



Dennis Historical Society Newsletter May 2018

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**Next Board Meeting, Tuesday, May 8th, 2:00 pm, Dennis Memorial Library, 1020 Old Bass River Road Dennis
Members Welcome!**

Please send information & stories for the newsletter to Dave Talbott at the DHS Website email address: info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

The Untold Story

Code Girls by Liza Mundy is the untold story of the *American Women Code Breakers of World War II*. Recruited from small Southern towns and posh New England colleges, more than 10,000 American women served in the U.S. Army and Navy as code breakers during World War II. The story of their work, which helped shorten the war and save thousands of lives, has not been told until now. Many of us have watched the PBS television series *“The Bletchley Circle”* and know of the wartime code breaking efforts in England. Now thanks to our own Bob Poskitt, we will learn about such efforts in the United States, and a connection to our Society!

Two women quoted in the book are Elizabeth Reynard and her cousin, Virginia Gildersleeve, ladies very important in the founding of the Dennis Historical Society. Elizabeth was a retired Barnard College professor when she purchased the Captain Theophilus Baker House and Buildings at the corner of Main Street and Trotting Park Road in South Dennis in the 1950s. She named the house “Jericho” after the city in the Bible whose “walls were falling down.” Following her death in January 1962, the restoration of the house and grounds was continued by Virginia Gildersleeve, Dean Emeritus of Barnard, who then gifted the property to the Town of Dennis in 1962. The Town then completed that restoration work. This gift was instrumental in the formation of the Dennis Historical Society.



Wave Lieutenant Senior Grade, Elizabeth Reynard



Virginia Gildersleeve, Dean of Barnard College

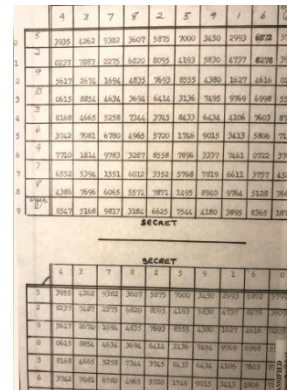
(Photos from the Dennis Historical Digital Archives)

Let's go back now to the early 1940s. Following the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the U.S. military decided to recruit educated young women with degrees from top colleges like Wellesley, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Goucher, Radcliffe, Barnard and Bryn Mawr to start the meticulous work of breaking the German and Japanese military codes. At the time, it was not easy to convince the all male, military bureaucracy that women could take on this difficult task. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was joined by advocacy groups, such as the American Association of University Women, with outspoken members like Virginia Gildersleeve, who is quoted as saying, "If the Navy could have possibly used dogs or ducks or monkeys, certain of the older admirals would probably have greatly preferred them to women." Gender equality was not a term even remotely understood, much less expressed at the time! In 1942, it was Elizabeth Reynard, who came up with the acronym WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Services) to describe the newly created Women's Naval Reserve, in which she was the first to be appointed a Lieutenant.

In 1942, only 4% of women in America had college degrees, and they were almost never seen in the male dominated workplace. With so many men in the military, however, the timing was right for women to jump at this opportunity to go to Washington and start new careers...even though they knew absolutely nothing about what they would be doing! These were women who were curious and resourceful. They wanted to earn a living on their own. Often, they excelled in foreign languages and math and were on the lookout for work that satisfied them intellectually. Many of them were dissatisfied school teachers and secretaries, most were quite brilliant!

With guidance from Virginia Gildersleeve, uniforms for these women were designed and introduced. They were smartly tailored and an instant success, as they conveyed to the skeptical public that the U.S. military really cared about its women. Some code breakers were quoted as saying, "the uniform and their independence" were among the top reasons they accepted these new positions. The work was very challenging! Often, it included 12 hour days. Working conditions were often hot, humid, and very crowded. Secrecy was of the highest priority, as any leaks, even to family members, might result in military deaths. Living conditions in Washington, DC were worse than the working conditions, very sparse. Several women often sharing a room and communal lavatories.

The first breakthrough came in cracking the code of the Japanese "Purple" machine, a truly unbelievable accomplishment that could only be duplicated decades later with the use of computers. Code breaking enabled our military to know the locations of enemy ships, their payloads, and travel routes. Breaking the codes the Germans transmitted on their Enigma machines led to General Eisenhower's decision to land US troops at Normandy instead of Calais, when D Day finally arrived. At the height, the code breaking women were deciphering over 126,000 enemy messages a month.



American Code Breakers at work during World War II.
(pictures provided by Bob Poskitt)

A Wonderful Final Note with a Local Connection!

Ann Barus Seeley was an outstanding, history major at Smith College in the early 1940s, when her dean asked her to attend a clandestine meeting in their science building. It was a recruiting meeting. Ann put her plans to be an intern at a prestigious firm in Washington on hold and jumped at the chance to be part of this new code breaking effort. Her job involved ceaseless, mental math, performed day after day, and week after week for more than three years. One of her mental gifts was the ability to detect common mistakes the enemy made in their coded messages. Identifying these mistakes was key in breaking the very complex Japanese codes.

Today, Ann is in her mid-nineties! She lives in a wonderful, early house on the Bass River in South Yarmouth and enjoys sailing, kayaking and giving tours of the Judah Baker Windmill close to her home on the river. Truly one of the unsung war heroes, Ann accepted the challenge to break the enemy codes. She takes her place along with Elizabeth Reynard, Virginia Gildersleeve, and other smart, courageous women, who greatly contributed to the war effort! They succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. When the war was finally over, these outstanding women quietly went back to their homes and lives, promising to keep their efforts secret. All of us today enjoy the freedoms of this wonderful country, because of these amazing women! The *Untold Story of the Code Girls* is factual and needs to be shared. To Ann, Elizabeth, Virginia and thousands of other women, we honor and remember you and your outstanding accomplishments! THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

Bob Poskitt

And thank you, Bob, for sharing the Cape Cod connection to this untold story of American history!

Editor's Note:

The email below was sent to the DHS on July 19, 2017

Mr. Talbott,

Attached is the panel in which we used the photograph of LT Elizabeth Reynard you graciously allowed the Naval War College Museum to use for our exhibit. Many active duty sailors will see this and learn about the origins of the WAVES 75 years ago, and we thank you for playing a part in that. The Dennis Historical Society has been credited as requested. Thank you for your help and have a wonderful day.

Walter Nicolds
Museum Specialist (History)
Naval War College Museum
686 Cushing Rd.
Newport, RI 02841

Implementing the W.A.V.E.S.

Congress implemented public law 689 as Title V to the Naval Reserve Act of 1938. The legislation enhanced the opportunities for women in the Navy significantly compared to the First World War. For example, the Navy allowed women to serve in both the enlisted and officer ranks. Initially, the Navy limited billets available to women to those located in the continental United States and on shore duty. These requirements were later altered to allow women to serve in United States territories overseas. However, while the women would receive the exact same pay as men holding the same rank, women were not entitled to pensions or health care benefits provided to their male counterparts.

The legislation allocated for women officer billets for one Lieutenant Commander, 35 lieutenants, 33% of the total women's officer allocation as lieutenant junior grades, and the remainder as ensigns. For the enlisted women, initial billets were in administrative and supply fields. As time went on the role of women in the Navy quickly grew eventually making 38 ratings available in everything from women to aviation mechanics.

The Navy created a distinguished council of women from academia to implement the legislation. Dr. Virginia C. Gildersleeve the dean of Barnard College and chairman of the Advisory Council of Women, suggested that Professor Elizabeth Reynard, also of Barnard College, be appointed as a special assistant to serve under the Chief of Naval Personnel, ADM Roswell Jacobs during the legislation. The first tasking for Prof. Reynard was to come up with a suitable name for the women serving in the Navy. After some consideration Reynard decided to come up with a nautical sounding name. After considering it an acronym, she came up with W.A.V.E.S. (Women Appointed for Voluntary Emergency Service). The word "Appointed" was quickly replaced with "accepted" since the only officers were appointed. She considered the two words that were designed to north the transitional title in the Navy. "Voluntary" and "Emergency". The word voluntary indicated that only women who volunteered to serve would join and were not drafted. The word Emergency conjured up the profound need for women to serve in billets and would not be permanent.

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IF Elizabeth Reynard visited an armed vessel to assist Roswell Jacobs, Chief of Naval Personnel and then served as Assistant Director of the W.A.V.E.S. under LCDR Mildred McAfee. Photo courtesy of the Dennis Historical Society.

The Advisory Council of Women selected Mildred R. McAfee, the president of Wellesley College, as the Director of the W.A.V.E.S. The Navy commissioned her at the top rank allowed for women at the time, Lieutenant Commander. LCDR McAfee was a strong advocate of women's education and role in society. She believed that women would be an indispensable asset to the Navy filling billets from recruiting duty to aircraft repair. With her staff of five W.A.V.E.S. officers, LCDR McAfee labored over the program that would recruit and train the women for service.

LCDR Mildred R. McAfee, Director of the W.A.V.E.S. (1942-1945). Photo courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command.

Joy Bright Hancock had served in the First World War as a Yeoman (Y). She had continued working on and off in the Bureau of Aeronautics (BuAer) since her time in service in World War I. Because she was over the thirty-five year age cutoff to enlist, Mr. Hancock decided to seek a commission despite her lack of a college degree and being thirty-five pounds under weight. Her colleagues at BuAer arranged for a private conference with LCDR McAfee and LT Reynard. LCDR McAfee decided not to let such a unique asset get away and issued an educational waiver for Mr. Hancock. The flight surgeon at BuAer worked around the weight issue and on 23 October 1942 Admiral John S. McCain, Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, signed Lieutenant Joy Bright Hancock into the W.A.V.E.S. Hancock was one of two World War I veterans to serve in the W.A.V.E.S., later joined by LT Dunlap White. LT Hancock served as the W.A.V.E.S. representative in the Bureau of Aeronautics and then as the representative for the Chief of Naval Operations. She would eventually take over as the Director of the W.A.V.E.S.

IF Joy Bright Hancock was a former Yeoman who was commissioned in getting the W.A.V.E.S. on board. She later served as the first Director of the W.A.V.E.S. Photo courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command.

The Navy did not consider that women would receive training at the established Navy schools with the men. Therefore, the W.A.V.E.S. issued college campuses, training stations. Companies that the needed living and coaching spaces required for Navy training. Enlisted W.A.V.E.S. trained at Hunter College's Bronx campus which the recruits called the "USS Hunter".

Hunter College has submitted to the base of President Franklin D. Roosevelt after he died Commander of the Naval Reserve Center.

Basic training was a six-week indoctrination into the Navy. Recruits learned Navy customs and traditions, history, drill and ceremonies, and physical readiness in the same way that men were indoctrinated. After basic training, W.A.V.E.S. were sent to specialized training schools such as the yeoman school at the Iowa State Teachers College and many others. To qualify for enlistment ladies had to be between the ages of 20 to 35, have a high school diploma and be U.S. citizens. About 78,000 women served in the enlisted ranks of the W.A.V.E.S. by the end of the war.

The first class of about 125 women were hand selected by LCDR McAfee and included LT Dorothy Strickton who later became the director of the J.P.A.A.S. (Jeepers Parades, Always Ready), the Coast Guard equivalent of the W.A.V.E.S. The women in the first class became the core administrators and instructors for the shipmastering of the W.A.V.E.S. Through the enlisted training of the W.A.V.E.S. roughly 100,000 officers completed officer training by the end of the war.

CAPT Mildred McAfee, Director of the Navy W.A.V.E.S. and CAPT Dorothy Strickton, Director of the Coast Guard J.P.A.A.S. Photo courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command.

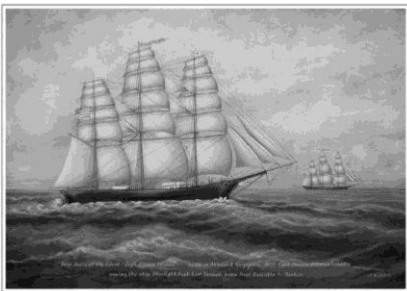
If you have a story to share, please email it to me, Dave Talbott, at:
info@dennishistoricalsociety.org

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South Dennis, MA 02660-0607

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02664

Coming in May to a Museum near you!

Hoisting the Sails



Dennis Sea Captains and the Ships They Sailed

EXHIBIT OPENING: MAY 19, NOON - 4PM
AT THE DENNIS MARITIME MUSEUM, WEST DENNIS
GRADED SCHOOL, 67 SCHOOL STREET, WEST DENNIS

Open thereafter Wednesdays & Fridays, 1-4pm, June 13 - September 21



This house and barn in East Dennis, "Photo 34-House," circa 1890, in the DHS Digital Archives, has no label. If anyone can identify it, or provide any information on it, please email me at info@dennishistoricalsociety.org. Helping to fill in the blanks for archive pictures will be a new, ongoing, newsletter feature.