

The WAVES at Cedar Falls

A good-looking young woman in a beautifully tailored tweed suit was among the passengers who stepped from a train at Cedar Falls, Iowa, on December 15, 1942. On her shoulder was an orchid, the last gift of fellow associates in the metropolitan office in which she had worked. "Here, you may have this", she said, handing the corsage to the Pullman porter, "I'm giving them up for the duration."

She was one of the one thousand and fifty young women who reported to the Naval Training School on the campus of Iowa State Teachers College at Cedar Falls as members of the first indoctrination class. The Iowa "boot" school for enlisted members of the Women Appointed for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES) was the first of its kind in the nation.

The opening of the school was marked with no pomp and ceremony, but with plenty of hard work. Navy officers, in uniforms with gold or blue braid, met every train, both day and night, and loaded recruits into buses bound for the campus. Young women from every State in the Union were logged in and rapidly billeted.

Those first apprentice seamen V-10 were not quite sure what was expected of them, but they knew the Navy had special ways of doing things and they were determined to meet the challenge. One of them had heard that the Navy made bed corners square, so the travel-worn recruits arriving between two and three A.M. and assigned to sleep on mattresses on the floor until bunks could be set up, struggled to make the required square corners before retiring!

They were not long left in doubt as to their duties. Captain Ransom K. Davis, who had been on convoy duty in the Pacific was in charge. He told them, "To the Navy, each one of you represents a fighting man". And the schedule was set up as nearly like other naval activities as possible. The "boots" were divided into two battalions with two companies in each battalion. The companies in turn were divided into four platoons. And thenceforth the WAVES were seen marching in military formations.

Captain Davis, according to one story, had glanced at the orders which sent him to Cedar Falls, and seeing the word Iowa, had thought he was being assigned to the famous battleship *Iowa*. In spite of his initial disappointment, however, he developed a decided affection for his command.

The staff sent to Iowa to train the first enlisted women in the Navy included both men and women officers and a ship's company of about fifty men. The officers included Lt. Comdr. E. E. Pettee serving as Executive Officer under Captain Davis; Lt. Margaret C. Disert, Officer in Charge of Seamen; Lt. W. H. Fetridge (author of "The First Navy Reader" and "The Second Navy Reader"), Instruction Officer; Lt. Comdr. Tom B. Marwil and Lt. Edgar Sherrin, Medical Officers; Ens. Ruth Houghton, Senior Nurse; Ens. Mary K. Brown, Dietitian; Ens. Edith Gentry, Physical Training Officer; Ens. Juliet Brussel, Drill Officer; Ens. Gladys Henderson (Gladys Hearst), Public Relations Officer; and Lt. Walter Lake, Chaplain.

Uniforming the "motley crew" of civilians was accomplished at Black's Department Store in Waterloo and at the Hughes Store in Cedar Falls. Gym suits were not available for three months, however, and the physical training classes presented an assorted variety of slacks, rompers, shorts, and even pajamas.

Winter uniforms were designed by Mainbocher and were of navy blue. Blouses were either navy blue or white. Ties for the navy were robin's egg blue and for the white (dress) uniforms they were black. Summer uniforms were

dresses of grey and white seersucker with black ties for everyday wear and all white for dress. Rank for the women officers was indicated by robin's egg blue stripes and the usual insignia.

Enlisted women slept in barracks in the dormitory at the Iowa State Teachers College and were supervised by house mothers. Officers had individual rooms. The administrative personnel had quarters in Cedar Falls. The food was Navy fare (excellent) and both the mess for enlisted women and the officers' dining room were in charge of the college cafeteria.

When the first indoctrination class graduated on January 14, 1943, Captain Davis expressed his satisfaction with the work. They were sent out as seamen second class, some to specialized schools for further training as hospital apprentices, machinist's mates, aviation metalsmiths, and aerographer's mates, some to direct assignment as yeoman strikers.

The second class arrived, and with them came about 150 SPARS. Until July, 1943, when a Coast Guard school was opened in Florida, SPARS continued to share Navy indoctrination facilities in Cedar Falls and in New York and also the specialized training schools. Lt. Comdr. Mildred H. McAfee, commander of the WAVES, visited the station on January 29, 1943.

The February issue of the *Iowave*, published by and for the WAVES at Cedar Falls, carried the headline announcement that on March 1, 1943, 420 Army Aviation Cadets would arrive on the campus for a five-months course preparatory to intensive ground training at pre-flight schools. For the fifteen months following their arrival, the sidewalks of ISTC echoed to the tramp of both khaki and blue-clad platoons, and the campus rang with Air Corps as well as Navy songs.

Plans to convert the Cedar Falls school from indoctrination to yeoman training were announced early in 1943, and the first yeoman training began in April. During the transition period there were classes of indoctrinees receiving basic training, yeoman classes made up of seamen who had received boot training here, and some classes of yeomen who had been indoctrinated at Hunter College.

The shift meant change in teaching personnel; the testing groups left and Women's Reserve officers who had been commercial teachers took their places. Eight and twelve week courses of yeoman instruction were organized, including shorthand, typing, naval forms and correspondence, filing, office procedure, as well as physical education, military customs, and current events.

On May 10, 1943, Captain Davis turned over

the command of the station to his successor, Commander E. E. Pettee. In his farewell address, he said, "I have seen the spirit with which class after class of trainees have responded to their training. I have come to realize how really capable, enthusiastic, loyal, and patriotic the WAVES are, and I hope to spread the good word about them wherever I may go." The May number of the *Iowave* contained this farewell pledge to Captain Davis: "The WAVES will be the best, and the best of the WAVES will be IOWAVES."

The new commanding officer, Commander E. E. Pettee, had been, by his own statement, one of the first to "join the WAVES". One fine August morning, he related, papers were handed to him, ordering him to Northampton in connection with the first WAVE school. He was considerably dismayed. He "huffed and puffed", and waved his orders in the face of his more-than-sympathetic commanding officer with remarks to the effect that they couldn't do that to him. But they could, and they did. Later he had to admit that he found the duty "pleasant, interesting, absorbing, and well worthwhile."

The first yeoman class was graduated on May 28, 1943, with Commander Pettee as their speaker. The following class had, as guests, representatives of the WAVE-SPAR Mothers' Club

of Minneapolis and St. Paul who lived with their daughters in Navy routine for a day and a half.

Iowa WAVES in training celebrated the first birthday of their organization on July 30, 1943. The birthday cake was cut outside the Rose Lounge of Bartlett Hall by Dean Alice Lloyd, member of the Women's Reserve Educational Advisory Council. Visitors were invited to demonstrations of typing and physical training activities and to the regimental review and inspection.

As class succeeded class through 1943 and 1944, remarks by the commanding officer at the time of graduation became an established tradition, lending humor and inspiration to the final exercises. On one occasion Commander Pettee said: "We who observe from the sidelines can note better than you yourselves what you have acquired since you have been in the service. You have more poise, more self-confidence, a better military bearing, greater understanding of what the Navy expects of you, and certainly higher technical skills." Speakers for the twenty-five graduating exercises held during 1943 to 1945 included both civilians and Army and Navy officers. Among these were four women.

As graduation followed graduation, the WAVES in training continued to have good times in addition to their full schedule of class

work. A succession of shows produced included "Anybody's Headache", "The U.S.S. Terrific", "States on Parade", "The Ancient Mariner", "The Casta-WAVES", "Convention of Veterans — 1955", a combined Army-Navy musical featuring the "Jive Bombers", and "R.I.P."

On Christmas Eve, 1943, each trainee placed a shoe outside her door to receive Santa's gifts. Some left notes addressed to the good old Saint. One prospective yeoman wrote:

To: Santa Claus.

Via: The Chain of Command.

1. How about a pair of arch supporters?

Other requests included oranges, shoe-shines, nylon hose, billets in California, special soldiers, sailors, and marines, and, especially, little red chevrons. The holiday festivities also included caroling and a Christmas dinner with Army Air Corps Cadets as guests.

Preëminent among the distinguished men of action who visited the station was Admiral W. D. Leahy, Chief of Staff to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. His noticeable tenseness on that visit was explained the following day, June 6, 1944, by the news of the invasion of Europe.

The WAVES' second birthday, in July, 1944, was celebrated nationally by the launching of two motor torpedo boats, bought with the \$1,080,000

from bonds purchased by the Women's Reserve personnel. In Cedar Falls the birthday was the occasion for an open house at Bartlett Hall for 500 civilian guests, who observed teaching and recreation, inspected medical facilities, and met staff members and trainees. In the afternoon a large group of WAVES went to the farms near Reinbeck, Iowa, to help detassel corn.

With keen nostalgia for happy days at this station, trainees, ship's company, and officers stationed in Cedar Falls will long remember their experiences. One Iowa WAVE wrote that she would always cherish the memory of the chimes of the Campanile — good cheer at mess — the crunch of snow on a sub-zero morning — the glorious colors of the autumn and miracle of an Iowa spring — laundry and popcorn lines at 1630 each day — a July bond rally at which survivors of the band of the U. S. S. *Helena* played — trainees singing "Auld Lang Syne" at graduation — Muriel Schell Sullivan's "WAVES Victory Hymn" as sung by the choir — hoping for a "ship-shape" from inspection — that uneasy waiting for interviews and orders — that catch in her throat as she watched reviews and participated in graduation exercises.

During the closing days of the school the same spirit of unity and coöperation prevailed. All

hands worked together at any task which needed doing. Here is an account written by a trainee in the last group at Cedar Falls:

The out-going sections were practically tossed out of bed on their noses last Tuesday morning, when the DB's (Destruction Battalion) took over, with "physical assistance" in the decommissioning of Bartlett.

It all began when sixteen hardy souls, to avoid the rigors of a PT class, volunteered their services for a mysterious detail, but it ended with the whole section hard at work tearing down bunks, shoving chairs around, neatly stacking mattresses in the East Lounge, and escorting bed springs down TOO many stairs. . . . One absent-minded seaman took the nuts and bolts out of the top bunk and then sat on the lower. (She was taken to sick bay in a dazed condition.)

Battered and bruised, aching in every muscle, but with a definite sense of accomplishment, the weary She-bees have been considering striking for Carpenter's Mate using as a recommendation their experience in the "Battle of the Bedsteads".

This article is a salute to that spirit and to Gladys Gooding, who assisted in its preparation.

GLADYS WHITLEY HEARST