

Dorothy Helen Farmer, U.S.N.R.

Until she married in January 1948, Dot's name in her military records appeared as "Dorothy Helen Farmer, U.S.N.R." The last four letters stand for "United States Naval Reserve." Even though they constituted less than four years out of a life that has, thus far, spanned ninety-three years, Dot's time in uniform holds great meaning for her. She becomes animated when sharing memories from that time. "Hey, Kentucky," she calls out, imitating how her fellow recruits, while in boot camp, tried to get her attention. As Dot explains, the women often addressed each other not by their given name but by the state they each came from. Dot already had a history of associating with groups of women in the workplace--the employees and tenants at the Evangeline Residence, her co-workers in hosiery repair at Hudson's, and the office staff at Sunbeam as well as Republic Aviation. Men were definitely on the premises, but it was women who surrounded Dot when she worked. A descriptive line she spoke when reminiscing about the employees in Hudson's hosiery repair department also applies to the women she met in her time as a WAVE--"I melded with a group of girls of different heritages."

But it is not the camaraderie alone that explains why Dot's time in the Navy is so dear to her. As a WAVE, she wore the uniform of the United States Navy. That is why these years remain a very special part of her life. Dot should be justifiably proud of them. During the greatest war of the 20th century, she played a vital role in the armed forces. At the same time, Dot also pioneered the way for generations of women after her to serve. In so doing, she helped to change history.

When Dot walked into the Navy recruitment office in August 1944, she did so for patriotic reasons. The country was at war, and she wanted to help in any way she could. Dot already contributed to the war effort by working at Republic Aviation. But military service offered an even deeper commitment. Within her immediate family, Dot made history when she enlisted. Not many Farmers served in the United States Armed Forces during either World War I or World War II. When America entered the First World War in 1917, her father James Bryd registered for the draft, but he was never called up. Her mother had some nephews who ended up in France with the American Expeditionary Forces. Dot recalls stories about them, primarily ones that focused on the long-term injuries they received from gas warfare. Some twenty years later in World War II, Dot's father was too old to serve. She does, however, remember his attempt to enlist at one point after Pearl Harbor. Her brothers and brothers-in-law held jobs in industries that produced war material. As such, they received deferments from their draft boards. Of her three brothers, only one served in the military, and it was only for a brief period.

Aside from making history within her family, Dot helped to make history for women with her Navy service. Some sixteen million Americans served in the armed forces during World War II. Of that number, about two hundred and seventy-two thousand were women; they thus represented about two percent of those in uniform.¹ Each branch actively recruited women since the draft law passed by Congress in September 1940 applied only to men. American women as a group had no history of military service. The one exception to this was the Army and Navy Nurse Corps which had their roots in the first decade of the twentieth century. Culturally, having women in the armed services ran counter to societal gender roles. Therefore, at the onset of World War II the Army and the Navy did not initially integrate women into their branches on a

level equal to that of male inductees. The legislation that authorized the induction of females into the Army and Navy designated, respectively, a secondary and a temporary status for them. The words “auxiliary” and “emergency” were used.

Within fourteen months of America’s entry into World War II, all of the armed forces sought women inductees in order to, as the slogan went, “Free a Man to Fight.” The Army became the first branch to recruit women with the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) in May 1942. (In June 1943 new legislation dropped the word “auxiliary,” integrating women more fully into the Army. The WAAC now became the WAC, the Women’s Army Corps.) The Navy followed the Army when legislation in July 1942 created the WAVES. Four months later, Congress authorized the SPARS, the female arm of the Coast Guard (SPARS comes from the Coast Guard’s motto of *Semper Paratus*, “Always Ready”). The Marine Corps became the last service area to induct women when Congress authorized their enlistment in February 1943; they had no special name aside from the one they proudly carried, Women Marines. At their high points, some 100,000 women served in the WACS, about 86,000 in the WAVES, approximately 10,000 in the SPARS, and Women Marines numbered around 17,600.²

When Dot signed up, she knew that women who were not nurses had served in the Navy during World War I. She did not realize, however, that they numbered about eleven thousand. World War I was the first time in American history when women who were not nurses enlisted in the Navy, Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard.³ In August 1916, as the Great War was being fought in Europe, the then-neutral United States passed a Naval Reserve Force law. It failed to include the word “male” in its criterion for military service. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels identified the World War I era as a time of “national emergency.” As such, he saw no problem with using women in primarily clerical work. The entry of American women into the Navy coincided with the country’s entry into World War I in April 1917. The enlisted women were officially designated as “yeomen (F),” the last letter standing for “female.” Unofficially, the women were known as “yeomanettes.” They underwent no real boot camp training, and the women lived at home while in the Navy. Just a handful of them served outside of the United States. Even though yeomen (F) had enlisted for a four-year period, the Navy released them from active service at the end of July 1919, nine months after an armistice ended World War I.⁴ Daughters of some of the yeomen (F) served as WAVES in World War II as did two of the yeomen (F) themselves.⁵



During the First World War, the United States Army had used women in primarily office work, hiring them as either volunteers or as contract workers. In both capacities, they were civilians.⁶ In World War II, months before the attack at Pearl Harbor, some Navy personnel voiced similar ideas in early discussions as to how it could use women in its ranks. The Command considered security concerns, the difficulties of enforcing discipline, and the obvious fact that civilians could leave a wartime position whenever they wished to do so. Before legislation was introduced, debates took place, too, as to whether women brought into the Navy would be an auxiliary unit or whether they would be fully integrated. The possibility of an auxiliary status prompted concerns over what one author identified as discipline, command and deployment. Wellesley College President Mildred McAfee, the woman who came to head the WAVES, made it very clear when government representatives approached her that she would assume leadership only if the Navy fully integrated women into the service. She would not accept an auxiliary status such as that originally given to women who entered the Army.⁷

Congress' declarations of war against the Axis Powers in December 1941 accelerated discussions on bringing women into the Navy. Early in 1942, that branch itself asked Congress to create a Women's Reserve. The Navy argued that women could be used for duties within the continental United States. This would release men for sea duty. President Roosevelt signed the bill that created the Women's Reserve on July 30, 1942, a date that today is still celebrated by Navy women as the birthday of women's naval service. Discussions occurred as to what to call the women who entered the Navy. "Yeomanettes" and "Seamanettes" were brought up. In the end, simply the designations for male enlistees were used--seamen and yeomen.⁸

More so than for men inducted into the United States Armed Forces, the Navy set forth restrictive requirements for women who wanted to join the WAVES. Regardless of whether they would hold an enlisted rank (which Dot did) or the rank of an officer, the following criteria applied--the applicant must be an American citizen, furnish three character references, and pass an aptitude test. While they could be married, women would be rejected if their husband held the Navy rank of ensign or higher. Additionally, women with children under the age of eighteen



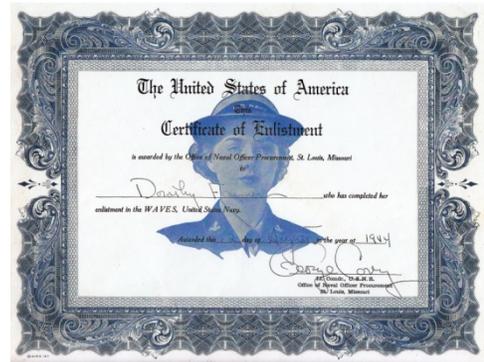
would not be accepted into the WAVES. Enlisted women had to be at least twenty years of age but not yet thirty-six; educationally, such applicants also had to have had at least two years of high school or business school. All of the branches of the armed forces had adopted height and weight requirements for male inductees. The Navy did the same for the WAVES. Enlisted women had to be at least fifty-nine inches tall and weigh a minimum of ninety pounds. (The volunteer's weight also had to be in proportion to her body.) If accepted into the WAVES, the women understood that they could be stationed anywhere within the continental United States for "the duration plus six months," a phrase men who served in the armed forces also fell under.⁹

Despite the high standards set by the Navy for WAVES, some scurrilous rumors still circulated regarding the character of women who volunteered for military service. Prejudice existed as women entered the various branches. Many people believed that women who assumed male jobs would lose their femininity. No one less than the chair of the Senate's Naval Affairs

Committee voiced the deeply rooted cultural belief that “a woman’s place is in the home” when Congress initially discussed creating the WAVES. Others voiced the belief that women who enlisted were not so much interested in serving their country as they were in finding husbands. But one defamatory statement regarding the character of women who donned a military uniform was of a much more negative nature--that such women were sexually promiscuous. The rumor took on enough significance that the military asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to look into the matter. (One possibility was that German agents within the United States were behind the accusations, hoping to negatively impact the number of women who volunteered to “release a man to fight.”) In the end, the FBI concluded that some American servicemen had spread such a rumor; they resented women’s entry into the armed services and were not anxious to leave Home Front duty stations for overseas assignments.¹⁰

Dot does not remember any of her siblings voicing concerns when she told them of her decision to enlist. She does, however, recall a judgment voiced by one of her Kentucky relatives. That woman had obviously heard the negative statements made about women who entered military service. As Dot phrases it, this relative feared that she was “on the downward path to Hell.” Dot’s mother had no reservations, however. According to Dot, Annie simply answered their relative’s concern with the declaration “I trust my daughter.” One question that did enter her mind, though, was how often Dot would be able to visit the family farm. Recall that Annie and James Bryd had enjoyed regular visits from their youngest child after she had moved to Evansville. Dot explained to her parents that she would have leaves at various times for personal travel.

About a month passed between the date Dot enlisted (August 12, 1944) and the date she was ordered to report for active duty (September 21, 1944).¹¹ In all probability, she used some of that time to travel back home, telling her parents of her decision. At that visit or perhaps on a later one, she took her belongings to store at the family farm. What we do know for sure is that on Thursday, September 21st, she boarded a train in Evansville that took her to St. Louis, Missouri. There she met up with some other newly enlisted WAVES. Together, Dot and the other young women traveled on another train to New York City. The enlistees were given a berth, arranged in what Dot calls a “double-decker fashion.” She recalls the train as an old one that burned coal to such a degree that smoke filled the air. When the recruits woke up from their sleep, they found, much to their amusement, that some of the smoke had made their nostrils black. For a woman born and raised in a place Dot describes as “the sticks,” seeing the skyscrapers of the most populated American metropolitan area must have been heady stuff. Detroit and Evansville were large cities, but New York was a world unto itself. Once the train arrived there, the WAVES in charge shepherded Dot and her companions to a subway that carried them to the Bronx. Upon disembarking, the recruits found themselves at their final destination, what Dot’s Navy records identify as the “USNTSCH (WR),” or in other words, the United States Naval Training School for Women Reservists. When Dot had woken up that Thursday at her brother’s home in



Evansville, she had been a civilian. In the course of a long day composed of two train rides and a short subway trip, she left that civilian world and entered the one of the American military.

The training school Dot arrived at in the Bronx operated out of Hunter College, a woman's institution of higher education. Naval personnel, metaphorically, called it the *USS Hunter*. Exactly five months to the day after President Roosevelt signed the bill bringing women into the Navy, the Secretary of the Navy approved the use of Hunter College as a boot camp for the



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WAVES. (Another woman's school, Smith College in Massachusetts, had begun serving as a training school for WAVE officers in August 1942, just weeks after Roosevelt authorized the women reserves. Beginning later that same year, WAVE officers would be trained, too, at Mount Holyoke College, another women's school in Massachusetts.) The Navy commandeered women's colleges since the dormitories there offered a feminine alternative to the harsh barracks at regular naval boot camps. Because college dorms were created with women in mind, the showers and toilets avoided the communal installations of male boot camps. The bathrooms were designed for use by one individual, with privacy a given. Doors, for example hung in the toilet stalls.¹² The expansive lawns and stately buildings gave a distinctive feel for a place of learning and beauty. Dot had always wanted to attend college, and now she was at one. The women on board the *USS Hunter* would be transformed, just like freshmen students would be as they worked toward graduation day. The difference was that the WAVE transformation focused on a change from a civilian status into a member of the United States Navy reserves. Dot's introduction to her time on the *USS Hunter* proved to be a wet one, a fact that amuses her even after all of these decades.



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The story of Dot's arrival at boot camp still brings a broad smile to her face when she shares it. It was raining in New York City that Thursday. Because joining the Navy was, as Dot puts it, "a big deal," she had bought a new, navy-colored dress to wear on the long traveling day from Indiana to New York. When she and the other WAVES got off the street car in the Bronx, they were still several blocks away from the college campus. As Dot walked in the rain, her dress began to shrink. The episode "afforded us a good laugh," she remembers. Although the newly enlisted WAVES were "tired," they were also "excited," to quote Dot. It would have been a reaction Dot shared with earlier and later women who volunteered for service in the United States Navy. The first enlisted inductees arrived on board the *USS Hunter* in February 1943. It continued to receive enlistees until October 1945. (With the surrender of the Germans in May 1945, and the Japanese three months later, the end of World War II meant that fewer volunteers were needed in the reserves.) One WAVE officer who taught on board the *USS Hunter* explained

that the ship, which had “set sail” in February 1943, “completed its voyage” in October 1945. In those years, the training command on board the ship could process six thousand recruits at a time; a new group’s arrival every two weeks coincided with the graduation of an earlier group. This was no small feat, understanding that the Navy used Hunter College as the boot camp for all enlisted women who joined the WAVES. When its voyage ended in October 1945, boot camp on board the *USS Hunter* had trained 80,836 WAVES, 1,833 SPARS, and 3,190 Women Marines.¹³

Like her fellow WAVES, Dot arrived at Hunter College as a “boot,” a word used to describe the enlistees during their six weeks of training. One of the first assignments Dot received concerned her housing. Unlike other women’s colleges, Hunter’s had been a nonresident institution. As such, no dormitories stood on campus grounds. In January 1943, a month before the first enlisted WAVES arrived for boot camp, authorities took over thirteen civilian apartment buildings near the campus. The apartments were then converted into dormitory-like residences. Dot observes that the eviction of the civilian residents, in a wartime city where housing was at a premium, “caused a lot of unhappiness.” The largest apartment building could accommodate



nine hundred recruits, the smallest three hundred. Laundry rooms, living rooms, and dining rooms had been installed in each remodeled structure. As in the dorms at other women’s colleges, doors hung on the toilet stalls and shower areas had partitions to allow some privacy. Four enlistees shared a bedroom. (Because of the passage of time, Dot recalls the name of only one of her roommates, “Ruth” from Pennsylvania.) The women slept in double-decker bunks. Dot remembers having the lower bed. From their first days together, the women called each other by the name of the state each hailed from. As Dot explains, “We were from all corners [of the country].” When another WAVE called to her, the woman yelled out “Kentucky,” or sometimes just “Hey, Kentuck.” One friend was “Kansas,” another “Pennsylvania.” Dot describes one benefit derived from such a custom. As she puts it, when the recruits called each other by the name of their state, they became “kinfolks right away.”¹⁴

In the language of the Navy, the apartments became the “billets” for the recruits. (In one sense, a “billet” was the sleeping quarters assigned to naval personnel. It could also be used to designate the service-related duties of a Navy woman or man.) This word became just one nautical term Dot learned when she began training. Aside from “billet,” her vocabulary came to include “deck” for “floor,” “gear” for one’s personal belongings, and to “police” meant to clean up an area. A “mess” no longer meant a situation of disarray; instead, it referred to the place the enlisted women ate, or it could also mean the meal itself. An authorized absence from duty up to forty-eight hours was “liberty, while one for more than that time was called a “leave.” These were just some of the new words Dot learned on board the *USS Hunter* during her indoctrination into Navy life.¹⁵

From her billet, Dot walked to four main buildings on the twenty-four-acre campus where the indoctrination took place. She still remembers their names. The administration occupied

Gillette Hall, enlistees attended classes in Davis Hall, the Navy took over the Student Hall for “messing,” and the gymnasium served as a place for physical training. Dot saw the month she spent on campus as a time that was “almost like going back to school.” She had wanted more education after Farmersville High School, and she received it at Hunter College, although her classes were all directed toward her military service and not ones of general education. Her Navy curriculum taught her Navy ranks and ratings, the traditions and customs associated with the branch, and naval history. In a class on ships and aircraft, Dot, who grew up in a state far away from any ocean, learned how to distinguish cruisers, destroyers, tenders, submarines, and aircraft carriers from each other. Physical training was, of course, also part of the curriculum. The



Davis Hall -- REAR U. S. NAVAL TRAINING SCHOOL (W. R.) BRONX, N. Y. HC 11

trainees marched in platoon formations to classes and their drills, singing as they did so. With amusement, Dot remembers one recruit from Alabama who “did not know her right foot from her left” when it came to marching. Even the singing did not help her keep in rhythm. This recollection brings a smile to Dot’s face not because of “Alabama’s” inability to keep in formation, but because the woman had been a music teacher in a public school before she joined the Navy.¹⁶

Inspections occurred on Saturday mornings in the billets. WAVES laid their clothing out on their bunk, placing the articles there in a certain order. Using the long side of the bed, Dot put her gym suit, reserve blue tie and black tie on the left side of the bed. Next to those she placed her uniform jacket and uniform skirt. Shirts occupied a third row--Dot laid out her white reserve blue and navy shirts, neatly folded in a prescribed way. Next to the shirts, she placed her raincoat. Her navy-issued purse, gloves, socks, and stockings formed the second to the last row. Two hats completed the layout. Dot stowed some gear in her locker, but again, on a certain shelf as dictated by regulations. For example, the locker held her undergarments and pajamas as well as any cosmetics she might have had. Failure to follow protocol could result in demerits.¹⁷

Recall that it was the WAVE uniform which she carefully laid out at every inspection that explains why Dot chose the Navy over the other branches for her service. The story that surrounds its creation clarifies why she saw it as the most attractive women’s military uniform. A famous Paris-based couturier designed it, Main Rousseau Bocher. (His label read simply “Mainbocher.”) Chicago-born Bocher expanded his business in 1939 to include a firm in New York City. One of his American clients was Josephine Forrestal, the wife of the Undersecretary of the Navy. She prevailed upon Bocher to donate his time to design the WAVE uniforms.¹⁸

Using the language of the war years, as a WAVE Dot was “uniformed” in four outfits--a summer dress white uniform, another called the summer grey, the working blue uniform, and “the dress blues.” Navy insignia, such as the fouled anchor or a three-bladed propeller, adorned each uniform. (Eventually, the Navy gave permission for the women to wear slacks if their billet or job assignment made that a more practical outfit.) Most WAVES received their uniform soon after they began boot camp, but Dot recalls one tall young woman, “Alabama,” who had to wait two or three more weeks before a uniform arrived at the *USS Hunter* that fit her large frame. The

Navy issued enlisted WAVES a two hundred dollar allowance for the purchase of a complete set of standard uniforms. After the woman had served a year, she received a quarterly gratuity of \$12.50 for the maintenance of her uniform. Navy regulations did not require enlisted WAVES to own some of the clothing, such as the summer white uniform or the winter overcoat. They could, however, purchase them if they wished to do so, and Dot does remember buying the white summer uniform.¹⁹

Navy-issued or approved accessories completed each uniform. As an enlisted WAVE, Dot's hat was a soft-crown headpiece, navy-blue in color, with a brim. The words "U.S. Navy" appeared on it. The original hat Mainbocher designed for the enlisted women created problems when it rained; its snap brim, which was turned up in the back of the hat, became a depository for water. A simple garrison cap took its place. In stormy weather, a WAVE donned a raincoat with a hat to which a havelock had been attached.



Depending upon which outfit she wore, Dot chose black oxford shoes or pumps as an accessory. Neither, however, could be suede or patent leather, and shoes with open toes or heels were prohibited. Dress pumps could be no more than two inches high while work heels were restricted to just one and a half inches. The white summer uniform required white summer shoes. Regardless of the shoe worn, the women were to wear stockings, which they purchased at a Navy

store. Dot still remembers the long lines the women stood in as they waited to get them. The stockings could be silk or rayon. (Nylon was used by the military in war-related products, such as in parachutes.) Initially, however, Dot bought cotton lisle stockings.

She describes them with a not-too-pleasant look on her face as "thicker" than other stockings, and having "a sheen to them. They were terrible.

They made our legs look ugly." A stocking with a run, even one that had been mended, was not allowed. Dot, who knew how to repair a run because of her time in the hosiery department at Hudson's, might have quietly disagreed with the wisdom of that prohibition. Dot carried a black leather purse, worn on a strap placed over the right shoulder.

Gloves completed the uniform, with some latitude as to what type the WAVE chose. Short and simple black or white gloves had to be worn, depending up the season and uniform. In spring, summer, and for

winter dress occasions, white gloves were required. On hot days, if gloves proved too uncomfortable, they were still to be carried in a purse or hand. In this era, ladies wore gloves, whether they were in the military or not.²⁰



Dot

With her uniforms issued to her, and boot camp behind her, Dot graduated as a WAVE at the end of October 1944. Families were invited to attend the ceremony, but Dot's relatives were too far away to do so. She left the *USS Hunter* on October 31, 1944 as a seaman 2nd class. That rating paid Dot fifty-four dollars a month. Promotions would be coming, however, and with them an increase in pay. Her training to qualify for those began at the United States Naval Barracks in Washington, D.C.²¹

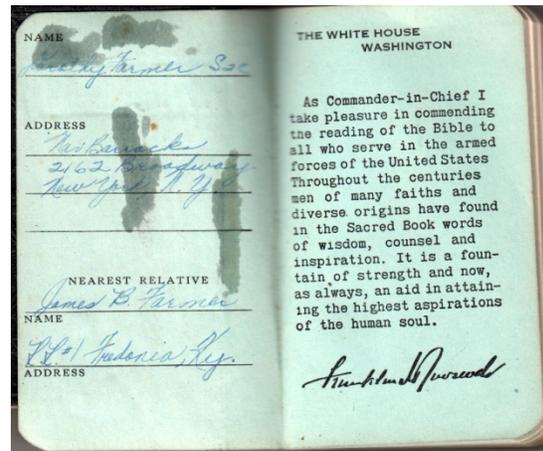
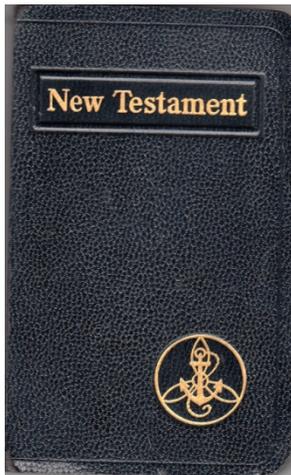
Upon graduation from boot camp, an enlisted WAVE could be given one of thirty-eight ratings. The list of possible billets was, therefore, a long one--a baker, cook, aerographer's mate (this person interpreted weather data), radio operator, storekeeper (who oversaw supplies), pharmacist's mate, yeoman (an office worker), draftsman, cartographer, research assistant, and laboratory technician are just a few examples. In keeping with the idea that the women freed men for sea duty, all WAVE assignments were to be "shore billets." WAVES handled eighty percent of the Navy's mail service. They constituted seventy percent of those assigned to the Bureau of Naval Personnel. Two-thirds of the enlisted staff in the Chief of Naval Operations' office were WAVES. When the war ended, twenty-five percent of enlisted WAVES worked in some area of naval aviation; they might be an aviation machinist's mate, an aviation metal smith (individuals who helped to keep Navy planes flying), a control tower operator, a Link Trainer instructor, or even a parachute rigger. WAVES billeted at the Naval Air Station in Elizabeth City, North Carolina trained pigeons used in communications. The Navy eventually designated nineteen service training schools for enlisted WAVES. All were located within the continental United States. Training in one's specialty could take place over a time span as short as a few weeks or as long as a year.²²

By the time Dot left the *USS Hunter*, the Navy had decided to assign her to Communications. As such, Dot received her initial training at Radio Washington at the Naval Barracks in Washington, D.C., what one high-ranking WAVE officer called "the nerve center of the Navy's entire communication system."²³ Dot arrived there on the same day she disembarked from the *USS Hunter*, October 31, 1944. A train undoubtedly carried her from New York City to the nation's capital. She stayed in the barracks with at least four other women, although she recalls that at times six women were assigned to her room. The bunks were double-decker ones, the same type she slept in while on board the *USS Hunter*. Some seven weeks later, on December 18th, her specialized training ended. Dot left Washington, D.C. for New York City. There she stayed overnight at the Naval Barracks. The next day she reported to her first duty station, the Third Naval District's Radio Station in New York City. Her uniform now displayed the "sparks" insignia that represented her Communications rating. Dot remained at the Radio Station for one and a half years, her longest duty station. Aside from her work in Communications, Dot enjoyed the social benefits of being stationed in New York City. She also witnessed a famous crash of a B-25 and the joyful celebrations that accompanied V-J Day.

Even though seventy years have passed since Dot lived and worked at the Naval Radio Station in New York City, she still remembers some addresses and buildings that defined her military service there. She first billeted at a building named the Manhattan Towers in Upper Manhattan, the northern area of the borough. She inscribed an address for her "Navy Barracks" in a small New Testament Bible Dot bought while at this duty station--2162 Broadway. That is probably the location of the Manhattan Towers. The WAVES' rooms had the same type of bunk beds that Dot had slept in on board the *USS Hunter* and at the naval barracks in Washington, D.C. Even though the top bunk was not as easily accessible as the bottom one, Dot preferred it because, as she phrases it, she could "lie there and look out" at the city through the window. Practically, she also points out that with a top bunk, "no one could pile their junk" on her bed.



WAVES ate their meals in a large dining hall. The chief, according to Dot, was particularly good at making desserts, perhaps because he had a French background. One day, as she was “going through the chow line,” Dot saw a fellow Kentuckian, Joe Rustin. Like Dot, he had grown up in Caldwell County and had graduated in the same high school class as had Dot. He, too, had enlisted in the Navy. That day at the Manhattan Towers, Joe was on KP (Kitchen Patrol) duty. Dot did not date him, but she did go out with other members of the armed forces. In particular, Dot remembers dating a Navy lieutenant, another Navy officer who was a dentist, and a Marine. She admits that she received more than one marriage proposal, but she diplomatically said “no” to them. As she puts it, the proposals “went in one ear and out the other. I wasn’t looking for a husband.” She was content being in the Navy.



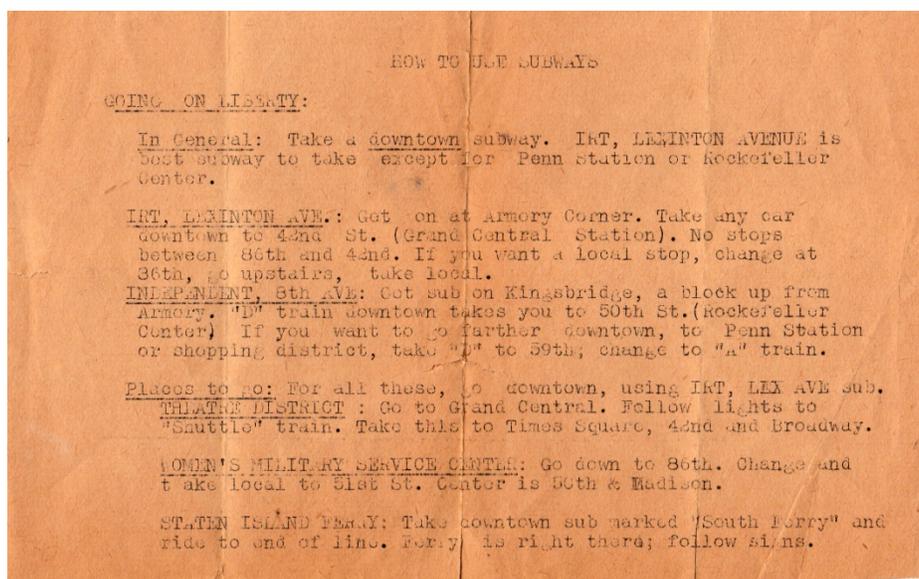
From the Manhattan Towers, Dot walked a few blocks to the subway. There she bought a ticket for five cents that took her to Long Island where the Navy operated its Radio Station at 99 Church Street. Dot remembers the building as a large federal government complex in which the Navy occupied the 15th floor. While at this duty station, Dot received a new rating--Telegrapher 1, 1st Class Petty Officer.²⁴ She explains, however, that she did not work with telegrams, as her T1 rating indicates. According to Dot, the Navy did not have a rating that described her particular work. It used the T1 simply for convenience.

Nationally, the Navy assigned a large number of WAVES to Communications. Seventy-five percent of encoding and decoding was done by the women.²⁵ Dot’s position in Communications, however, did not involve that clandestine area. She summarizes her job as one where she received messages and sent them along “to their proper designation.” Dot points out that “a Western Union outlet” existed on her floor at 99 Church Street, “but it was not used a lot.” Instead, the Navy relied on its own machines. The room Dot worked in had what she describes as “big electrical trunks.” (In this sense, “trunk” refers to a communication network.) Slots on a wall emitted typed messages on ticker tape, perhaps one inch in width. The beginning of each tape designated which city the message was destined for, such as Boston or Norfolk. (Dot remembers the addressee as always a location, never a person.) The message was not encoded. Dot and other WAVES ripped the communication off of the long piece of tape that the

machine ejected in what seemed to be a constant stream. A bell rang when the transmission ended for a particular message. If it was what Dot calls “a priority message, bells jingled.” That sound signaled to the WAVES that they were to hurry to rip off the communication. The WAVE clipped the ticker tape onto a hook affixed to a post that stood in the large room. Another WAVE picked it up and took it to an adjoining radio room, a “Message Center.” From there, a Navy radioman sent it to the designated destination.

Her work shifts in Communications varied. She describes them collectively as “3-3-3.” Dot had three days when she had to report to 99 Church Street in the morning. Over the course of the next three days, her workday began in the afternoon. On three subsequent days Dot started working in the evening. A seventy-two hour liberty followed each of those three day sequences.

The Navy Command in New York City typed up a sheet of paper with specific instructions on how to navigate the subway system. Dot has kept it all of these years, suggesting perhaps that it represented more than one “adventure” she enjoyed in the year and a half she was stationed there. One side of the sheet bore the title “How to Use Subways.” The other side explained “Coming Back from Shore Liberty.” On leaving the Navy barracks at Manhattan Towers, officers instructed Dot and other WAVES to “take a downtown subway,” recommending Lexington Avenue, Penn Station, or Rockefeller Center. The instruction sheet suggested that WAVES might enjoy the theater district, the Women’s Military Service Center, and the Staten Island Ferry. Regardless of where the WAVES went when they had time off on, the subway instruction sheet urged them to “Remember, going on Liberty it’s ‘downtown,’ coming back it’s ‘uptown.’ ” When WAVES returned to the barracks, the Command warned them that they should allow more than an hour for the subway trip to insure that they were not late in reporting back.



Dot always returned on time from liberty and from her leaves. She did go to each of the places recommended on the subway instruction sheet. The “live stage shows,” as she calls them, in New York City’s theater district especially delighted her. Dot spent hours at the Women’s Military Service Center (which acted as a type of USO for women in uniform). She judges her ride on the Staten Island Ferry to have been “an adventure.” On another of her liberty days, she



went to a circus in Madison Square Garden. Dot explains that regulations allowed her to wear civilian clothes while on liberty, but she invariably wore her uniform since it gave her free admission to various shows. Dot spent another liberty in the City of Perth Amboy, New Jersey with a fellow WAVE, Mitzi Giles. Mitzi's parents lived there. That visit became immortalized in a photograph. Mitzi snapped a picture of Dot in her uniform in the Giles' backyard, with laundry hanging in the background. On one of her leaves, Dot experienced her first airplane ride. Ethel and Edith still lived in Detroit. A WAVE friend, Marion Drake, hailed from Lansing, Michigan where her family lived. Together, Dot and Marion flew on a commercial flight from New York City to Detroit. When questioned about the cost of an airline ticket versus a train fare, Dot quickly replied that the plane ride "was more thrilling."

One vivid memory Dot still holds from her time stationed in New York City occurred on July 28, 1945. While today she does not remember that specific date, she does recall the tragic event that happened then. It was a Saturday, and Dot was working at 99 Church Street. A B-25 bomber flew over the city. Army Captain William F. Smith sat at the controls, flying servicemen from Massachusetts to LaGuardia Airport in New York City. Smith was an experienced pilot, having flown bombing missions in Europe. But he confronted heavy fog on his approach to LaGuardia. Visibility was almost zero. The control tower suggested that the captain not attempt a landing. Smith acknowledged the communication and then signed off. Probably not realizing it, he turned the plane in such a direction that it ended up over midtown Manhattan, with skyscrapers dotting the landscape. At that time, the Empire State building, with its one hundred and three floors, was the tallest building in the world. The B-25 crashed into the 79th floor and others below and above it. Smith died as did two others on the plane. Eleven people inside of the building perished.²⁶ From the 15th floor at 99 Church Street, Dot could see the catastrophe as it happened. Fifty-six years later, on September 11, 2001, terrorists high jacked two commercial airliners that they flew into the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan. By that date, Dot lived in California. Television stations broadcasted footage of the airlines crashing into the Trade Center throughout that day and the ones that followed. Dot was one of a handful of Americans who had seen such a sight once before.

Dot was at her duty station on Church Street, too, just a few weeks later when an event very different in tone occurred--New Yorkers received news that World War II was over. A few months earlier, Germany's surrender had ended the war in the European Theater. When that happened, Dot recalls that she was working as the news was announced. She remembers, however, no joyful festivities that day in May. No celebrations took place in American communities or in the combat theaters because the war still continued in the Pacific. But on August 6 and on August 9, 1945, the United States dropped a new weapon--the atomic bomb--on two Japanese cities. It carried a destructive force that the world had never seen before. Just days later, the last of the Axis Powers accepted the terms of the Allies.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt did not live to see the war's end. He died suddenly on April 12, 1945. Like so many of her generation, Dot remembers exactly where she was when she heard

the news of his death. She was off duty, on the “roof garden,” as she calls it, at the top of the Manhattan Towers. Dot recalls thinking, “What will we do without Roosevelt?” He had been president for over twelve years, a man Dot calls “our one and only anchor.” As dictated by the United States Constitution, Vice-President Harry S. Truman assumed the office of Chief Executive. At 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 14th, Truman announced the news that the war was over. Three minutes later, the electric sign at the Times Square Tower displayed the words “Official—Truman announces Japanese surrender.” The President’s statement began what *Life* magazine judged to be “the biggest spree in U.S. history.” By 7:30 p.m., an estimated half a million people had flocked to Times Square to share their joy. Two and a half hours later, a city police official estimated the crowd had reached two million.²⁷

The celebration continued into the next day. Dot remembers watching from the fifteenth floor of the Church Street building the festivities in the streets below. She especially recalls all of the confetti thrown from the windows of offices. “People were celebrating all over,” she exclaims. Five thousand tons of paper, confetti, and even small pieces of material in the garment district rained down from windows high up. Throughout the country, air-raid sirens sounded, churches rang their bells, cars honked their horns, and many just joyfully shouted in the streets.²⁸

For the United States, three years, eight months, and seven days had passed since the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. Now, the war was finally over. Dot’s service in the Navy, however, was not. While she did not know it in those days of jubilation, she had one more major duty station left. Her sense of adventure, which had served her well, was going to take on a whole new direction. An adventure of the heart awaited her at the Navy’s Radio Station in Great Lakes, Illinois.

¹ David M. Kennedy (ed.), *The Library of Congress World War II Companion* (New York, p. 2007), pp. 163, 168, 323 on the numbers of those who served, men and women. For the numbers who served in WW II, see especially *Selective Service and Victory, The 4th Report of the Director of Selective Service* (Washington, D.C., 1948), p. 154; this report explains the difference between an oft-cited military service of some 12 million and another of some 16 million. As *The 4th Report* notes, the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard reached a “peak strength of 12, 314,000 on June 1, 1945, just after V-E day.” That figure included about 275,000 women but did not include MIAs, POWs, or “deceased.” The report continues, “By December 31, 1945, as many as 15,000,000 men” were in the service or had served at one point since the Selective Service began in 1940.

² D’Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America, Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 20 gives the legislation dates for all branches. If Army and Navy nurses (47,000 and 11,000 respectively) are added to the “peak wartime enrollments” of the women in their service branches, a total of 271,600 women wore the uniform in World War II. That number increases to about 350,000 if, instead of peak wartime enrollments, the “total number who served at one time or another” is counted; by branch of service, that was some 140,000 WACS; 100,000 WAVES; 13,000 SPARS; 23,000 Women Marines; 60,000 Army nurses and 14,000 Navy nurses.

³ [www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/History/wwi\(war\).html](http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/History/wwi(war).html) and www.uscg.mil/history (accessed September 19, 2014).

⁴ Joy Bright Hancock, *Lady in the Navy, A Personal Reminiscence* (Annapolis, 1972; 2002 edition), pp. vii, 23, 24, 27, 28, 48, 220; “Marie Johnson, 107; Veteran Was a WWI ‘Yeomanette,’ ” *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 2004, B10. In comparison to the Yeomanettes, who numbered in the thousands, only 305 women enlisted in the Marines, due in large part to the fact that the Marine enlistments did not begin until August 1918 and the war ended in November (Captain Linda L. Hewitt, USMCR, *Women Marines in World War I*, Washington, D.C., 1974, pp. 1, 4, 49). Hewitt identifies April 1917 as the date when women entered the Navy (pp. 1, 3).

⁵ Laura Rapaport Borsten in her memoir, *Once A WAVE: My Life In The Navy, 1942-1946* (Studio City, CA, 1995), p. 56, mentions the daughters; Borsten herself was a WAVE officer in World War II. One of the two women who

served in the Navy both in World War I and World War II was Joy Bright Hancock; she identifies herself and Eunice White as the two women, Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, p. 64.

⁶ [www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/History/wwi\(war\).html](http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/History/wwi(war).html) (accessed September 19, 2014).

⁷ Susan H. Godson, *Serving Proudly, A History of Women in the U.S. Navy* (Annapolis, 2001), p. 109; Borsten, *Once A WAVE*, p. 5; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, p. 50.

⁸ Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S. Navy, *U.S. Navy At War, 1941-1945* (Washington, 1946), pp. 29-30; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, p. 56; Borsten, *Once A Wave*, pp. 56-57.

⁹ Requirements for women who wanted to join the WAVES are taken from a World War II handbook for women who entered the Navy and Coast Guard--Lieutenant, U.S.N.R, Mary Virginia Harris' *Guide Right, A Handbook For WAVES And SPARS* (New York, 1944), pp. xxiii, 36, 42. See also Godson, *Serving Proudly*, p. 116. Because of this educational requirement, the WAVES were overwhelmingly drawn from the middle class; and originally, Navy service was open only to white women.

Officers in the WAVES had to be twenty to forty-nine years old and have a college degree or a degree from a two-year college plus some professional experience (Harris, *Guide Right*, p. xxiii and Godson, *Serving Proudly*, p. 116). African American women were not allowed into the WAVES until October 1944, a month after Dot left for boot camp; less than one hundred served (Godson, *Serving Proudly*, p. 116 and Evan Bachner, *Making WAVES, Navy Women of World War II*, New York, 2008, p. 6).

¹⁰ Campbell, *Women at War with America*, pp. 37, 61; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, p. 55; Godson, *Serving Proudly*, p. 115.

¹¹ Both dates are taken from Dot's "Notice of Separation from U.S. Naval Service," January 16, 1948 (her "date of separation").

¹² Godson, *Serving Proudly*, p. 117; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, pp. x, 74, 102; Borsten, *Once A WAVE*, p. 193.

¹³ Borsten, *Once A WAVE*, p. 52; Godson, *Serving Proudly*, pp. 119, 120; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, pp. 103, 104, 105, 107-108; Harris, *Guide Right*, p. xv on the fact that all enlisted WAVES went through boot camp at Hunter College.

¹⁴ Borsten, *Once A WAVE*, pp. 46, 49 for the use of the word "boot"; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, pp. 102, 103, 172, 174.

¹⁵ Harris, *Guide Right*, pp. 100-102 contains a glossary of such words.

¹⁶ Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, pp. 104, 106, 108; Borsten, *Once A WAVE*, p. 46.

¹⁷ Borsten, *Once A WAVE*, pp. 47-50 details the inspections and the proper placement of the gear.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25; Godson, *Serving Proudly*, p. 124; www.fashionencyclopedia.com/Le-Ma/Mainbocher.html (accessed September 30, 2014); www.homefromtheroines.com/exhibits/uniform-identity/design/the-designer/ (accessed September 28, 2014).

¹⁹ Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, p. 103 uses the noun "uniform" as a verb, as in "uniforming" and "uniformed"; www.history.navy.mil/ac/posters/wwiwomen/wave3.htm (accessed December 26, 2011); Harris, *Guide Right*, pp. 19, 20, 21, 22; Godson, *Serving Proudly*, pp. 124-125 identifies the gray-and-white summer work uniform as made of seersucker.

²⁰ Harris, *Guide Right*, pp. 20, 26, 27, 29-30; Borsten, *Once A WAVE*, p. 6; Godson, *Serving Proudly*, pp. 124-125. A March 15, 1943 article in *Life* magazine, "WAACS & WAVES," detailed on page 78 what an enlisted WAVE carried in her bag.

²¹ Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, p. 106 uses the word "indoctrination" to describe boot camp at Hunter College. Dot's Honorable Discharge papers state she left Hunter College on October 31, 1945 and arrived in Washington, D.C. that same day. It also lists her rank at the time of her graduation as an "S2." Monthly salaries for WAVE rates can be found at www.history.navy.mil/ac/posters/wwiwomen/70-623-f.jpg (accessed December 26, 2011).

²² Maj. Gen. Jeanne Holm, USAF (Ret.), *Women in the Military* (Novato, CA, 1982), p. 100. U.S. Navy, *U.S. Navy at War*, pp. 29-30; Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, pp. 106, 108, 118-119, 126, 128, 210; Harris, *Guide Right*, pp. xvi-xx; "WAVE Trains Pigeons for Navy Blimps," *Times-Advocate*, February 10, 1945, p. 4

²³ Hancock, *Lady in the Navy*, p. 210.

²⁴ Dot's Honorable Discharge lists her duty stations and the rating she held at each one.

²⁵ Godson, *Serving Proudly*, p. 125.

²⁶ www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92987873 (accessed October 21, 2014).

²⁷ Herbert J. Cohen, editor, *125 Years of Famous Pages From The New York Times, 1851-1976* (New York, 1976), "All City 'Let's Go' ", August 15, 1945, p. 1; "Victory Celebrations," *Life*, August 27, 1945, p. 21.

²⁸ "Victory Celebrations," *Life*, August 27, 1945, p. 23; Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's A War On? The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York, 1970; 2003 edition), p. 355.