

A HISTORY OF THE WOMEN MARINES, 1946-1977



HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

COVER: On 4 November 1948, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Clifton B. Cates administers the oath to the first three women to be sworn into the Regular Marine Corps. They are (left to right) LtCol Katherine A. Towle, Maj Julia E. Hamblet, and 1stLt Mary J. Hale.

A HISTORY OF THE WOMEN MARINES, 1946-1977

by

Colonel Mary V. StremLOW, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve



HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

1986

PCN 19000309400

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402

Foreword

Despite the acknowledged contribution made by the 20,000 women Reservists who served in the Marine Corps during World War II, there was no thought in 1946 of maintaining women on active duty or, for that matter, even in the Reserve forces. This volume recounts the events that brought about the change in thinking on the part of Marines, both men and women, that led to the integration of women into the Corps, to the point where they now constitute eight percent of our strength.

The project was the idea of Brigadier General Margaret A. Brewer, who, in 1975, as the last Director of Women Marines, noted that the phasing out of women-only organizations marked the start of a new era for women in the Corps, and the end of an old one. Further, she rightly reasoned that the increased assimilation of women would make the historical trail of women in Marine Corps difficult to follow.

The story is drawn from official reports, documents, personal interviews, and transcribed reminiscences collected by the author and preserved by the Oral History and Archives Sections of the History and Museums Division.

The pattern set during World War II of calling women Reservists "WRs" was followed after the passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in 1948 by referring to the women as "Women Marines," or more often as "WMs." In the mid-1970s there was a mood to erase all appearances of a separate organization for women in the Marine Corps and an effort was made to refer to the women simply as Marines. When it was necessary to distinguish between the sexes, the noun "woman" with a lower case "w" was used as an adjective. Thus, throughout the text the terms "WR" and "WM" are used only when dictated by the context.

The comment edition of this manuscript was read by many Marines, men and women, who were directly associated with the events. All but one of the former Directors of Women Marines contributed to the work and reviewed the manuscript draft. Unfortunately, Colonel Katherine A. Towle was too ill to participate.

The author, Colonel Mary V. StremLOW, now a retired Reservist, has a bachelor of science degree from New York State University College at Buffalo. She counts three other women Marines in her family—two aunts, Corporal Rose M. Nigro and Master Sergeant Petrina C. Nigro, who served as WRs in World War II, and her sister, retired Major Carol Vertalino Diliberto. Colonel StremLOW came to the History and Museums Division in 1976 with experience as a company commander; S-3; executive officer of Woman Recruit Training Battalion, Parris Island; inspector-instructor of Women Reserve Platoon, 2d Infantry Battalion, Boston; instructor at the Woman Officer School, Quantico; and woman officer selection officer for the 1st Marine Corps District.

In the interests of accuracy and objectivity, the History and Museums Division welcomes comments on this history from interested individuals.



E. H. SIMMONS
Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

Preface

A History of the Women Marines, 1946-1977 is almost entirely derived from raw files, interviews and conversations, newspaper articles, muster rolls and unit diaries, and materials loaned by Marines. There was no one large body of records available. In the course of the project, more than 300 letters were written to individuals, several mass mailings were made, and notices soliciting information were printed in all post and station newspapers, *Leatherneck*, *Marine Corps Gazette*, *Retired Marine*, and the newsletters of Marine Corps associations. More than 100 written responses were received and some women Marines generously loaned us personal papers and precious scrapbooks. Especially helpful in piecing together the events between World War II and the passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act were the scrapbooks of former Director of Women Marines Colonel Julia E. Hamblet, and former WR Dorothy M. Munroe. Taped interviews were conducted with 32 women, including former Director of the Women's Reserve Colonel Ruth Cheney Streeter.

Researching this history was a challenge. Women's units were extremely difficult to find. Only those labeled "Women Marine Company" were easily identified. At times, days were spent screening the muster rolls of all the companies of all the battalions on a base looking for one with personnel having feminine first names. More recent unit diaries were even less useful since they are not signed by commanding officers and initials are used rather than first names. To add to the problem, the Corps had no system that permits a researcher to find a married woman when only her maiden name is known, or vice versa.

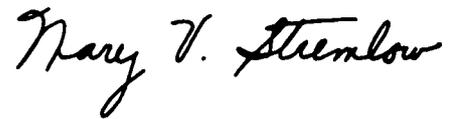
The author and the women Marines whose story is told in this monograph owe a special debt of gratitude to Master Sergeant Laura J. Dennis, USMCR, now retired, who from January to October 1977 voluntarily worked several days a week at the History and Museums Division, doing the painstaking research that resulted in the publication of much more material than would have been otherwise possible. Had it not been for her tenacity and dogged determination, easily 100 names, now documented for posterity, would not have made it to these pages. She tracked vague but important leads that the author, because of limited time allowed for the study, could not. Later, as a civilian volunteer, she shepherded the work through the comment edition stage and assisted in the search and final selection of photographs.

Master Sergeant Dennis also induced Colonel Agnes M. Kennedy, USMCR, to volunteer for the difficult task of indexing the manuscript. In the process, Colonel Kennedy further assisted in checking and verifying hundreds of names cited. Her own experience as a Marine officer enabled her also to make other valuable comments.

The manuscript was prepared under the editorial direction of Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., chief historian of the History and Museums Division. Teacher and mentor, he encouraged the author to take the step from merely parroting a string of facts to presenting interpretations as appeared justified. More than 100 Marines reviewed the draft edition and, thanks in large measure to Mr. Shaw's expert guidance, few took issue with the historical facts or the interpretations of those facts.

The author also received valuable assistance from Mrs. Catherine A. Kerns, of the division's Publications Production Section, who prepared the typeset version of the manuscript, offering numerous stylistic suggestions in the process, and who was particularly helpful in the rendering of captions

for photographs and in designing the tables which appear both within the text and in the appendices. Thanks also are due to Mr. W. Stephen Hill, the division's graphic artist, who is the book's designer, and who prepared all of the boards used in printing. His contribution has been to enhance the usefulness of the book by making its appearance especially attractive.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary V. StremLOW". The signature is written in a cursive style with a mix of uppercase and lowercase letters.

MARY V. STREMLow
Colonel, U. S. Marine Corps Reserve

Table of Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword	iii
Preface	v
Table of Contents	vii
Introduction	1
CHAPTER 1 A Time of Uncertainty, 1946-1948	3
A Time of Uncertainty	3
Postwar Women's Reserve Board	4
Termination of the Wartime MCWR	5
Retention of the WRs at HQMC	5
A New Director	6
The Volunteer Women's Reserve	7
4th Anniversary Celebration, 13 February 1947	7
The Women's VTUs	8
Plans for the Organized Reserve	11
Release of the WRs Delayed Again	11
Stenographers Recalled	13
CHAPTER 2 Women's Armed Forces Legislation: Public Law 625	15
Women's Armed Forces Legislation	15
Provisions of Public Law 625	18
CHAPTER 3 Going Regular	21
The Transfer Program	21
Establishing the Office and Title, Director of Women Marines	23
The First Enlisted Women Marines	24
The Pioneers	25
Reindoctrination of the Officers	25
Reindoctrination of Enlisted WMs	26
Designation of Women Marines	27
Recruit Training Established at Parris Island	27
The First Black Women Marines	31
Establishing the Women Officers' Training Class at Quantico	33
CHAPTER 4 The Korean War Years	39
Organized Reserve Gets Underway	39
Mission and Administration	39
The First Seven WR Platoons	40
Add Six More Platoons	42
Mobilization of Organized Reserve Units, Korea	44
Volunteer Reservists Answer the Call	46
Women Marines Return to Posts and Stations	46

Korean War Brings Changes to Recruit Training	53
A Few Changes at Officer Candidates School	53
The Korean Years, Reprise	54
CHAPTER 5 Utilization and Numbers, 1951-1963	57
Utilization of Women Marines, Evolution of a Policy	57
Report of Procedures Analysis Office, 1951	57
Women Officers' MOSs, 1948-1953	60
1950-1953 Summary	62
1954-1964	62
Numbers	62
Utilization, 1954-1964	62
Rank Does Not Have Its Privileges, Officers	63
Rank Does Not Have Its Privileges, Staff Noncommissioned Officers	65
Noncommissioned Officer Leadership School	65
A Woman in the Fleet Marine Force	68
1954-1964 Summary	68
CHAPTER 6 Utilization and Numbers: Pepper Board, 1964-1972	69
The Pepper Board	71
Women Marine Program Revitalized, 1965-1973	73
Strength Increases	73
Women Officers Specialist Training, 1965-1973	74
Women Lawyers and Judges, A Beginning	75
Professional Training	76
Amphibious Warfare School	76
Post-Graduate Schooling	76
Command and Staff College	76
The Armed Forces Staff College	77
Advanced Training and Assignment of Enlisted Woman Marines, 1965-1973 ...	77
New Woman Marine Units, Stateside	78
Marine Corps Supply Center, Barstow	78
Marine Corps Supply Center, Albany	79
Marine Corps Air Station, Kaneohe	79
Women Marines Overseas	79
Marine Corps Air Station, Iwakuni	80
Marine Corps Air Station, Futema, Okinawa	81
Marine Corps Base, Camp Butler, Okinawa	81
Women Marines in Vietnam	83
Women Marines in Marine Security Guard Battalion	87
Women Marines Overseas, Summary	87
CHAPTER 7 Utilization and Numbers: Snell Committee, 1973-1977	89
Strength, 1973-1977	90
New Occupational Fields	90
Military Police	91
Presiding Judges	92
Breaking the Tradition	93
Bandsmen	94
Women Marines in the Fleet Marine Force	95

Women in Command	98
1973-1977, Summary	100
CHAPTER 8 Reserves After Korea	101
Deactivation of the WR Platoons	104
Woman Special Enlistment Program	104
Strength	106
Women Reserve Officers	106
Formal Training for Women Reservists	106
CHAPTER 9 Recruit Training	109
Mission	109
The Training Program	109
Arrival at Parris Island	113
The Daily Routine	114
Recruit Regulations	116
Recruit Evaluation and Awards	120
WM Complex	123
Command Reorganized	124
CHAPTER 10 Officer Training	125
Location	125
Training Program	126
Traditions	127
Awards	129
1973-1977	129
Towards Total Integration	132
Second Platoon, Company C, BC 3-77	135
CHAPTER 11 Administration of Women	137
Supervision and Guidance of Women Marines	139
Barracks	141
Daily Routine	143
Discipline	144
CHAPTER 12 Promotions	145
Public Law 90-130	145
Enlisted Promotions	148
CHAPTER 13 Marriage, Motherhood, and Dependent Husbands	151
Marriage	151
Motherhood	151
Dependency Regulations	154
The Military Couple	155
Marine Wife, Civilian Husband	155
CHAPTER 14 Uniforms	157
The Beginnings of Change, 1950	159
The Mainbocher Wardrobe, 1950-1952	161

After Mainbocher	164
Grooming and Personal Appearance	167
Utilities	168
CHAPTER 15 Laurels and Traditions	169
Legion of Merit	169
Navy and Marine Corps Medal	169
Bronze Star Medal	172
Joint Service Commendation Medal	172
Dominican Republic	173
WM Anniversary	174
Women Marines and Mess Night	177
Molly Marine	177
Women Marines Association	180
CHAPTER 16 The Sergeants Major of Women Marines	181
Bertha L. Peters	182
Evelyn E. Albert	182
Ouida W. Craddock	184
Mabel A. R. Otten	184
June V. Andler	185
Grace A. Carle	186
CHAPTER 17 The Directors of Women Marines	187
Katherine A. Towle	187
Julia E. Hamblet	189
Margaret M. Henderson	190
Barbara J. Bishop	191
Jeanette I. Sustad	192
Margaret A. Brewer	193
The Position	194
Notes	197
Appendices	207
A. Women Marines Strength, 1948-1977	207
B. Occupational Fields for Women Officers	209
C. Occupational Fields for Enlisted Women	211
D. Women Marine Units, 1946-1977	213
E. Women Marines Who Served in Vietnam, 1967-1973	225
F. Enlisted Women Marines Retained After World War II Who Served Until Retirement	227
Index	229

Introduction

“The opinion generally held by the Marine Corps is that women have no proper place or function in the regular service in peace-time. This opinion is concurred in by the Director of Marine Corps Women’s Reserve, and a majority of the Women Reserves.”¹ In these words, Brigadier General Gerald C. Thomas, Director, Division of Plans and Policies in October 1945, stated the basic Marine Corps case against women on active duty. He elaborated his stand with the contention, “The American tradition is that a woman’s place is in the home . . .” and, “Women do not take kindly to military regimentation. During the war they have accepted the regulations imposed on them, but hereafter the problem of enforcing discipline alone would be a headache.”²

The controversy over what to do with the women had been going on for months before the hostilities of World War II ended. It was a problem—an emotional one at that—which had to be faced. It was agreed that the Women Reserves (WRs) had successfully met the challenge of military service. At the close of the war, working in 225 specialties in 16 out of 21 functional fields, WRs constituted 85 percent of the enlisted personnel at Headquarters Marine Corps and one-half to two-thirds of the permanent personnel at all large Marine Corps posts and stations.³ It was generally acknowledged that it had been necessary to activate a women’s unit for wartime duty; it was safe to assume that women would be called upon in any future, major emergency; most Marines, however, men and women, displayed a marked lack of enthusiasm toward the prospect of women in the postwar Marine Corps. The men were understandably reluctant to admit women permanently into one of the few remaining male-dominated societies, and the senior women officers were concerned about the type of women who would volunteer. Colonel Ruth C. Streeter, wartime Director of the Marine Corps Women Reserves (MCWR), believed that there was a difference in the women who enlisted for purely patriotic reasons due to the war, and those who enlisted after the G.I. Bill was passed—those who joined for what they could get for themselves.⁴

The pressure to give peacetime military status to women came from the other services, most notably the Navy. In the summer of 1945, the Secretary of the Navy, James V. Forrestal, made the statement, “The Navy favors retention, at least in cadre strength, of the WAVES, as well as SPARS and the Marine Auxiliary.”*

Hoping to keep the Marine Corps out of any grand-scale plan for maintaining a women’s corps in peacetime, Colonel Streeter developed a plan for an inactive Women’s Reserve to be administered by no more than 10 women officers on active duty. On the accompanying routing sheet, she pencilled:

These comments are submitted at this time because there is considerable agitation in the Navy in favor of keeping WAVES on *active* duty in peacetime. It comes mostly from BuAir, Communications, and Hospital Corps. The WAVES themselves are much opposed to the plan.⁵

Colonel Streeter, tempered by her experience in building a wartime women’s organization from nothing, took a very practical approach to the matter. She recognized that in planning a Reserve of women, wastage was going to occur because many of the women trained for military service would marry and have children, but this was a loss which would have to be accepted if women were truly needed. Indeed, if war threatened, even mothers could give a few months’ active service for recruiting and training programs until enough new women Marines were ready to carry on.

By December 1945, General Thomas’ division had developed a detailed plan for training a postwar, inactive, Volunteer MCWR (VMCWR) of 500 officers

*In 1943, when women joined the Marine Corps, the Director of Reserve, Colonel Littleton W. T. Waller, wrote to Representative Louis L. Ludlow of Indiana: “. . . these women will not be auxiliary, but members of the Marine Corps Reserve which is an integral part of the Corps and as . . . they will be performing many duties of Marines it was felt they should be so known.” Col Littleton W. T. Waller, Jr., ltr to Hon. Louis L. Ludlow, dtd 8Feb43. (File 1535-55-10, Female Enrollment Marine Corps Reserve No. 1, Central Files, HQMC). Thus, the term *auxiliary* used by the secretary was incorrect.

and 4,500 enlisted women, that would provide a nucleus of ready WRs capable of being expanded rapidly into a war-strength organization. In the introduction to this plan it was bluntly stated, "The ar-

guments against retention . . . preclude any further discussion in favor of women being kept on active duty."⁶ In the eyes of the leading Marines, the case was closed.

CHAPTER 1

A Time of Uncertainty, 1946-1948

*A Time of Uncertainty—Postwar Women's Reserve Board—Termination of the Wartime MCWR
Retention of the WRs at HQMC—A New Director—The Volunteer Women's Reserve
4th Anniversary Celebration, 13 February 1947—The Women's VTUs—Plans for the Organized Reserve
Release of the WRs Delayed Again—Stenographers Recalled*

A Time of Uncertainty

At the end of the war in August 1945, the strength of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve was approximately 17,640 enlisted women and 820 officers. Demobilization procedures for women called for the mandatory resignation or discharge of all WRs, officers and enlisted. Demobilization was to be completed by 1 September 1946.

Colonel Streeter, who felt strongly that no woman should remain after she was no longer needed, asked to be released. She resigned on 6 December 1945 and, the following day, her assistant, Lieutenant Colonel Katherine A. Towle was appointed the second Director of the wartime Marine Corps Women's Reserve and promoted to the rank of colonel. To Colonel Towle fell the dual responsibility of overseeing the demobilization of the women and planning for a postwar women's organization.

In the spring of 1946 there was a steady flow of correspondence between the Chief of Naval Personnel, Vice Admiral Louis E. Denfeld, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), General Alexander A. Vandegrift. The Navy was making plans for a WAVE organization with 1,500 officers and 10,000 enlisted women on active duty. The Army had already publicly announced its plan to give Regular status to the WACs.¹ The Commandant, however, stood firm. The only women Marines on active duty during peacetime would be "Director, VMCWR; OIC [Officer in Charge], Personnel; OIC, Planning and Training; OIC, Recruiting; six officers, one officer assigned to each Recruiting Division."²

Recognizing that some sort of women's military organization was inevitable, and because legislation authorizing a women's inactive Reserve was pending, the Marine Corps no longer required WR officers to resign. Those still on active duty were allowed to request assignment to inactive status, and those already separated were sent a letter asking them to reenlist in the Reserve and reminding them of the privileges and responsibilities of belonging to the Marine Corps Reserve. Upon request, they could be reappointed to the permanent rank held upon resignation.³

Former colonel Mrs. Streeter was one of the women who applied for a Reserve commission, but her request was denied because of a legal restriction that precluded the appointment of more than one woman colonel in the Reserve. In fact, Mrs. Streeter, who saw the wartime Women's Reserve through all of its growing pains and its initial demobilization, had voluntarily given up terminal leave in order that her successor (then Lieutenant Colonel Towle) might immediately have the rank of colonel. The Commandant told Mrs. Streeter that he would recommend her to the Secretary of the Navy for reappointment in her rightful rank in the inactive Reserve, but the Navy Judge Advocate General held that there could be no exception. He later reversed his decision and Mildred H. McAfee Horton, the WAVE Director, was given Reserve status as a captain.*

Colonel Joseph W. Knighton, legal aide to the Commandant, advised General Vandegrift on 13 March 1946 of the Army's and the Navy's plans to keep women on active duty. They even allowed for women in their budgets—something that the Marine Corps was not to consider until after passage of the women's armed forces legislation in 1948. It was apparent that Admiral Denfeld was giving more than lip service to the support of women since he had instructed the Na-

*Subsequently, efforts were made by Colonel Towle, and two Commandants, General Vandegrift and General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., to straighten out the matter. It was not until 1959, however, through the persistence of Colonel Julia E. Hamblet, that this situation was satisfactorily resolved. In a letter to the Chairman, Board for Corrections of Naval Records, the then Commandant, General Randolph McC. Pate, wrote: "Correction of Mrs. Streeter's records would erase an apparent inequity and allow her to be affiliated with the Marine Corps Women's Reserve which she was so instrumental in establishing. This correction would afford the Commandant of the Marine Corps great satisfaction." (CMC ltr to Chairman, Bd for Corr of NavRecords, dtd 31Mar59 [*Postwar MCWR I File*]). He also wrote to Mrs. Streeter and said, "In view of your outstanding contribution to the Corps, I sincerely hope you will not deprive me of the opportunity of recommissioning you as a Colonel in the Marine Corps Reserve." (Gen Randolph McC. Pate ltr to Mrs. Ruth C. Streeter, dtd 25Feb59 [*Postwar MCWR I file*]). And so, on 25 June 1959, Ruth Cheney Streeter was reappointed a colonel in the Marine Corps Reserve and retired.

vy's judge advocate general to prepare a bill which would enable the Navy to have women in its Regular component. Colonel Knighton put two questions to the Commandant:

(1) Does the Marine Corps want women in its regular peacetime establishment? (2) If the answer is negative, can the Marine Corps justify this stance if the Army and the Navy have come to the conclusion that women should be included in their permanent establishment?⁴

In response, the Plans and Policy Division recommended that the Marine Corps be excluded from the provisions of Denfeld's proposed legislation to provide Regular status for women because ". . . the number of billets which could be filled to advantage by women in the postwar Marine Corps is so limited that the increased administrative overhead could not be justified." Although the Commandant approved this recommendation on 18 March, that was not the end of it.

Postwar Women's Reserve Board

Acting on a suggestion from Colonel Towle, on 28 March 1946, General Vandegrift appointed Colonel Randolph McC. Pate, Director, Division of Reserve, senior member of a board to recommend policies for administration of women in the Marine Corps postwar Reserve structure. The board convened at Headquarters, Marine Corps (HQMC) on 1 April and consisted of Colonel Pate, Colonel Richard C. Mangrum, Colonel Katherine A. Towle, and Major Ernest L. Medford, Jr., with Major Cornelia D. T. Williams and Major Marion Wing as additional members, and Captain Sarah M. Vardy as member and recorder.⁵

The report of this board, which was approved by the Commandant on 7 June, called for women to be included in both the Volunteer and Organized components of the Reserve. Enlisted women would be trained at unit meetings in home armories. Officers would train at an annual summer officer candidate school to be established at Quantico and then return home to participate in a Reserve unit. A total of 45 officers and 32 enlisted women—all Reservists—would be assigned to continuous active duty to administer the program. It was spelled out that no woman would be allowed to remain on active duty longer than four years, and summer training was not considered necessary even for the organized Reservists. At the time of the study, only the volunteer, inactive status was legally possible and many of the 40 recommendations were based upon the premise that legislation would

be passed authorizing inclusion of woman in the Organized Reserve. Finally, the board recommended that a qualified woman Reservist of field grade be selected as soon as possible for the position of director and that she be appointed to the rank of colonel.⁷

Concurrence with the creation of a permanent women's Reserve was unanimous. The staff comments, for the most part, dealt with minor administrative details. Colonel Knighton, however, spotted the weakness which would eventually alter the opinions of the leading women officers. He recognized that the four-year active duty limit was impractical, and he stated:

. . . where can you find a woman, unless she happens to be unemployed and hunting for a job, who would agree to serve on active duty for a short period? In peacetime housewives will not volunteer, socialites will not be interested, and a woman who has to work for a living, unless she is temporarily looking for employment, will certainly not sign up for a few years of active duty in the Women's Reserve.⁸

Long before the board report was officially approved, Colonel Towle outlined its main points in a statement she prepared for the Joint Army-Navy Personnel Board on 17 April, and for the 9 May House Naval Affairs Committee Hearings on H. R. Bill 5919, "To amend the Naval Reserve Act of 1938, as amended so as to establish the Women's Reserve on a permanent basis"*

By the time the bill was reported out of committee on 21 May, it had undergone some major changes. The next day, Admiral Denfeld wrote to Representative Margaret Chase Smith of Maine giving his views of what the legislation should embody. Due mainly to her efforts, the subsequent draft read:

All laws or parts of laws which authorize the appointment of persons to commissioned grades or ranks in the Regular Navy and Regular Marine Corps and which authorize the enlistment of persons in the Regular Navy and Regular Marine Corps should be construed to include the authority to appoint and enlist women in the Regular Navy and Regular Marine Corps in the same manner and under the same conditions as such laws or parts of laws apply to the appointment and enlistment of men.⁹

Now, like it or not, the Marine Corps was included. In the words of Victor Hugo, "No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come."¹⁰

*See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of the Women's Armed Forces Integration Act of 1948 (P.L. 625).



Marine Corps Commandant Gen. A. A. Vandegrift (center) is shown with Col. Katherine A. Towle (right) and Col. Ruth C. Streeter (left) in December 1945. Col. Towle has just succeeded Col. Streeter as the post-war Director, Marine Corps Women's Reserve.

Termination of the Wartime MCWR

The office of the wartime MCWR was closed on 15 June 1946 when Colonel Towle began her terminal leave. Before leaving the Marine Corps to return to the University of California's Berkeley campus as administrative assistant to the vice president and provost, Colonel Towle proposed the name of Major Julia E. Hamblet to be director of the women's postwar organization. She wrote:

It is believed that Major Hamblet has all the attributes and qualifications desirable in a director of a postwar MCWR. She is a college graduate, about 30 years of age (which is considered a great advantage in appealing to volunteers among younger women, especially those of college age), of fine appearance, with a great deal of natural dignity and poise, and has an outstanding service record and reputation. She has had experience in both line and aviation assignments and has served in the present MCWR since her commissioning in the First Officers' Class in May 1943.¹¹

The recommendation of Major Hamblet to head up the postwar MCWR was acknowledged and held in abeyance.

Turning to another matter, Colonel Towle suggested that her assistant, Captain Mary V. Illich, continue duty in the Personnel Department to take care of the work incident to the termination of the office of the director. Captain Illich and one private first class were assigned the task of tying up the administrative details of the wartime Women's Reserve and were expected to finish by 15 July 1946.

Retention of the WRs at HQMC

It is ironic that only two months earlier, on 14 June, in a report on the state of the MCWR to the Director of Personnel, Colonel Towle wrote:

General morale during demobilization has been gratifyingly high. Part of this had been due to the definite stand

the Marine Corps itself had taken from the beginning on MCWR demobilization, particularly in setting and maintaining 1 September as the terminal date of the wartime Women's Reserve. It had been a goal to work toward, and Marine Corps women have never had the uncertainty and confusion concerning demobilization which have occurred in some of the other women's services because of the shifting of date and changes in policy.¹²

Most of the WRs still on active duty in the summer of 1946 were working at Headquarters on the administrative job of demobilization of the wartime Marine Corps. In spite of the general feeling against retention of women in the Marine Corps, individual work supervisors were anxious to keep their women on the job. As the September deadline for the release of all WRs neared, case after case of exception was requested. Few were granted, but this activity not only kept Captain Illich on the job, but also on 30 August gave her an assistant, First Lieutenant Mary Janice Hale.*

This appointment followed a major change in policy announced on 7 August 1946 when the Commandant authorized the retention on active duty at HQMC, on a voluntary basis, of 100 WRs for a period of eight months. These women, clerk typists, payroll clerks, and auditors, were to be assigned to a new division of the Personnel Department established to administer the Armed Forces Leave Act of 1946. One officer would be retained to command a company to be activated on 1 September, all of whose members would live off post and be placed on subsistence and quarters allowances. The last of the WR barracks was finally closed. As an inducement to apply, privates first class who were accepted would be automatically promoted to corporal.¹³

The next day, 8 August, the Commandant authorized the retention of 200 additional WRs until 30 June 1947. It was specified that these women "... must have clerical, stenographic or other specific ability (no cooks, truck drivers, hairdressers, etc., unless they have a secondary clerical specification)."¹⁴

Company E, 1st Headquarters Battalion, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, commanded by First Lieutenant Regina M. Durant, was activated on 19 August 1946 with a strength of 12 officers and 286 enlisted women, with Master Sergeant Geraldine M. Moran as first sergeant.

*Lieutenant Colonel Hale, who retired in March 1964, is the only woman officer to have served on continuous active duty from World War II until the completion of a 20-year career.

A New Director

Major Julia E. Hamblet had served as assistant for the Women's Reserve from December 1945 until she was released from active duty in April 1946. She had never considered the military as a career and was very much in favor of the Marine Corps plan for women in organized and volunteer Reserve units.

While in England visiting her family, Major Hamblet, as other Marine veterans, received numerous letters from Headquarters Marine Corps. The familiar brown envelopes contained words of thanks and appreciation for wartime service, advice regarding veteran's benefits, a request to keep in contact with the Reserve District commander, and information regarding the planning for the postwar Reserve.

In mid-June 1946, rushing to an appointment from her brother's London home, she found yet another message from Headquarters. In a hurry, she put it in her purse and promptly forgot it. Nearly a week later, while at a party, she remembered the letter and opened it to find that it was not the routine form letter she had come to expect. Instead it was a personal letter to her from the Commandant, General Vandegrift.

In the letter he explained the plan to establish women as part of the Organized Reserve and to maintain on active duty a limited number of women Reservists to administer the program. He stated:

Because of your record and experience in the present Marine Corps Women's Reserve, you have been selected to fill the position of Director of the postwar Women's Reserve, and it is hoped that you will be interested in accepting this appointment. If you do accept, it is desired that you be available for duty at Headquarters Marine Corps not later than 1 September 1946. You will understand, of course, that the continuance of a postwar Women's Reserve and the position of Director are contingent upon the enactment of enabling legislation by the Congress which is currently giving it consideration.

A prompt reply will be appreciated.¹⁵

Had she not immediately thereafter received letters from both Colonels Streeter and Towle expressing their pleasure at her selection and their concern for the future of the MCWR, Major Hamblet's first inclination would have been to refuse the appointment. Rather, on 25 June, she wrote to the Commandant and accepted.

Due to the difficulty in obtaining transportation from England at the time, she asked to be activated there, so that she could travel on military orders.¹⁶ Existing laws did not permit members of the MCWR to

be on active duty anywhere outside the United States except Hawaii. Therefore, she was informed that she could not be assigned to duty until her return.¹⁷ Major Hamblet reported to the Division of Reserve, Headquarters Marine Corps on 6 September 1946, and became the Director, MCWR.

At this time two distinct women Marine programs existed with the sex of their members as the only common denominator. At Headquarters, the several hundred retained wartime WRs continued to work on administrative matters unrelated to the MCWR. These women were under the cognizance of Captain Illich in the Personnel Division. Then there was Major Hamblet in the Division of Reserve concerned with initiating detailed planning for a postwar, inactive Reserve. Inevitably, some confusion arose. In a study dated 8 October, Major Hamblet wrote:

The relationship of the undersigned to the 286 enlisted women and 5 officers retained on active duty after 1 September 1946 for assignment other than MCWR postwar planning is not at present clear. It would seem evident, however, that the powers assigned to the Director, MCWR, should be exercised in relation to all women reservists, on whatever basis they may be serving.¹⁸

Clarification was soon made, in no uncertain terms, in a Headquarters Memorandum of 16 October 1946 which stated the policy for the administration of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve. The wording was precise and unequivocal, and it was the foundation of a policy that was to last for more than 25 years. The Commandant directed:

That all matters of policy and procedure pertaining to the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, which are initiated by any department or division of Headquarters Marine Corps, be referred to the Director, MCWR, for comment and recommendation. In regard to matters of policy, such reference shall be made prior to submission to the Commandant of the Marine Corps for approval; in matters of procedure, such reference shall be made prior to execution.¹⁹

The Volunteer Women's Reserve

With a staff of two women, First Lieutenant Mary J. Hale and Technical Sergeant Dolores M. Adam, Major Hamblet began her work. She faced the task totally committed to the urgency of obtaining as soon as possible the nucleus of a postwar women's Reserve. Her visit to England and France during the summer convinced her that the world situation was still unsettled and that greater utilization of womanpower in the U.S. military would be required in the event of another war. As a member of the first officer training class in

the wartime MCWR, she saw the difficulties of building up such an organization after an emergency had already occurred. In 1943, the Marine Corps had been forced to rely on civilian facilities and Navy personnel to get its women's program started. Worse, male Marines, needed for combat, were used instead to train women.

Major Hamblet recognized that the unclear status of the women's legislation in 1946 jeopardized the success of a women's Reserve. The long and uncertain delay allowed former women Reservists to become absorbed in their civilian interests and lessened the chance of their enlisting in a future Reserve.

She questioned the necessity of waiting until the legislation was actually passed before taking positive action. There was reasonable doubt about the legality of an Organized Reserve but she believed that no such obstacle blocked the creation of a Volunteer Reserve. Indeed, the WAVES were, at that time, reenlisting women for full-time active duty in the Volunteer Reserve.

Pending the enactment of permissive legislation, Major Hamblet urged immediate enlistment of as many former members of the MCWR as possible in a volunteer status since, she reasoned:

These women already have had indoctrination and training; and those among them who do desire could later transfer to an "Organized Reserve," if one were activated. Meanwhile, they would at least constitute a roster of trained personnel, available for active duty if the need arose.²⁰

A step in this direction was taken on 23 December with the publication of Marine Corps Letter of Instruction 1391, authorizing the enlistment of former women Reservists in the Marine Corps Reserve. This was part of a purposeful effort to maintain contact with the women who had served so well in World War II. The intention was to keep the women interested and predisposed to join a volunteer or organized unit when legally possible. Furthermore, it supplied the Corps with a pool of ready, trained volunteers. The first enlistment contract received was that of Staff Sergeant Elizabeth Janet Steele, who, a few months later, activated and commanded Volunteer Training Unit 3-1(WR), New York, New York.²¹

4th Anniversary Celebration, 13 February 1947

Keeping in touch with former WRs became a task of giant proportions for the three women—Major Hamblet, Lieutenant Hale, and Sergeant Adam. They drew the cases of nearly all the 18,000 World War II

women Reservists and personally reviewed each one in order to compile an up-to-date roster with current addresses. Ostensibly, this list was to be used in determining the geographic areas best suited for future Organized Reserve units, but it was put to a more immediate use in planning a celebration in honor of the fourth anniversary of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve.²²

Selected officers in 25 cities were asked to accept chairmanship of these birthday parties and were provided with the names of officers and capable NCOs in their area. They were told:

In order to afford continuity to the MCWR it is important that we have anniversary parties all over the country this year and bring together again as many as possible of the former WR's, both officers and enlisted personnel. . . . Because there has been such a delay in getting the postwar program underway, it is just that much more important that we do a bang-up job on February 13th. . . . It is realized what an undertaking this will be, but the dividends in the form of the goodwill of former WR's (which we are most anxious to have!) will be tremendous.²³

Since no funds were provided, many of these officers and NCOs used their own money for stationery and postage in order to contact the veterans.

Birthday greetings were sent to individual women Reservists reminding them that this was the time to recall friendship and experiences. "Get out the uniform—dust off the moth balls, let out the seams, roll up the hair and gather round to rehash the Marine Corps days," they were told.²⁴

More than 2,500 WRs attended the parties in 22 cities and at the Marine Corps Air Station at Cherry Point, North Carolina. San Francisco, where 395 women gathered under the chairmanship of First Lieutenant Pearl Martin to hear the guest speaker, Colonel Towle, was the site of the largest celebration. Another coup was scored by Captain Mildred Dupont and the New York WRs when former Colonel Streeter agreed to be the honored guest and to help cut the traditional birthday cake.

The Marine Corps Women's Reserve Post 907, American Legion, in Chicago sponsored a grand event in the Gold Room of the Congress Hotel. The committee was headed by First Lieutenant Dorothy R. Dietz. Captain Emma H. Hendrickson (later Clowers), who was to become one of the first 20 Regular women Marine officers in November 1948, read congratulatory messages from Headquarters and spoke to the group of the plans to utilize women in the Reserves.

The Washington, D.C. area celebration was unique in that it was attended by former WRs, inactive women Reservists, and numbers of women still on active duty.

The fourth anniversary parties accomplished their mission. In addition to being occasions of much fun and recall, they provided Headquarters with a roster of former WRs who were still interested in the Marine Corps and a nucleus of officers and NCOs who were able organizers.

The Women's VTUs

Authorization for the formation of volunteer training units (VTUs) came on 9 January 1947 in Letter of Instruction 1397. The objective of this program was to develop a ". . . pool of efficient general duty, staff and specialist personnel which, on call, can fill needs for individuals or groups in an emergency."²⁵ In order to form a VTU, a group of 10 Reservists, commissioned or enlisted, male or female, was required. Women could, of course, join a unit already established by men.

The appeal was made almost entirely to patriotism and *esprit de corps*. The Marine Corps Reserve recruiting material offered membership, tradition, and prestige of the Corps, credit toward promotion in rank, social and athletic activities, a lapel pin, and an I.D. card. Attendance and participation were voluntary and members could not be called to active duty without their consent except in the event of war or national emergency. Reservists would retain the rank held on discharge, and only male members would be eligible for periods of active duty.²⁶

There was considerable latitude allowed in planning a VTU training schedule. Units could specialize in one field, such as intelligence, communications, photography, etc., or follow a more general pattern. A general unit might emphasize lectures on current world problems, and a women's unit might spend all its time giving clerical assistance to the male Marine Reservists.

Seattle has the distinction of being the home of the first women's Volunteer Training Unit—VTU 13-12(WR)—established in January 1947 and commanded by Captain Nancy M. Roberts.

In November 1947, Maj Julia E. Hamblet (right) congratulates Capt Constance Risehari-Gai (left), commander of Volunteer Training Unit 1-1, Boston, Massachusetts during ceremonies to present awards earned by Women Reservists during World War II.



From the 1st Marine Corps Reserve District Headquarters, then located in Boston, Captain Constance Risegari-Gai, commanding officer of VTU 1-1(WR), wrote:

Dear Ex-Marine,

Do you want to remain an ex-Marine — or would you like to drop the “ex”, remove the “homing pigeon”, “ruptured duck” or whatever you call it from your uniform, and again be able to write USMCR after your name?

Yes, the Corps wants you back, right now, in the Volunteer Reserve, although later you may have an opportunity to go into the Organized Reserve.²⁷

Boston chose Marine Corps administration as its specialty, scheduled regular lectures, and got “field practice” by assisting the 2d Infantry Battalion, USMCR, with its paperwork. The Boston WRs met every Wednesday night on the fourth deck of the Navy Building-Marine Corps Reserve Armory (formerly the Fargo Building) to type enlistment papers, medical records, and routine correspondence.

Elements of that unit gave similar help on Saturday and Sunday mornings to the three Marine aviation squadrons at nearby Squantum. And, on Tuesday, others went south to Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot to lend a hand to Company B, 2d Infantry Battalion. Frequently, the women were called on for recruiting and public relations activities as well. Lack of work was never a problem.

In the notice for the week of 12 November 1947, Captain Risegari-Gai added, “Major Julia Hamblet expressed much pleasure and satisfaction with the work of VTU 1-1. She stated that we have the largest actually working unit (there is a larger unit in New York which meets for training lectures once a month).”²⁸

The WRs of New York would, no doubt, have taken exception to the captain’s assessment of their unit. VTU 3-1(WR), activated in February 1947, and commanded by Staff Sergeant Steele was not only the largest women’s volunteer training unit, with a strength at one time of 100 members, but it was the only all enlisted women’s VTU and it remained active until 20 August 1957—a little more than 10 years.²⁹ By 1954, it had logged in a record of over 7,000 voluntary unpaid hours of service to the Marine Corps, doing clerical, recruiting, and typing duty for many Marine Reserve units including Marine Fighter Squadron 132, the 1st Infantry Battalion, the 19th Infantry Battalion, and the 14th Signal Company.³⁰

Among its early members were Helen A. Brusack, who eventually integrated into the Regular Marine Corps and remained until her retirement as a gun-

nery sergeant in May 1972; Agnes Hirshinger, who commanded the unit from July 1949 until its deactivation; Dorothy T. Hunt (later Stephenson), who integrated and was a member of the staff that established women’s recruit training at Parris Island in 1949; Pearl Jackson, the first enlisted woman accepted for officer candidate training after the integration of women into the Regular Marine Corps; and Alice McIntyre, who later integrated, became a warrant officer, and served 20 years.³¹

Second Lieutenant Julia M. Hornsby activated the Baltimore VTU(WR). Members of the Woman Marine Organized Reserve platoons of the post-Korea era remembered her as the Reserve liaison officer at Parris Island who was vitally involved with their summer training period.

First Lieutenant Kathryn E. Snyder established VTU 12-4 (WR) at San Francisco on 10 February 1948. The next year, serving on continuous active duty, she became the first inspector-instructor (I&I) of the women’s Reserve platoon in that city and eventually the I&I of the post-Korea Women Reserve Administration Platoon in Detroit.

In Philadelphia, Captain Dorothy M. Knox commanded VTU 4-4 (WR), activated in September 1947. When the Organized Reserve finally became available to women in 1949, Captain Knox and her entire VTU became the nucleus of Philadelphia’s WR platoon. They had already lost one member to the Regulars—Captain Elsie Eleanor Hill. In time, Dorothy Knox integrated, served with the major women’s commands—to include assignments as commanding officer of the Woman Marine Detachment at Quantico and later of the Woman Recruit Training Battalion at Parris Island—and retired as a colonel in 1970.

San Diego’s Volunteer Training Unit, VTU 11-2 (WR) was activated on 26 February 1948 with First Lieutenant Ben Alice Day as commanding officer. Lieutenant Day, among the first 20 Regular women officers, later reverted to the Reserve when, as a major, she married Brigadier General John C. Munn (later Lieutenant General Munn, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps). The Munns retired in 1964 in the first husband-wife, Regular-Reserve retirement ceremony in Corps history.³²

In 1977, Lieutenant Colonel Ben Alice Munn recalled:

... with respect to the interest Colonel W. R. Collins (later Major General, USMC; now retired) had in the group. As the Inspector-Instructor of the Reserve unit in San Diego, he gave most generously of his time and energy to help

set up a program, and to keep the meetings interesting. This was very difficult as the question of what to do with Women Reserves, besides sitting them in front of typewriters, was an unanswered question. There was no training program or syllabus. (The question remained for a good 20 years or more! The Marine Corps had bowed under wartime pressure that historic February 1943, and it was my impression that the Corps was glad, or relieved, to see the last of us go off to inactive duty or to civilian life!)

Perhaps Colonel Collins was ahead of his time for I will remember one lecture he gave to VTU 11-2 (WR) in which he described a trip he made to Russia immediately after hostilities ceased. He gave a vivid description of his observation of Russian women being used in every military job, from sweeping snow off runways to driving tanks.³³

Women's VTUs were also formed in Indianapolis, Indiana; St. Louis, Missouri; Los Angeles, California; Oakland, California; Chicago, Illinois; Rochester, New York; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Kansas City, Missouri; Portland, Oregon; New Orleans, Louisiana; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Atlanta, Georgia; and Washington, D.C. The WR volunteer training units were a source of great pride to the Marine Corps. Between March and December 1947, women Reservists worked a total of 5,000 hours of voluntary service.

The immeasurable importance of these units lies primarily in their effectiveness in keeping hundreds of WRs interested in their Marine Corps affiliation during the two years it took to pass legislation allowing Regular and Organized Reserve status for women. Many of the units later transferred 100 percent to the Organized Reserve. Individuals integrated into the Regular Marine Corps when it became possible in late 1948 and early 1949. Others, mobilized for Korea, remained to complete a 20-year career.

Plans for the Organized Reserve

Planning for the Organized Reserve, which was to be the heart of the peacetime women's program, continued based on the expected passage of enabling legislation. The Marine Corps was deeply committed to this concept and Major Hamblet and her staff worked out the details while at the same time they tried to maintain the interest of former women Reservists. At one time there was talk of 30 women's companies throughout the country. But, by 1947 this figure was reduced to 15 companies at 10 officers and 235 enlisted women each, for a total of 150 officers and 3,525 enlisted women.³⁴ Reserve companies were planned for those cities with the greatest concentration of women Reservists and where interest was the most obvious.

During the year and a half before the law was finally passed, it was the intention of the Marine Corps to activate a Women's Reserve company in each of the following cities: Atlanta, Georgia; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Dallas, Texas; Detroit, Michigan; Indianapolis, Indiana; Los Angeles, California; New Orleans, Louisiana; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; San Francisco, California; Seattle, Washington; St. Louis, Missouri; Toledo, Ohio; and Washington, D.C.

The legislative delay was frustrating and costly. In spite of efforts to keep the women interested, they drifted away and company-size units never materialized.*

Release of the WRs Delayed Again

In February 1947, the first hashmark, the official insignia of a full four years of active duty and the traditional mark of a "salty" Marine, appeared on the uniform of Technical Sergeant Mary F. Wancheck.³⁵ Others would soon sew them on. Just as the women were settling in and beginning to feel quite at home, the plan for their release was again under discussion.

The Assistant Commandant and Chief of Staff, Major General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., seemed reluctant and on 17 April 1947, he sent a short memorandum to General Thomas: "Now that the time has come to discharge our WRs do you still want to go through with it? We will lose many good clerks, a number of whom are processing claims, etc."³⁶ The predictable response was, "I feel that we must carry out these discharges. Only 23 of these WR's are working on claims."³⁷

Careful coordination between work sections and the separation center was necessary to facilitate an orderly demobilization. The women were to be transferred to Quantico in groups of 20 per working day during the period from 13 June to 30 June in order to meet the deadline. Because the medical and administrative processing would take several days, it could not be done at Henderson Hall where WR barracks were no longer available. Work sections were assigned quotas of women to be released on a regular schedule to avoid a last-minute overload.

Hardly had the details been arranged when on 22 April, Colonel John Halla, Acting Chief of the Disbursing Branch, asked to keep 28 women Reservists

*For a more thorough discussion of the women's Organized Reserve program, see Chapter 3.

on active duty until 31 December 1947 to work on a backlog of claims. The Commandant approved the request, but, added a terse directive, “. . . see to it that they are *not* deviated to any other work.”³⁸

Contrary to the Commandant's published policy that all matters affecting the MCWR be submitted to the Director, MCWR, Major Hamblet was not consulted on the transaction involving the retention of the 28 women. She called this omission to the attention of the Director, Division of Reserve and reiterated:

The undersigned has stated her arguments against the retention of women on active duty either as reservists or as members of the regular Marine Corps. It is believed that all women who are not working on postwar plans for the MCWR should be discharged as expeditiously as possible. It is considered particularly unadvisable to retain a group as small as twenty-eight.³⁹

Major Hamblet was fighting a losing battle. Not only were there more requests to keep women on active duty but some divisions wanted to call back already released women officers with special qualifications.

The case of Captain Edna Loftus Smith put the whole matter of WR retention back into the spotlight. She was recalled for membership on the Marine Corps Aviation History Board. The Director of Aviation wrote: “This officer is peculiarly well qualified for this duty, more so than any officer in the Marine Corps, due to her wartime duties. . . .”⁴⁰

The legality of her recall opened a Pandora's box of legal considerations. How would she be paid? There was no authorization to use Reserve funds for matters connected to the war already fought and the Commandant had made no mention of women in his statement to Congress relative to the 1948 Reserve appropriations. Beyond the question of money, Brigadier General William T. Clement, Director, Division of Reserve, even doubted the authority to maintain WRs in the Volunteer Reserve under existing laws.

In spite of his uncertainty and due to the critical personnel shortage, he suggested that the Commandant's policy to discharge all WRs by 30 June be reversed. This would eliminate the problem of recalling individual Reservists and take care of the problem of pay since WRs on active duty were being paid from Regular Establishment funds.

Twenty-eight women were already being retained beyond the 30 June 1947 deadline to work on claims. “However,” wrote General Clement, “claims cannot be settled until muster rolls are checked which justifies

the retention of the WRs in that section, and by the same token, those on duty in the Decorations and Medals Section are working to clean up the war load.”⁴¹ He believed it was better to keep all WRs on active duty on a voluntary basis until the passage of permanent legislation to resolve the situation. To ease the embarrassment caused by the constant shifting of dates and policy changes it was rationalized that the 30 June 1947 date was originally set with the idea that permanent legislation covering the women would have been enacted by that time.

Following General Clement's suggestion, a week later in early June, General Shepherd recommended the retention of WRs rather than approve a request that several hundred enlisted men be transferred to Headquarters. Since the efficiency of each woman Reservist was considered to be far greater than that of the average enlisted man to be brought in, he feared a marked loss in work output with the proposed changeover.

Thus another last-minute reprieve for the women at Headquarters arrived on 9 June when the final demobilization deadline was changed to read, “. . . for a period of six months after the war is declared over or such shorter time as meets the requirements of the Marine Corps.”⁴²

General Thomas once again asked that the previously published policy be strictly adhered to and that only the five officers actually working on the postwar program and the enlisted women kept as a result of the latest change be allowed to remain on active duty. He recommended that the other four women officers still on duty (Smith not included) be released as soon as their work was completed and that no more women officers be recalled except to fill a possible vacancy in the billets designated for the MCWR.* General Vandegrift's approving signature was a bittersweet victory, for next to the word, *approved*, he wrote “with the addition of one (1) WR officer for duty in the office of the J.A.G. [Judge Advocate General].”⁴³

*At the time of General Thomas' memo, there were 10 women officers on active duty: Major Hamblet and Lieutenant Hale working on MCWR plans; Captain Illich working on matters related to the women kept on active duty; Captain Elizabeth J. Elrod and Captain Durant at the WR company; Major Frances W. Pepper and Second Lieutenant Pauline F. Riley at the Post War Personnel Reorganization Board; First Lieutenant Marie K. Anderson in the Supply Department; and Captain Sarah M. Vardy and Captain Smith in the Division of Aviation.

In the files of the Director of Women Marines was found an undated, unsigned, brief history of the women in the Marine Corps which begins:

It is rumored that when it was announced that women were going to be enlisted in the Marine Corps that the air was colored with profanity in the language of every nation as the members of the old Corps gathered to discuss this earth-shaking calamity. It is entirely probable that the wailing and moaning which went on that day amongst the old Marines was never equalled—never, that is, until it was announced that the women Marines were going home. Then, with a complete reversal of attitude many of those same Marines declared that the women in their offices were essential military personnel and absolutely could not be spared from the office.⁴⁴

Stenographers Recalled

A severe shortage of clerk-stenographers brought

Col Katherine A. Towle cuts cake on the 6th anniversary in February 1949 of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve. Mrs. Ruth Cheney Streeter looks on. In the background (from left to right) are TSgt Grace L. Benjamin, Cpl Emilie Pranckevich, TSgt Agnes T. Hirschinger, SSgt May Ann Henritze, MSgt Marie B. Benziger, and Sgt Elsie F. Futterman.



another demand for the recall of formerly active enlisted women Reservists. Few enlisted men were qualified and Civil Service was unable to fill the needs of Headquarters, so, in October 1947, 1,500 applications were mailed to women Reservists in the Volunteer Reserve. It came as a great surprise and disappointment when only 56 were returned—and of the number only 28 were considered qualified. The fact is that the letter soliciting applications was not very enticing. The maximum tour assured was for six months—the women could not request earlier release and the Marine Corps could not guarantee anything more.⁴⁵

Among the women recommended for recall were Staff Sergeant Lotus T. Mort, who later became the third woman warrant officer in 1954; Corporal Mildred A. Novotny, who was among the first eight enlisted

women to be sworn into the Regular Marine Corps on 10 November 1948; and Technical Sergeant Helen L. Hannah, who retired in 1975 with 32 years service as a Reservist. Lotus Mort recalled that she was a bit hesitant when her orders arrived on Christmas Eve, but on 5 January 1948, she reported for six months and

stayed for 17 years until her retirement in 1965. The poor response to the call for stenographers was the first indication that competent women needed to be assured of more security if they were going to leave their homes and good jobs. Colonel Knighton's prediction of 1946 had come to pass.

CHAPTER 2

Women's Armed Forces Legislation: Public Law 625

Women's Armed Forces Legislation—Provisions of Public Law 625

Women's Armed Forces Legislation

Nearly three years elapsed from the end of hostilities in August 1945 until legislation giving women regular military status was finally passed and signed into law by President Harry S. Truman on 12 June 1948. The drawn-out process, marked by gains and reverses along the way, was the cause of much of the uncertainty experienced by women Marines on duty at Headquarters. Without the legislation there was no security for those women, and no one knows how many competent WRs, who would have preferred a career in the Marine Corps, asked to be discharged simply because they could not afford to wait.

The proposed law received little support from the Commandant—and for some very good reasons. The Marine Corps had an authorized regular enlisted strength of 100,000 and then as now, operated on a limited budget. Understandably, neither the men nor the women wanted to sacrifice combat billets to make room for the women. General Vandegrift was heartily in favor of women as Regular Marines provided they would not count against his end strength; otherwise, he was unalterably opposed.

A study of the position taken by the other services regarding the women's bill reveals that the Army and the Navy intended to use large numbers of women in occupational fields not required in the Marine Corps. There was a strong case made, for example, for women in the medical field: nurses, Medical Corps WAVES, dental technicians, and laboratory technicians. Furthermore, they contended that these billets which were planned for the WAVES and the WACs would not affect overseas rotation of the men. This was not the situation in the Marine Corps.

The senior women officers, Colonels Streeter and Towle and Major Hamblet, were aware of the unique problems faced by the Commandant, and they were also conscious of the climate at Headquarters.* They recognized exactly how far the Marine Corps would

*Colonels Streeter and Towle, although no longer on active duty, were frequently consulted on matters relating to the postwar plans for the women in the Marine Corps.

be willing to go and believed that a crusade by the women would have had negative results. The plan for a strong Women's Organized Reserve backed up by a Volunteer Reserve was a compromise that most Marines could accept, and this was the proposal they carried to Capitol Hill.

The Honorable Carl Vinson, on 29 March 1946, introduced H.R. 5919, "To amend the Naval Reserve Act of 1938, as amended, so as to establish the Women's Reserve on a permanent basis . . ." (79th Congress, 2d session). As the purpose clearly states, the bill was strictly a Reserve measure and in its original form allowed the Marine Corps only 50 officers and 450 enlisted women on active duty during peacetime. It was referred to the Committee on Naval Affairs and hearings were held on 9 and 10 May.

In her book, *Lady In The Navy*, Captain Joy Hancock notes, "The burden of presentation before that committee was carried largely by the members of the Women's Reserve who were not in a position of sufficient authority to speak with the necessary assurance of Navy plans and policies."¹ Colonel Towle, the Commandant's representative, prepared a short statement summarizing the plans for a Reserve organization with an active duty strength of 32 officers and 28 enlisted women—at the most.²

American military women enjoy a relationship of unusual cooperation. Perhaps it stems from the shared experience of being a minority in a previously all-male world. For whatever reasons, they have made it a point of honor to be mutually supportive. Accordingly, when the time came to testify before the committee, Colonel Towle was careful not to undermine the much stronger WAVE position.

After the initial hearings in the House, Admiral Denfeld enlisted the aid of Congresswoman Margaret Chase Smith, who had taken a public stand in favor of Regular status for service women. Mrs. Smith had been cautioned by the chairman, Carl Vinson, that her amendment to include Regular as well as Reserve status would kill the whole bill.³ Mrs. Smith's view was, "The Navy either needs these women or they do not. . . ."⁴

As a result of the efforts of Admiral Denfeld and Mrs. Smith, a new draft was prepared which would extend the scope of existing laws governing the Regular Navy and Marine Corps to include women. For all that, time ran out before further action was taken. When the 79th Congress adjourned, the women's bill died in committee. Consequently, it would be necessary to begin fresh at the next session.

The women in the Army worked on a separate bill until the armed services were combined to become the Department of Defense. At that time, the women joined forces in order to present as strong a case as possible while allowing for the unavoidable differences.

Added to the varied duties assigned to Major Hamblet when she returned to active duty in the fall of 1946 was the task of tracking the pending legislation. Sandwiched between the planning of the postwar Reserve, and the vain attempt to demobilize the wartime WRs, she studied and commented on the women's bill and made occasional appearances before congressional committees. She was asked verbally by Colonel Pate to submit, "arguments against keeping women on active duty in the Marine Corps either as reservists on continuous active duty or as members of the Regular establishment." She did so in a 29 April 1947 memo, ending with the statement:

If it is decided that women shall be on active duty for an indefinite period of time, their rights should be protected by making them members of the Regular establishment of the Marine Corps rather than keeping them on continuous active duty as reservists.⁵

By the time the Senate subcommittee hearings of the 80th Congress began on 2 July 1947, the Navy bill S. 1529 and the Army bill S. 1103 were combined to form S. 1641. Most observers were certain that women were going to be made part of the Regular Armed Forces. General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower opened his testimony saying, "Not only do I heartily support the bill to integrate women into the Regular Army and Organized Reserve Corps, but I personally directed that such legislation be drawn up and submitted to this Congress."⁶ A critical shortage of infantrymen and the need to stabilize the Women's Army Corps prompted him to stress the urgency of action to the Congress.

General Eisenhower was followed by Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz who said, "The real fact must be acknowledged that in any future war it will be mandatory to have at our command immediately all pos-



Congresswoman Margaret Chase Smith of Maine.

sible resources. Womenpower is one of them."⁷ It should be noted that the Allies made good use of women in the armed services in World War II.*

Colonel Knighton followed, reading a brief, two-sentence Marine Corps statement: "The previous witnesses have expressed the views of the Commandant; the Commandant of the Marine Corps is in favor of the bill and trusts that it will be enacted as soon as possible."⁸

*In an interview in October 1976 in Heidelberg, Germany, Albert Speer, Hitler's weapons production chief said: "How wise you were to bring your women into your military and into your labor force. Had we done that initially, as you did, it could have affected the whole course of the war. Women would have been far superior, for example, to our impressed labor force from occupied countries, which you called 'slave labor.' We would have found out, as you did, that women were equally effective, and for some skills superior to males. We never did, despite our critical manpower shortage in the late years of the war, make use of this great potential." (*San Diego Union*, 30Nov76).

The brevity and the wording of the statement cast some doubt on the Commandant's true feelings. In order to offset its negative effect at Headquarters, Colonel Knighton sent a memorandum to the Assistant Commandant, General Shepherd, along with a file of statements given before the Senate Armed Services Committee which he said:

... contain almost unrefutable arguments why: it is vital that women be integrated into the Regular Establishment of *all* services.

I informed the Senate Committee that the views expressed by these witnesses reflected the views of the Commandant.

As it has been rumored that the Commandant is opposed to having women in the Regular Marine Corps, it might be well to circulate these statements to the heads of all Departments and offices.⁹

Colonel Knighton was perhaps the strongest voice heard in the Marine Corps in favor of integration of the women. As legal aide to the Commandant, legislation was his responsibility but he seemed to go a step further in an effort to convince others of the need for this particular bill. He went so far as to testify at a Senate hearing in place of Major Hamblet when he feared that she, due to her own doubts, would not be convincing enough. The bill passed the Senate on 23 July 1947 and was sent to the House committee where it sat until the adjournment of the first session, but this time it would not be necessary to begin anew.

In anticipation of the enactment of the legislation, a board was convened in December 1947 to propose a program for women as Regular Marines. Keeping in mind that every woman in the Regular Marine Corps would be at the expense of a man, careful thought was given to their most efficient utilization. The study, therefore, provided for 65 officers and 728 enlisted women to be assigned to Headquarters Marine Corps, both at Henderson Hall and the Marine Corps Institute; offices of the directors of the Marine Corps Reserve Districts; Headquarters Recruiting Divisions; Department of Pacific and Depot of Supplies at San Francisco; Marine Corps Schools, Quantico; and to the Organized Women's Reserve Program.¹⁰

In February 1948 just before the House Armed Services Committee was scheduled to meet, Captain Ira H. Nunn of the Navy Judge Advocate General's office wrote to the Commandant asking for his help. In view of the considerable opposition to the bill, a strong presentation was deemed necessary, and plans were being made for appearances by the Secretary of Defense, the Chief of Naval Operations, the Chief of Naval Personnel, and the Deputy Surgeon General. The letter read:

Advice is requested as to whether the Commandant can appear in support of the bill It is understood that the Departments of the Army and Air Force will be represented by Generals Eisenhower, Bradley, Spaatz, Devers, Paul, Armstrong, and Strothers.^{11*}

The Marine Corps was represented at those crucial hearings by Major Hamblet, who was introduced by Colonel Knighton.

The hearings were heated and prolonged, but the outcome seemed assured. To almost everyone's surprise, however, in early April, the committee reported out a measure which would have limited enlistment of women in the armed services to Reserve status only. During the debate, Margaret Chase Smith tried to get House approval of the Senate version, but only 40 members backed her while 66 were opposed. The opponents argued that, "Regular status for women in the military service now might result in a draft for women in another war and West Point would become a coeducational college."¹² The solution seemed to be to put women in a Reserve status.

The bill, S. 1641, then went into a joint conference by members of both the Senate and the House to reconsider the differences. Support came from patriotic organizations, professional and business women groups, and most importantly from the ranking military men of the day. Fleet Admiral Nimitz, Chief of Naval Operations, in backing the legislation said:

This legislation has been requested after careful study of the overall requirements of the Navy, now and in the future. It is the considered opinion of the Navy Department and my own personal belief that the services of women are needed. Their skills are as important to the efficient operations of the naval establishment during peacetime as they were during the war years.¹³

The bill that emerged from the joint conference established a Women's Army Corps in the Regular Army, authorized the enlistment and appointment of women in the Regular Navy and the Regular Marine Corps and the Navy and Marine Corps Reserve, and the

*General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower; General Omar N. Bradley, Chief of Staff of the Army; General Carl T. Spaatz, Commanding General, Army Air Forces; General Jacob L. Devers, Commanding General, Army Ground Forces; Lieutenant General Willard S. Paul, Director of Personnel Administration, General Staff, United States Army; Brigadier General Harry G. Armstrong, U.S. Army Air Forces, Commandant of the School of Aviation Medicine; Brigadier General Dean C. Strothers, U.S. Army Air Forces, Director of Military Personnel under Deputy Chief of Staff, Personnel and Administration.

Regular and Reserve of the newly created Air Force in which the women would be known as WAFs (Women in the Air Force). Ten days later, 12 June 1948, President Truman signed the long-debated Women's Armed Services Integration Act, Public Law 625.

Provisions of Public Law 625

Generally, P. L. 625 gave equal status to women in uniform, but there were a number of restrictions and special provisions. While the law placed no limit on the number of women who could serve in the Reserves, it did specify that the number of women Regulars could not exceed two percent of the nation's total armed strength in the Regular Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. It provided for a gradual build-up which would allow the Marine Corps a strength of 100 officers, 10 warrant officers, and 1,000 enlisted women by June 1950. In fact the Marine Corps did not anticipate or want to fill the allotted quota.

Based upon a strong recommendation from Mrs. Streeter, the new law contained the provision that the Director of Women Marines would be detailed to duty in the office of the Commandant to assist the Commandant in the administration of women's affairs. Originally, she, like the WAVE director, would have been responsible to the Personnel Department. Mrs. Streeter, in response to a letter from General Vandegrift in August 1947, recalled her duty in the Personnel Department and the limitations under which she worked during the war. She gave great credit to the courtesy and cooperation of all the men at Headquarters with whom she worked, but she argued that the Director would be in a better position to deal with all branches, and that her cognizance over all women Marines and all matters affecting them would be recognized if she did not come under one particular branch.¹⁷ General Vandegrift agreed and the women's bill was amended before it came to the final vote. For all services, the director was to be selected from among the Regular women officers serving in the grade of major or above (lieutenant commander for the Navy) and would hold the temporary rank of colonel or Navy captain.

Promotion regulations loosely paralleled those of male components, except that women could not hold permanent rank above lieutenant colonel. Additionally, the number of Regular women lieutenant colonels could not exceed 10 percent of the number of Regular women officers on active duty—for ma-

jors, the law read 20 percent.* Inasmuch as lieutenant colonel was the senior grade that women officers could then hold (with the exception of the Director), non-promotion to this rank was not considered a passover. Women officers retired from the senior ranks upon reaching a mandatory retirement age which was for majors, 20 years or age 50, whichever came sooner, and for lieutenant colonel, 30 years service or age 55, whichever was sooner. The law also specified that women could not be assigned to duty in aircraft engaged in combat missions nor to vessels of the Navy other than transport and hospital ships.

Women were entitled to the same pay, leave, allowances, and benefits as men, but with an important proviso. Husbands would not be considered dependents unless they were in fact dependent on their wives for their chief support, and the children of servicewomen would not be considered dependents unless their fathers were dead or they were really dependent upon their mothers for their chief support. This apparently simple exception was the cause of much frustration and bitterness as the law was interpreted over the years. In effect, it negated many of the service benefits normally considered routine by the men. For example, quarters could not be assigned to a woman married to a civilian, nor could her husband shop at the post exchange or commissary store.**

The Marines especially appreciated the section of the law dealing with the Reserves for it made possible, at last, the much-discussed Organized Women's Reserve. Nearly two years had passed since Major Hamblet had been called to active duty to frame the postwar women's plans which, by this time, were laid out in great detail and ready for implementation.

Women were now a part of the Regular Marine Corps in spite of earlier opposition to this radical idea. In the spring of 1946, when the legislation was first introduced, no one, least of all the women themselves, ever thought in terms of Regular status. As time went on, however, there was increasing evidence that no real-

*The provision held up a number of promotions to field grade rank. In 1962, Captain Grace "San" Overholser Fields stayed on active duty longer than she intended after her marriage in order to keep up the strength figures of the Regular active duty women officers, thereby allowing Major Jeanette I. Sustad, a future Director of Women Marines, to be promoted to lieutenant colonel. (Grace Overholser Fields interview with HQMC).

**For a detailed discussion of marriage, motherhood, and dependent husbands, see Chapter 13.

ly effective and continuing nucleus of trained personnel could be counted on in the Defense Establishment unless some permanency was assured women who volunteered for training and assignment in peacetime.

The passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 recognized this fact and was a natural sequel to the excellent record of the women who served in World War II.



Col Ruth Cheney Streeter, wartime Director of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, before leaving her post recommended that the position be strengthened, a proposal which lead ultimately to the Marine Corps amendment to Public Law 625 and placement of the Director in the table of organization of the immediate office of the Commandant.

CHAPTER 3

Going Regular

*The Transfer Program—Establishing the Office and Title, Director of Women Marines
The First Enlisted Women Marines—The Pioneers—Reindoctrination of the Officers
Reindoctrination of Enlisted WMs—Designation of Women Marines
Recruit Training Established at Parris Island—The First Black Women Marines
Establishing the Women Officers' Training Class at Quantico*

The Transfer Program

The integration of women was now a *fait accompli*, and in Colonel Towle's view, ". . . the Marine Corps had, with varying degrees of enthusiasm but always in good grace, accepted the fact that women as potential 'careerists' in the Marine Corps must be reckoned with and provided for."¹ To this end, the first step was to find a suitable Director, but the process of transfer from Reserve to Regular could not wait for her selection, acceptance, and arrival.

Major Hamblet, still the Director of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, recommended Colonel Towle be named to that post. Although the press had announced that the services would probably retain the current directors, and certainly she was the one most familiar with the plans to be implemented, Major Hamblet recognized that her age and rank would work to her and ultimately to the women's disadvantage. There would be, she was certain, a good deal of opposition to the appointment to colonel—even on a temporary basis—of a 33-year-old woman with only five years of military experience.² Colonel Towle, on the other hand, was happily ensconced as the Assistant Dean of Women at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, and she felt that Major Hamblet should continue as Director.

General Clifton B. Cates, then Commandant, found himself in the uncomfortable and certainly unusual position of personally having to ask a woman to accept a Regular commission. In the summer of 1948, his aide called Colonel Towle to tell her that the Commandant was planning an official trip to California and wished to meet with her in San Francisco at the Saint Francis Hotel. At the ensuing interview, Colonel Towle was not prepared to make a definite commitment to return, but she and General Cates discussed details of organization and particularly the position of the Director and her access to the Commandant.³ The general agreed to consider her recommendations and to talk them over with his advisors at Headquarters. The outcome was the appointment of Colonel Katherine A. Towle as the first Director of Women Marines.

Admittedly, she was one of the women who originally had grave doubts about the need or even desirability of having women in the military during peacetime, but on thinking it over, she said, "the logic of the whole thing did occur to me: that this was sound. . . ."⁴ Any uncertainties she entertained were set aside once and for all when she returned to Washington in the fall of 1948, and she undertook her work determined to make the women truly integrated, contributing members of the Corps.

In July, while the matter of a director was still unsettled, letters containing information about the transfer program were sent to women Reservists and former women Reservists. The women were to be selected based upon their qualifications to fill the 65 officer and 728 enlisted billets. Of the 65 officers selected, 21 would receive Regular commissions and 44 would be assigned as Reservists on continuous active duty, presumably with the Organized Reserve companies.⁵

Since 18,000 enlisted women had served in World War II, it was not anticipated that nonveterans would be accepted for perhaps nine months to a year after the transfer program got underway. A continuing board would be convened at Headquarters to select applicants at the rate of 75 per month until the planned strength was reached. After that, several recruit classes per year would be conducted at Henderson Hall to compensate for losses due to normal attrition. It was estimated that no more than 200 recruits would be needed during the first two years.⁶

Former enlisted Reservists could enlist for two, three, or four years, and had to meet the following requirements: be 20-31 years old; have two years of high school or business school; be a citizen of the United States or its insular possessions; be married or single; have no children under 18 years of age regardless of legal custody; have no dependents; be able to pass the prescribed physical examination; and possess an honorable or under-honorable-conditions discharge. The deadline for receipt of applications was set at 15 September 1948.⁷

In the case of officers, the flow of promotions as well as available billets had to be considered. It was decided that the 21 initial selections for Regular sta-



On 4 November 1948, Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen Clifton B. Cates administers the oath to the first three women to be sworn into the Regular Marine Corps, (left to right) LtCol Katherine A. Towle, Maj Julia E. Hamblet, and 1stLt Mary J. Hale.

tus should be allocated to: majors and above, two; captains, five; first lieutenants, seven; and second lieutenants, seven. All officers and former officers were sent letters similar to the ones used to solicit enlisted candidates. The promise of security in these was a bit vague in that they were told, "Subject to budgetary limitations and satisfactory performance of duty, applicants are assured at least a 3-year tour of duty. . . ." And following the details of the projected officer candidate class was written, "As these new officers are obtained, the Reserve officers on continuous active duty will be ordered to inactive duty."⁸

To be considered for transfer to the Regular Marine Corps, women officers had to have completed two years of accredited college work or pass an equivalent examination; be physically qualified; have no children under 18 years of age; and fit into a complicated age-grade structure which would protect them later from mandatory, involuntary retirement.

The enlisted selection board convened on 21 Sep-

tember with Colonel Lester S. Hamel as senior member. The first report, submitted on 4 October, recommended the approval of 142 applicants and the tentative approval of 45 others subject to age and physical waivers.⁹

It became increasingly apparent and by late September it was conclusive that the number of enlisted applicants was below expectation and the quota would not be reached. The cause of the disappointing response is a matter of speculation. First, there is no evidence that large numbers of women were interested in a military career. During the congressional hearings on the women's armed services legislation, the voice of the woman veteran was not heard. Then, the age group involved was vulnerable to marriage and motherhood, and while marriage itself was not a prohibiting factor to enlistment, it certainly was a deterrent. Finally, the physical standards were quite stringent and the age restrictions for officers were, at the very least, difficult. The women officers of World

War II were, by and large, older than average when compared to men of the same rank.

A Plans and Policy Division study of 24 September 1948 recommended that the grade distribution for officers be revised in light of the applications received; that the deadline for enlisted applications be extended to 1 January; that officer applications be forwarded to the board for consideration regardless of ineligibility for age or physical condition; that applications for new enlistments by nonveterans be authorized; and that recruit classes begin by 1 March 1949.¹⁰

Many of the recommendations were approved. The enlisted transfer program was extended and age and physical waivers were granted, but the problem of opening up the program to nonveterans was set aside. And, indeed, at the time it was a problem. The Marine Corps was not yet racially integrated and to open enlistments meant to face "the Negro question." Furthermore, it required the hasty establishment and staffing of a recruit training command for women.

In spite of the liberalized reenlistment procedures, less than 350 applications were received and about 25 percent of these came from WRs on duty at Headquarters.¹¹ Even as Colonel Towle arrived on 18 October, suggestions, plans, and recommendations for the reenlistment, recruitment, and training of women Marines were being discussed and changed almost daily. The paucity of applicants for the transfer program demanded new thinking.

The officer transfer program, for its part, moved relatively smoothly requiring only a few changes in rank distribution. On 26 October the names of the 21 Regular officers selectees were announced. The list included 1 colonel, 2 majors, 7 captains, and 11 first lieutenants. Not counting Colonel Towle, who had recently reported aboard, only Major Hamblet and Lieutenant Hale were on active duty at the time of selection. The initial list of women recommended for Regular commissions named:

Colonel Katherine A. Towle
Major Julia E. Hamblet
Major Pauline E. Perate
Captain Pauline B. Beckley
Captain Barbara J. Bishop
Captain Margaret M. Henderson
Captain Emma H. Hendrickson
Captain Elsie E. Hill
Captain Helen J. McGraw
Captain Nancy M. Roberts
First Lieutenant Kathleen J. Arney
First Lieutenant Eunyce L. Brink
First Lieutenant Ben Alice Day

First Lieutenant Frances A. Denbo
First Lieutenant Mary J. Fisher
First Lieutenant Jeanne Fleming
First Lieutenant Mary J. Hale
First Lieutenant Margaret S. Ordemann
First Lieutenant Pauline F. Riley
First Lieutenant Margaret L. Stevenson
First Lieutenant Jeanette I. Sustad¹²

The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Cates, administered the oath to the first women to become Regular Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Towle, Major Hamblet, and Lieutenant Hale, in his office on 4 November 1948. On the previous day, Colonel Towle had been discharged as a colonel from the Marine Corps Reserve. Upon accepting a Regular commission, she was appointed a permanent lieutenant colonel, and then, assuming the position of director, she was promoted to the temporary rank of colonel once again.

*Establishing the Office and Title,
Director of Women Marines*

In an analysis of the wartime Marine Corps Women's Reserve written in 1945, the authors, very diplomatically, but very clearly, pointed out the handicap under which Colonel Streeter worked—as an advisor with no real authority of her own. The report explained:

. . . the first real problem confronting the Marine Corps was what to do with the Director, MCWR. There really did not seem to be much place for her. Certainly she could not "direct" anything without cutting squarely across all official channels and chains of command, and creating divided responsibility at all points.

Luckily, Colonel Streeter had great good sense, and a wonderful knack for getting along with people, for it was through the medium of friendly relations with department heads and commanding officers that she eventually gained their confidence so that . . . suggestions could be made to them with some hope of success.¹³

Colonel Streeter rightfully concluded that the middle of a war was no time to quibble over administrative and organizational details, but before leaving the Marine Corps, she respectfully made the recommendation that, ". . . a new study be made by the Division of Plans and Policies embodying the experience of this war as to the best possible use which can be made of a Director, MCWR, in case of another war," and "That her position be strengthened if this can be properly done within the structure of the Marine Corps."¹⁴

Colonel Streeter was ultimately responsible for the Marine Corps amendment to P. L. 625 which placed the Director in the table of organization of the im-

mediate office of the Commandant. While serving as Director of the MCWR between September 1946 and November 1948, Major Hamblet continually strived to maintain some degree of control over all matters that affected the women. When Colonel Towle was asked to return as the first Regular Director, the clarification of this one issue was a factor in her acceptance. Clearly, to the most senior women officers, the position of the Director of Women Marines was a matter of concern. This position was defined in a study of 20 October 1948 which stated:

In establishing the office and title of the senior woman Marine, consideration is given to the following:

(a) An important aspect is the field of public relations, involving contacts outside of the Marine Corps. To insure maximum prestige and effectiveness in these duties, it is necessary that the senior woman Marine hold a title which indicates a position of importance in the Marine Corps.

(b) This officer must have cognizance of all matters pertaining to women Marines, Regular and Reserve, even though such matters are handled by the appropriate Headquarters agency in the same manner as for other Marines. Assigning actual administration and control of women Marines to existing agencies precludes establishment of a separate divi-

sion or department to carry out such functions. Under these circumstances, the senior woman Marine could best exercise cognizance over matters in her sphere if she were established as an assistant to the Commandant for woman Marine matters. In this capacity she could initiate action on matters affecting women Marines or make recommendations on policies and procedures concerning them but prepared by other agencies.¹⁵

The recommendations were approved and the senior woman Marine was called the Director of Women Marines. Due directly to the efforts of Colonels Streeter and Towle and Major Hamblet between 1945 and 1948, the Director of Women Marines enjoyed a somewhat autonomous role, able to attend the Commandant's staff meetings in her own right, and able to bring to the Commandant or to a division head any conflict which she felt merited his attention.

The First Enlisted Women Marines

The enlisted WRs stationed at Headquarters lost no time in applying for Regular status, and, by November, Colonel Towle was most anxious that the 210 already selected women be sworn in as soon as possible

On 10 November 1948, the Commandant, Gen Clifton B. Cates, administers the enlistment oath to the first eight women sworn into the Regular Marine Corps, (left to right) MSgt Elsie J. Miller, TSgt Bertha L. Peters, SSgt Betty J. Preston, SSgt Margaret A. Goings, Sgt Mildred A. Novotny, TSgt Mary F. Wancheck, SSgt Anna Peregrin, and SSgt Mary E. Roche. Col Katherine A. Towle, Director of Women Marines, is at far right.



in order to generate some favorable publicity and interest. On the 173rd anniversary of the Marine Corps, 10 November 1948, the first eight women, all WRs on duty at Headquarters Marine Corps, were given the oath of enlistment by the Commandant. Seven of those women, Master Sergeant Elsie J. Miller, Technical Sergeants Bertha L. Peters and Mary F. Wancheck, and Staff Sergeants Margaret A. Goings, Anna Peregim, Betty J. Preston, and Mary E. Roche, had been on continuous active duty since their enlistment for wartime service. The eighth, Sergeant Mildred A. Novotny, had responded to the call for stenographers made in late 1947. The eight new women Marines were enlisted at the same rank that they held in the Reserve.¹⁶

A WR at Headquarters during that period, retired First Sergeant Esther D. Waclawski, remembered that she had already spent two days in Separation Company when the transfer program was announced. She and her friend, Technical Sergeant Petrina "Pete" C. Nigro, rushed to the recruiting station on Pennsylvania Avenue to "join the Marines." Although on active duty, these women had to follow the same procedures as former WRs all over the country.¹⁷ Upon acceptance, they were issued the usual travel orders with the senior woman put in charge. Typical of the travel orders of the time was a set dated 17 November 1948 and addressed to Master Sergeant Alice Julia Connolly, which read:

Having been enlisted this date in the USMC-W, you will, when directed, take charge of the below named women and proceed this date to Headquarters Battalion, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., where upon your arrival you and the women in your charge will report to the Commanding Officer thereat for duty.

Technical Sergeant Marion Olson Barnes
 Technical Sergeant Anna Marie Scherman
 Staff Sergeant June Virginia Andler
 Staff Sergeant Rose Mary Barnes
 Staff Sergeant Wilma Greifenstein
 Staff Sergeant Jeanette Marie Johnson
 Staff Sergeant Vera Eleanor Piippo
 Sergeant Ruby Alwilda Evans
 Sergeant Bertha Janice Schultz

As no transportation is involved none is furnished.¹⁸

Since it is safe to assume that a group of senior NCOs is not likely to get lost on the way to the battalion to which they are already attached, the orders must have been issued because "it is always done that way."

The Pioneers

The original band of women in the Regular Marine Corps, now to be known as WMs, must have been an adventuresome lot. They had little idea of what was in store for them, either in the way of assignments, length of service, or acceptance by the men of the Marine Corps. Colonel Margaret M. Henderson, later to be a Director of Women Marines, recalled that she applied more or less to see if she could make it. Lieutenant Colonel Elsie Eleanor Hill submitted her application with the thought in mind that she would probably be stationed at home, in Philadelphia, where she had spent her entire wartime tour.¹⁹ The Inspector-Instructor of the Reserve unit there told her of the plans for an organized platoon in the "City of Brotherly Love."

Lieutenant Colonel Emma Hope Hendrickson Clowers, reminiscing about her feelings when she was sworn into the Regular Marine Corps on 3 December 1948, said:

I think most women officers in the first group who came back as regular officers wondered how we would be received by the career Marines. . . . We knew there had been no lack of enthusiasm on the part of the men for the many thousands of us who enlisted during WW II to lend a hand and "FREE A MAN TO FIGHT"—our WW II motto. But that was quite a different situation from one in which we were returning as career officers and would inevitably be in competition with them in varying degrees. It therefore was with much pleasure and surprise that, through the efforts of a male officer and his men, I was made to feel that they were happy and proud to welcome me back in the Marine Corps as a regular officer. At that time I was completing some studies at the University of Southern California and was ordered to report to the CO, MB, NB, [Commanding Officer, Marine Barracks, Naval Base] Long Beach to be sworn into the Regular Marine Corps. The CO (Lieutenant Colonel Charles T. Hodges) put on a formal parade, with all his men in dress blues and held the swearing in ceremony on the parade grounds, followed by a reception in my honor. Pictures and a write-up appeared in two of the L.A. papers and in the USC paper. I think this first experience as a regular officer not only made me feel that I was again a part of the Marine Corps but also served to erase my doubts as to acceptance as a regular officer.²⁰

Reindoctrination of the Officers

In view of the long period of inactive service for most of the returning women—over two years for some—Colonel Towle planned a short reindoctrination course to be held at Henderson Hall. The one-time class of 17 of the new officers was scheduled for 13 to 17 December under the direction of Captain Il-

lich. Then one of these officers was to be selected to conduct similar training classes for the enlisted women to begin in January.²¹

Reindoctrination for the officers included classes in administration, naval law, military customs and courtesies, leadership, recruiting, and a discussion of the role of women in the Regular services. There was a myriad of administrative details to attend to and then there was the matter of "close order drill."

In her wisdom, Colonel Towle asked for an indoor hall where the officers could drill unobserved, and so the Post Theater at Henderson Hall became their drill field. But the colonel underestimated the drawing power of the sight of women officers in a military formation trying to recapture the marching precision of their "candidate days." Enlisted men crowded in the doorways and enlisted women filled the projection booth to watch the group in which, retired First Sergeant Betty Schultz remembered, "Each officer had a step of her own."²² To make matters worse, the floor was slippery and the women were self-conscious of their too short, and in some cases too tight uniforms in front of the onlookers and in particular in front of the handsome drill instructor, First Lieutenant William H. Lanagan, Jr., later to be a brigadier general.

Most of those women had never expected to return to the Marine Corps and were lucky if they had even one uniform as a souvenir of their days in the Corps. After the war, skirt lengths dropped drastically with the arrival of the fashion called "The New Look." Lengthening skirts became a major preoccupation. "We were very interested in looking each other over to see how we managed to put together a uniform," recalled Colonel Henderson. Like the other tall women, her only recourse had been to insert a piece of fabric just below the skirt waistband. This meant, of course, that she could never remove her jacket.²³

They had the opportunity to order new uniforms from the tailor during the week of reindoctrination, but there was no solution to the problem of the fashionable longer skirts hanging several inches below the short overcoats. Major General William P. T. Hill, the Quartermaster General, insisted upon depleting the wartime supply of uniforms before ordering new ones but later he relented and bought longer skirts which, of course, did not match the five-year-old jackets.²⁴

It is likely, believing that they had seen the last of the women, that the Marines sold WR uniforms to surplus dealers after the war. Although no documents

have been found to prove it, the evidence is convincing. When P.L. 625 was finally signed by President Truman, a surplus dealer came to Headquarters and offered to sell WR uniforms to Lieutenant Hale. There is a well-known story of a former woman Reservist shopping in a Pittsburgh department store and finding all the elevator operators dressed in Marine uniforms complete with the distinctive buttons. But perhaps the worst incident of all is the one told by Colonel Hamblet. Among the novelties for sale by a concessionaire at the circus was a woman Marine uniform hat. There was but one displayed and she bought it.²⁵

Next to the uniform problem, the officers in that first group were confronted by the postwar Washington housing shortage. Although some expected to be permanently stationed in the area, others knew that their stay was temporary. Tired of paying exorbitant rates in a downtown hotel, about 10 of them rented several unfurnished apartments in Shirlington (Arlington, Virginia), a few miles from Marine Corps Headquarters. Captain Hill, the OIC (Officer in Charge) of the enlisted reindoctrination program, was able to borrow cots, dressers, and mess tables from Headquarters Battalion, Henderson Hall, and thus allow the women to set up "squadbays" in the empty apartments. A card table and chairs were loaned by newly arrived Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, when his secretary, June Hendrickson, joined the group.²⁶

Reindoctrination of Enlisted WMs

Beginning in January 1949, Captain Hill supervised a series of enlisted reindoctrination classes and had an office at Henderson Hall. The women had to be issued uniforms, reclassified, and given refresher classes in military subjects. As with the officers, much time was spent on administrative matters such as allotments, savings bond purchases, issuance of new identification cards and tags (dog tags), photographs, and physicals. The WMs attended the five-day class in groups of 15 and were billeted in the former dispensary during the course.

Twenty-seven women Reservists living on the west coast were selected for transfer to Regular status and Captain Illich went to the Headquarters of the Department of Pacific in San Francisco in late January to conduct their training on the spot. In a letter to the commanding general, Major General Leroy P. Hunt, Colonel Towle explained the reindoctrination course and made assurances that Captain Illich could handle it with a minimum of effort on the part of the

general's staff. She also told him of her intention to assign First Lieutenant Margaret Stevenson to the Department of Pacific. Tactfully, she wrote:

As you probably know, it was always the policy in the MCWR to have at least one woman officer detailed to duty at a post or station where enlisted women were serving, who in addition to her regular assignment, could have general supervision over their welfare, appearance, etc. and to whom they could go for advice and information if they wanted to. I believe such a policy is sound and highly desirable for many reasons.

Lieutenant Stevenson has had Quartermaster training, but can, I feel certain, do almost any kind of administrative work. She had an excellent record as a Reserve officer, is most conscientious and sincere, and very pleased with her assignment. I am sure you too will be pleased to have such a competent woman officer as our first "regular" representative in your Headquarters. Since she comes from California, she is as amazed as she is pleased that the Marine Corps is sending her back there for duty.

Forgive this long letter, but I thought this information might be of interest and assistance to you in your consideration of plans for the coming invasion of Women Marines.²⁷

While the Director of Women Marines personally selected women officers with specific billets in mind, she was totally aware that assignment is a command prerogative and that she had no authority once the woman reported to her duty station. Colonel Towle, in her gracious way, developed the peacetime women's organization in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition with the male Marines. After the initial doubts and outright opposition to the integration of women, it came as a pleasant surprise when the men not only tolerated the female presence but went out of their way to help them get established.

Designation of Women Marines

A Marine Corps Memorandum, dated 16 November 1948, directed that women entering the Regular Marine Corps be referred to as "Women Marines," with "USMC-W" as the short title or reporting form. The identification of Reservists would be "USMCR-W."²⁸ Colonel Towle took great exception to the "W" and the proper designation of women Marines became one of her first priorities. She suggested an alternative in a memorandum which stated:

It is believed the apparent inconsistencies can be resolved if the "W" as indicator of a woman Marine were used with the service number rather than as a component designator. For example: Second Lieutenant Jane Doe, USMC (W050123) (0105) or for a reservist, Sergeant Jane Doe, USMCR (W755123) (0143). This is clear and concise, and

would be used in every instance in official correspondence, orders, records, and publications where the service number is customarily indicated. It would also be evidence, which the Director of Women Marines considers important for the morale and prestige of the women, that women are an integral part of the Marine Corps or the Marine Corps Reserve, and not relegated to a specially constituted women's component as USMC-W and USMCR-W imply.²⁹

Her plan met with some opposition. While one staff comment noted the naval tradition to identify non-combatant components; for example, Captain Joe Doe (MC), another suggested the idea could be carried to the extreme and cooks would be designated Corporal Joe Doe, USMC-C. Written, staffed, and rewritten, the recommendation was finally approved on 17 March 1950 and thereafter the "W" was placed before the serial number of women Marines.³⁰

In the same vein, Colonel Towle preferred the word "women" to "female," and in her comments on a proposed order regarding officer promotion examination, she wrote:

The use of "female" instead of "women" in referring to the distaff side of the Marine Corps was gone into quite thoroughly when the new Marine Corps Manual was written. It was finally agreed upon that "women" would be the accepted terminology even when used as an adjective, e.g., "Women Marines," "women officer," etc. The usage follows that established in Public Law 625, "Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948." From a purist's point of view "female" may be correct when used as a counterpart of male, but from a woman's point of view it is very objectionable. I would appreciate, therefore, having reference to "female" deleted and "women" substituted

This sounds a little like "the battle of the sexes." It won't be unless we are called "females"!³¹

Recruit Training Established at Parris Island

The idea that only 200 new recruits would require basic training during the first two years was soon abandoned. On 29 November 1948, even before the transfer program was completed, Colonel Towle was investigating the possibility of conducting woman recruit training at Parris Island, South Carolina. Because the majority of women Marines would have to be recruited from among civilians, and because of the numbers involved, Henderson Hall was no longer considered suitable. Not only was it too small, but it was not considered the type of Marine Corps post whose mission and atmosphere would help instill the desired *esprit de corps* and pride which distinguish Marine recruits. To strengthen her case, Colonel Towle pointed out the convenience of having several appropriate specialist schools at Parris Island since training beyond



Capt Margaret M. Henderson (right) reads the order activating the 3d Recruit Training Battalion, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, in February 1949.

basic military indoctrination would be essential if the WMs hoped to attain the mobilization objective of being a skilled group ready for expansion in case of war.³² Happily, Major General Alfred H. Noble, Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, gave his unqualified support to the idea.

Captain Margaret M. Henderson was selected to head up recruit training. With no more written guidance than a piece of paper on which was typed the general training plan, she and several members of her staff went to work at a long table outside Colonel Towle's office on the first floor of Marine Corps Headquarters.³³ Lieutenant Colonel Mary Hale, who as a lieutenant was assigned as training officer to the embryo command, believed that, "Margaret Henderson was the perfect choice" to establish recruit training. She had had extensive teaching experience in civilian schools and was OIC of the Marine Corps Institute Business School during the war.³⁴

In early January, Captain Henderson accompanied Colonel Towle to Parris Island to inspect the available facilities and to discuss the proposed training schedule. The women were assigned Building 902 in the

same area used by World War II WRs. They would share the mess hall, Building 900, and the administration/gymnasium facilities, building 914, with other activities, primarily the Recruit Depot's Instruction Company.

Captain Henderson arrived at Parris Island for duty on 25 January with Lieutenant Arney who was on temporary duty to set up the WM uniform shop. By the end of the month Lieutenants Hale, Fisher, and Sustad reported and by mid-February the enlisted women were on the island, and all were attached to Headquarters Company, H&S Battalion. The roster included:

- Captain Margaret M. Henderson, Commanding Officer.
- First Lieutenant Jeanette I. Sustad, Executive Officer.
- First Lieutenant Mary J. Hale, Training Officer; Security Officer
- First Lieutenant Mary J. Fisher, Police & Property Officer; Special Services Officer.
- First Lieutenant Kathleen J. Arney, Temporary duty connected with WM uniform matters.
- Master Sergeant Elsie J. Miller, Sergeant Major.
- Technical Sergeant Bertha L. Peters, Chief Clerk.
- Technical Sergeant Barbara A. Ames, Special Services NCO.
- Staff Sergeant June V. Andler, Pay Clerk.

Staff Sergeant Dorothy T. Hunt, Instructor.
 Staff Sergeant Dorothy E. Sullivan, Platoon Sergeant.
 Sergeant Margaret K. Leier, Instructor.
 Sergeant Marie A. Proulx, Correspondence Clerk.
 Sergeant Ruth Ryan, Police Sergeant.
 Sergeant Bertha J. Schultz, Platoon Sergeant.
 Sergeant Agnes C. Thomas, Duty NCO.
 Sergeant Ardella M. Wheeler, Quartermaster Clerk.
 Sergeant Mary E. Zabriskie, Platoon Sergeant.
 Corporal Rosa V. Harrington, Instructor.
 Corporal Grace M. Karl, Instructor.³⁵

Although set up like a battalion and so designated, the 3d Recruit Training Battalion, the unit in no way resembled a battalion in size. A visiting Army general saw the "battalion" led by a captain and remarked, "Now I've seen everything!" The organizational plan was deliberate, however, and was based on General Noble's desire that the senior woman Marine on the depot, Captain Henderson, have disciplinary control over all women Marines at Parris Island. Captain Henderson was designated his advisor on mat-

ters concerning WMs and as such was a member of his special staff.³⁶

The six-week training schedule for women recruits was organized into eight periods daily Monday through Friday and four periods on Saturday for a total of 264 hours. The objectives were stated as:

- 1) To give basic Marine Corps indoctrination to women who have no previous experience.
- 2) To give the women information on the part the Marine Corps played in our national history and its place in the current National Military Establishment.
- 3) To classify each individual to fill an available billet according to her abilities.
- 4) To develop in each individual a sense of responsibility, an understanding of the importance of teamwork, and a desire for self-improvement and advancement in the Marine Corps.³⁷

With those objectives in mind, the 20 women went to work preparing the barracks and classroom; writing lesson plans, recruit regulations, and battalion orders; making out training schedules and coordinating

Future Director of Women Marines, 1stLt Jeanette I. Sustad (standing second from left), is photographed with the original staff of the 3d Recruit Training Battalion, Parris Island.





Platoon sergeants SSgt Dorothy E. Sullivan (left) and Sgt Betty J. Schultz (right) with the first platoon to undergo training at the 3d Recruit Training Battalion, Parris Island.

their plans with all the depot facilities that supported recruit training. The barracks needed little renovation, but they had to be scrubbed and shined to meet the standards of distaff Marines. Sergeant Ryan ordered bunks, locker boxes, linen, and supplies and her job was made easier by the depot supply people who saved their best for the 3d Battalion. Sergeants Schultz and Sullivan arranged squadbays. Several of the enlisted women had some college background, and they went to work writing lesson plans. Lieutenant Hale, a self-described “pack rat,” made good use of orders and schedules she had saved from her wartime tour at the WR school at Camp Lejeune, and the Marines of Instruction Company under the command of Major Gerald T. Armitage helped in all facets of the preparation.³⁸

The enlisted staff—all ranks from master sergeant to corporal—was billeted on the lower deck of Building 902. Recruits would eventually occupy an upper squadbay. In addition to everything else, the women prepared themselves for this important assignment by practicing close order drill in an empty upper squadbay. They had no other training, and they were as ap-

prehensive about meeting the recruits as the recruits were about meeting them.³⁹

The drill instructors were selected from among male Marines with experience on the drill field. Staff Sergeant Jack W. Draughon had been a D.I. for two years when Lieutenant Colonel Herman Nickerson, Jr., asked him if he would be interested in the job with the 3d Battalion. After a careful screening by Captain Henderson, Staff Sergeant Draughon, Sergeant Payton L. Lee, and Corporal Paul D. Lute were assigned as the drill instructors. Sergeant Draughon remembered very clearly his first interview with Captain Henderson. It was strange in those days to sit across from a Marine captain answering, “Yes, ma’am” and “No, ma’am.” Leaving her office, he met Lieutenant Colonel Nickerson and Colonel Russell N. Jordahl in the passageway and Colonel Jordahl said, “So you’re going to be the D. I. for the women Marines?” to which Draughon answered “Yes, ma’am.” The story quickly made the rounds and Marine artist Norval E. Packwood immortalized the incident in a “Leatherneck” cartoon.⁴⁰

The male drill instructors taught close order drill,

first aid, chemical warfare, and classes on general orders. At first they had to endure some goodnatured harassment when they took the recruits outside the battalion area, and Marines taunted them with, "Hey Sarge, your slip is showing." To avoid snickers and kidding, Sergeant Draughon often got the platoon going and then stepped up on the sidewalk and walked as if alone, but with one eye on his recruits.⁴¹

While the staff was still readying itself at Parris Island, the Marine Corps formally announced on 13 January 1949 that enlistment was open to nonveterans. General requirements were somewhat stricter than those for WRs who transferred from Reserve to Regular in that recruits had to be single, had to be high school graduates, and had to be approved by a board, convened quarterly, at Headquarters Marine Corps. Private Connie J. Lovil of Locksburg, Arkansas, was the first woman Marine recruit to arrive—reporting in on the day the battalion was formed, 23 February.⁴² Retired First Sergeant Betty Schultz remembers being "scared as all heck," when going to Port Royal to meet the first contingent of recruits. She and Sergeant Dottie Sullivan were the platoon sergeants of Platoon 1A which began training on 2 March, donned its uniforms for the first time on the 11th, and graduated on Tuesday, 12 April.⁴³

Colonel Towle came down from Headquarters as the guest of General Noble and together they attended the ceremonies which included an outdoor inspection, marching to the accompaniment of the Parris Island Drum and Bugle Corps, and the traditional speeches in the classroom. Of the 30 graduating recruits, 15 remained to attend Personnel Administration School and the rest were sent directly to Headquarters for duty.⁴⁴

The First Black Women Marines

It is rumored that several black women "passed" as white and served in the MCWR, but, officially, the first black women Marines enlisted during the summer of 1949 and joined the 3d Recruit Training Battalion on 10 September. Platoon 7 therefore is believed to be one of the first racially integrated Marine Corps units since, at the time, black male Marines were segregated and trained separately.⁴⁵

The press had often questioned Colonel Towle on the Marine Corps policy regarding black women, and she answered that they would be recruited the same as whites. During the congressional hearings, after the war, Representative Adam Clayton Powell of New York had made quite an issue of the fact that no black women had served in the MCWR. It was a serious matter

complicated by the southern tradition of segregation. The number of black women Marines was sure to be too few to allow for any type of separate facilities and no one was quite certain how white women, unaccustomed to mixing with blacks, would react to an integrated barracks situation.

Colonel Towle called Captain Henderson and told her that she would not send one black woman, by herself, to Parris Island—this out of consideration for the woman. Captain Henderson and Lieutenants Sustad and Hale discussed what they foresaw as potential problems, and they decided to assign bunks to the incoming platoon geographically rather than alphabetically—northern recruits at one end of the squadbay and southern recruits at the other. They told no one of the plan, including the platoon sergeants, and according to First Sergeant Schultz, they were completely unaware that the precaution had been taken.⁴⁶

A more frivolous concern was the beauty shop. The white hairdressers from Beaufort did not know how to do the black women's hair, and it is doubtful that they would have been willing to do it in any case. Both Captain Henderson from Texas and Lieutenant Hale from Georgia knew that the recruits would need special preparations and equipment but neither was quite certain what they were. They enlisted the help of the black maid who worked in the Women Officers' Quarters to buy the necessary supplies.⁴⁷ When she had completed all arrangements, Captain Henderson called in the staff and gave a stern warning that if anyone treated these recruits differently from the others, they would answer to her.

Ann Estelle Lamb of New York City, whose enlistment contract was signed by Major Louis H. Wilson, Jr., a future Commandant of the Marine Corps, and Annie E. Graham of Detroit arrived on the same day, and from all accounts their boot training was uneventful.⁴⁸ Although both women were from northern cities they undoubtedly understood the time and the place, and they did not complain, for example, about fixing their own hair, after hours in Lieutenant Hale's office.

No one connected with recruit training at the time remembers any unpleasantness and, in fact, Colonel Henderson now believes that the separation of the southerners from the blacks was unnecessary. She does recall, however, that the curiosity of the entire depot was piqued and that all eyes were on Platoon 7. Wherever they went, Marines, including the commanding general, were at the window to stare.⁴⁹

Occasionally, recruits attended football games in Savannah, drawing lots for tickets. As chance would have it, Privates Lamb and Graham were among the lucky recruits one weekend and everyone took a deep breath as blacks and whites left together on their way to the segregated stadium. Again all went well.^{50*}

Private Lamb remained at Parris Island to attend the Personnel Administration School where she finished first in a class of 61. Now a student rather

*See Henry I. Shaw, Jr., and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (Washington: History and Museums Division, HQMC, 1975), p. 56 for a discussion of General Noble's attitude towards integration while he was the Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, S.C.

than a recruit, she went on liberty, but it was somewhat inconvenient outside of the depot. Many years later, Colonel Henderson met a woman who had been in charge of the USO at Beaufort during the period, and the woman told her of an incident concerning a WM who called to make reservations for roller skating, but she said that there would be a Negro with the group and if she was not welcome, none of them would come.⁵¹

The third black woman Marine, enlisted in Chicago in 1950, was Annie L. Grimes, destined to become a warrant officer in 1968 and the first black woman officer to retire after a full 20-year career.⁵² From the beginning, black and white women Marines trained and lived together. Accounts differ as to whether the

Pvt Annie L. Grimes, the third black woman to join the Marine Corps and destined to become the first black woman officer, with her recruit platoon at Parris Island, in 1950.



blacks were subjected to discrimination, but there is general agreement among active duty and former WMs that any discrimination or harassment directed at the black women was always a case of individual personalities and never a case of organizational bias.*

*Establishing the Women Officers'
Training Class at Quantico*

After the initial selection under the so-called transfer program, the only source of women officers was through the commissioning of second lieutenants who successfully completed the Women Officers' Training Class. The class, which vaguely resembled the male Platoon Leaders Course, was conducted at the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico. WOTC, as it was known, was the responsibility of the Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools and fell under the operational control of the Education Center and the administrative control of Headquarters Battalion.

The class, held only in the summer, was divided into two six-week periods: the first a junior course; and the second a senior course. College graduates and seniors would attend both sessions, juniors would attend only the junior course, and qualified enlisted women were scheduled only for the senior course. Successful candidates who held a bachelor's degree and who were at least 21 years old would be commissioned second lieutenants in the Marine Corps Reserve. Only seven honor graduates would be offered Regular commissions and these would then attend an additional eight-week Women Officers' Basic Indoctrination Course (WOIC) to be held at the Basic School. The

*"I find it hard, in 1980, to look back on those days. But it was a fact of life during the years 1949 and 1950. My friends today are just friends, whether white or black. But I was just as guilty as anyone in the change process. I can recall that at MCAS, Cherry Point, I was very much concerned about the acceptance and/or treatment of my Negro enlisted women, who arrived in 1950 to become a part of WMD-2. It all worked out—thanks to the wisdom of Sgt Major Alice J. Connolly and T. Sgt Katherine O'Keefe—two superb human beings.

When I learned that two Negro women would be reporting to my command, I was concerned. But I consulted my trusty Sgt Major Alice J. Connolly, and together we decided on a course of action. They would be billeted in an area with T. Sgt O'Keefe, a devout Christian woman, and if there were any problems, they would be referred to the Commanding Officer. How antiquated this decision now seems to be! But in retrospect, it was important that we placed the two Negro women in areas where there would be minimal or no rejection—and, of course it worked. We had no problems." Col Helen A. Wilson comments on draft manuscript, dtd 1Jan80.

Reservists could request assignment to continuous active duty, but most would return home in an inactive status.

Each session was limited to about 50 candidates who were at least 18 years old; single; citizens of the United States; and college graduates, or in the case of undergraduates, regularly enrolled in an accredited school and pursuing a course leading to a degree. Enlisted women and former WRs who were college graduates or who could pass a college educational equivalency examination were encouraged to apply.⁵³

Publicity for the program began in April 1949 but there were no pamphlets, posters, mailing lists, or other procurement aids. The recruiters' teams for the Platoon Leaders Course brought mimeographed information sheets to the coeducational schools they visited, but it was very late in the season for a class beginning in June. The first woman officer procurement officer was, in effect, Colonel Towle herself, who made a three-week tour in May of women's colleges in the northeast and southeast to acquaint the colleges and the students with the program.⁵⁴

Captain Hill was selected to head the WOTC staff of four officers and six enlisted women, all temporarily assigned to Quantico and attached to the Schools Company, Headquarters Battalion. Captain Hill and Lieutenant Eunyce L. Brink left Headquarters on 20 April for the five-month tour. Colonel Towle wrote long, explanatory letters to Captain Nita Bob Warner and Lieutenant Doris V. Kleberger, both Reservists, and asked them to join the staff. In her letter to Lieutenant Kleberger she wrote:

While on active duty your base pay would be that of a first lieutenant. In case you have forgotten, \$200.00 is a first lieutenant's pay. You would also, of course, be entitled to any longevity which you have earned. For every three years this is a 5 per cent increase. By this time, you must be very close to the second pay period, or 6 years. You would also draw the customary \$21.00 a month subsistence. As you would be in Government quarters at Quantico you would not draw quarters allowance.

Naturally, I have no way of knowing whether you are in a position to consider this proposition, or even whether you are interested. I can only hope for both, as I know you would help immeasurably in this important venture. I also think it could give you not only satisfaction in a job well done but afford you a rather pleasant and profitable occupation for the next few months. I would not, however, want to interfere with any future plans you may have made, or to have you sacrifice the permanency of a civilian occupation for temporary duty with the Marine Corps. Whether there would be opportunity for you to continue in a Reserve billet after this summer job is finished is something I cannot predict



Col Joseph C. Burger, commander of The Basic School, awards regular commissions to members of the first Woman Officer Training Class, 1949: Virginia M. Johnson, Essie M. Lucas, Anna F. Champlin, Eleanor M. Bach, Doris V. Kleberger, Betty J. Preston.

right now. For a limited time there might be, but I don't want to hold that out as an inducement.⁵⁵

At the time, both Captain Warner and Lieutenant Kleberger were graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley, and were personally known to Colonel Towle. Luckily for the woman Marine program, a number of competent WRs and former WRs were in school during that period and could afford to take a chance on a temporary assignment. Lieutenant Brink, a Regular officer, was temporarily detached from her duties as administrative assistant to the Director of Women Marines in order to be platoon leader. The staff was completed by Technical Sergeant Janet R. Paterson, Technical Sergeant "A" Fern Schirmer, Staff Sergeant Mary S. Cookson, Sergeant Rosalie C. Evans, Corporal Helen C. Cathcart, and Corporal Anna M. Delaney.⁵⁶ Most of the instruction

was done by male officers from the staffs of the Basic School, Junior School (later Amphibious Warfare School), and Senior School (later Command and Staff College). Colonel James T. Wilbur and his staff at the Education Center worked very closely with Captain Hill in developing a syllabus, schedules, and lesson plans.⁵⁷

The women were quartered in the old WR area overlooking the Potomac. The candidates and the enlisted staff were assigned to Barracks 3076 which was used as a dependents' school during the winter. The NCOs, on the lower deck, had a lounge and private rooms—the candidates were billeted in squad rooms on the

Capt Elsie E. Hill, officer-in-charge, conducts Saturday morning personnel inspection of the first Woman Officer Training Class, Quantico, Virginia in 1949.



second deck. The four women officers lived nearby in Married Officers' Quarters, Building 3078, which was an apartment building converted from a barracks. It was unheard of at the time for women officers to live in bachelor officers' quarters, so they were given a three-bedroom apartment in the quarters reserved for married lieutenant colonels and colonels. Few colonels wanted to live in the building, yet there was some healthy grumbling about giving junior women Marines a field grade apartment.⁵⁸

In spite of the late start and the lack of recruiting material, 180 completed applications were received, and 67 candidates from 35 colleges began the junior course on 10 June 1949. They were welcomed by the Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools, Major General Shepherd, who told them he personally felt there was a "definite place for women Marines during peace, as there was during war," and he encouraged them to try for the Regular commissions.⁵⁹ General Shepherd had already given convincing evidence of his positive view toward women in the Marine Corps with his efforts to keep WRs on duty after World War II. In recalling the period, Lieutenant Colonel Hill stated emphatically that the women could not have managed the officer training on such short notice without the "marvelous support" of the male Marines at Quantico, especially General Shepherd. He took an active interest in their training, often appearing during a drill period, where as a perfect southern gentleman he always removed his hat when speaking to a woman Marine—no matter what her rank.⁶⁰

The first WOTC graduation exercises were held on 9 September 1949 in the auditorium of the Amphibious Warfare School, Junior Course. Thirty-four candidates were recommended for commissions: 18 immediately and 16 pending the receipt of a bachelors' degree. A quota of seven Regular commissions was allowed. Those to be appointed Regular officers were:

Eleanor M. Bach
 Essie M. Lucas (former WR; later Dowler)
 Joan Morrissey
 Betty J. Preston (among the first enlisted WRs sworn into the Regular Marine Corps on 10 November 1948)
 Anna F. Champlin
 Virginia M. Johnson (later Sherman)⁶¹

The seventh and last one was given to Lieutenant Kleberger, who was in competition with the candidates in her platoon. In a 1977 letter to the History and Museums Division, Lieutenant Colonel Kleberger wrote:

While serving on the staff, my interest in remaining in the Marine Corps became very intense. I discovered that I met all "requirements for commissioning" (including age . . . less than 27 on 1 July of the year of commissioning) with the exception of the requirement that I be a graduate of WOTC. I requested commissioning in accordance with existing regulations, requesting that "graduation from WOTC" be waived in that I was a platoon leader and certainly possessed the required training. Additionally, in view of my six years in the Marine Corps Reserve, I requested appointment to the rank of first lieutenant (a request that was not granted).⁶²

This case was repeated in 1950 when Lieutenant Elaine T. Carville, then on continuous active duty, asked to be transferred to the Regular Marine Corps. Since there were so few vacancies and they were viewed as recruiting incentives, the Procurement Branch opposed the idea of giving Regular appointments to former WR officers. Having approved Lieutenant Kleberger's case just a year earlier, Colonel Towle felt that Lieutenant Carville should have the same opportunity to compete for a regular commission. Her comments included:

Unfortunately, there is nothing that I can find to prevent former WR officers from applying for regular commissions providing they meet all requirements, including that of age. When the directive concerning the "transfer" program was written this loophole was apparently not considered. Actually because of the age requirement I doubt if we will have many, if any, more such requests; most of the MCWR officers are already too old even with service adjusted age. Carville herself just got under the wire.

Since the WOTC had been set up as the sole means of procuring regular women officers, I would not approve of Carville not being required to take some training. It might be possible to assign her as a platoon commander as we did Kleberger last summer, which could excuse her from attending the WOTC, or her present duties as Assistant Inspector-Instructor of an organized reserve platoon might be considered equivalent training. Certainly, however, she should be required to attend the two months of additional indoctrination if selected for a regular commission as second lieutenant. . . .

Fortunately, Lieutenant Carville is, I understand from various sources, a capable officer, and if selected would probably be a credit to the Marine Corps. But if her request is approved she should be given to understand:

- (1) That she will compete with WOTC graduates on an equal basis, with no prior assurance of selection.
- (2) That she can in no event receive a regular commission higher than second lieutenant.
- (3) That she would have to complete such basic indoctrination as the Marine Corps prescribes.⁶³

These women, Doris Kleberger and Elaine Carville, both retired lieutenant colonels, were the only former WRs who had to take a demotion upon transfer to

the Regular Marine Corps. Captain Warner, the assistant OIC that summer at Quantico, did not meet the age requirements for transfer and remained a Reservist. During the Korean War, another integration program opened, and she was able to integrate without losing any rank.

A problem surfaced in 1953 when Lieutenants Kleberger and Carville found:

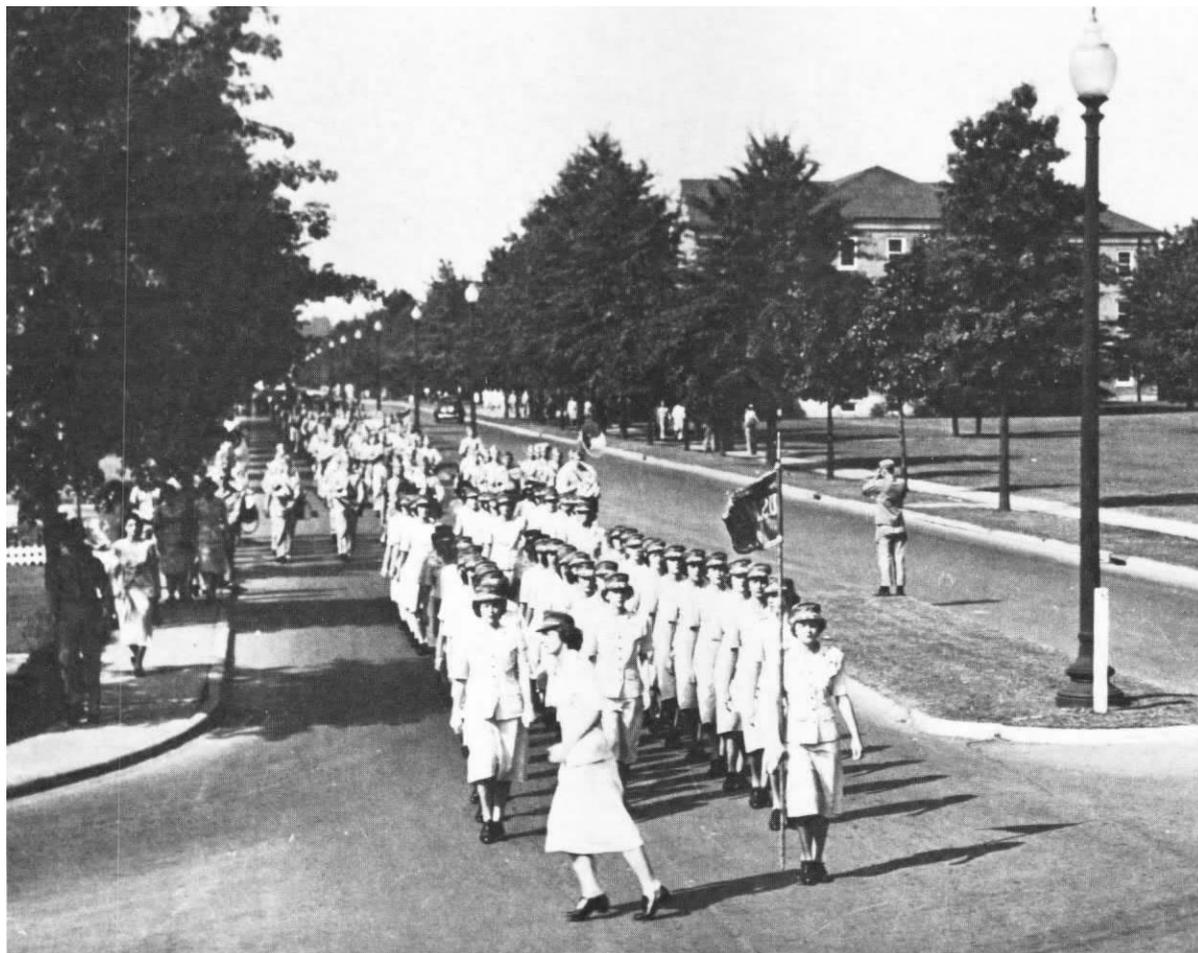
... that we were subject to separation from the Marine Corps under P.L. 625 because of the loophole in the law that neither the Marine Corps nor either of us considered when accepting commissions as second lieutenants with date of rank of 1949 and 1950, respectively. Basically, this provided for the separation of officers who had completed seven years of active commissioned service, regular and *reserve*, and who had not been selected for the rank of Captain. JAG ruled that we could not eliminate our reserve active time and there was no way we could become eligible for Captain before

reaching that seven years of active commissioned service. This eventually required seeking relief from the Board of Correction of Naval Records and subsequent reassignment of date of rank to provide eligibility for the rank of Captain before mandatory separation.⁶⁴

In addition to the Regular commissions awarded to members of the first class, Reserve commissions were given to: Sara J. Anderson, Nedra C. Calender, Catherine L. Frazier, Pearl A. Jackson, Mildred D. Morrow, Mary E. O'Donnel, Emily C. Ogburn, Shirley A. Pritsker, Margaret C. Roberts, Barbara J. Stephenson, Phyllis L. Jones, and Marie L. Henry.⁶⁵ Among the 16 undergraduates who returned to school, but later served on active duty were Barbara B. Kasdorf, Joan P. O'Neil, Natalie Noble, and Mary Sue Mock.

The seven "Regulars" were assigned to the Basic School and began the Woman Officers' Indoctrination

Capt Elsie E. Hill, officer-in-charge, leads candidates of the first Woman Officer Candidate Class as they parade on Barnett Avenue, Quantico, Virginia, summer 1949.



Course on 23 September, but an administrative detail delayed their commissioning until the end of the month. During the intervening week, WOIC consisted of one Reserve first lieutenant and six Reserve sergeants—one of whom, Joan Morrissey, was underage and had to complete the entire course as an enlisted woman.⁶⁶

Captain Hill, assigned to the S-3 of the Basic School, and now the only woman staff officer left at Quantico, accompanied the students on a trip to Parris Island which was planned to acquaint the new officers

with recruit training and to give them the opportunity to drill enlisted troops. In the fall of 1949, there were no enlisted women—except Sergeant Morrissey—stationed at Quantico, and it was awkward, if not impossible, to conduct any type of close order drill with a formation of seven women.⁶⁷

Upon graduation, 18 November, the lieutenants were transferred and Captain Hill was reassigned to the Testing and Educational Unit, thereby becoming the first postwar woman Marine to be permanently stationed at Quantico.⁶⁸