 1944 (Naval Historical Center, 70-623-Q).

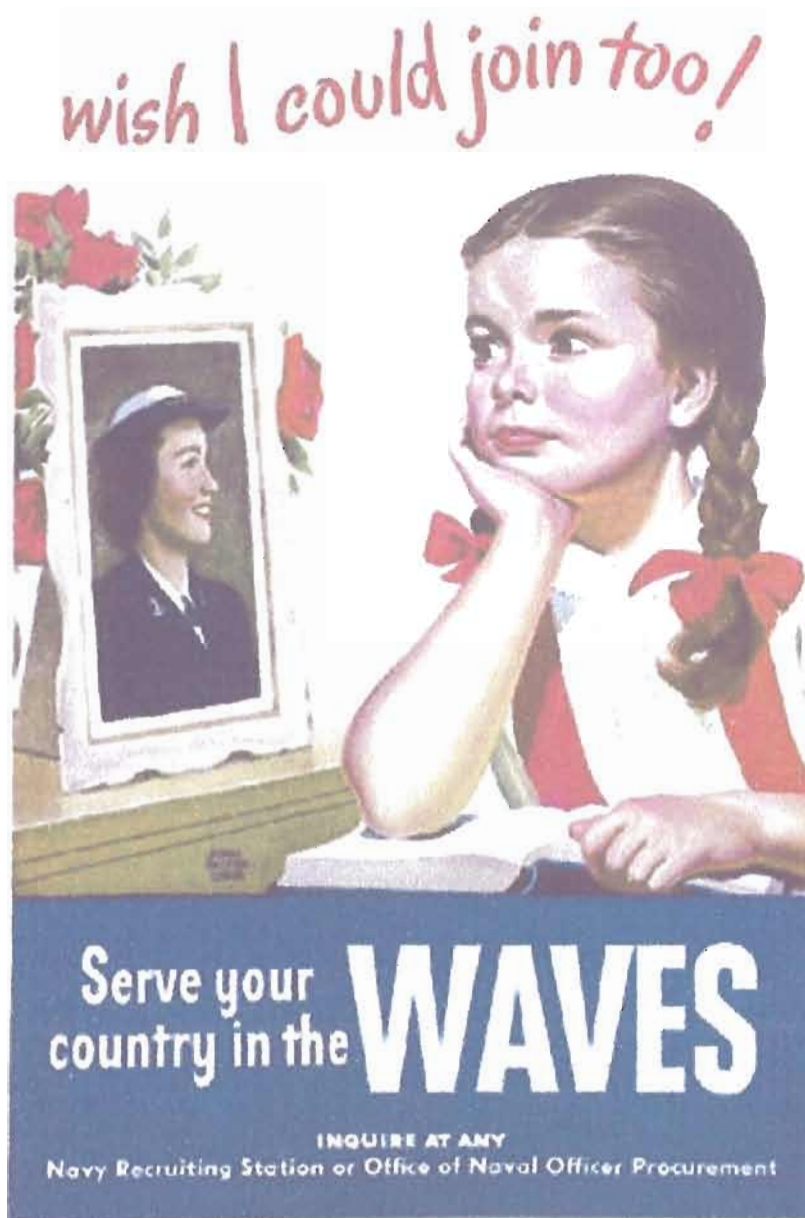


Figure 15: John Falter, "Wish I could Join Too!", U.S. Navy, 1944 (Naval Historical Center, 81-156-N)



brunette and the SPAR has black hair and blue eyes. This could be the poster that Dot Forbes was thinking about when she talked about her group of friends.

The poster presents a notion of idealized femininity (the women almost seem to be glowing due to the artist's use of color and highlighting), but it also suggests that femininity is *enhanced* by volunteering for military work. The message written in italics over the navy blue background says, "For your country's sake today -- For your own sake tomorrow." Underneath in block text over a dark red background, women are told to "Go to the nearest recruiting station of the armed service of your choice." Implicit in this message is that the women pictured are admirable and enviable.

A similar message is found in a recruitment poster for the WAVES. A young auburn haired, blue-eyed woman looks proudly into the distance (See *Figure 17*). Again, she is the essence of femininity, with red lips, lightly rouged cheeks and neatly curled hair. "To make men free," the poster reads, "enlist in the WAVES today." As in the previous poster, the woman is shown only in head and shoulders. Behind her is the red, white and blue of the American flag. A ray of light alights on her hair and shoulders; like the multi-service poster above, the woman appears to be glowing.

This poster offers the initial message that women should enlist to make me free. But the poster adds an additional appeal to patriotism. The poster reminds women "'..you will share the gratitude of a nation when victory is ours'" written in lower case script and as a quotation. It gives no indication of who is speaking. The woman in the poster? The head of the WAVES, Mildred McAfee? The President of the United States? Without attribution, the poster allows the individual her own interpretation of who is



*Figure 16:* Steele Savage Recruiting Publicity Bureau, “For Your Country's Sake Today: For Your Own Sake Tomorrow,” U.S. Army, 1944 (National Archives, 44-PA-120).



*Figure 17:* John Falter, “To Make Men Free,” U. S. Navy, 1944 (Naval Historical Society, 70-623-G).

saying the words. One woman might think the quote is coming from a world leader; another might think that it is coming from her brother serving overseas.

The poster also echoes the Navy's concern with reputation. Every element of it subtly combats the slander of the rumor campaign. The woman (as painted by Falter) looks wholesome and virtuous. She is attractive without being threatening, neither model perfect nor femme fatale sultry. Freckles faintly dot her cheeks and, aside from the red lipstick and slight rouge, she appears to be wearing no make-up. She embodies the "girl next door."

In many of the Navy recruitment posters the "girl next door" is wearing a complete WAVE uniform. In one, two young women stride confidently in front of the New York City skyline (see *Figure 18*). The women are shown from head to toe; the poster exhorts "Don't miss your great opportunity..the Navy needs you in the WAVES." They wear the WAVE white dress uniform and appear smart, confident, and stylish. New York, of course, by this point had been established as the center of American fashion.<sup>36</sup> The young women in the poster (and by extension, recruits) were a part of the elite fashion world.

This poster also illustrates how the Navy tried to shape group identity through the uniform (like the poster above, it is also derived from a Falter painting). The two women walk in lockstep, their heads turned in the same direction toward the New York skyline and the ships in the harbor. Each carries a white clutch purse and wears white oxfords with a short stacked heel and neatly tied bow. The suggestion is that by joining the WAVES, a woman will be just like the smartly dressed young women in the recruitment



*Figure 18:* John Falter, “Don’t Miss Your Great Opportunity,”

U. S. Navy, 1944 (Naval Historical Society, 70-623-I).

poster, wearing fashionable uniforms (in this case dress white), part of the what McLaughlin called a “refined” branch of the service.

*It was a picture of a -- not kind of like Betty Boop, but it was in that era, in the uniform and they -- I don't know if they said they needed us, but just kind of like that . . . You know, they had the one for the men, Uncle Sam and “I need you.” So anyway, I became the Navy.*

- Phyllis Jensen (Ankeney), World War II WAVE

*I went down to the recruiting office with this friend who was going in. She was determined. She was from this small town in Northern Wisconsin, you know. All these people who were coming here, to Milwaukee to get jobs that were available. And so I went with her. And that in the recruiting office was where I saw these pictures of all the wonderful things you could do. And I saw this Navy control tower operator. And I thought, “Oh, Violet. I think I can do that.”*

- Violet Strom (Kloth), World War II WAVE

The Navy and Coast Guard used many variations on the theme of enlisting as a patriotic duty in the recruitment posters. But while the Navy campaign emphasized wholesomeness and refinement, the Coast Guard posters offered a bit more jaunty campaign to inspire recruitment. “Don’t be a spare, be a SPAR” was one message. “Make a Date with Uncle Sam” was another. Multiple posters told viewers “The Girl of the Year is a SPAR.”

The Coast Guard posters visually attracted the viewer in different ways than Navy posters. While the woman in “To make men free” looks past the audience to some unseen point, in “Make a Date with Uncle Sam” the SPAR looks directly at the poster’s audience (see *Figure 19*). The woman has light brown hair and dark eyes, and has linked her arm though Uncle Sam’s; her gloved hand rests on his forearm. Her look is both intimate and proud. She is directly challenging the viewer to do follow her lead and enlist with the Coast Guard.

The artist’s decision to have the woman look directly out at the poster transforms the viewer’s relationship with it. The woman’s strong gaze demands that the viewer gaze back. The eye is immediately draw first to her face and the almost regal way she holds herself, seemingly pausing in mid-stride (aside from a portion of one arm, she is shown only up to her shoulders). After a glance at Uncle Sam (who, unlike the woman, is in profile and facing right, with his eyes almost squinted shut), the viewer next is drawn to the only red type on the page, the word “SPARS.” It is written in an almost-casual, marker-like script.

While the Navy women are portrayed the epitome of fashion, or as a dedicated girl-next-door, the Coast Guard woman in this poster seems a much more worldly being. She is, essentially, army candy or a “trophy,” a young woman “dating” a significantly older man. Her gaze confronts the viewer and offers a challenge to follow her lead. Her drop-lidded, deeply shadowed eyes smolder with sexuality. She has none of the Navy’s girl-next-door innocence. Other posters featuring SPARS likewise feature more challenging images, including one created by famed pin-up artist Antonio Vargas.



*Figure 19:* Bradshaw Campbell, “Make a Date with Uncle Sam,” U. S. Coast Guard, 1944 (Naval Historical Society, 2004-93-6).



Antonio Vargas emerged in 1940 as a successor to *Esquire*'s resident pin-up illustrator George Petty. Vargas was a former Hollywood artist, who was quickly renamed "Varga" by the magazine.<sup>37</sup> His images became known as "Varga Girls." Varga Girls traditionally are dressed in skimpy clothes (short shorts, negligees, lingerie). The artist "embellished freely upon his renderings of the female body in order to exaggerate their sexuality. The Varga Girls' impossibly long legs ran derriere-lessly into their waists; their ample breasts spread irrationally far across their chests."<sup>38</sup> Varga Girls were indisputably sexual beings.

The Varga poster utilizes "The Girl of the Year is a SPAR" theme, to encourage women to "Join the Women's Reserve of the U.S. Coast Guard" (see *Figure 20*). This image is a somewhat modified Varga Girl. Though she she does have his signature wasp waist and exaggerated breasts, this woman is fully clothed, wearing a form-fitting Coast Guard uniform as she strides toward the viewer. She is blonde, smiling, and, like the "Make a Date" woman, looks her audience in the eye. Her cheeks are highly rouged, her lips a kiss of red, her eyes sparkling bright blue. Her skirt clings slightly to her legs and is blowing in the wind as she walks. The skirt is actually slightly sheer -- the viewer can see the woman's legs through what appears to be a lightweight silk gauze rather than a heavy wool twill. She wears the bucket ("go-to-hell") hat, but instead of conservative walking shoes has on a pair of modified pumps with high enough heels that she appears to be standing on tip-toe. A large "halo" surrounds the entire woman. This image is a sharp contrast to the almost conservative illustrations by Falter for the Navy. It transforms the SPAR into a pin-up.

World War II has been described by one scholar as the “golden age” of the pin-up.<sup>39</sup> Pin-ups weren’t limited to “girlie” magazines or a specialized male-only audience, but rather were reproduced in publications catering to both men and women. Charles G. Martingette writes:

Almost all the leading “mainstream” magazines commissioned scores of artists to paint pictures of attractive men, women, and children .. A “pin-up” image is one that shows a full-length view of its subject and characteristically has an element or a theme or some kind of story. The woman in a pin-up is usually dressed in a form-revealing outfit.<sup>40</sup>

While the Varga poster would classify as a pin-up, the other military posters could best be classified as what Martingette identifies as “pretty girl” art: glamorous illustrative depictions of women with some of the sexualized and storytelling qualities of the pin-up.

As Maria Elena Buzek notes, during World War II the image of the pin-up was idealized by both men and women. Soldiers, sailors and pilots brought copies of Varga girls overseas, painting copies of pin-ups on their planes or pinning up copies of *Esquire* magazine in their bunks. Women, many working in non-traditional jobs, created what Buzek dubs “homemade pin-ups”: snapshots of themselves and their friends in alluring poses to send to beaux or keep for themselves. She notes:

Despite their impossible proportions, the Varga Girls were part of the dialogue that gave women a language for such sexual self-expression. As fictional icons of female allure and American productivity, upon them could be projected either the image of any woman or ideals of every

women -- and women were both comfortable and flattered by the comparison.<sup>41</sup>

The Varga Girl was at once both everywoman and the ideal every woman wished she could become.

Only one Navy image found in archives and poster records has the same pin-up qualities as the Varga. It was created by Varga's predecessor at *Equire*, George Petty. The poster says "Women, too, serve in navy blue! Join the WAVES or SPARS" (see *Figure 21*). The woman is wearing the WAVE uniform (the phrase "U.S. Navy" is clearly visible on her "go-to-hell" hat) and stands on tip-toe in front of the Navy's "fouled anchor" banner. Her skirt is slightly form fitting, but is obviously made of a heavy woolen fabric. She looks directly at the viewer, beaming with a wide smile, coquettishly beckoning the viewer with a single cocked finger. Her uniform skirt hugs her slim figure. Her shoes, far from being alluring, are the "Mother Hubbard"-style "energetics" which Irean Gartman complained about wearing. But even though it was crafted by a famed pin-up artist, the Petty WAVE lacks the sexualized qualities of the Vargas SPAR. Her sexuality, in contrast to the aggressive confidence of the SPAR, is safe and flirty. Petty's WAVE is a "pretty girl."

The visual choice of the two branches of the service -- the pin-up of the SPARs and the "pretty girl" of the WAVES -- shows a division in their identities. The WAVES embraced the role of being the elegant girl next door, a woman who would attend an elite college and wear high-fashion clothes. The SPAR was equally enviable; a more down-to-earth woman aware of her own desires and in control of her own destiny. Both had an



*Figure 20: Antonio Varga, "The Girl of the Year is a SPAR,"*  
U.S. Coast Guard, c. 1944 (Naval Historical Society,  
2004-93-6)



Figure 21: George Petty, "Join the WAVES or SPARS," U.S. Navy, c. 1944 (<http://www.americanartarchives.com/petty,g.htm>, accessed January 21, 2008).

initial advantage over the WAAC -- they were fully integrated into their respective service branches.

*“Don't Miss Your Great Opportunity . . .”*

In August of 1942, the WAVES began setting up recruitment offices for officers and enlisted women. The initial class of officers was hand-picked by McAfee and the Advisory Educational Council; it included future WAVES leader Winnifred Quick Collins as well as future SPARs head Dorothy Stratton. Women involved in the organization of WAVES, such as Mildred McAfee, Elizabeth Reynard, and Joy Hancock, avoided training altogether. These recruits were rushed through a pared down version of officer training and graduated in late September 1942.

Meanwhile, recruitment stations were set up around the country, to gather recruits for both the officer and enlisted ranks. Here, again, the Navy learned from the mistakes of the WAAC. When the Army first opened its doors to women, lines snaked around the block outside of recruiting offices often filled with women who had no intention of actually serving, but who just went down on a lark.<sup>42</sup> As a result, there was a lot of unfavorable publicity in newspapers about the type of woman “enlisting” -- most of whom never actually enlisted. By contrast, the Navy initially required that interested women write a letter of intent to their local procurement office. “If the basic facts looked promising, they would then be sent an application form together with a time -- an appointment -- for an interview.”<sup>43</sup> There were no lines, no unfavorable publicity. While the Navy and Coast Guard later loosened recruitment tactics, initially the Navy was in complete control of the image of even potential recruits.

The Navy also made sure that recruitment offices were set up in locations that conveyed class and sophistication.<sup>44</sup> Rather than downtown or in shoddy neighborhoods, the Navy recruited women in more “uptown” surroundings with officer and enlisted women reporting to the same building. This was in contrast to the WAAC, which initially had women report to the same offices as men, often in very sketchy locations. “I was very happy about that because I thought that set a tone of it being in a nice neighborhood, shall we say” McAfee recalled.<sup>45</sup> Even the location of the recruiting office conveyed the message the Navy was somehow “better” than other branches of the service.

*We had a very very good recruiter in Hartford. If he did not think you were the type of person to go in -- he wanted high grade people -- he did not encourage you. I know, personally, I knew one of the girls who came in, my sister had known. And she was not of the best of character. And my mother, my mother allowed her to come to the house and stuff because she didn't believe in not, but sister was warned she wasn't to do this with her, wasn't to that with her. Even though she was older. He would not take her in. She went to New Haven and the recruiter there took her.*

- Dot Forbes (Enes), World War II WAVE

*In '43, I was twenty. And I could go in. I had to be twenty with my parents' consent. So I decided this was what I wanted to do. My folks both signed for me because they had both -- my dad came to the US when I was fourteen, my mother when she was eighteen from Denmark. And never saw family again other than what was already here in the US. Nobody had*

*stopped them from doing what they wanted to do and so they were ready to sign.*

- Phyllis Jensen (Ankeney), World War II WAVE

*My father refused. Of course, he was dead set against it. My mother was dead set against it as well. They were thinking I was going to be going to the dogs [laughs]. Cussing and swearing, smoking and drinking and what else. It took me six months to break down my mother to sign for me. Six months. I was twenty and a half when I went in.*

- Billye Grymwade, World War II WAVE

*Most of my friends -- you had to be twenty to go in. Your brothers could go in at eighteen. And so I had a lot of friends that spent their nineteenth year trying to persuade the old man to sign for you .. "What about Rosie O'Donnell's father letting her join the Marines and you don't mean to say the O'Donnells have more moxie than the Demodys?!" It was a campaign.*

- Josette Dermody (Wingo) World War II WAVE

*We had some guests for dinner and the lady of the couple was a retired elementary school teacher. My dad said, "I don't know if I want to sign this or not. I don't know if I want her to get into a group that's all kinds of people. They might not be brought up the way she was brought up. I don't know if I want her to rub elbows with all those kinds of people." And this teacher friend of theirs said, "Don't worry about her, Walter. She will*



*gravitate towards the kind of person she is.” That’s very true. The friends I made in my three and a half years in the Navy were all brought up pretty much the way I was.*

- Joyce Fish (Sherwood), World War II WAVE

The battle over the appropriateness of military service for women was something the Navy would fight throughout the war. For the Navy, that battle began in the home. As the women recall, many parents echoed the sentiment of Representative Beverly M. Vincent (D-KY), who was one of the most vocal opponents to legislation allowing women in the Navy. The congressman:

believes that girls are more experienced at “putting on lipstick and looking in mirrors” than anything else. For that reason, he said today, he would prefer that the Navy recruit its non-combatant workers from among World War I Veterans. “They’re more interested in their work than how they look,” Mr. Vincent said.<sup>46</sup>

The new recruits were well aware of the problem, having fought the battle themselves in order to enlist. “The little song that they sang gleefully at Northampton and elsewhere, ‘I Didn’t Raise My Girl to be a Sailor,’ was a very real sentiment on the part of many of the families and parents,” McAfee recalled.<sup>47</sup>

McAfee and others in Navy leadership believed that by promoting the high standards for the Navy women, they would be able to assuage worried parents and loved ones. Parents were told the Navy provided fine housing, religious and moral guidance, a

chance at a good career and constant supervision of volunteers.<sup>48</sup> Collins says the emphasis on these high standards helped ease the mind of worried parents:

The Navy emphasized that a requirement for serving in the WAVES was an education -- a college degree for officers and a high school diploma for enlisted personnel -- and a reputation as an individual of integrity and high moral character. It was necessary to continue to give parents information about this new career once their daughters joined the service. Parents were very proud of their daughters in their uniforms and wanted to know more about their daily routine.<sup>49</sup>

Women college graduates were actively courted as officer recruits, through stories in both mainstream media as well as in speciality alumnae magazines.<sup>50</sup>

Opposition to military service wasn't universal. Some parents welcomed having their daughters serve in the military. Dot Forbes' father, himself a reservist, encouraged her enlistment. He willingly signed the paperwork to allow her to enlist at twenty. Others avoided potential parental disapproval by waiting until they were twenty-one to sign up; at that age women were considered "of age" to enlist.

Susan Ahn Cuddy, one of the few Asian American WAVES, was old enough to not need her mother's signature when she signed up. But as a first generation Korean American, she also knew that her family could be subject to disapproval from her community for her accepting a non-traditional role. So she enlisted in secret at age twenty-seven in 1942, without discussing her plans with her mother:

Susan was going to sign up no matter what, even if her mother objected.

There was a good chance that her mother would object: it was not a proper thing for a girl, especially for a Korean girl. But Mother approved Susan's decision gladly. Mother was deaf to all the strenuous objections from Dad's colleagues.<sup>51</sup>

Not only was her mother deaf to the criticism, but she protected Cuddy from it. As Cuddy explains, "If I had gone to her and asked permission, she would have been criticized. But since I joined the Navy, and *then* told her, she was fine. She was wonderful."<sup>52</sup> Cuddy was the first Asian WAVE and the first Asian WAVE officer.

Cuddy said she enlisted because she "wasn't about to sit idly about and watch."<sup>53</sup>

Other women expressed a similar desire to do *something* to assist in the war effort. Lois Fish was another early recruit (she was in the first class of enlisted women at Bloomington, Indiana in September 1942). She said since she had no brothers serving, she felt obligated to serve (and her father agreed). Margaret Gay, another member of those first WAVE classes, remembers hearing about the WAAC, but waiting for the Navy to finally allow women in. She recalls thinking, "Well, if it's good the Navy will have it." Helen Edgar, another early recruit, believes the extensive omnipresent propaganda campaign pushed her to enlist. "My memory of it, it was just a total 100 percent war effort," she says. "Because we *finally got it*." As she tells it, the early propaganda after Pearl Harbor helped her to understand that *everyone* had to participate in some way in order to end the war.

*Within the next six months of the time of Pearl Harbor and the time I enlisted, I noticed the fellows that were my friends were all leaving because there was a draft then. They didn't have anything to look forward to except being in the service. I thought, "Well, I ought to help, too." I didn't have any brothers. And I thought, well, I wanted to do my part. There was a very strong furor of patriotism after Pearl Harbor. Everybody wanted to help the war effort. Instead of going to college, I wanted to enlist so I could help the war effort*

- Joyce Fish (Sherwood), World War II WAVE

*When we went inside there was a recruiter in the lobby of the theater and so he approached us and gave us some literature and talked to us. We went in and saw the show. And while I was in there I kept thinking about it. And when we went out he was still there. So I went over and talked to him again. At that point was when I decided to join the SPARs. He was from the Coast Guard. And [laughs] anyhow I signed up all the papers there in the lobby of the theater.*

- Barbara Stroda (Wright), World War II SPAR

*I don't see how you could have done otherwise. I mean, I was always furious that all these men were going. Now that sounds, you don't want to go to war, but when you're that young you're protecting your country . . . I just did it. Maybe that's kind of the reputation I have in my family [laughs] I don't know. But they didn't object at all. They just kind of looked*

*at me with open eyes, but they helped me. They took me in the station when I had to go to boot camp and put the star in the window just like you would for anybody.*

- Janette Shaffer (Alpaugh), World War II WAVE

*[My parents] said, "If we didn't think you'd be mad at us for the rest of our lives, we wouldn't do it. But, but, it seems like you want to join, so we'll sign it. But we aren't happy signing it." And the funny part about this is, Monroe is a very small town and has a pool hall. It really was a tavern. And Dad liked to drink his beer every once in awhile, and when he went into town he'd have a beer. So then he'd go out on the street corner. And you know everybody -- he'd be out talking to these guys and they'd be bragging about their sons. Farmers always wore bib overalls. And my dad put his fingers under his suspenders and he'd say, "Well, let me tell you about my daughter." [laughs] They were very proud of me joining the Navy after I joined.*

- Dotty Anderson (McDowell), World War II WAVE

The Navy pushed the theme that it was a patriotic duty to join the military in every aspect of its propaganda. On September 3, 1942, the radio program *March of Time* broadcast from the training school at Smith College in Northampton. Paul Milton interviewed two young women about why they enlisted. Catherine L. Laird as the daughter of American missionaries in China. She said, "The Japs caught my parents in Hong Kong. They spent eight months in a prison camp. They lost everything and I know

how they were treated.” The other interviewee, Virginia Aileen Hillyard of New Orleans, was the daughter of a Naval officer. “He had a shore job, but he WANTED sea duty,” she said of her father. “He died last April, in service. And so when the Women’s Reserve started, I joined up. I can’t help my father now, but all of us in the Reserve can help men get the active duty they want.”<sup>54</sup>

A similar theme was echoed in publications, such as *A Letter From Naval Reserve Midshipmen’s School (WR) Northampton, MA*:

Patriotism is the strongest motive of every woman joining this man’s Navy. You may ask any WAVE why she volunteered and in most cases she will pass it off with a light remark, such as, “Oh, I thought the uniform was kind of cute,” or “I thought a change of scenery would do me good.” Later, when you become friends with that girl and find out more about her, you will probably discover that her brother was killed at Pearl Harbor, or that her fiance was lost on Bataan or that her father is in service with the Merchant Marine.<sup>55</sup>

This was the case with some of the women in this project. Violet Strom came from a large family in Wisconsin. Her older brother was a pilot who was shot down and taken prisoner in Germany. When she heard, she went down to the WAVES office to enlist. Strom is an embodiment of the Falter recruitment poster which depicts a WAVE receiving a telegram with bad news.

But patriotism wasn’t the sole reason for enlisting. Most of the women interviewed had worked at a defense plant before signing up for the Navy and Coast

Guard. Many found these jobs routine and boring, but they were also unable to quit because the work was necessary for the country's military mobilization.<sup>56</sup> Enlisting was the only way they could free themselves from the drudgery of this work. As Mickey Griffin explains, "That was war work and you were working at the shipyards and you could not quit. So that's when I said, 'I'm definitely going in the service.' And I went." Doris Mansfield was stuck working on a hand-operated grinder at Minneapolis Honey, exposed to metal dust which was destroying the roots of her hair. Like Kalinaukas, she enlisted in the Navy rather than continue in this line of work.

Some, like Doris Cain, chose to enlist in the Navy to escape a difficult home situation. Cain was recently separated from her husband and saw the Navy as a way to avoid seeing him every day. Another woman was rooming with guardians after her parents died; the living situation was strained and uncomfortable. The Navy offered a way out.

Other women enlisted to pursue the glamorous jobs portrayed in the recruitment posters or specific work described in pamphlets. Pat Graves signed up specifically to work as a machinist's mate. Virginia Benvenuto wanted to work in a hospital. Betty Bruns wanted to put her pilot experience to use as a flight mechanic. Helen Gunter was attracted by the Navy's appeals for "women with motion picture experience." She had taught junior high school students how to make short films. Friends encouraged her to enlist:

Surely the Navy wanted people with more professional background than my experiences in junior high school. But my friends' question had

planted a seed in my mind, and once planted, it took root. I was thirty-seven years old and the war, I knew, would be the greatest event of my lifetime. I wanted to be a part of it. My sister and brother were married and had children, but I was single, free to enlist. And if I volunteered for any military service, I wanted to go Navy.<sup>57</sup>

Yet even while describing the desire for interesting work or a new life, the women return to the notion of patriotism. It was, for Gunter, “the greatest event of my lifetime. I wanted to be a part of it.” Underlying the practical reasons was the notion promoted by the Navy propaganda: this was something a woman *had* to do.

By constructing the jobs as a patriotic duty, the Navy was able to recruit women while allowing for the fact that the women wouldn’t be able to hold the jobs once the war was over. The WAVES and SPARs were part of *volunteer emergency* service. The framing would allow women to feel good about taking non-traditional work, and feel equally good about leaving it when the war was over. As Collins wrote:

Women who accepted these jobs were true patriots. After all, everybody was expected to pitch in. If you weren’t doing something to help win the war, either in a volunteer role or a full-time civilian or military job, most Americans believed you weren’t a good citizen. When civilian and military leaders realized that mobilizing all available manpower resources would still not give the United States all the personnel it needed for its armed forces, they turned to womanpower. They understood that women



could help not only by working at civilian tasks but also by working directly for the military establishment.<sup>58</sup>

However, the Navy and Coast Guard overlooked one small detail: what would happen if the women enjoyed their temporary work? What would happen if they discovered professional satisfaction in their jobs? The reality of military work would have profound impacts on the women who served.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mildred McAfee Horton and Helen K. Sargeant, "Reminiscences of Mildred McAfee Horton: Oral History" (Cambridge, MA: Schlessinger Library on the History of Women in America, 1982), 67.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Hawes, *Why is a Dress? Who? What? When? Where?* (New York: Viking Press, 1942), 37.

<sup>3</sup> Dale McConathy, "Mainbocher," in *American Fashion: The Life and Lines of Adrian, Mainbocher, McCardell, Norell, Trigère*, ed. Sarah Tomerlin Lee (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company, 1975), 111.

<sup>4</sup> McConathy, "Mainbocher," 135.

<sup>5</sup> See: Mildred McAfee Horton, "Oral History," in *Recollections of Women Officers who served in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard in World War II, including WAVES Director Mildred McAfee, Joy B. Hancock, Jean Palmer, Dorothy Stratton, Elizabeth Crandall, Etta Belle Kitchen, Frances Rich, Eleanor Rigby, Louise Wilde, Tova Wiley and Senator Margaret C. Smith*, eds. John Mason and Etta Belle Kitchen (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1979) and Horton and Sargeant, "Reminiscences."

<sup>6</sup> Horton, "Oral History" in *Recollections of Women Officers*, 52.

<sup>7</sup> See: Horton and Sargeant, "Reminiscences."

<sup>8</sup> See: Horton and Sargeant, "Reminiscences."

<sup>9</sup> Hawes, *Dress*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> McConathy "Mainbocher," 171.

<sup>11</sup> Their knowledge is bolstered by published accounts about the uniform. Helen Gunter describes in detail the design created by the "famous Parisian couturier," adding "as civilians we had never dreamed of owning a Mainbocher design, and we thought the two shades of blue were feminine and flattering." Even when Mainbocher is noted as American, as in Winifred Quick Collins' book, his name is given as "Main Rousseau Bocher," which has a distinctly French flair. However, there is no evidence in his biography that "Rousseau" was his middle name. See: Helen C. Gunter, *Navy WAVE: Memories of World War II* (Fort Bragg, CA: Cyprus House Press, 1992), 33; Winifred Quick Collins, *More Than a Uniform* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1997), 43; and McConathy, "Mainbocher," 115.

<sup>12</sup> Ruth P. Rubenstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 83.

<sup>13</sup> Collins, *Uniform*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> See: Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994/1899).

<sup>15</sup> Hillary Radner, "Roaming the City: Proper Women in Improper Places," in *Spaces of Culture*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage Publications, Ltd. 1999), 93.

<sup>16</sup> "A Letter From Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (WR) Northampton, MA" 1943, Sophia Smith Collection, 12.WS Box 4 16G3 181, Folder: Publications General 1943-44, Smith College Archives.

<sup>17</sup> See: "The Waves' Uniforms: 'Womanly, Workmanlike,'" *New York Herald Tribune* (August 29, 1942); Nona Baldwin, *New York Times* "WAVES Uniforms Stir Enthusiasm at 'Fashion Show' in Washington," *New York Times* (August 29, 1942); Associated Press, "Short Skirts for Sailorettes," *New York Sun* (August 29, 1942); "The Shock of Females as God Made Them," *New York Post* (August 29, 1942), Elizabeth Reynard Papers A-128, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe University; also "US at War Women: No Glamor Girls," *Time* (March 12, 1945), 22.

<sup>18</sup> Transcript of "LT. JG Louise K. Wilde, Public Relations Officer of the U.S. Naval Training School, Smith College," WHYN Northampton, 21 September 1942, Sophia Smith Collection, 12.WS Box 1 16G2 180, Broadcasts Folder 1942-44, Smith College Archives.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Ada Cox Gage Dunham, "Oral History," Women's Veteran's Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, <http://library.uncg.edu/depts/archives/veterans/> (accessed December 3, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 134.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Vining and Barton C. Hacker, "From Camp Follower to Lady in Uniform: Women, Social Class and Military Institutions before 1920," *Contemporary European History* 10-3 (2001) 371.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Fussell, *Uniforms: Why We Are What We Wear* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Nancy Wilson Ross, *The WAVES: The Story of the Girls in Blue* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1943), 132-133. It is interesting to note that while I in no way saw every newspaper article published during this era (and made no attempt to), none of the dozens of articles discussing the WAVES and SPARS uniform collected in several archives were headlined "May Choose Own Underwear." Ross does not cite which newspaper she is quoting.

<sup>24</sup> "WARNS AGAINST COPYING WAVES," *New York Times*, September 17, 1942, Elizabeth Reynard Papers A-128.

<sup>25</sup> "America Salutes: The Best Dressed Women in the World Today," *Vogue*, May 1943, Sophia Smith Collection, 12.WS Box 6 16G3 181.2, Folder: Publications WAVES Clippings May 1-16 1943, Smith College Archives.

<sup>26</sup> Joan Angel, *Angel of the Navy: The Story of a WAVE* (New York: Hastings House, 1943), 68.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Ellis, "Getting the Message Out: The Poster Boys of World War II," *Prologue Magazine* 37-2 (Summer 2005), <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/summer/posters-1.html> (accessed April 6, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> The National Archives, "Powers of Persuasion: Poster Art from World War II," [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers\\_of\\_persuasion/powers\\_of\\_persuasion\\_home.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/powers_of_persuasion_home.html) (accessed January 18, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Ellis, "Getting the Message Out."

<sup>30</sup> The National Archives, "Powers of Persuasion."

<sup>31</sup> The National Archives, "Powers of Persuasion."

<sup>32</sup> The poster was created for the Westinghouse corporation and was originally displayed in factories for a brief two-week period, February 15 to 28, 1942. Another more muscular version of "Rosie" was produced by Norman Rockwell for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1943. For a full discussion of the impacts of the "Rosie" imagery, see James J. Kimble and Lester C. Olson, "Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconception in Howard Miller's 'We Can Do It!' Poster," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2005), 533-570.

<sup>33</sup> The National Archives, "Powers of Persuasion."

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<sup>34</sup> When visiting the Naval Historical Center, the curator of posters there noted they only had a small portion of the posters created to recruit women and were using a book produced by an online sales company as one research tool for posters.

<sup>35</sup> Falter enlisted in the Navy in 1943 and created more than 300 posters for both male and female Naval recruitment drives. He also created covers and illustrations for *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Cosmopolitan*, *McCall's*, *Life*, and *Look*. See: Museum of Nebraska Art, "John Phillip Falter," <http://monet.unk.edu/mona/first/falter/falter.html> (accessed January 21, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> See: Hawes, *Dress*; Elizabeth Hawes, *Fashion is Spinach* (New York: Random House, 1938).

<sup>37</sup> For a description of the careers of Vargas and Petty, see: Maria Elena Buzek, *Pin-up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Buzek, *Pin-up Grrrls*, 205.

<sup>39</sup> Walt A. Reed, "Pin-Up Art: A Historical Commentary," in *The Great American Pin-Up* ed. Charles G. Martingette and Louis K. Meisel (Köln: Tashcen, 2002), 16

<sup>40</sup> Charles G. Martingette, "The Great American Pin-up," in *The Great American Pin-Up* ed. Charles G. Martingette and Louis K. Meisel (Köln: Tashcen, 2002), 32.

<sup>41</sup> Buzek, *Pin-up Grrrls*, 227

<sup>42</sup> Horton, "Oral History" in *Recollections of Women Officers*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Horton, "Oral History" in *Recollections of Women Officers*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> The Coast Guard would later use the same recruitment offices.

<sup>45</sup> Horton and Sargeant, "Reminiscences," 73.

<sup>46</sup> From *New York Times*, 8 July 42 no author listed: Smith College Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Horton and Sargeant, "Reminiscences," 115.

<sup>48</sup> Collins, *Uniform*, 66.

<sup>49</sup> Collins, *Uniform*, 66.

<sup>50</sup> "The Navy Comes to Smith" was part of a newsletter sent to twelve thousand members of the Smith College Alumnae Association, see: "The Navy Comes to Smith," *Alumnae Association Newsletter Summer* (1942), n.p., Sophia Smith Collection 12.WS, Box two 16G3 180.1, General: History (1942-80), Smith College Archives.

<sup>51</sup> John Cha, *Willow Tree Shade: The Susan Ahn Cuddy Story* (Seattle: Korean American Heritage Foundation, 2002), 77.

<sup>52</sup> Yoosun Park et al, "KAHS Oral Histories: A Conversation with Susan Cuddy," *Korean American Historical Society Occasional Papers* 4 (1998-1999), 37.

<sup>53</sup> Cha, *Willow Tree Shade*, 77.

<sup>54</sup> "Transcript," *The March of Time*, September 3, 1943, Sophia Smith Collection, Broadcasts Folder 1942-44

<sup>55</sup> *A Letter From Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School*, 28.

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<sup>56</sup> Women talk about being “frozen” in the war production jobs during the war. I can find no record that people were prevented from quitting unsatisfactory employment or changing jobs; instead, the War Production Board discussed the ongoing problem of “the endless shifting of workers” in essential industries. The women perhaps had been talking about *deferment*, which temporarily prevented a man or woman from entering the military until a replacement worker could be found and trained. See Bureau of Demobilization, Civilian Production Administration, *Industrial Mobilization for War*, 704-705.

<sup>57</sup> Gunter, *Navy WAVE*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Collins, *Uniform*, 39.

## CHAPTER VII

### FREEING A MAN TO FIGHT

*At first it would come out, I would say in the movies. And you could see the women marching at Hunter College. And I thought, "Gee, that's really something." I thought, "Maybe I could work in my photography with that."*

- Dorothy Riley (Dempsey), World War II SPAR

While the recruitment posters and uniforms would prove powerful recruitment tools, the Navy was also savvy enough to realize the need for continued coordinated publicity throughout the war. The publicity would fulfill two goals. It would keep the the WAVES in the public eye, improving recruitment efforts. It would also help those women already a part of the service, by reminding the public of the good character of the women who served and the important work they were doing.

This chapter will outline the maturing publicity plans the Navy and Coast Guard had for the female branches, looking specifically at coverage in glossy magazine photo-essays in *LIFE*, *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. The magazine articles dovetailed with the desired propaganda mission of the Navy, however, the Coast Guard was curiously absent from the high-profile publicity mix, appearing only in *LOOK*. Explanations as to how

this happened can be found in oral histories from officers of the era. It will identify how the Navy publicity may have been so successful, exploring the coordinated media campaign used by military public relations officers in consultation with the Office of War Information. Finally, the chapter will analyze the shifting public image of Navy and Coast Guard women as the war progressed and ended, through representations in three motion pictures released in during and immediately after World War II: *The Navy Way* (February 1944), *Here Come the WAVES* (December 1944), and *Tars and SPARs* (January 1946).

### *Military LIFE*

Newspapers, magazines, and newsreels were covering every move of the new Navy and Coast Guard women, especially those who were part of the early training classes. Smith College archivist Florence Snow wrote in her diary at the time that shortly before the first officer training camp two young women arrived at the facility. She thought they were WAVES arriving early; it turned out they were newspaper reporters who had sneaked onto the facilities in hopes of getting a preview.<sup>1</sup> In her diary, Snow paints a picture of news people invading Smith's small campus like locusts in hopes of getting some sort of story of the WAVES.

The newspapers and newsreels were assisted by the Navy's in-house publicity department. The department produced a vast amount of material about the WAVES (the Coast Guard's publicity was somewhat less effective, as will be discussed later in this section). The material was then forwarded to newspapers around the country or shared with newsreel production houses for inclusion in the shorts run between double features

at the cinema. Women interviewed recall seeing WAVES in newsreels or participating in the films as they were at boot camp. During World War II, the Navy had five thousand people working for the photographic unit, which included both still photography and film. The unit's budget was \$50,000,000.<sup>2</sup> In 1942 alone, the photographic unit distributed 178,620 still pictures to press outlets.<sup>3</sup>

On September 21, 1942, *LIFE* magazine first turned its focus onto the WAVES.<sup>4</sup> This was just weeks after the initial group of officer candidates began their accelerated training at Smith College and just days before the first group of enlisted women would report for duty. The photo-essay was spread over three pages and included five photos detailing the Mainbocher uniform design. *LIFE* editors wrote, "To design a functional yet feminine uniform, the Navy turned to Mainbocher, Chicago-born designer who won fame in Paris. Mr. Bocher donated his designs."<sup>5</sup> A similar spread appeared in *Vogue* magazine in October of 1942, profiling Mildred McAfee and featuring former *Vogue* editor Josephine Forrestal modeling the uniform.<sup>6</sup> In the December 15, 1942 issue of *LOOK*, Mildred McAfee was named one of the "All-American" women of 1942.<sup>7</sup>

Other media coverage came in over the next few months. Newsreels followed a series of military firsts: first officer camp, first enlisted camp, first group of Coast Guard women. Newspapers likewise followed the various developments of the Naval women. Officers clipped copies of newspaper articles for their scrapbooks. At Smith College, Frances Snow, the Smith College alumnae director, asked alumnae to send her clippings from their local newspapers. Copies poured in from around the country.<sup>8</sup>



The first major national magazine photo-essay on the WAVES appeared in *LIFE* magazine's March 15, 1943 issue. Unlike the September 1942 story, which covered the WAVES as incidental to the main news of the week (the cover featured Fawzia, the Queen of Iran), in this issue military women were considered the top story of the week. From pages seventy-two to seventy-nine, the magazine featured a story on the first classes of women to complete military training. Two pages were devoted to the WAACs. The remainder, and the prime spot of the cover, went to the women serving in the WAVES. There were twenty pictures in all (five WAAC, fifteen WAVES) in both color and black and white. All were shot by the renowned Martin Munkácsi, who *LIFE* editors called "the world's greatest photographer of women." At the time, *LIFE*'s weekly circulation numbers averaged approximately two million people.<sup>9</sup>

Munkácsi was known for his innovative fashion photography. His models were constantly in motion, jumping over puddles or climbing into airplanes.<sup>10</sup> But he didn't limit his lens to the high fashion world; Munkácsi was also an accomplished photojournalist, whose 1930 image *Liberia* was cited by legendary photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson as the single image which prompted him to begin shooting photographs and conceive of the notion of a "decisive moment."<sup>11</sup> In 1931, his images were included in a list of the world's top one hundred photographs.<sup>12</sup> By 1934, Munkácsi was under contract with *Harper's Bazaar*; he also worked for *LIFE* and *Ladies Home Journal*.<sup>13</sup>

By giving this assignment to a celebrated photographer (rather than pawning it off on a lesser talent) *LIFE* subtly signaled to its readers the importance of women entering

the service. Nonetheless, the copy at time was skeptical. At one point, the unnamed writer said:

By last week, the WAVES and WAACs were no longer military experiments. They were military reality having appeared for duty with startling effects at Army and Navy posts all over the country. Undoubtedly they were doing good work, but old-time officers and enlisted men still could not get used to them.<sup>14</sup>

The copy also emphasized the hard work and medical examinations the women underwent as recruits. Though the women received a large number of shots, the article pointed out “unlike male sailors and soldiers who are timid, not a WAVE has ever fainted.”<sup>15</sup>

One photograph featured WAACs running through the surf, formally echoing Munkásci's *Liberia* photograph or the seminal fashion shot he took for *Harper's Bazaar* of Lucille Brokaw running along the beach in Long Island. Army women are also shown marching on the beach and learning how to use duffle bags as floatation devices in a pool; by contrast, the WAVES are shown in much more ordinary situations. They sit on watch duty, learn in a classroom, or receive mail. WAVE recruits get physical examinations (draped in white sheets) and receive immunizations (and don't faint). The final, full-page photograph shows a chubby-cheeked apprentice seaman asleep under a blanket stamped U.S. Navy.<sup>16</sup>

One color shot in the *LIFE* essay stands out for its richness. It was taken at Smith College and shows a section of a line of officers marching in formation two-by-two. The

line reaches from the lower left corner of the frame to upper right quadrant. The women's dark blue coats contrast with the pale colored rocks and gravel on the ground and the white froth of a waterfall behind them. The sky is an almost-unnatural shade of light blue.

Two elements of the photograph remain in my mind's eye: the patch of chartreuse and lime green grass and the white of the house seen through the trees. These small details for me are its punctum. My eye falls down the slope of rocks (much like the water falls down the waterfall), pulled into the image by the surprising shock of green and the peek-a-boo played by the stately building through the tree's branches. Munkácsi's construction draws me into the image and to the women walking across the scene. The photo is taken from such a distance that no individual WAVE becomes identifiable: the "group" is the subject in this frame.

The prosaic situations the WAVES are situated in through the Munkácsi photographs reflects a concern from Navy officials.<sup>17</sup> McAfee noted:

We had to persuade people as they came to apply for admission that they should not expect an easy life or a glamorous life. There were many glamorous features to the life in a naval station, with the parades and the reviews and so on, but much of the work of anybody in the Navy involved standing by to be there in case there was a crisis, and then they must be ready to act. And that is a dull occupation, much of it. <sup>18</sup>

But even though the subject matter may not be glamorous, especially in contrast to the surf and sand photographs of the WAAC, Munkácsi's WAVES appear serious and sophisticated. The sheet worn in the examination room resembles the glamorous drape of an evening gown and the gloves the women wear while sitting watch are spotlessly white. In adjacent pictures, the WAVES are the picture of professionalism, conducting a mock court-martial or marching across the Smith campus in perfect military formation.

Instead of emphasizing that "beauty and femininity should not be compromised,"<sup>19</sup> Munkácsi's photographs of the WAVES reflect that beauty and femininity can exist side-by-side with competence and professionalism. This is perhaps best exemplified by the *LIFE* cover. Thirteen women stare at the viewer, each wearing her WAVE uniform in front of a dark background. The women are attractive, but none appear to be wearing make-up to enhance their looks. Their faces pop out of the dark grays and black that surrounds them. They wear pleasant, but serious, expressions. These aren't frilly fashionistas, but young, working women well-equipped for the job ahead.

### *A Coordinated Effort*

By the time the *LIFE* article appeared, Hunter College had been transformed into boot camp for enlisted women (Hunter accepted its first boot class in February, 1943). As the new camp opened, the Navy revealed new, coordinated publicity efforts. The District 3 Photographic Section took photographs and wrote news releases about the

women as they circulated through Hunter College, providing information for each woman's hometown newspaper.

The Public Relations Form A which recruits filled out, giving personal, professional and educational background were used to discover special feature stories and to serve as a file in fulfilling requests . . . [In August, 1943] The Form A was revised to include more personal information and the Form B instituted to give a comprehensive personal background of some five thousand recruits a month and to indicate the assignment of every recruit after graduation from "boot" training.<sup>20</sup>

Navy personnel at Hunter used charts to keep track of where recruits came from and would use their stories to assist in recruitment efforts. Publicity was stepped up to service districts where enlistments were declining.

This sort of recruitment publicity was part of a larger, coordinated promotional plan developed by the Navy. By October, 1943, the Office of War Information (OWI) and the Naval Bureau of Personnel (BuPers) co-published an eleven-page media guide entitled *Information Program for the Women's Reserve of the US Navy*. The booklet was sent to magazine and newspaper editors as well as broadcast (radio) reporters and newsreel companies.<sup>21</sup> The goal was stated directly:

The use of women in helping run naval shore establishments has proven such an outstanding success that recruitments have nowhere kept pace with the increased number of naval positions waiting to be filled by women. The urgency of the need for more women in the Navy, as well as

the unique opportunities the Navy offers in types of work and way of living, must be brought home to women all over the country.<sup>22</sup>

The booklet estimated that in order to fill needs, the Navy would need an average of twelve-hundred WAVES per week.<sup>23</sup> It was proposed that information about the WAVES reach a peak during November and December of 1943, and again in April, July and November of 1944.<sup>24</sup>

The booklet also outlined a “National Education Program” for media, which included seven key facts that should be stressed in coverage. The Navy *needed* women to enlist; serving as a WAVE wasn’t just a cute fad.<sup>25</sup> The WAVES received good pay, worked in interesting and exciting jobs, had a lot of friends, and were admired by servicemen.<sup>26</sup> Each of these ideas could serve as powerful motivating factors for women who signed up to serve. But two of the facts seemed designed to directly combat the rumor and innuendo campaign about military women and spoke directly to the women’s notion of identity.

Fact seven took on the issues of rumors, noting that, “27.5 percent of eligibles questioned had parents who disapproved; of the reasons given by parents, 92.3 percent of these objections was due to either misinformation or lack of information.”<sup>27</sup> Rather than mentioning any of the rumors directly (other than the reference to “misinformation”), the booklet instead focused on indirect contradiction to combat them. Women currently serving in the Navy have “high standards of personal conduct.”<sup>28</sup> One recruit is quoted as saying, “I feel like a girl with eight brothers.”<sup>29</sup> Twice in the booklet, the WAVE’s personal relationship with a Navy chaplain is mentioned. By emphasizing the virtue and

wholesomeness of the women involved in the WAVES, media coverage could serve to counter suggestions about the women's character.

The Navy also sought to use potential media coverage to reinforce the identity it was constructing for the WAVES: that they were somehow "better" than others. Fact four stated "some of the most attractive and alert young women of today are joining the Navy to make their contribution to victory."<sup>30</sup> A short notation added "WAVE training builds leaders and makes women capable of assuming responsibility both in military and later in civilian life."<sup>31</sup> The pamphlet even quoted the President of the United States as praising the quality of the WAVES.<sup>32</sup> It was clear as to the media message the Navy and OWI sought: naval standards are high, WAVES "have poise and wear a smart, respected uniform,"<sup>33</sup> and by serving women would be enriched; i.e. they would become "better" people.

One example of this sort of publicity push occurred in late 1944, when the Navy accepted the first African American WAVES (see *Figures 22 & 23*). Remember, November of 1944 had been identified as one of the key dates for peak publicity about the WAVES. Frances Wills and Harriet Pickens enlisted in October 1944. They were sent to Smith College for training as the only two African American officer candidates in the WAVES. Wills remembered her every move being followed by Navy photographers:

Harriet and I were asked to pose pushing down together to close a suitcase. Although the photograph itself was first-rate and has been shown many times in the years since that day it was entirely fictional. By the



*Figure 22: "Mrs. Wills and Pickens Sworn into the Navy,"*

New York, NY, U.S. Navy, 1944 (80-G-47025, Naval

Historical Center, National Archives). Frances Wills

(Thorpe) is at the left and Harriet Ida Pickens is at the right

being sworn in by Lieutenant Rosamond D. Selle.





*Figure 23: “Lt. JG Pickens and Ens. Wills packing,”*  
Northampton, MA, U.S. Navy, 1944 (80-G-297443, Naval  
Historical Center, National Archives). Harriet Ida Pickens  
is on the left and Francis Wills (Thorpe) is on the right.

time that the photographer approached and described the shot he wanted, both Harriet and I had long since stowed away all our gear and were waiting with the same undisguised eagerness as all of our classmates for train time. It was not difficult to smile a happy smile.<sup>34</sup>

The women were a part of the last class of officers trained at Smith College. Pickens finished ranked third in her class, a point mentioned by Navy publicity.

This isn't to dismiss the news worthiness of Pickens and Wills' enlistment or to naively assume that the Navy's breaking racial barriers would cause only positive reactions. Of course, as the first African American women in the Navy, they would receive more publicity (positive and negative) than the average white officer. Racism and segregation were a part of American life in the mid-twentieth century; the Navy had a less than stellar record in its treatment for African American *men*, mostly limiting them to kitchen and janitorial duties.<sup>35</sup> What is curious, however, is the timing of Pickens and Wills' admission and how they were framed (college educated, ladies), which coincided with the Navy's publicity intents and goals.

There is also evidence that this particular publicity push met with some success. It was those photographs which encouraged Jean Byrd to enlist. Her family knew Pickens' father through their college alumni association. Byrda said when she heard the WAVES would be accepting African American women, she looked to see if Pickens had enlisted: "I saw it in the paper, where she went up . . . to train for officer's training school. And I said, "So the Navy is for me." Not only was Pickens' father a college dean, but she had graduated from Smith College. Her collegiate association vetted the WAVES

for Byrd as something appropriate to join. The Army had long been accepting African American female recruits (they had their own segregated units), but as Byrd put it, “I wanted to be different. I wanted to be something nice.” She echoed the Navy’s framing in her recollection.

### *Navy Glamor*

While both photo weeklies (*LIFE*, *LOOK*) and fashion magazines (*Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar*) would run photo-essays about the women in the service, the tone of the photographs would differ greatly. The general audience publications would showcase the women as doing their patriotic duty; one of the primary reasons for women to enlist as outlined by the Navy/OWI’s press guide. The women were only serving so that men could come home sooner. The fashion publications, geared to a female audience, would emphasize the guide’s secondary reasons, focusing on the personal enrichment found in the WAVES. By joining the WAVES, women would become part of an important elite.

Louise Wilde ended up being the national coordinator of the WAVES publicity efforts. Wilde was a graduate of Mount Holyoke who worked in public relations and for newspapers before joining the WAVES. She constantly struggled with making sure recruiters “weren’t just trying to emphasize that cute little chick.”<sup>36</sup> Francis Rich, a Smith College alumna and a former starlet, also assisted in publicity and in making sure women were assigned to interesting jobs.<sup>37</sup>

Wilde coordinated all aspects of media coverage: arranging interviews, escorting writers to bases and even acting as an on-set consultant to the feature film *Here Come the WAVES*. She emphasized the publicity guide’s goals. “You had to constantly reiterate

the same old things -- you were in to do a job and not just be play girls,” she recalled.<sup>38</sup>

The media was most frequently attracted to stories about the “glamor” jobs:

There were certain fields that were more glamorous for people to see naturally than the yeomen and the storekeeper and the two most glamorous were in the whole broad spectrum of naval aviation and the hospital work . . . The yeomen and storekeeper, they were just doing paper work and that’s not very glamorous. But the emphasis was always on trying to show that they were doing a job and also subtly emphasize the fact that they were ladies doing this.<sup>39</sup>

The coverage focused on personal stories of individual women, appearing everywhere from newsreels to small town weekly newspapers; nationally-broadcast radio interview programs to a company’s in-house newsletter.

While *LIFE* portrayed the hard work of average WAVES in its 1943 photo essay, the high fashion magazines *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar* focused on the “glamor” jobs WAVES could hold. *Harper’s* first showed a small photograph of WAVES at work in May of 1943 (a machinist’s mate cleaning a plane). In July of that same year, both publications featured the WAVES. *Vogue* put a group of WAVES in marching in parade formation on the cover; the woman at the front is holding a gold trimmed U.S. flag. *Harper’s* ran a full-page photograph by Louise Dahl-Wolfe, showing a WAVE bidding farewell to her former life.

The photograph is both elegant and slightly surreal. The WAVE is attired in dress white uniform, with white gloves and an officer’s hat. Her back is toward the viewer.

The WAVE gestures with her right hand toward an elegant marble curved staircase which has an ornate wrought-iron banister winding up the side closest to the WAVE. At a curve in the staircase, a woman dressed in a Mainbocher gown looks down on the WAVE below. The woman on the staircase appears as if she is inserted into the picture as a double exposure; you can see through her body to the wall and stairs behind her. Though the WAVE's face is in a slight shadow, it's evident they are the same woman: one a part of society's elite (as evidenced by the evening gown she is wearing), the other a part of the Navy's elite (her hat indicates she is a WAVE officer).

The copy on the facing page reinforces this interpretation. It reads, "Good-by, now but not forever. It's a leavetaking, not a final parting from the WAVE for the wraith of her old self on the stairs."<sup>40</sup> The elegantly attired woman on the stairs, and on the ground, are one and the same. Like the poster urging women not to miss their great opportunity, this photograph associates the WAVES with the elite of the fashion world. But it goes one step further. The WAVE in the photograph was *already* a part of this elite world (it's a leavetaking). Her entrance into the WAVES helps to reinforce the organization's class and sophistication.

The photograph was taken by Louise Dahl-Wolfe, who, like Munkácsi, had a contract with *Harper's Bazaar* (the magazine signed her in 1936).<sup>41</sup> Dahl-Wolfe was friendly with and influenced by the Hungarian-born Munkácsi. His photograph of the model running on the Long Island beach ushered in a new "vision of American women, energetic in the early morning sunlight, free and strong, (which) became the wind of a new look in fashion photography, one that Louise Dahl-Wolfe was to catch in her sails."<sup>42</sup>

However, unlike Munkácsi, who was obsessed with motion, Dahl-Wolfe's subjects were poised in the moment *before* they moved. The women appeared still, but "clearly had the potential for movement and might have had trouble staying as still as statues."<sup>43</sup>

In November and December of 1943, months identified by the Navy for intensified publicity, Dahl-Wolfe photo essays appeared first in *Harper's Bazaar* and then in *Vogue*. The series of photographs (three in *Harper's* and three in *Vogue*) was taken at the Naval Air Combat Station in Jacksonville, Florida. The essays are remarkable in the artistic way they portray the women. In one, an aerographer's mate looks to the sky, peering through a piece of forecasting equipment. The woman is in profile, her head tilted back highlighted by the rays of the sun. She is uniform, but only in shirtsleeves, rather than the navy blue jacket. In a second, WAVES and sailors stand side-by-side, leaning over the railing of a lighthouse tower. The photo is a study in contrasting shades of white: the plaster of the building, the puff of the clouds, the linen of the WAVE and sailor uniforms. In another, two WAVES work in an air traffic control tower. Like the first picture, they are in shirt sleeves. One woman works the microphone, calling orders to pilots in flight.

What makes the photographs intriguing isn't so much their subject matter as they way Dahl-Wolfe constructs the scene. In the control tower photograph, she uses the strong architectural lines of the building to draw the viewer's eye to the WAVE speaking into the microphone. The face of the second WAVE is slightly out of focus; her in-focus right foot and pant-clad leg dominate the right front of the photograph. The shadows in the crease of the pant leg echo the steel girders of the control tower walls. In the group photograph of the WAVES and sailors, the black rimmed curve of the lighthouse roof

echoes in both the curve of the balcony's handrail as well as in the black rimmed hats the WAVES wear, topped with the white insert. It first appears as if two of the WAVES in the picture are looking at one of the sailors. But a closer look at the photograph reveals that they are looking *past* the man and at each other. He is less important than the camaraderie and job they share.

But it is the shot of the aerographer's mate that best demonstrates "Dahl-Wolfe knew precisely how to make [a] woman look casual, comfortable, cool, and nonetheless, ineffably chic."<sup>44</sup> The woman in the photo isn't a model, but rather a WAVE on duty. The tilt of her head, her loose hair falling to her collar, is both casual and fashionable at the same time. The woman's skin glows with the light of the sun. Her uniform, lacking the formality of the jacket, appears both supremely comfortable and also classically elegant. The angular lines of the huge machine she peers through accentuate the long, lean lines of her body. She looks up through the machinery, gazing to the heavens. She appears to be a woman supremely in control of her own life.

These were women who were perhaps most directly freeing men to fight. Men skilled shooting from gunnery turrets and piloting planes would be far more useful on the battlefield than in the classroom training others. The Navy recognized this: by 1944, "Captain McAfee found that the number of WAVES on duty that year equaled the number of men it would have taken in peacetime to man ten battleships, ten aircraft carriers, twenty-eight cruisers, and fifty destroyers."<sup>45</sup> Not only were women doing the work, but in many cases were *surpassing* the men doing the same jobs. As the war progressed, being trained by a woman was a status symbol of sorts as it was believed that the better

and more competent pilots and gunners were trained by women.<sup>46</sup> Despite these advances, the Navy was fighting an outside perception that saw military service for women as “unfeminine, regimented routine, and with a questionable social status.”<sup>47</sup>

Bilge Yesil contends that the government’s World War II propaganda imagery presented idealized images of the woman war worker, which, far from empowering, instead marginalized women’s efforts:

Women were shown to be able to work outside the home, yet were bound by it. They could easily take on a man’s job and fulfill traditional male responsibilities with competence, but only until the men returned home.

They were important to the war effort, yet they were secondary.<sup>48</sup>

While this reading may prove true for some advertising and OWI-sponsored propaganda, the Navy’s message was a bit more complicated. Far from positioning women as secondary to men, the Navy’s propaganda mission sought to demonstrate that a WAVE “shares with our men in uniform the responsibility and honor of contributing directly to the Nation’s battle for victory.”<sup>49</sup> The Navy’s message was that the women’s work was not only important for the war effort, but would also *improve* the already-high character and abilities of the women volunteers.

The photographs reflect competence of the WAVES, a competence that is also manifest in the WAVES descriptions of their own jobs. “I was assigned an SNJ . . . I had to take care of the plane,” recalled machinist’s mate Pat Pierpont. Link trainers Dot Forbes, Jean Clark and Janette Shaffer can still describe in minute detail every aspect of their jobs. “It was fascinating,” Forbes said. Gunnery instructor Pat Connelly said, “We



went through the same program that the men did.” Nowhere in the memories is there any indication that the women felt that they were somehow “secondary” to the war effort. In both the photographs and the women’s memories, their work is of utmost importance, absolutely vital to the United States’ success in World War II.

The SPARs, meanwhile, were facing two related challenges: successful recruitment and publicity. Overall, about twelve thousand women enlisted in the Coast Guard during the war (they had the capacity for ten thousand women working in jobs at one time). Dorothy Stratton, the SPARs commander, admitted they “never had very good public relations.”<sup>50</sup> The organization was set up differently than the Navy, which had a well-established publicity department before the war began.<sup>51</sup> Stratton said the Coast Guard emphasized many of the same areas as the Navy (training in unusual jobs and educational opportunities), but they still weren’t getting enough women to enlist. She said they were also fighting the perception that the SPARs were made up of the dregs: women who couldn’t make it in the Navy.<sup>52</sup>

These public relations difficulties meant the SPARs failed to generate the media coverage of the WAVES. *LOOK* magazine was the only mass market publication to feature the SPARs on the cover during the war. The September 5, 1944 photograph is a head and shoulders shot of Eileen Van Dree, a photography specialist from Portland, Oregon. The shot echoes the thematic modes of the recruitment posters, with the colors red, white and blue dominant. Van Dree gazes past the viewer slightly up into the sky. Her expression is calm and resolute.

But like the recruitment posters, the SPAR represented on the *LOOK* cover is far more feminized than the Munkácsi-shot WAVES on the cover of *LIFE*. Her hair is neatly curled and her make-up is flawlessly applied: from the blush of pink on her cheeks to the thick coating of mascara on her eyelashes and the brown shadow on her lids. Her coloring reinforces the patriotic theme (blue eyes, uncannily white pupils, red hair). Her lips are toned deep red with lipstick. By contrast, Munkácsi's WAVES wore no visible make-up, their hair is neat but not professionally-coifed, their image is captured in black and white. The SPAR on the *LOOK* cover, in her studio perfection (shot by U. S. Coast Guard photographer Robert H. Gries), appears to be a sister to the Vargas pin-up in the SPARs recruitment poster. However Van Dree is no pin-up: she is the epitome of the "pretty girl."

The contrast in the photographs could be largely due to timing. The Munkásci photographs were taken at the beginning of the war. The Navy may have approved the more serious images in a move to counter the assumption that women would have an easy or glamorous life in the military. The official Coast Guard photograph was from late-1944, when women had already been in the service for two years. But unlike the WAVE photo essays in *LIFE*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Vogue*, the SPAR is shown not working or on the job. She is posing for a portrait. Unlike the WAVE who bids farewell to the "wraith of her old self," the SPAR is portrayed embracing the trappings of "normal" life: salon-perfect make-up and hair.

The photograph may be evidence of the publicity problem the Coast Guard faced in getting their message across, which as Dorothy Stratton emphasized, was "a very

weak area with us, very weak.”<sup>53</sup> The WAVES, under the competent PR guidance of Louise Wilde, presented a coordinated, consistent message. The SPARs had no such guidance. However, like the recruitment posters, the *LOOK* photograph also displays a distinct contrast in the images of the WAVES and SPARs. This contrast between public “face” of the two branches would become even more pronounced in the feature films released about Navy and Coast Guard women.

### *The Hollywood Way*

Hollywood produced 1,313 feature films during the first three years of the war; 28.5% (374) dealt with an aspect of the war effort.<sup>54</sup> From 1942 to 1945, the films were produced under the guidance of the OWI, with input from the War Department and the Production Code Administration.<sup>55</sup> Wartime films would toe the government line on policy, military security and morals. “The results were an effective combination of information, patriotism, hero-worship, and propaganda.”<sup>56</sup> But at that same time, the propaganda reinforced what people were already thinking and experiencing. As the women recalled, talk about the war was “everywhere.”

Some of the films made no attempt to hide their propagandistic goals. Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* series was initially “designed to indoctrinate members of the Armed Forces concerning the events leading up to American participation in a European and Asian war.”<sup>57</sup> The series was widely used by the U.S. military for both men and women. WAVES and SPARs watched the first installment, *Prelude to War*, during boot camp. The films were also released to civilian theaters, but received a tepid response from the general audience.<sup>58</sup>

More successful, at least with civilian moviegoers, were “Victory films,” “briefies,” and newsreels. These short films (ranging from as short as one minute to as long as twenty minutes) were produced by the studios and the OWI and, in some cases, could be delivered to screens in just four weeks.<sup>59</sup> Everyday women were used in some of these efforts. Former WAVE Ali McLaughlin remembers being part of a film Lockheed created about a new plane it was assembling. More commonly, stars were used to help publicize the messages. For instance, actress Loretta Young promoted “Women at War Week” in November of 1942, giving her message to the women in the audience:

It is a period of enlistment for those who feel they aren't doing enough . . .

Women at War Week reminds us we no longer need sit around and wait.

There is a job for every one of us and it is our duty to find that job,

because every job we do is a pledge that our homes will not be

destroyed . . . Women at War Week is a call to arms of all American

women.<sup>60</sup>

Meanwhile, the Navy consulted with Hollywood luminaries, including producer David O. Selznick (*Gone with the Wind*) and John Ford (*The Searchers*; Ford was also a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy during World War II), to determine how best to use documentary and newsreel footage to publicize the Navy's efforts.<sup>61</sup>

Women within the WAVES were among those working on Navy films. Frances Snow shot hundreds of feet of color footage of the experiences of officers at Northampton. The film included shots of women marching in formation for regimental review, attending classes, and relaxing by window shopping and attending church

services. According to letters from Snow, the edited film was screened at naval stations, but it's not clear if it ever received a theatrical release.<sup>62</sup> Another film, released by the Navy to theaters as an aid in recruitment, showed a day in the life of a WAVE air traffic controller stationed in San Diego.<sup>63</sup>

WAVE Helen Gunter ended up working in the photographic division of the Navy, shooting a wide variety of training films for both men and women. Most of the films she worked on were designed only for internal Navy consumption. But one of her coworkers did create a film about WAVES for a general audience:

I remember a short, cocky Hollywood actor who angled an assignment for a film to recruit WAVES. He told me that subject gave him better promise than a "nuts and bolts film" to become a civilian director after the war, because "a recruitment film would have theatrical distribution." Naturally, he had to include scenes of how WAVES were used, but he ended the film with the glamorous wedding of a beautiful enlisted WAVE, no longer in uniform but in a diaphanous bridal gown from Saks, as she exchanged marriage vows with the officer under whom she had been assigned. The conclusion clinched the stereotype. I thought it was trite, unimaginative, disgusting -- theatrical rather than militarily professional.<sup>64</sup>

McAfee describes a similar film, which was "a little bit cheap in the way that it was going to appeal to these girls. When I saw it, I was simply bewildered and baffled."<sup>65</sup> The film showed young women entered the Navy with the sole purpose of flirting with young men. The film ended up being withdrawn.

Just 43 days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, MGM released the first anti-Japanese movie, *A Yank on the Burma Road*, a low-budget B-movie “hacked out in record time to capitalize on the Japanese invasion threat in the vulnerable southeast Asian nation of Burma.”<sup>66</sup> B-movies first emerged during the Depressions and typically ran on the under card of a double feature. The films were inexpensive and quickly produced, shot often in less than a week. Because of their quick production time, B-movies could quickly respond to the global conflict of World War II:

When Pearl Harbor shook the American people from their complacency, the B-industry went immediately to a war footing and, using some stereotypical themes from other genres, quickly turned out one title after another which touched upon the national emergency. No subject, issue, person or location was omitted. Unlike the major studios, when the B-films went off to war they covered every facet, no matter how implausible, *in toto*. No bizarre or incredulous [stet] storyline was discarded if it remotely resembled anything germane to the global conflict.<sup>67</sup>

One of the films incorporating a WAVES story line was a B-movie, *The Navy Way*.

*The Navy Way* tells the story of a disparate group of male boots sent to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station on the shores of Lake Michigan in Illinois. It was directed by William A. Berke, who was known as “Dollar Bill” Berke for his ability to churn out B-movies quickly and on budget. He made thirty-four films between 1942 and 1945.<sup>68</sup> The film stars Robert Lowery and Robert Armstrong as two naval cadets who vie for the affections of a WAVE, played by Jean Parker. The formulaic film is notable only because

it is the first time the female lead of a motion picture held the occupation of a Navy WAVE (her role is fairly minor; the film's story is really about the men's experiences at boot camp). The film was shot on location at Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

But even though the *story* wasn't about WAVES, the film's publicity campaign focused on aiding in recruitment of Navy *women*. Publicity suggestions for the film included a newspaper article entitled "Wear your hair *The Navy Way*," having a WAVE staff a recruitment booth in the theater lobby during screenings, and an outline for a blind date stunt between Navy men and WAVES. Local theaters owners were told, "Since the picture is an inspiration for every would-be WAVE, your newspaper editor should be approached for special editorials, stories and art."<sup>69</sup>

The film was released in February, 1944, and its publicity efforts (as well as the one-dimensional view of WAVES and their jobs), seem to be caught between the somewhat conflicting publicity directives put out by the OWI and the Navy regarding Navy women during this time period. While the Navy's plans emphasized the work experience, leadership skills and poise women would gain by entering in the WAVES, the OWI emphasized that military women "are not remolded into some other kind of half-male, half-female hybrid. Women have been educated and continually encouraged not only to remain feminine, but to try and become 'more so.'"<sup>70</sup> Hence, the emphasis on "girly" things such as dating or hairstyles in the publicity.

Navy leaders don't mention *The Navy Way* in oral histories; neither do women who served in the military. In a way this isn't surprising. It's highly likely, since this was a B-movie, that it was released and quickly vanished in the glut of similar-quality films

produced during the era. But the WAVES also had little input into the making of the movie. As a result it didn't accurately reflect either women's experiences or the standards of WAVES leadership. Things would be completely different in the making of, and the reception of, the feature film *Here Come the WAVES*.

Every genre of Hollywood film "went to war" during World War II, including the musical comedy. As Allen L. Woll observes, the musical comedy "contributed to the war effort by the depiction of the honest and committed soldier eager to fight and die for his country. Unlike the majority of wartime films, the soldier of the musical comedy was rarely seen overseas or in a combat role."<sup>71</sup> The films focused on soldiers, but women's contributions often received equal emphasis:

In order to achieve victory, the musical comedy girl became a woman who outgrew adolescence and faced the world in a time of harsh reality. The new woman of the wartime musicals was stronger and more self-assured than ever before. She, too, could participate in the war effort as an equal with men.<sup>72</sup>

As a result, not only was this genre of film uniquely positioned to be able to emphasize the contributions of the WAVES, but the publicity focus could also promote the women's roles as articulated by the Navy.

*Here Come the WAVES* was released in late 1944. Unlike *The Navy Way*, this film is *about* the WAVES and not about a group of men who encountered a lone WAVE while at boot camp. The film depicts two of the standard themes of the World War II military musical comedies (the process of conscription, the camp show) and depicts two standard



recruit “types” (the reluctant soldier who initially doesn’t want to serve and the committed soldier, who understands why personal sacrifice is necessary to save American values).<sup>73</sup> But *Here Come the WAVES* slightly subverts the audience’s expectations. Not only are the recruits women, but in this case the two protagonists are identical twins: the serious and dedicated Rosemary (committed soldier) and the ditzy and boy-crazed Susie (reluctant soldier), both played by Betty Hutton.

On its surface the film is a rather convoluted love story. Susie has a mad crush on the faddishly-popular crooner Johnny Cabot (Bing Crosby), who is attracted to Rosemary. Rosemary thinks Cabot, and the hype surrounding him, are ridiculous and feigns interest in Cabot’s best friend Windy (Sonny Tufts). All four are in the Navy and end up working on a show designed to recruit WAVES. Rosemary and Johnny fall in love and, at the end, Susie gives up her crush on Johnny for the true love of Windy. The film was directed by Mark Sandrich, an established musical comedy pro, who had worked on the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers vehicles *Shall We Dance?*, *Top Hat*, and *The Gay Divorcee*.<sup>74</sup>

But the love story ends up taking a back seat to the message that serving in the WAVES is a proud and worthy job for a woman. The sisters, Rosemary and Susie Allison, have a successful nightclub act which they leave behind in order to join the military. Despite Susie’s insistence that “we’re doing more for morale than Dorothy Lamour’s sarong,” Rosemary still longs to do something more for the war effort. “Every time we sing that song I feel like maybe we’re not doing the right thing,” she says as she leafs through a recruitment booklet for the WAVES.<sup>75</sup> According to the film, Rosemary’s

decision to enlist is something that other, admirable, women are doing. A line of women clad in fur coats march proudly into a local recruiting center. A military wife bids her husband farewell in New York's Grand Central Terminal and then enlists herself. A high-powered female advertising executive tosses aside her campaign plans for a "patriotic" chewing gum when she spots a WAVES recruiting billboard outside of her corner office window. The film's cross-section of volunteers are both patriotic and successful, competent, independent women.

Louise Wilde was the highest ranked of a group of eight WAVES who served as technical advisors on the project. Their influence appears to have been substantial. The film shows detailed information about women's experiences in boot camp and in military life. Initially, recruits march at Hunter College in street clothing topped by their white-topped bucket hats (the only off note is that they are wearing their own shoes for comic relief, rather than Navy-issued footwear). Recruit "barracks" in the film are set up in studio apartments; the rooms have three bunk beds and six girls sharing one bathroom. Women in the film say they asked to be sent to the East Coast since they really wanted to go West. When at their base in San Diego, women are bunked four to a cubicle, sharing a barracks with one hundred or so others. Each of these details matches WAVE life as described by Navy veterans.

Studio publicity lauded this attention to detail. "Sandrich paints a true portrait of the Women's Naval Reserve," reads publicity material at the Library of Congress. "The activities of the WAVES, as authentically recorded with full Navy supervision, serves as background for the musical frolic."<sup>76</sup> But the women interviewed also recalled the film

and its portrayal of their military service favorably. More than half of the women talked about the movie during their oral history interviews. I was told by more than one woman the (unverifiable) rumor that the film was based on the experiences of “real life” twin WAVES, who were from Portland, Oregon.

*Here Come the WAVES* both validates and glamorizes the experiences of the women. It is the one major Hollywood film to focus only on the WAVES. It showed the jobs women held (yeoman, flight instructor, storekeeper, air traffic controller). The film not only was shot at Hunter College and the Naval Training Station in San Diego, but average WAVES (such as Dot Forbes) were used in the marching scenes at the beginning and end of the film. “Any” WAVE could have participated, if she were based at Hunter College or San Diego at the time.

As one of those average WAVES, Dot Forbes recalled the experience with a mixture of pride and loathing, While she enjoyed being able to say she was part of the film, “We had to wear our Navy blue uniforms. Serge, wool serge. Marching,” it wasn’t a perfect experience. She continued, “I hated the song that Johnny Mercer wrote [“Here Come the WAVES”]. I thought, ‘I’ll never hear or listen to another one of his songs.’ We had to sing it over and over and over and over and over.” But the inclusion of “real” WAVES was part of the film’s charm, and likely the reason it was mentioned frequently by women interviewed.

Because the film follows the “camp show” war musical mode, the second half of *Here Come the WAVES* centers on putting on the show: rehearsals, trial performances, and the show’s “debut” in New York. Again, this reflects the experience of actual

WAVES. Several women mentioned they participated in war bonds or recruitment song-and-dance shows. Mildred McAfee recalled initially this was problematic, as women were supposed to be only filling roles which had been held by men:

We had quite a little trouble, for instance, over the fact that several of the districts wanted to have women's bands and choruses and things, and many of them did it, but it was frowned upon nationally, because these girls hadn't come in to be showmen, they'd come in to do the work that men would be doing . . . It was a very popular kind of thing, but they were constantly being held in check.<sup>77</sup>

However, the Navy, and the Coast Guard, also realized the enormous public relations benefits such shows could have for the service. One show became so popular that it ended up the basis for a Hollywood film.

During World War II, the Coast Guard looked at how to address its lagging recruitment numbers. It began a touring show which eventually became known as "Tars and SPARs." The show featured both Coast Guard men (tars) and Coast Guard women (SPARs). It toured the East Coast during the summer of 1944,<sup>78</sup> and starred Cesar Romero and Victor Mature.<sup>79</sup> Dorothy Riley was a member of the "Tars and SPARs" northeast revue. She remembers their group was taken off of regular duty so they could tour the region.

The stage show was the basis for the feature film *Tars and SPARs*. The film was released after the war was over (1946), and didn't follow any of the "soldier musical" thematic modes. Though based on a stage show, *Tars and SPARs* used the "camp show"

motif only as a secondary story line (some of the characters rehearse for the show, and it is later featured as part of the grand finale musical number). Instead, it is strictly a straightforward love story, where boy meets girl, boy loses girl (twice) and, finally, boy gets girl. The film follows Coast Guardsman Howie (Alfred Drake), who wants more than anything to serve on a battleship overseas. Howie keeps getting assigned shore duty, however, and misleads Chris (Janet Blair), the SPAR who takes over his job, into thinking he is a combat veteran. Hijinks ensue, and the couple realizes their true love for one another when Howie is actually assigned to a battleship and goes missing in action. He is found, in time for a rousing musical conclusion.

Unlike *Here Come the WAVES*, *Tars and SPARs* makes little mention of the women's work or of any patriotic/professional ambitions for serving. While men's military motivations are clear (they want to fight in war), women's go mostly unmentioned. Penny (Jeff Donnell), the one female character who does talk about why she enlists, became a SPAR so she can follow her junior high school crush across country, from Yonkers to Southern California and later to Hawaii. Penny constantly regales Chris with tales of how she got Chuck (Sid Caesar) to commit; it takes a kiss at the end for him to realize they will marry. When Penny and Chuck do kiss, he says to her, "Let me tell you something else, now that you've got me the condition that I'm in, I want you to know who's going to be the boss . . . I'm not going to stand for you trotting all over the place kissing people, anybody, like fellas."<sup>80</sup> She readily agrees, happy that he's jealous, but also willingly giving up any independence she might have had. Military service in this

picture ideally and inevitably leads to matrimony. There is no sense that that the women's jobs are needed or desired.

This tone is echoed in the promotional materials for the film. Tie-in suggestions to theater owners included hosting a Tar-SPAR wedding ("Make sure it's done in good taste" the copy warns), using "two attractive girls, dressed in short-skirted Spar [stet] uniforms and carrying semaphore flags, to wig-wag signals back and forth across busy streets," and pitching a woman's page story about how to turn the SPAR uniform into street clothes.<sup>81</sup> The Coast Guard's support of the film is mentioned.

To a degree, the film did represent one facet of the women's military reality. Many of the women *did* meet and fall in love with servicemen while in the military: a majority of the women I interviewed married either while serving or soon after getting out. Ruth Gaerig (like the woman in the *Here Come the WAVES* montage) initially joined the service because her fiancé had been drafted. "I'm not going to stay here by myself. I'm going to go into the WAVES," she remembers thinking, adding "That's why I enlisted." They married when he returned, on September 1, 1945; she had to get special permission from her superior officer to wear a gown and veil. But to show the women as entering service *only* with the goal of meeting a man would be misrepresenting their experiences. In their oral history interviews they talk about their romantic lives, but the focus of their stories is how and why they served.

As a result, *Tars and SPARS* seems a bit adrift, especially when in contrast to *Here Come the WAVES*. The 1944 film had a distinct vision of how to represent military women, as molded by Louise Wilde and manifested by Mark Sandrich. Women acted

independent of men; marriage was not their prime goal (and was only mentioned by Bing Crosby's character, not the women). But two years later, director Alfred E. Green had a less focused concept of military women.<sup>82</sup> In 1946's *Tars and SPARs*, it is the women who are obsessed with marriage; men want to serve. Whereas in *Here Come the WAVES*, the final musical number ends with Rosemary and Susie saluting Johnny and Windy aboard their battleship singing "Here Come the WAVES," the finale in *Tars and SPARs* is the song "Love's a Merry-Go-Round" and features the two romantic couples swaying on a swing.

Part of this may be due to the time of the film's release. As Woll notes, postwar musicals "relied on standard formulas of the war years which had little meaning after 1945."<sup>83</sup> Soldier musicals simply weren't relevant anymore, and so filmmakers turned to a more standard romance formula. But part of the problem could also lie in the image problems the SPARs battled during the war years. Stratton admitted the SPARs didn't have the sharp identity focus of the WAVES, as molded by Mildred McAfee and supported by Navy brass. Without that clear sense of military self, the SPARs were more susceptible to outside interference, which portrayed the women as less career-directed, less motivated and less serious than their Navy counterparts.

Of course these images, both photographic and cinematic, are merely *media* representations of the women who served in the Navy and Coast Guard. While they may have powerful resonance today as tangible texts which can be looked at and analyzed, they don't get at the complexity of the women's experiences. For that, one must turn to the women's words.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Florence H. Snow, *Alumnae House Diary*, 26 August 1942, Sophia Smith Collection, 12.WS Box 1 16G2 180, Smith College Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Mame Warren, "Focal Point of the Fleet, U.S. Navy Photographic Activities in World War II," *The Journal of Military History* 69 (October 2005), 1049.

<sup>3</sup> Warren, "Focal Point," 1073.

<sup>4</sup> Copyright issues limit reproduction of photographs from the photo-essay.

<sup>5</sup> "WAVE Uniform," *LIFE*, 21 September 1942, 49.

<sup>6</sup> "WAVE Uniform," *Vogue*, 1 October 1942, n.p.

<sup>7</sup> "All American Women 1942 vs. 1941," *LOOK*, December 15, 1942, 14.

<sup>8</sup> The archives at Smith College offer an especially rich collection of newspaper clippings due to Snow's efforts, but archives at Radcliffe and Barnard Colleges as well as Virginia Gildersleeve's files at Columbia University also hold numerous clippings culled publications found around the country.

<sup>9</sup> Association of National Advertisers, *Magazine Circulation and Rate Trends 1940-1957* (New York: Association of National Advertisers, 1958).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Hagan, "Review/Photography: Showing Women in a New Way Freely," *New York Times*, February 12, 1993, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F0CE7D8173EF931A25751C0A965958260>,

<sup>11</sup> Susan Stamberg, "Interview with Henri Cartier-Bresson," *Morning Edition*, National Public Radio, 3 July 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Nola Tully, "Martin Munkasci: Think While You Shoot," *New Criterion*, April 2007, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Hagan, "Showing Women in a New Way Freely."

<sup>14</sup> "WAACs and WAVES," *LIFE*, 15 March 1943, 72.

<sup>15</sup> "WAACs and WAVES," *LIFE*, 15 March 1943, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Copyright issues limit reproduction of photographs from the photo-essay.

<sup>17</sup> *LIFE* notes in its "Contents": "All photos and text concerning the Armed Forces have been reviewed and passed by a competent military or naval authority," *LIFE*, 15 March 1943, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Mildred McAfee Horton and Helen K. Sargeant, "Reminiscences of Mildred McAfee Horton: Oral History" (Cambridge, MA: Schlessinger Library on the History of Women in America, 1982), 115.

<sup>19</sup> Bilge Yesil, "'Who Said this is a Man's War?': Propaganda, Advertising Discourse and the Representation of the Woman War Worker During the Second World War," *Media History* 10-2 (2004), 113.

<sup>20</sup> *Navy Service: A Short History of the United States Naval Training School (WR) Bronx, NY*, compiled by the Public Relations Office, USNTS (WR), Elizabeth Reynard Papers, Box 2 5V, Schlessinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 24.



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- <sup>21</sup> *Information Program for the Women's Reserve of the US Navy*, Office of War Information/Bureau of Naval Personnel, October 1943, Jane Barton Papers MC542 Box 3, Folder 3.1 [Loose items from #7F +B10-7F+B12], Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.
- <sup>22</sup> *Information Program*, n.p. (preface).
- <sup>23</sup> *Information Program*, 1.
- <sup>24</sup> *Information Program*, 2.
- <sup>25</sup> *Information Program*, 1.
- <sup>26</sup> *Information Program*, 2.
- <sup>27</sup> *Information Program*, 2.
- <sup>28</sup> *Information Program*, 5.
- <sup>29</sup> *Information Program*, 11.
- <sup>30</sup> *Information Program*, 2.
- <sup>31</sup> *Information Program*, 2.
- <sup>32</sup> *Information Program*, 10.
- <sup>33</sup> *Information Program*, 6.
- <sup>34</sup> Francis Thorpe, Memoir, Frances Thorpe Collection AFC/2001/001/37683-27, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.
- <sup>35</sup> See: Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, (1996). "Securing the 'Double V': African-American and Japanese-American Women in the Military During World War II," in *A Woman's War Too: U.S. Women in the Military in World War II*, ed. Pauline N. Poulos & United States. National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1996), 327-354.
- <sup>36</sup> Louise Wilde, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers who served in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard in World War II, including WAVES Director Mildred McAfee, Joy B. Hancock, Jean Palmer, Dorothy Stratton, Elizabeth Crandall, Etta Belle Kitchen, Frances Rich, Eleanor Rigby, Louise Wilde, Tova Wiley and Senator Margaret C. Smith*, eds. John Mason and Etta Belle Kitchen (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1979), 21.
- <sup>37</sup> Horton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 73.
- <sup>38</sup> Wilde, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 30.
- <sup>39</sup> Wilde, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 31.
- <sup>40</sup> "Goodby Now but Not Forever," *Harper's Bazaar*, May 1943, n.p.
- <sup>41</sup> Vicki Goldberg, "Louise Dahl-Wolfe," in *Louise Dahl-Wolfe*, eds. Dorothy Twining Globus et al (New York: Abrams/Umbrage Editions, 2000), 19.
- <sup>42</sup> Nan Richardson, "Louise Dahl Wolfe," in *Louise Dahl-Wolfe*, 28.
- <sup>43</sup> Goldberg, "Louise Dahl-Wolfe," 21.
- <sup>44</sup> Goldberg, "Louise Dahl-Wolfe," 21.
- <sup>45</sup> Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 90.

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- <sup>46</sup> Horton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 84.
- <sup>47</sup> *Information Guide*, 1.
- <sup>48</sup> Bilge Yesil, "'Who Said this is a Man's War?'" 113.
- <sup>49</sup> *Information Guide*, 5.
- <sup>50</sup> Dorothy Stratton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 65.
- <sup>51</sup> For details see: Hancock, *More Than a Uniform*; Warren, "Focal Point."
- <sup>52</sup> Stratton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 31.
- <sup>53</sup> Stratton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 65.
- <sup>54</sup> David E. Meerse, "To Reassure A Nation: Hollywood Presents World War II," *Film and History* 6 (1976), 82.
- <sup>55</sup> Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 43.
- <sup>56</sup> Robert Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II* (Metuchen, NJ & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994), 10.
- <sup>57</sup> Kathleen M. German, "Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* Series and the American Audience," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (Spring 1990), 237.
- <sup>58</sup> Doherty, *Projections of War*, 79.
- <sup>59</sup> Doherty, *Projections of War*, 81.
- <sup>60</sup> "Women at War Week," perf. Loretta Young, in *Universal Newsreels 1940s Disk One*, Von Walthour Productions, 2007.
- <sup>61</sup> Warren, "Focal Point of the Fleet," 1070-1072.
- <sup>62</sup> Sophia Smith Collection, Film: WAVES of Smith College folder 1943, 12.WS Box 1 16G2 180, Smith College Archives.
- <sup>63</sup> "Ann Peyton," U.S. Navy, n.d. in *Navy WAVES and Coast Guard SPARs*, Traditions Military Video, 2007
- <sup>64</sup> Helen Clifford Gunter, *Navy WAVE: Memories of World War II* (Fort Bragg, CA: Cyprus House Press, 1992), 121.
- <sup>65</sup> Horton and Sargeant, *Reminiscences of Mildred McAfee Horton*, 64.
- <sup>66</sup> Robert Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II* (Metuchen, NJ & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994), 131.
- <sup>67</sup> Fyne, *The Hollywood Propaganda of World War II*, 131.
- <sup>68</sup> "William A. Berke," *Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0075318/> (accessed February 2, 2008).
- <sup>69</sup> *The Navy Way*, Publicity Files, Motion Picture and Television Reading Room, Library of Congress.
- <sup>70</sup> Office of War Information, *Women in the WAR: For the Final Push to Victory*, (Washington, DC: Office of War Information, 1944), 4.

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<sup>71</sup> Allen L. Woll, *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1983), 84.

<sup>72</sup> Woll, *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War*, 94.

<sup>73</sup> For a discussion of themes and character types in the Hollywood war musical see Woll, *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War*, 84-85.

<sup>74</sup> "Mark Sandrich," Internet Movie Database, <http://imdb.com/name/nm0762263/> (accessed February 2, 2008).

<sup>75</sup> Ken Englund et al, *Here Come the WAVES*, Paramount Pictures (1944).

<sup>76</sup> *Here Come the WAVES*, Paramount Studio Publicity, LP13062, Motion Picture and Television Reading Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>77</sup> Horton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 93.

<sup>78</sup> Thomson, "SPARs: the Coast Guard & the Women's Reserve in World War II."

<sup>79</sup> Dorothy Riley (Dempsey) was one of the performers in the stage show, but did not travel to Hollywood to be in the feature film.

<sup>80</sup> Decla Dunning et al, *Tars and SPARs*, Columbia Pictures Corporation (1946).

<sup>81</sup> From Library of Congress LP34

<sup>82</sup> Green would later go on to direct *The Jackie Robinson Story*. See: "Alfred E. Green," Internet Movie Database, <http://imdb.com/name/nm0337595/> (accessed February 2, 2008).

<sup>83</sup> Woll, *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War*, 162.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IDENTITY AND MILITARY SERVICE

*I think the WAVES, and the women generally, but my WAVES are my expertise, are kind of the hinges of history . . . They were there when the world changed. And they didn't cause it particularly but it wouldn't have happened in the same way if the women hadn't have been there.*

- Josette Dermody Wingo, World War II WAVE

The Navy's first group of women entered training on August 28, 1942 at Smith College. The 120 women were given just one month to become fully versed in "the Navy way" before going on to train and supervise other Navy women. By October, 1942, training facilities for both officers and enlisted women were operating full swing. Initially, the Navy established contract schools to give intensive instruction in yeoman (secretarial), storekeeping (accounting/bookkeeping) and radio work. Each was at a college campus. Oklahoma A&M College in Stillwater was selected as the training base for yeomen, Indiana University in Bloomington for storekeepers and University of Wisconsin Madison for radiomen. By December, the Navy added a first boot camp for women at the Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls. On each campus, the Navy recruits shared space with current college students.<sup>1</sup>

But Iowa State would only be a temporary fix. The Navy wanted to use the campus as a second site for the large number of female yeomen needing Navy training. In addition, new fields were opening up to women in the Navy beyond the initial three job classifications; as a result, the Navy increased its female war personnel need estimates from ten thousand women to seventy-five thousand.<sup>2</sup> As the need for personnel increased, the Navy searched for another location for boot camp: a college campus they could take over for the duration of the war which also had the capacity to feed, house and train approximately six thousand WAVE “boots” (trainees) at any given time. Hunter College in the Bronx, New York, seemed an ideal solution. Hunter College accepted its first class of enlisted recruits on February 16, 1943.<sup>3</sup> Initially, Coast Guard SPARs were trained with the WAVES, but by mid-1943, the SPARs had their own enlisted boot camp at the Biltmore Hotel in Palm Beach, Florida.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter will continue to answer the second research question, investigating how women who served remember their time in boot camp, speciality training, and military assignments. It will demonstrate how selected *individual* women encountered the publicity machinations underway by the Navy and Coast Guard. The interview pool includes women from the first enlisted women’s class, those who attended officer training, and one who was in what would be the final boot camp class, which was in session as the war ended. As a result, there is a perspective from all periods in the war. The chapter will outline their experiences through military life before moving onto demobilization and the women’s emotions as their military experiences were drawing to an end.

*From Recruits to Boots*

For a woman, enlisting in the WAVES or SPARs wasn't as simple as requesting an application form and then signing up.<sup>5</sup> Women first had to fill out a single page request form, to be sent to the Office of Naval Officer Procurement in order to receive an application. It included questions about the woman's marital status, education, and if she had previously "communicated in writing with the Navy concerning the WAVES or SPARs."<sup>6</sup> Only inquiries deemed acceptable would be sent an application form; it requested detailed information about the woman's work experience, criminal record, hobbies and community involvement. Women also had to successfully complete an aptitude test similar to the present-day SAT, checking for mathematical, grammatical and copy editing skills.<sup>7</sup> Both officer and enlisted candidates were required to have three letters of recommendation to include with their applications.<sup>8</sup> If the applicant met the qualifications and had proper recommendations, she would then be invited for an interview, the final process to weed out unacceptable candidates. Potential candidates would be assessed for both mental fitness as well as their physical ability to do the job. Those who didn't make the cut would be sent home.

Once accepted, a woman would wait for official orders to report to duty. Women say the waiting period lasted anywhere from a couple of weeks to a few months. Many women interviewed continued working until they received orders to appear at boot camp. One woman volunteered at the local recruiting office, signing up other military volunteers while awaiting her orders. Another asked the recruiter if she would be able to complete

her school year as a teacher when she signed up in December of 1942. She got her notice to report for duty in February of 1943.

*We sat [at the train station] and wondered, "What are we supposed to do?" We looked around the station. "There's nobody here. What are we supposed to do?" We went to the station master there, we showed him our orders and he said, "Just get over there on track five and get on the troop train." "The troop train?" we thought, "Good grief! What's that?"*

- Jean Clark, World War II WAVE

*We got on the train in Omaha, went down to St. Louis. And then we had to get on a train to come across the country, picking up boots along the way. And then we went -- I remember looking out at night at Columbus, Ohio, because I asked the porter where it was. It was so lit up and I had never seen a city lit up like that, especially at night.*

- Jane Ashcraft (Fisher), World War II SPAR

*We met a whole group of people in Los Angeles. Union Station was where we met. There must have been about 80 people, women. Women dressed differently then, so everybody came dressed up ready like they were going to a tea party, not for the train. Well, you traveled on trains in those times too, you dressed up. So we really weren't dressed that comfortably for a*

*long trip. I think I had on a skirt and sweater, but I still wore my heels.*

*And the train took about four days to get to New York.*

- Margaret Anderson (Thorngate), World War II WAVE

*We were all in the same age group, a lot of them from Portland and different areas. We all came in and met the train. There was a recruiter that took us to the train depot. We rode from there to Palm Beach. When you got to Chicago. I don't know, back then -- you've probably never ridden in a train -- the trains back then are not what they were today either. The seats turned around and everybody smoked, whew, it was bad. But anyhow, we did have a Pullman berth . . . We were just young green kids who had never done anything . . . It almost took us 10 days from Portland to get to Palm Beach for -- well, you see, troop trains and such had priority. So if you had a troop train coming through, the train you were on just pulled off on the siding so the troop trains could go through, or whatever they were hauling that was essential. They were allowed to go through.*

- Barbara Stroda (Wright), World War II WAVE

*We went across the country on a train. And I kept a diary of that. And one of the things I wrote in my diary, was that it was my job to wake people up in the morning. And they taught me to say, "Hit the deck" instead of "Get up." That was my first real Navy phrase. When we got to Hunter, though,*



*we learned a lot more Navy phrases. Some of them were helpful and some of them weren't.*

- Virginia Gillmore, World War II WAVE

*I forget how many there were of us, but we left on the train together [from Salem, Oregon]. Went to New York to the Bronx, to Hunter College. And we were supposed to be stationed as a unit, but as soon as we got into the auditorium where they sent you to different places, everybody was sent to different -- we weren't together ever.*

- Dotty Anderson (McDowell), World War II WAVE

*We had been spoiled on the train. We hadn't done anything for five days. Then we got on the train and got off. We lined up again with our suitcases. They took us to feed us, because we hadn't eaten. We did a lot of waiting along the line. It must have been ten or so when they finally got food to us. Then we went and got our quarters. Apartment buildings in New York. Of course, we were on the fifth floor and had to lug our suitcases up to the fifth floor. Then we had to have a shower. See, we had been on the train five days, so we all had to. I don't know how we managed it. Who went first. But we all did and got to bed probably two, three o'clock and we got up at five-thirty. The Navy had no respect!*

- Merrily Kurtz (Hewitt), World War II WAVE

The new recruits travelled to boot camp for the most part via train. Women report being on an official "troop train" (military-only transport) or being given a voucher to

travel aboard a commercial carrier. They generally travelled with a group of other women. Only one woman recalls traveling separate from fellow recruits aboard a commercial train -- she lived in an isolated rural area and had gotten her orders after the scheduled train had already departed. She was forced to travel to boot camp alone.

The recruits were often the subject of media attention before they even left their home towns. Most frequently, this attention came in the form of short newspaper articles similar to wedding or engagement announcements, with a photograph and one or two paragraphs of copy stating the woman had joined the service. Many of the women saved copies of these stories. Sometimes, as in the clipping my mother's family saved, there was no story, but simply a photograph of the woman being sworn into the Navy or Coast Guard with a one or two line caption of explanation underneath.

But the newspapers also offered more elaborate coverage of enlistments. Dot Forbes saved an article about her family's volunteerism: she signed up for the WAVES, her brother enlisted in the Army and her father (a former member of the National Guard) volunteered for the Red Cross within a few weeks of each other. Both her father and brother ended up serving overseas. Other women saved clippings that told of a number of women enlisting at they same time they did. The February 23, 1944 issue of the *Oregonian* featured a full page spread of pictures of female recruits. It proclaimed in large type "OREGON WAVES HELP WIN THE WAR"; part of the copy included instructions for how a young woman could enlist.<sup>9</sup>

An even more elaborate example of recruitment publicity efforts came from July and August of 1944. Dorothy Anderson saved numerous articles about a special Salem,

Oregon, WAVE platoon. She became a member of the group, which included 24 other Salem-area women and seven from Portland. According to a full page spread in *The Oregon Statesman*, “The first all-Oregon WAVES platoon . . . through special permission . . . will remain together throughout indoctrination training with their own recruit petty officers.”<sup>10</sup> Each woman was shown wearing her WAVE uniform. The article painted a glowing picture of the recruits:

It does seem that enlistment in this fine organization is a rare privilege and opportunity for young women. WAVES whom I have seen appear to be most enthusiastic over their work. They praise the treatment they receive in the Navy and feel the thrill of taking part in a great enterprise and of really doing their turn for their country.<sup>11</sup>

In Anderson’s picture, she is beaming in her navy blue uniform, looking slightly past the camera. Other women wear dress white uniforms, an interesting choice since many of the women report not purchasing dress uniforms with their clothing allowance. Anderson doesn’t remember how she got the uniform she wore, but being fitted for a uniform was part of the WAVE experience at boot camp. It’s entirely possible the women were wearing clothes that weren’t their own for these “official” portraits.

The publicity push for the Salem platoon didn’t fall into one of the “key” months identified by the Navy in its media publicity guide as key for recruitment; the women left for boot camp on August twentieth, 1944 (the Navy listed April, July and November as 1944’s target dates).<sup>12</sup> But nonetheless, the “all-Oregon” unit offers a remarkable way for the Navy to have a continuous stream of stories placed in a variety of Oregon

newspapers, from the establishment of the “all-Oregon” unit to individual enlistments to the unit’s departure by train in late August.

Despite the publicity surrounding the Salem platoon, the women’s military experience didn’t play out exactly as portrayed in *The Statesman Record*. Anderson recalls traveling to boot camp together as a group on the troop train. But once the women arrived in New York they were split into new divisions. The “all-Oregon” unit was simply a publicity ploy. Anderson doesn’t recall seeing any of the Oregon women ever again.

*They took me to Hunter to boot camp. And then when I got there it was all, orders this and orders that. And I remember distinctly thinking to myself, “How did I get into this mess?” . . . [laughs] I was such a spoiled brat. “Gosh, you’re telling me what to do all the time?”*

- Ali McLaughlin (McConnell), World War II WAVE

*You really had nothing personal in your life anymore. Every two girls had a chest of drawers. And the bottom, they were staggered. So when the inspection party would come in to look over and see if everything was just the it should be. We were even told how to fold our slips and things like that, you know? And I still do it today. [laughs] Everything is in three. You know, you fold a towel in three? We fold our slips in three, our underwear in three, and pajamas, everything.*

- Dorothy Riley (Dempsey), World War II SPAR

*I stood inspection one time, because, see, they would come down the corridors and you could hear them coming. You were at attention and you couldn't say anything or do anything. One time I remember very clearly I was standing alone in my bunk room and I could hear them coming. The other girl had, I don't know, an appointment or something. I had to stand all by myself. All of a sudden, I saw a speck of dust. I would have eaten it, really. And I'm serious, because I didn't know what they would do. I lifted up the basket and put it underneath and stood at attention.*

- Lois Jeannie McCabe (Linder), World War II WAVE

*We marched down the hill to Hunter College to our classes. We marched to our chow line, when we had chow. One thing, now this was in February or March when we were there. And I can remember this one morning -- now, if you've ever seen the rain gear that we wore. They called them havelocks. I would say that marching along in the dark, you know in the wee hours of the morning to go to breakfast. Clump clump clump. We probably looked like we were nuns from the nunnery or something. You know, dark clothes, marching along. And I looked over at the - there was the el train you know, high. You could see the lights of it. And I thought to myself, "What on earth did I sign up for? What did I think I was doing? Marching along at this ungodly hour to get breakfast?"*

- Eileen Horner (Blakely), World War II WAVE

*I remember clearly it was a Sunday morning and the building I was in at Hunter College the phones were right there. There was a whole bank of phones where you could call. I guess it was my mother who answered the phone, or my father, I forget who, but I know that they answered the phone and I broke out crying. [laughs]. They're saying, "What's the matter? What's the matter?" And I said, "I'm homesick." I never thought I would get that way, but I did. Even now, it brings tears to my eyes. I remember feeling so lost at that point because you are with complete strangers.*

- Dot Forbes (Enes), World War II WAVE

Attending boot camp, at least initially, left many of the women with an intense sense of disorientation. Dot Forbes explains it most directly, "I remember feeling so lost at that point because you are with complete strangers." Others spoke of questioning their decision to serve or of the strangeness of setting up rooms with a large group of women they didn't know. Any comfort level the women had reached on the train trip across country, traveling with women of a similar geographic background, would quickly be erased.

For some of the women, this was the first time they had lived away from home. But Forbes, who broke into tears when she called home, was one who had spent time away from her family before, living for several months with another family in the Midwest. Others had attended college, or had moved away from their families to a larger city to find work after graduating from high school. Yet they, too, expressed this feeling of disorientation when first attending boot camp.

Part of this could be the nature of military indoctrination itself. The training centers for the WAVES, set up around the country and then at Hunter College, had specific rules for the new recruits. Women report not be allowed to leave camp until a short day-long leave the final weekend, or not being able to have visits from family or friends except at certain predetermined times. The initial training may have been on college campuses, but the atmosphere was far from collegiate. Anna Fogelman described boot camp as “hard work, not glamorized.” The women were immediately and fully absorbed into the Navy life.

Despite the personal hardships, the Hunter College training station was considered a success. Much of the credit goes to Elizabeth Reynard. After working in Washington to help establish the WAVES, Reynard returned to New York and, according to Mildred McAfee, built up the Hunter College training program. “The whole service was very much indebted to her because she really did a stunning job on this New York recruit school, which became very famous,” McAfee recalled.<sup>13</sup> Reynard realized the importance of visual aids in the indoctrination of women, and coordinated with Joy Bright Hancock to get real life examples of things the women might be working with into the classrooms, including “a Link trainer, various airplane models, aircraft engine models, a tail gun, aerological instruments, parachute packing table and parachutes, a voice recorder and instruments to test voices for control tower aptitude, airplane dashboard equipment, and many other devices.”<sup>14</sup> She also established a Navy museum on the grounds of Hunter College.<sup>15</sup>

From that first boot camp in February of 1943 through the end of the war in August of 1945, 80,836 WAVES were trained at Hunter College. An additional 1,844 SPARs and 3,190 Women Marines also received training there at some point.<sup>16</sup> The primary objective of the school, according to Joy Bright Hancock, was threefold:

1. Adequate medical examinations determined fitness for service. 2.

Uniforming, drill, and personnel information requisite to the conduct of a recruit as a useful member of a military organization. 3. The selection of recruits best fitted to fill the special quotas for service training.<sup>17</sup>

Boot camp lasted six weeks, and every two weeks another group of two thousand women would enter Hunter College for training.

The initial SPARs trained at Hunter College alongside the WAVES. But the Coast Guard wanted their women to have a unique training center, possibly to help alleviate the confusion of two groups with same uniform training side by side (the women Marines also got their own boot camp away from Hunter College). In May of 1943 their training facility was relocated to the Biltmore Hotel in Palm Beach, and so the SPARs lost the association with college life of the WAVES. Coast Guard recruiters played up the “pink palace” (as it became known) in its recruiting efforts. “The slogan ‘Train under the Florida sun’ was added to the recruiters' propaganda arsenal and during the next eighteen months, more than seven thousand SPARs received their basic training at Palm Beach.”<sup>18</sup> In December, 1944, the Coast Guard would relocate the SPARs training facility again, this time moving to Manhattan Beach, New York, normally a permanent Coast Guard training station for men.<sup>19</sup>



The SPARs' choice of training facilities reflects the identity expressed through the recruitment posters. While the WAVES were elite "college girls," the SPARs were the sexy, down-to-earth girl next door. Their training was at a hotel resort, or alongside men at regular Coast Guard facilities.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, while the WAVE recruits talk about the disorientation they felt in the transition from civilian to military life, the SPARs interviewed express none of this confusion. It's possible that the WAVES, by being so closely linked to college campuses, led the women to expect a collegiate experience while serving. Their discomfort would last while they adjusted to the structure of military life. The SPARs, training away from colleges, gave women no such expectations.

*The first thing they did down in Florida was put us in boot camp. We had to jump through the tires, you know. Then the next thing we had to do was we had to scale a wall. We couldn't do it. I said to the girl in back of me, "Quinn, push, because I'll never get over that wall" . . . There was a big rope and it had a knot on it. And there was a pit with mud here. We had to back up and jump and my friend Quinn who was with me, I said, "Quinn, I'm never going to make that pit." And she said, "Neither am I." So we sneaked over to another line. We never had to go over it. We didn't get caught. I said, "If we're caught, we're out. They'll get rid of us."*

- Dorothy Riley (Dempsey), World War II SPAR

*They had an honor system, which I wasn't very good at [ah-hem], to go swimming. They had what they called sea and surf, which was somebody's private swimming pool which they gave to the Coast Guard to use for*

*training. And if you could jump in from the deep end and swim the length of the pool, you were considered advanced. And I could do that. I can't anymore, but I could then. They went everything by that, so they'd say in the mornings you check everything that's going on. And they'd say, "The intermediates will swim, advanced will be on the obstacle course and the beginner swimmers will play games." I don't like games. I didn't like the obstacle course either. So I swam every time. I could hang onto the side of the pool and kick my feet with the beginners. No problem [laughs]. So I wasn't very good with the honor system.*

- Vickie Burdick (Leach), World War II SPAR

*I didn't do anything very important. About boot camp, the toughest thing about boot camp was that we were given our shots, that time of year, New York is very hot in the summertime. And some of the typhoid shots your arm swells up. Your arm swells up after the typhoid shots. And you can get, you know, have a slight fever or something. And marching, some of the gals fainted along the side while marching. And I remember the officers saying, "Pay no attention, keep right along. Leave her there. Leave her there." And I thought that was awful cruel. That was my very, one of my first impressions there at boot camp.*

- Patricia Farrington (Siegener), World War II WAVE

*They kept us boots busy all day long. Besides class work and getting out on the field marching and drilling and that sort of stuff. The exercise,*

*calisthenics. And then marching from the apartment house, muster out in the middle of the street and then march in formation to the college where the dining room was, meals three times a day. And that evening, the first evening we ate there, they served liver and onions. I thought, my god, I can't survive in this Navy! [laughs]*

- Dot Bougie (Soules), World War II WAVE

*When I was at boot camp it was Easter Sunday and that was our first Sunday to be able to go off base. As that time our uniforms, the hats were rolled brims and the crown was white for your formal uniform, and navy blue for your work uniform. While we were there we went to St. Patrick's Cathedral. We marched from Hunter College from the subway . . . So there's this whole section of . . . St. Patrick's Cathedral of white hats . . . I could see those white hats all the way down.*

- Dorothy Sudomir (Budacki), World War II WAVE

Not only did the expectations for boot camp differ for WAVES and SPARS; the way they remember their experiences differs as well. Women who served as WAVES noted meaningful moments, such as Dorothy Sudomir's recollection of the row upon row of white-hatted WAVES at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral on Easter Sunday. She thought by allowing the women to sit together in a large group, St. Patrick's was giving a tribute to the WAVES. Men "didn't want women in the service," she observes. But the Catholic Church was supporting and in essence "vetting" the quality of the women and their contribution to the Navy.

A number a WAVES told a similar story to that of Patricia Farrington, being shocked that they were forced to ignore a colleague who had fainted while marching or while standing in an official review. One woman told about a regimental review where numerous girls were fainting; their instructions were that the girl behind should catch the person as she fell down, lie her on the ground and then stand back at attention. Another woman recalled an event which was unusual because no one fainted. One woman explained that she saw this as a way of building group unity and of teaching women to listen to orders and not think for themselves. But the fact that so many women remember this part of boot camp unfavorably (as something which went against their instincts) indicates that the Navy wasn't entirely successful in this ploy.

SPAR boot camp memories, by contrast, tended to be lighthearted. It was only SPARs who talked about cheating during exercises, by either leaving a difficult task or avoiding it altogether. Another SPAR discussed a night when a German sub was spotted off the coast of Florida. The boots all trooped out into the hallway in the middle of the night in full uniform, and were forced to wait there for hours until the danger had cleared. Most of the women ended up sprawled in the hallway, falling asleep on floor. When the lights came back on, "it was the funniest thing you could ever see," recalled Roberta Moore. "It was like a bunch of drunks or something."

This isn't to say the WAVES didn't find some of their boot camp experiences humorous. Janette Shaffer remembered marching in a gymnasium, when their drill leader got distracted and didn't give them any directional commands, such as to turn or to halt. The women by this point had been so ingrained with military rule, that they didn't stop

marching. As they approached the end of the gym, they began climbing up the gymnastic equipment at that side of the building. “If they had it in a movie, I’d love to see Lucille Ball or somebody doing it,” she recalled, laughing. “It was really funny.” A similar story is told of the first class at Northampton in the WAVE officer oral histories.<sup>21</sup> But unlike the SPARs interviewed, the WAVES also recalled the serious in their learning experience.

### *On the Job Training*

Boot camp lasted six weeks. Afterward, most women were assigned to speciality training school, depending upon their abilities. Initially, women were only allowed to serve as yeomen, storekeepers, and radio communications officers.<sup>22</sup> By late-1943, that list had expanded to 246 different job categories, including Link trainer instructor (training pilots in instrument flying), Aerographer’s Mate (weather forecasting), and carrier pigeon raising (a single class of recruits who learned how to breed and train carrier pigeons). Speciality training lasted from four weeks (Hospital Corps) to fourteen months (Japanese language), with the bulk of schools offering around three months of extra training.<sup>23</sup> A handful of women received no speciality training, but rather went directly to an assignment.

*I knew what it was going to be, because they weren't going to put me anywhere else, period. Because they told me when I enlisted, you get to choose, to a certain extent, where you might want to go or where you might want to be placed. Well, that sounded pretty good. I didn't know that was a little bit of a, you know, exaggeration. I said, "I know where I*

*want to go, I know what I want to do. I want to work in a hospital.*

*Period. I'm joining to go in the hospital period. I'm not going in to be a secretary. I'm not going to work office machines."*

- Virginia Benvenuto (Matich), World War II WAVE

*When we were at Hunter College, we had to take tests. They took us around, and showed us all these different things that we could be put in for. I fell in love with control tower operator or Link trainer instructor, which was like a small plane on a pedestal. When the pilot is in there, it's just like being in the cockpit and doing night flying stuff. They had patterns they had to fly and stuff like that. I thought it was fantastic. I thought it was the most interesting thing I had seen. They try to, they have interviews and they try to not get your hopes up. They said, "Well, you've never done any teaching." . . . When she came in to give us our assignments, as she came into the room she looked at me. And she walked away, and she said, "Now, when I tell you what your assignment is, I don't want to hear a peep out of you. There will be no screaming and yelling." Afterwards, I realize she was talking to me, because she realized how much I wanted this job. [laughs]*

- Dot Forbes (Enes), World War II WAVE

*When I look back what intrigued me was the tests, the battery of tests that they gave us. I had a very nice gal who finally interviewed me. She made me feel good. Of course, she said with my bad eyesight I wasn't eligible for*

*control tower. The next billet that was was Link trainer and they didn't have any openings. So she put me in gunnery, aerial gunnery.*

- name withheld, World War II WAVE

*We had all these lectures and interviews and I put [gunnery mate] down first. The second was, I thought I'd like to be a parachute rigger, but they talked me out of that. Link trainer, I think, was the second one. And they said, "OK, now we have a chance. We have one chance. You've got two," we had three choices. So they put me down for storekeeper. And I thought, "That's what I'm going to get." I don't know, I must have, in the testing, I must have shown I had an ability to teach. I hadn't had any college. When we, I think there were -- how many of us on our base -- we were not too many. We weren't a big group. We were a very elite group.*

- Pat Connelly, World War II WAVE

*I wanted to be in something top secret. I think I ended up in yeoman school because that was what was available. They asked if I wanted to do something in the physics line because I tested good for that but I said, no, I wasn't interested in physics. I didn't even know what it was at the time, but I guess the mathematical part of it or I might have been in something different. But by the time I went in a lot of the odd, good jobs that you hear other people talk about like communications and coding and so forth were already taken. So they were just filling up these offices.*

Margaret Anderson (Thorngate), World War II WAVE

*They had something called -- I can't think of the word right now -- com -- complements to be filled. And they would let the people at Hunter know what was needed and then the people at Hunter would just assign us. And sometimes they would listen to a request but mostly they would just fill out the complements for Florida or California or wherever people, we were needed. We weren't really given choices.*

- Virginia Gillmore, World War II WAVE

*I got orders to go to Newport and start a beauty shop. And I was just crushed. But nobody knew it. I mean, I came here, I got on that train. I didn't know where I was going, didn't know what I was going to do and all that. So I thought, "If they tell me that's what I'm going to do, I'm going to do it." So when they changed my orders, I said, "That's alright." And I made out like a bandit.*

- Dorothy Sudomir (Budacki), World War II WAVE

While the official word was that all Navy and Coast Guard jobs were of equal importance, among the women a sort of pecking order arose. "Glamorous" jobs were those which allowed the women to perform jobs outside of the norm for women: radio operators, control tower operations, coding and decoding of messages, gunnery mates. Those were generally located at Naval Air Stations. "Non-glamorous" jobs were those which one could do in non-military life, such as the clerical work done by storekeepers or yeomen. Hospital work and parachute rigging were jobs that were considered glamorous or desirable by some and undesirable by others. Parachute rigging was rejected by some



women because of an incorrect rumor that they would have to jump out of planes and test their chutes.

Many women told me they didn't want one of the "glamor" jobs. They were happy to work as yeomen and storekeepers, content in their knowledge that they were "freeing a man to fight." Others explained their yeomen or storekeepers assignments by saying the Navy was just filling complements. In other words, it didn't matter how the women tested or what their desires were: they were assigned to a certain position because that's what the Navy needed at that time.

WAVES and SPAR officers to a degree were aware of this divide. Mildred McAfee discussed at length in her oral histories how much of the work the women did was seen as meaningless, and how WAVES officers tried, with limited success, to advance the idea that the jobs needed to be done and it was preferable for a woman to do them; a man could be better used on the front lines.<sup>24</sup> SPAR Commander Dorothy Stratton echoed that idea. She said that since men were at sea, women did "the paper work and the routine work and some of the specialized work that certainly had no sex label attached to it. It could be done by any intelligent person."<sup>25</sup> But women were nonetheless attracted to jobs which they couldn't do in the non-military world. "You could no longer mention the opening of another aviation rating without having hundreds of requests pour in," said Joy Bright Hancock. "That was the glamor. And so many of them who wanted to get into aviation had been secretaries or something, so they didn't want to be a yeoman. They wanted to do something different. They wanted to get their hands into something."<sup>26</sup> Hancock said even those who didn't get the "glamorous" jobs

eventually came to the realization that their jobs mattered as well. They were doing something directly for the war effort.

*I wish I knew [how I was selected for air traffic control tower school]. I often wondered. I finally came to the decision that I didn't have so much accredited knowledge, but I must have - someone saw some potential. That was it. Potential. With the interview that was conducted, we were interrupted, as soon as we were free to talk again, I initiated, I started it. I was so enthused. The lieutenant who was in charge, the woman lieutenant said, "Why do you want to go and be a controller?" I said, "Because it's so exciting!" I left afterwards and I thought, "Oh, what a dumb thing to do."*

- Violet Strom (Kloth), World War II WAVE

*We had an intensive course in meteorology and forecasting and entering weather maps. You had to memorize all of these weather codes. You know, when you see a weather map it's got the pressure and the temperature and the rainfall. And what kind of clouds there are and how much rain has fallen in the last six hours and all -- and this all has to fit under a dime when you entered it. You entered it dipping a pen in India ink and entering this on a map.*

- Liane Rose (Galvin), World War II WAVE

*When I was in class, we had to pack a parachute . . . We had to pack it up so that it would work again. We did that, and laid it on the table. The*

*instructor would come along and just pull the ripcord. Find out if it was going to work. He found one that didn't work. He picked up a chair and threw it across the room. The girl who had packed the chute was in tears. It was a real lesson for us, because that chute wouldn't open. She left a little stick -- just a loop of the shroud line, so it never would have opened.*

- Phyllis Jensen (Ankeney), World War II WAVE

*[Communications training in] Madison, Wisconsin was the best duty I ever had. I was really happy there, even though they ran a crash program from five in the morning until ten at night. We had calisthenics as they'd roll us into balls. The calisthenics, they were trying to counteract the stress of learning code. You had to learn it to a certain speed. We were pushed. They were trying to get us out as much as possible, to fill in, you know? For the guys. They had a very stressful calisthenic program to counteract the stress. Some of the girls couldn't handle it. They washed out. Because pushing you to learn code, is something, it's very stressful or nerve-wracking somehow. I think they put me in that though because I had played the piano, can you imagine that? I was really afraid that they were going to put me as yeoman, train me as a yeoman. Because, of course, I had worked for Washington, DC in the War Department. And I didn't want to do that. I wanted to do something different or something interesting.*

- Patricia Farrington (Siegener), World War II WAVE

During World War II, the Navy's presence was felt across the country. The interviews reflect that geographic diversity. Women served in coastal locations (Jacksonville, Pensacola, San Diego, Los Angeles, Newport, Rhode Island, Corpus Christi, Texas) but also in completely landlocked areas (Norman, Oklahoma, Klamath Falls, Oregon). The most common posting in this group was Washington, DC; eight of the women spent part of their service time stationed around the nation's capitol. Other common postings were the Seattle and San Francisco areas (each mentioned by six women).

These trends make sense. Seattle and San Francisco were major administrative ports for the Navy's Pacific fleet; women would be stationed in these communities to free a sailor to go aboard ship.<sup>27</sup> Washington, DC housed the federal government and the Navy Department. More than half of the uniformed personnel at the Navy Department in Washington during World War II were women; women filled seventy-five percent of the jobs in Radio Washington (head of Navy's communications system) and seventy percent of the jobs in the Navy's Bureau of Personnel, headquartered in DC.<sup>28</sup>

### *Military Work*

Women who were assigned non-traditional jobs in the WAVES reveled in the glamor their out-of-the-ordinary status provided. "We were an elite group," said Pat Connelly. The work is described by the women as "interesting" and "exciting." One woman who became a gunnery instructor was almost blasé about boot camp. She criticized those who placed a huge emphasis on it, and said she really didn't remember

anything except for the testing that qualified her as a gunnery instructor. The bulk of her oral history details her experiences on the job.

These two constructions reveal a tension in the interviewees. While both groups express pride in their military duty, for yeomen and storekeepers, the jobs were too close to what the women could do on the outside. As a result, they are forced to look to other elements of their military lives for satisfaction and pride. By contrast, the non-clerical WAVES and SPARs find it *easier* to express that pride through their work. Their military path led them to jobs they couldn't do in the civilian world.

*Men, of course, sailors, were doing the [Link] training before. As soon as we came in, they were shipped out to sea. They weren't too happy about it, because a lot of them had been in service before the war. You know, had been in the Navy. They had their families in Pensacola and they didn't want to leave particularly. They liked the jobs they had.*

- Janette Shaffer (Alpaugh), World War II WAVE

*The Link is a simulated aircraft. It has all of the instruments inside that are in the airplane at that time. The gyroscope, you know, and all of the things that you need to watch. Air speed, everything. So we had to learn to operate it ourselves so we knew how it would work. Then the aircraft itself set on a pedestal and it rotated. It dipped its wings. It would change direction. It had all of the controls. You could move it forward, or you could move it up or down. You could elevate it. According to the*

*instruments inside it would show you that you had gone up or down or that you had turned to the right or to the left.*

- Jean Clark, World War II WAVE

*We went through the same program that the men did. We shot machine guns, shot guns, pistols. We did the whole program as if we were going to be gunners. And then those who went on, sometimes to a more advance gunnery. We were the very, very beginning. How to aim was what it really was. That's why we shot guns and machine guns. How to aim. And we were teaching how to aim at planes coming in.*

- Pat Connelly, World War II WAVE

*They took the actual turrets from the, like the PBYS, from the planes and had them installed there. They had the guns, when they pulled the trigger a light came on on the screen and the sound of the guns came. We had two projectors. One projected, you could see the Zeros coming in and the other one had where they should have been -- a bulls eye showing where they should be shooting.*

- Betty Barnard (Daly), World War II WAVE

*I was assigned an SNJ air plane that I was the plane captain of. And that meant I had to take care of the plane, gas it, keep it in running condition, wash it, and just take care of it. We also had other jobs when our planes were gone and up in the air. We had a line shack where we would take turns -- we had so many hours on and off to take care -- we had a great*

*big board that told the Corsairs that were in condition to fly and which ones weren't. And we would assign the planes to the pilots.*

- Pat Pierpont (Graves), World War II WAVE

*I went to Pawtuxet, Maryland and that was a naval air testing base. And they had everything there. They had every kind of Navy plane. They had all of these pilots that were testing the planes. We were open around the clock. Lord we were serving in shifts because these planes were flying. The pilot could choose where they wanted to fly, as long as the area was authorized. And so they would just go to operations and say, "I'm going to so and so. This is my plane." And we didn't care where they would, where they would fly the plane just as long as they would keep it in the air. Because that's what we wanted to know. If it was safe for our pilots. They'd test it for endurance and manageability and all of the things that would affect the pilots that were going to fly those planes.*

- Violet Strom (Kloth), World War II WAVE

As mentioned in Chapter Seven, the media paid a great deal of attention to the women who filled unusual jobs. From photo essays in *Vogue* and *Glamour* to the assigned jobs of the twin sisters in *Here Come the WAVES* (a Link instructor and a control tower operator), the jobs on air stations were the focus of the media of the day. And while on the one hand the Navy and Coast Guard attempted to downplay the unusual (Louise Wilde's attempt to turn focus away from the "cute chick" on the aircraft base<sup>29</sup>), on the other they *publicized* women's work on those same bases. Pat Pierpont, an aircraft

machinist's mate, has an eight-by-ten glossy black and white photograph taken while she was assigned to the Jacksonville Naval Air Station as an aircraft machinist's mate.

Pierpont is a tall, slender woman; in the photograph she stands on the runway, dressed in men's slacks and a work shirt, signaling a plane with semaphore flags. Her demeanor in the photograph calls to mind a young Katharine Hepburn (see *Figure 24*).

However, Pierpont remembers (and saved) this single photograph, rather than any of the thousands of others the Navy created. This illustrates another trend in the project: the women interviewed for the oral history project only recall (and usually saved) publicity when it was specifically about them, from articles about their enlistment to copies of official Navy photographs of their experiences on the job. Other publicity they only vaguely remember. Dorothy Turnbull, for instance, was a WAVE recruiter and in a position to remember WAVE publicity campaigns. She saved numerous photographs taken of various campaigns she staged or participated in (see *Figures 25-26*). She had no memory of any of the national media publicity surrounding the WAVES.

Other women saved group photographs taken by Navy photographers during boot camp, speciality training, or at their individual assignments. Some of them remembered being part of newsreels, especially during special occasions, such as when President Roosevelt or Madame Chiang Kai-Shek of China reviewed the troops. They recalled the crush of reporters when crooner Frank Sinatra played a concert for the WAVES. They remember films and photographs made of them marching from one location to another at their stations or, as in the case of Jean Clark, through the streets where they were stationed. The women didn't find the publicity they experienced directly an





*Figure 24: “Wave Flagging a Plane,” Jacksonville, Florida, U.S. Navy, 1944. Pat Pierpont is the aviation machinist’s mate in the photograph. (Courtesy of Pat Graves).*



*Figure 25: “Eleanor Roosevelt Visits Hunter College,” the Bronx, NY, U.S. Navy, c. 1943. The first lady is in the print dress at center. Dorothy Turnbull is one of the three enlisted WAVES at the far side of the car. (Courtesy of Dorothy Stewart).*



*Figure 26:* “Beaumont Salutes her WAVES,” Beaumont, TX, U.S. Navy, c. 1944. Dorothy Turnbull at a celebration with the local recruiter from Beaumont, Texas. (Courtesy of Dorothy Stewart).

inconvenience. Being given the “star treatment” was all a part of the adventure they were having in the military. As Jean Clark remembered, “That was kind of exciting.”

A difference, however, emerges in the types of photographs the women saved. While Pat Pierpont and Dorothy Turnbull saved photographs of themselves *at work*, yeomen and storekeepers saved photographs of themselves *in military formation*. These personal mementos are further evidence of the divide between the two groups. Both groups of women embraced the Navy’s framing that the WAVES and SPARs were “elite.” However, those who did work unusual for women could use their jobs as a manifestation of their elite status. Yeomen and storekeepers, by contrast, used their military identity to differentiate themselves from the general population. They became elite by putting on a uniform and becoming a WAVE or SPAR.

All of the women, regardless of job, share one element in describing their military lives. Each describes herself as a trailblazer; someone who was doing something unique for the time. Again, *how* each woman says she blazed a trail is dependent upon her job. Those who worked as aerographers, machinists, link trainers and gunnery instructors, etc. used their work as a way of demonstrating their status as an innovator. Those who held jobs similar to work readily available to women in the outside world (yeomen, storekeepers) described themselves as being unusual within the military group. They were the first, or only, woman to be placed in a particular situation or they experienced specific things away from the job which set them apart from not only civilians, but also from the rest of the WAVES and SPARs. They constructed themselves as different.

*I never had any problem where I was. If they did, they didn't show it. I never saw it. But, oh I'm sure there were places -- it was a man's Navy. You knew that. See, I went in with that attitude it was a man's Navy and I was just in to do a job and I'd do the job the best I could. We made damn sure we did it to the best of our ability and a little better sometimes because we knew they'd be watching you. But I can really say I had no problems.*

-Margaret Gay, World War II WAVE

*I was the only WAVE in the whole building. There were lots of other women, but they weren't in service. And they were sort of envious of the fact that I was well regarded by both officers and enlisted people. In fact, the officers, I was sort of the first one there I told you, the only one so far. And they didn't know what to do. They knew that people should salute them, but they didn't know what to do for a WAVE. Were they supposed to take off their hats as a gentleman or was I supposed to salute them as an enlisted person. So, we sort of compromised. I was very much the enlisted person out in the halls, but as soon as the elevator doors closed they would take off their hats. [laughs].*

- Virginia Gillmore, World War II WAVE

*I ran an addressograph machine. Now, they don't even know what those are in this day and age. It was a forerunner of the computer. We would type out addresses and they would come out on a little metal plate. There*

*was a rack that the metal plate fits in. Run the envelopes through it and address 'em. We did it for all the Coast Guard stations and lot of the district offices and stuff. Part of the time we delivered mail. And let's see what else. Oh, and our most important thing of all [laughs]. If somebody was dating somebody in the Coast Guard, and wanted to know something about their background, and it was up to my friend in Personnel to look up their information, and it was up to me to see who they got letters from. So we'd know if they were married or not.*

-Jane Ashcraft (Fisher), World War II SPAR

*We did shipping and receiving. We shipped all -- well, we shipped bodies home. Anything like, personal effects that hasn't caught up with a pilot, we'd ship it to wherever he was stationed again. Receiving. We brought in all the supplies there . . . Shipping and receiving. And we received more that we shipped.*

- Dotty Anderson (McDowell), World War II WAVE

*[The Merchant Marine] was a good way to get out of the country, to get away, if you could sign up with a ship before they caught up with you. And no one had really paid much attention to this list until I came to the [Coast Guard] Shipping Commissioner's office. Everybody hated it, so they didn't pay any attention to it. So they gave it to me and I happened to be one of those people who remembers names ,, One day, this little man came in. He was a cook. He was probably about five three or four. One of these*

*little weasely people like that. When I saw his name, I thought, "Gee that name sure rings a bell." So I said to him, "One minute, I need to look up something. Will you excuse me?" And he said, "Sure." And so sure enough he had murdered his wife. So I said to him, it was just lunch time, I said, "Why don't you go have lunch and come back after lunch, and I'll just keep your seamen papers here." They could do that. They rarely let the papers out of their sight. They kept them clipped to their pocket, chained to their pocket. "Sure." Left it. Came back at noon, after lunch, and I called the FBI. In came six brawny FBI guys . . . And they said, "Are you Mr. Joe Blow?" And he said, "Yes." And they said, "You're under arrest."*

- Roberta Moore (Hockett), World War II SPAR

The vast majority of WAVES and SPARs served as yeomen and storekeepers. While the specifics of the jobs would vary depending upon the individual posting, yeomen in general did basic secretarial work, such as dictation, typing, filing, stenography and the like. They also kept track of the comings and goings of personnel (discharges, transfers, promotions). Storekeepers kept track of supplies and did general accounting work. They rarely worked in an actual "store" (Ship's Service, in Navy parlance), but instead were in charge of the paperwork involved with receiving and shipping inventory.<sup>30</sup>

This work was remarkably similar to that which women could do outside of the military. Nonetheless, military men were often initially resistant to the idea of women

entering their domain. Mildred McAfee said they were certain women couldn't do the job:

This is the thing which I think was the most perplexing to a lot of people in the Navy, that this bunch of women came in here and, with no axe to grind at all, we just went on about our business. The men were perfectly astonished over the fact, for instance, that the first group of yeomen were good workers.<sup>31</sup>

What the commanders appeared to have forgotten was that office work was one area where young women of this era were able to find work as civilians and that the women had often received stenography and accounting training in high school or business college.

But from all accounts, it appears the women were able to win over even recalcitrant men. Gay directly addressed the problem: "It was a man's Navy." Gay, who ended up making a career of the Navy, said she was able to be successful by recognizing going in that she was moving into a new area, and by making sure to do the best work she could. Given the end-of-war assessment of the success of the WAVES and SPARS, it would seem many women acted in a similar way. McAfee said even the officers who were opposed to WAVES in general felt "their" WAVES, women who they worked with directly, were fine. WAVE officers again and again told the story of a grumpy Navy captain who was assigned a female yeomen early in the war. He complained, but the woman wasn't reassigned. At the end of the war, the naval officer was assigned a



yeoman, this time a man. He again complained asking why he wasn't being assigned a WAVE.<sup>32</sup>

Women who served as yeomen and storekeepers spent little time in their oral histories describing the specifics of their work. Instead, they discuss what made their assignments different from that of the "average" military person in the same position. Ashcraft's job enabled her to check up on the men they were dating, making sure they were really available. Gillmore was the only WAVE in her office, the envy of the civilian women working there. Anderson almost breezes past one of the unpleasant aspects of her job -- coordinating shipping home the bodies of sailors killed in action. Moore was instrumental in bringing a murderer to justice.

But even when what makes the job unusual is a less serious matter (interoffice envy, dating), the women add to the story to give it a bit of heft or importance. At one point in her interview, Gillmore tells how she eased tensions with the envious civilian women in her office by providing them each with a pair of "GI nylons": thick cotton lisle hose. They had assumed she was getting special perks, such as sheer hose, simply because she was in the military. When they realized she had to wait in line for sheer hose, just like them, they accepted her more willingly. Through this story, Gillmore shows that she is not only sensitive to the feelings of others, but she is savvy enough to understand how to subtly change coworkers opinion. By presenting the women with "GI Nylons" she tells the women that while they may envy her smart uniform and link to important military work, she really isn't any better than them.

Ashcraft turns to V-J Day to help the listener understand the importance of her military service. When she went with her SPAR friends into town to celebrate the end of the war, one woman remained behind. Florence was a native of the Philippines, the widow of an American GI. Many of her family and friends had been killed in the War. When the SPARs returned to their bunk, Ashcraft said, “She was on her her knees with her rosary. The moon was shining through a window on her. She had been saying prayers for everybody the whole time we were in town. And did it sober me up quick.” Ashcraft’s story paints a beautiful visual image (“the moon shining through a window” on a woman praying), but also uses the story to show how the service helped her to grow as an individual and become aware of something outside of herself. Her joy at the end of the war is tempered by the realization that thousands of others didn’t live to experience war’s end.

*[The Marines on the base] just got back from the battles, I don't really know what battles. I've always been meaning to look up the time frame but I just haven't. I kind of don't want to. But they were on guard duty there, and one of them -- we became friendly. I used to go down when I had time off and we'd stand and talk all the time . . . Anyway, I asked him if he had the time would he want to come home with me for Christmas. And he started to cry. He said, "I want to but I can't. I'd ruin your Christmas." He said, "All I can think about is the officer making me go out in the ocean and making me drag out the other Marines." Parts of them. Not the whole body but parts of bodies so they could get the dog*

*tags and that sort of thing. And he said, "I just can't get it off my mind."*  
*He said, "I stand here and I think about it all the time and it's just awful."*  
*And he said, "I know if I came home with you, I wouldn't be any better. I*  
*might start to cry or something" . . . I've often wondered how these men*  
*who got no psychological help got through the terrible horrible*  
*experience.*

- Ali McLaughlin (McConnell), World War II WAVE

Like Gillmore and Ashcraft, McLaughlin was also a yeoman. But her story even more directly demonstrates the need for women in these "average" jobs to stress the importance of their military service. McLaughlin initially was reticent to tell me her story. She first approached me at a meeting for veterans in Grants Pass, Oregon, telling me her service wasn't like other women, and she only had one story to tell. She broke down in tears when telling me about the emotionally-scarred Marine she befriended. The experience left me hesitant as to what to do next. On the one hand she had approached me about this one story. On the other, it seemed as if the telling of the tale could be emotionally dangerous for her.

I waited several weeks before approaching her, this time by letter. As Wendy Rickard has noted, "Oral history offers the possibility of both affirming and destabilizing a personal narrative. Part of its value lies in its subversive potential,"<sup>33</sup> the telling of the story in the presence of another for the historical record. I wanted to be sure that McLaughlin knew she was under no obligation, but if she wanted to, I would be interested in hearing her oral history. She wrote back by e-mail and said that she was

interested in doing a full interview. About two-thirds of the way through the interview, she told this story. She was also the first woman to return her edited transcript. She removed several stories from her personal narrative. This one remained.

For McLaughlin, the potential personal emotional risks associated with this story are outweighed by her need to go on the record and tell me that WAVES weren't all about dating men or going to parties. She wanted to emphasize that *even yeomen* did incredibly important work. She spent time listening to the battle-scarred Marines, helping them to get over what she called a "terrible horrible experience." By telling her story, she is inserting into the historical record an important element of the work of World War II WAVES. They helped men to partially recover from the horrors of war.

*The WACs were able to go overseas, and since the WAVES didn't go on board ship, we were to relieve the guys for sea duty. Give up the desk job so they could go to sea. I guess a lot of the girls complained that they wanted to go overseas. So finally Washington did relent and said the WAVES could go overseas. As soon as they had a starting date, I immediately volunteered.*

- Doris Mansfield (Leichliter), World War II WAVE

*When we were in Hawaii, ships would come in. Somehow or another, I don't know who was in charge of it, but they'd always get the ships that came in from the Pacific fresh vegetables and things. And sometimes we'd get things. It seemed like we got cottage cheese one time. One of the fellows, one of the girls went with one of the fellows who was in that*

*department brought us a container of cottage cheese. And it tasted so good! You know, some things we didn't get. So they'd always have those things for the fellows when they came in. And I think in a way, this is kind of off the top of my head, that the reason they had us WAVES go to Hawaii, which of course helped [in military work], was for us to mix with the fellows that were coming back from overseas. A lot of those fellows had been over there two, three years and longer. A lot of them hadn't seen white women and they didn't really know how to act and react to women. So it kind of, if they did come out and meet us white women to get used to us again.*

- Merrily Kurtz (Hewitt), World War II WAVE

*At Hickson Field [Hawaii], there was this young man who came over. Tried to talk to me and I -- I couldn't talk to him. I was too involved in my own grief. His eyes were staring and he had bloody bandages on his head and I couldn't talk to him and I couldn't come out of myself and I feel awful about that. I couldn't. They needed to talk to girls from home. They were fresh from the battlefield of Okinawa . . . I did feel for them. And it kind of hit me afterward. Even as late as the last few years and this war and stuff. DAMN. I just, God, why did they have to have that? Why did they have to lose them? Why?*

- Patricia Farrington (Siegnier), World War II WAVE

The first group of WAVES arrived in Hawaii in January of 1945; SPARs, like WAVES were allowed to serve in Hawaii and Alaska until the war's end. While officially the Navy worried about the safety of the military women (one captain suggested building a fence around the WAVES facilities to protect them from men<sup>34</sup>) and placed them in suitable work, it seems unofficially the job was for women to help men transition to civilian life. Louise Wilde, who was in charge of the WAVES in Hawaii, said some male officers, such as chaplains or the Executive Officer, would ask that she arrange for women to act as homecoming escorts for men who had been at sea. She would refuse to order the women to socialize:

Usually you could get them to understand that. Always when there were any ship parties, we passed the word around and if there were any volunteers who wanted to go, fine. And of course a lot of people made very good friends that way but you're not going to order out 200 girls to march over somewhere to a party.<sup>35</sup>

As at other stations, most of these women filled yeoman and storekeeper positions, but some women did work in other jobs, such as decoding enemy messages.

The women don't necessarily recognize they helped re-socialize men who had been in combat. But they do remember going out with men, in groups and individually. Merrily Kurtz's memories of Hawaii's are not so much of working as of attending a series of beach parties and get-togethers with her WAVE friends and a group of military men. The photographs from the outings are relaxed and distinctly non-military, with women in swimsuits and men in bathing trunks and shorts. Doris Mansfield has a similar collection

of lighthearted photographs and mementos from her time in Hawaii (see *Figures 27-29*). It was only in the process of the oral history interview that Kurtz reevaluated her memories. Thinking that the WAVES were there to help men relearn how to act around women was something that came “off the top of (her) head.” It is only with the wisdom of hindsight that she realizes the benefits of their presence had on the men stationed temporarily in Hawaii -- helping them to become reacclimated to “normal” life through non-combat events like beach parties.

Likewise, it is hindsight that enables Patricia Farrington to reflect with regret about her inability to help a sailor wounded in Okinawa. She remembers being consumed with her own grief, having just learned that a young man she dated had been killed in action. The regret and guilt she feels over having not come out of her grief to talk with the sailor is entwined with the anger she still feels over the loss of her beau. “I did feel for them,” she says of the injured sailors, before wondering later in the interview, “Why couldn’t I have overcome my own grief to help him?”

Farrington, like McLaughlin, not only told me this story during her oral history interview, but chose for it to be included in her transcript. She fully realized the potential for emotional destabilization the story held, confessing that it was something that still haunted her even 60 years after the event. But nonetheless, she wanted it to be part of her life story, part of the historical record. She, like McLaughlin, excised other stories from her personal narrative. This story remained.



*Figure 27:* Merrily Kurtz and friend, Honolulu, Hawaii, c. 1945. (Courtesy of Merrily Hewitt).

*Figure 28:* Merrily Kurtz and friends, Honolulu, Hawaii, c. 1945. (Courtesy of Merrily Hewitt).







But Farrington has a different purpose in telling this story than McLaughlin.

Farrington worked in one of the coveted “glamor” positions during World War II: she was a radio operator, encoding and decoding radio messages during her time as a WAVE.

While in Hawaii, she was stationed in an underground bunker, handling communications between the Navy, the Army and even the British fleet regarding the Pacific theater war.

Her story is told not to reassert that the WAVES did important things, but rather to show that military service did not strip women of their feminine qualities. “I was a person who felt things deeply,” she says, something that continued while even in the military.

In ways, Farrington’s story resembles that of Ashcraft. Both show how experiences in the war caused the women to grow outside of themselves; something the women realized only after the war was over. Ashcraft, by seeing her bunkmate praying for the dead, understood and internalized the profound suffering the war had caused. It is the image she remembers in her mind’s eye when she thinks of V-J Day. Farrington, meanwhile, remembers the bandaged sailor, and feels guilt that she couldn’t have put aside her own grief in order to help him. Her experience leads her to understand and internalize the importance of compassion for others.

#### *Leaving the Military for the Post-war World*

When women enlisted to serve in the WAVES and SPARs, they signed up for the duration of the war plus six months. The reality was that some women left military service just days after V-J Day (September 2, 1945). The women tell of a Navy-instituted point system in order to get out of the service. Points were accrued based on how long one had served, one’s age and if one was married or not. Married women, like my

mother, who had been in the service for a while, were decommissioned almost immediately. But others stayed in much longer. Jane Ashcraft, who was still in boot camp on V-J Day, ended up serving eleven months after the end of the war. She says they were initially going to send her class home without ever completing boot camp. They were allowed to stay in order to help with the decommissioning process.

*VJ Day was a BIG day at Bremerton. I stood up in the window on the hill at radar school with Captain, captains, and generals and Commander Pitts. We watched the news come in. We knew it was coming. And when the bells began to ring and the whistles started blowing, the big tears started rolling down everybody's eyes because we knew it was the end of the war.*

- Virginia Gillmore, World War II WAVE

*I was there when the war ended. And the instant, the instant they got communication the war was over they did not have any more pilots go out. It was that dangerous. I'll never forget that, because we went down to report for duty. They said, "There are no pilots going out. There will be no more pilots going out."*

- Janette Shaffer (Alpaugh), World War II WAVE

*We couldn't wait to get downtown Washington where everybody was celebrating. Now, I don't remember seeing drinking. I'm sure there was plenty of it. But we were just going around high fiving people or hugging*

*people or whatever. One fellow would grab you and you were dancing around in a circle. It was just good clean fun is what it was.*

- Liane Rose (Galvin), World War II WAVE

*When the war ended I was, the night they were all celebrating downtown, I had duty in the barracks [laughs]. I didn't get to go out that night. I had duty in the barracks. That I remember. I had duty in the barracks.*

- Ramona Ransom (Wheeler), World War II WAVE

*That day that the war ended, why Market Street was just jammed. You couldn't even move. This one guy reached over, picked up and took my hat off. I said, "Hey! Give me that hat back!" He said, "Why? You're not going to need it." Well, I did need it. I had to work points out to get released. Some of the girls got released right away. I had to work until March twentieth, 1946.*

- Helen Baldwin (Ruecker), World War II WAVE

At the end of the war, women found themselves at a crossroads. Some wanted to continue service in the WAVES.<sup>36</sup> Still others describe being ready to move on to the next stage of their lives. Many had married during the war and were eager to return home and begin families. A majority of women I spoke with wanted to take advantage of the G.I. Bill and attend college. Not all were able to do that; some went to school for only a few months while others didn't attend at all. But for a portion of the women, college was a desired and attainable goal, due to the provisions of the G.I. Bill, a benefit often mentioned in WAVES recruitment and decommissioning literature.

A small portion of women stayed in the military. About 1,800 women extended their active duty past July 30, 1946, the “official” end-date for WAVES.<sup>37</sup> Eventually, these women either entered the reserve or joined the military outright when the Navy decided to allow women into the service in mid-1948. Others rejoined the Navy as reservists at this time, at the same rank and pay scale they had during the war.<sup>38</sup> Margaret Gay ended up being career military. Billye Grymwade moved from being a yeoman during World War II to working as a flight attendant on naval air transport planes in the post-war years. Eileen Horner, Vickie Burdick and Clara Moomey joined the reserves and were recalled to service during the Korean War.

Mildred McAfee Horton said when she talked with women who had joined the Navy during World War II, they looked back on their service with pride:

They liked belonging to a great branch of the service. Whichever it was, its members knew it was the greatest branch and were proud to be identified with the power and might of the United States . . . Whatever their future, they face it with the conviction that, having shared military service with the men of their generation, they face the problems of the future with a special understanding of how those problems look to male contemporaries who have been in service. With their femininity accented, they thus emerge from the war as more experienced and interesting people.<sup>39</sup>

While her observations may be true, the women report a different post-war experience.

While proud, they often didn’t talk about their military service with others. Eileen Horner

says even now she reads obituaries of women she knows who never told her they served during World War II in the WAVES. “We did the job and went home,” she says. “You faded back into the woodwork.”

And yet, some women refused to fade. Not only did they tell their stories as oral histories, but the women insisted on finding other methods of inserting their tales into the historical record. Through fictionalized accounts and memoirs, both published and unpublished, some women insisted that their time in service mattered and needed to be recognized; that they did do something important.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description of the military training procedures, see: Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (Washington: Brassey's, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 63.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Reynard offers a detailed record of the establishment of the Hunter College boot camp, see: Elizabeth Reynard Papers. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

<sup>4</sup> John A. Tilley, "A History of Women in the Coast Guard," U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office, <http://www.uscg.mil/history/> (accessed January 22, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Enlistment forms for the two branches of service were identical; the form included a space to indicate from which branch of service the woman was interested in receiving an application. See: Jeanette F. Lissey and Edith Harvey, *Prepare for the Official Tests for WAACs, WAVES, SPARs and Marines!: A Complete Guide and Instruction Book for Women in Military Service* (New York: Capitol Publishing Company, 1943).

<sup>6</sup> Lissey and Harvey, *Official Tests*, 45.

<sup>7</sup> For samples of the test see: Lissey and Harvey, *Official Tests*, or Nancy Wilson Ross, *The WAVES: The Story of the Girls in Blue* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1943).

<sup>8</sup> Lissey and Harvey, *Official Tests*, 48.

<sup>9</sup> "Oregon WAVES Help Win the War," *Oregonian*, 24 February 1944.

<sup>10</sup> Charles A. Sprague, "Salem's First WAVES Platoon Leaves Today," *The Oregon Statesman*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Sprague, "Salem's First," 3.

<sup>12</sup> Office of War Information/Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Information Program for the Women's Reserve of the US Navy*, October 1943, Jane Barton Papers, MC542 Box 3, Folder 3.1 [Loose items from #7F+B10-7F+B12], Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

<sup>13</sup> Mildred McAfee Horton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers who served in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard in World War II, including WAVES Director Mildred McAfee, Joy B. Hancock, Jean Palmer, Dorothy Stratton, Elizabeth Crandall, Etta Belle Kitchen, Frances Rich, Eleanor Rigby, Louise Wilde, Tova Wiley and Senator Margaret C. Smith*, eds. John Mason and Etta Belle Kitchen (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1979), 57-58.

<sup>14</sup> Joy Bright Hancock, *Lady in the Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1972), 105.

<sup>15</sup> Horton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 58.

<sup>16</sup> Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, 108.

<sup>17</sup> Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, 104.

<sup>18</sup> Tilley, "A History of Women in the Coast Guard."

<sup>19</sup> Robin J. Thomson, "SPARs: The Coast Guard and the Women's Reserve in World War II," U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office, <http://www.uscg.mil/history/> (accessed January 25, 2008).

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<sup>20</sup> Before the enlisted women moved to Manhattan Beach, Coast Guard SPAR officers trained alongside men at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. See: Thomson, "SPARs: The Coast Guard and the Women's Reserve in World War II."

<sup>21</sup> In this case, the women were crossing the street approaching a parked car. When the drill leader couldn't remember the proper military command, she said simply, "Use your judgement, ladies." See *Recollections of Women Officers*.

<sup>22</sup> Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> *Information Guide*, 7-10.

<sup>24</sup> Horton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Dorothy C. Stratton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 57.

<sup>26</sup> Joy Bright Hancock, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 106.

<sup>27</sup> Seattle was the headquarters for the 13th Naval District, which included Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Wyoming. San Francisco was headquarters for the 12th Naval District, which included Utah, Nevada and Northern California. See: Julius Augustus Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1959): 521.

<sup>28</sup> Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 89.

<sup>29</sup> Louise Wilde, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Information Guide*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Horton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 79.

<sup>32</sup> This story varies depending upon who tells it. Jean Palmer and Joy Bright Hancock tell it as a change of opinion from a single male officer who learned from firsthand experience of the value of the WAVES. However, Tovah Wiley, who says she received the calls and makes it clear that it was two different officers that she spoke with, tells the story to illustrate an overall shift of opinion within the Navy about the WAVES. See Hancock, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 73-75; Jean Palmer, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 35; and Tovah Wiley, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Wendy Rickard, "Oral History - 'More Dangerous than Therapy?': Interviewees' Reflections on Recording Traumatic or Taboo Issues," *The Journal of the Oral History Society* 26, No. 2 (1998): 35

<sup>34</sup> Eleanor Grant Rigby, "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 35.

<sup>35</sup> Louise Wilde "Oral History," *Recollections of Women Officers*, 42.

<sup>36</sup> SPARs had no choice of staying in the service or not. The women's branch of the Coast Guard was closed after the World War II emergency had ended.

<sup>37</sup> Ebbert and Hall, *Crossed Currents*, 102.

<sup>38</sup> For a detail of the Congressional wrangling over the Act's passage, see Ebbert and Hall, "Setting a New Course," *Crossed Currents*.

<sup>39</sup> Mildred McAfee Horton, "Women in the United States Navy," *The American Journal of Sociology* Volume LI, No. 5 (March, 1946): 450.



**CHAPTER IX**  
**IDENTITY AND THE HISTORICAL RECORD**

*Who wants to hear my story? It's not that interesting You have that feeling about it. And I've felt that I'm just an ordinary person. But a few years ago I was going to Lewiston, and this gal was going with me and . . . she said, "You have led such an interesting life." Well I never thought that my life was that quote unquote interesting. So for me to be able to share in such a way that you think my life is interesting is intimidating to me. Because I want to be interesting, but I don't think I am [laughs].*

- Eileen Horner (Blakely), World War II WAVE

When listening to the women interviewed and reading their transcripts, two curious, and I believe related, trends have emerged. Women often diminish the importance of their lives. "I didn't do anything important" is a constant refrain in the interviews. But concurrently, the women in the interviews position themselves adjacent to what most would agree is "important": historically significant events.

Of course, the oral history interview itself encourages these seemingly contradictory trends; ordinary individuals evaluate and position their lives in relation to the historical meta-narrative. Nonetheless, it is necessary to parse what is meant by the women's rhetorical move of saying they "didn't do anything important." Do the women

really believe their lives and work was of no value? If so, why do they find it necessary to participate in the very public process of oral history, placing their names and life stories within the historical record? Furthermore, why did a large number of the women also feel it necessary to somehow record their words, via fiction, memoirs or some other format, for the historical record. It becomes necessary to analyze the content and *context* of the women's words.

In this chapter, I will conduct a meta-analysis, investigating what we can learn from the data and how (or if) it can be applied to other projects. This dissertation, like many oral history projects, raises intriguing questions about the notion of memory and its relationship to the historical record. This chapter seeks to answer the third research question of my dissertation. In it, I will analyze the spoken words as well as the published and unpublished writings of the women interviewed to explain the seemingly incongruent communicative act of telling one's life story *for* history while at the same time minimizing one's role *in* history.

*"I Didn't Do Anything Important"*

For this group of women, the way in which they tell their stories both acknowledges the constraints of their world and subtly transforms it. Minimizing the importance of their wartime work *and* postwar lives enables the women to seemingly conform with expectations for women of their era. While this group of women was the first accepted into military service in the United States at the same rank and pay scale as men, they were also told from enlistment that they were "freeing a man to fight" overseas. Their jobs were only temporary and would disappear at the end of the war. But

knowing the expectations of the era didn't necessarily mean the women fully embraced those expectations. Karan Barad writes, "Meaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility."<sup>1</sup> By performing their life stories to another for the historical record the women refuse to marginalize their experiences, but instead claim their well-deserved roles in history.

This type of approach was pioneered by Jane Addams in *The Long Road of Woman's Memory*. In the book, Addams uses the urban myth of the Devil Baby (a horned child supposedly in residence at Hull House) to demonstrate how women can achieve power through telling even seemingly "false" tales.<sup>2</sup> Her writings demonstrated a profound respect for the role of memory in shaping identity and one's sense of place in the world, but also showed that "a well-told story has the power to give beauty and significance to rough reality and to transform resentment, unhappiness, and horror into art."<sup>3</sup>

In other words, it becomes necessary to interpret the women's words and actions *from their perspective*. Sandra Harding's standpoint theory is an effective tool for understanding the rhetorical choices of the women involved because it is based in the social situation of the group under consideration.<sup>4</sup> Her example of date/marital rape victims' denial of their attacks while at the same time reporting the violation they felt ("I never called it rape") seems to echo the rhetorical structure of the World War II veterans ("I didn't do anything important").

*I wanted to see as much of the world as I could since I had never gone anyplace growing up because my dad would never go anyplace. Once I got to New York and saw how much fun it was to travel, I just wanted to do all the traveling I could. So I had decided that based on my parents, by the time I was -- I didn't want to get married and I figured I didn't want to until I was past 30, because up to 30 I would see all the world I could see. That was my logic.*

- Doris Mansfield (Leichliter), World War II WAVE

*Operation Crossroads. That was the last job I had in 1946. I was processing everybody's orders. The officers, the civilians. And that's the first time I had heard of a nuclear engineer. I never heard the term, and so it was relatively new . . . There were a lot of things they did not know at that time. This hadn't been that long since the Manhattan Project actually happened . . . I don't know if any of them realized the power of the atom bomb.*

- Eileen Horner (Blakely)  
on her work on the Nuclear Tests at Bikini Atoll

In the oral histories, the women do more than simply claim their rightful role in the historical record. Words to the contrary (“I want to be interesting, but I don’t think I am”), they are also claiming what they see as their rightful recognition for doing and witnessing something important. This desire extends beyond their wartime work. The women (sub)consciously place themselves adjacent to important historical events. Their

narratives become a historic reconstruction, a process of negotiation between what the women were told by society and what they experienced. Ann K. Clark observes, “understanding memory requires seeing memory at work and that as it works it functions in different ways. Memory . . . engages, both tying together and changing whatever it works on.”<sup>5</sup> Addams saw these negotiations in the telling of memories as a way of making sense out of the world.<sup>6</sup>

This process of negotiation is demonstrated in Mansfield’s oral history. She enlisted in the WAVES during World War II, and was one of the handful of military women allowed to travel outside of the continental United States, serving part of her Navy tenure in Hawaii.<sup>7</sup> She wasn’t just part of an elite group in the Navy. After the war, she began working for the Civil Service as a secretary. Her work took her on two assignments to Vietnam during the war there: once during the Tet Offensive and again during the Fall of Saigon (see *Figure 30*). A woman in her veteran’s group suggested I talk with Mansfield because she had interesting experiences. But Mansfield told me point blank she “didn’t do anything interesting.”

Her story about the arriving in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive immediately challenges that assertion. She stepped into the middle of history:

*When we got to the hotel the captain said, “Now when we stop the Jeep, don’t worry about your suitcase. You just run into the lobby and we’ll bring your suitcase in” . . . They assigned me to a room on the second floor with a Red Cross girl. All night, we could hear the shooting going on. They covered the windows with dark curtains. So she looked out the*

*curtains on one side and I looked out on the other and we saw lots of Jeeps going down the street, open air Jeeps with lots of bodies hanging out the back . . . So the next morning she decides she wasn't going to stay. Somehow she got the Red Cross to agree to take her back home. But I was obligated for two years.*

Mansfield's job was working for the military in the Civil Service. She was a secretary, supporting a small group of men based in Saigon.

During her interview, Mansfield describes a difficult family life in the years after World War II. Her husband died when her daughters were pre-teens, and she struggled to raise them alone. She eventually moved to Salt Lake City with her two girls (rebellious teenagers by this point), both of whom were bouncing in and out of legal and emotional troubles. She says she was fed up, and decided to teach her daughters that they couldn't count on her to constantly bail them out by signing up for a stint in Vietnam.

In her negotiations through memory, Mansfield needs to explain why she would be so willing to abandon her "woman's role" and leave her teenagers daughters for a dangerous job in Vietnam. She is the same woman who earlier said she wasn't interested in marriage and wanted to travel until she was at least 30 years old. But in her storytelling, she doesn't abandon her daughters. She signs up for work overseas to force them to grow up; she is actually supporting their emotional process by leaving. Even when she arrives in Vietnam, and realizes the danger she faces, returning home isn't an option. Unlike the Red Cross girl, who can pull some strings and go home, Mansfield was "obligated" to stay for two years.



*Figure 30:* Doris Mansfield with Military Staff from her Civil Service Job, Saigon, Vietnam, March 28, 1972 (Official U.S. Army Photograph, courtesy of Doris Leichliter).

Like Mansfield, Horner repeatedly minimizes diminishes the value of her war work. Many times before and during the interview she questioned whether her story was interesting enough to tell. She served for the WAVES during both World War II and the Korean War, working as a Yeoman in Washington, DC. Horner wasn't assigned to one specific unit, but floated from unit to unit as needed.

As a result she met a number of prominent military officers. In telling her life story, she directly confronts the memory's challenges:

*Admiral Rickover, I don't know if you've heard of him, he was a -- I was trying to remember if I actually saw him one time or if I just imagined that I did. I don't know. I couldn't take an oath that I had actually seen him.*

Horner knows she assisted men who worked for Admiral Hyman Rickover, who directed the planning and construction of the world's first nuclear powered submarine. She talks about how she saw the men age as the work progressed. But she can't remember if she actually met Rickover, or if she just imagined that she met him.

In *Illuminations*. Walter Benjamin embraces the inaccuracy of memory as a crucial component in storytelling. He divides storytelling into two different types of memory, as conceived by Proust. *Mémoire volontaire* is that connected to the intellect; things we consciously remember and have experienced.<sup>8</sup> *Mémoire involontaire*, by contrast, is the memory of things we neither know nor have personally experienced; a hearsay which becomes a "truth" for the individual.<sup>9</sup> In a life, both combine to form an



individual's memory of self. In storytelling, Benjamin feels how the life is remembered is more interesting than how the life actually was lived.

Horner's struggle with her own memories ("I couldn't take an oath that I had actually seen him") vividly demonstrates how *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire* become fully entwined as our "memories." Benjamin says *mémoire involontaire* leaves an afterimage in the brain which is often more vivid than actual experience.<sup>10</sup> In this case, the afterimage hasn't yet become so embedded that it is completely inseparable from Horner's actual experiences, or *mémoire volontaire*. She questions *if* she saw him, or just imagined that she did.

Horner does work hard to make sure her memories are "true." She keeps a detailed scrapbook of her time in the military, and collects books about the projects with which she was involved. Yet her actions, and her struggle with the truth of her memories, are indicative of displacement. Edward Casey observes that contemporary displacement has a number of symptoms, of which "nostalgia is one of the most revealing . . . Nostalgia, contrary to what we usually imagine, is not merely a matter of regret for lost times; it is also a pining for *lost places*, for places we have once been in yet can no longer enter" (emphasis included).<sup>11</sup> Horner doesn't romanticize the past over her present (by contrast, she seems more comfortable in her skin now than the person she remembers), but she does cherish her history and misses the role she held in the military. Because she is recalling her life for the historical record, she feels compelled to get it "right."

Part of her purpose in telling about Operation Crossroads is to illustrate how everyone in this project was venturing into unknown territory:

*There were a lot of things they did not know at that time. This hadn't been that long since the Manhattan Project actually happened . . . I don't know if any of them realized the power of the atom bomb. Maybe the scientists themselves had an inkling, but I don't know if they ever knew.*

Horner never says she feels guilty for what happened at the Bikini Atoll. But by talking about the Manhattan Project, and the power of the atomic bomb, she uses her contemporary knowledge to subtly pass judgement on what happened. Those who went to the Atoll to film and witness the experiment may not have known about the long-term physical risks of nuclear explosions. “Maybe the scientists themselves” knew, she observes. Far from a sense of nostalgia, Horner’s memory has a distinct undercurrent of unease with her past.

Horner deals with this unease by turning her memories into a balancing act between self-deprecating humor and poignancy:

*I was in what they called the rear echelon back in Washington DC. And so when I got everybody's orders processed, I decided I wanted to take the flight and go out to the West Coast . . . My bag's packed, ready to go. And the last thing in the afternoon this guy comes in and I had processed his orders and I said, "You're the guy who's going to bump me"*

Transcripts don't do justice to Horner's delivery at this point in the interview. She rolls her eyes, her voice takes on a tone of resignation. She's setting the listener up for a joke, and she is the foil:

*And that's exactly what happened. I didn't get out on that flight. The guy that had, my contact person had been transferred to some other place, so I had no clout. But I finally got out the the next day and got to the West Coast and I got to wave the ship goodbye when they pulled out.*

The humorous tone of her delivery undercuts the poignancy of the scene she paints for the listener. She is sitting on the dock, alone as she tells the story, waving goodbye to the ship of enlisted men, officers, civilians and nuclear engineers sailing off into an unknown future.

#### *Negotiating the Space of Memories*

Horner and Leichliter's oral histories demonstrate how individual women struggle to find a place in history through oral storytelling. By entwining themselves to historically important events, they give importance to their "unimportant" contributions to the military. Other women used more traditional methods prior to sharing their oral histories. For instance, every woman who is a member of the Cascade Seafarer's Chapter of WAVES National (thirteen of the fifty-one interviewees) wrote a short summary of her military experiences which was submitted to the Library of Congress's Veterans History Project. Patricia Farrington wrote up her memories for a project on Naval intelligence during World War II. Anna Fogelman's essays have been published in books distributed in southern Texas. Several women sent me one or two page biographical summaries, or printed out copies of their registration at Women in Military Service for America Memorial (WIMSA), which includes biographic information and their service records.<sup>12</sup> Still others, like Dorothy Riley (Dempsey), told me of being active in educational

activities, such as traveling to schools to tell children about their World War II experiences. Riley also participated in an episode of the Fox NewsChannel program *War Stories with Oliver North*.

Riley initially hoped to be a Chaplain's Mate when she enlisted in the SPARs. The only problem: she was Roman Catholic. At the time, the Church didn't allow women to assist priests in Mass. So, she was assigned instead to be Master of Arms and was stationed to a barracks in Boston. As Master of Arms, Riley acted as a combination den mother and counsellor of sorts to fellow SPARs, keeping track of the 406 women in her barracks and helping them if they were having trouble. Since she had also done some singing growing up, when a glee club formed in her barracks, she eagerly joined up. Later, she was selected to be a part of the *Tars and SPARS* war bond show and was taken off regular duty to travel throughout New England.

In her account,<sup>13</sup> Riley has firmly implaced herself into a specific location and time: New England, 1942 to 1943, working on a war bonds show. Casey notes that implacement is characterized by specificity. "It is occasion-bound; or, more exactly, it binds actual occasions into unique collocations of space and time," he writes. "It is to be *somewhere in particular*: a peculiar somewhere in space that situates the 'somewhen' in time. Whereabouts pin down whenabouts" (emphasis included).<sup>14</sup>

Being implaced in a specific where and when (as part of the war bond revue) positioned Riley as different from "other" SPARs. She emphasizes this elite status in the story. Thus, she mentions she auditioned for the show with a large number of women; but only six members of her group were selected. They were then relieved of their

regular duty for this special assignment. But she also is aware of how the listener might interpret her being taken away from regular duty for something as superficial as a song and dance revue. So she sets up the story to reinforce the value of the show, saying, “That was at a time when our finances in the war were at such a pressure.” Entertaining becomes a supreme patriotic duty. Significantly, Riley mentions the fundraising purpose of the show *first*; being taken off regular duty is slipped in as a throwaway line at the end.

Having established that the show was an important military contribution, Riley now has the freedom to move to the topic which for her is far more interesting: the people she worked with because of the show (comedian Frankie Fontaine, actress Veronica Lake, band leader Skitch Henderson). Hollywood actor Cesar Romero was brought in as the star:

*He was fantastic. As a kid from the Bronx I was in awe of him. He had just come back from the South Pacific with the Coast Guard. And he had been through a number of landings that were bad, and he was recuperating. So they thought they'd put him in the show . . . It went over so well as the first war bonds show that we went on the road and we travelled around. And we would be someplace for maybe the weekend and we would have rehearsals every day and a show at night.*

But she makes a point to subtly emphasize that she wasn't just a star-struck fan ogling a dreamy celebrity. Romero, after all, was a veteran of the South Pacific who was only in the show because the Coast Guard was giving him a break from military action.

Meanwhile, the cast, Romero included, worked hard, rehearsing every day and performing every night.

Riley's memories jump effortlessly back and forth through time. Before I pressed "play" on the digital recorder, she spoke about the Hollywood musical *Tars and SPARs*, which was based on the war bonds revue. While Riley wasn't a part of the film, she remembers performing some of the song and dance numbers on stage. After outlining how she came to her role in the SPARs, and her assignment to to war bonds show, she then leaps forward in time to the early 1990s:

*The mayor of my town called and he said, "Dot, did you work with Cesar Romero?" And I said, "How did you know? I never told anybody." And he said, "I've got ways." And he said, "He's coming to Rutherford tomorrow and we want you to go and meet with him." And I said, "Forget it. He's from Hollywood. He wouldn't remember a kid from the show years ago."*

She expects me as a listener to make this chronological leap with her.

In the recollection, she again projects seemingly mixed signals about the importance of her role in the SPARs. Her experiences were important enough that her hometown mayor would call her and arrange for her to meet with a Hollywood star. She said, "I never told anybody," but, as Portelli notes, the stories from an oral history interview have likely been told before in offhand bits and pieces to family and friends.<sup>15</sup> Of course, Riley has already told me, a stranger, a well-rehearsed story about her SPARs experiences, a story which her family and friends (including the local mayor and various

New Jersey schoolchildren) had also likely heard. She saved memorabilia from her time in the stage show, listing her as part of the cast with Cesar Romero, Frankie Fontaine and Skitch Henderson.

Riley is also playing to the audience of the oral history interview. In the recollection, she tells the mayor that Romero wouldn't remember her, dramatically setting up a story where she and the Hollywood star will have a meaningful conversation:

*I went to the theater and I'm a nervous wreck. I'm white haired. I was twenty-one when I met him. Anyway, we got to the theater and they had all the tv lights out and all this business. And he came out and I said, "Don't even pretend you know me because I know you don't." When I showed him the pictures and I asked him if he remembered the war bonds show, and he said, "Oh yeah. I remember that." And so we talked for quite awhile. And I asked, "Did you every get together with your own shipmates," and he said, "Of course I do." And I said, "Did you ever see Sid Ceasar?" And he said, "Sid Ceasar, Victor Mature. We were all Coast Guard." And anyway, it was quite an experience. And then when I went back to my regular job I missed all the hullabaloo I had been on.*

Riley doesn't even give Romero a chance to pretend that he knows her. She immediately lets him off the hook, and instead they talk about the show in general. By remembering the show, Romero, a Hollywood celebrity with dozens of roles to his credit, reaffirms its importance. In the story, Riley again positions herself adjacent to celebrity, not only

Romero, who she spoke with, but also his fellow Coast Guard buddies Sid Ceasar and Victor Mature.

But the about face at the end of this memory is perhaps its most intriguing characteristic. When she first says “it was quite an experience,” the listener, comfortable at the theater (which is now part of my memory through *mémoire involontaire*), initially thinks Riley is talking about the conversation with Romero. But her next line makes me realize she has jerked me back to the 1940s. Riley’s memory thus forms a direct link between the interview location in 2006, the New Jersey theater in the 1990s, and 1940s New England, on and off stage working for the SPARs.

Curiously, Riley’s *Tars and SPARs* experiences are absent from the recollections presented in *War Stories*. In the television program, Riley is described as supervising eleven women working with LORAN, the Navy and Coast Guard’s top secret ship tracking system. Riley details the specifics of the job, “The LORAN base was mostly just one room which they slept in and worked in. But every two minutes a message would be sent to any ship or plane and they would pick it up and echo it back. It was very important at that time in the war and it helped a great deal.”<sup>16</sup> The implication from the program was that Riley also was a LORAN operator. It is never mentioned that she was a Master at Arms.

The program itself, with its swooshing graphics, omnipresent sound effects, and quick cut editing style, may have been prone to hyperbole. Riley never directly says “I was a LORAN operator,” but instead uses the third person “they” when talking about the work. It seems likely the producers and writers misunderstood Riley’s memory and were



confused about her use of the word “oversee” in regards to her Master of Arms duties. In the oral history, Riley explains that she was a part of the Coast Guard’s personnel department. But she never mentions the program’s misrepresentation when describing appearing on the show:

*They said, “Would you be willing to come in and speak to us about the women in the Coast Guard?” And I said, “Yes, I certainly would. I’d like to tell the world about what we did. We were not only mechanics, a lot of our women worked in decoding, those sorts of things.” So she said, “We’d like to ask you some questions,” and “Could you wear your uniform?” and so on. Which doesn’t fit, of course. It comes to here these days. I just bought a navy blue blazer and transferred all my insignias. I went into New York City and they taped. I thought they would have all the make-up people and that but they didn’t. I thought, “Oh, boy, wait until they see these wrinkles!” But that was what he wanted. He wanted people to see that those World War II women were still around.*

Three other times in the oral history, Riley offers a similarly detailed memory about being interviewed by Oliver North.

These descriptions are Riley’s way of demonstrating that she still misses part of that hullabaloo which positioned her as different from other women who served. But instead of saying directly “I miss being on stage,” Riley instead uses her military experiences as the rationale for the attention she received later in life. She was selected for an interview on a cable television program or a heart-to-heart chat backstage with

Cesar Romero because her work was “important at the time.” Oliver North didn’t talk to her because of her somewhat tenuous celebrity status, but because he “wanted people to see those World War II women were still around.” Her “somewhen in time” becomes a space of prominence: on-stage during World War II, backstage during the 1990s, or on-camera in the twenty-first century.

### *Vision and “Re-vision”*

The concepts of *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire* have been used by feminist oral historians as a means of explaining not only the fragility of memory and the uniqueness of an individual story, but also to help explain the importance of storytelling in women’s recollections. It becomes a give and take between actual and vicarious experience. Terry DeHay describes this negotiating process as *re-vision*. Working from a model developed by Adrienne Rich, DeHay says re-vision allows women to assess history, evaluate their roles within it, and recognize how their stories may have been misrepresented by the dominant culture. “The act of re-visioning creates fresh cultures to stand in opposition to the dominant culture, which has historically both absorbed and repressed them,” she writes.<sup>17</sup> Re-vision is essentially a cosmic “do-over”; a chance to recognize and remedy history’s errors and omissions.

DeHay believes this process becomes manifest in women’s writing. She notes re-vision allows the author to create a story about an individual’s negotiations with memory, such as in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*, which:

tells the story of a young girl’s coming of age, of her recognition of the oppression of her community, her growing anger and commitment to

saving herself as she cannot save [her girlfriend] Sally. At the same time, it is the story of the creation of a storyteller, one who will not forget and for whom remembering the lives of the men and women on Mango Street is a means of understanding herself as well as her community.<sup>18</sup>

Esperanza, the semi-autobiographical character at the center of *The House on Mango Street* is told at one point, “You will always be Mango Street. You can’t erase what you know. You can’t forget who you are.”<sup>19</sup> Mango Street, a place deemed insignificant by mainstream history, is an essential part of Esperanza’s (and by extension Cisneros’) identity. By injecting it into history, in this case through semi-autobiographical fiction, Cisneros asserts its importance.

In this case of the WAVES and SPARs, women who have written book-length essays most frequently use the memoir format to re-evaluate and re-assert the worth of their wartime contributions. I am aware of at least a dozen published accounts, including books by two of the women interviewed for this project. Other women have told me that they have written their memoirs; one allowed me to see a copy for this dissertation. Comparing the women’s written words with their oral history interviews offers an opportunity to see the different way women negotiate and make a space for their stories within the historical record. Two are especially illuminating: the stories of Helen Edgar (Gilbert) and Josette Dermody (Wingo).

In her oral history, Edgar frequently referred me back to her memoir. “You have to read the book!” she joked to which I replied, laughing, “Well, part of the oral history

process is the *oral* part. *Telling* the stories!” For her, the memoir was a therapeutic process:

*The stuff that I remembered -- as I typed and wrote about stuff, the more I remembered. The more I remembered, the more I typed, blah blah blah. And one thing led to another. I finished all the military stuff and decided the Depression should be included because it made us ready for the war. And I thought my early childhood in the '20s, the roaring '20s, was so dysfunctional it had to be told [laughs]. And then, and then the rest of the story about my marriage and my alcoholism and the airline crash and the recovery, my recovery and my learning how to live life on life's terms and be at peace within, you know?*

The storytelling process, through writing the memoir, offered Edgar a chance at re-vision; remembering her life and putting it into context.

In a way, she was trying to resolve a tension of sorts: how her memories often conflicted with those of other World War II-era WAVES. Edgar scoffed at some of their memoirs, feeling that the other women glossed over details or attempted to make themselves appear “goody-goody.” Laura Black says this is an key function of the storytelling process for people identified with a larger group identity. Stories are:

Important ways that people construct their identities, and telling and responding to stories help group members negotiate the tension between their individual and collective identities. In this way, storytelling allows interaction partners to shape their identities in relation to one another.<sup>20</sup>

For Edgar, the tension is centered around sex, and the sexual activities of the WAVES she knew.

Edgar talks openly about sex. In her memoir, *“Okay, Girls -- Man Your Bunks!”*, she describes her group of friends as being serially monogamous. By this she means they would have an affair with a sailor (generally a pilot in training) while he was on the base. When he shipped out, the relationship would end. She was stationed at Corpus Christi and describes wild parties in town during off hours. “During our big parties it was ‘no holds barred.’ I am prone to think there was more heavy petting than actual intercourse, but I’m not sure,” she writes.<sup>21</sup> She remembers a few women getting pregnant as a result of their activities and being discharged and sent home. She talks openly about lesbianism on base.

She also makes it clear that it wasn’t just some unnamed “others” engaged in the sexual play; she was a willing participant. For instance, Edgar talks about becoming a member of the “Mile-High Club” -- having sex in an airplane in flight -- while a WAVE. She writes that she and the Lt. Commander she was involved with, “had strong chemistry, the kind where you feel the electricity flowing between you.”<sup>22</sup> In her oral history, she offers a more detailed explanation for her sexual explorations:

*We were scared. We didn’t talk about it. It was only in night in bed when the lights went out that you wrapped yourself up and thought, “Oh my god. How’s this all going to end? Is it ever going to end?” It was a whole different feeling than if we had been at home working and, you know, maybe dating. It was just a different lifestyle and a different attitude. I’m*

*not ashamed of anything I did during the war. I'm not ashamed I went into the "Mile-High Club." God, what a night that was! Totally illegal to be in the airplane. See, they didn't think that we as women should be in an airplane because if there was an emergency we wouldn't jump because we were women. That's the kind of thinking they did with us. We were not allowed in airplanes. And, you know, me sneaking off into a PBY with an officer was just "Oooh!" . . . We did that kind of stuff just because we wanted adventure. We were, you know, young enough to think if we could get away with it it would be kind of fun.*

The oral history and book offer similar details about the event (in the book she calls it "one of my more prestigious accomplishments"<sup>23</sup>), but in the oral history she offers a more detailed explanation of why sexual activity came about. "We were scared," she says. People behaved differently because of the tension of the time.

As a result, Edgar's stories offer a counterpoint to the image of the WAVES the Navy was trying to project. In many ways, she epitomized the rumors surrounding military women (sexually active), but she doesn't see it that way.

*We weren't all the the time running around with the idea of getting a man or being in bed with a man or whatever. We were young and we were at the peak of our hormones and there was a damn war going on. There was a war going on. OK. We went to bed with guys. We made love. It felt good. It felt safe. It wasn't something that we were running around getting*

*money for or doing every day. We were in some people's eyes promiscuous.*

*In my eyes, we were normal.*

In her eyes, by *not* talking about sexuality and women's sexual activities, a key part of the story is ignored. Through her memoir and oral history, she is attempting to both tell the alternative side of the story and resolve a tension between the collective identity of the WAVES (refined, elite, sophisticated) and the identity she embodied (sexually active, relaxed, having fun). On the one hand, she embraces the Navy-generated media image (gushing about the designer uniform, calling the Navy "higher class" than other military branches). On the other, she rebels against that very media construction.

Edgar was aware of the media influence in getting war information to the public, calling it "brainwashing" in her oral history interview. She, like many of the women interviewed, mentions general media sources, such as newspapers, radio and newsreels. By contrast, Josette Dermody Wingo was one of the few WAVES interviewed to directly refer to a *specific* media message as influencing her decision to join. She cited the poster showing a pair of WAVES walking toward New York City. "Have you seen the WAVES propaganda?" she asked, laughing. "It was *everywhere*." She is also the only woman to use the term "propaganda" when referring to the World War II-era media.

Dermody's storytelling, both in the book *Mother was a Gunner's Mate* and in person, shows a hyper-awareness of newspapers, magazines, posters and other media outlets. As a gunnery mate at Treasure Island, she would work with sailors who had been out to sea and had come back into port for a refresher course. In her oral history, she says this made her privy to certain information:

*We would read the paper and try to figure out what the hell was going on and where Jerry was and so on and so forth. It was totally schizophrenic when we caught onto it because the newspapers were full of good news. "The Seventh Army is advancing in Gerdenkruten" you know, "They've made a stand yesterday" but nevertheless, the sailors would get the Armed Forces Radio. I have to tell you our sailors were in and out all the time . . . The radio men would get the Armed Forces stories which were probably full of the same type of propaganda but usually the opposite because the psychology was to comfort and encourage the home folks but to make guys mad enough to fight.*

She doesn't credit this knowledge to her present self, but, rather, seems to indicate that even at the time, the men and women in the Navy were aware of the propaganda (even calling it such) and were trying to find out information to counter it and get at the "real" information.

A similar media awareness permeates *Mother was a Gunner's Mate*. Throughout the book, people read newspapers, listen to the radio, and gossip about official and unofficial military news. Dermody also displays a rich imagination, producing running headlines about her WAVE experiences, often to comic effect, such as when she was training how to be a gunnery instructor. At one point the magazine was incorrectly loaded in her gun and "Gunny," their teacher, roughly pushed her out of the way to quickly unload the overheating device. When she protested his brusque behavior, he



gruffly explained that a jammed magazine would explode in just seven seconds, maiming or killing the person behind the trigger:

Nobody looking at me can tell, I don't think, that I am a person who was seven seconds away from looking St. Peter in the face, but trickles of sweat run down the hollows on either side of my spine, shivery even in the midday heat. LOCAL GIRL REPORTS NEAR MISS ON GUNNERY RANGE. No way, thanks.<sup>24</sup>

Another time, when she “accidentally” pushes her on-again, off-again boyfriend Blackie into the lake after learning of an infidelity, she imagines specific media coverage: “The *Detroit News* will headline LOCAL GIRL HELD IN INVESTIGATION BY NAVY, the *Free Press* will say NORTHWEST WAVE DROWNS LOVER IN CALIF. LAKE -- CLAIMS ACCIDENT.”<sup>25</sup> Blackie didn't drown, but did come out of the water with his pride somewhat wounded.

Dermody's book is billed as an “I-was-there” memoir. But in her oral history she acknowledges that some characters are composites, and “half the time I made up people's names anyway.” Facts also don't jive; in her oral history she says she had one brother and was the oldest child, but her memoir paints her as the middle child (and only girl) in a family of three. But to criticize Dermody for some small factual discrepancies is to miss her larger point. “WAVES are kind of the hinges of history,” she says. “They were there when the world changed.”

Unlike Edgar, Dermody isn't struggling to reconcile differences between her individual and group identities. She is frequently referred to by other women in *Mother*

was a *Gunner's Mate* as "Miss Priss;" in many ways she embodies the "goody-goody" that Edgar scorned. But while Edgar describes the WAVE as a forerunner of the unapologetic sexually active woman of the latter twentieth century, Dermody sees WAVES as having a different role. Dermody doesn't credit the WAVES with changing the world, but says without their experiences, the world wouldn't be the place we know today.

### *Fact versus Fiction*

It is in the negotiation between past and present, memory and desire, where storytellers allow the reader insight into the process of re-vision. The reader witnesses the individual's attempt to transform a place and her relationship with it, and how identity is tied up in a sense of locale. Edward Casey describes places as "matters of experience . . . an essay in experimental living within a changing culture."<sup>26</sup> As individuals and individual experiences change, places change too. As Doreen Massey notes, "We are constantly making and remaking the time-spaces through which we live our lives."<sup>27</sup> Re-vision and experience become part of a mobius strip, constantly shifting and transforming both place and individual identity.

Two of the women interviewed, Billye Grymwade and Margaret Anderson (Thorngate), opted out of the memoir format and instead used fiction to tell the story of the WAVES. Grywade's book *MATS and Me: WAVES Flight Attendants on Military Aircraft* was self-published in 2003;<sup>28</sup> Anderson's is an unpublished manuscript entitled *When Flags Flew High, a Novel of World War II Based on Actual Events Both Home and Abroad*.<sup>29</sup>

Grymwade uses her post-war experiences as a springboard for a purely imagined story. Like her book's heroines, Grymwade served as a WAVE during World War II and then in the post-war years replaced male flight orderlies aboard military air transport planes (MATS). But there the similarities end. Grymwade's characters engage in purely imaginary (and purely romantic) adventures: a desert tryst with a Arab sheik, an inter-racial romance between a southern belle and an African American man, the "cute" meeting which blossomed into a love affair. Other than the women's job description (working as a MATS flight attendant), their tale has little in common with Grymwade's oral history.

Anderson's book is another story. Anderson, who was based in San Francisco during World War II, positions herself, and her lead character Anne Wharton, in close proximity to historic events. Wharton, like Anderson, grew up in a small coastal town just north of Los Angeles (Wharton in the fictional Beachside, Anderson in Carpinteria). Wharton, like Anderson, joined the WAVES and was stationed as a yeoman in San Francisco. The experiences Anderson describes in her oral history are lived by her character in her book (see *Figures 31-32*).

Like the other women, Anderson says that her work wasn't all that important. But, unlike the others, she expresses disdain for her military job and assignment:

*It was kind of a disappointment if you want to know the truth. I was stationed at the federal office building in downtown San Francisco. We lived in apartments like civilians. We didn't live in barracks or anything like that. We were free to come and go as we liked to. We lived the life of*

*Riley. The job was too mediocre for me. I would have liked to been assigned something more thrilling but I was back in supply where it was all paperwork.*

Anderson points out specifics of place which made her job so disappointing. They didn't live in barracks, with the restrictions of living under military authority, but were free to come and go as they pleased.

In other words, her experience of military space didn't fit with her preconceptions of it. Tim Edensor discusses the nature of "purified space," which has certain expected conformities and characteristics. Something which is "out-of-place" in such a space stands out as not belonging to the larger group. For Anderson, the purified space of the military included wearing a uniform, living in barracks and following military rules. Part of Anderson's disappointment with her military experience is that it wasn't military enough: she lived in an apartment and had "the life of Riley." Her experience didn't conform with her sense of what placement in the military meant.

Her character doesn't have this problem. Wharton embraces the "life of Riley" the apartment offered because it was a respite from the monotony of her WAVES job:

Not having to live in WAVES barracks was a wonderful unexpected plus, but her spirits soon plummeted when she found that her new job was every-thing she hoped it would not be. She had studied hard to attain a good shorthand speed and all they did was sort papers according to kind or color, and then look for the official numbers of the ships, and keep a file

*Figure 31: “V is for Victory,” the Bronx, New York, c. 1944 (courtesy of*

*Margaret Thorngate).*

Margaret Anderson is

at center. “Ann

Wharton” lived in the

same boot camp

barracks as Anderson.



*Figure 32: “Dress Greys,” San*

*Francisco, c. 1944 (courtesy of*

*Margaret Thorngate).* Margaret

Anderson is at right with two

unidentified WAVES and a

newspaper boy. “Ann Wharton”

was also based in San Francisco

during World War II.

on each ship. Any fifth grader could have done as well without any training. The worse part was writing form letters to suppliers that required eight or ten copies. Therefore typing had to be slow and hard to go through layers of onion skin and carbon. And correcting mistakes was even worse so they had to be extra careful. But she wrote glowing reports to Brad trying to make herself feel important.<sup>30</sup>

When fictionalizing her life story, Anderson reevaluates her disappointment. She allows her character to luxuriate in her living circumstances and to criticize the monotony of her assigned job.

Nonetheless, Anderson is still craving a genuine military experience and is forced to look outside the workplace and her living situation in order to find it.

*I think probably one interesting moment was we got to go out on the USS Missouri battleship before it got sent into the Pacific. A busload of us were taken out so we could tour the ship.*

Anderson doesn't have any photographs of herself aboard the USS Missouri. However, many groups of WAVES were taken aboard various ships for goodwill tours. The Navy Historical Center's collection includes photographs of WAVES dressed in their summer seersucker uniforms, touring aboard the USS Missouri (see *Figures 33-34*). It's entirely possible that Anderson was a part of a similar tour group.

In her novel, the fictional Anne Wharton is likewise invited aboard the U.S.S. Missouri for a goodwill tour, which she recalls when she sees one of the signature

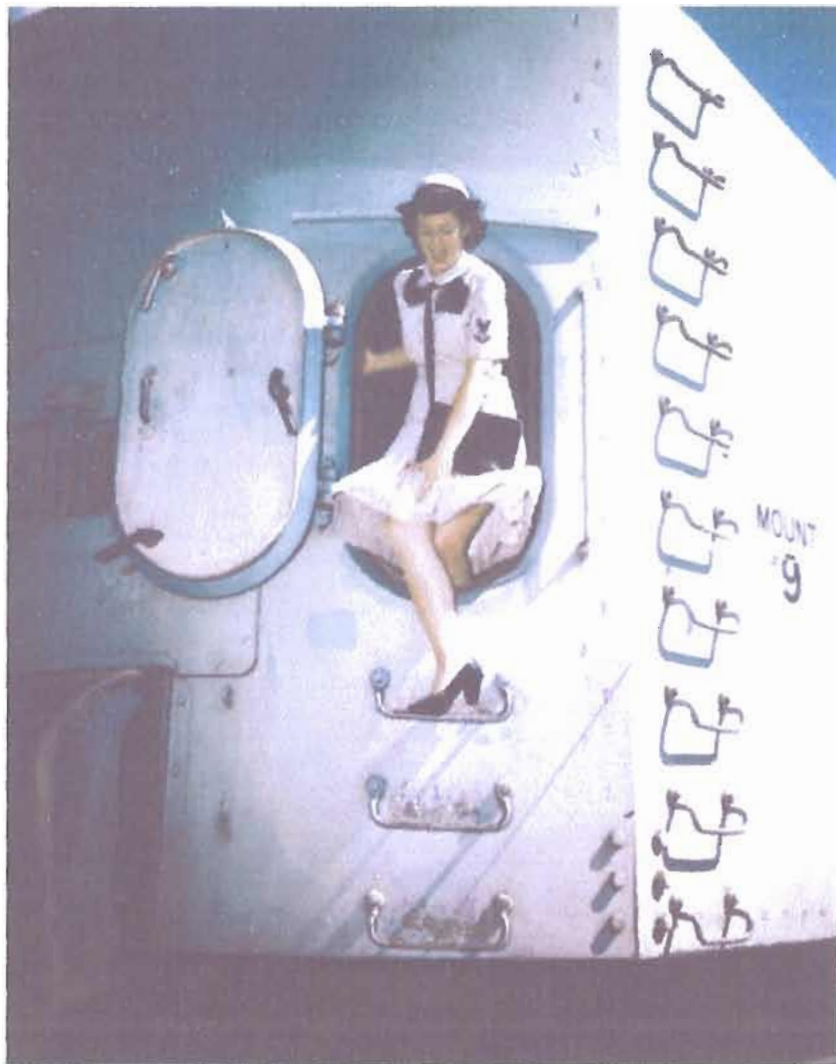
photographs of the war: Joe Rosenthal's *Flag Raising at Iwo Jima*. Wharton had a personal connection with the photograph:

The photographer, Joe Rosenthal, had caught in a split second, a picture that was to become immortal, the symbol of the Americans fight for democracy. It was also special for Anne for one of the ships was the Battleship Missouri that they had toured last fall. It was taking part off shore in the Battle for Iwo Jima and she thought about the sailor who asked her to paint a stripe on the deck that day. She smiled thinking about how they had to go up the ladders very carefully to keep the sailors from seeing up their skirts.<sup>31</sup>

This description calls to mind the photographs Navy publicists took of women aboard the Missouri. In one, the woman's skirt blows up around her knees as she attempts to descend a ship's ladder in high heels.

But the fictional description also echoes Anderson's own oral history interview. Just like her character, Anderson is asked to do her part to help the fleet:

*I was on the deck and there were two seamen who were painting the deck gray. One of them handed me the paintbrush and said, "Here, paint some of this for luck." I said, "Sure" and ran it back and forth for several boards and I said, "OK, the USS Missouri will be the luckiest ship on the fleet." And it was, because it was where the surrender was signed with Japan.*



*Figure 33:* Yeoman Third Class Betty Martin Exiting the Rear Door of a 5"/38 Gun Mount, While Touring the USS Missouri in an East Coast Port. c. August 1944 (80-K-4570, Naval Historical Center, National Archives).





*Figure 34: WAVES visiting USS Missouri, c. August 1944*

(80-K-4563, Naval Historical Center, National Archives).

Anderson's story inserts her directly and dramatically into history. The insertion is fascinating on a variety of levels. Repeatedly in military histories, it is mentioned naval men of the era believed it was unlucky for women to be aboard ships (Mildred McAfee says Naval tradition was "that women were dangerous on ships"<sup>32</sup>). Yet Anderson says these two sailors asked her to paint the ship *for luck*, which in the retelling is done with a flourish that invites comparison with a papal blessing of an audience. Through her blessing, she foretells the ship's role in the ending of the war.

This isn't the end of the story, however. Anderson has linked herself to the surrender of Japan, but as a storyteller she wants reinforce to the listener that her role in the war was important:

*Years later I came back and went on a tour of the ship. Where they signed the treaty on the ship and put the plaque was where I painted. The officer made a point to show it to me. It was kind of eerie and strange but it happened.*

Not only did Anderson bring the ship luck, but the peace treaty was signed at the very spot where she brushed on a few strokes of paint on the deck. Far from being unlucky, her presence on the USS Missouri brought luck to the sailors aboard, the country, and even, in the eyes of her generation, the entire civilized world.

This isn't the only tale which Anderson tells to position herself in history. She also says she witnessed the ceremony which gave birth to the United Nations. A treaty establishing the U.N. was signed in San Francisco in 1945, and Anderson recalls being one of a handful of people to get tickets to the event and to be in the room as the treaty

was signed (in her book, the character Ann Wharton not only witnesses the signing of the treaty, but also is a part of the public relations crew for the event). Again, Anderson has nothing to verify her presence, other than her memory. In another story, she tells of driving in the desert outside of Las Vegas with her husband and seeing a large, bright mushroom-shaped cloud. She was witness to an atomic bomb test.

So should one disregard Anderson and her memories? I would argue a vehement “no.” Portelli found a similar transformation of the “facts” (as verified in newspaper coverage) in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, where a community’s memory of an event relocated the killing of a worker to a different time and space from when it actually occurred. Portelli used this event to demonstrate how errors in memory, or even willful misremembering, offer telling clues about an individual’s sense of self and a group’s collective identity.<sup>33</sup>

A similar struggle emerges in Addams’ writings of the story of the Devil Baby, a pointed-eared, cloven-tailed imp was born as punishment for a father’s heresy. Even though neighborhood women (and men) insist the child is at Hull House, Addams knows he isn’t there. But she is also loathe to dismiss the story as a mere fable. For Addams, the telling process is not the *only* important act.

I was surprised, not so much by the fact that memory could integrate the individual experience into a sense of relation with the more impersonal aspects of life, as that the larger meaning had been obtained when the fructifying memory had had nothing to feed upon but the harshest and most monotonous of industrial experiences.<sup>34</sup>

By reconstructing a story, the narrator transforms the reality of the situation.

Anderson, by offering memories that position her as a historical actor, is merely being more direct than the other women. Nonetheless, her memories serve the same function as theirs: they act as a means of re-remembering. Like the others, Anderson is demonstrating the importance of the work of the WAVES and SPARs. Her memories, and the way she chooses to tell them, thus serve to counter the initial statement that they didn't do "anything important." Anderson uses her memories, and her fictional recreations of them, to actively work against what she saw as the monotony and boredom of her military job, and to demonstrate that the women were a crucial and necessary part of the World War II military structure. They made major contributions to the world we know today.

### *Memory, Place and Identity*

The women's fictional and non-fictional forays into the historical record allow them to do a bit of historical reclaiming. Cvetkovich says the oral history interview "is itself a complex tool, sometimes revealing . . . issues only through gaps and silences within the interviews and conflicts between them."<sup>35</sup> In this case, the women are battling not only conflicts within themselves, but also conflicts in history's perception of them. Sociologist Joan Acker describes women who "looked back at their younger selves who, during World War II, had been independent, self-confident . . . traveling alone across the country. They couldn't believe they had ever been such independent, fearless people."<sup>36</sup>

While the women in this project followed a similar life trajectory, moving from military work to home and family, they aren't amazed at the independent, fearless people

in their path. Rather, in the storytelling process, the women reassert those independent, self-confident selves, mentioning society's expectations (that their military jobs weren't important) only to eventually brush those expectations aside. In telling their oral histories, the women's histories "accumulate into a social protest . . . against existing conventions."<sup>37</sup> The evaluations of their lives allow the women to embrace their fearlessness, and challenge the society which devalued their work experiences. Far from fading back into the woodwork, this group of 80 and 90-year-olds want to reassert their importance, claim their role in history, and change it. Through telling the stories, the women are saying they, and their work, mattered.

*This particular film emphasized taking women into the factories to support the war. Well, the theme over and over and over, as I picked up in that particular film, was that you go and you do the job and then you go home afterwards. And what that told me that it was a deliberate tactic. And it answered the question for me as to why, over the years, I never talked about my military service. And there were other women I knew for years before I ever found out they had been in the military. And some I never did know until I saw their obituary. We were so programmed, is the only word, the best word that I can think of, that we did the job and went home . . . Temporary and then you faded back into the woodwork. And of course, a lot of us didn't fade back into the woodwork because we had a*

*job that was different than housework and so forth because it was more interesting and needful.*

- Eileen Horner (Blakely), World War II WAVE

*We were the hinge. We grew up in this old world watching our mothers and our fathers and then our marriages were completely different. For instance, the father was the head of the house. And you had to get, if it was a serious decision he made it. But Mother picked the day to bring it up. Mother made his favorite meal. Mother got everything all organized so he feeling mellow and stuff. There were all these different ways that nobody bothers to do anymore, but they were kind of survival things. They were just the way the world went smoothly that way ..But what happened? They didn't stay. The feminist movement popped all over. It was as if it wasn't going, it wasn't fitting anymore.*

Josette Demody (Wingo), World War II WAVE

*I didn't know until probably the last five years that all these other women felt the same way. And we were together and we talking about having to get permission to go into the service and having to do this and having to do that, and one of the women said, "Well I taught my daughters they didn't have to to anything they didn't want to do!" We realized we were getting shortchanged. So in many ways we produced the girls in the '60s who went out and said, "We're not going to to that."*

- Jane Ashcraft (Fisher), World War II SPAR

Neal Gabler argues that this re-imagining of self is a part of a larger American move away from reality and toward entertainment. Life, he says, has been so influenced by films and television that we don't consider our life to be genuine or worthwhile unless it resembles a movie feature, complete with a designed house, appropriate costumes and a director (life coach):

In the life movie Americans had become Method actors mastering the art of playing themselves by, as Elizabeth Taylor had described it, making their fiction reality. Like those apocryphal cartographers . . . who use the land as a map of itself, they had learned to reach into themselves to pull out the "sense memories" of their lives in order use them to make a convincing performance of their own lives.<sup>38</sup>

Modern Americans are constantly on a stage of their own creation, and, more importantly to Gabler, they don't consider life worthwhile unless it takes place upon that stage.

This certainly shifts the concept of place. Rather than Casey's "matter of experience," place becomes matter of imagination, shaped by what we've voyeuristically observed via the media and then appropriated into our own lives. Perhaps instead of simple actual experience, we likewise inhabit a world of what Paul Adams dubs "mediascapes," where "the media actually disassemble and reassemble people's frameworks of knowledge and action in space and time."<sup>39</sup>

This post-modern space sounds a good deal like Benjamin's *mémoire involontaire*, something experienced only indirectly, through the stories or tales of others. Why did Benjamin privilege this form of memory over the other? He believed *mémoire*

*volontaire* is limited by the intellect: a conscious remembering of what an individual knows he or she can recall. *Mémoire involontaire* has no such limitations. It is characterized by the afterimage, a trace of something left on our brain. Access to this hidden or forgotten memory can be spurred by an unrelated sensory experience, such as the taste of a cookie or the smell of a flower. Through it, an individual can develop a memory independent of experience.

To “hear” the slap of the jump rope while standing next to Lucy and Esperanza on the hot pavement of Mango Street, to “grip” the paintbrush with Wharton/Anderson and spread a few strokes on the sun-kissed deck of the U.S.S. Missouri, or to feel the fear masked by bravado as Josette Dermody is whisked from her soon-to-explode mis-loaded gun is to understand the power of *mémoire involontaire*. As readers (and listeners), we have only experienced these specific events through storytelling. Yet through the thick description of the authors, each becomes a part of the reader’s memory. Observing how individuals access *mémoire involontaire* and incorporate its afterimages into their lives thus allows the researcher insight into an experience which Benjamin called “a rejuvenating force which is a match for the inexorable process of aging.”<sup>40</sup>

For the women of the WAVES and SPARs, *mémoire involontaire* gives them a way to challenge the dominant media messages they received about their military service, both during and after the war. Maureen Honey notes that in 1940s advertising women were praised for their nontraditional roles during the war, but were also constantly reminded that once the war ended, roles would change again: “a full-time homemaker was a integral part of this American idealization of the family.”<sup>41</sup> Maria Diedrich and



Dorothea Fischer-Hornung have observed that media messages during wartime had a specific goal:

short-term and situational change in women's responsibilities and public assignments without endangering conventional hierarchical gender roles.

Decoded, the promises of change, improvement and progress turn out to be nothing but a sophisticated linguistic juggling act that retained and stabilized the traditional patriarchal gender relationships of male domination and female subordination.<sup>42</sup>

Thus women were being told that while their jobs were important during the war, they weren't important enough to continue during peacetime.

As the interviews indicate, this double message set up a subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, disconnect in the women. Their oral histories demonstrate how they attempt to resolve the conflict they felt at this mixed message. On the one hand, they repeat the mantra which rationalizes why they left: "I didn't do anything important." On the other, by positioning themselves within history, they demonstrate that their jobs were important after all. In this case, *mémoire involontaire's* afterimage asserts the importance of women's work, allowing the WAVES and SPARs a way to reclaim their place in history.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28-3 (2003), 821.

<sup>2</sup> See: "Women's Memories: Transmuting the Past, as Illustrated by the Story of the Devil Baby and "Women's Memories: Reacting on Life, as Illustrated by the Story of the Devil Baby" in Jane Addams, *The Long Road of Woman's Memory*, ed. Charlene Haddock Seigfried (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Katherine Joslin, *Jane Addams, a Writer's Life*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 174.

<sup>4</sup> Sandra Harding, *Is Science Multicultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1998), 151.

<sup>5</sup> Ann K. Clark, "Memory, Housecleaning and Love: Addams' *Long Road of Women's Memory*" (paper presented at "Exploring Jane Addams, the 29th Annual Richard R. Baker Philosophy Colloquium," Dayton, OH, November 7, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Addams, "The Long Road of Woman's Memory," 16.

<sup>7</sup> 6,600 women served in Hawaii during the latter months of World War II, beginning late December 1944.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 158.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 160-161.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 214.

<sup>11</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 37.

<sup>12</sup> The Veterans History Project was established in 2000 and is funded by Congressional legislation. Its establishment may have been the impetus for many women to write their stories. Likewise, WIMSA encourages female veterans to record their histories in some way. It was founded in 1997. Most women interviewed are WIMSA supporters and likely have heard the message that they have an obligation to share their personal histories. Others mention being inspired by Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998), specifically because it for the most part left out women's experiences. However, many of the women interviewed began writing their stories *before* 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Riley's story is quoted at length in Chapter Five, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," in *Narrative and Genre*, ed. Mary Chamberlain and Paul R. Thompson (London; New York: Routledge 1998), 24.

<sup>16</sup> Cyd Upson and Anse Wieling, *War Stories with Oliver North: The Women of World War II*, Fox NewsChannel (2005).

<sup>17</sup> Terry DeHay, "Narrating Memory," in *Memory, Narrative and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures*, Amritjit Singh et al (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 30.

<sup>18</sup> DeHay, "Narrating Memory," 42.

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- <sup>19</sup> Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (New York: Random House, 1984), 105.
- <sup>20</sup> Laura W. Black, "Deliberation, Storytelling, and Dialogic Moments," *Communication Theory* 18 (2008), 99.
- <sup>21</sup> Helen Gilbert, "Okay, Girls -- Man Your Bunks!" *Tales from the Life of a World War II Navy WAVE* (Toledo, OH: Pedestrian Press, 2007), 69.
- <sup>22</sup> Gilbert, "Okay, Girls -- Man Your Bunks!," 91.
- <sup>23</sup> Gilbert, "Okay, Girls -- Man Your Bunks!," 91.
- <sup>24</sup> Josette Dermody Wingo, *Mother was a Gunner's Mate* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004) 56.
- <sup>25</sup> Wingo, *Gunner's Mate*, 194.
- <sup>26</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 31.
- <sup>27</sup> Doreen Massey, *Power-Geometries and the Politics of Time-Space* (Heidelberg: Department of Geography, University of Heidelberg, 1999), 23.
- <sup>28</sup> Billye Grymwade, *MATS and Me: WAVES Flight Attendants on Military Aircraft* (Ventura, CA: Puma Press 2003).
- <sup>29</sup> Margaret Thorngate, "When Flags Flew High, A Novel of World War II Based on Actual Events Both Home and Abroad, December 1941 - September 1945" (computer DVD file, courtesy of the author).
- <sup>30</sup> Thorngate, "When Flags Flew High" (Chapter 19), 154.
- <sup>31</sup> Thorngate, "When Flags Flew High" (Chapter 24), 220.
- <sup>32</sup> Horton, "Oral History," *Recollections of Woman Officers*, 102.
- <sup>33</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 26.
- <sup>34</sup> Addams, *The Long Road of Woman's Memory*, 43.
- <sup>35</sup> Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, 204.
- <sup>36</sup> Joan Acker, *Class Questions, Feminist Answers: The Gender Lens Series* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 49.
- <sup>37</sup> Addams, *The Long Road of Woman's Memory*, 29.
- <sup>38</sup> Neal Gabler, *Life the Movie : How Entertainment Conquered Reality*, (New York: Vintage, 2000), 229.
- <sup>39</sup> Paul Adams, "Mediascapes," in *American Space/American Place: Geographies of the Contemporary United States*, ed. John. A. Andrew and Johnathan M. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 293.
- <sup>40</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 212.
- <sup>41</sup> Maureen Honey, "The 'Womanpower' Campaign: Advertising and Recruitment Propaganda During World War II," *Frontiers* VI -1 (1981), 53.
- <sup>42</sup> Maria Diedrich and Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, "Introduction," *Women and War: The Changing Status of American Women from the 1930s to the 1970s*, ed. Maria Diedrich and Dorothea Fischer-Hornung (New York: BERG, 1990), 6.

## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSION: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Why did I enlist? I was a very shy, naive person from a rural area. I had never been more than twenty miles from home. I had just graduated from high school and participated in very few things. I don't know, except it felt like I was supposed to. At this time in my life it was where I was supposed to be. It turned out that it was true. I was very lucky. I was beginning to feel some of what we say, "If you listen, you will know what to do with your life."*

- Anna Fogelman, World War II WAVE

In this project, I posed three research questions. I sought to discover how the women describe their decision to enlist in the military, and contrast that with the military's framing of an identity for their recruits. I wondered how national media messages about the work of the WAVES and SPARs would compare with the women's recollections about their military life. Given that this is an oral history project, I asked how women might seek to add their stories to the historical record and how their storytelling is transformed by the oral and written process.

To a degree, this dissertation was framed as an example of Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding, as complicated by the passage of time and the selectivity of memory. Given that the women interviewed fail to remember the vast majority of media messages from the World War II era, it would seem as if the encoding/decoding framing was a failure. But that would be far too simplistic a conclusion. As this dissertation has demonstrated, the women repeated the military's media messages in sometimes surprising ways.

### *Encoding/Decoding*

The Navy and Coast Guard's initial recruitment techniques had a specific goal: to counter concerns about the reputation of military women. These concerns were ranged from the benign worries by a parent about a daughter moving away from home to the malignant rumors about military's women's sexuality. The solution, for the Navy was to present consistent message of the refined nature of the women who served; the Coast Guard was less successful in this front. Both WAVES and SPARs, though, gravitated to the Navy message, describing themselves as part of the military elite.

Subsequent national media campaigns reinforced the notion of the successful consistency of the Navy messages -- and the failure of the Coast Guard to have a similar consistency in its framing of SPARs. WAVES were portrayed as professional, confident, and successful. SPARs, by contrast, were presented as overly feminine and in the military to find a man. The women's memories of wartime service, for the most part, ignore these media messages, unless the messages were directly related to the women who served. This leads to two conclusions. Either the women consciously ignored the

output of the media (they were too busy to pay attention) or the media messages were for the most part so on target with the women's personal identities that for the most part they didn't register. The second conclusion is a description of successful propaganda. Given that the women describe their service time in ways that conforms to the Navy messages, I would argue that the WAVE media messages were examples of successful propaganda. The SPAR media messages didn't conform to that identity and so were ignored.

The women's own writing -- fiction and non-fiction -- reaffirms the success of the Navy propaganda. The women believe that their war contributions were important. Their contributions to the historical record, through fictionalized accounts, memoirs, television interviews or even the oral history process, help them to reassert that point and to counter post-war media. Though they may be loathe to call themselves "feminists," the women in many ways act in the manner of feminist scholars. They are affirming the importance of the "concrete particularities of the ordinary."<sup>1</sup> They are saying that their stories deserve to be placed within historiography.

The research revealed another, more personal, finding. Reflexivity demanded of ethnographic-style research does not come easily to me. I am not, by nature, a journal keeper. But I went into this dissertation on a personal quest of sorts, driven to find out a part of my mother's history that was hidden to me. Reflexivity, as a result, was a necessity. For me, the reflexivity was first found during the convention held for WAVES and SPARs veterans. It ended up shaping the conclusions I drew from my oral history interviews.

*The Search for Thick Conversation*

In late summer 2006, members of WAVES National held their annual convention aboard a Carnival Cruise ship. They toured the Gulf of Mexico and Western Caribbean Sea, leaving from Galveston, Texas, and traveling to Montego Bay (Jamaica), Grand Cayman, and Cozumel (Mexico). The women ranged in age from grey-haired World War II veterans to those who had served in the Iraq War. More than five hundred women, with their family and friends, were aboard the cruise.

During the week, the women held a ceremony to remember military colleagues who had passed away since the previous convention in 2004. First they gathered in one large meeting room, and rang a bell for each woman who had died. They then walked to an outside deck near the life boats. Each woman took a place alongside the railing. A prayer was read, and then the women tossed rose petals over the side. The red of the petals swirled in the white of the foam left in the ship's wake (see *Figures 35-36*).

But during the cruise the women veterans weren't the only one recognizing the value of their, and their peers', contributions. They also got some long-overdue recognition from the non-WAVES National world. The first day, the ship's cruise director announced over the public address system that the group was on board. The women all sat in one area in the dining room, and were often approached by other passengers. "It's amazing. 'You were in the Navy?' 'Yeah, we were in the Navy.' 'And what did you do?'" Dorothy Budacki recalled being asked. Women told of people coming up and thanking them for their military service. Sixty years after the last WAVE received a

notice of separation from the Navy, the women received a small, but public, acknowledgment of the value of their contributions.

During the last full day at sea, as the women gathered to have the group photograph taken in the three-story central atrium, other passengers on the ship watched from surrounding balconies. The women looked up from the ground floor to the photographer, who was perched on a balcony above. He kept trying to hush the women, who had by this point broken into an impromptu chorus of *Anchors Aweigh*, *God Bless America*, and *WAVES of the Navy*. Eventually they all looked up in unison, a sea of red, white and blue, smiling faces and (mostly) grey hair (see *Figure 37*).

The 2006 WAVES National Convention placed me in an unusual position as an oral history researcher. On the one hand, it was a type of one-stop shopping: the women were gathered to attend a convention and reminisce about their experiences. They were confined to the cruise ship as we travelled from port to port in the Caribbean Sea. Two full days were spent “at sea,” with no more pressing distractions than the pool or the on-board casino. Other days we spent hours traveling from port to port.

The close quarters were both a blessing and a curse. While my roommate (a friend from high school) found out of the way nooks and crannies to avoid the ship-imposed “fun” (Carnival markets itself as “the fun ship” and its cruises offer a constant barrage of contests, games and entertainment), I spent few hours lounging on the deck or seeing the ocean pass by. My time was spent in cabins and meeting rooms around the ship talking with women. I interviewed ten women over the seven-day cruise (see *Figures 38-39*). A technical glitch, which erased several of my digital files, forced me to



*Figure 35: Women  
Wait to Toss Rose  
Petals Overboard,  
WAVES National  
Convention,  
Caribbean Sea,  
September 22, 2006  
(Courtesy of Mel  
Kangleon).*



*Figure 36: Women  
Wait to Toss Rose  
Petals Overboard,  
WAVES National  
Convention,  
Caribbean Sea,  
September 22, 2006  
(Courtesy of Mel  
Kangleon).*



*Figure 37: WAVES National Convention Group Shot, Caribbean Sea, September 22, 2006 (Courtesy of Mel Kangleon).*



*Figure 38: Author  
Talking with  
Unidentified WAVES,  
WAVES National  
Convention,  
Caribbean Sea,  
September 22, 2006  
(Courtesy of Mel  
Kangleon).*

*Figure 39: Violet  
Kloth (left) with  
Freddie McBride,  
WAVES National  
Convention,  
Caribbean Sea,  
September 18, 2006  
(Courtesy of Mel  
Kangleon).*



interview four of the women twice. I spent approximately sixteen hours of the cruise in recorded interviews, not including talking with each woman before and after each interview took place.

The bulk of the rest of the time was spent with the women. Except for the first night, during each dinner (and several lunches) my roommate and I ate with WAVES (see *Figures 40-41*). The first day in port (Montego Bay, Jamaica), we were joined on an off-ship tour by Margaret Anderson. She spent the entire hour drive up a narrow, winding, rutted mountain road talking about the WAVES National organization. The tour itself consisted of two person rafts floating down a local river. Margaret was paired with another WAVE on the raft (see *Figure 42*), but the second my raft docked, Margaret was by my side with a running commentary: “Where were you? It took you forever to get here. I told my guy to take his time and I think he rushed us down. We’ve been here a long time. I thought you were lost.” Another WAVE, Anna Fogelman, asked if she could go shopping in Cozumel with my friend and me (see *Figure 43*). Since I had an interview scheduled with another woman, I arranged to meet Anna at her room at 10 in the morning to go ashore. When I returned from the interview, Anna was already in my room; my friend said she had been there for about an hour waiting for our shopping trip.

The oral history process can be emotionally draining; aboard ship this mental exhaustion was intensified. Before and after the cruise, I limited myself to just two interviews per day. When I attempted to do three interviews, I found my interview skills lagging and I didn’t pay enough attention to the storytelling process. I was unable to find thick conversation. But aboard ship, even if I only did two interviews a day, I was still

*Figure 40:* Clockwise from top left: Mickey Kalinauskas, Margaret Anderson, author, Virginia Gillmore; WAVES National Convention, Caribbean Sea, September 18, 2006



(Courtesy of Mel Kangleon).



*Figure 41:* Unidentified WAVES at Dinner, WAVES National Convention, Caribbean Sea, September 19, 2006 (Courtesy of Mel Kangleon).



*Figure 42:* Margaret Thorngate (right) with unidentified WAVE, WAVES National Convention, Jamaica, September 20, 2006 (Courtesy of Mel Kangleon).

*Figure 43:* From left: Mel Kangleon, author, Anna Fogelman, WAVES National Convention, Caribbean Sea, September 22, 2006 (Courtesy of Mel Kangleon).



surrounded by the women all day long. The close proximity was a double edged sword. They couldn't get away from me, but, by the same token, I couldn't get away from *them*.

My notes from the cruise reflect the tension I was feeling. "I headed up to the jazz lounge to meet Mel (my friend). I caught Anna in the corner of my eye. I'm exhausted," I wrote. The notes continue:

I consciously avoided her, walking on the other side of the room to the computer lab to see if Mel is there. Anna has mentioned several times she is going to the jazz lounge -- I know she wants to meet Mel and I [stet] there. I'm tired, burned out, not sharp. I don't want to alienate her, but I also just want to relax. The jazz band [we met the night before] sees me and invites me to sit. I do, guiltily. I know Anna is there. I'm avoiding her. I watch out of the corner of my eye while talking to the boys (BOYS!) in the band. At point point I see Mel, excuse myself and drag her and Anna (who Mel is sitting with) over to our table. Stupidly, I hope that these jazz boys (infants, really) won't find Anna dull or irrelevant or boring. I worry about what they'll think of her -- as if it matters. I blame my exhaustion, my weariness at the act of being up all the time. I need to hide, I need quiet, I need to escape into another world for a few minutes. How does this get done -- how does a researcher maintain empathy with their subject when really all she wants to do is not talk about them and their lives for an evening? Am I somehow terrible for wanting the time to

myself? I don't think so, but I also worry about how to strike a balance between satisfying an interviewee and satisfying myself.

The notes, complete with grammatical errors and parenthetical comments, are evidence of my mental exhaustion. My handwriting, difficult to read under the best of circumstances, is nearly indecipherable. The notes seem more the self-reflexive insights of an ethnographer, rather than the shared authority of the oral history interview.

Previous notes were limited to less selfish concerns. I physically described the women in detail, wrote of how each woman approached me to share her oral history, and outlined the circumstances of each interview (who was there, where we were, how long it took). But the entry for the second-to-last night, by focusing on my internal tension, rather than an external description, illustrates how treacherous the search for thick conversation can be. I knew that in order to gather the richest conversation and to fully participate in the shared authority of the oral history interview I had to be willing to give something of myself. The neutral journalistic observer would need to be erased. The notes from the cruise are evidence that this can be a painful and difficult process.

I am not the first oral historian to struggle with what has been called the “burden of intimacy.” Ann Cvetkovich wrote in her project on AIDS activism:

Freighted with methodological, theoretical, and psychic baggage, the interview process was always both humbling and revelatory. The burden of intimacy of encouraging people to talk about their emotional experience even when I didn't know them especially well, was an ongoing challenge.

The labor of sympathetic listening in order to facilitate someone else's



articulation of her experiences was often exhausting, and I felt myself overwhelmed by all the voices in my head.<sup>2</sup>

For oral history research, being overwhelmed may be to a large degree unavoidable. Mary Marshall Clark argues that oral historians engage in a constant struggle against indifference. She contends, “Our tasks do not permit us partial listening. Our tasks instead confer upon us the mission to hear the resonance between private and public stories and to remark on the myriad ways they are connected.”<sup>3</sup> The researcher is charged with transforming the burden of being personally overwhelmed to the goal of articulating the oral history narrative to a larger public.

The cruise served as an important and necessary experience in my personal process of transformation. It was through its total emotional exhaustion that I learned of my own personal limits. By restricting the number of interviews in a given day I could keep myself from becoming “overwhelmed by all the voices in my head.” More importantly, the full immersion of the cruise helped me to better see through the “eyes” of the women who served during the war. The way they “adopted” me, involving me in all their activities (and to a large extent, my roommate), helped convey to me the sense of urgency they felt in getting their story told. The experience made me a more receptive researcher.

### *My Mother's War, Redux*

From the start, I have acknowledged this project was to a degree a personal search. During the course of the research and writing, I came to realize that my interpretations may have been partially influenced by my knowledge of my mother, who

as a young woman attended fashion design school and later impressed upon her two daughters the need to be “ladies.” It was from her that we each got the message that college wasn’t an option but a necessity, the notion that fine art and music was an essential to life, and that one should always be “dressed” when out in public. My mother instilled both of her daughters with a notion of “class.”

But untangling where that notion of class came from becomes similar to trying to figure out if the chicken or egg came first. Did my mother, or any of the women, join the Navy because it projected an image that they associated with themselves? Or did they adopt a notion of class and identity because they were Navy women? In other words, did the women make the Navy or did the Navy make the women? The only certain conclusion I can draw from these questions is that the women’s descriptions of themselves, both WAVES and SPARs, coincide to a large degree with the Navy’s description of the WAVES. Even though the SPARs had admitted publicity difficulties and offered mixed messages, the women I interviewed describe an identity consistent with that of the WAVES. This indicates they either related to the Navy’s publicity and associated it with both the WAVES and SPARs or that the Coast Guard veterans adopted the Navy’s imagery for themselves, rejecting the more sexualized messages of the Coast Guard.

There are large areas which I have ignored in the course of my research into the Navy’s construction of identity through media messages. This dissertation by necessity was focused on one small area of the WAVES and SPARs’ experiences. Future research could move in many different directions. It could include a textual analysis of national

newsreel footage and radio reports, available at the Library of Congress and Naval Historical Center. Other media messages, from local newspapers to books of the era are ripe for analysis. For this project I looked at (but did not analyze) Navy photographs the women saved; tracking each individual through her files at the Naval Historical Center and seeing the photographic record of her time in the service could prove an interesting path of research.

The research also ignores certain evidence found within the individual interviews. Though the women spoke about their post-war experiences in the oral histories, this dissertation does not look at what happened to the women after the war. I have drawn general conclusions about how the women thought their war experiences impacted their post-war lives, but I intentionally ignored details of those experiences. The stories are ripe for analysis. I also largely ignore the minutiae of the women's daily experiences during the war; this at some point could also provide a rich source for historical and cultural research.

To reiterate an observation from Chapter Three, another researcher may find within the oral histories alternate paths of research more intriguing and intellectually challenging than the area I have selected. But looking at the Navy's construction of identity through propaganda and then by analyzing the women's words in the light of that propaganda offers an important contribution to three areas of World War II research: historical analysis, media studies, and feminist studies. It provides a framework around which future studies can be structured.

Initially, I framed the oral history project as a test case of sorts of Stuart Hall's notion of encoding and decoding, as applied to World War II propaganda. However as the findings demonstrate, the study complicates Hall's original theory, which seeks to explain the *contemporary* reception of media messages. Hall's model fails to take into account how we are influenced by remembered and internalized media output (his concern was the immediate impact of a message seen in its own time). It has no framework to allow for the subsequent encoding and decoding which takes place within memory. Meanwhile, oral history theory, such as Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson's model, recognizes the encoding and decoding which occurs as part of the conversation between the narrator and the oral historian, but fails to fully problematize the historic media influences which may shape the storytelling process.

By analyzing the media messages in concert with the women's recollection of their historic selves, this dissertation offers a valuable contribution to both oral history and communication knowledge. It shows how the two disciplines fully intertwine. It illustrates dramatically the multiple layers of encoding and decoding which take place in storytelling. During the interviews, the women tell their life stories in ways that a person from a different generation can understand. Their lives, and the time that they spent in the way, are encoded also with a sense of historic perspective. They reevaluate their lives as they tell their histories, actively encoding and decoding their personal experiences in the storytelling act. But the memories themselves, and the identities the women describe, have been to a degree shaped by the omnipresent consistent media messages the women encountered.

Meanwhile, as the researcher, I too am engaged in multiple forms of encoding and decoding. I attempt to use my outsider's knowledge of the era to understand and explain the media messages to my contemporaries. I attempt to honestly, and actively, listen to the women, making sure I understand their stories *as they tell them*. In the listening, I also make sure they are telling their stories in such a way so that a third person reading the transcripts can garner understanding. Here I am charged with the task of writing the women's histories in such a way as to accurately represent their experience, encoding it in such a way so that not only do I tell their stories (and my interpretation of them), but that I do so in a way not to harm the women. I waffle over the use of the word "fabulist," eventually deleting it from the dissertation. I wonder if revealing the personal exhausted scrawl of my notes from my cruise will anger or embarrass Anna (though I leave it in).

When one steps back to think about it, the multiple layers of encoding and decoding become almost dizzying. The oral history interviews illustrate how natural and unconscious the process actually is. The women talk. I listen. Together, we evaluate and reevaluate. At times, we struggle for mutual understanding. But at other times, such as when Virginia Gillmore asks me to help her remember the words of "our" WAVE song, it is evident that the women fully embraced me and my interpretations. They trusted my presence and knew I would represent them fairly and accurately.

In the Prologue I posed a question: who was that sultry woman with blood-red lips staring out at me from a creased but still-glamorous portrait? Through the course of my research I have come to some answers. That glamorous woman contributed in previously ignored ways to our nation's history. She, like hundreds of thousands of

others, participated in something new and different, changing the path of her life in previously unimagined ways. She was, in the words of Anna Fogelman, “where she was supposed to be” at that point in time of her life. That woman was my mother and she was a Navy WAVE.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 167.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Marshall Clark, "Holocaust Video Testimony, Oral History, and Narrative Medicine: The Struggle Against Indifference," *Literature and Medicine* 24-2 (Fall 2005), 281.

## APPENDIX A

## INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO POTENTIAL ORAL HISTORY NARRATORS

Note: The letter was mailed to individual women on University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication letterhead.

first name last name  
address 1  
address 2

date

Dear Ms. last name:

I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Oregon, working on a dissertation based on the oral histories of women who served in the WAVES and SPARs during World War II. I received your name and address from the Columbia Ripples after attending the picnic meeting in Portland this summer.

I am interested in this project because my mother was a World War II WAVE, serving as a Pharmacist's Mate in San Francisco and Oakland. I am interested in talking with you about your experiences in the service, why you decided to join, and how it impacted your life. I've been lucky enough to talk with 16 WAVES and SPARs who have already shared their life stories with me. I especially enjoyed talking with the 10 women who I met this past summer while attending the WAVES National convention cruise.

I anticipate conducting 1-3 interviews with each participant. Part of the oral history process includes recording interviews for a historical archive. I have recorded both audio and video interviews (the participant chooses) and have spoken with the WIMSA memorial about donating the tapes to their archive after I have completed my dissertation research. I anticipate completing my dissertation in May 2008.

I hope that you'll consider being a part of this process. If you have any questions, or would like to arrange to do an oral history interview, please feel free to write or phone



me. My home address is 201 Spyglass Drive, Eugene, OR 97401. My telephone is 541-335-9795 and my e-mail is [kryan5@uoregon.edu](mailto:kryan5@uoregon.edu).

Thank you for considering participating in this project.

Sincerely,

Kathleen M. Ryan

## APPENDIX B

## FOLLOW-UP LETTER WITH QUESTION TOPICS

Note: The letter was either mailed to individual women on University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication letterhead or e-mailed via the author's University of Oregon e-mail account.

first name last name

address 1

address 2

date

Dear first name:

It was good to talk with you the other day. Thank you in advance for agreeing to share your oral history with me.

In this project I am looking at three general areas: your decision to join the WAVES, your experiences while in the military and how the military impacted your life. I generally start out with a fairly broad questions and let the conversation direct how we will proceed. It's very possible that my questions won't follow this list, but it will give you an idea of my focus.

Where were you when World War II started?

Tell me about how you heard about Pearl Harbor. What was your reaction?

It seems like it was a very different time from now (in terms of patriotism and military service). What are your impressions? Before joining the military did you do anything to

help the "war effort"?

How did you first hear about women being allowed to join the military?

Why did you decide on the WAVES?

What was your family's reaction?

Tell me about your trip to boot camp.

What was it like when you first got to boot camp?

Tell me about your uniform. Did it play a factor in your joining the WAVES?

What was toughest about boot camp? Your living conditions? Marching?  
Exercise? Learning to be part of the military? Something else?  
Where did you go for further training? Was that your first choice?  
Tell me about your advanced training.  
Where did you get stationed? What was your job?  
What did you do in your "spare time"?  
What was it like being a "trailblazer" of sorts?  
Tell me about the end of the war. How did you hear about it? What did you do?  
What was your reaction to the end of the war?  
Tell me about what it was like to go back to civilian life.  
Would you have wanted to remain in the WAVES if you could have?  
Do you think your life would have been different if you hadn't served?  
How did serving impact your life? How did serving impact your family?

As I said, those questions are very general, but ideally they'll get you started thinking about things. Don't worry about having "memorized" answers or anything. An oral history is designed as story telling, a conversation. And if you have any material you think I would like to see such as photographs, a diary, letters, a scrapbook, etc. Please feel free to bring them out for me to see.

Again, thanks so much. I'll see you on (date of interview). If you need to reach me for any reason, my cell phone is 541-335-9795.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Ryan  
Ph.D. Student and Graduate Teaching Fellow  
School of Journalism and Communication

## APPENDIX C

## WAVES NATIONAL ARTICLE

From *White Caps: The Newsletter for WAVES National*, February 2007

receiving their White Caps. Usually there are two reasons for that. 1. A member has not paid her national dues or national hasn't received the dues payment, or 2. A member has moved and I don't receive notification in a timely manner or the Post Office has not been notified of a move. Just a couple of suggestions. Each year by May please check the first two digits of the first line of your white caps label to see if the dues year (07) has been updated. If it has not and you paid your national dues to your unit treasurer or mailed your national dues if you are a MAL, please see your unit treasurer or Pat Childers to see if she received your payment. This will expedite in correcting any problems so you will receive your white caps on time. If you have moved or know that you will be moving please forward a change of address to me as soon as you can by the 25th day of the following months of Jan, March, May, July, Sept. and Nov. The White Caps is

one of the benefits of paying your national dues and I would like to see every member receive and read her newsletter. I thank you for your assistance and until next time.  
Anchors Aweigh! Gloria

## WHITE CAPS EDITOR

Barb Turner



I really do read all of the newsletters that you mail to me. I appreciate receiving them and look forward to each and every one. Remember, if you want your unit article in the *FOAM off the WAVES* pages, please e-mail or snail mail your article to me and copy Sharon Woods. If you are a MAL, I want to hear from you too. If you mail a suggestion or an article to me, however and don't bother to sign it or put a return address label on it, it will not get published, or, obviously a reply!

#### Holiday Greetings for Recovering Sailors and Marines at National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) Bethesda

The Marine Liaison at Bethesda Hospital, where wounded Marines return stateside to recover or for rehabilitation, reports that they have not been receiving enough greeting cards or Thinking of You cards for the number of wounded at the hospital. Won't you please think about including a card or two to:

A Recovering Sailor or Marine, National Naval Medical Center, Marine Corps Liaison Center, 8901 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20889

Your card(s) will be a great present to boost morale of a wounded warrior and each one costs only 39 cents to mail. If you would mail just one Thinking of You card each month during the year, the wounded warriors would receive a great benefit knowing that American citizens appreciate their sacrifice, care about them and wish for their speedy and full recovery.

### Sea Service Women Made History

Kathleen Ryan

I am working on a dissertation dealing with the role of women in the WAVES and SPARs during World War II. The project is based around oral history interviews with women who served. So far, I have about 25 women who have shared their oral histories with me. I have met a woman who was a member of the first boot camp, and the self-proclaimed "youngest living SPAR" (she was the youngest in her boot class, which was the final boot class for the SPARs). I'm very excited about the project, because I hope to help shed light on an area of American history which has been largely ignored by both the mass media and academic scholars.

Over the summer, I was lucky to attend two important gatherings. The first was the Columbia University Summer Institute on Oral History in June, which gave me insight into how to help individuals best tell their stories. I then put my newfound knowl-

edge to work in September, when I attended the WAVES National Convention. I met, and interviewed, a number of interesting women.

I recently was invited to present a paper on some of my research at the Ninth Women's History Month Conference at Sarah Lawrence College. The conference is called "Women at War: Soldiers, Sisters, Survivors"—the dates are March 2-3, 2007 in Bronxville, NY. I will be talking about the role of the uniform in recruitment and identity for WAVES and SPARs.

Biographical information: My mother, Mary (Marovich) Ryan entered the Navy on 7/15/43 and attended Hunter College. She served as a Pharmacist's Mate at Treasure Island during World War II and was discharged in 1945. I spent 18 years as a professional journalist before returning to college to get my Ph.D. in Communication and Society; I want to teach at the collegiate level after graduation.

While I am based in Oregon, I will be traveling for this research, so women from other areas shouldn't hesitate to call or write me if they are interested in participating. When I have completed my research, I have arranged with the Women's Memorial (WIMSA) to have the oral history tapes and transcripts donated to their archives.

POC: Kathleen Ryan, PhD Student and Graduate Teaching Fellow, School of Journalism and Communication, 1275 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1275, 541-335-9795 (cell) or [kryan5@uoregon.edu](mailto:kryan5@uoregon.edu)

#### REGIONAL NOTES –

Region VIII Wishing everyone a happy and healthy New Year. Please remember the dates for the Regional Conference in Vermont. Hope to see everyone there. Don't forget to work on membership.

Pat Weiner

## APPENDIX D

### ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM

Note: This release form was provided to women either as they did the oral history interview or after they read and edited the transcripts of the completed oral history interview.

### **HUMAN SUBJECTS RELEASE FORM**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kathleen Ryan from the University of Oregon School of Journalism & Communication. I hope to gather the oral histories of women who participated in World War II as WAVES. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your military service.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to be part of up to three videotaped interviews about your experiences in the war. I believe the story of the women who served in World War II has not been adequately told, and your participation will help to add to our understanding of American and Women's history. By agreeing to participate in an interview, you agree to the release of your name and other identifying factors, such as the location of your military service.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with WAVES National. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Kathleen Ryan, School of Journalism & Communication, 1275 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1275, 541-346-3551 or Lauren Kessler, School of Journalism & Communication, 1275 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1275, 541-346-3753. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office for Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510. You have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any

time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

Signature of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

## TRANSCRIPT COVER LETTER

Note: The letter was either mailed to individual women on University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication letterhead and/or e-mailed via the author's University of Oregon e-mail account. All women but one received a printed copy of individual transcripts; the one woman received her transcript as a word processing document, on her request.

first name last name

address 1

address 2

date

Dear first name:

First, thank you for participating in the oral history project. I have interviewed 51 women in connection with this project, and your stories are helping me to better understand the World War II era. After much delays, I have finally completed transcribing your interview. I do apologize for the delay, but I had more than 3 days (72+ hours) of interviews to transcribe, and the process has been quite time consuming. Attached is the transcript of your interview. I have included two copies: one for you to edit and return to me, and the second for you to keep for your files.

On editing, you don't want to "clean up" your speech too much. This is a transcript of a conversation, and so it's important to keep some of those "markers" of conversation. Instead, I'd worry about the major errors that you may have made in conversation. There may be a couple of places that I've marked with a ? or with sp? If you could please check those and correct as necessary. If there are certain stories you would like to remove, I understand. Also, please let me know if you would like to change something completely, or if you want to add an explanatory note to the transcript.

I also noted that I don't have a release from you. I thought we had signed one, but it's entirely possible that it never got filled out. Could you please sign and return to me the two release forms attached? The first is for the University and is required by my

dissertation. The second is so the oral history tape and transcript can be donated to the Women's Memorial after I am done with this project. I think it's important that other historians have a chance to access the oral histories. I know reading old oral histories has been very valuable for me.

Please return the edited transcript and any releases in the stamped envelope. I am currently writing the dissertation, so if I could get the material returned as quickly as possible, I would greatly appreciate it. I would like to be sure to represent your stories as accurately as possible.

As always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to write, e-mail or call. Thank you again for participating!

Best,

Kathleen Ryan  
Ph.D. Candidate & Graduate Teaching Fellow  
[kryan5@uoregon.edu](mailto:kryan5@uoregon.edu)  
541-335-9795 (cell)



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