

WORLD WAR I COMMEMORATIVE SERIES

The Navy's
FIRST ENLISTED WOMEN



Patriotic Pioneers



REGINA T. AKERS, PHD

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*Naval History and Heritage Command,
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INTRODUCTION

I am honored to contribute *The Navy's First Enlisted Women: Patriotic Pioneers* to the Naval History and Heritage Command's (NHHC) commemoration publications for World War I. These women's loyalty, selflessness, professionalism, and patriotism are exemplary and can inspire today's naval personnel, especially the females who stand on their shoulders.

Women have volunteered to serve their nation during every war or conflict since the American Revolution. The female yeomen continued this legacy and remained focused despite strong criticism. The Navy operated more efficiently and effectively with them. Some forces within the Navy and Congress tried to prevent these amazing women from receiving the recognitions they earned following the war. However, with the help of the American Legion, naval officers, and other advocates, the female veterans continued their fight to be recognized. Chapter 1 considers the contradiction between the United States' engaging in a war to protect democracy while denying democratic rights and privileges to women and blacks. It also provides a brief overview of the history of women in the military prior to the United States' entry into World War I. The second chapter describes Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels's decision to recruit women, the enlistment process, and their "basic training." The third chapter analyzes how the various clerical and non-clerical duties of the yeomen (E) contributed directly to the success of the Navy's strategy and the Allied victory, as well as gender relations. The fourth chapter explores how the war changed the world, their lives, and the Navy. The epilogue summarizes key changes in the status of Navy women since World War I. The select list of sources will help those desiring further study. This pamphlet also provides photographs and citations throughout its text that are all in the public domain.

World War I histories tend to minimize, marginalize, or ignore the multiple roles of civilian and military women. Some authors have helped to fill this gap such as Lettie Gavin's *American Women in World War I*; Kimberly Jensen's *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War*; and Susan Godson's *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the U.S. Navy*. Evelyn M. Monahan and Rosemary Neidel-Greenlee's *A Few Good Women: America's Military Women from World War I to the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*; Eunice C. Dessez's *The First Enlisted Women 1917-1918*; and Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Halls' studies

Crossed Currents: Navy Women from World War I to Tailhook, and *The First, The Few, The Forgotten* are also noteworthy. *The Navy's First Enlisted Women: Patriotic Pioneers* is intended to elevate the historical discussion and enrich the available literature on women's military service.

There is much more research to be done on the roles of American women in World War I especially on the contributions of African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other people of color. Their patriotism in the face of blatant racism, discrimination and Jim Crowism is commendable and deserves more scholarly attention. The National Archives and Records Administration released the World War I veterans' official service records at the National Military Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri, without restriction, making an extremely valuable source available. Related primary documents can be accessed via the websites for many archives.

Historians, documentary editors, film directors, and others launching projects relating to the history of the Great War tend to include little about military women. Too many scholars do not recognize the utilization of women as a personnel readiness issue. When asked about the decision to exclude or minimize women's participation, some explain that they are not doing social history. Many scholars referred to history about women as social history until the 1970s. A paradigm shift is needed. Producers, historians, webmasters, museum curators, and others interpreting history can, and should, make a greater effort to be more comprehensive while expanding our knowledge of the war. Those looking for subjects for their documentary, dissertation, thesis, or article need look no further.

My hope is that this history educates, entertains, and engages readers and motivates them to learn more about these outstanding women. May it also raise new questions about the yeomen (F.)'s experiences and give readers a greater appreciation for their World War I service and sacrifice. Finally, I believe readers will be inspired by the female yeomen's patriotism and contributions. The conclusions presented are mine and do not necessarily represent the Department of Defense or any component thereof. I am responsible for any errors therein.

— Regina T. Akers, Ph.D., Historian, Naval History and Heritage Command

UNITED STATES NAVY RANKS DURING WORLD WAR I

OFFICER

O-10	Admiral
O-9	Vice Admiral
O-8	Rear Admiral Upper Half
O-7	Rear Admiral Lower Half
O-6	Captain
O-5	Commander
O-4	Lieutenant Commander
O-3	Lieutenant
O-2	Lieutenant Junior Grade
O-1	Ensign

Commissioned Warrant Officers

Appointed Officers Midshipman 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Class

Warrant Officers

ENLISTED

E-7	Chief Petty Officer
E-6	Petty Officer First Class
E-5	Petty Officer Second Class
E-4	Petty Officer Third Class
E-3	Non-Rated Men, First Class
E-2	Non-Rated Men, Second Class
E-1	Non-Rated Men, Third Class

SOURCE: <http://www.naval-history.net/WWINavyUS-Ranks.htm>

1

“SETTING THE STAGE”

This chapter provides some essential context for the history of the Navy’s first enlisted women. It highlights the sharp contrasts between the country’s founding principles, democratic values and justification for war, and the treatment of women and African Americans. War Department policies reflected the accepted societal standards and expectations for both groups. Women and African Americans endured legal discrimination practiced by law, custom, and tradition with no expectation of protection or justice. Large segments of society treated both groups as second-class citizens. This treatment contradicted the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution that stated that no state can make or enforce laws that limit the privileges of citizens of the United States. The Fifteenth Amendment granted American citizens the right to vote, however, women and blacks could not do so in 1914. The chapter also provides an overview of the two group’s impressive record of participation and support during wars, conflicts, and crises and considers how the experiences of the nation’s leaders influenced their policies and programs.

Societal standards required women to be chaste, discreet, and, if married, submissive to their husbands. They were thought to be delicate, weaker than men, and dependent on them. Parents prioritized sending their sons to college instead of their daughters whose primary roles were to become mothers, wives, and home makers. Many women had their own agenda during the Progressive Era (1900–1920). They were part of the international suffrage movement as well as the anti-war and temperance campaigns. The women’s club movement provided self-help and funding for various causes. No strangers to controversy, they supported the efforts to end child labor, to improve safety and working conditions in factories, and to grant women control over their bodies (i.e., using birth-control methods). Several women leaders emerged during this period including Nannie Helen Burroughs, an African American educator and suffragist; Margaret Sanger, leader of the birth control movement; Mary Ritter Beard, author and member of the Women’s Trade Union League; Madam C. J. Walker

and Maggie Lena Walker, African American entrepreneurs; and Jane Addams, pacifist, social worker, and founder of the Hull House.¹

The Navy allowed women to enlist for service before the United States entered the Great War. During any national crisis dating back to 1775, women continued their legacy of volunteering their service—despite their social status and discrimination. During the American Revolution, women supported the colonial forces on and off the battlefield by maintaining the home front, nursing the wounded, and sponging out cannons between shots. Women boycotted British goods and made bandages. During the American Civil War, the government hired women en masse to meet the labor needs. They led the U.S. Sanitation Commission, the American Red Cross and other critical organizations. Women also dressed in disguise to enlist and others accompanied military units. Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man to fight as Robert Shurtleff with the 4th Massachusetts Regiment. She earned an honorable discharge and her husband received her pension posthumously.² Hiding her gender, Sarah Emma Edmonds served as a soldier in the Union army.³ Susie King Taylor distinguished herself as a scout and raider with the 33rd United States Colored Troops, and Harriet Tubman led Union troops in combat. In 1862, four African American nuns, Sisters of the Holy Cross, Alice Kennedy, Sarah Kino, Ellen Campbell, and Betsy Young were among the 12 nuns who assisted the sick aboard USS *Red Rover*, the Navy's first hospital ship.⁴ Ann Bradford (1830–1903), born a slave in Rutherford, County, TN, reported for service as a contraband aboard USS *Red Rover* in January 1863. She enlisted as a first class boy to support the nurses. She married Gilbert Stokes in 1864 and lived in Belknap, Illinois until his death in 1866. After becoming literate, she received a \$12.00 monthly pension for her service in 1890.⁵ Women also

¹ Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes, An American History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2005), 406–479.

² See <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/deborah-sampson>; Herman Mann captured her service in *The Female Review: or Memoirs of An American Young Lady in 1797*.

³ See her autobiography *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army: The Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps and Battlefields*, originally published in 1865; Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33rd United States Colored Troops, Late 1st South Carolina Volunteers*, originally published in 1902.

⁴ Susan Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the U.S. Navy*, 19; <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/z/list-z-grams/z-gram-116.html>; https://archive.org/stream/HISTORYOFU.S.NAVYHOSPITALSHIPREDROVER/HISTORY+OF+U.+S.+NAVY+HOSPITAL+SHIP+RED+ROVER_djvu.txt.

⁵ Lisa Y. King, "In Search of Women of African Descent Who Served in the Civil War Union Army," *Journal of Negro History*, 83:302–309; <https://blackpast.org/aah/stokes-ann-stokes-1830-1903>; <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2001/fall/black-sailors-1.html>. This is a link to an article about our A-A Civil War Sailors project by Dr. Joseph P. Reidy our Director of Research; <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-sailors-detail.htm?sailord=STO0026>.

worked as spies, seamstresses, and couriers. Dr. Margaret Walker, a contract Army surgeon was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. After the war, William Catha bravely fought in disguise with the 38th United States Colored Infantry Regiment, Buffalo Soldiers until a doctor discovered her gender during an illness. The government contracted women nurses during the Spanish-American War, but they did not become an official part of the military until Congress created the Army Nurse Corps in 1901 and the Navy Nurse Corps seven years later. Thus, in 1914 nurses were the only women in the U.S. armed forces. The military expanded its recruitment and utilization of women during the first World War out of necessity. This decision met opposition from those believing that a woman's place was in the home. Others questioned the judgement of any woman desiring to serve in the armed forces—given the reputation of some uniformed men. Women were not considered equal to men and did not receive equal wages for equal work in civilian jobs.

“These are history-making days. It will be the greatest war in the world’s history,”

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt⁶

World War I started with the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife in Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist on 28 June 1914. One month later Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, which had a protective alliance with Russia. German support for Austria-Hungary put most of Europe into conflict immediately after the assassination. The Triple Entente of France, the United Kingdom, and Russia fought against the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria.⁷ In an attempt to preempt a two-front war, Germany invaded France through Belgium, which had a treaty with the United Kingdom drawing Britain into the war. Modern weaponry paired with outdated tactics and static trench warfare resulted in deadly consequences. Soldiers shared their trenches with lice, rats, and mud. As in previous wars and conflicts, no one returned home unchanged. The sights and sounds of war left many veterans with permanent

⁶ Stanley Weintraub, *FDR's Introduction to War, Politics, and Life* (Boston, MA: Da Capo, 2013), 64.

⁷ The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution led to Russia's withdrawal from the war by way of Russia signing the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty with Germany on 3 Mar. 1918.

disabilities such as dismemberment, hearing loss, blindness, lung conditions due to gas exposure, and shell shock.⁸

The tremendous casualties and strains on manufacturing suffered by the Allies made victory over the Central Powers uncertain without the United States' participation. General John J. Pershing, Commander of the American Expeditionary Force, led over 600,000 soldiers supporting the Allies. He estimated that three million soldiers would be needed to stop the German advance, protect resources and railways, train in theater and build docks, hospitals, bridges, telephone nets and other critical infrastructure. American soldiers, as well as Marines and Coast Guard members distinguished themselves in several campaigns including Oise-Aisne, Soissons, Chemins des Dames, and Verdun. In the Atlantic, the U.S. Navy escorted convoys and fought German U-boats.

It is ironic that such a catastrophic world war ended what is known as the "Progressive Era." Another paradox is the fact that progressive President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, the man who led the United States through the war and was a champion for social reform, free trade, and democratic liberty allowed discrimination against blacks and women to continue. The United States' leaders' beliefs about these societal groups influenced their decision-making processes and policies. Wilson, a former president of Princeton University, and governor of New Jersey was a progressive Democrat committed to domestic reform. He was born in Staunton, Virginia on 28 December 1856, to Reverend Doctor Ruggles Wilson who established the Southern Presbyterian Church and Janet Woodrow Wilson. He witnessed the country's struggle to unify following the Civil War and the separation of the blacks and whites by law, custom, and practice after Congress abolished slavery. Wilson graduated from Princeton University in 1879 and the University of Virginia law school in 1880. After earning his doctoral degree at the Johns Hopkins University in 1886, he taught at Bryn Mawr College, Wesleyan University and Princeton University. As an isolationist he had no desire to enter "their war" or "the war over there." Historian Robert Love noted that Wilson's approach to foreign policy was based on "a Calvinist conception of international morality."⁹ Wilson adhered to a policy of neutrality and reluctantly agreed to

⁸ "World War I, The Great War from 1914-1919," <http://1900s.about.com/od/worldwari/p/World-War-I.htm>; Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 1-24; Frank Blazic, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/u/us-navy-world-war-i-redirect.html>; Dudley W. Knox, "American Naval Participation in the Great War (with special reference to the European Theater of Operation)," <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically;http://militaryhistory.about.com/od/1900s/fl/World-War-I-Marshall-Joseph-Joffre.htm>; *A Guide to the American Battle Fields in Europe*, prepared by the American Battle Monuments Commission (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [hereafter GPO], 1927), 1-20.

⁹ Love, 460.



President Woodrow Wilson waves his top hat from the deck of USS *George Washington* (ID No. 3018), as she steamed up New York Harbor upon the President's return to the United States from the World War I peace conference in France, 8 July 1919. NHHC photograph, Washington Navy Yard (WNY), Washington, DC, NH 18

incremental involvement by way of sending Britain and France much needed supplies and escorting their ships to assure safe passage. He ran for his second term on the promise to keep the nation out of the war. Wilson argued that “every reform we have won will be lost if we go into this war.”¹⁰

Events changed his mind. When a German submarine sank the British liner RMS *Lusitania* on 7 May 1915, 201 passengers, including 159 Americans died. The unprovoked sinking of unarmed ships continued (i.e., the British liner *Arabic* on 19 August 1915). Germany periodically agreed not to attack unarmed passenger ships, but merchant ships remained its navy's targets. It was principally the German submarines patrolling the U.S. Atlantic coast, the unrestricted submarine warfare against Allied ships, and the intercepted Zimmermann Telegram—in which a German foreign secretary proposed an alliance between Germany

¹⁰ Weintraub, 71; Arthur S. Link, “Woodrow Wilson,” *Presidents: A Reference History* (The Gale Group, 2002).

and Mexico in the event that the United States entered the war—that led Wilson to seek Congressional declaration of war against Germany.¹¹

Congress declared war against Germany following Wilson's 2 April 1917 address proclaiming that it was a war to make the world safe for democracy, to protect human rights, to end the German military threat, and to assure freedom of the seas. He noted, "There is not a single selfish element, so far as I can see, in the cause we are fighting for. We are fighting for what we believe and wish to be the rights of mankind and for the future peace and security of the world."¹² He reminded Americans that everyone on the battlefield and at home had a contribution to make to the war effort. Within days of the declaration of war, Congress began passing key legislation. The Selective Service Act, for example required all males from 21 to 30 years of age to register for military service. In an effort to control the flow of information about the war and to assure the emphasis on the U.S. war's aims, the President started the Committee on Public Information.

The cabinet members who Wilson appointed to lead the Departments of War and Navy were essential to United States' successful prosecution of war against the Central Powers. Edward M. House, a businessman and one of



Josephus Daniels served as Secretary of the Navy during Woodrow Wilson's presidency. He was in office from 5 March 1913 to 5 March 1921. *NHHC photograph, NH 2336*

¹¹ Arthur S. Link, "Woodrow Wilson," 2002; Robert W. Love, *History of U.S. Navy, Volume One, 1775–1941* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1992), 472–475, 481–483; Transcript of the Zimmerman Telegram, 1917, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=60&page=transcript>; Zimmerman proposed that Mexico ally itself with Germany if the United States entered the war.

¹² President Wilson's 2 Apr. 1917 address to Congress requesting a declaration of war against Germany.

Wilson's closest advisors, recommended Josephus Daniels, a native of North Carolina and career newspaper businessman, for the position of Secretary of the Navy when the President selected his first cabinet. Daniels who shared similar interests with Wilson as a democrat, a progressive, a pacifist and a segregationist, became the longest serving Secretary of the Navy since Gideon Wells during the Civil War. Despite his lack of experience with the Navy and anti-war beliefs, he set forth significant reforms, the least of which were improving naval training and anti-submarine warfare doctrine, and suspending the distribution of alcohol at naval commands at sea and ashore. He launched naval aviation and deployed gunboats and Marines to Mexico, Panama, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. Under his direction, millions of American soldiers on Navy-escorted transports arrived safely in the European theater. Also, better-quality mine detection and destruction techniques, and ship performance were developed during his tenure. He required the Naval Academy to admit Sailors from the fleet for the first time and that every naval base and ship have an academic department. Daniels seized German ships in U.S. ports, refurbished them, and used them as troop transports. The *Vaterland* renamed *Leviathan* delivered 96,804 troops and the *Hamburg* renamed *Powhatan* transported 14,613.¹³

When Secretary Daniels offered Franklin D. Roosevelt the job as his Assistant Secretary of the Navy, the young FDR replied, "It would please me better than anything else in the world. All of my life I have loved ships and been a student of the Navy, and the Assistant Secretary is one place, above all others I would love to hold."¹⁴ Roosevelt had known the sea from a young age and had crossed the Atlantic 20 times. He maintained a collection of ship models, artwork, and a large maritime library. This Harvard trained lawyer saw this position as a key professional step in his ascension to the Presidency of the United States. Daniels and Roosevelt had support. Congress established the Chief of Naval Operations position in 1915 and Daniels selected Rear Admiral William S. Benson to fill it. Benson, a Georgia native and, an 1877 Naval Academy graduate (and an Anglophobe) was the commandant of the Philadelphia Navy Yard. His sea commands included the cruiser *Albany* and battleship *Utah*. According to author William N. Still, Benson, "sought to prepare the navy for war, but the novelty of his position and pacifism of the naval secretary limited his activity."¹⁵

¹³ Daniels, 90-91. For more information about Edward M. House see <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol-59-no-3/colonel-house.html>.

¹⁴ Weintraub, 18.

¹⁵ William N. Still, Jr., *Crisis at Sea: The United States Navy in European Waters in World War I* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006, 8-9.



Franklin D. Roosevelt as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, April 1917.
NHHC photograph, NH 50868

Daniels sent Rear Admiral William S. Sims, President of the Naval War College and an 1876 Naval Academy graduate, to London as his liaison with the British Navy. Daniels told Sims,

*You have been selected for this mission not because of your Guildhall speech but in spite of it. If the time ever comes when the British Empire is seriously menaced by an external enemy, it is my opinion that you may count upon every man, every dollar, every drop of blood of your kindred across the sea.*¹⁶

Daniels instructed Sims to travel in civilian attire and to keep him and CNO Benson informed. Benson reminded Sims that the British and the Americans had different goals. Wilson made the situation worse when he told Sims to send strategy and policy reports directly to him. Sims's first report of 14 April 1917, indicated that the German submarines were more successful than initially thought and that Germany threatened Allied supplies, communications, and control of the seas. First Sea Lord Admiral John R. Jellicoe warned Sims that "[t]hey [the

¹⁶ Daniels, 39.

Germans] will win, unless we can stop these losses—and stop them soon.”¹⁷ Wilson and Daniels did not believe the situation to be as critical as described. Sims proved a harsh opponent of Daniels openly expressing his disagreements with his strategy and leadership.¹⁸

Manning the United States Navy

“The supreme test of the nation has come. We must all speak, act and serve together.”

President Woodrow Wilson’s 2 April 1917 address to Congress

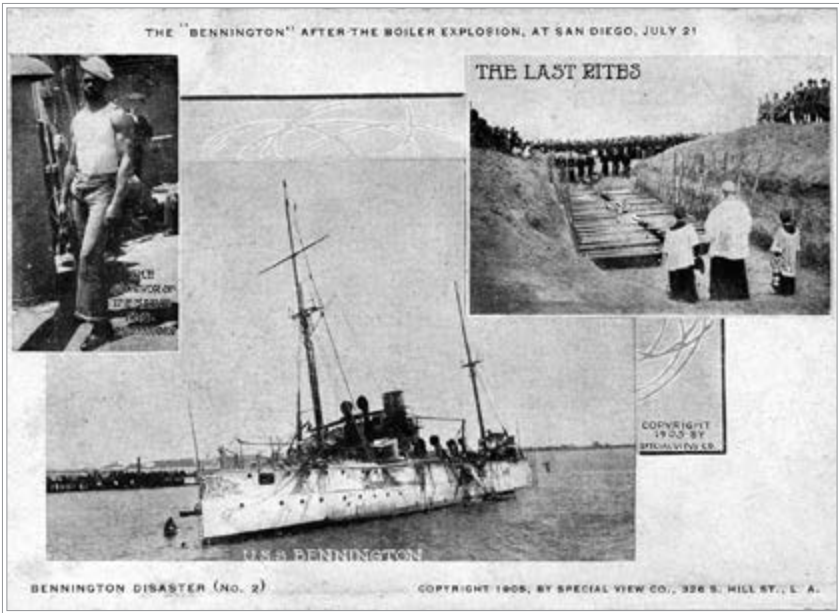
The Navy had 342 ships and 79,182 officer and enlisted personnel in 1917. There were points during the war when recruiters could not meet their goals. The need was so urgent that Sailors recently graduated from basic training reported to the war zones without the benefit of advanced training and the duration of boot camp was shortened. The new graduates often replaced more experienced personnel needed to work on the newer ships. Commanding officers complained about their crews’ inexperience and frequent turnover. They opposed the idea of having the “green crews” complete their training aboard ship. The quality of life on a ship varied depending on the type of vessel. The crews typically endured over-crowding, sea sickness, repeated drills, limited amenities, severe temperatures, and leaking ships. The coal heavers or the “black gang” as they were called due to the coal covering their skin worked in the bottom of the ship in one hundred degrees without ventilation. Crews faced the dangers of enemy attacks, heavy seas, and violent storms. The mess depended on the availability of refrigeration, the length of the trip, the size of the ship, the freshness of the food supply, and the ability of the cook.

Despite the desperate need for manpower, Daniels did not make maximum use of all available personnel. His progressivism did not extend to blacks. Naval policy limited blacks to service in specific ratings primarily as messman or steward and to the enlisted ranks. Mess Attendant John Henry Turpin survived the explosion aboard the battleship USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor on 14 February 1898, and a boiler blast aboard USS *Bennington* Gunboat #4 on 21 July 1905. Though he became one of the Navy’s first black chief petty officers as a gunner’s mate in 1917, he was one of the few exceptions.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹⁸ Mark D. Mandeles, “Review of Tracy Barrett Kittredge. . .,” 10 Sept. 2015; Love, 459; Still, 10–15, 21–22.

¹⁹ <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/us-people/t/turpin-john-henry-Dick.html>.



USS *Bennington* (Gunboat No. 4) Fine-screen halftone reproduction of a photographic montage, published on a postal card by the Special View Company, 326 S. Hill St., Los Angeles, California. It shows the ship after her 21 July 1905 boiler explosion, the burial of victims of the disaster, and one of her surviving crew members. This Sailor is almost certainly John Henry (Dick) Turpin, who had also survived the explosion of USS *Maine* in February 1898. *Donation of H.E. (Ed) Coffey. NHHHC photograph, NH 102779-KN*

Such discrimination did not lessen the African American's desire to enlist. There were 5,328 blacks among the Navy's 435,398 Sailors in 1918.²⁰ They fought to maintain a democracy that did not grant them their democratic and constitutional rights. Daniel's policy was consistent with Secretary of War Newton D. Baker who commented on the participation of blacks in the armed forces on 30 November 1917:

As you know it has been my policy to discourage discrimination against any persons by reason of race. This policy is adopted not merely as an act of justice to all races that go to make up the American people, but also to safeguard the very institutions which were now at the greatest

²⁰ *Annual Report of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1918* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1918), 453; The 435,398 includes U.S. Naval Reserve Force, the U.S. Navy and the National Naval Volunteers.

*sacrifice engaged in defending and which any racial disorders must endanger. At the same time there is no intention on the part of the War Department to undertake at this time the so-called race question.*²¹

Women Answer the Government's Call

Once again women responded to the call to action. They filled jobs left vacant by men serving in the military, and maintained the home front. They staffed canteens, grew food, and sold liberty bonds. Red Cross nurses worked at home and in the war theater. The “hello girls” speaking fluent French operated the U.S. Army Signal Corps switchboards overseas. The military also relied on women to alleviate their personnel shortages. Army and Navy nurses treated patients at home and abroad. For the first time, the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard enlisted women. The next chapter explains Secretary of the Navy Daniels's decision to enlist women, the recruitment program, their motives for joining, the enlistment process, and their benefits.

²¹ Emmett J. Scott, *Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (Chicago, 1919), 59.

2

“WOMEN JOIN THE NAVY”

“They knew one thing . . . the COUNTRY WAS IN DANGER and had called the Women of America. They Answered.”²²

Over 11,000 women from every state, American territory, and the District of Columbia volunteered to enlist into the United States Navy to free male Sailors for combat duties. These women courageously performed primarily clerical work with little if any knowledge of the Navy, how it functioned, and where they might be assigned. Like the men they replaced, they willingly exchanged their lifestyles and freedoms for naval policies and procedures. In the face of many challenges and criticism they remained unwavering in their support of the Allies’ efforts to defeat their enemies and to bring their loved ones home sooner. Although the Navy provided no basic training, they assumed their duties and often proved more productive and effective than the men they freed for combat. After working 10- or 12-hour days, they endured classes to master basic naval policies, practices, and regulations. This chapter describes the Navy’s need to enlist women, their reasons for enlisting, as well as the Navy’s recruitment efforts, enlistment process, and training for its newest reservists.

The Navy’s First Enlisted Women

In addition to assuring the best deployment of naval ships, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels required personnel to support the war effort at home.

²² Chapter II Mobilization, 11, Volume 1, COLL/226, Eunice C. Dessez papers, box 1 of 7, Archives, Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington Navy Yard [hereafter NHHC, WNY]; these papers are in bound five inch binders; unnumbered pages are filtered throughout the numbered pages; there are numerous photos and newspaper articles dispersed throughout the volume many of which lack citations and/or dates; the overall volume is fragile; The First Enlisted Women U.S. Navy 1917–1918, COLL/226, Dessez, Eunice C., box 1 of 7, Archives, Building 57, NHHC; this collection is the source material for Dessez’s *First Enlisted Women*, her published handbook for Yeoman (F) [hereafter Dessez papers].

In 1917, the Navy had 128,666 regular enlisted personnel.²³ When the Civil Service Commission reported its inability to provide the number of personnel required to meet the Navy's need for clerical workers, Secretary Daniels explored his options. When he learned that there was no legal reason why women could not be enlisted, he changed the Navy forever. For the first time, women joined the ranks of its enlisted men. The yeomen (F) and the Navy nurses in World War I paved the way for the women in today's Navy.

More than one person claims to have been the first to propose the recruitment of women to Daniels. Lieutenant Commander Frederick Payne, a recruiter in Philadelphia, suggested that women enlistments would persuade more men to join. Representatives John J. Eagan (D-NJ), Fred L. Blackmon (D-AL), and other members of Congress also approached Daniels about this.²⁴ Charlotte Louise Berry Winters, a native of Washington, DC, stated that she discussed women's rights to enlist with Daniels in 1916.²⁵

The Naval Appropriations Act of 1916 (Public Law 241) established the United States Naval Reserve Force, which was composed of six classes: Fleet Reserve, Naval Reserve, Naval Auxiliary Reserve, Naval Coastal Defense Reserve, Volunteer Navy Reserve, and the Naval Reserve Flying Corps. The act stated that any United States citizen could serve, requiring four-year enlistments, and taking the oath of enlistment. Daniels admitted women into Class 4, the Naval Coastal Defense Reserve, which allowed for the first enlistment of officers and enlisted personnel, because it had the budget to pay for the new reservists.²⁶

On 19 March 1917, Rear Admiral Leigh C. Palmer, the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, which was the personnel branch in the Navy Department, issued a memo to the naval districts announcing the women would be enlisted "in the ratings of Yeoman, Electrician (Radio), or in such other ratings as the commandant may consider essential to the District organization." Eventually, 11,000 enlisted women served along with 1,713 nurses, 269 enlisted female Marines, and 2 enlisted women in the Coast Guard.²⁷

²³ *Secretary of the Navy Annual Report 1918*, Bureau of Navigation, 72.

²⁴ Evelyn M. Monahan and Rosemary Neidel-Greenlee, *A Few Good Women: America's Military Women from World War I to the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 6; Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Current: Navy Women in a Century of Change, Third Edition* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1999), 5.

²⁵ Unsigned, "Among first to enlist and the last US woman veteran of World War I," *New York Times*, 5 Apr. 2007 <http://www.smh.com.au/news/obituaries/among-the-firsts-to-enlist-and-the-last-us-woman-veteran-of-world-war-i>.

²⁶ Unnumbered pages between pages 24 and 27, Chapter IV, Recruiting 1917-1918 and Women Called to Colors, Dessez papers, box 1.

²⁷ Statistics, 42, Chapter V, The Yeoman (F), Dessez papers box 1.

Women's Motivations

Women of various ages and cultural backgrounds made inquiries about service in the Naval Reserve before the official announcement. In addition to patriotism, their interest stemmed from the Navy providing equal pay for equal work based on rank and regular employment. Like the male Sailors, their service helped to bring their loved ones home sooner and to help the country defeat the Germans. Some women joined to honor their relatives and friends who had been killed or wounded. Another motive was joining with a relative. Sisters Ethel Trussler Fahey and Fannie served at the P&C Depot in New York; five of their relatives also joined the military. Some women were so excited that they enlisted before age 18. Thelma Franklin's screening failed to discover that she was 14 years of age. Chief Yeoman Helen Harper, a Canadian native assigned to the U.S. Naval Hospital in Washington, DC, was the first female reservists naturalized into the United States.²⁸



Suffragists silent protest during World War I. U.S. National Archives 165-WW25-2973a

²⁸ Unsigned, "First Yeowoman Ask for U.S. Citizenship," *The Courier Journal* (Louisville, KY), 14 Apr. 1919, 6; Unsigned, "Yeoman Now Citizen of U.S.," *The Lincoln Star* (Lincoln, Nebraska), 29 Apr. 1919, 12.

Some women were drawn by doing something different or continuing their family's legacy of military service.²⁹ They also thought enlisting might persuade the President and Congress to support the proposed 19th Amendment to the Constitution granting women the right to vote. Suffragettes met in the homes of future female yeomen such as Joy Bright Hancock.

Recruitment Efforts

Women were not drafted. Like the nurses, they volunteered. Naval service was one of several means of supporting the war. Thus, the Navy had to compete for the attention of 18- to 35-year-old American women whose options included the National League for Women's Services, the Women's Council on Defense, the American Red Cross, the Women's Land Army, and factory jobs. Applicants had to be United States citizens, be physically and mentally fit, take the oath of enlistment, and agree to serve for four years wherever the Navy stationed them. The Navy placed recruitment ads in national and regional newspapers including the *Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and on the radio. One of the more popular posters read "If I were a man I would enlist."

Answering Daniels's Call

*"Many of these patriotic women who applied for enlistment did not know whether they would be sent to sea or to strange lands; they did expect the Navy to provide for them as it had for enlisted men."*³⁰

Loretta Perfectus Walsh, a native of Olyphant, Pennsylvania, and a graduate of the Lackawanna Business School in Scranton, distinguished herself as the first woman to enlist. When she joined, Loretta was employed as a civilian clerk at a Navy recruiting station in Philadelphia. She was motivated by her family history of military service and her love for her country.

Word of mouth also proved effective. When Frieda Greene's father mentioned the announcement at their dinner table, she remarked, "That's for me."³¹ Another

²⁹ Ebbert and Hall, 6-9; Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly, A History of Women in the U. S. Navy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press and Washington Navy Yard, DC: Naval Historical Center, 2001), 61-62; Godson's book is the first and only comprehensive academic published history of women in the United States Navy that covers nurses and non-nurses; Ebbert and Hall's study focuses on Navy women who were not nurses. The *Notebook*, 30 Sept. 1980, XLII, no. 3, Yeoman F. File, Early Records, Navy Department Library, WNY; The *Notebook* is the newsletter for the National Yeoman F. Association established in 1926 by the women reservists to preserve their history.

³⁰ Unnumbered pages between pages 24 and 27, Chapter IV, Recruiting 1917-1918 and Women Called to Colors, Dessez papers.

³¹ Her married name was Frieda Payne; At the age of 101, Freida Payne spoke at the opening ceremony for the Women in Military Service for America in 1992.

recruit came to Washington, DC, for a civilian job. Her parents were so concerned about their daughter being in “a dangerous place for a girl” that they insisted she live outside of the city with a cousin and her father arranged for a Navy ensign to meet her at the train station. After the ensign asked her why she had not considered enlisting, she applied. Phyllis Kelley was employed as the secretary to the Dodge Brothers Motor Company in Boston when she heard that she could apply at the Naval Reserve in the Boston Navy Yard. Kelley began her enlistment process on her lunch hour. Margaret Mary Fitzgerald King of Stevens Point, Wisconsin, the daughter of a U.S. Army major, had a civil service job during her father’s tour in the Philippines. She enlisted in the Navy on 7 June 1918, in Portland, Oregon, with Len Butzer Reynolds.³² Gertrude Edna Murray was working at the Globe Wernicke Company when someone called from the Fleet Supply Base across the street in south Brooklyn in desperate need of a file clerk. Murray responded to their call and went on to manage 40 female yeomen as a chief yeoman at that base.³³

Lou McPherson Guthrie and two friends applied when the Navy appealed for 100 women war workers to reduce the shortage of accounting workers in the Navy Yard. Guthrie considered government work when her seventh-grade teaching position at a North Carolina school ended. After getting 95 percent of the questions in the math section of the civil service examination correct, she accepted a job with the Bureau of War Risk Insurance in the Smithsonian Institution building in the nation’s capital. She welcomed the annual salary of \$1,000. When she discovered that the YWCA could not accommodate her, she decided to live in one of the homes open to women workers. Secretary Daniels, cabinet members, and others helped to alleviate the housing shortage by hosting civilian and military personnel assigned to Washington, DC.³⁴

Joy Bright Hancock relieved a man for duty in the Pennsylvania National Guard when she assumed his job as statistician. Captain Elmer Wood, recalled to active duty, commanded the Branch Hydrographic Office of the Navy in Philadelphia. He had known Hancock since her childhood. He supported her effort to join by introducing her to Captain George Cooper, assigned to the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Cooper directed her to the Naval Home to start the process.³⁵

³² Unnumbered pages, *The Notebook*, 30 Sept. 1980, XLII, no. 3, Folder 7, Printed Material, COLL 236/ Helen G. O’Neill Papers, box 1 of 1, Archives, NHHC.

³³ Monahan and Neidel-Greenlee, 7.

³⁴ Lou MacPherson Guthrie, “I was a Yeomanette,” *Proceedings* (Dec. 1984), Volume 110/12/982, 57–64.

³⁵ Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, Veterans Day Remarks, Women in Military Service for America Memorial, 11 Nov. 2016, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches-View/Article/1003737/veterans-day-remarks>; Joy B. Hancock, *Lady in the Navy: A Personal Reminiscence* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1972), 23; Mrs. Henry F. Butler, “I was a Yeoman (E)” (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Foundation, 1967), 3–4; Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, 7–8; Still, 191.



Joy Bright Hancock, photographed in February 1918 while serving in the Office of the Naval Superintendent of Construction, New York Shipbuilding Corporation, Camden, New Jersey. *Courtesy of Captain Joy Bright Hancock, USN (Retired). NHHC photograph, NH 94945-A*

Helen O'Shaughnessy and Bell V. Dunn distinguished themselves as the first women to enlist in Charleston, South Carolina and aboard USS *Hartford*, the former flagship of Admiral David G. Farragut.³⁶

Multiple sisters from one family enlisted as did a few mother-daughter pairs, along with the daughters of cabinet officers, members of Congress, and naval officers. The female yeomen represented every state. The highest number of them came from New York at 2,329, Massachusetts at 1,324, and Virginia at 1,071. Many of these pioneers were working in related fields.³⁷

Charlotte Louise Berry Winters, a native of Washington, DC, learned about an opportunity to serve as a yeoman (F.) after she graduated from the Washington Business High School. She was among the first women to enlist and spent the war as a clerk in the Naval Gun Factory at the Washington Navy Yard. When Winters died in 2007, she was believed to be the last surviving female World War I veteran.³⁸ Elizabeth Kirk Stewart and Elizabeth Townson Campbell, both DC natives, enlisted on 24 March 1917, and were the first applicants to get their physical exams at the Naval Hospital at 23rd and E Streets, N.W., and the first enlisted women assigned to the Naval Gun Factory.³⁹ There were 14 African

³⁶ Unnumbered pages, Chapter 1, War Clouds Gather, Dessez papers box 1.

³⁷ "Enlisted Women in the U.S. Naval Reserve Force in World War I," Chapter 1, Mobilization, unnumbered pages, Dessez papers box 1.

³⁸ Unsigned, "Among first to enlist and the last US woman veteran of World War I," *New York Times*, 5 Apr. 2007, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/obituaries/among-the-firsts-to-enlist-and-the-last-us-woman-veteran-of-world-war-i>.

³⁹ Unnumbered pages, Chapter II, Mobilization, Dessez papers box 1.

Americans—DC, Texas, Mississippi, and Maryland natives—among the 1,874 enlisted women assigned to naval facilities in Washington, DC.⁴⁰

Opposition to Enlisting Women

Everyone did not welcome the patriotism of female enlistees. Parents' beliefs about Sailors' behavior and character made them reluctant to support their daughters' decision. Male Sailors were skeptical about women's contributions and feared they would disrupt their work space and reduce efficiency. Individuals expressed the argument that women did not belong in "their service" in newspapers. Yeoman (F) Lou MacPherson Guthrie recalled reading a retired colonel's editorial that noted, "Preposterous! First women wanted to vote. Then Alice Roosevelt started them smoking cigarettes! Now they're talking about being soldiers. Next thing we know they'll be cutting off their hair and wearing pants!"⁴¹ Eunice C. Dessez observed, "Old-time sailors of the day were somewhat scandalized and nonplussed by the thought that WOMEN would wear the same uniform



U.S. Naval Enrollment Office at 10th St. and Pennsylvania Ave, S.E. as it appeared in ca. 1880. *Courtesy of Andre Sobocinski, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, 12-0244-001*

⁴⁰ See Richard Miller, "The Golden Fourteen, Plus: Black Women in World War I," *Minerva, Quarterly Report on Women in the Military*, vol. XIII, no. 4/4 (Fall/Winter, 1995) to learn more about the African American Yeoman (F).

⁴¹ Evelyn M. Monahan and Rosemary Neidel-Greenlee, 6; Ebber and Hall, 8-9; Guthrie, 60.

as themselves.⁴² Yeoman (F.) Lillian Budd recalled an older Sailor telling her that he would immediately request sea duty instead of serving with her. Another Sailor proclaimed he would rather serve in China than work with women.⁴³

Lieutenant Charles H. Venable, USN, recalled to active service on 19 February 1917, commanded the United States Naval Reserve Enrollment Office at 10th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E., in Washington, DC.⁴⁴ His staff included Eunice C. Dessez and other Yeomen (F.), two Navy nurses, and one civilian, a Mr. J. A. Dawkins. They worked ten-hour days and averaged 640 enrollments between March and September of 1918. September 1917 and August 1918 marked the lowest and highest numbers of enlistments, respectively 17 and 1,077. The officers and men of the land-based naval railway gun batteries under Rear Admiral C. P. Plunkett, USN, were among their notable enlistees.⁴⁵ Mr. Steve T. Early, a journalist who later served as the third White House press secretary and for a few months in the Truman Administration, sent Irene Manning of Washington, DC, with his letter of endorsement, to this enrollment office. Lieutenant Venable promptly enrolled her on 31 March 1917.⁴⁶

The Process of Joining the Navy

Enlistment was not a complicated process. Applicants completed an interview and a written exam often at the recruiting station. Those with clerical experience took a typing or stenographer test. They were also required to be physically fit like their male counterparts. However, the logistics of the enlistment process were not initially in place. Navy nurses performed some of the preliminary exams to ensure the potential enlistees' eligibility for service, but Navy doctors conducted most of them. This created some uncomfortable situations. After Lillian Budd told the staff at the recruiting station she wanted to join the Navy, the doctor immediately instructed her to remove her clothes. She recalled being horrified, but not deterred. After a naval medical officer completed his assessment and she passed a shorthand test, she took her enlistment oath and began her naval service as a yeoman first class. Estelle Kemper recalled the women recruits having to stand along a hallway in towels waiting to see the doctor. This embarrassed some and made others fearful. A fellow recruit exclaimed to Kemper, "You act like you

⁴² Chapter II, Mobilization, 11, Dessez papers, box 1.

⁴³ Jean Gillette, "Uncle Sam's First Woman Recruits," *The Retired Officer Magazine* (July 1991), 40.

⁴⁴ The enrollment office is the site of the Navy's first hospital in Washington, DC. Today it is the Hill Center, a non-profit organization promoting community and culture.

⁴⁵ Chapter V, Recruiting 1917-1918 and Women Called to Colors, The Yeoman (F.), 33-47, Dessez papers, box 1.

⁴⁶ Chapter, VIII Accomplishments, 99, Dessez papers, box 1; Doris Kerns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt—The Home Front in World War II* (New York: Touchstone, 1995).

didn't mind having no clothes on!" Trying to calm her down, Kemper assured her that the doctors were used to seeing nudity and added, "Oh, after the first couple of times you get used to this sort of thing." The woman misunderstood her statement and Kemper tried to reassure her that the doctor was so focused on his job that no one had anything to fear.⁴⁷

Having met all the requirements, the Navy's newest members took the same oath as male Sailors:

I, _____ do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America, and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all enemies whomsoever; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the Rules and Articles of the Government of the Navy.

After receiving their identification card, most returned home until the Navy issued their orders. If the new reservists had an urgently needed skill set, they often reported for duty the same day.

Salary and Benefits

Their pay was based on their rank. A yeoman (F) earned \$28.75 per month with a 20-cent deduction for hospitalization. Since the Navy did not provide housing or messing, the women also received \$1.25 per day for subsistence pay and an annual \$60.00 clothing allowance. The Bureau of Navigation began issuing identification



Obverse of an identification bracelet issued to Yeoman (F) Bertha Sobel, 19 August 1918. *Courtesy of Mrs. Louis (Sobel) Dulitz, 1968. NHHC photograph, NH 65802*

⁴⁷ Jean Gillette, "Uncle Sam's First Women Recruits," *The Retired Officer Magazine* (July 1991), 38; Butler, 3.

tags—or “dog tags”—to yeomen (F) from the new Navy building in accordance with General Order No. 294.⁴⁸ An identification bracelet was also worn.

Working Out a Few Administrative Issues

Enlisted women in the Navy raised new administrative problems. For the first time, the Navy had to document a Sailor’s gender. The Bureau of Navigation automatically assigned new Sailors to ships. When the women received orders to ships, they were ascribed to barges and other sunken naval property. It did not take long before people starting calling the women by nicknames such as “yeomenettes” and “yeowomen.” Rear Admiral Samuel McGowen, the paymaster of the Navy, objected, stating, “These women are as much a part of the Navy as the men who have enlisted. They do the same work . . . and have done yeoman service.”⁴⁹ Thus, naval officials designated the women the rating of “Yeoman (F),” the “F” denoting female to distinguish them from males.

Training

*“Indoctrination was not the order of the day; one simply
plunged into service cold.”*

Joy Bright Hancock⁵⁰

Just as the Navy did not plan for assessing their physical fitness, there were no preparations for their training, housing, or uniforms. Their enlistment rating and rank depended on a recruit’s experience. Most enlisted as yeoman, master-at-arms, or mess attendant third class. A small number entered the Navy as chief yeoman. Typically, training happened on the job and from reading the *Bluejacket’s Manual* and mimeographed naval regulations. They learned close order drill on the National Mall after duty hours. Without the benefit of basic training, they had to take classes designed for them at 7:00 PM at the enrollment office at 10th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E. The Navy discontinued the night school on 3 October 1918.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Harris Lanning, Navy Department, Bureau of Navigation, Washington, DC, N-622-B, 12 Dec. 1918 to all Bureaus and Offices, Subject: Identification Tags, copy, Chapter VIII Accomplishments, unnumbered page, Dessez papers box 1; see a copy of General Order No. 295 at <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/i/identification-tags-dog-tags.html>.

⁴⁹ As quoted in Godson, 62.

⁵⁰ Hancock, 23.

⁵¹ Chapter VII Training, 55–56 and see typed note of 3 Oct. 1918, “LT Jackson telephoned that night school for men and women in the naval reserve force will be closed until further notice,” without explanation, unnumbered page, Dessez papers box 1.



Yeomen (F), U.S. Naval Reserve Force, New enlistees receive training in telegraphy from a Chief Petty Officer, at the Naval Training Center, Great Lakes, Illinois, in 1917. Some of these women are in uniform while others are still wearing civilian attire. *Courtesy of the U.S. Naval Institute Photo Collection, 1983. NHHC photograph, NH 95082*

Housing

The Navy's barracks were filled, eliminating that option for the Yeomen (F). Some could supplement their benefits by renting a house, but that was not the norm. The YWCA and private homes helped to alleviate the housing shortage, but Washington simply lacked the capacity to host all the civilian and military people working in the nation's war headquarters.

Ann Ginter De La Fountaine of Pacheco, California, assigned to the Medical Department at Mare Island, was among the exceptions. She and the other yeomen (F) lived in a refurbished Marine Corps barracks and commuted to work riding a two-car train nicknamed the "Powder Puff Special."⁵² Marion F. Walsh Driscoll also had quarters.

⁵² "This and That" continued, Anne Ginter De La Fountaine, unnumbered pages, *The Note Book*, vol. XLIII, no. 1, 31 Mar. 1982, Folder 7, Printed Materials, 31 Mar. 1976 to 3 Aug. 1985, COLL/236 Helen G. O'Neill (National Yeoman (F.)), 236, box 1 of 1, Archives, NHHC.



Camp Columbia, on the district line, a temporary solution to the housing shortage in Washington, DC, 1918, for Yeoman (female) and other wartime personnel. *Collection of Mrs. Josephine Mitchell Brousseau, Long Island City, New York, 1968, NHHHC photograph, NH 65940*



YN (F) Marian F. Walsh before living quarters in Boston, Massachusetts. *NHHHC photograph, NH 65325*

The Enlisted Women's Uniform

The female yeomen reported for duty in their civilian attire because the Navy did not initially provide them with uniforms. They eventually received their Norfolk-style jacket that they wore with a dark skirt. Navy uniform regulations followed, but the respective commanding officers had final approval. The Navy's failure to designate one cover (hat) for the yeomen (E) is evidenced in the

photos depicting the wide variety of headgear. Their covers, however, had to have wide brims to cover their hair buns, which were kept in place with three-inch hairpins. Yeomen (F.) in factories processing munitions wore overalls. There were complaints that the heavy cape added to the female uniform was only comfortable during the coldest weather.⁵³



Chief Yeoman (F.) Ada Hasford, C.Y.U.S.N.R.F. BuNav 1918–19, COLL/226, Dessez, Eunice C., Photo in pocket at the end of the volume, no series number, Volume 1, Box 1 of 7, Archives, Building 57. NHHC, photographed by author

Esther Kemper disliked the uniform because

[t]he skirts were straight, tight, and the most awkward length possible. The jackets were shapeless affairs, loosely belted in a sort of 'Norfolk' attempt. The entire ensemble turned out to be as flattering to the female form as our father's business suits would have been. . . . Normally we were not a bad-looking lot. In those uniforms we could have been outdone in looks by the Salvation Army. Well, we were a crestfallen crew—almost a tearful one. We did love our country, and did want to do our duty by the Navy, but how on earth could any country demand such a sacrifice?⁵⁴

⁵³ Chapter IV, Yeoman (F.) Uniforms, Chapter IV, Recruiting 1917–1918 and Women Called to Colors, Dessez papers, box 1; Eunice C. Dessez, *First Enlisted Women*, 44–51.

⁵⁴ Butler, 6; “The Yeomanettes of World War I,” (photo essay) *Proceedings* (Dec. 1957), 1335–1388.



Yeoman (F.) Eloise Fort and Chief Yeoman (F.) Lassie Kelly pose for a tall and short photo, while visiting New York City. They were part of a contingent of 250 Yeomen (F.) who were sent from Washington, DC to participate in Victory Loan Drive. *NHHC photograph, NH 53170*

Earl Goodwin, known as “the Dean of Washington Correspondence” and married to Elizabeth Cromelin, part of the Yeoman (F.) battalion remarked,

As for him who sneered at the uniform of these women I would almost believe him perverted mentally. The yeoman (F) uniform is the uniform of the United States, and to have worn it in war time is the greatest service any American can perform. Whether the wearer is a man or a woman—the honor is greater than anything else I know, except the honor of dying for the country in that uniform. So if by chance anyone forgets himself far enough to sneer at the yeoman (F) uniform, let the finger of scorn be pointed at HIM—not the uniform.⁵⁵

The yeomen (F.) remained committed despite the Navy’s failure to establish a training program for them before starting their active duty service. Their patriotism was not deterred by the administrative and logistical challenges or the hostile opposition they endured. The next chapter focuses on

⁵⁵ Earl Godwin, “Heard and Seen,” Washington, DC, 15 June 1919, Chapter VIII, Accomplishments, vol. 1, unnumbered page, Dessez papers box 1.



Yeoman (F.) Margaret Foster and her brother in February 1919. *Courtesy of Mrs. Stuart (Margaret Foster) Wheeler, 1968, NHHC photograph, NH 65607*

how their diverse and multiple contributions as Yeomen (F.) contributed to the Allied war machine, gender relations on the job, and the work-related difficulties they faced. Various profiles will show how their jobs gave them a front-row seat to the war effort and naval advancements during the war. Their work also gave them direct access to the President, cabinet members, and senior naval leaders.

3

“REPORTING TO WORK”

“It will be a source of inspiration to the country at large to learn that the able and conscientious men and women who are devoting their best thoughts and untiring energies to the efficient administration of the NAVY permit no half measures to hurt their support of the National cause, but act as well as think on the spirit that their ALL is not too much.”

Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy⁵⁶

The Navy’s first enlisted women worked at naval commands across the United States and overseas, supported Allied operations and campaigns, and contributed directly to the Allied victory. In addition to traditional clerical and administrative duties, these pioneering women assembled munitions, transported classified materials, transcribed documents, and assisted nurses at overseas hospitals. Wilma J. Whitman, for example was one of several yeomen (F) assigned to U.S. Naval Intelligence, Department Censorship, in San Francisco in 1918.⁵⁷ The Navy Department could not have survived without women reservists. They proved themselves so valuable that commanding officers recognized the ability of most individual yeomen (F) to do the work of several Sailors.

The female reservists endured long hours, insufficient housing, reduction in their income (in some cases), and public opposition to their enlistment. During the 1918 influenza epidemic, the Yeomen (F) worked with patients, increasing their own exposure to the deadly epidemic. Their wartime service

⁵⁶ Josephus Daniels, memorandum 13 May 1918, Chapter VII, Training, 51, COLL 226/Dessez papers, box 1 of 7, Archives, NHHC, Dessez papers.

⁵⁷ Unnumbered page before official letters near page 125, Chapter, Adjusted Compensation, Dessez papers, box 1.



Military and civilian personnel of the Supplies and Accounts office in the Main Navy or Munitions Buildings, circa 1918. *NHHC photograph, NH 52941*

gave them a very direct view of the war and historic events (i.e., providing administrative support for the Navy NC-4 seaplane's first transatlantic flight). Motivated primarily by patriotism, they responded to President Wilson's appeal to "Do Your Bit for America" by enlisting in the United States Navy.

Women's Work

"The war efficiency of the Navy is due, in big part, to the excellent work of the women employed in it . . . the women who have the men's jobs have shown themselves as efficient as the men."

Rear Admiral Samuel McGowan, Paymaster General of the Navy and Bureau of Supply and Accounts⁵⁸

⁵⁸ As quoted in Susan H. Godson, "Women Power in World War I," *Proceedings* (Dec. 1984), 64.

Those doing business with the Navy Department likely encountered female yeomen or benefitted from their productivity. Female yeomen labored up to ten hours a day and often for six days a week. Their clerical duties ranged from typing to dispensing payroll. They prepared and processed much of the Navy's paperwork, including that which supplied ships and submarines with medical supplies and Sailors with food and uniforms. They paid those submarine crews in port for resupply or repair and transported classified material. They also drafted condolence letters and other correspondence. Alice Regina Costello processed death notices, which, unfortunately, placed her in a position to learn of her brother's death on the job. Twenty-three female yeomen helped staff the reserve officers' school, public works school, base hospital, supply department, and medical staff at the Norfolk Naval Operations Base in July 1918. Maybelle M. Bond worked in the accounting department at Pier 19 in Philadelphia. Eleanor Griffith, an auditor at the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts, signed multi-million-dollar contracts. Helen O'Neill approved all correspondence prepared in the Division of Enlisted Personnel in the Navy Department. Men could not believe the female voice receiving their call on the switchboard. Joy Hancock delivered plans from the superintending constructor's office to the ships under construction in the New York Navy Yard. She later served as the personnel yeoman at the Naval Air Station, Cape May, New Jersey, where she recorded the proceedings from the naval courts-martial and boards. District of Columbia native Charlotte L. Winters enlisted with her sister. Charlotte spent the war as a typist at the Naval Gun Factory in the Washington Navy Yard.⁵⁹ The assistant senior inspector to the commandant of the Washington Navy Yard noted 350 female yeomen working in various departments, including Master-at-Arms Third Class Annie Sharp Sietz.⁶⁰

Yeomenettes also conducted non-administrative duties varying from production-line munition assemblers to a Ph.D. bacteriologist. Yeomen (F.) processed fingerprints and designed camouflage for ships. Dazzle camouflage, also known as "Razzle Dazzle," was used to distort the ship's appearance by applying

⁵⁹ Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *The First, The Few, The Forgotten* (Naval Institute Press, 2002), 40-54; Frederick N. Rasmussen, "Charlotte L. Winters, 109, U.S.' last female veteran of WWI," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 Mar. 2007, 115; Gavin, 9; Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1993), 12; Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly: A History of Women in the U.S. Navy* (Naval Historical Center and Naval Institute, 2001), 56-79; Julie Mantinband, "What the Woman Means to the Navy," *Norfolk Naval Recruit* (July 1918), vol. 1, no. 3; Mantinband was a Yeoman (F.) assigned to Dr. William H. Bell, the Office of the Medical Inspector; Unsigned, ". . . And to the Sugar'n Spice Too," *The American Legion Magazine* (Nov. 1977), 9; photo essay, "The Yeomanettes of World War I," *Proceedings* (Dec. 1957), 1338-1385; Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I, They Also Served* (University of Colorado Press, 1997), 6-7; Joy B. Hancock, *Lady in the Navy: A Personal Reminiscence* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1972), 24-25.

⁶⁰ Chapter IV, Recruiting 1917-1918 and Women Called to Colors, 27, Dessez papers.



Nurse and a Yeoman (F) working in the hospital's laboratory, 2 June 1919.
NHHC photograph, NH 59493

the paint in random geometric patterns, making it harder for the enemy to determine a ship's weapons, size, length, speed, and course. This had the potential of causing enemy attackers to miscalculate firing solutions.⁶¹

Chief Yeoman Eunice C. Dessez spent the war at the Naval Reserve Enrollment Office at 10th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E., in Washington, DC, commanded by the afore-mentioned Lieutenant Charles H. Venable. The staff reached their highest numbers of the war in August 1918 with 1,077 enrollees. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, escorted interested women to the office. Venable and his staff walked them through every step in the process from the application to taking the oath of office. Some began work on the first day, but most returned home to await orders. Venable had two nurses on his staff.⁶² Dessez praised Venable, "The thousands of Yeomen (F) who passed through the Naval Reserve Enrollment

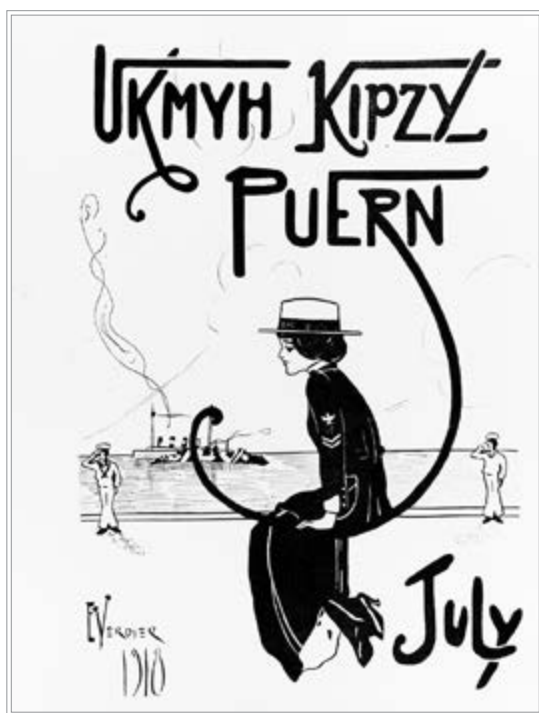
⁶¹ *The First, The Few, The Forgotten*, 17; <https://publicdomainreview.org/collections/dazzle-ships/>; <https://visitpearlharbor.org/razzle-dazzle-ships-camouflage-in-world-war-ii/>.

⁶² Chapter IV, Recruiting 1917-1918 and Women Called to Colors, 36-41, Dessez papers, box 1.

Office at Washington will remember the dignified officer who administered the oath of office to them and signed their service records.”⁶³

Their assignments, especially those in naval intelligence jobs, allowed the yeomen (F) to view the war in real time. Mable Vanderploeg Pease transmitted messages to “Simsadus,” referring to Admiral Sims, U.S. Navy liaison to London. Florence Whetsel charted submarine activities along the East Coast of the United States. Lillian Budd translated messages from naval ships and commands and delivered them directly to President Woodrow Wilson and members of his cabinet. Marion Porter Taylor monitored classified Allied ship movement reports in the Atlantic. The staff at the Office of Naval Intelligence in New York included 50 yeomen (F), some of whom participated in espionage investigations.

A small percentage of the female reservists had assignments outside of the continental United States in Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Panama Canal Zone. Naval Intelligence and Cable and Postal Censorship at the Navy Yard in Pearl Harbor had 30 female yeomen third class on staff. The few working with classified materials did not wear their uniform so as to conceal their duties.



Yeoman (F) Cartoon by E. Verdier, published as cover art for the July 1918 issue of *Ukmyh Kipzy Puern*, the magazine of the U.S. Naval Cable Censor Office, San Francisco, California. The magazine's title is in Bently's Code, and translates as *The Monthly 'Gob'*. *Collection of Ora Hirsch Merritt, 1968. NHHHC photograph, NH 97240*

⁶³ Chapter IV, Recruiting 1917–1918 and Women Called to Colors, 32, Dessez papers, box 1.

Virginia Sanborn of Kannakai, Molokai, left her position as a stenographer with McNery's Company to join the Navy after the commandant of the Naval Station Hawaii publicized his immediate need for typists, stenographers, and wireless operators. Alexandra J. Munro, one of seven female yeomen on staff, served as the stenographer for Commodore Dennis H. Mahan, USN, commodore of the Censorship Bureau. Chief Yeoman Winifred Gibbon and Chief Yeoman Edith Barron deployed to base hospitals in Paris and Brest, France, respectively. Pauline Bourneauf's ability to speak fluent French made her an ideal candidate for assignment at Base Hospital No. 1 in Paris. Florence Hooe also worked Paris in the naval attaché's offices.⁶⁴

Navy Life

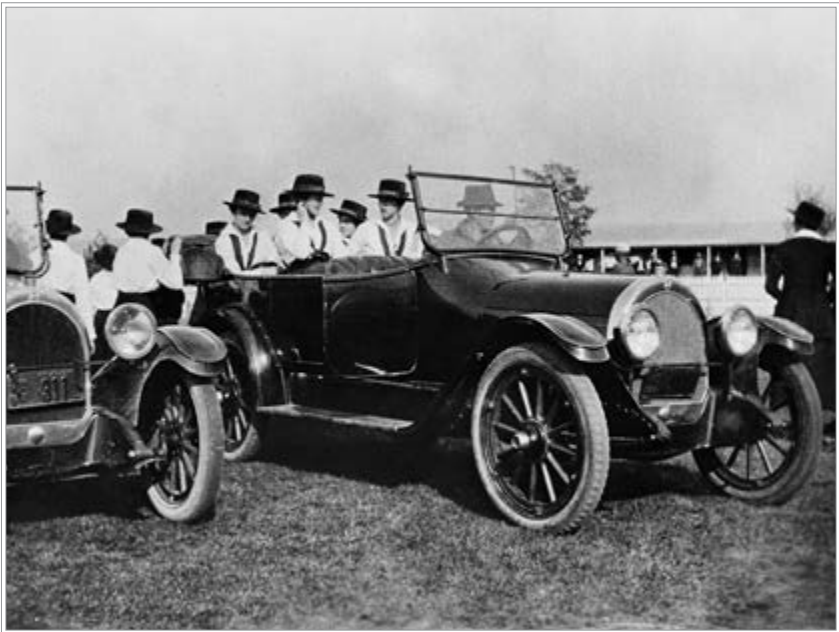
As members of the Naval Reserve Force, the yeomen (F.) were subject to the same rules as their male counterparts. Lieutenant Commander R.N. Marble's 10 October 1918 memo to the commanding officers at all of the Navy bureaus and offices outlined the administrative guidelines, including the procedures for requesting leave and liberty. The Bureau of Navigation also distributed mimeographed copies of the two-page explicit instructions entitled "The Guidance of Naval Reservists, Male and Female."⁶⁵ The yeomen (F.) spent their leave and liberty visiting local tourist attractions and friends and attending dances. They played on Navy-sponsored competitive basketball, baseball, track, and swimming teams and they enjoyed picnics, billiards, and the movies. Some women reservists stationed in the nation's capital spent their day off supporting the Salvation Army's doughnut drive. The type of recreational activities varied from one shore establishment to another. Yeomen (F.) participated in the naval regatta on the Charles River in Boston. Joy Hancock sold liberty bonds at the Keith's Theater in Philadelphia. Addie Worth Bagley, wife of Secretary of the Navy Daniels, rented a house at 1720 Massachusetts Avenue to provide a recreation club for Navy women. Yeomen (F.) assigned to the Boston recruiting

⁶⁴ Commandant, Fourteenth Naval District, Volume 1, "World War II Administrative History," 142 in Navy Department Library; *The First, The Few, The Forgotten*, 44–46, 51–55; *The Note Book*, 30 Sept. 1980, vol. XLII, no. 3; "Uncle Sam's First Women Recruits, *The Retired Officer Magazine* (July 1991), 41; ". . . And to the Sugar'n Spice Too," *The American Legion Magazine* (Nov. 1977), 9; Gavin, 8; Picture Press Gravure Section, *Washington Post*, 20 April 1919, 16, photos illustrating Yeoman (F.) working on camouflage; Unsigned, "Women who enlist in Navy may be on active duty soon, Miss Virginia D. Sanborn, first to enroll as Yeoman First Class, Coastal Defense Reserve," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 6 Apr. 1917, 7; Unsigned, "Honolulu Woman Joins U.S. Navy," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 5 Apr. 1917, 1; Sanborn's father began service as an Army Medical Corps Officer in 1918; Unsigned, "Seven Yeomanettes Serve Uncle Sam in Wireless Office," *The Hawaiian Gazette*, 21 Dec. 1917, 8; "The Telephone Operators," 2 pages, unnumbered, Chapter IV, Recruiting 1917–1918 and Women Called to Colors, Dessez papers box 1.

⁶⁵ Three pages, undated, unsigned and Navy Department, BuNav, Wash., DC, 10 Oct. 1918, subj: enlisted personnel organization, signed by R. N. Marble, LCDR, USNRF, Chapter VII, Training, 54–55, Dessez papers, box 1.

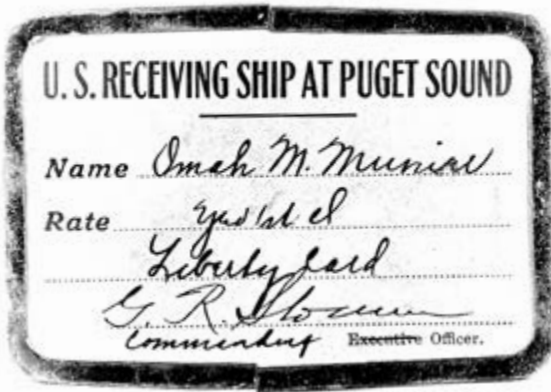
office organized rowing and track relay teams. Commanding officers encouraged such activities for morale and esprit de corps.⁶⁶

Mrs. Daniels also organized a yeoman (F) battalion composed of four companies trained by a Marine staff sergeant to participate in parades and to meet returning military personnel in New York City. They also greeted President Wilson and senior leaders arriving at Union Station, sold liberty bonds, and sponsored community activities. In the summer of 1919, the Navy Yard workers hosted field games with children under the age of 16 at the Central High School stadium. The schedule included 50- and 100-yard dashes, hurdles, the broad jump, the pole vault, the relay race, as well as the sack race, and jump



Yeoman (F) from Puget Sound Navy Yard who traveled to Spokane, Washington, in September 1918 to take part in the Inland Empire Annual Fall Fair. They were quartered at Davenport Hotel and accompanied by Rear Admiral and Mrs. Robert E. Coontz, as well as by Chief Gunners Mate Dave Walker, who was the drill master. Mrs. Omah M. Swanson comments that Rear Admiral and Mrs. Coontz were very wonderful people, deeply interested in all of the Yeoman (F) projects and activities. *Courtesy of Mrs. Omah (Munier) Swanson, 1969. NHHC photograph, NH 72832*

⁶⁶ Hancock, 24-25; Gavin, 14; *The First, The Few, The Forgotten*, 69-70; Margaret Kernodle, "Life had its problems for Sailor Girls of 1917," *Poughkeepsie Eagle News* (Poughkeepsie, NY) 29 Sept. 1942, 4; Unsigned, "Yeoman (F.) Gave Day's Work" *Washington Times*, 22 May 1919, 1.



Liberty card issued to Yeoman 1st Class (F.) Omah Margaret Munier, USNRF, who served at the Receiving Ship, Puget Sound Navy Yard, Bremerton, Washington, in 1918–19. *Donation of Mrs. Omah (Munier) Swanson, 1969. NHHC photograph, NH 86038*

rope.⁶⁷ The yeomen (F.) enjoyed being recruiters and did it very well. Their first-hand accounts in the media proved effective tools. Ethel Leona Bergmann, a Washington, DC native, wrote articles about her naval service for the *Saturday Evening Post* that Navy recruiters used.⁶⁸



Liberty bond parade Yeomen from Washington, DC on parade in New York to aid the Victory Liberty Loan. *NHHC photograph, NH 115529*

⁶⁷ Unsigned, “Navy Yard Employees Hold Field Day,” *Washington Post*, 21 June 1919, 10; Ebbert and Hall, 15, Gavin 13, Dessez, 54–57.

⁶⁸ <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/view/Military.aspx?tid=8972451&pid=-595626400&vid=3d6701f5-7fe2-46c7-b869-d40fa46d831f>.

Challenges

The women expecting assignments to a ship were disappointed when they learned that the federal law prohibited such orders. They worked long hours and many jobs were tedious, redundant, and boring. Yeomen (F.) in sensitive or classified jobs could not share their experiences with others. Some offices functioned at a much higher tempo than others. The women's training and drill requirements in the evenings during the week caused them to delay their recreational time until the weekends. Nell Weston Halstead was so bored with her clerical duties that she complained to her captain and requested orders to France. He responded, "What the hell could a girl do on a battleship? Get back to your job."⁶⁹ The yeomen (F.) assigned to the wireless office within the cable office at the Censorship Bureau in Hawaii endured the constant rattle of the telegraph keys. The process started with an officer marking the messages received at the counter with a blue pencil. After several reviews, the telegrapher sent the messages over the Marconi and federal wireless plants for transmission.⁷⁰ Lou MacPherson Guthrie shared, "By now, many more girls were enlisted in the Navy. The work was becoming routine. The glamour was gone. The boys were overseas. We felt stalemated in Washington. Worse still, a rumor started that we were being moved across the river next to a fertilizer factory in Alexandria. But then suddenly the war was over!"⁷¹

Recognition

Commanding officers recommended female naval personnel for promotion. The candidates had to take tests administered every quarter to compete for these. Rear Admiral Samuel McGowan was among those recommending yeomen (F.) for officer commissions. Congressman James A. Gallivan (D-MA) appealed directly to Secretary Daniels that Chief Yeoman Daisy Pratt Erd be commissioned an ensign. Daniels appreciated their efforts, but he lacked the necessary authority.⁷² Years later, Daniels remarked,

I regret of these first women in the Navy that there was no provision of law that existed for the promotion as commissioned officers. I could and did enroll them as Yeomen (F.) and Marinettes, but it required legislative action to give them rank as officers. Women did not then have

⁶⁹ Gavin, 5.

⁷⁰ Unsigned, "Seven Yeomanettes Serve Uncle Sam In Wireless Office," *The Hawaiian Gazette*, 21 Dec. 1917, 8.

⁷¹ Lou MacPherson Guthrie, "I was a Yeomanette," *Proceedings* (Dec. 1984), 64.

⁷² *The First, The Few, The Forgotten*, 42; Gavin, 13; Eunice C. Dessez, *First Enlisted Women, 1917-1918* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company), 30-31; *Crossed Currents*, 1993, 14-15; Unsigned, "Will the Navy Commission Women?" *Army-Navy Journal*, 55, 8 June 1918, 1569; Godson, 65.

*the ballot and Congress looked askance at women in the Navy, as did the old navy 'sundowners' who resented their intrusion into what had been an exclusively male organization. In fact, very shortly after the armistice, legislation was enacted directing their demobilization.*⁷³

Secretary Daniels and his bureau chiefs recognized the contributions by yeomen (F) in their 1918 annual assessment. Daniels observed, "These women who enrolled were of the elect of their sex, and I do not know how the business of the Department of the Navy yards, and stations and of the districts could have been carried on without them. Their efficiency has again illustrated women's large part in war work."⁷⁴ Rear Admiral Leigh C. Palmer, chief of the Bureau of Navigation, wrote: "The civil service clerks and the men and women of the reserve yeoman branch have given excellent service. It would have been impossible to carry on the duties of any of the bureaus or offices of the Navy Department had it not been for the efficient and loyal work of these men and women."⁷⁵ Rear Admiral Charles W. Parks, chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks reported "The force is now 10 times what it was in July 1916. While the work under the bureau is on the basis of funds available for work under its cognizance has increased approximately 38% during the same period. The services of women have been utilized to a large extent, especially in the clerical force and naval reservists, and to some extent the technical forces."⁷⁶ The chief of the Hydrographic Office noted, "The carrying on of the increased work resulting from the state of war has been rendered possible by utilizing temporarily the services of men and women of the Naval Reserve Force."⁷⁷ Surgeon General William Braisted, in his letter commending Yeoman (F) Kathryn Clark, noted "the great debt the country owes the splendid young women who gave their services so completely and whole heartedly during the trying days of the war."⁷⁸

⁷³ Josephus Daniels, "Josephus Daniels welcomes Uncle Sam's Skirted Sailors, World War I Secretary sure women will introduce more democratic spirit into service," *Baltimore Sun*, 9 Aug. 1942, 11; A. L. Willard, United States Navy Yard, Washington, DC, Commandant's Office, 22 Sept. 1917 and Joel W. Bunkley, United States Navy Yard, Washington, DC, Commandant's Office, To: Bureaus, Offices, etc. employing naval reservists, 11 Feb. 1918, Subject: Recommendations for promotion of reservists, Chapter VII, Training, Dessez papers, box 1.

⁷⁴ *Department of the Navy Annual Report 1918* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1918), 66.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 437.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 432.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 457.

⁷⁸ Society, Unsigned, *Washington Post*, 26 June 1920, 7.

Race and Gender Relations

Despite the urgent need for personnel, Secretary Daniels did not recruit all interested women. Recruiters initially turned away African Americans or deemed them unqualified with fabricated reasons. Individuals questioned this policy of exclusion in letters to Daniels that he chose not to answer. Whatever answer might have been drafted could not have hid the irony of such a decision in a war to make the world safe for democracy. His policy was consistent with the Navy practice of limiting the number of ratings in which blacks could serve and not promoting them to officer ranks. Nonetheless, in 1918 14 black women enlisted and worked in the Muster Roll Division at Main Navy supervised by fellow African American John Temple Risher.⁷⁹ Risher, a native of Jackson, Michigan, married Annie Louis Greene, the sister of Armelda Hattie Vawter, one of the 14. Armelda was a clerk in the naval aviation department when Risher recruited her. She enlisted as a landsman yeoman fourth class, an undesignated rank, and rose to become a yeoman third class. Robert Roster Greene, her father, was an educator and the author of *Recollections of the Black Belt* (1926). He worked in the nation's capital as the clerk-in-charge with the railway mail service (1891–1922) and with the post office (1922–1925).⁸⁰

The 14 black female yeomen hailed from three states: Mississippi (7), Texas (2), and Maryland (1), and from the District of Columbia (4). Courtland Milloy's 1992 interview with Sarah Davis Taylor, the Maryland native, reported that the Navy disqualified black women in their first efforts to enlist by claiming that they had flat feet. After the war, she worked as a clerk in the Navy Department for 23 years and had the privilege of being mentored by Dr. E. Franklin Frazier, a renowned sociologist, professor, and scholar at Howard University.⁸¹ Ruth Welborn, one of the 14 and her grandson, Commerce Secretary Ronald H. Brown are buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Eunice C. Dessez's *First Enlisted Women* makes no mention of these pioneering 14 African Americans.

⁷⁹ Richard E. Miller, "The Golden Fourteen, Plus," *Minerva* (Fall/Winter 1995), 7–13; Kelly Miller, *History of the World War for Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Austin Jenkins Company, 1919), 597–598; Muster rolls for Washington, DC, Navy Department Personnel, periods ending Sept. 1918, Dec. 1918, and Dec. 1919. Records of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives I, Washington, DC.

⁸⁰ Unsigned, "The First of the Golden Fourteen," YN2/C Armelda Hattie Greene, USNRF, <https://presumptionandfolly.wordpress.com/2018/08/12/>; Unsigned, "The Black Navy Women of World War I," 7 Sept. 2015, <https://americanwomeninwwi.wordpress.com/tag/womens-history/>; Green, Robert Royster entry in *Who's Who in Colored American*, Vol. 6, 217; <https://www.geni.com/people/John-T-Risher/298055> and <https://www.myheritage.com/names/John-Risher>; John Tremple Risher (1889–1948) is buried in Maryland; Boston National Historical Park (/bost/), "Women Workers at Boston Navy Yard during World War I," <https://www.nps.gov/articles/women-workers-bny-wwi.htm>.

⁸¹ Courtland Milloy, "A love story of historic proportions," *Washington Post*, 20 Dec. 1992, B1.

Moreover, this author's research has not revealed how Risher accomplished this or why Daniels allowed him to do so.

In regards to gender, most female yeomen reported that their shipmates and civilian co-workers welcomed them and appreciated their willingness to serve their nation. Joy Hancock and Lucy and Sidney Burleson described their work environments as respectful and positive.⁸² Typically, it was the senior enlisted personnel with decades of service who did not believe women belonged in "their" Navy. They resented the fact that women could wear "their" uniform without having to meet the sea duty requirements. No one reached the rank of chief petty officer quickly, so these men did not appreciate the women reservists starting their service in that rank. Naval officers also expressed their displeasure, sometimes in published editorials. After some time, it became evident that once the women learned their job the odds of male Sailors being deployed or receiving orders to a ship actually increased, engendering surprisingly mixed feelings. According to Yeoman (F.) Mazie Carie of San Diego, "The sailors didn't like us very much. You see we were all yeomen and they would rather tickle a type writer than go to sea. Every time one of us enlisted two men received sea duty."⁸³ Some Sailors had such strong objections to working with women that they requested transfers. Male civilians also shared these negative sentiments. Agnes Carlson copied naval food orders at the New London Naval Base in Connecticut. Her brother had to defend her honor in a fight with an older civilian who had shared a negative remark about the yeomen (F).⁸⁴

Naval leaders did not accept such criticism. R. C. Shepherd's editorial argued the women should not be in the same rating as men because they could not perform the duties and they "cheapen the badge." Captain Joseph L. Taussig at the Bureau of Navigation remarked, "There are more [male] yeomen doing shore duty than in any other rating and many of these yeomen have never been to sea and it is beginning to look that even in spite of all our efforts we are not going to be able to get them to sea. In view of this I see no reason why the yeomen should consider that their rating has been cheapened by the Yeowomen wearing the same badge."⁸⁵

Publishers also captured supportive commentaries. The May 1917 issue of the *Newport* (Rhode Island) *Daily News* recorded:

⁸² Hancock, 26; *The First, The Few, The Forgotten*, 23.

⁸³ Alma Kirkland, "The Navy has changed since 1917, especially for women," In *Service Circles, Independent* (Long Beach, CA, 5 Aug. 1971), 19.

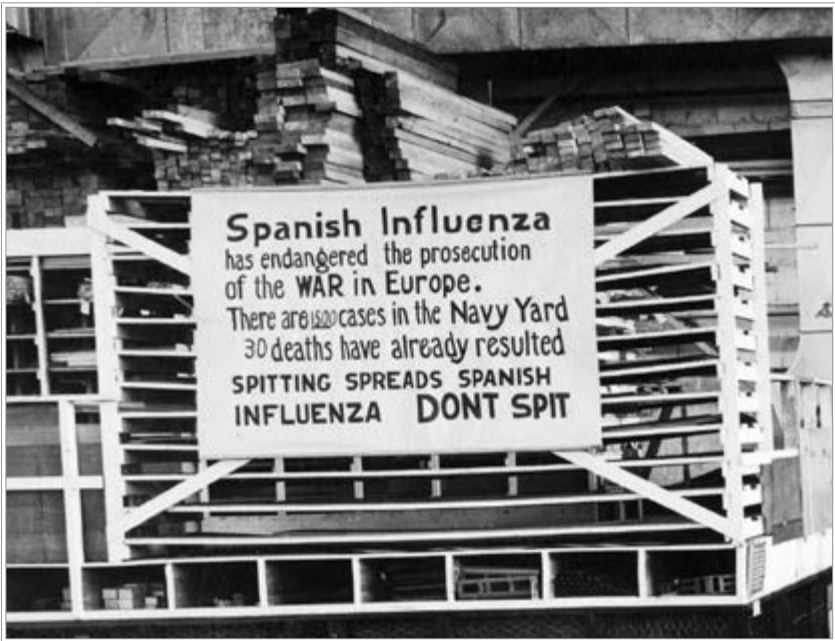
⁸⁴ Gavin, 9-10.

⁸⁵ *The First, The Few, The Forgotten*, 24.

Every woman who may be called upon to do work of a man will not be worth so much as the man whose place she will take, but . . . it is quite possible that in some cases the substitute will develop enough capacity to make her more valuable than the man she succeeds . . . [the question] is not to really one of sex, but the ability and value.⁸⁶

The Spanish Influenza Epidemic

The 1918 Spanish influenza epidemic took millions of lives around the globe. No one was exempt. It struck 57 yeomen (E.), 25 Navy nurses, 2 women Marines. Over 500,000 Americans died between October 1918 and February 1919. The female enlistees described this disaster as one of the most unusual experiences of their naval service. The international medical community's best efforts to prevent the



Mounted on a wood storage crib at the Naval Aircraft Factory, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on 19 October 1918. As the sign indicates, the Spanish Influenza was then extremely active in Philadelphia, with many victims in the Philadelphia Navy Yard and the Naval Aircraft Factory. Note the sign's emphasis on the epidemic's damage to the war effort. *NHHC photograph; this image is cropped from NH 41731*

⁸⁶ *Newport Daily News*, 17 May 1917, 5.

spread of the epidemic proved inadequate. There were too few doctors, funds, and resources to combat it more effectively. Newspapers published advertisements for Father John's Medicine, laxative bromol quinine tablets, and other products promising to prevent or cure the flu. The papers also featured information about the methods citizens should take to protect themselves and their communities such as wearing a mask at all times, isolating the sick, and burying victims quickly. The influenza overwhelmed hospitals and morgues. The very young and the elderly were particularly vulnerable. The population was discouraged from attending large gatherings and ordered to stay home if they had any symptoms. As the virus progressed, public health officials closed movie theaters, schools, businesses, and factories. People compared this catastrophe to the plague. Ships arriving in Europe delivered troops and Sailors at various stages of illness.⁸⁷

Olive Stark O'Sullivan, stationed at the State Pier and Experimental Station in New London, Connecticut, remembered, "It was a particularly virulent type of flu. And the deaths were many. A person would be absent one day and the next day you heard he was dead. I roomed across town from the pier and it seemed I could never go to and from without seeing a flag-draped coffin en route to the railroad station." Yeoman (F.) Estelle Kemper recalled,

During the epidemic I went early to the office, armed with a big bottle of disinfectant and washed all the desks and chairs and telephones with the bug-killer. Just the same, it seemed to me that every morning somebody else was missing from his or her desk, and all too often when I called a phone number, I learned the clerk had died overnight. We were winning the war in Europe, but for a few weeks death seemed to have put his awful finger on our capital city.⁸⁸

Admiral Sims, reported to Washington from London: "There is no doubt that this epidemic is now greater threat to people on ship-board than the submarine is."⁸⁹ Yeoman (F.) Loretta Perfectus Walsh became ill and recovered, but her exposure shortened her life. She died from a related cause on 6 August 1925.

⁸⁷ Carla R. Morrisey, RN, BSN, "The Influenza Epidemic of 1918," <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/on-line-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically>; Godson, 76; Dessez, 63-64; laxative bromo quinine advertised in *The Washington Herald*, 18 Oct. 1918, 3; *The Courier-News* (Bridgewater, NJ), 11 Oct. 1918, 13 published ads for Father John's Medicine; Dessez, *First Enlisted Women, 1917-1918*, 63-64, "The Fall of 1918, The Influenza Epidemic" and R. N. Marble, LCDR, USNRF, "Information for all bureaus and offices," 14 Oct. 1918, Chapter VII, Training, unnumbered page and 87, Dessez papers.

⁸⁸ Mrs. Henry F. Butler, "I was a Yeoman (F.)," (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Foundation, 1967), 15 [She served as Estelle Kemper]; Dessez, 63-64; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy 1919, Department of the Navy* under Bureau of Medicine and Surgery; Gavin, 11-12; Godson, 76.

⁸⁹ William N. Still, Jr., *Crisis at Sea: The United States Navy in European Waters in World War I* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2006), as quoted on page 224.

“Let every man and every woman assure the duty of careful, provident use and expenditures as a public duty, as a dictate of patriotism which one can expect ever to be excused or forgiven for ignoring. . . . The supreme test of our nation has come and we must all, speak, act and serve together.”

President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Proclamation to the American People

The yeomen (F.) did that and much more. They courageously accepted the President’s charge. They were the nation’s first enlisted women and they forever changed the United States Navy. The recommendations to commission them and the potential for one yeoman (F.) to relieve two male sailors documented their outstanding job performance and potential. They dispelled the prevalent myths and fears about women enlisting. Eventually, the women’s productivity and performance transformed some of their harshest critics into their supporters. Moreover, their male counterparts came to realize that the women had enlisted for some of the same reasons as they had—patriotism and defeating the Germans. The yeomen (F.) increased efficiency rates, proving that the Navy was better with them than without them. Their work in munitions, camouflage, deciphering, and other specialty functions saved lives and made critical contributions to the success of the nation’s war effort. Moreover, their naval service enhanced their lives. The yeomen (F.) had a significant role in capturing, interpreting, protecting, and transmitting critical information about the war that facilitated anti-submarine warfare, battlefield strategies, and medical treatment. Looking back, the yeomen (F.) enriched and extended women’s legacy of naval service. While they may not have called themselves pioneers, they paved the way for those who followed them.

The next chapter considers what female yeomen’s naval service meant to them, how the war changed their lives, their post-war challenges, and their efforts to preserve their history.

4

“CHANGING THE WORLD, THEIR LIVES, AND THE NAVY”

“I thought I was doing something for my country—I can see now how much more my country has done for me.”⁹⁰

YNC Lillian Budd, USNRF

The yeomen (F.) proved their worth many times over and received well-earned accolades for their work from President Woodrow Wilson and others.⁹¹ The quality of their work, their productivity, and their overall contributions to the Navy’s war effort persuaded leaders to invite them to continue their duties as civilian employees. Despite their invaluable service, yeomen (F.) had to fight for the rights and benefits they deserved. Post-war developments mirrored pre-war beliefs about military women and a lack of respect for them. Though they had not enlisted for long, most enjoyed the experience and had mixed feelings about leaving the Navy. They established the National Yeoman (F.) Association in 1926 to preserve their history. This chapter shows how the Great War forever changed the world, the yeomen (F.), and the Navy.

The War Ends

The United States’ raw materials, manpower, supplies, and military forces gave the struggling Allied nations victory over Germany and the Central Powers. Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany resigned on 9 November 1918, and, two days later, Germany signed the surrender documents in a railroad car near Compiègne, France, ending the first global war. From that time forward, that date has been known as Armistice Day. Victory had come at a steep cost. The combined Allied and Central

⁹⁰ Jean Gillette, “Uncle Sam’s First Women Recruits,” *The Retired Officer Magazine* (July 1991), 42.

⁹¹ *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1918* (Washington, DC, GPO, 1918), 66, 437.

Powers' casualties included 8.3 million killed and 21.3 million wounded.⁹² The war caused unprecedented physical damage in Europe.

However, the Great War also saw the introduction of many innovations, including military aviation, advanced medical treatments, and the first time women formally enlisted in the U.S. military. Victory also inspired hope for the future and that the triumph of democracies over authoritarianism would lead to a brighter future for all. President Wilson's 1918 Thanksgiving Proclamation read in part, "My Fellow Countrymen: The Armistice was signed this morning. Everything for which America fought has been accomplished. It will now be our unfortunate duty to assist by example, by sober, friendly counsel and by material aid in the establishment of just democracy throughout the world."⁹³



Peace Delegation in session in le Salon de L'Horloge, French Ministry of Defense in supreme conference in world history, President Wilson is seated to the left of speaker. *U.S. National Archives*, 165 WW 400A13

⁹² C.N. Turman, "First World War Casualties," *history learning.co.uk* The History Learning Site, <http://www.historylearning.co.uk/world-war-one-and-casualties/first-world-war>.

⁹³ "Every Aim of U.S. Attained President Declares," *Washington Times*, 11 Nov. 1918, 2; "Thanksgiving-1918 By the President of the United States of America, A Proclamation," *Washington Post*, 18 Nov. 1918, 1.

Celebrations Abound!

Yeoman (F.) Estelle Kemper heard the announcement about the Armistice while working in the Navy Department Building in Washington, DC. She hesitated to believe the news because so many false reports had been made previously. When it became evident that the day had finally arrived, ringing bells and blowing whistles reflected the joy of the moment. The capital city, as she remembers, was “so wild that night” that she and a group of friends could not find an establishment to dine at until midnight.⁹⁴ Spontaneous celebrations of every kind occurred around the country. Strangers hugged each other in their excitement. Yeoman (F.) Lou MacPherson Guthrie recalled, “Armistice Day was wildly exciting. All offices closed. We danced in the streets with any passerby. Everyone was happy. Everyone laughed and celebrated. On 12 November, it was hard to get back to our humdrum duties. But then began a series of parades to greet military brass and returning units. And there were parades of any old kind. The Yeomanettes were always in the vanguard.”⁹⁵ The members of the National Council of Women organized a national “Victory Sing” at 4:00 PM Eastern Standard Time on Thanksgiving Day.⁹⁶ Major D. J. Donovan, who processed the men drafted in the nation’s capital, observed, “Anybody who has been sending boys away since the war began couldn’t help but rejoice. I’ve looked into the faces of so many mothers and wives and sweethearts, seen them trying to be brave with their hearts breaking, that I had the time of my life when I was able to give the good news to the crowd at the hut this morning.”⁹⁷ As Guthrie noted, the end of the war did not mean the end of duties for yeomen (F.). Secretary of the Navy Daniels needed their support during the demobilization of naval forces.

“Well Dones, Bravo Zulos”

There was no shortage of compliments for the Navy’s women reservists. Secretary Daniels commented, “These women yeomen, enlisting as reservists, serve as translators, stenographers, clerks, typists, on recruiting duty, and with hospital units in France. Too much could not be said of their efficiency, loyalty, and patriotism.”⁹⁸ Rear Admiral Samuel McGowan, paymaster general of the Navy, also praised them, noting that “the efficiency of the Navy’s entire supply system

⁹⁴ Mrs. Henry F. Butler, “I was a Yeoman (F),” (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Foundation, 1967), 8.

⁹⁵ Lou MacPherson Guthrie, “I was a Yeomanette,” *Proceedings* (Dec. 1984), 64.

⁹⁶ Unsigned, “Nation will sing on Thanksgiving,” *Washington Times*, 21 Nov. 1918, 7.

⁹⁷ Unsigned, “Order Halts New Draftees at Train,” *Washington Times*, 18 Nov. 1918, 2.

⁹⁸ Josephus Daniels, *Our Navy at War* (The Navy War College Series, originally published Washington, DC: Pictorial Bureau, 1922), 329.

would have been impaired had it not been for the women reservists.”⁹⁹ Carlton Fitchett, a reporter and columnist in Seattle Washington, published a satirical commentary that read in part, “The dawn of peace has brought regrets as well as jubilation, for now we’ll lose the Yeomanette, who nobly served the nation. The ‘gobs’ will bid them fond good-bye, in spite of orders stringent, the day when they demobilize the power-puff contingent.”¹⁰⁰ The *Norfolk Naval Recruit* paid tribute to them: “The yeomanettes throughout the country by their association with the Navy have exerted an inspiring influence on the men of the service. No man can fail to do his part when the womanhood of the nation is answering the call so fearlessly.”¹⁰¹ They not only gave outstanding service, they exceeded others’ expectations. “It is estimated that about 40 percent of the work at headquarters could be performed by women but authorities believed that three women would be needed to do the work of two men. However, the highly competent performance of women enlistees proved they were equal if not superior to men.”¹⁰²

Perhaps the highest recognition of their abilities was reflected in the Navy’s invitation to continue their jobs as civilians. Joy Bright Hancock, one of the most well-known yeomen (F.), worked for the Bureau of Aeronautics (BuAer) between the world wars and helped launch the bureau’s newsletter. She was a female reserve officer during World War II and became the third director of the Women Reserves after the war. Captain Hancock was one of the principal naval leaders assuring the passage of the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, which gave women a role in the peacetime military. Sarah Davis Taylor was one of the 14 African American yeomen (F.) transferred to civilian status as a clerk at the Navy Department, a position from which she retired 23 years later.¹⁰³ Charlotte Winters retired from her job at the Naval Gun Factory in the Washington Navy Yard with 34 years of service on 31 March 1953. Maguerite “Missy” LeHand’s work on Franklin Roosevelt’s 1920 vice presidential campaign led Eleanor Roosevelt to hire her to organize her husband’s correspondence. Her duties over time culminated in her becoming Roosevelt’s personal secretary during governorship and later his private secretary during his presidency, starting in 1932. She was known for outstanding work, her attention to detail,

⁹⁹ Frederick S. Herrod, *Manning the New Navy: The Development of a Modern Naval Enlisted Force, 1899–1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 65.

¹⁰⁰ Carlton Fitchett, “The Yeomanettes’ War,” Chapter IX, Demobilization, unnumbered page, Dessez papers.

¹⁰¹ “The Woman and the Navy: Julia Mantinband, What the Women Means to the Navy,” *Norfolk Naval Recruit* (July 1918), vol. 1, no. 3, 38; Julia Mantinband, a Yeoman (F.) assigned to Dr. William H. Bell, the Office of the Medical Inspector.

¹⁰² Gillette, 40.

¹⁰³ Richard E. Miller, “The Golden Fourteen, Plus: Black Women in World War I,” *Minerva, Quarterly Report on Women in the Military*, vol. XIII, no. 4/4, (Fall/Winter 1995), 7–13.

her ability to anticipate the president's needs, and her loyalty to and admiration of the president. She eventually became one of the president's confidantes and a close friend of the family, periodically living with them.¹⁰⁴ At the time of her death in 1944, President Roosevelt commented,

Memories of more than a score of years of devoted service enhance the sense of personal loss which Miss Le Hand's passing brings. Faithful and painstaking, with charm of manner inspired by tact and kindness of heart, she was utterly selfless in her devotion to duty.

During Congressional hearings on the Navy retaining yeomen (F.) as civilians, Senator Carroll S. Page (R-VT), chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee "expressed warm sympathy with the desire of the young women to remain in Uncle Sam's service, not as civilian employees, as the House is trying to make them do but as real Yeoman (F.) with all the characteristics of loyalty, spirit, and hard-working patriotism."¹⁰⁵ Helen F. Harney, a Boston native, is an exception. She served from 1918 to 1928 and re-enlisted in August 1950. Her assignments included master-at-arms for the third-floor women's reserve barracks at Naval Station Newport, Rhode Island. The Navy granted her a waiver to remain on active duty beyond the age of 65 to allow her to retire with 20 years of service.¹⁰⁶

Demobilization

*"They had saved the day in war, and the Navy regretted the legislation which compelled the disbanding."*¹⁰⁷

Josephus Daniels, former Secretary of the Navy, 1922

The Navy stopped recruiting women on 11 November 1918, but did not demobilize all of the female yeomen from active duty until 1919, because they had signed up for a four-year enlistment. The Naval Appropriations Act of 11 July 1919 placed all reservists, including the females, on inactive duty. They received \$12.00 per year until they officially discharged.¹⁰⁸ The majority of the yeomen (F.) officially separated from the Navy by 1920. Each reservist received orders documenting her change in status and a \$60 gratuity per the Revenue Act of 1919.

¹⁰⁴ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 9, 20-22, 115-117, 218.

¹⁰⁵ Unsigned, "Yeoman (F.) Deny They Hold Jobs Just to put on nifty duck uniforms," *Washington Times*, 20 June 1919, 16.

¹⁰⁶ Unsigned, "Oldest Wave in Navy Helps Celebrate Branch's Birthday," *Newport Daily News* (Newport, RI), 31 July 1963, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Josephus Daniels, *Our Navy at War*, (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), 330.

¹⁰⁸ BuNav let. N65-BKM-LA, 30 June 1919, Chapter IX, Demobilization, 113, Dessez papers, box 1.

The Navy issued war service certificates documenting the individual's full name, serial number, term of service, and type of discharge. Chief Eunice Dessez and six of her colleagues at the Naval Reserve Enrollment Office at 10th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E., in the District of Columbia completed certificates for all naval reservists in the area. The Navy transferred the reservists' service and medical records to the Bureau of Navigation.¹⁰⁹ The yeomen (F.) also received the two-sided discharge certificates recording the details of their service, including their type of discharge, their rating, and their enrollment period. Secretary Daniels observed the last drill of yeomen (F.) in 1919.

The service-connected benefits for all veterans included membership in the American Legion and military preference when applying for civil service jobs. Also, the Bureau of Navigation awarded all Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard veterans a Victory Medal. Mrs. Henry F. Butler recalled, "The only distinction I won as a grounded Navy enlistee came after the Armistice in 1918. Every member of the services was issued a medal on a rainbow ribbon. This 'Victory Medal' was 'general issue' but the then Secretary of the Navy personally presented mine to me, with the conventional kiss on each cheek. A little French to be sure, but a very satisfactory honor!"¹¹⁰

Reflecting on Their Service

The Navy's first enlisted women cherished their opportunity to serve their nation during World War I and found their experiences to have a lasting impact on their lives. The following remarks are representative of what their service meant to them:

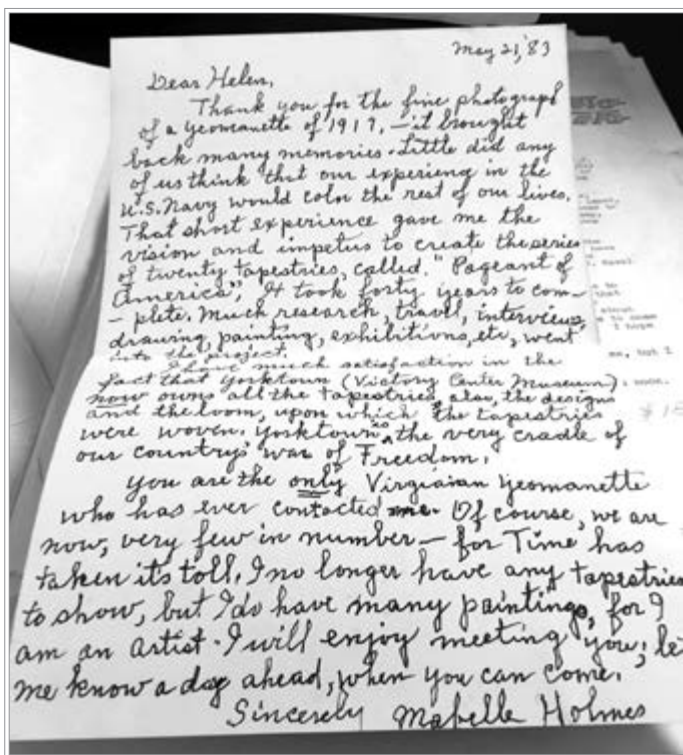
- "Thank you for the fine photograph of a yeomanette of 1917—it brought back many memories. Little did any of us think our experience in the U.S. Navy would color the rest of our lives. That short experience gave me the vision and impetus to create the series of twenty tapestries, called 'Pageant of America.' It took forty years to complete. Much research, travel, interviews, drawing, painting, exhibitions, etcetera went into the project."¹¹¹
- "I will always be grateful for having served in the Navy, and for the privileges of being a Legionnaire and member of our unique organization."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ War Service Certificates, United States Navy, unnumbered page, Chapter IX, Demobilization, Dessez papers, NHHC Archives, building 57.

¹¹⁰ Butler, 13.

¹¹¹ Letter of 21 May 1983 from Helen Holmes of Waynesboro, VA to Helen G. O'Neill, Folder 6, NYF Correspondence, COLL 236/Helen G. O'Neill, (National Yeoman (F.)), box 1 of 1, NHHC Archives, building 57, WNY.

¹¹² Mrs. Irene M. Brown, *The Note Book*, vol. XLII, no. 3, 30 Sept. 1980, Folder 7, Printed Material, O'Neill papers.



Mabelle Holmes letter of 21 May 1983, to Helen O'Neill. *Helen COLL/236, Helen O'Neill Papers, Box 1 of 1, Archives, NHHC, photo taken by author*

- “Having jobs and doing our ‘duty’ (as we saw it) fully compensated the Yeomen (F) in my acquaintance for their lack of money, lack of prestige, long working hours—even those uniforms—and we were sorry when the Navy gave us our ‘honorable discharges in 1919.’¹¹³
- Susan Godson’s *Proceedings* article captured these thoughts: “We had a small part in the great Allied victory,” “I loved it and felt it was doing my bit,” former Chief Yeoman, “We didn’t realize it at the time, but we were trailblazers for women in the military,” and “I wouldn’t give up one single minute of my service.”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Mrs. Henry F. Butler, *I was a Yeoman (F)* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Foundation, 1967), 13; she served under the name Estelle Kemper.

¹¹⁴ Susan H. Godson, “Women Power in World War I,” *Proceedings* (Dec. 1984), 64.

- Another yeoman recalled the pride of having “marched down Pennsylvania Avenue, in the capital of the nation, under the baton of John Philip Sousa, with our victorious troops returning home.”¹¹⁵

Several yeomen (F.) met their spouses in the service and started families after the war. Their naval service introduced them to things they probably would not have encountered, enhanced their confidence, and, in some cases, increased their income. Like the men they replaced, they were very proud of their time in the Navy and enjoyed friendships that spanned their lifetimes.

Yeomen (F.) and the Fight for Equality

Honorable Discharges

Despite their notable wartime service, yeomen (F.) had to fight for the rights and benefits they deserved. In the shadow of a war to save the world for democracy, these women were not treated as equals. Some officers, for example, gave other than honorable discharges to their female yeoman rather than honorable ones because they believed women would not enlist in the Navy again. Other than honorable discharges led employers to think the veteran had done something wrong or inappropriate. The yeomen (F.)’s protests fell on deaf ears until they found an advocate in Rear Admiral Charles B. McVay, Jr., chief of the Bureau of Ordnance. As soon as he learned of the situation, he informed Secretary of the Navy Daniels, which resulted in the Bureau of Navigation issuing guidance to naval districts and yards ordering them to grant honorable discharges to all who warranted them.¹¹⁶

This decision did not escape the attention of the media. Earl Goodwin noted in his *Washington Times* commentary,

*These women should not be discharged under a cloud of cheap sneers and criticism. They should be thanked, warmly, generously, and with the appreciation of the entire nation. They should receive HONORABLE DISCHARGES. I want to tell you they have the esteem and love and appreciation of the entire United States. I trust a little thoughtless talk in a Congressional Committee room will not sink too deeply into their hearts. They deserve everything EXCEPT this sort of treatment.*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Dessez, 81.

¹¹⁶ Eunice C. Dessez, *The First Enlisted Women, 1917–1918* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Company, 1955), 69–72; Unsigned, The Honorable Discharge, Chapter IX, Demobilization, 116, Dessez papers, box 1.

¹¹⁷ Earl Goodwin, Washington’s Own, *Washington Times*, 15 June 1919, The Honorable Discharge, unnumbered page Chapter IX, Demobilization, 116, Dessez papers, box 1.



Captain Charles B. McVay, Jr. *NHHC photograph*,
NH 47810

Adjusted Compensation Bonus

The Adjusted Compensation Bill enacted by Congress in 1924 excluded the yeomen (F) while compensating the men with whom they had worked or who they had supervised. Paul McGahan, department commander of the District of Columbia American Legion, and Kenneth McRae, a member of the Senate press gallery, believed the act to be a gross injustice to the women who had served their country. McGahan, along with McRae, appealed directly to members of Congress and successfully urged them to amend the bill to include women.¹¹⁸ Helen O'Neill reported on this at a 1924 Jacob Jones Post No. 2 American Legion meeting: "A Bill Known as the HR 3242 (Adjusted Compensation Act) has been introduced by Republican Representative McKenzie (Chicago) on December 13, 1923. This bill would exclude all Yeoman (F) from its benefits . . . The post passed a resolution petitioning the American Legion to protect and represent the interests of former servicewomen against discrimination as contained in the McKenzie amendment."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ *Crossed Currents* (1993), 18–19.

¹¹⁹ Untitled typed document, Folder 6, NYF Correspondence, O'Neill papers.

Naval Reserve Act of 1925 (43 Statute 1080)

In 1925, as a further affront to women, Congress recommended amending the Naval Reserve Act of 1916, which allowed women to enlist, to permit only males to serve. They based their decision on their belief that there would not be another war and, should one happen, that women would not be recruited. Former yeomen (F.) testifying before the Senate Naval Affairs committee argued that the proposed amendment was “an unmerited slur upon the services rendered by the women in the Navy.” Republican Senator Tasker L. Oddie (R-NV) moved that the word “male” be deleted from the act.¹²⁰ Senator James Wadsworth, Jr. (R-NY), however, insisted that the deletion “involved far reaching, even unknown implications.” Lacking support for his motion and not desiring to delay the bill, Senator Oddie withdrew his motion. Thus, the Naval Reserve Act of 1925 (43 statute 1080) eliminated the possibility of women serving in the reserves.¹²¹

Conclusion

Despite all the challenges, these women responded to their nation’s call, excelled in their service, and, by their own words, would have done it all again. The service of Navy’s first enlisted women forever changed their own lives and the Navy. Their support during the influenza epidemic of 1918, their overseas service at field hospitals, and the deaths of 37 of them demonstrated their willingness to serve and to sacrifice wherever assigned. The yeomen (F.) quieted most critics with their productivity and their ability to operate efficiently within a military organization and to work well with men. Though enlisted primarily to provide clerical support, they excelled in munitions assembly, intelligence, cable decoding, recruitment, and other non-administrative specialties. They showed that the Navy was better with them than without them. The Navy did not have to lose their talent because many yeomen (F.) continued doing the same job as civilian employees. The officers who recommended them for commissions proved that women could qualify for officer ranks. Like many of their male counterparts, they met their spouses during the war and later started families with them. A number of former yeomen (F.) became Gold Star Mothers or War Mothers, mothers who lost sons and daughters in military service during World War II.¹²²

¹²⁰ See <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=o000035> for more information about Senator Oddie.

¹²¹ *Crossed Currents* (1993), 19; Hancock, 48; Dessez, 74–75; Regina T. Akers, “Doing Their Part: The WAVES in World War II,” Doctoral Dissertation (Howard University, 2000), 12–31.

¹²² See <https://www.goldstarmoms.com> for more information.

While Secretary Daniels capably led the Navy through the war, laid the foundation for a more modernized service, and improved training and quality of life for Sailors, his efforts proved to be largely inadequate for ensuring equality for all naval personnel. Despite his support for the yeoman (F.) program, he limited the pool of recruits by only reluctantly enlisting black women. Moreover, he ignored the obvious hypocrisy of his blatant racist actions in the midst of a war that was to “Make the World Safe for Democracy.” To their credit, the Navy’s discriminatory practices did not deter African American women’s patriotism. They fought to defend rights they were denied at home. The African American yeomen (F.) served in segregated offices and cities, all the while enduring a society that treated them like second-class citizens, and, like their white counterparts, bore the burdens of their gender.

The short-sightedness, chauvinist attitudes, and disregard for the yeomen (F.) led members of Congress to exclude women from serving in the Naval Reserve and to try to deny them benefits they had earned. Rear Admiral McVay and others successfully intervened on the women’s behalf. Throughout the war, naval leaders, journalists, and others expressed their appreciation for the yeomen (F.) and addressed the challenges these women faced. The women themselves expressed their concerns and achievements in newspaper articles, editorials, and interviews.

The service of the yeoman (F.) and the other women during the war contributed to the passage of the 19th Amendment, which finally gave women the right to vote in 1920. President Wilson said,

*We have made partners of the women in this war; shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right. This war could not have been fought, either by the other nations engaged or by America, if it had not been for the services of the women—service rendered in every sphere. . . . The women of America are too noble and too intelligent and too devoted to be slackers whether you give or withhold this thing that is mere justice; but I know the magic it will work in their thoughts and spirits if you give it to them. The tasks of the women lie at the very heart of the war, and I know how much stronger that heart will beat if you do this just thing and show our women that you trust them in as much as in fact and of necessity depend upon them.*¹²³

¹²³ President Woodrow Wilson, Address to the Senate on the 19th Amendment, 30 Sept. 1918, web version, http://www.public.iastate.edu/~aslagell/SpCm416/Woodrow_Wilson_suff.html.

It is significant that President Wilson easily made this argument for women, but did not conclude that African Americans earned the same privilege and right.

Post-war attempts to deny women their rights as war veterans reflected some Congressional members' disregard for their contributions. Congress then left nurses as the only women in the military between the wars and necessitated the creation of a training program for new female recruits during the next world war. Those planning the World War II program benefited from the experiences of the yeomen (F). Like all recruits, women needed basic training, uniforms, and housing. Naval leaders learned, for example, that they should have those things in place before women join. Moreover, qualified women should be promoted to officer ranks. The yeomen (F) would have profited from having female officers to train and mentor them, and the Navy would have benefited from their leadership.

The Navy's women reservists took the initiative to preserve their history by starting the National Yeoman (F) Association at the Sequa-Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia in 1926. The association was "to foster and perpetuate the memory of the service of Yeomen (F) in the United States Naval Reserve Force of the United States during World War I; to preserve the memories and incidents of their association in World War I; by the encouragement of historical research concerning the service of Yeomen (F); by the promotion of celebrations of all patriotic anniversaries; to cherish, maintain, and extend the institutions of American Freedom; to foster true patriotism and love of country, and to aid in securing for mankind all the blessings of liberty." All women veterans of the U.S. Naval Defense Reserve Force who had served as yeomen (F) between 6 April 1917 and 11 November 1918 and had received honorable discharges qualified for membership. Cecilia Geiger was elected as its first commander. Helen C. McCarty and Bellerose Munier established the *Note Book* as their monthly newsletter in 1928 to preserve and share their history, and to exchange information about the organization and its membership (marriages, illness, retirements, deaths, etc.), progress on its goals, its budget, and reports from the leader of the association.

The *Note Book* included the association's prayer, "O Lord, Pilot of our organization, The National Yeoman (F), direct the course of our deliberations today that they may be pleasing to Thee, of benefit to the community, state and Nation, and ultimately in securing for all mankind the blessings of peace and good will Amen." The association received their charter from Congress (S. 1687, Public Law No. 676, 74th Congress) on 15 June 1936. The organization received the two pens President Roosevelt used to sign the bill into law.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ *Note Book*, 30 June 1936, III, no. 3, O'Neill papers.

Over the years, their agenda included publishing the *Note Book*, attending patriotic events, and holding a national conference and regional meetings. Loretta Perfectus Walsh, the first enlisted woman, was buried in Olyphant, Pennsylvania and association members subsequently tried to have her grave moved to Arlington National Cemetery. They also gave media interviews. Margaret Mary Fitzgerald King appeared on the *Today Show* in New York City in 1963 and presented a plaque honoring Secretary of the Navy Daniels to the commanding officer of USS *Josephus Daniels* (DLG-27) in Boston in 1964. The association also started a scholarship program. Their stamp advisory committee urged the Post Office to issue a commemorative stamp honoring yeomen (F.). The subsequent congressional bill provided for the issuance of a commemorative postage stamp in honor of the first enlisted women in the armed forces.¹²⁵

Declining membership and health and financial challenges reduced the membership. Eventually, the association did not have enough members to maintain the leadership positions. Former Yeoman (F.) Helen Holmes of Waynesboro, Virginia, noted this in her letter to Helen G. O'Neill: "You are the only Virginian yeomanette who has ever contacted me. Of course, we are now, very few in number—for time has taken its toll."¹²⁶ The National Yeoman (F.) Association was disestablished on 31 December 1985. The final issue of the *Note Book* (Vol. XLIV, No. 6) was published on 31 December 1985, and the association's archives were donated to the Smithsonian Institution's American History Museum in Washington, DC.

In spite of the association's efforts, many were not familiar with the women's naval service. During World War II, for example, Admiral Ernest J. King, commander in chief of U.S. Naval Forces and Chief of Naval Operations, asked Joy Hancock why she was not wearing her World War I Victory Medal. She responded that she was uncertain about her eligibility to do so. After reassuring her, he presented her with one. Ironically, an admiral she encountered in the hallway challenged her: "There is one thing you ladies must learn. You do not wear decorations unless you have earned them." She explained, "But Admiral, I did earn this ribbon. I was in World War I and Admiral King has just pinned this ribbon on my uniform." He responded, "Well, there are only a few of us left."¹²⁷

¹²⁵ *Note Book*, 30 Sept. 1980, XLII, no. 3, O'Neill papers. The bill was H.R. 5066, 94th Congress, (1975–76), sponsored by Congressmen Burke and J. Herbert (R-FL), House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, and introduced 18 Mar. 1975.

¹²⁶ Helen Holmes of Waynesboro, VA, letter of 21 May 1983 to Helen G. O'Neill, Folder 6, NYF Correspondence, O'Neill papers.

¹²⁷ Hancock, 64–65.

EPILOGUE

The yeomen (E.) enhanced the legacy of the women who had previously supported the nation during wars, conflicts, and crises, and set an example for those who followed them. Naval personnel and society at large need to know about these outstanding patriotic volunteers to better appreciate the opportunities available to women in today's Navy and the costs of the freedoms they enjoy. Military women have reached many significant milestones since 1918. Congress established women reserve programs in the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard in 1942, and in the Marine Corps in 1943 in support of the World War II war effort. The services commissioned their first woman officers and the Navy Nurse Corps members transferred from relative to regular rank in 1944, making Sue S. Dauser, director of the Navy Nurse Corps, the service's first female captain. The contributions of the 300,000-plus World War II women veterans helped to persuade Congress to pass the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, which allowed women to serve in the regular military. There were, however, restrictions that would be removed over the next 70 years: women could not constitute more than 2 percent of the total personnel in each branch, only one woman could be in the 0-6 rank group (captain in the Navy and Coast Guard; colonel in the Marine Corps, Army, and Air Force), and women could not serve in ground combat. The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) was opened to women in 1950.

Most of the changes in the status of military women since 1917 resulted from Congressional actions, women's court cases against the Department of Defense, and the needs of the military, and often happened during election years. The Department of Defense ended the draft and started the all-volunteer force in 1973. Within a year, the Navy began expanding opportunities for women by opening up the Chaplain Corps, aviation training, and diving school. Congress passed legislation lifting the ban on regular promotion to senior rank in 1967, limited the parameters of the combat exclusion law several times between 1973 and 1993, and permitted women to serve on combatant ships in 1994. Today's navy women are benefitting from increasing opportunities introduced by Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr. (1970-1974). Zumwalt's Z-Gram 116 outlined his plan for expanding the roles

of women.¹²⁸ The Navy established its first official equal opportunity policy in 1976 during CNO Admiral James Holloway's tenure. Women filing cases against the Department of Defense led the services to permit pregnant women to remain in the service in 1975, and to admit women into the military and naval academies in 1976.

Communications Electrician Second Class Yona Owens was denied the opportunity to serve on USNS *Michaelson*, a survey ship, based on Title 10, Section 6015 of the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act, which prevented women from assignment to combatant ships. Owens, with Yeoman Suzanne Holtman, Photographer's Mate Natoka Peden, and Seaman Valarie Sites, made a class action suit against the Department of Defense (*Owens v. Brown*). They argued that the federal statute was unconstitutional and prohibited women from serving on a wider variety of naval ships limiting their opportunities. American Civil Liberties Union attorney Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a member of the team defending the women. Sometime later, Lieutenant Kathleen Byerly, *Time* magazine's Woman of the Year in 1976, and three other officers joined the suit. District Judge John J. Sirica ruled in their favor in 1978. Congress amended section 6015 and the Navy began the "women in ships" program in the same year.¹²⁹

Navy nurse Joan C. Bynum became the first black female officer promoted to the rank of captain in 1978. In June 1991, Ginger Lee Simpson distinguished herself as the first female director of the Senior Enlisted Academy.

Opportunities continued to multiply over the next four decades. Female officers commanded shore establishments, aviation units, and combatant ships. The Navy promoted Lillian E. Fishburne as its first black female admiral in 1998 and assigned women to positions previously held only by men (i.e., chief of chaplains, judge advocate general, and leading the Civil Engineer Corps). Their participation in major wars and conflicts rewrote the rules of engagement and combat exclusion policies long before Congress actually changed the law. There were no clearly delineated lines of combat or combat zones. Military bases in theater endured regular enemy attacks. Women were among the fatalities suffered from terrorist attacks at home and abroad (i.e., bombing of USS *Cole* on 12 October 2000 and the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York's World Trade Center and on the Pentagon). They served in and

¹²⁸ See <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/z/list-z-grams/z-gram-116.html> and Zumwalt's *On Watch, A Memoir* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1976).

¹²⁹ Susan Godson, *Serving Proudly, A History of Women in the Navy* (Naval Historical Center and Naval Institute, 2001), 232–233; Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents, Navy Women in a Century of Change, 3rd Edition* (Brassey's, 1999), 242–245; <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/455/291/1415795/>.

out of harm's way during operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, New Dawn, and Inherent Resolve, and continue to do so in anti-piracy operations and current global hot spots. They have also endured life-changing injuries such as dismemberment and traumatic brain injury from improvised explosion devices. Women were among the prisoners of war taken by the Iraqis during Desert Shield/Desert Storm and Enduring/Iraqi Freedom. The Marine Corps' successful "Lioness" program led the other services to establish female engagement teams that interact with and search Muslim civilian women and children for contraband and bombs, conduct civil affairs engagement, train women in various civic functions in Muslim regions, and gather intelligence. These programs were partially in response to the cultural and religious norms in Muslim countries (i.e., women could not be touched by a man outside of her father, brother, or spouse).

At the time of publication, women make up 17 percent of the total naval force—19 percent of the officers and 20 percent of the enlisted personnel. Their largest presence continues to be in Navy medicine: 28 percent in the spring of 2016.¹³⁰ They constitute 27 percent of the civilian work force, 25 percent of the Senior Executive Service,¹³¹ and 27 percent of the Naval Academy Class of 2020. Captain Amy Bauernschmidt, a 1994 Naval Academy graduate and pilot, is the Navy's first female executive officer aboard a nuclear ship, USS *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN-72). In 2016, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter removed the last limitations on military women serving in the Navy SEALs and other special operations forces, permitting them to serve in any job for which they qualify. Michelle Howard, the first four-star female admiral, served in the highest assignment held by women to date when she began her duties as the Vice Chief of Naval Operations in 2014. In April 2017, the Navy had 21 woman admirals representing many communities and specialties. Rear Admiral Sarah A. Joyner, the first woman to command a strike fighter squadron (VFA-105) and a carrier air wing (CVW-3), has led the Physiological Episodic Action Team since August 2017. Rear Admiral Yvette M. Davids, the first Hispanic woman to command a ship, the USS *Curts* (FFG-38), is the senior military advisor to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Political-Military Affairs. Five women have reached the rank of fleet or force master chief. April D. Beldo, the first African American fleet master chief, retired with 30 years of service in January 2017. Dee Allen, an African American, is the highest-ranking enlisted woman and has been assigned

¹³⁰ "News You Can Use, Gender, Navy Medical Corps, Spring 2016," *Navy Medical Corps News* (Winter 2017), 12.

¹³¹ "Navy Celebrates Women's History Month," Story Numbers NNS180301-70, 3/1/2018 (9:23AM From Navy Office of Information) http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=104545.

as the command master chief of U.S. Fleet Forces Command/U.S. Tenth Fleet since March 2017. Female Supply Corps officers and enlisted personnel were seamlessly integrated into the submarine force. As of 2018, up to 20 percent of submarine crews can be female. Lieutenant Marquette Leveque, one of the first pioneering women in the submarine force, served as one of the women-in-submarines program coordinators.

When the Women in Military Service for America Memorial opened in 1992, Yeoman (F.) Frieda Hardin, escorted by her son, a retired Navy captain, urged the women to “[g]o for it!” Today’s Navy women are doing that and much more as they excel across specialties and at all ranks. They continue to make significant contributions to the Navy mission and the defense of our nation. Like the yeomen (F.) before them, the women of today are demonstrating that the Navy is better with women than without them, and that the value of the Navy is enhanced by having a diversified workforce representing varied backgrounds, skill sets, experiences, cultures, and levels of education. As today’s Navy women pass the torch to the next generation, there is a real possibility that one of them will serve as the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, the surgeon general, the superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy, the commanding officer of an aircraft carrier, the master chief petty officer of the Navy, or in other senior leader positions. The first enlisted women may not have imagined such possibilities, but we are confident that these patriotic pioneers would be very proud.

For Further Research

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About the Author

Regina T. Akers is a historian in the Emergent Response Section in the Histories Branch in the History and Archives Division at the Naval History and Heritage Command. She enjoys a national reputation as a subject matter expert on diversity and personnel issues in the United States military, with an emphasis on women and African Americans in the Navy. As the command's lead oral historian, she conducts career, special topic, and end-of-tour interviews with senior leaders and other notable civilian and military personnel. Dr. Akers earned her doctorate in U.S. and Public History at Howard University, where she taught women's and public history as an adjunct professor. Her publications include book chapters, articles, book reviews, and blogs. Dr. Akers presents at a myriad of symposia ranging from the Naval Academy to the National Archives, and has given many subject matter expertise media interviews. Her special assignments include the African American Civil War Sailors Project, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Task Force, and the advisory committee to establish a women's history museum on the National Mall. As a member of the inter-service committee updating the Pentagon's African American Corridor, Dr. Akers is writing the Navy content for the new exhibit.



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