

1945 February 12-18

Women in Uniform



Thirteen Nurses just signed up for the army nurse corps were honor guests of the Elks at a banquet Monday night, the lodge according them the same send-off it has shown flyers, Wacs and Waves of the vicinity. Four officers of Camp McCoy station hospital were joint guests with them. In the back row standing, left to right, the nurses are Elizabeth Pischke, West Salem; Lillian Gordon, Galesville; Kathryn Mauel and Margaret Hansen, Cashton; Emma Young, Soldiers Grove; Mary Jo Anderson, Lansing, Ia.; Norma Michel, Prairie du Chien; Marie Waldenberger, Onalaska; Marie Zimmer, Spring Valley. Seated at the left of

the McCoy officers are Pat Nash, Arcadia, and Marian Farley, New Lisbon; at the right, Marjorie Roberts, 1335 Wood, and Jane McLaughlin, 333 North 23rd. McCoy officers are Capt. E. Starr, Lieut. Maren A. Frye, Lieut. Mary E. Miller and Lieut. Clanton C. Shipp, Jr. One nurse, Janis Neisis of Manitowoc, Wis., was absent from the gathering because of illness. Completing the banquet company were Norman Schulze, district deputy; Joseph L. Murphy, exalted ruler; Paul Sobek, secretary; John B. Coleman and George Howe, chairman and secretary of the Elks' war and defense committee.

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Among this group of thirteen women being honored for volunteering to become Army nurses are **Elizabeth Pischke of West Salem, Marie Waldenberger of Onalaska, Marjorie Roberts of La Crosse, and Jane McLaughlin, also of La Crosse.** They are just a few of the many La Crosse County women who volunteered to serve their country during World War II.

For eons, women had cared for children and their homes while men went off to war. The 20th Century, especially World War II, was when that began to change.

At the beginning of World War II, the only options for American women in the military were the Army Nurse Corps (est. 1901) and the Navy Nurse Corps (est. 1908).¹

With the great demands for manpower during World War II, the armed forces found it necessary to fill some other jobs with women so more men could be deployed in combat roles.

Some 300,000 to 400,000 American women volunteered to serve in the military during World War II.²

In a military that was segregated by sex, as well as by race, women in World War II served in an alphabet soup of military acronyms denoting new female formations:

- WAAC: Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later shortened to Women's Army Corps or WAC; curiously, the *La Crosse Tribune* always wrote it as "Wac")
- WAVES: Navy Women's Reserve.
- SPARS: Coast Guard Women's Reserve.
- WASPS: Women Airforce Service Pilots.
- Marine Corps Womens Reserve, which did have an acronym.³

The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was established in May 1942 for women ages 20 to 50. The 100,000 women who became WACs went through six weeks of basic training and then specialized schooling. Women could become officers by completing officer candidate school. WACs performed about 250 different jobs in the Army, and about 18 percent of these women were sent overseas.⁴



La Crosse Tribune, 1945 February 7, page 5

Wac Transfer

Pvt. Dorothy Sweet Malinowski has been transferred from Fort Des Moines, Ia., to McCloskey General hospital, Temple, Tex. Her present duty is driving an ambulance.

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For women enlisting in the Navy, their equivalent was Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) created in July 1942. They were ages 20 to 36, and their first stop was Hunter College in New York City for an indoctrination course. By the end of the war, there were about 86,000 WAVES who were doing a wide variety of jobs in the Navy.⁵

Jeanne Spangler S 2/C has been transferred from Hunters College, N. Y., to Washington, D. C., where she is now working in the Bureau of Personnel.

La Crosse County Record, 1945 February 15, page 1

Coast Guard Women's Reserve (SPARS) came into being in November 1942. The 10,000 SPARS had shore posts in the Coast Guard.⁶



Lieut. (JG) June Dittman Nowak, now stationed at Seattle, Wash., as the district war bond officer for the coast guard, 13th naval district, received commendations from Admiral R. R. Waesche, commandant, U. S. coast guards, for her outstanding work in connection with the Pearl Harbor Day cash sale drive recently completed. Under her supervision and guidance, the coast guard 13th naval district led the entire nation in the coast guard sales of war bonds, netting almost a million dollars. The banner was given to the district officer. Lieut. Nowak is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Dittman, 2405 State.

La Crosse Tribune, 1945 February 10, page 8

In February 1943, the Women's Reserve, U.S. Marine Corps, provided slots for 19,000 women. After basic training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, they were given a variety of duties in the United States and its territories.⁷

Cooks' Course

Marine Pvt. Geraldine L. Hovind, daughter of Mrs. Julian Erickson, 741 North 23rd street, recently was graduated from the second cook's course of the Women's Reserve schools in Camp Le Jeune, N. C.

Before enlisting Miss Hovind was graduated from Logan high school and was employed as a clerk in a defense plant. At present she is on duty as an assistant cook in the Woman's Battalion at Camp Le Jeune.

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Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) and Women's Auxiliary Ferry Squadron (WAFS) was the place for women who wanted to fly airplanes in the United States.⁸ These women ferried aircraft from base to base, test-flew repaired aircraft, and towed targets for anti-aircraft gunnery practice.⁹

Because of almost worldwide combat, there was a tremendous need for nurses to take care of the large number of sick and wounded men. In December 1944 alone, about 30,000 sick and wounded servicemen were shipped back to the United States, and in January the number increased to 33,000. With 70,000 beds added to hospitals, there was a shortage of nurses to attend to them all. By early 1945, there were 44,000 women in the Army Nurse Corps, and 71 percent of them were stationed overseas. The Army Nurse Corps commissioned 1,050 nurses in January 1945, and 1,450 in February, but that still left them short by 16,000.¹⁰ Throughout the first part of this year, there were regular appeals in the *La Crosse Tribune* for women to become military nurses.

Nurses found themselves in places that put them in harm's way. They served in field hospitals that were not far from the front lines. Nurses were also on troopships that were sometimes attacked by the enemy. Sixteen Army nurses were killed during the war by enemy fire. When the Japanese conquered the Philippines in early 1942, sixty-eight American service women were captured.¹¹ They endured three years of captivity and deprivation in Japanese prison camps. Another source states that more than 200 military nurses died in the line of duty from all causes.¹² More than 1,600 nurses received decorations "for bravery under fire and meritorious service."¹³

In almost every edition of the *La Crosse Tribune* in the first few months of 1945, there are articles about area women serving in various capacities in the armed forces. The segregation of women in the military was also reflected in the local press. Almost without exception, articles about women in the service are all on the "Women's Page: News for and about Women." Here they are side-by-side with articles about engagements, marriages, anniversaries, women's organizations, and other news oriented toward women.

An exception is this entry from the *La Crosse County Record*, published in Onalaska.



La Crosse County Record, 1945 March 29, page 1

Such columns in the local newspapers were "Our Men in Service," or the above "Our Boys at War." The editors of the *Record* apparently did not realize the incongruity of their column heading and the first paragraph in the column that week. It was rare for women in the military to show up in these columns.

Women took a big leap in the direction of parity in military service during World War II. There were still a lot of hurdles and opposition to overcome during the evolution to where we are today, but these women are the ones who showed the way for those who came after.

Jeff Rand
Adult Services Librarian
La Crosse Public Library

Sources & Notes:

¹ David M. Kennedy, ed., *The Library of Congress World War II Companion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 166. See also: Judith A. Bellafaire, "The Army Nurse Corps," *Center for Military History*, 2003 October 3, <https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/72-14/72-14.HTM>. "The Army Nurse Corps," *WW2 U.S. Medical Research Centre*, accessed 2020 February 16, <https://www.med-dept.com/articles/the-army-nurse-corps/>. "Nurses Corps," *Pritzker Military Museum & Library*, accessed 2020 February 16,

<https://www.pritzkermilitary.org/explore/museum/past-exhibits/shes-wow/nurses-corps/>. Amanda Thibault, "Home Front to War Front: The Navy Nurse Corps During World War II," *Gettysburg College*, 2016 December 12, https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1550&context=student_scholarship.

² "Women's Service," *Summary of the Second World War and Its Consequences: An Alphabetical Reference Book* (Chicago: F. E. Compton & Company, 1946), 120. The National World War II Museum puts the number at 350,000. (See endnote 3.) David M. Kennedy (page 323) states that it was about 272,000, or two percent of the military.

³ "History At a Glance: Women in World War II," *The National WWII Museum*, accessed 2020 February 14, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/women-wwii>.

⁴ "Women's Service," 120. See also: Melissa Ziobro, "'Skirted Soldiers': The Women's Army Corps and Gender Intergration of the U.S. Army during World War II," *Army Historical Foundation*, 2016 June 21, <https://armyhistory.org/skirted-soldiers-the-womens-army-corps-and-gender-integration-of-the-u-s-army-during-world-war-ii/>. Judith A. Bellafaire, "The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service," *Center for Military History*, accessed 2020 February 16, <https://history.army.mil/brochures/wac/wac.htm>. "American Women: World War II," *Library of Congress*, accessed 2020 February 16, <https://memory.loc.gov/am>.

⁵ "Women's Service," 120-121. See also: Sarah Aillon, "The WAVES Of World War II," *National Women's History Museum*, 2019 September 25, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/waves-world-war-ii>. Regina T. Akers, "The WAVES' 75th Birthday," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, 2019 May 10, https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1942/manning-the-us-navy/waves_75th.html. "Navigating the WAVES in World War II," *The Sextant, Naval History and Heritage Command*, 2014 November 6, <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/2014/11/06/navigating-the-waves-in-world-war-ii/>.

⁶ "Women's Service," 121. See also: Robin J. Thomson, "SPARS: The Coast Guard & the Women's Reserve in World War II," *U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office*, accessed 2020 February 16, <https://www.history.uscg.mil/Browse-by-Topic/Notable-People/Women/SPARS/>. William H. Thiesen, "The Long Blue Line: SPARS--female trailblazers of the Coast Guard," *Coast Guard Compass*, 2018 April 12, <https://coastguard.dodlive.mil/2018/04/the-long-blue-line-spars-female-trailblazers-of-the-coast-guard/>.

⁷ "Women's Service," 121. See also: "Free a Marine To Fight: Women Marines in World War II," *National Park Service*, 2017 November 9, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/womenmarinesworldwarII.htm>. "Women Marines in World War II," *Marine Corps University*, accessed 2020 February 16, <https://www.usmcu.edu/Research/Marine-Corps-History-Division/Brief-Histories/Marines-in-World-War-II/Women-Marines-in-World-War-II/>.

⁸ "Women's Service," 121. WAFS and WASPS were technically civilian organizations run by the Army, according to David M. Kennedy, page 168. See also: "History: Origins and Achievements of the WASP," *National WASP World War II Museum*, accessed 2020 February 16, <https://waspmuseum.org/history.html>. Susan Stamberg, "Female WWII Pilots: The Original Fly Girls," *National Public Radio*, 2010 March 9, <https://www.npr.org/2010/03/09/123773525/female-wwii-pilots-the-original-fly-girls>. Caroline Johnson, "Women with Wings: The 75-Year-Legacy of the WASP," *Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum*, 2018 August 5, <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/women-wings-75-year-legacy-wasp>.

⁹ "History At a Glance: Women in World War II."

¹⁰ "Army Nurse Corps Needing 16,000 Nurses Immediately," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 March 18, page 8.

¹¹ "History At a Glance: Women in World War II."

¹² David M. Kennedy, 324.

¹³ "History At a Glance: Women in World War II."