DOWN TO THE SEA IN SLIPS*

Florence C. McLaughlin

This is the story of the recruiting of Navy WAVES\(^1\) from the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, office during World War II, partly told through the clippings, pictures, and hand-written comments in the seven-pound notebook of the former Lt. Wanda McLaughlin, now Mrs. Wayne Hampton Pascuzzi. By 30 July 1945, the WAVES' third birthday, thirty-two hundred young women from Western Pennsylvania were on active duty, and the Pittsburgh Recruiting Office was meeting its new weekly quota of sixteen.\(^2\) The national group had grown to eighty-six thousand in 1945, and took pride in the fact that they had relieved men for sea duty.\(^3\)

These young WAVES were not newcomers to Pennsylvania military tradition; during the American Revolution both Margaret Corbin\(^4\) and Molly Pitcher\(^5\) received pensions from the Pennsylvania Legislature for acting as cannoneers when their soldier husbands were disabled. Or take this entry from Colonial Records: "... an order was drawn upon the Treasurer in favour of Mrs. Eleanor Hitchcock, for the sum of twelve pounds, in full of her account for her services in the years 1775 and 1776, in erecting at Cape Henlopen a large pole, and hoisting thereon from time to time two flags, as signals to vessels belonging to the bay and river Delaware, of the approach of the enemy, pursuant to instructions from the Committee of Safety, dated September 16, 1775."\(^6\)

As the colonial frontier pushed inexorably westward, almost every blockhouse boasted women like Ann Hupp Miller on Dutch Fork of

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Miss McLaughlin, a graduate of Carnegie-Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh, was an officer in the United States Navy in World War II. Sworn into the Navy by Lt. Wanda McLaughlin (not a relative) Miss McLaughlin resumed her career as a teacher of English and Journalism in Mt. Lebanon High School at the close of the war.—Editor

* Edgar Bergen's Charley McCarthy defined WAVES as "sailors who went down to the sea in slips."

1 Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service.
2 Pittsburgh Press clipping from Lt. Wanda McLaughlin's notebook. Hereafter designated NB.
3 Ibid.
4 Colonial Records, Pennsylvania, Vol. XII, 34.
Buffalo Creek, near Claysville, Pennsylvania. Alone with the women during an Indian raid on March 31, 1782, "with children screaming about her and the other women wringing their hands in despair, Ann Hupp Miller never lost her head. Gathering all the guns in the blockhouse, she fired from one porthole to another, giving the impression the place was well defended." Finally she induced some women to man the portholes, and others to keep the guns loaded, until their firing was heard at Rice's Fort and help came.7

Nursing seemed to be the forte of women in Civil War and World War I service. Elizabeth Dysart, a volunteer nurse who often went out on Civil War battlefields, received a gold watch from her patients, and a jewelled 12th Army Corps Badge from the medical officers.8 Colorful Dr. Mary Walker, contract surgeon and spy and in 1864 a commissioned officer, wore trousers with her uniform; in fact, she liked men's clothing so much that after the war she continued to wear it despite jeers and rotten eggs.9 And one more woman, Katherine Mae Joyce, a Pittsburgh nurse from the Allegheny General Hospital contingent of World War I. While serving at an Evacuation Hospital south of Verdun, she contracted pneumonia and died, September 21, 1918. Katherine Mae Joyce received a military funeral at the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh; the Pittsburgh Post for World War I nurses was named in her honor.10

Now, with tradition cited, we shall return to the Navy WAVES of World War II, who volunteered "for the duration and six months or the pleasure of the President," proudly wearing Navy blue.

American women came gradually into the local military picture. First mention on Carnegie Library's microfilmed newspapers of any Pittsburgh woman in military service was Helen Richey of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, who flew war supplies from British factories to strategic defensive areas in the British Isles. Another item from Pittsburgh Press microfilm at the Library, dated September 10, 1942, stated that since women pilots were clicking with the RAF, a second Ferrying Squadron would be soon formed.

First mention of the WAVES was on microfilm from the Pittsburgh Press on 14 July 1942 announcing that the Women's Naval Reserve Bill had been "...sent to conference by the House, creating

7 Biddle and Lowrie, 75.
8 Ibid., 194-195.
9 Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XIX (Scribners, Copyright 1936 by the American Council of Learned Societies), 352.
a Women's Naval Auxiliary Force. The difference between the House and Senate Bill are minor. Chairman Carl Vinson (D., Georgia), of the Naval Affairs Committee asked for a conference when Representative Beverly M. Vincent (D., Ky.) objected to unanimous agreement to the Senate Amendment." All difficulties were ironed out, and it was on 30 July 1942 that the WAVES became an official part of the United States Navy.

Skipper of the new group was Commander, later Captain, Mildred H. McAfee, whose first official picture was described in an article by Helene Josephine Jackson in *Shipmate*, June 1944: "It's formal, serious even . . . But if you should look closely you would see that the corners of her firm, yet sensitive mouth curve upward and you would know . . . that momentarily . . . her bright eyes will crinkle in amusement . . . and there's a vital, clear-eyed look . . . And poise, magnificent poise . . . ."

Captain McAfee, daughter of the late Reverend Cleland Boyd McAfee, formerly moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, was a Vassar graduate, entering the service from the presidency of Wellesley College. She became the first woman ever to be commissioned a naval officer of the Women's Reserve on 21 July 1942, the initial goals being for one thousand WAVE officers, and ten thousand enlisted women.11 "She would be called upon to meet exigencies for which there would be no precedent, and she was a woman invading a man's world."12

One of her first published statements was "It's a man's Navy and women's place is not to reform but to conform."13 It was she who by her example set the pace for all WAVES.

The Navy looked for the best products of the colleges and other schools for their beginnings. "We had to," Miss Elizabeth Reynard of the Hunter College Training Center explained, "we had to have the best to set the tone."14

Having touched briefly on the beginnings of the organization, let us turn to Ensign Wanda McLaughlin, through her notebook tell her story from enlistment to discharge, and in so doing, tell the essential story of all WAVES, whether they were assigned to BuShips in Bath, Maine, communications in Norfolk, Virginia, barracks duty in Washington, D. C., a disbursing office in San Francisco, a hospital in

11 Helene Josephine Jackson, "Captain Mildred H. McAfee," *Shipmate*, June 1944, NB.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
New Orleans, or to any one of a thousand and one duties in a far-flung Navy.

Prior to receiving her commission in the Navy, Ensign McLaughlin had been employed in the personnel department of Marshall Field and Company, Chicago, Illinois, and at the University of Chicago, being active in affairs at the University of Chicago Settlement House. She was graduated from the University of South Dakota, with degrees in music and languages.

Hers was the first class of WAVE officers training at Mt. Holyoke College, but the second class of WAVES, since “Smith College had the first class plus a second one while we were at Mt. Holyoke,” she stated in a letter to the writer. Enlisted WAVES trained at Hunter College, New York City, and at Milledgeville, Georgia. Later Mt. Holyoke College was superseded in officer training by Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, with WAVES living on campus and at the Northampton Hotel.

She wrote in her notebook: “Wanda Mae McLaughlin, Civilian, reported for training at Mt. Holyoke and on 19 October 1942 became Wanda Mae McLaughlin, Ensign USNR-WR in the very first class at Mt. Holyoke, the only W-V (S) there.” It was a frantic time: “... a long memory of classes in Ships and Aircraft, Organization and Administration, History, Personnel, Admiralty law, being on the ‘Tree,’ having laundry detail under Ensign Dona Trapani, who buoyed up my crestfallen spirits. Drilling and marching through rain. My roomies. Many cokes between classes. Tea in a delightful New England bookstore after 1700. Shots in the arm on Wednesday. A horror in my uniform — getting fatter by the week. The lovely Berkshires from our window. Rita and I in New York on week-end liberty, afraid to salute. Singing after evening show and study period. Hearing Miss McAfee the first time. Folk dancing and how I hated it! Captain’s inspection on Saturday mornings, and a wild dash for trains out of town afterward. Some of us had week-end liberty in Boston the weekend of the great night club fire. Fortunately none of us disobeyed orders about going into night clubs, but there was great tension until everyone was accounted for. Getting back a minute late from liberty and thinking we would be courtmartialed. Graduation and still not being sure I would be hauled out of line at the last moment. But in the

15 In Navy parlance, being “on the Tree” shows anything but aptitude. It is a weekly list of shortcomings, posted for all the world to read. Failing examinations, tardiness, untidy uniform, a poorly made bunk, an incorrectly filled-out laundry list are a few of the possible items on the list. Life’s darkest moment!
confusion they didn't bilge me! I drew Philadelphia which broke my heart — I wanted New York."

Muscles ached during training, feet became blistered. Arms were sore from shots. Class work was piled on without sufficient time to study. At Northampton and at Holyoke, future officers evaded "lights out" at 2200 (once 10 p.m.) by having one girl on the deck (once a floor) under a blanket with a flashlight and a textbook; while one roommate stood watch at the door, the rest took part in a whispered question-and-answer session.

Egos were reduced to a pulp, and only the good sport with a saving gift of laughter could survive. One future officer at Northampton, for example, who had been on the Aptitude Tree for four consecutive weekly postings, was preparing her family to receive their daughter in disgrace at the end of the training period with her "Well, I'm on the Aptitude Tree again . . . ." One day she read her roommates a clipping from her hometown paper: "Miss ............., daughter of the ..............'s, of ................. Avenue, has been honored during her WAVE training at Northampton by making the Aptitude Tree four weeks in a row." After roaring with laughter over the clipping, she never again made the "Tree" and was commissioned after two months of training, serving with distinction. Somehow the clipping had put everything in perspective.

Girls marched to classes, to chow, to shots, to uniform and shoe fittings, to evening lectures that seemed designed to keep them from studying, to church on Sunday, in regimental review every Saturday. As they marched they sang and every week brought new songs. Here are some of the Mt. Holyoke favorites from Ensign McLaughlin's notebook:

**This Is the Navy**

This is the Navy, Ensign Kidd,
You keep your boyfriend's picture hid,
Sea maneuvers and love don't mix
And the Captain's not at all like Dorothy Dix.

This is the Navy, Ensign Beals,
You said farewell to your high heels,
You march through puddles that simply ooze
But you never must have mud upon your shoes.

This is the Navy, Ensign Redd,
The last job you do is climb to bed,
Though you sleep 60 inches above the deck, 
You sleep as you never slept, by heck.

OH, HOW I HATE TO GET UP IN THE MORNING 
(To the tune by Irving Berlin) 
Oh, how I hate to get up in the morning, 
Oh, how I'd like to remain in bed, 
But the hardest blow of all 
Is to hear the matey call 
"All hands hit the deck" 
"All hands hit the deck" 
"All hands hit the deck"—this morning.

Some day I'm going to scuttle the matey 
Some day they're going to find her dead, 
And then I'll fix the other pup, 
The officer who wakes her up 
AND SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE IN BED!!

Now I Am an Ensign in the Dames' Navy 
(To the tune of "Queen's Navy," Gilbert and Sullivan) 
When I was a gal, I made so bold 
As to call the cellar by the name of hold. 
I prattled merrily of Mates of the Day 
And I stowed all my gear in a shipshape way. 
I used to speak so nautically 
That now I am an ensign in the Dames' Navy. 
I used to speak so nautically 
That now I am an ensign in the Dames' Navy.

When I was a tot I learned respect 
For all j.g.'s and Mates of the Deck. 
I rose and shone when day was night 
And I knew that port was left and starboard right. 
I climbed topside so ladderly 
That now I am an ensign in the Dames' Navy.

After two months, brand-new Ensign McLaughlin left Mt. Holyoke, and reported briefly to Philadelphia before receiving orders for the office of WAVE and Naval Officer Procurement Headquarters, Keystone Hotel, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, arriving in a blizzard.
Officers at headquarters with whom she served were Commander Charles McK. Lynch; Lt. James Hezlep, executive officer; Lt. C. Stanton Belfour, who at first headed the recruiting drives for men and women; R. D. Seltzer, officer in charge of the WAVE office; and Lt. Josephine Campbell, senior WAVE officer.

Ensign McLaughlin's first speaking engagements have this entry: “Stan and I appeared before many men's service clubs. Some clubs were most cordial, some listless.” She had her picture taken beside a recruiting poster at Erie, Pennsylvania, “still puzzled about how to wear a WAVE hat without looking scalped and still be GI.”

In May 1943, Mildred Chambers Y3/c and Ensign McLaughlin started out on their own. During WAVE week, Ensign McLaughlin spoke before over five thousand people in ten days. “Applicants stayed away in droves,” she wrote in her notebook. “But from the hardest place to crack, Erie by August 1944 was furnishing one-third of Pittsburgh's enlistments.”

Miss Kay North, the Navy's early civilian representative in Erie, helped to recruit several outstanding officers, and the WAVES were under way. By 1944 Seaman Grace Loudon was stationed permanently in Erie, and Ensigns Jean Moore and McLaughlin went up on Saturdays to swear in recruits.

At one time in Erie thirteen WAVES were sworn in on the stage at the Warner Theater. “I swore in seven between a Tarzan picture and Bank Night. It was effective, so we continued,” she wrote. “We finally had Dr. Jaubrich at the Erie Induction Center do physicals there each Saturday, because we were getting so many girls from the Erie vicinity."

Meadville was another town often visited, with Venango Inn the WAVES' “beloved home away from home.” Here Lt. McLaughlin and her team of assistants, now grown in number to include Grace Loudon, Elizabeth Henning, Margot Strandberg, and Yeoman 2/c Heyne, put on the biggest drive of any during a three-day period. The team won a national Navy citation.

“I spoke while Corky the Human Cork bobbed merrily around in the Y pool! We took a bus from Venango Inn each morning, and someone would come for us at night. Then the Medical Board came and we swore in thirty-seven, at night. Cynthia was the thirty-seventh, at 2 A.M. at the Inn.” In addition, ten 19-year-old girls were committed to the Navy immediately after passing the crucial twentieth birthday. The drive began on 23 February and ended on 1 March 1944.

Thirty-seven enlistments and almost as many unusual names.
“There was an Alexa, a Birdena, a Twila Ileen, a Melva, a Cosima, a Margaret Magdalene, a Velma. What's in a name? At least we can answer Shakespeare's question: Good WAVE material.”

During this enlistment drive in Meadville, a press release by Commander Charles McKenna Lynch, officer in charge of Naval Procurement Office in Pittsburgh, appeared in the local paper;¹ in it he stated that there was a career for every young woman in helping her country win the war as a member of the WAVES.

“WAVES have become weather forecasters, aviation mechanics, electricians, physiotherapy technicians and a long list of equally fascinating and vitally important jobs,” he stated.

“Women are able to do these jobs in part because of their civilian experience and in part because of additional training which they receive in the Navy. As a matter of fact many girls discover aptitudes and abilities which they never suspected they possessed as a result of the placement tests which are given to every girl.”

The notebook contains an undated interview with Commander Lynch in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, in which he enlarged upon his above statement about WAVES: “They are efficient, industrious, and loyal. As for discipline, they take to it like a midshipman in the United States Navy, and that's high praise.”

Commander Lynch readily admitted that he had to change his mind about women in the Navy. “In fact, I was sorry for the Navy. I thought girls would be more interested in their dates than in their work and would want to leave the office at five o'clock. Now they have my one hundred per cent approval. Never in one instance has there been an infraction of discipline. They don't want special favors — and they don't get them.”

He praised the four WAVE officers and five enlisted girls who served in the Pittsburgh Naval Procurement Office as all excellent speakers. “Effective in their presentation of detail, they retain their enthusiasm, and they are tireless, even though some of them have been called upon to make as many as five speeches in five different theaters in an out-of-town district after a hard day's work at the office,” he declared.

As for their office duties, WAVES interviewed candidates, gave aptitude tests, kept records, made radio broadcasts, conducted recruit-

¹ From Carnegie Library Reference Room: this Meadville paper from 1941-43 published a morning paper called the Tribune-American and an evening paper called the Republican; in 1944, the morning paper was called the Tribune-Republican and the evening, the Republican; in 1945, only an evening paper was published, the Tribune-Republican. Owners were the Bates family. Clipping in NB is undated.
The WAVE recruiting team at Meadville: Mary Elizabeth Henning, Sp. 3/c; Ember Heyne, Yeoman 2/c; Lt. (j.g.) Wanda McLaughlin; Grace London, Rec. Spec. 3/c; and Margo Strandberg, Rec. Spec. 3/c. (Winter uniform.)
Their first launching of an LST at Dravo Shipyards, Neville Island, 30 July 1943, first birthday of the WAVES. Ensign Wanda McLaughlin, Ensign Mildred McCarrol, Ensign Margaret Bovard, Lt. (j.g.) Ruby Leighton, Ensign Ann Marsh, and Ensign Josephine Campbell. (Dress blues with white hat top.)

Ember Heyne, Yeoman 2/c; Mary Elizabeth Henning, Rec. Spec. 3/c; and Lt. (j.g.) Ann Marsh, enjoy cake at the WAVES’ second birthday party, 30 July 1944. (Dress whites.)
Lt. (j.g.) Wanda McLaughlin, wearing havelock and winter overcoat.

Lt. Wanda McLaughlin in the summer seersucker uniform of gray and white stripes, with her new overseas cap. (There was also a striped cover for the standard hat, a white cover to be worn with dress blues and dress white uniforms, and a navy blue woolen cover for winter uniform, all easily snapped on.)
On their second birthday, 30 July 1944, WAVES are on the bridge at the commissioning of an LST, Dravo Shipyards, Neville Island.

Lt. Wanda McLaughlin presents a ship's bell to Commander Charles McKenna Lynch at the WAVES' third birthday party, 30 July 1945, at "Starboard Light," home of Commander and Mrs. Lynch.
ing drives in a neighboring town, addressed a home front rally, attended ship launchings, addressed clubs, paraded for bond rallies, administered the oath to newly recruited WAVES, and sent off groups of candidates for training. He also emphasized the girls’ pride in their uniforms, that they well represented the Navy in its best tradition.

In a recent letter to the writer, Lt. McLaughlin also commented on the office staff: “It was a significant honor for Commander Lynch to be made the head of the entire Naval District, shifting the center from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh for however brief a period. As I told you, our office was scrutinized for the secret of our good spirits. Commander Lynch set the tone of unfailing gallantry toward the WAVES and concern for the crew. He and Mrs. Lynch even remembered the births of sailors’ children. Stan Belfour unquestionably led the enthusiasm for our recruiting work, both men’s and women’s. Bob Seltzer demanded and received full performance of duty. He was an excellent administrator. And Jim Hezlep was the epitome of the Navy officer — handsome, immaculate, dignified yet emanating the suspicion of his sense of humor.

“Jo Campbell’s role of Senior WAVE was unenviable. She had to set the standards for selecting officer candidates as well as become acceptable to a male clerical crew, and later supervise a bevy of most attractive, intelligent, and highly individual women new to regimentation.”

Lt. McLaughlin also referred to happy public relations with the Pittsburgh Courier and the Negro WAVES, clean-cut, brilliant, and well-qualified.

Inducting seventy-five WAVES in Pittsburgh one night when the Pirates played the Giants was the biggest and most exciting swearing-in of WAVES.17 “The girls stood in a large circle. We also had numerous Naval officers present. I had the dreadful duty of asking the entire crowd to rise, and was ever so grateful that they did, and remained standing while I administered the oath, then marched the girls off the field,” Lt. McLaughlin recalled.18

WAVES from the Pittsburgh office had the thrill of their first ship launching at the Dravo Shipyard on Neville Island on the group’s first birthday, 30 July 1943. There was also a large ball to celebrate the birthday, given by the American Women’s Voluntary Services in the William Penn Hotel Ballroom. A huge crowd came.19

17 Letter, to writer from Lt. Wanda McLaughlin, 31 August 1968.
18 Ibid.
19 NB.
Erie, Meadville, and Pittsburgh have been mentioned so far as good recruiting sources. Dubois, Johnstown, Altoona, Greensburg, Uniontown and Wheeling also furnished many WAVES. All of these towns except Wheeling simply gave girls information material and referred them to Pittsburgh; but Wheeling had a whirlwind chief Imhoff, whose sole duty was to recruit WAVES. Wheeling was always a favorite town with recruiters, because the Navy was treated well.20

Outstanding in the notebook was a recruiting-bondselling program called "WAVES Ahoy," including a fashion parade, in Oglebay Park Outdoor Theater, in Wheeling, on Sunday evening, 11 June 1944. It was produced by the Musical Steelmakers of Wheeling Steel in cooperation with the Wheeling Sub-Station Recruiting Office of the United States Navy.

The Wheeling Steel Corporation, newspapers, merchants, radio stations, and the "Ripples," who were WAVE and civilian representatives, all helped to make the affair a memorable one; the Fifth War Loan was emphasized.

Music was nostalgically salty, "Anchors Aweigh," of course, "The Navy Hymn," "WAVES in Navy Blue." The girls modeled the blue work dress, winter coat, summer greys, slacks, pharmacist mate's smock, havelock,21 enlisted white, and officer white.

Lt. McLaughlin's comment on the Wheeling program: "Everything went off smoothly. Dottie Stow and I had an unsuccessful drive for the first time, but the program did a lot of good." Lt. McLaughlin also made her first national radio broadcast during the program. Her speech was about "Invasion," which came two days later in Normandy.

The last news clipping in the notebook is from the Pittsburgh Press concerning the celebration of the WAVES' third birthday, 30 July 1945, at "Starboard Light," home of Commander and Mrs. Lynch: "Playing host and hostess to more than 50 officers and enlisted personnel of the United States Navy procurement office in Pittsburgh as well as some civilian guests were Commander and Mrs. Charles McKenna Lynch. He, with offices in Pittsburgh, is now procurement officer for the Fourth Naval District."

20 NB.
21 From the Random House Dictionary of the English Language: "A cap cover with a flap hanging over the back of the neck, for protection from the sun. (Named after Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857), English general in India.)" It was part of the Northern Zouave uniform early in the American Civil War, and was adapted for the WAVE uniform as rain gear. Sailors do not carry umbrellas!
The news clipping reviewed the growth of the WAVES from 30 July 1942, less than eight months after Pearl Harbor. "Starting from scratch they have grown to 86,000, and take pride in the fact that they relieved that many for sea duty."

The Pittsburgh office, the story stated, had recruited thirty-two hundred WAVES in all.

In the news photograph of the party, the caption read: "Lt. Wanda McLaughlin presented Cdr. Lynch with a ship's bell as a token of esteem and appreciation from the WAVES of the Pittsburgh office. 'Ring the bell, Commander,' brought the reply, 'You don't ring a ship's bell. You strike it."

In the ensuing months, World War II came to a close, and the WAVES became civilians. One last comment on the girls from the Pittsburgh office: In them one sees all WAVES. All were selected first because of special training or education in civilian life. All had passed rigid physical and mental tests, aptitude tests, and basic training. On assignment, they were all extremely adaptable, proud of the Navy, and proud to wear the Navy blue.

These happenings seem light-years ago. And this was how they all felt.

Captain Mildred McAfee, now Mrs. Douglas Horton, admirably expresses the spirit of the WAVES in her contribution for this article:

"Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service in the Naval Reserve of the Second World War had a song which included the words, 'We will free our Navy's men who will free the world.' Twenty-five years later the task is unfinished, but WAVES who entered military service to accomplish that purpose are glad that they could serve their country as it undertook to protect and spread freedom.

"At one time there were some eighty-six thousand women in Navy uniform. They were all volunteers who hoped by their service to shorten a war they and their brothers hated. They came from all the states and none came more eagerly or helpfully than those from Pennsylvania.

"The nation is indebted to them, but they would be the first to insist that they are indebted to the nation for giving them the opportunity to share the responsibility of citizenship which the men of the country assumed so fully."

(The writer wishes to express her appreciation to Mrs. Mildred McAfee Horton and Mrs. Wanda McLaughlin Pascuzzi for their invaluable help in the writing of the above article.)