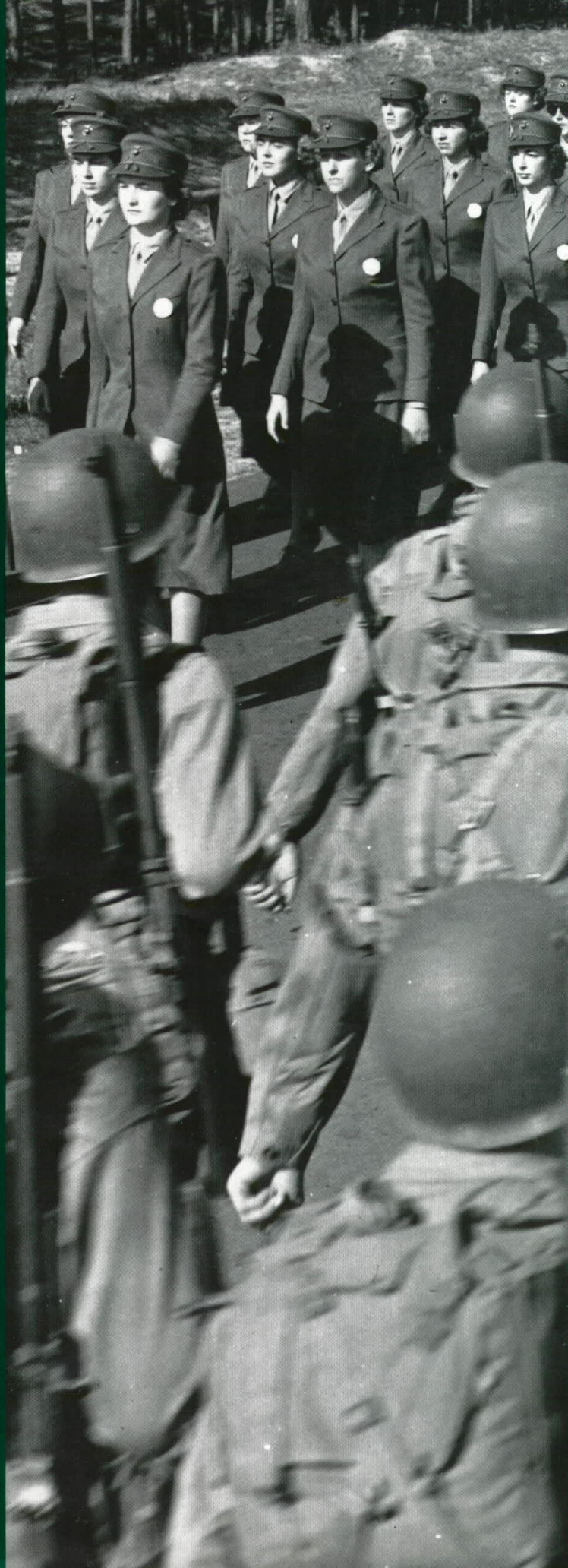


FREE A MARINE TO FIGHT:

WOMEN MARINES IN WORLD WAR II

MARINES IN
WORLD WAR II
COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

BY COLONEL MARY V. STREMLow
U.S. MARINE CORPS RESERVE (RET)





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by Colonel Mary V. Stremlow, USMCR (Ret)

Some stories sound too contrived to be true, yet are repeated too often to be dismissed as mere folklore. One such tale was rescued and restored to its rightful place in history when Mary Eddy Furman confirmed that, yes, the portrait of Archibald Henderson, 5th Commandant of the Marine Corps, crashed from the wall to the buffet the evening that Major General Commandant Thomas Holcomb announced his decision to recruit women into the Corps. Mrs. Furman, then a child, was a dinner guest at a bon voyage dinner party given for her father, Colonel William A. Eddy, and the Commandant's son, Marine Lieutenant Franklin Holcomb, on 12 October 1942 when the Commandant was asked, "General Holcomb, what do you think about having women in the Marine Corps?" Before he could reply, the painting of Archibald Henderson fell.

We can only surmise how Archibald Henderson would have reacted to the notion of using women to relieve male Marines "for essential combat duty." On the other hand, General Holcomb's opposition was well-known. He, as many other Marines, was not happy at the prospect. But, in the fall of 1942, faced with the losses suffered during the cam-

paign for Guadalcanal—and potential future losses in upcoming operations—added to mounting manpower demands, he ran out of options.

With 143,388 Marines on board and tasked by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to add 164,273 within a year, the Marine Corps had already lowered its recruiting standards and raised the age ceiling to 36. At the same time, President Roosevelt's plan to impose a draft threatened the elite image earned by the selective, hard-fighting, disciplined Marines, and so, the Commandant did what he had to do. In furtherance of the war effort, he recommended that as many women as possible should be used in non-combatant billets.

The idea was unpopular, but neither original nor unprecedented; women were already serving with the Army and in the Navy and Coast Guard Reserves. In fact, during World War I, 300 "Marinettes" had freed male Marines from their desks and typewriters at Headquarters, Marine Corps, to go to France.

Periodically, between World War I and World War II, prodded by people like Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall and Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers, military and elected leaders gave fleeting thought to the idea of a women's corps. Marshall knew that General John J. Pershing had specifically asked for, but not received, uniformed female troops. Rogers, a Red Cross volunteer in France in 1917, was angry that women who had been wounded and disabled during the war were not entitled to health care or veterans' benefits. She promised that ". . . women would not again serve with the Army without

the protection the men got."

Yet, until 1941, not many people took the available studies seriously and even advocates could not agree on whether the women should be enlisted directly into the military or be kept separate, in an auxiliary, where they would work as hostesses, librarians, canteen workers, cooks, waitresses, chauffeurs, messengers, and strolling minstrels.

Congresswoman Rogers eventually compromised and settled for a small auxiliary and in May 1941 she introduced H.R. 4906, a bill to establish the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) to make available ". . . to the national defense the knowledge, skill, and special training of the women of the nation." The legislators argued and stalled. Even the brazen Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was not enough to move them to pass the bill until 15 May 1942.

Unfortunately, the notion was doomed from the start and the WAAC, an auxiliary of women who were neither military nor civilian, ultimately was reorganized and converted to full military status as the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in late summer 1943. Meanwhile the Navy watched the unraveling of the WAAC very closely as it struggled with its own version of a plan for women.

Some say there were naval officers who preferred to enlist ducks, dogs, or monkeys to solve the manpower shortage, but the decision was made at the highest level to use women and furthermore, recognizing the fate of the failed WAAC, the women would be "in" the Navy. With sideline help from Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Navy bill, Public Law 689, was signed on 30 July 1942, establishing

On the Cover: "Free a Marine to Fight" could well be the caption of this picture as women Marine recruits pass male Marines in combat gear heading for field training at Camp Lejeune in 1943. Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 6153

At left: A WR color guard is photographed at Headquarters, Marine Corps, summer 1944. Photo courtesy of Mary R. Rich

the Navy Women's Reserve (WAVES). The same law authorized a Marine Corps Women's Reserve (MCWR), but the Marines weren't ready to concede just yet. In the meantime, the Coast Guard formed a women's reserve, the SPARS.

Bowing to increasing pressure from the Congress, the Secretary of the Navy, and the public, the M-1 section of Plans and Policies at Headquarters, Marine Corps, proposed a women's reserve to be placed in the Division of Reserve of the then-Adjutant-Inspector's Department. The Commandant, in the absence of reasonable alternatives, sent the recommendation to Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, and, in the end, the matter was finally settled for the Corps on 7 November 1942 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave his assent.

Early Planning

On 5 November, the Commandant wrote to the commanding officers of all Marine posts and procurement districts to prepare them for the forthcoming MCWR and to ask for their best estimates of the number of Women Reservists (WRs) needed to replace officers and men as office clerks, radiomen, drivers, mechanics, messmen, commissary clerks, etc. He made clear that, within the next year the manpower shortage would be such that it would be incumbent on all concerned with the national welfare to replace men by women in all possible positions.

Armed with the responses, planners tried to project how many women possessing the required skills would be enlisted and put to work immediately, and how many would need special training in such fields as paymaster, quartermaster, and communicator. Based on their calculations, quotas were established for recruiting and training classes were scheduled.

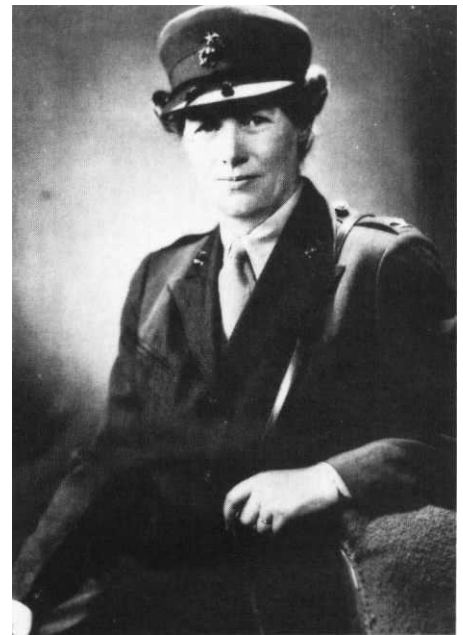
Early estimates called for an initial target of 500 officers and 6,000 enlisted women within four months,

and a total of 1,000 officers and 18,000 enlisted women by June 1944. The plan for rank and grade distribution followed the same pattern as the men's with only minor differences. For officers there would be one major and 35 captains, with the balance of the remaining commissioned officers being first and second lieutenants.

The highest rank, fixed by Public Law 689, permitted one lieutenant commander in the Women's Reserve of the U.S. Naval Reserve, whose counterpart in the Marine Corps would be a major. Eventually, the law was amended so that the senior woman in the Navy and Coast Guard was promoted to captain and in the Marine Corps to colonel.

The public, anticipating a catchy nickname for women Marines much like the WACS, WAVES, and SPARS, bombarded Headquarters with suggestions: MARS, Femarines, WAMS, Dainty Devil-Dogs, Glamarines, Women's Leather-neck Aides, and even Sub-Marines. Surprisingly, considering his open opposition to using women at all, General Holcomb adamantly ruled out all cute names and acronyms and when answering yet another reporter on the subject, stated his views very forcefully in an article in the 27 March 1944 issue of *Life* magazine: "They are Marines. They don't have a nickname and they don't need one. They get their basic training in a Marine atmosphere at a Marine post. They inherit the traditions of Marines. They are Marines."

Marine women of World War II were enormously proud to belong to the only military service that shared its name with them and, actually, insisted upon it. It happened that, in practice, they were most often called Women Reservists, informally shortened to WRs. When referred to as women Marines, or Marine women, the "w" was not capitalized as it was later, after the passage of the Armed Forces Integration Act of 1948, the



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 12627
Col Ruth Cheney Streeter, the first director of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, was photographed at Headquarters, Marine Corps, Washington.

law that gave women regular status in the military. Then, Women Marines were best known as WMs. In fact, women would have to wait 30 years before the gender designator would be dropped and they at last would be simply Marines.

The First WRs

The decision to organize the Women's Reserve in the Division of Reserve was natural because the division was already responsible for recruiting all reserve personnel. Up to this point it had nothing to do with training, but now, it inherited all matters pertaining to the Women's Reserve, including training, uniforming, and administering. An organization created within the Division, the Women's Reserve Section, Officer Procurement Division, was staffed to handle the new activity. It very capably accomplished its first mission, the selection of a suitable woman for the position of Director of the MCWR when the eminently qualified Mrs. Ruth Cheney Streeter was commissioned a major and sworn in by the Secretary of the Navy on 29 January 1943.

Major Streeter was not, however,

the first woman on active duty in the World War II Marine Corps. A few weeks earlier, Mrs. Anne A. Lentz, a civilian clothing expert who had helped design the uniforms for the embryonic MCWR, was quietly commissioned with the rank of captain. She had come to Marine Headquarters on a 30-day assignment from the WAAC and stayed.

By all accounts, the selection of Mrs. Streeter to head the MCWR was inspired. It fell to this woman who had never before held a paying job, to facilitate recruiting, training, administration, and uniforming of the new Women's Reserve.

Mrs. Streeter, 47, president of her class at Byrn Mawr despite completing only two years of college, wife of a prominent lawyer and businessman, mother of four including three sons in service and a 15-year-old daughter, and actively involved for 20 years in New Jersey health and welfare work, was selected from a field of 12 outstanding women recommended by Dean Virginia C. Gildersleeve of Barnard College, Columbia University. Dean Gildersleeve chaired the Advisory Educational Council which had earlier recommended to the Navy the selection of Lieutenant Commander Mildred McAfee, Director of the WAVES.

Colonel Littleton W. T. Waller, Jr., Director of Reserve, and his assistant, Major C. Brewster Rhoads, travelled across the country to interview all candidates personally, and discreet inquiries also were made about the nominees. The Commandant firmly believed the success of the MCWR would depend largely on the character and capabilities of its director. Mrs. Streeter must have seemed an obvious choice. She was confident, spirited, fiercely patriotic, and high-principled. Discussing the interview in later life, she said:

As nearly as I can make out, General Holcomb said, "If I've

got to have women, I've got to have somebody in charge in whom I've got complete confidence." So he called on General Waller. General Waller said, "If I've got to be responsible for the women, I've got to have somebody in whom I have complete confidence." And he called on Major Rhoads. So then the two of them came out to see me.

Having passed muster with both Colonel Waller and Major Rhoads, Mrs. Streeter was scheduled for an interview with General Holcomb. In the course of the first meeting, he asked repeatedly whether she knew

any Marines. Dismayed, and convinced she would be disqualified because she did not know the right people, she answered honestly that she knew no Marines. In fact, this was exactly what the Commandant wanted to hear because he worried that if she had high-ranking friends in the Corps, she might circumvent the chain of command when she couldn't get her way. After the interview, Colonel Waller said he thought it went well, but the appointment still had to be approved by the Secretary of the Navy. That was good news for Mrs. Streeter since Secretary Knox was a close friend of her mother and

Col Streeter poses with two other women's reserve directors: Capt Dorothy Stratton, head of the Coast Guard SPARS, left, and Capt Mildred McAfee, of the WAVES.

Photo courtesy of Mary R. Rich



her in-laws, and her husband had been the Secretary's personal counsel.

Throughout her long life, Ruth Streeter remained a devoted Marine, but the Corps had not been her first choice. After the fall of France in 1940, Mrs. Streeter believed the United States would be drawn into war. In interviews she spoke of German submarines sinking American ships a mile or two off the New Jersey shore, in plain sight of Atlantic City. So, fully intending to be part of the war effort, she learned to fly, earned a commercial pilot's license, and eventually, bought her own small plane. In the summer of 1941 Streeter joined the Civil Air Patrol, and although her plane was used to fly missions aimed at keeping the enemy subs down, to her enormous frustration, she was relegated to the

position of adjutant, organizing schedules and doing ". . . all the dirty work."

In later years, retired Colonel Streeter reminisced that British women were flying planes in England early in the war and she expected American women to be organized to ferry planes to Europe. When, at last, the quasi-military Women Air Service Pilots (WASPs) was formed under the leadership of the legendary aviatrix, Jackie Cochran, Mrs. Streeter was 47 years old, 12 years beyond the age limit. Nevertheless, she tried to enlist four times and was rejected four times before she asked to meet Jackie Cochran personally, and then she was rejected the fifth time.

In January 1943, before the public knew about the Marine Corps' plan to enlist women, Mrs. Streeter

inquired about service in the WAVES. She asked about flying in the Navy but was told she could be a ground instructor. She declined and a month later found herself in Washington, the first director of the MCWR.

After Major Streeter and Captain Lentz were on board, six additional women were recruited for positions considered critical to the success of the Women's Reserve. They were handpicked because of their special abilities, civilian training and experience, and then, with neither military training nor indoctrination, they were commissioned and assigned as follows: Women's Reserve representative for public relations, First Lieutenant E. Louise Stewart; Women's Reserve representative for training program, Captain Charlotte D. Gower; Women's Reserve representative

Capt Henry W. Bransom speaks to a group of WAVES who volunteered to transfer to the Marine Corps and work in

recruiting offices, such as this one in Washington, D.C. They wore WAVE uniforms until USMC uniforms were ready.

Photo courtesy of Marine Corps Gazette



for classification and detail, Captain Cornelia D. T. Williams; Women's Reserve representative for West Coast activities, Captain Lillian O'Malley Daly (who had been a Marinette in World War I and personal secretary to the Commandants from that time); Women's Reserve representative for recruit depot, Captain Katherine A. Towle; and Assistant to the Director, MCWR, Captain Helen C. O'Neill.

The somewhat dubious distinction of being last to take women had its benefits. The missteps and problems of the WAACs, WAVES, and SPARS were duly noted and carefully avoided by the Marines, but more significantly, the other services were generous in sharing advice and resources. Right from the beginning, the Navy was a full partner in getting the fledgling MCWR off to a good start.

There was widespread skepticism about whether men could properly select female applicants, so women were sought immediately for recruiting duty. The Navy sounded a call among WAVE officer candidates and 19 volunteers were selected for transfer and assigned to Marine procurement offices where, still dressed in their Navy uniforms, they set to work recruiting the first Marine women.

By agreement between the Navy Bureau of Personnel and Headquarters, Marine Corps, and to avoid competition in the recruiting of women for either naval service, Naval procurement offices were used by Marine procurement sections. Women interested in joining the WAVES or the Marines went to one office to enlist and receive physical examinations. In time, however, the Marine Corps developed its own network of recruiting offices. The official announcement finally came on Saturday, 13 February 1943, and women enthusiastically answered the call to "Be a Marine . . . Free a Man to Fight." Although enlistments were



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 147-81

The first WR recruits to be shipped to New York for training at Hunter College receive instructions from 1stLt Helen Perrell at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station.

scheduled to begin on the following Monday, the record shows that at least one woman, Lucille E. McClarren of Nemaquin, Pennsylvania, signed up earlier, on 13 February.

Women who aspired to serve as a WR had to meet rather stringent qualifications which prescribed not only their age, education, and state of health, but their marital status as well. At the start, the eligibility requirements were similar for both officers and enlisted women: United States citizenship; not married to a Marine; either single or married but with no children under 18; height not less than 60 inches; weight not less than 95 pounds; good vision and teeth.

For enlisted or "general service," as it was called, the age limits were from 20 to 35, and an applicant was required to have at least two years of high school. For officer candidates, requirements were the same as for WAVES and SPARS: age from 20 to 49; either a college graduate, or a combination of two years of college and two years of work experience.

In time, regulations were relaxed so that the wives of enlisted Marines were allowed to join, and enlisted women could marry after boot camp.

Black women were not specifically barred from the segregated Marine Corps, but on the other hand, they were not knowingly enlisted. While it is rumored that several black women "passed" as white and served in the MCWR, none have been recorded. Officially, the first black women Marines, Annie E. Graham and Ann E. Lamb, arrived at Parris Island for boot training on 10 September 1949.

Early recruiting was so hectic that in some instances, women were sworn in and put directly to work in the procurement offices, delaying military training until later. American women were determined to do their part even if it meant defying the objections of parents, brothers, and boyfriends who tried to keep them from joining up.

Marian Bauer's parents were so shaken at her decision to enlist that they refused to see her off. But then there were the lucky ones like Jane Taylor, who remembers the wise advice from her father, a World War I sailor, "Don't ever complain to me. You're doing this of your own free will. You weren't drafted or forced. Now, go—learn, travel, and do your job to the best of your ability." Zetta Little, the daughter of Salvation

Army officers, joined because, “. . . someone waved a flag and said my brother would come home from the war sooner if I did.”

The Marines were serious about the weight limits and just as underweight male enlistees have always done, underweight women devoured bananas washed down with water to bring their weight up to the required 95 pounds. Audrey Bennington, after being rejected by a Navy doctor because she was underweight, left the induction center to gorge herself, and when she returned, the corpsman turned accomplice, looked away as she climbed on the scale clutching her fur coat and shoes. An equally accommodating corpsman rested his foot on the scale and wrote down 95 pounds when diminutive Danelia Wedge was weighed the second time. “Wedge” got as far as Camp Lejeune but was afraid her military career

was over when a doctor asked what had caused her to lose so much weight since enlistment. He accepted her quick response, “Well, sir, long train rides don’t agree with me.”

Throughout the war the minimum age, set by law, remained unchanged even though it was sometimes difficult to defend. After all, some teenagers argued, 18-year-old girls were able to enlist in World War I, and even some 17-year-olds joined with their parents’ consent. Others wondered why 18-year-old boys could be sent to combat, yet 18-year-old girls could not serve at all.

While some parents fought to keep their girls home, others asked special consideration for daughters who were too young to enlist. One of the most poignant letters came from a World War I holder of the Distinguished Service Cross who wrote to the Commandant in January 1943,

even before news of the Women’s Reserve was announced:

I know this is no time to reminisce, but I do want to bring this to your attention. I am the Marine from 96th Company, Sixth Regiment, who was with Lieutenant [Clifton B.] Cates and a few other Marines that captured Bouresches, France, and I turned over the first German prisoner and machine gun to you that our battalion captured on the night of 6 June 1918. I have a big request to ask As I have no sons to give to the Marines, I would be more than happy if you . . . would recommend my daughter to the newly-formed Marines Women Reserve Corps. While I appreciate that her age may be a little young, she will be 18 this June . . . I

LtCol Streeter welcomes national officers of the Marine Corps League Auxiliary to the WR barracks at Henderson Hall. From left are Mrs. Mabel Murry, LtCol Streeter, Auxiliary President

Mrs. Louise Jacobsen, and Mrs. Olyse Marchi. LtCol Streeter never missed an opportunity to reassure civilians that a motherly figure was watching over her women Marines.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 12270



feel sure she could fit into your program . . . surely this is not too much for a D.S.C. ex-Marine to ask of you

Recruiting for the MCWR was almost too successful and one procurement officer, cautioning that the number of applicants so far exceeded the quotas that he feared a backlash of ill will, suggested that publicity be curtailed. Within one month of MCWR existence, while Marine forces regrouped after the campaign for Guadalcanal, and prepared for the move to New Georgia and the advance up the Solomons chain, Colonel Waller reported: "The women of the country have responded in just the manner we expected Thousands of women have volunteered to serve in the Women's Reserve and from them we have already selected more than 1,000 for the enlisted ranks and over 100 as officers."

Naturally, each service wanted to recruit the very best candidates, and the women directors, joined in a singleness of purpose, set aside inter-Service rivalry to get the job done. Typically, the four leaders, Major Streeter; Major Oveta Culp Hobby, WAAC and WAC; Lieutenant Commander Mildred H. McAfee, WAVES; and Lieutenant Commander Dorothy C. Stratton, SPARS, ironed out their differences on recruiting women from the war industries, civil service, and agriculture, and submitted a recommendation to the Joint Army-Navy Personnel Board which eventually became an all-Service policy.

Women working in war industries were discouraged from enlisting, but some were persistent and in the end were required to go to the local office of the United States Employment Service for approval. Civil Service employees needed a written release "without prejudice" from their agency and when a reluctant employer released the employee "with prejudice," none of the Armed Serv-

ices would consider her application for 90 days. Marines went a step further and barred their own civilian women employees who enlisted from working in their original jobs even if classified to a similar military occupational specialty.

Almost immediately, Major Street-er and the public relations officer, Lieutenant Stewart, toured the United States, speaking at many gatherings such as women's clubs and Chambers of Commerce, to explain the purpose of the MCWR and to win public support. A more subtle but equally important reason for the tour and indeed for having a Director of Women's Reserve at all, according to Colonel Streeter, ". . . was because the parents were not going to let their little darlings go in among all these wolves unless they thought that somebody was keeping a motherly eye on them."

Families had good reason to be apprehensive; the early months were difficult for the Women Reservists. Of all the problems, ranging from barracks obviously designed only for male occupancy to the scarcity of uniforms, the most trying were the stares and jeers of the men which in the words of Colonel Katherine A. Towle, second Director of the MCWR, ". . . somehow had to be brazened out."

From the start, the directors of the WACS, WAVES, SPARS, and MCWR focused their energy on the war effort, but it was difficult not to be distracted by the change in attitude of the fickle public whose early enthusiasm for women in uniform gave way to a nasty, demeaning smear campaign that started as a whisper and grew to a roar. The WAAC took the brunt of the abuse and never really recovered. It was so bad that some suggested it might be part of an enemy plot to sabotage the nation's morale. Sadly, a military intelligence investigation showed otherwise.

Nevertheless, the MCWR met its

goal on schedule and reached strength of 18,000 by 1 June 1944. Then, all recruiting stopped for nearly four months and when it was resumed on 20 September 1944, it was on a very limited basis.

Everyone agreed that the MCWR's recruiting success was directly tied to the Marine Corps' reputation — the toughest, the bravest, the most selective. Women like Inga Frederiksen did not hesitate to accept the challenge of joining the best. When a SPAR recruiter told her she was smart not to join the Marines because they were a lot rougher, Inga knew she had to be a Marine.

Early Training: Holyoke and Hunter

Thanks to the Navy, officer training began when the MCWR was only one month old. Sharing training facilities saved time and precious manpower in getting the women out and on the job. Moreover, Marines benefitted from the Navy's close relationship with a group of prominent women college presidents, deans, and civic leaders who gave sound advice based on years of experience with women's programs. Just as important they offered several prestigious college campuses for WAVE and subsequently, MCWR training.

The Navy's Midshipmen School for women officers, established at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, later branched out to nearby Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley. Enlisted women were trained at Hunter College in New York City, and without question, the distinguished reputations of these two institutions enhanced the public image of the WAVES and the women Marines.

The first group of 71 Marine officer candidates arrived at the U.S. Midshipmen School (Women's Reserve) at Mount Holyoke on 13 March 1943. The women Marines were formed into companies under the command of a male officer,



Photo courtesy of Evelyn Wallman Gins

The last class of WRs to graduate from boot camp at Hunter College, The Bronx, are at the far end of the formation of Marines and WAVES held on the grounds of Columbia University.

Between 27 March and 10 July 1943, more than 3,000 women Marines were fully trained at Hunter before all MCWR schools were moved to Camp Lejeune later that year.

Major E. Hunter Hurst, but, similar to Marine detachments on board ships, the WR unit was part of the WAVES school complement, under final authority of the commanding officer of the Midshipmen School.

Officer candidates joined as privates and after four weeks, if successful, were promoted to officer cadet, earning the right to wear the coveted silver OC pins. At that point women who failed to meet the standards were given two options: transfer to Hunter College to complete basic enlisted training or go home to await eventual discharge. Cadets who completed the eight-week course but were not recommended for a commission were asked to submit their resignations to the Commandant. In time, they were discharged, but permitted to reenlist as privates unless they were overage.

A disappointment shared by members of the first Officer Candidates' Class (OCC) and recruit class was the scarcity of uniforms. Both trained for several weeks in civilian clothes because uniform deliveries were so

slow. In fact, the official photo of the first platoon to graduate from boot camp at Hunter College is a masterful bit of innocent deceit because as Audrey L. Bennington tells it, "Only the girls in the first row – and a few in the second row – had skirts on. We in the other rows had jackets, shirts, ties and caps, but – NO skirts. Lord and Taylor was a bit late in getting skirts to you."

Recruits received very precise and clear instructions before leaving home. They were told to bring raincoat and rain hat (no umbrellas), lightweight dresses or suits, plain bathrobe, soft-soled bedroom slippers, easily laundered underwear, play suit or shorts for physical education (no slacks), and comfortable dark brown, laced oxfords because, "... experience has proven that drilling tends to enlarge the feet." They were also warned not to leave home without orders, not to arrive before the exact time and date stamped on the orders, and not to forget their ration cards.

During the first four weeks the

MCWR curriculum was identical to that of the WAVES, except for drill which was taught by reluctant male drill instructors transferred to Mount Holyoke from the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina. Officer candidates studied naval organization and administration, naval personnel, naval history and strategy, naval law and justice, and ships and aircraft. The second phase of training was devoted to Marine Corps subjects taught by male Marines and later, as they, themselves became trained, WR officers. This portion of training was conducted apart from the WAVES and included subjects such as Marine Corps administration and courtesies, map reading, interior guard, safeguarding military information, and physical conditioning.

On 6 April, members of the first officer class received their OC pins and on 4 May history was made as the first women ever became commissioned officers in the Marine Corps. Retired Colonel Julia E. Hamblet, who twice served as a Director

of Women Marines, recalled the comical reactions she and other women of the first officers class received: "That first weekend, we were also mistaken for Western Union girls."

The Marine Corps section of the Midshipmen School operated on a two-part overlapping schedule, with a new class arriving each month. The first three classes each received seven-and-a-half weeks of training. In all, 214 women officers completed OCC training at Mount Holyoke.

Meanwhile, Headquarters, Marine Corps, was making plans to consolidate all MCWR training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, by 30 June. The women of the fourth Officer Candidates' Class reported to Mount Holyoke on 5 June, were promoted to cadet on the 29th, boarded troop trains for the two-day trip to Camp Lejeune on 1 July, and finally graduated on 7 August.

Two weeks after the first officer class reported to Mount Holyoke, en-

listed women were ordered to the U.S. Naval Training School (Women's Reserve), at Hunter College in The Bronx, New York City. Seven hundred twenty-two "boots" arrived in three increments between 24 and 26 March and were billeted in nearby apartment houses. On the 26th, 21 platoons of women Marines began training with the WAVES and on 25 April they graduated. Since the school was designed for WAVE indoctrination, the curriculum was largely geared for the Navy. Some subjects were clearly not pertinent for Marines, so modifications were made and once again reluctant male Marines were pulled from Parris Island to be instructors. Training sessions varied from three and a half to five weeks and besides the dreaded physical examinations, time was allotted for uniforming, drill, physical training, and lectures on customs and courtesies, history and organization, administration, naval law, map reading, interior guard, defense against

chemical attack, defense against air attack, identification of aircraft, and safeguarding military information.

Between 26 March and 10 July 1943, six classes of recruits, of approximately 525 each, arrived incrementally every two weeks. Of the 3,346 women who began recruit training at Hunter, 3,280 graduated.

And again, as at Mount Holyoke, separate Marine companies were formed into a battalion under the command of a regular officer, Major William W. Buchanan, who reported to Navy Captain William F. Amsden, commanding officer of the school. Captain Katharine A. Towle, who had been specifically recruited from the University of California at Berkeley and commissioned directly from civilian life without any Marine training, was Major Buchanan's senior woman staff officer. Actually, she was the only woman Marine officer at Hunter until the first officers' candidate class was commissioned. The rest of the Marine Corps staff included 33 male instructors—10 officers and 23 enlisted men—to teach classroom subjects to the Marine women and 15 to 20 male drill instructors to supervise the close order drill of all "boots," WAVES and Marines.

Captain Towle, destined to be the second director of the MCWR and the first Director of Women Marines after passage of the Women's Armed Forces Integration Act of 1948, described her indoctrination into the Corps in a 1969 interview:

No one could have been greener or less military than I in those early days. I even came aboard the school in my civilian clothes. My uniforms were still in the process of being tailored for me in New York. I could tie the four-in-hand uniform tie for my uniform khaki shirt, but that was about all. I was soon, however, to learn basic procedures under the kind and watchful tutelage of the Marine

The 1st Platoon, U.S. Naval Training School (Women's Reserve), gathered at Hunter College in New York City, April 1943. Because uniform shipments were delayed, only the women in the first row and a few in the second wore uniform skirts.

Photo courtesy of Audrey L. Bennington





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 310463
Col Katherine A. Towle, second director of the Women's Reserve and first post-war Director of Women Marines, was a dean at the University of California, Berkeley, before entering the Marine Corps.

Corps detachment's sergeant major, a Marine of some thirty years' service. He really must have had some bad moments.

What you will do when you're a good Marine, is really something. Every day for the first week he would escort me to a quiet room away from curious eyes (which was just as well) and give me instructions in how to salute properly, as well as other helpful lessons on what was expected of a Marine Corps officer. And I shall certainly always be grateful to Sergeant Major [Halbert A.] McElroy . . . for helping to make a proper officer out of me. He really personified the pride of being a Marine and he soon indoctrinated me with this same feeling. I was determined, no matter what happened, not to let him down after he had spent so much time on me, and I don't believe I really ever did.

Training: Camp Lejeune

Planners originally thought to use existing Navy resources and facilities for all MCWR recruiting and train-

ing, but Marines soon saw the advantage of having their own schools. It wasn't only that Mount Holyoke and Hunter Colleges were overcrowded and stretched beyond reasonable limits by the number of women arriving every week. There was a larger motive for moving MCWR schools to Camp Lejeune and, simply, it was the famed Marine *esprit de corps*. Camp Lejeune, where thousands of Marines were preparing for deployment overseas was the largest Marine training base on the East Coast and offered sobering opportunities for the women to observe field exercises and weapons demonstrations, and to see the faces of the young men they would free to fight.

Major Hurst, commanding officer of the Marine Detachment at Mount Holyoke, understood almost immediately the drawbacks of trying to indoctrinate and train Marines in such patently civilian surroundings as a college campus. Less than a month after training began he wrote Brigadier General Waller:

In drawing these up [training schedules], I found myself wish-

ing more and more that we could include some weapons instructions, at least pistol, for our women . . . I have found that the women come into the Marine Corps expecting to learn to shoot and I, of course, would like to see them become the first women's reserve in the country to take up the specialty of their men if Headquarters considers the idea at all feasible. I wouldn't have had the nerve to suggest it if Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt hadn't asked me on her visit last week how soon they were going to learn to shoot. She expressed surprise at learning that the women of the U.S. were not learning as much about weapons as the women of other countries

Nearly a half century later, the retired 23d Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., expressed a like sentiment when he wrote in 1990:

I commenced to realize the meaning of sexism in the armed

The headquarters of the Women's Reserve Schools at Camp Lejeune supervised the recruit training of more than 18,000 women during the course of World War II.

Photo courtesy of Mary R. Rich





Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 6180
WR recruit Mary C. Harris learns first-hand about a carbine from GySgt Daniel Carroll, a member of Edson's Raiders recently returned from the Southwest Pacific. WRs were the only military women to receive combat training during boot camp.

forces while I was a Marine Corps observer with the British army during the Battle for Britain. During a night bombing raid against London, I watched the women gunners in an anti-aircraft battery battle the incoming German planes. I suddenly asked myself, "Why aren't our women—able, loyal, and patriotic as they are—permitted to participate in this fashion?"

The Marine Corps Women's Reserve Schools—officer candidate and boot training along with certain specialist schools—opened in July 1943 under the command of Colonel John M. Arthur. Officer candidates and recruits in training at Mount Holyoke and Hunter Colleges were transferred to Camp Lejeune, New River, North Carolina, where nearly 19,000 women became Marines during World War II.

Just one month before the MCWR schools opened, Major Streeter asked that weapons demonstrations be made a regular part of the curriculum. Frankly, she wasn't satisfied with

mere classroom lectures on combat equipment, landing operations, and tactics so she tactfully suggested:

If it is possible to arrange transportation and schedules that would not interrupt the training of the men in these lines of work, I believe it would be a definite inspiration to the Marine Corps Women's Reserve to see them actually in training.

As usual, her instincts were right on target and the envious WRs attended two half-day sessions observing demonstrations in hand-to-hand combat, use of mortars, bazookas, flame-throwers, guns of all sorts, amtracs, and landing craft.

The recruits traveled to Wilmington, North Carolina, on women Marine troop trains of about 500, commanded by a woman lieutenant and two enlisted assistants. They arrived at the depot as civilians, but the transition to Marines began immediately. The women were lined up, issued paper armbands identifying them as Marine "boots," ordered to pick up luggage—anybody's lug-

gage—anybody's—and marched aboard the train. The process accelerated at the other end where they were met by shouting NCOs who herded them into crowded buses to be taken to austere, forbidding barracks with large, open squadbays, group shower rooms, toilet stalls without doors, and urinals.

The women were quartered in the red brick barracks in Area One set aside for the exclusive use of the women's schools. Their patriotism and idealism was sorely tested and some readily admit they cried when they realized what they had done. Others wondered why they had done it at all. There was, however, no time in the schedule for adjustment. General processing, medical examinations, uniforming, and classification tests and interviews to assess abilities, education, training, and work experience were top priority. Orientation classes and close order drill were scheduled for the first day and a strict training regimen kicked off with 0545 reveille.

One thing hadn't changed from the days at Mount Holyoke and Hunter—the male DI's weren't happy. Shaping up a gaggle of "BAMs" ("broad-assed Marines") was not what they wanted to do with a war going on. Feeling the scornful scrutiny of fellow Marines, it seemed that the DI's took on a touch more bravado than they dared on the college campuses. One boot felt the DI's resented the women, "... more than a battalion of Japanese troops." She was probably right.

For the first year, at least, many male Marines didn't take the trouble to disguise their resentment. Disregarding the Commandant's wishes about nicknames, some Marines visibly enjoyed embarrassing the WRs with the derogatory label, BAMs. Some women took it in their stride, but it became tiresome and many were furious. When the famous bandleader, Fred Waring, referred to the WRs as BAMs, a con-



Photo courtesy of Raelyn Harman Subramanian

To the WR recruits, uniform shortages were routine in the early days. Rose M. Nigro, one of the five women in the author's family who served with the women Marines in World War II, and Betty Hall, had a long wait for a full issue. Here they wear recruit badges, oxfords, and caps at boot camp at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

tingent got up and walked out during a performance at Camp Lejeune.

Marjorie Ann Curtner recalled a particularly mean-spirited stunt engineered by a group of Seabees who corralled every stray dog in the area, shaved them like poodles, painted "BAM" on their sides, and set them free to roam the ranks of a graduating WR platoon.

For the first time in their lives, many of the women experienced the hurtful sting of coarse epithets as men vented their feelings about the Corps taking "niggers, dogs, and women." Crude language and blatant

disdain took its toll on the morale of the Women's Reserve and its director, causing the Commandant to take steps to end it. In August 1943, he sent a clear message, fixing responsibility for change on unit commanding officers when he wrote:

Information reaching this Headquarters indicates that some . . . officers and men of the Marine Corps treat members of the Women's Reserve with disrespect . . . Coarse or even obscene remarks are being made without restraint by male

Marines in post exchanges, moving picture houses, and other places in the hearing of members of the Women's Reserve . . . This conduct . . . indicates a laxity in discipline which will not be tolerated. Commanding officers will be held responsible

By mid-1944 open hostility gave way to some sort of quiet truce and it wasn't long before the women's competence, self-assurance, sharp appearance, and pride won over a good many of their heretofore detractors. It was put in perspective by a young corporal wounded at Guadalcanal: "Well, I'll tell you. I was kinda sore about it (the women Marines) at first. Then it began to make sense—though only if the girls are gonna be tops, understand." And, in time, Marines could even be counted on to take on soldiers and sailors who dared to harass WRs in their presence.

In September 1943, the first female hometown platoon, made up entirely of women from Philadelphia reported for boot camp. The public relations gimmick of forming a platoon of women recruited from the same area and sending them to training as a unit caught on quickly and on 10 November, the 168th birthday of the Marine Corps, the Potomac Platoon of women from Washington, D.C., and the first of two WR platoons from Pittsburgh were sworn in at fitting ceremonies.

Seventeen more hometown platoons followed; from Albany, Buffalo (two), and Central New York; Pittsburgh, Johnstown, Fayette County, and Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania; Dallas and Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; St. Paul, Minnesota; Green Bay, Wisconsin; Seattle, Washington; the state of Alabama; northern New England; and southern New England. Each platoon was ordered to duty en masse, completed boot training together, and after-

wards, received individual orders to specialist schools or duty.

From 15 March 1943 until 15 September 1945, 22,199 women were ordered to recruit training and of these, 21,597 graduated. The remaining 602 were separated for medical reasons or because they were found unable to adapt to military life.

All women in the early Officer Candidates' Classes were Class VI(a) reservists recruited directly from civilian life without the advantage of enlisted experience. Consequently, for the first seven Officer Candidate Classes, the primary emphasis was on attitude adjustment, forming new habits, learning the Marine Corps "way," and adopting a military perspective. Close order drill was used to instill discipline and teach the women to respond to orders with precision. To their dismay, old salts found that the renowned tactics famous for making Marines out of civilians weren't working very well with women: shouting, "reading off," and threats were virtually useless. The methods were changed eventually, but only after the original staff members were removed. Colonel

Outstanding "boot," PFC Mary C. Harris, earned an immediate appointment to Officer Candidates Class at Camp Lejeune in December 1943. Officer Candidate (OC) pins were earned after four weeks of successful officer training.

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 6164



Marine Corps Historical Collection

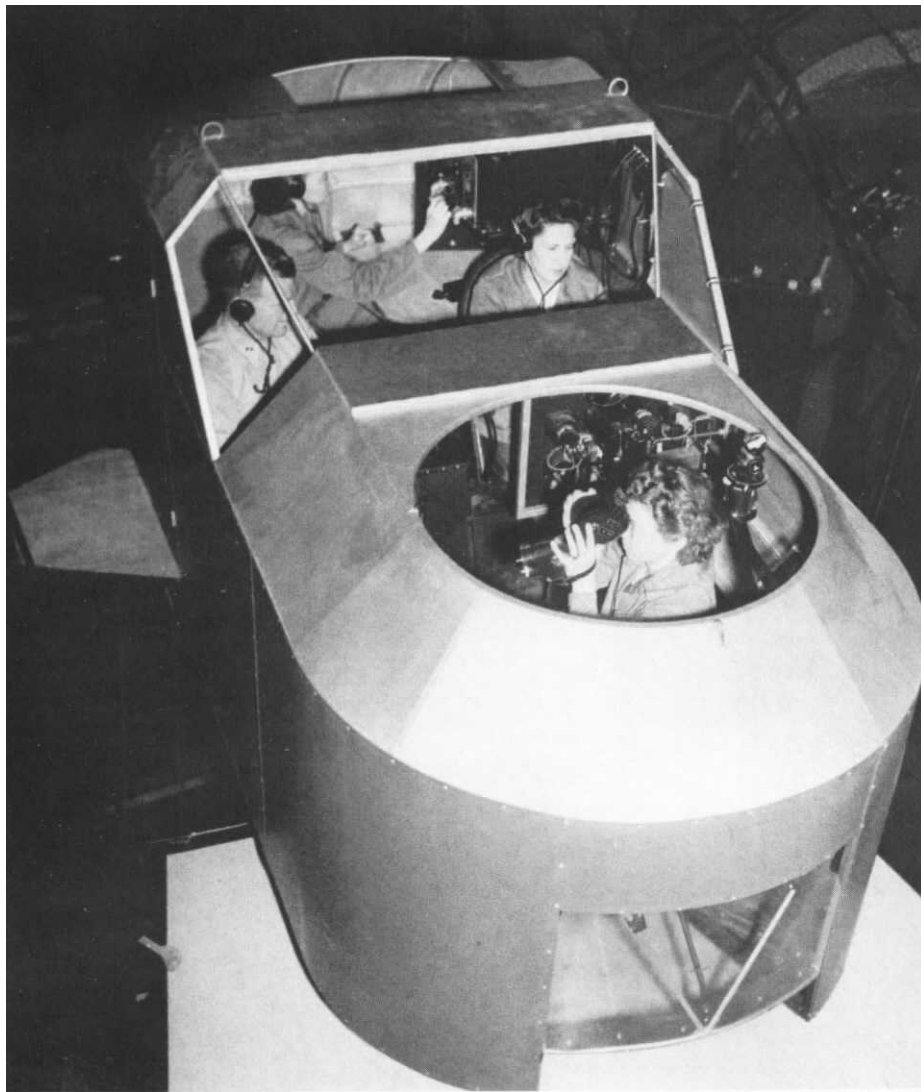
On 13 February 1944, "Col Mike," the mascot of the Central Procurement Division in Chicago, tells 2dLt Florence Bailey what it was like in the Old Corps. The "Free a Marine to Fight" recruiting poster in the background has a portrait of a woman Marine painted by famed artist Douglas Crockwell. The original painting hung in the office of the Director of Women Marines until the billet was abolished in 1977.

Streeter lamented that the problem was never satisfactorily resolved since there were so few experienced officers on hand to work on it and there was no time for experimentation.

For approximately seven months, from December 1943 to June 1944, the Officer Training School ran on a three-block plan with two candidates' classes and a post-commissioning course, Reserve Officer Class (ROC), meeting at the same time. Each class of about 60 was organized into a company of two platoons, with a company commander and two platoon leaders. As the manpower crunch waned and the goal of 18,000 women was reached, the three-block system gave way to two-block in June 1944, with one officer candidate class and one ROC in session concurrently. A single-block plan was adopted

in January 1945 and continued until the school closed on 15 October.

A significant change occurred when, in July 1943, commissioned status was opened to enlisted women to take advantage of their experience, and at the same time, build morale and *esprit de corps*. To be eligible, a Marine had to complete six months service, be recommended by her commanding officer, and be selected by a board of male and female officers convened at Headquarters, Marine Corps. The eighth officer class, in October 1943, was made up of both Class VI(a) and Class VI(b) reservists – the latter being Women's Reserve enlisted. Thereafter, the majority of new women officers came from the ranks and from that point on, only civilian women with critical, specialized skills or excep-



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 7184

Capt B. E. Tucker, Sgt Rita Schwartz, PFC Jeanette Walker, and PFC Jane Russell are shown in the fuselage of a Link Trainer, with the celestial dome in the background. By August 1944, WRs conducted all courses of Link instruction at Cherry Point.

tional leadership qualities were accepted for Marine officer training.

Reserve Officer's Class

Commissioning large numbers of NCOs caused the MCWR to shift the focus from making Marines out of civilian women to making officers out of enlisted women. An entirely new attitude and point of view was called for and this led to the creation of the Reserve Officer Class (ROC) for the newly commissioned officers in early December 1943.

It was meant to be a two-week introduction to life as an officer, but, almost immediately it was lengthened to four weeks to broaden the students' perspective and lessen the pressures that built up during basic

officer training. Classes were less formal, privileges and responsibilities were given, and rational problem solving was stressed. The ROC staff tried to teach the new officers what they, if anyone, should have already known: toughness and threats are poor substitutes for firmness and motivation.

The staff revised and refined the course content for several months until finally, by the end of the third ROC, it was satisfied. Experienced officers from Camp Lejeune, nearby posts and stations, and Headquarters, Marine Corps augmented the regular staff. Outside speakers such as the Red Cross field director, the chaplain, and post psychiatrist

described how they could assist line officers. ROC was immensely successful, principally because it was so practical, and even experienced MCWR officers, especially those who had been working in limited fields such as recruiting, were sent for advanced training.

Nine hundred sixty-five women, including the 11 with direct commissions and the 19 transferred from the WAVES at the start, were eventually commissioned in the Marine Corps Reserve. Of the 589 Class VI(a) reservists who began officer training, 72 or 12 percent were dropped and of the 641 Class VI(b) reservists selected from the ranks, 223 or 35 percent were not commissioned.

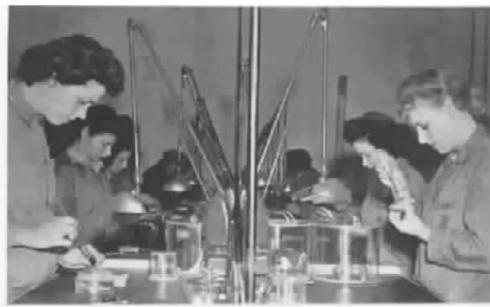
Specialist Schools

From the very beginning, selected officers and enlisted women were given specialist training and by the end of the war, 9,641 women – 8,914 enlisted and 727 officers – attended schools run by civilians, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. The earliest Navy courses were: Aviation Machinist's Mate at the Naval Training School, Memphis, Tennessee; Link Training Instructor at the Naval Air Station, Atlanta, Georgia; and Aviation Storekeeper at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. The first Marine Corps schools opened to women were: cooks and bakers, motor transport, quartermaster, and non-commissioned officers. After graduation from OCC at Mount Holyoke, several officers were sent to the Navy's Communications School in South Hadley.

All in all, by the end of the war women attended some 30 specialist schools and the variety is a testament to the dramatic shift in thinking on what women could do: first sergeant, paymaster, signal, parachute rigger, aerographer, clerical, control tower operator, aerial gunnery instructor, celestial navigation, motion picture operator/technician, aircraft instruments technician, radio operator,



An aviation mechanic works on airplane engines



Sensitive gyroscopic instruments are repaired by experts



Riggers packing parachutes at parachutist's school



On duty in the Women's Reserve uniform shop



Receiving radio messages at Marine Corps air station



Woman Marine transmits final weather report to pilots



Operating litho-press at New River



Serving in a Marine aviation control tower

Photos courtesy of Sarah Thornton

The photographs in this collage show various duties given to WRs assigned to aviation units.

radio material teletypewriter, post exchange, uniform shop, automotive mechanic, carburetor and ignition, aviation supply, and photography.

Uniforms

The basic wardrobe was pretty much chosen before the public announcement of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve. In mid-December 1942, the Commandant asked that Mrs. Anne Adams Lentz, an employee of the War Department, be assigned to Headquarters "for a period of approximately 30 days." Before the war, Mrs. Lentz worked in the school uniform department of a large New York City retail store, and then for eight months she assisted the WAACS with the design of their uni-

form. Action on the Commandant's letter was swift and Mrs. Lentz came on board in early January. After a preliminary consultation with the Depot Quartermaster in Philadelphia, she went to New York to oversee the design and construction of model uniforms for the Women's Reserve by the Women's Garment Manufacturers of New York. The Commandant's guidance was specific; he wanted the women dressed in the traditional Marine forest green with red chevrons and he insisted they look like Marines as much as possible. This was in stark contrast to the Navy which denied its women the privilege of wearing gold braid throughout the war.

Before her 30-day assignment ex-

pired, Mrs. Lentz decided to become a Marine, and became the first Woman Reservist when she was sworn in as a captain on 15 January 1943. The oath of office was administered by her husband, Brigadier General John M. Lentz, USA, who was attached to the Army Ground Forces Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

On 11 June 1943, a Uniform Unit was created as part of the Women's Reserve Section at Marine Corps Headquarters to arrange for uniforming enlistees when assigned to active duty, replenishing clothing from time to time, and planning for future needs. Soon after, on 17 June, the Marine Corps Women's Reserve Uniform Board was established to suggest articles of clothing and make



For a publicity photograph, the women of Company H, 2d Headquarters Battalion, Henderson Hall, model the various work and dress uniforms worn by women Marines during the

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 13061
 course of World War II. From left are PFC Florence Miller, Cpl Lois Koester, Cpl Carol Harding, Sgt Violet Salela, Cpl Grace Steinmetz, Cpl Rose Mazur, and PFC Mary Swiderski.

recommendations to the Commandant. The original uniform regulations were published in August 1943 after approvals from the Uniform Board, the Commandant, and the Secretary of the Navy. But, this was not an issue so easily settled and a final version reflecting numerous changes, modifications, and additions, was reissued on 30 April 1945 as *Uniform Regulations, U.S. Marine Women's Reserve, 1945*. These regulations remained in force and the uniforms of women Marines changed very little until a new wardrobe was designed by the French couturier, Mainbocher, in 1952.

Officers were paid a uniform allowance and gratuity of \$250 and enlisted women received \$200. With this the women bought two winter

uniforms, hats, shoes, summer outfits, a purse, wool-lined raincoat, specified accessories, and undergarments. To make certain that the carefully designed uniforms looked exactly as intended and met the Corps' high standards, 13 women officers were ordered to a six-week intensive training session where they were drilled in the techniques of tailoring, alterations, clothing construction, and fitting before being assigned to uniform shops run by the post exchanges at major Marine Corps posts throughout the country.

The seemingly excessive attention to the women's uniforms reflected not only the Corps' well known concern with appearance, but it showed an astute appreciation of the problems encountered by the other services.

The early WAAC uniform, for example, had been designed over a man's suit form with broad shoulders, no bosom, and slender hips. Although the prototype looked just fine, the real thing caused endless problems.

Unfortunately, the Marine Corps Women's Reserve adopted the WAVES' flawed system of supply and distribution, selling clothing manufactured by various firms at a 10 percent mark-up to retail stores and then reselling it at a 30 percent mark-up to the Women Reservists. The arrangement was abandoned within a year because the prices were excessive, shortages were the rule, and the women refused to pay for uniform items with defects—no matter how minor. The latter problem caused a log jam which would have

been avoided if uniforms were simply issued with no arguments allowed.

Major reform was called for and on 16 February 1944, the Uniform Unit of the Women's Reserve Section, Reserve Division, Procurement Branch was transferred to the Office of the Quartermaster General and became the Women's Reserve Section, Supply Division, Quartermaster Department. The first action was to terminate all retail agreements and take responsibility for uniforming away from post exchanges.

Then, in August, four women officers became inspectors, visiting manufacturers and doing whatever they could to expedite the fulfillment of contracts. But despite the several organizational changes and system modifications, in her final report at the war's end, Colonel Streeter wrote, ". . . the supply of MCWR clothing was one of the few problems to which a satisfactory solution had not been found at the time that demobilization of the Women's Reserve began."

Col Katherine A. Towle, second director of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, inspects WRs wearing winter service green at MCRD, Parris Island, in 1945.

Photo courtesy of Sarah Thornton



On one point everyone agreed: all matters of supply of the women's uniforms should have been handled as it was for enlisted men.

Style

Tailored femininity was the goal, and by all accounts, it was achieved. The widespread and enthusiastic approval of the attractive uniforms gave everyone's morale a big lift, especially because once on active duty, Marines could not wear civilian clothing even on liberty. Colonel Streeter was especially proud of their appearance and demeanor. In her words, "You know, they had a certain reserve. They always looked well. They held themselves well. They had a certain dignity. And that was each one of them"

The MCWR uniform mirrored what was worn by all Marines in color and style, but was cut from a lighter-weight cloth. Generally, officers and enlisted women wore identically styled uniforms of the same fabric: this was not true of male



Department of Defense Photos (USMC) 7416 2dLt Elizabeth McKinnon, left, wears the summer service uniform with detachable green officer's epaulets added so that rank insignia could be seen more easily.

Marines. Women officers wore green, detachable epaulets on the shoulder straps of summer uniforms and had additional dress uniforms. For dress, they wore the Marine officers' traditional gilt and silver emblems and the enlisted women wore the gilt emblems of enlisted Marines. Both wore the bronze eagle, globe, and anchor on their service uniforms, but positioned it differently. While the vertical axis of the hemisphere paralleled the crease line of the jacket collar for officers, it was worn perpendicular to the floor by enlisted women. Coats, caps, shoes, gloves, handbags, and mufflers were the same for all ranks. Enlisted women wore the same large chevrons as the men.

Winter Service Uniform

Officers and enlisted women wore a forest green, serge man-tailored jacket and straight, six-gore skirt during the colder seasons. A long-sleeved khaki shirt with four-in-hand necktie, green cap, brown shoes and gloves, and bronze metal buttons completed the outfit. Women Reservists were easily recognized by their unique, visored bell-crowned hat, trimmed with a lipsick-red cord which set them apart from the



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 13024
Pvt Anna K. Peterson, a clerk in the Family Allowance Section at Headquarters, Marine Corps, enlisted to help shorten the war so that her Navy husband could return as soon as possible. The fabric of her seersucker summer service uniform was selected for comfort.

WACs, WAVES, and SPARS whose hats closely resembled one another. They had a heavy green overcoat or khaki trenchcoat with detachable lining, always worn with a red muffler in winter. All women Marines owned black galoshes, boots, or rubbers to fit the unpopular, but comfortable oxfords.

Officer Winter Dress

Women Marines did not have a dress blue uniform until 1952. During World War II and for the seven years following, officers turned their winter service outfit into a dress uniform with a white shirt and forest green tie in place of the routine khaki. Enlisted women had no comparable dress option.

Summer Service

The summer service uniform, a distinct departure from tradition, was a two-piece green and white seersucker or plisse dress. The fabric was specially selected by Captain Lentz for its comfort and laundering ease. V-necked and fastened with white or green plastic buttons, the jacket was available with short or long sleeves. The first summer hat, a round cap with a snap brim, was short-lived and was replaced by one styled after the winter hat, but in spruce green

with white cap cord and bronze buttons. Later a garrison-style cap in the same light green shade and trimmed with white piping was added. Shoes, oxfords, or pumps, were brown and a white rayon muffler was worn with the trenchcoat. When it was realized that officer rank insignia could not be seen on the striped dress, green shoulder boards were added and they were fastened to the epaulets by the shoulder strap button and the rank insignia.

Summer Dress

The hands-down favorite uniform of all World War II WRs was the short-sleeved, V-necked white twill uniform worn with gilt buttons on the jacket and cap, dress emblems,

and white pumps. The stiffly starched uniform never failed to evoke compliments. Enlisted women were disheartened when, after the war, because enlisted men had no equivalent uniform, it was discontinued.

Officer Summer Dress

Officers could choose among three summer dress uniforms: the white one worn by the enlisted women but with added green shoulder straps, summer dress "B," and summer undress "C." The latter two, made of white twill, worsted, or palm beach material were worn with a short-sleeved white blouse, and without a necktie or green shoulder straps. The "C" uniform was long sleeved and

Pvt Billie J. Redding married her hometown beau, Navy Ens William A. Lewis, in a military wedding in San Diego. The bride and her maid of honor, Helen Taylor, violated uniform regulations by wearing corsages on their white dress uniforms.

Photo courtesy of Billie J. Redding Lewis





Photo courtesy of Barbara Baker Rosinski
 WRs Arlene Wilson and Barbara Baker model work and dress versions of the summer uniform. For dress, a bright green cotton cover was used over the purse.

collarless. On these two uniforms, the officers wore their dress emblems not on the collar as usual, but on their epaulets, near the armhole seams, and they centered the rank insignia between the emblem and epaulet button. One WR reminisced that even a lieutenant looked like a four-star general with so much metal on her shoulders.

Handbags, Shoes, and Hose

Women Marines had only one handbag, a brown, rough textured leather purse with a shoulder strap and spring closure. They learned to wear it over their left shoulder, leav-

ing their right hand free to salute. The same brown bag became a bright summer accessory with the addition of a removable, spruce green, cotton purse cover and matching shoulder strap. Everyone wore dark brown, smooth leather oxfords or pumps with the winter service uniform and similar white pumps for dress in the summer. The dress pumps, with heels between one and one-half and two inches high, were trimmed with a flat bow.

Ladylike and fashionable full-length, beige, seamed stockings were de rigeur with all service and dress uniforms and cotton hose was worn

in ranks. Since nylon, rayon, and silk stockings were rationed because of wartime shortages, some women in other services were allowed to use leg makeup, but not women Marines.

Utilities and Exercise Suits

Covert slacks were worn for certain duties, but the most common work uniform was the olive-drab, cotton utility uniform worn with the clumsy, heavy, high-topped shoes known as boondockers. The trousers with a bib front and long, crossed straps were worn over a short-sleeved, matching shirt or white tee shirt and topped by a long-sleeved jacket. Enlisted women stenciled their rank on the shirt and jacket sleeves.

For recreation, field nights, and physical conditioning, women Marines wore the "peanut suit," so named because of its color and crinkled appearance. It was a tan, seersucker, one-piece, bloomer outfit with ties at the bottom of the shorts. In keeping with prevailing standards of propriety, the women modestly covered their legs with a front-buttoned A-lined skirt when not actively engaged in sports, exercise, or work details.

Grooming, Handkerchiefs, and Undergarments

One of the first lessons learned by the women Marines was that there were rules for everything. Lipstick and nail polish could be worn, and in fact were encouraged, but the color absolutely had to harmonize with the red cap cord of the winter cap, regardless of the season. The favorite color was Montezuma Red, designed in their honor. Rouge, mascara, and hair coloring were permitted, but had to be inconspicuous. Realistically, it was nearly impossible for a woman to tint or bleach her hair because the color had to match the information on her identification card. The regulations favored feminine hair styles with hair neither too short nor too long; by directive, hair could touch, but not cover the collar.



Photo courtesy of Eleanor Nocito Tuomi
Pvt Eleanor Nocito, in dungarees and snap brim hat, served at MCAS, El Toro.

Not even something as personal as underwear escaped strict regulation. Bras and girdles – whether needed or not – and full length white slips were always worn underneath the service and dress uniforms. Handkerchiefs could be khaki when the khaki shirt was worn, otherwise, they had to be white.

Hair ornaments were forbidden and the only jewelry allowed were simple rings and wrist watches.

The uniforms were fashionable and admired and thankfully belied the never-ending logistical problems surrounding their design, specifications, sizing, inspections, supply, and distribution.



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) 301456
Cpl Constance H. Bacon, a bank teller before the war, worked as an auditor in the Paymaster Department, Headquarters, Marine Corps. On her fingernails is regulation "Lipstick Red" nail polish, which was formulated to match the red cap cord of the winter service uniform.

Classification-Detail-Transfer

In 1943 the country desperately needed womanpower, but almost no one knew for certain just how far the limits of tradition could be stretched or, more likely, breached. By custom, working women were mainly employed in offices, classrooms, hospitals, retail stores, libraries, beauty shops, or in homes as domestics. Not many women drove trucks, or buses, and they certainly didn't fix them. Women did not work in the trades—plumbing, electricity, carpentry—and

A woman Marine bicycles at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in a seersucker "peanut suit," named for its beige, crinkly fabric and bloomer legs, and worn for its comfort.

Photo courtesy of Raelyn Harman Subramanian

