The Coast Guard & the Women's Reserve in World War II

By PA2 Robin J. Thomson

CG THANKS SPARs

To the Coast Guard Women's Reserve:

As you approach your 50th anniversary of service, we in the U.S. Coast Guard salute you.

As World War II set in, like most Americans, you knew there was a job to be done. More than 10,000 of you set to work showing your eagerness for the war effort, your pride in our nation and your patriotism in the work you undertook.

We honor the traditional Coast Guard zeal and dedication with which you served when your country needed you.

To those who are with us today and those who have crossed over the bar, we thank you for your pioneering spirit. You paved the way not only for the Coast Guard women of today, but for an entire service of equality and diversity.

Your service in the Coast Guard is now a memory, but is not forgotten. To all SPARs past and present, we wish you fair winds and following seas.

Semper Paratus forever, from the women and men of today's Coast Guard, Coast Guard Reserve and Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Sincerely,

J. W. Kime

J. W. KIME, ADM, USCG
Commandant

The Coast Guard & the Women's Reserve in World War II is a publication of the Coast Guard Historian's Office, and a *Commandant's Bulletin* insert for October 1992. For information about the Coast Guard, visit your local library or write to the Coast Guard Historian's office at Commandant (G-CP/H), 2100 2nd St. S.W., Washington, D.C. 20593. Text, design and layout by PA2 Robin J. Thomson. Inside photos courtesy of the Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Front Cover: Yeoman Third Class Ruth Conn was one of 10,000 SPARS who served in the Coast Guard Women's Reserve from 1942 to 1946. Photo courtesy of Coast Guard Historian.

Back Cover: The Coast Guard produced a number of SPAR recruiting posters during World War II. Top left photo by PA2 Teffan H. Brown, all others courtesy of Coast Guard Historian.

WORDS FROM THE CAPTAIN

On their 50th anniversary, the director of the SPARs recalls the early days and salutes today's Coast Guard

To the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard:

As we SPARs approach our 50th anniversary, we salute you and are grateful for the opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the Coast Guard for having created us Nov. 23, 1942.

We still belong to the Coast Guard in spirit. We may have changed a bit, as has the Coast Guard over the years, but our devotion to the Coast Guard hasn't.

We note with awe and respect, the widened opportunities the current women who are serving in the Coast Guard have.

We couldn't go to sea, let alone command a Coast Guard cutter. We had no authority over any man in the Coast Guard, officer or enlisted. We couldn't serve beyond the continental limits of the United States. Our command authority was severely limited.

I am sometimes referred to as the commanding officer of the SPARs. Actually, I had no command authority. All I had was power of persuasion.

Two of the reasons for our survival were that we believed deeply in our mission and the commandant of the Coast Guard, ADM Russell R. Waesche, who gave us full support. Both factors were critical to success. Moreover, since we were untried, we knew that if one failed, we all failed. That is why we tried so hard.

Criticism of married women who volunteered was somewhat muted by the Congressional restriction that no woman with children under 18 years old could enter any of the services. How different things are now.

We, the pioneers, salute the Coast Guard for its progress in the utilization of women. It is a leader in the field. Do you think the original SPARs may claim a little bit of the credit?

It was not always easy to be a pioneer. The public was uncertain about us. So were some of our civilian colleagues. I caught criticism from all sides.

In fact, a woman trustee at Purdue University — where I had been dean of women — said, "Dorothy, you can't afford to do this." I just said, "I can't afford not to."

As I think of our early days, I remember our shipmates for whom the bell has already tolled. We miss them, we honor them. Our lives are diminished by their absence. May God be gracious unto them.

The SPARs are a loyal band. As we gather in Washington, D.C. to celebrate our 50th, Nov. 19–23, we look forward to singing once more, "Aye, Coast Guard, we are for you."

Sincerely,

Dorothy C. Stratton

D.C. STRATTON, CAPT, USCGR (W)
Director, Coast Guard
Women's Reserve

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Dorothy Stratton was born March 24, 1898, in Brookfield, Mo. After she graduated from Ottawa University in Kansas with a bachelor of arts degree in 1920, she alternated between teaching at high schools and studying — receiving a master of arts in psychology from the University of Chicago and a doctorate of philosophy from Columbia University.

She joined the staff of Purdue University in 1933, as dean of women and associate professor of psychology. She became a full professor in 1940.

In 1942, she left Purdue on a leave of absence to join the Navy Women's Reserve as a senior lieutenant.

When President Roosevelt signed the bill establishing the Coast Guard Women's Reserve in November 1942, Stratton was the first woman accepted for service and was named as director of the SPARs, with the rank of lieutenant commander. She was made a commander Jan. 1, 1944, and a captain one month later.

Her medals and awards include the Coast Guard Legion of Merit medal and the American Theater and Victory ribbons.

Women Join the Fight in World War II

These mothers, daughters, sisters, wives and fiancées of the brave young men wanted to do their part too, became soldiers, sailors and airmen — and even Coast Guardsmen

Above: *A young woman reads a Coast Guard SPARs brochure during World War II.*

The 1940s bring memories of tearful train-station good-byes, war bond drives, ration cards and much-feared telegrams.

To the soldiers, sailors and airmen of that era, World War II was not just a far-off conflict, it was a reality. These young men were in the forefront in war-torn Europe and the battle grounds of the Pacific.

But for the women left behind, the reality of war was also close to home. These mothers, daughters, sisters, wives and fiancées of the brave young men wanted to do their part too and became soldiers, sailors and airmen — and even Coast Guardsmen in the global war.

On Nov. 23, 1942, legislation was approved creating yet another arm of the U.S. Coast Guard, one that would pave the way for Coast Guard women of today — The U.S. Coast Guard Women's Reserve, also known as the SPARs.

Although the Coast Guard had done many jobs since 1790 without taking women into its enlisted or officer ranks, the onset of a world war changed the course of history for

women in all the armed services. When World War II came, the Coast Guard and the other services found themselves in great need of more men at sea and more troops on foreign soil. They acknowledged that filling U.S. shore jobs with women would allow more men to serve elsewhere and hasten the war effort.

SPARs provide the answer

The SPARs were the answer to the Coast Guard's problem. These women were under military direction, and they were subject to assignment according to the needs of the service. This was one of the the key factors in using women as part of the military force. The jobs they were filling could not have been done by civilians working for the armed forces because they were not as mobile and did not fall under military law and discipline.

The establishment of the SPARs also showed legislative recognition of a democratic woman's right to directly participate as members of the armed services in the joint war effort.

Even their male counterparts thought highly of the SPARs.

"Uncle Sam needs the SPARs or he'd never have them in uniform," said Coxswain Frank Bartlett. "They are a saving to the government. If they were civilian employees in civil service, they would be drawing high wages.

"As it is, they are drawing the same as we are for the same job we once had," he said. "We welcome them. They gave us our one and only chance for the job we want, — the sea."

This new influx of personnel on the horizon raised some questions for the previously all-male service. Separate housing and messing facilities and personnel policies were among the issues under consideration with this revolutionary concept.

The service dealt with the berthing and messing problem by providing separate housing — often dormitory style — for the newest Coast Guard personnel.

When it came to personnel policies, the Coast Guard reflected on the issue as a whole. Since fairness and individual consideration of personnel had long been standard, if not a tradition for the Coast Guard, the service welcomed the newest ranks — women reservists — in the same manner as those before them. The Coast Guard's policy did not change with the onset of women. It remained to make use of its personnel to carry out the varied duties and responsibilities and to equally reward those who gave faithful service.

10,000 women volunteer

The Coast Guard and the nation were in need, and America's young women re-

Below: *Two SPARs raise their right hands to be sworn into the service.*
Inset: *A recruit takes a break before boarding a train bound for indoctrination training.*

Right: *SPARs stand watch in a communications center during the war.*

sponded. More than 10,000 women volunteered for service between 1942 and 1946. This reserve corps also had its own commanding officer, Dorothy C. Stratton.

Stratton was the dean of women on leave from Purdue University and a lieutenant in the Navy Women's Reserve, also known as WAVEs. She was promoted to lieutenant commander when she became the director of the SPARs and was later promoted to captain.

In fact, it is believed that she was the originator of the nickname SPARs. Their original name, WORCOGS, gave way to the nautical term and the contraction of the Coast Guard's motto — Semper Paratus, Always Ready.

Patriotism is key

There were many reasons why these young women joined the SPARs. One of the main reasons enlisted SPARs joined was patriotism. They expressed a desire to be of more direct help in the war effort.

Other reasons included a wish to relieve a man for active combat elsewhere, a chance for self improvement or advancement, an opportunity for travel, and a desire for excitement and adventure.

> *"We welcome them. They gave us our one and only chance for the job we want — the sea."*
>
> — Coxswain Frank Bartlett

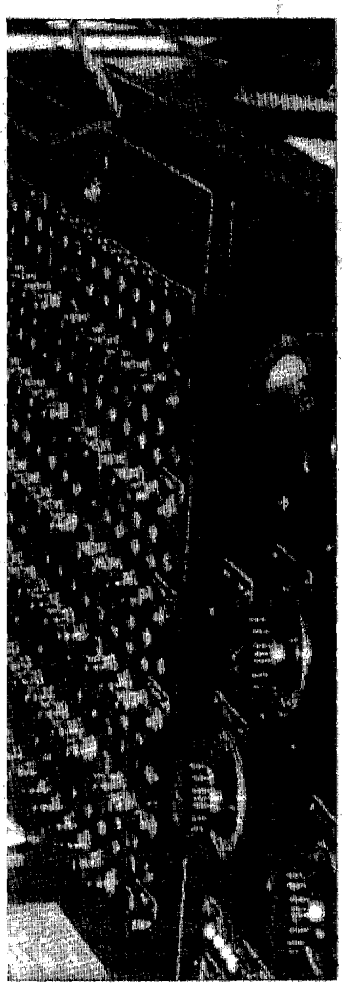
Soon after the legislation was passed in November 1942, a recruiting drive began to build the SPAR corps. Although military services had been recruiting their members for many years, SPAR recruiters faced two challenges — recruiting women and recruiting them for one of the least-known services.

In fact, in early 1944, Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, issued a guidance memorandum for SPAR recruiting officers.

The recruiters were told not to sit in an office and wait for the women to walk in; they should go to the field and talk to prospective applicants and their families.

They did just that, according to LT Kay Arthur, a former SPAR and co-author of *Three Years Behind the Mast: The Story of the Coast Guard SPARs*.

"When the memo arrived at a southern



Left: *An electrician's mate traces an electrical distribution path.*

recruiting office, the staff had just returned from a trek through a cotton field to secure enlistment permission from a girl's irate parents who were at work there," Arthur said.

Another aspect of SPAR recruiting was the much-debated *Tars and Spars* music and dance show. The show was on the road in East Coast cities during the summer of 1944. It is not known how much the show drew the attention of applicants, but SPAR officers did agree that the show raised the level of Coast Guard-consciousness as a whole.

Coast Guard begins recruiting black women

While the recruiting drive was moving forward, it wasn't until October 1944 that the Coast Guard authorized its recruiting officers to accept black women for enlistment, provided they were fully qualified.

This initiative came after a Department of the Navy directive. Because the officer training program for recruited civilians had come to a close, no civilian black women were accepted as officer candidates. However, some black women were interested and applied for enlistment. Within the first six months after the new initiative, four black women had made application and were accepted into the SPARs.

Even though the officer corps was closed to civilian black women, it was possible for prior-enlisted black SPARs to attend officer training.

"There were six nurses of my heritage who were ensigns," said Yeoman Second Class Olivia J. Hooker, the first black woman to enlist in the SPARs.

All SPAR applicants went through a relatively similar experience called processing. Similar to the enlistment process of today, the young women waded through a mountain of forms, interviews, physical exams and a mental aptitude test.

The average woman applying for enlistment was a single, 22-year-old high school

Above: *SPAR ensigns go armed with pistols on confidential missions for communications offices.*

graduate. She had worked for more than three years in a clerical or sales job, earning $26.94 per week before joining.

The chances were good that she came from Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio or California, according to a May 1943 survey.

In a similar survey done in July 1943, it was discovered that the average SPAR officer applicant was a single, 29-year-old college graduate. She worked for seven years in either a professional or managerial position, in the field of education or government, earning $50 per week before joining the SPARs. In most cases, her service in the Coast Guard used the tools of her profession or civilian experience.

After the rounds of paperwork and exams, the eager applicants were finally on their way.

"The Women's Reserve of the United States Coast Guard was officially established by act of Congress on 23 November 1942, but for each of us it really got underway on the date when, as a shakingly triumphant civilian, we raised our right hands and repeated the oath that made us a SPAR," Arthur said.

Enlisted training begins

Like their male counterparts, SPARs also arrived at an embarkation point on their way to basic training. With tearful goodbyes and well wishes from family and friends, the SPARs departed and the training began.

Enlisted SPARs trained at a variety of places, beginning with the first group of WAVEs who transferred to the SPARs and trained at a college campus in the midwest, to the last few to leave the training station at Manhattan Beach, N.Y.

For SPARs, the indoctrination period was a mad rush of classes, physical education, aptitude tests, physical exams, shots, drill, mess and watch. It was the job of the training stations to convert the enlistees as soon as possible. It was the boots' responsibility to hurry up and wait. And wait they did, for graduation day, when they received orders.

It was this experience that transformed a young woman of the 1940s from Miss Smith with casual posture, wearing a fashionable bob and the latest women's clothing styles, into Seaman Smith with her shoulders back, sporting neatly trimmed hair and enormous pride in her uniform.

Oklahoma's A&M University in Stillwater was the home to the first SPARs who trans-

ferred in from the WAVES. This training center also became a specialist school for the yeoman rating.

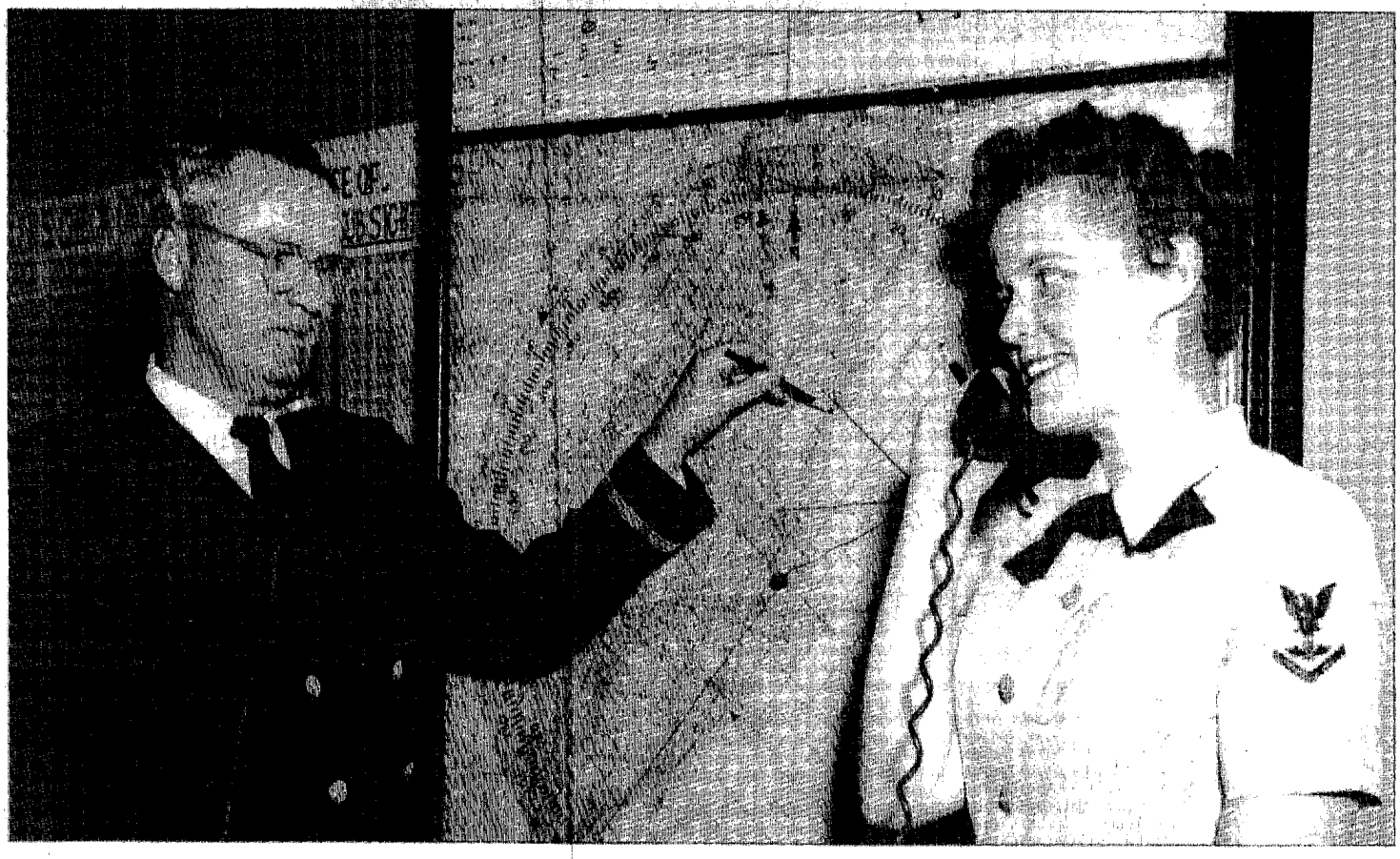
If the SPARs joined the Coast Guard to see the coast, they did not even come close as they were assigned to a training station in the midwest for their first five weeks in the service.

Although Stillwater may have seemed far removed from the Coast Guard by its location, the SPARs who went there came away with basic Coast Guard skills intact and a fondness for a place they entered with anticipation and fear.

"We fell into routine easily, working hard, trying to finish each day's homework and keep our rooms ship shape as well," said Yeoman First Class Margaret Gorley Foley, who trained at Stillwater. "The captain's inspection on Saturday was a white-glove inspection, and the wind that blew in the Oklahoma red dust certainly didn't help any."

Having once paid heed to rumors of field mice, snakes and wild

Left: *A bugler gives the wake-up call to SPAR boots at the Palm Beach training station.*
Below: *A control tower operator third class works in the rescue control center with the duty controller at Naval Air Station Norfolk, Va.*



Above: *Air control operators conduct a pre-flight briefing with a pilot*

indians running amuck on this wild frontier that was their training station, Foley said the Stillwater women left with a change of heart.

"Our stay at A&M finally came to an end. It wasn't all fun, for we had worked hard, but they were perhaps the three most pleasant weeks I spent in service," she said.

"After we were logged out, our train rounded a curve; we may not have said it, but I think we all felt that scuttlebutt had dealt unfairly with Stillwater," Foley said.

Another college campus, Iowa State Teachers College, became the site of the naval training station for the first group of 150 civilian women who enlisted as SPARs. These SPARs were trained, not by Coast Guard instructors, but by naval officers, both men and women. Later, SPAR officers arrived and the course of instruction included Coast Guard history as well as the usual military courses — rates and ranks, insignia, nautical terms and customs and courtesies.

Among many similar schools, Cedar Falls was one place where young and confused apprentice seamen arrived, but departed as competent seamen second class. This included Chief Storekeeper Mary Jane Klein.

"The captain's inspection on Saturday was a white-glove inspection, and the wind that blew in the Oklahoma red dust certainly didn't help any."

— Yeoman First Class Margaret Gorley Foley

"I began guarding the coast in the corn state of Iowa," Klein said. "Not a drop of salt water, nor a sailor in sight. Yet I was directed to the first ladder, portside, to my billet on the second deck, and ordered to square the corners of my bedding and learn to tell time Navy fashion."

Much like their counterparts of today, the SPAR boots entered the training facility running and did not stop until graduation day.

"The first day at boot camp was chiefly one of relaxation and getting acquainted

with my bunkmates," Klein said. "At 0530 the next morning, however, I heard a shrill whistle and a booming voice give forth with 'hit the deck.'"

Like her fellow SPARs at Cedar Falls, Klein said there was never a dull moment in those weeks of training.

"Frozen in my mind are the chilling memories of the fire drills at 0200 or any hour before dawn, as I picture the long line of pajamas and robes planted in two feet of snow like stalks of corn, while the officers pretended that the dormitory was afire," she said. "I often wondered if I didn't prefer burning to death to the slow tortures of exposure."

Klein, her bunkmates, and all the SPARs that followed her, left the four weeks of intense drill, training and homework, looking forward to the day they would report to their new units as seamen second class.

SPAR boots move on to a training station in the Bronx

Even though two of the early training bases were in the midwest, more than 1,900 SPARs survived the harsh Bronx winter climate along with WAVEs at Hunter College, N.Y.

Like the indoctrination classes at Stillwater and Cedar Falls, the boots learned the basics of the Coast Guard. Hunter's SPARs lived in a five-story converted apartment house that served as their barracks. The billets consisted of two rooms and a bath shared by 10 women.

"It was hit the sack at 2130 and hit the deck at 0530," said Storekeeper First Class Toni Bassett, a former Hunter College SPAR boot. "I soon learned to slide in and out of the sack without disturbing the covers too much. The most difficult problem was the 10 of us trying to make the head in that half hour (before morning chow)."

Once again, these SPAR boots eagerly awaited the day when they passed their final exams and were on their way to serve at their stations.

"Somehow out of the darkness of confusion, I managed to grasp enough Coast Guard history, organization and important facts to pass the final examinations," Bassett said. "At least they didn't send me back home. They sent me, as a reward, to Storekeeper School in Milledgeville, Ga."

Even though the first enlisted SPARs were trained at Navy schools, the needs of the Coast Guard soon mandated the establishment of separate Coast Guard indoctrination and training that was overseen by SPAR officers.

Left: *SPARs sew and repair parachutes at a Coast Guard air station.*
Center: *Two of the service's 18 SPAR parachute riggers pack a chute.*
Below: *The parachute riggers detangle the lines on a chute.*

SPARs take over the *Pink Palace*

Just six months after the SPAR recruiting drive began, the service established a training center for SPARs. One month before it opened, the news had hit the streets about the opening of the SPARs new indoctrination

facility — the Palm Beach Biltmore Hotel in Florida.

Although it sounded glamorous and sophisticated, the 430 rooms given up by the Biltmore were a far cry from their original pageantry when SPAR training began in June 1943. Walls were knocked out, partitions were built, rich decorations were removed and the first 900 women reported aboard. The former *Pink Palace* had changed to Coast Guard blue.

Over the next 18 months, more than 7,000 women were indoctrinated at Palm Beach. During that time the training course was expanded from four to six weeks to allow extra time for classes and uniform issue. The Biltmore also became home to the yeoman, storekeeper, and cooks and bakers schools.

The Palm Beach SPAR boots learned the ropes much like their shipmates at the three campus-setting indoctrination facilities.

Photographers Mate Second Class Dorothy Wilkes, who went through boot camp at the Biltmore, said, "They fed us, issued linen, and took us to our deck where the mate taught us how to make up our bunks according to regulations. This was not new to me, but you should have seen some of those beds."

Along with basic Coast Guard skills, recruits at all the training centers, including Palm Beach, were also drilled in the art of deck swabbing.

"Did you know there is a very definite art to swabbing a deck or mopping a floor as it used to be known?" Wilkes said. "Well there is, and I learned the hard way. I still have the impression, though, that the corridors had a faculty for elongating themselves each time I was on the end of a swab."

Whether it was basic training or a specialty school, one thing bonded these SPARs together — they were training for service in the Coast Guard.

Even with something as small as a song, these women felt the significance in training at their own station and serving their country.

"To hear *Taps* from the patio of the training station, I tried to stay awake even if sleep was engulfing me," Wilkes said. "I felt closer to those fellows who were sacking in on rolling, tossing ships in enemy-infested waters somewhere over there."

Below: *A Coast Guard Reserve cadet explains ship rigging to two Women's Reserve officer candidates aboard the Coast Guard Academy's training tallship* Danmark. **Inset:** *SPARs don their 1857-era British-soldier style foul-weather gear aboard the training ship* Danmark.

Boots head to chilly N.Y.

After a year and a half, the SPARs left their warm Florida breezes for the chilly northeastern weather of New York once again. By December 1944, recruiting for SPARS ended except for replacements and special needs.

Because they no longer had the need for an extensive training station, all future SPARs were trained at Manhattan Beach, N.Y.

The SPARS arrived in Manhattan in true boot style — in the rain, said Seaman Second Class Patricia M. Raddock.

"We weren't equipped, having come from California in high heels, no hats and summer clothes," she said. "We got up

with the bugle and started right out in a military way, high heels and all, marching to chow."

SPAR training at Manhattan Beach differed from the other training stations in one dramatic way — their competition at this regular training station included men.

The men and women of Manhattan Beach lounged, drilled, ate and slept separately, but they all belonged to the same service.

These women and men did, however, compete for station honors.

"Right across the way, there were boy boot companies to compete against," Raddock said. "We were spared very few of the details of training that were given to the men, right down to the mess duty."

For the 1,900 SPARs who went through Training Station Manhattan, their indoctrination also included the *Never Sail*, a dryland training ship where they learned the difference between a garboard strake and a mizzenmast.

This training center also housed the yeoman, storekeeper, cooks and bakers and general office schools.

"We were full-fledged and we were salty. By gosh, we were Coast Guard."

—Seaman Second Class Patricia M. Raddock

Like the others before them, all of the trainees at Manhattan Beach looked beyond the mess duty, inspections, classes and competition to graduation day.

"We were full-fledged and we were salty," Raddock said. "By gosh, we were Coast Guard."

No matter where they received their initial boot training, when the women completed the basic indoctrination period, they were either assigned to a specialized school or directly to a job in the field. Assignments were determined by the person's aptitude,

Above: *Wearing their newly issued parkas, SPARs report to the district office in Ketchikan, Alaska, to relieve shore-based officers for combat duty.*

Above: *A SPAR storekeeper verifies information for payday disbursements* **Right:** *A mail specialist distributes incoming letters and parcels.* **Far right:** *To augment mail specialists, a yeoman makes a mail run.*

previous training, work experience, personal preferences and the needs of the Coast Guard.

Officers face the rigors of training

Even though they were fewer in number, SPAR officers also had to face the same rigors of training as the enlisted women. Their training stations and jobs were different, but all SPARs, regardless of rate or rank, were given an overall picture of the Coast Guard.

Unlike their enlisted shipmates, SPAR officers were trained in only two locations. The first SPAR officers were also former WAVEs who volunteered to transfer to the Coast Guard and attend the Naval Reserve Midshipman School in Northampton, Mass.

Later, the recruitment of civilians for SPAR officers began and the women also began training at the Coast Guard Academy in

New London, Conn. The officer candidates gained practical knowledge of leadership and organization during their six-week curriculum.

Of the 955 SPAR officers, 299 were prior enlisted. At that time, any qualified enlisted woman was eligible to apply for officer training. In fact, the last class of SPAR officer candidates was comprised entirely of former enlisted personnel.

Northampton OCs march 10 miles a day

In December 1942, 12 WAVEs, who transferred to the Coast Guard, attended Northampton's naval training school. All together, more than 200 women followed in their footsteps at this school.

Marching to classes in both fair and foul weather was the norm. In fact, it was an order from headquarters. Known for its hills, Northampton's SPARs marched back and forth three times a day to classes, dormitories and their chow hall at the Hotel Northampton.

In addition to the estimated 10 miles a day they put on their marching shoes, the SPARs also spent two hours a day doing physical education or drill just to stay fit.

Memorizing facts and figures, attending five classes per day, and marching and physical training filled the seemingly endless days of training for the OCs.

Arthur, who attended officer training in Northampton, said the OCs even devised their own systems for remembering vital information for tests at the training station.

"One entire platoon astonished the instructor by murmuring aloud on a quiz: *'Bad Girl Eats Raw Yellow Mangoes Too Carelessly, Poor, Poor, Sap,'*" Arthur said. "But they all managed to name the grades that could be warranted: boatswain's mate, gunner's mate, electrician's mate, radioman, yeoman, machinist's mate, torpedoman, carpenter's mate, pharmacist's mate, photographer's mate and storekeeper."

The OCs were afraid of bilging out — the SPAR term for being dropped from training — but they hoped and waited for the all-sought-after graduation day.

SPARs are first women at CGA

Relatively few women trained at the Navy school in Northampton. The primary training facility for the OCs was the Coast Guard Academy.

Not only were the SPARs the pioneers for today's Coast Guard women, they also were the first women to attend a military academy. During the war, the Coast Guard was the only service that trained women OCs at its academy.

Here, more than 700 future SPAR officers were immersed in the traditions of the nation's oldest, continuous seagoing service for their six-week indoctrination period.

These OCs learned their practical leadership and Coast Guard administration skills

Below: *A storekeeper tackles paperwork at a district office.*

Right: *A hospital apprentice assists in a dental procedure.* **Inset:** *A pharmacist's mate helps patients at a medical clinic.*

from two experienced women officers who were temporarily assigned to the academy.

Like most new OCs at the school overlooking the Thames River, the new arrivals at the formerly all-male school were not triumphant. After being dumped out of a taxi cab at Chase Hall, the OCs fell into the school's routine. They went out on boats and marched the same paths as the future male officers. Here also, the training included classes, physical training, inspections, drill and watches.

"I've never been so bushed in my life," wrote an unnamed academy OC in her secret diary, which at the time was considered non-regulation. "If it weren't for the identification button on my chest, I couldn't even remember my name. We hit the deck around here at 0615 which is the Coast Guard way of saying 6:15 a.m., which is too darned early no matter how you say it. Before the New England dawn has thoroughly jelled, we are up, dressed, fed and marking time."

Through all the turmoil of academy life, the SPARs endured until their commission-

ing day to receive their first stripe as an ensign — a blue braid.

Following the indoctrination period, the majority of SPAR officers did not receive any specialized training because those who were recruited into the officer ranks already had some civilian training or experience that would benefit the Coast Guard.

Seabags are issued

In addition to training in their first few weeks, both enlisted and officer SPARs were issued their seabags.

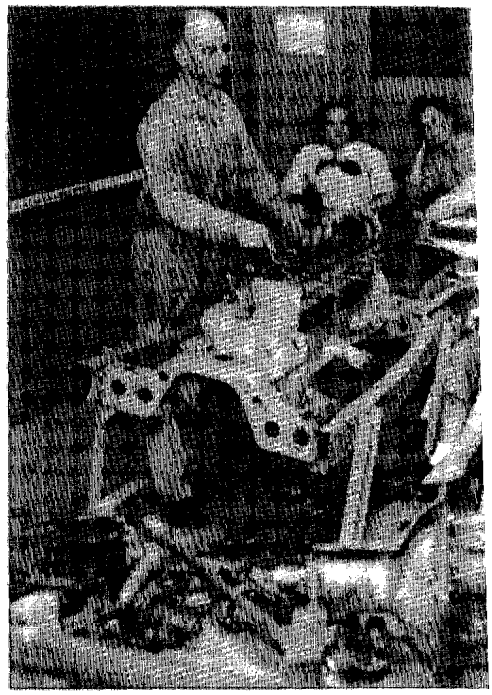
Early recruiting pamphlets described the SPAR uniforms as a "navy blue, semi-fitted garment." With the intent of making the figures of all members as nearly equal as possible, the uniform consisted of a six-gored skirt of serge gabardine or tropical worsted and a four-button blouse with rounded lapels. The Coast Guard shield was worn on the sleeve and the seal on the lapels.

Like the uniforms of today, rating badges and rank stripes were worn on the sleeves. One big difference was in the officer uniforms. Rank stripes on their whites were blue instead of gold — blue denoted reserve ranks.

The SPARs had a variety of shirts, including work shirts, silk dress shirts and everyday cotton shirts.

They also had several covers depending on the occasion and their officer or enlisted status. For enlisted women, the round-crowned, snap-brimmed hat was known as jaunty or casual. This hat had "U.S. Coast Guard," in gold letters across the hatband. The officer's hat, often referred to as *boat*, was adorned with the same cap device that male officers wore: the Coast Guard gold eagle on a horizontal silver anchor. However, no provisions were made for women with the rank of commander or above to wear reserve blue scrambled eggs on the brim. For

Below: *Two graduates of the SPAR cooks and bakers school dish up dinner at the chow hall.*



Above: *A motor machinist's mate works on a vehicle at the motor pool.*
Center: *SPARs attend specialized training before becoming rated motor machinist mates.*

informal use, both officers and enlisted women wore garrison caps.

During the summer, SPAR's work wear included a gray and white striped short-sleeved seersucker dress with a removable jacket. Their head gear matched the gray and white seersucker; however, garrison caps were also authorized.

For summer dress occasions, another version of the standard uniform was made in a white fabric. They even disguised the regular-issue handbag by removing the strap and covering the black bag with an envelope of white poplin.

Since glamour was not the intent with the SPAR uniform issue, inclement weather did not call for umbrellas. But rather, it called for a navy blue cap cover of water-resistant material, that was patterned after gear worn by British soldiers in 1857.

Now that the SPARs were indoctrinated, trained and outfitted, they were ready and eager to serve their country.

The commandant of the Coast Guard sent word to field commanders that they were expected to use SPARs and release men for duty elsewhere wherever they could. Well over half of all Coast Guard men were at sea duty during the war and SPARs appeared in high proportion to men at shore establishments, according to Arthur.

At the peak of the Coast Guard's reserve strength during World War II, one out of every 16 enlisted members and one out of every 12 officers was a SPAR.

Women serve in the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii

The first SPARs of 1942 were filling shore billets only in the continental United States. Working in district offices and field units alike, SPARs were assigned to every Coast Guard district except the 10th District in

Puerto Rico. Finally in late 1944, Congress relaxed its ruling that kept service women stateside and allowed them to serve in Alaska and Hawaii.

However, they were still restricted from duty in Puerto Rico because of a lack of housing suitable for women.

Thirty-seven percent of SPAR officers held general-duty assignments. Duties in this category included administrative and supervisory work throughout the Coast Guard.

There were other billets for SPAR officers, including communications officers, pay and supply officers, barracks officers and recruiting officers.

Above: *A motor machinist's mate tests the battery on a truck.*

SPARs hold a variety of jobs

Although all enlisted SPARs were not automatically slated for clerical work, a large portion did become yeomen and storekeepers.

"Not all of us assigned to paperwork found it boring," Arthur said. "We didn't by a long shot. We may have liked that type of work to begin with or we may have had the kind of job where, if we had any imagination, we could see how our contribution fitted into the same pattern of victory which the men were weaving abroad."

While traditional clerical work represented the bulk of the ratings for SPARs, many worked in other specialized fields.

Billets for SPARs included parachute riggers, chaplains assistants, air control-tower operators, boatswains mates, coxswains, radiomen, ship's cooks, vehicle drivers and many more.

For instance, a small group of women became pharmacist's mates. Those with prior practical nursing or medical experience were assigned as assistants in sick bays.

Another field was opened to women during the SPAR years — aviation. Only 18

Left: *A SPAR radioman works at a district radio-repair base.*

women were rated parachute riggers, 22 were trained as Link trainer operators and 12 as air control tower operators. This small corps of women in the aviation field may not have been piloting the aircraft, but their jobs demanded the utmost in accuracy and skill because numerous lives depended on it.

Another non-traditional field that employed SPARs throughout the Coast Guard was the radioman technician rate. Because of the stringent qualifications, only a small number of women were both qualified and interested in performing the fundamentals of radio repair and maintenance at district radio repair bases.

The unknown specialty

Even though there were several non-traditional fields for women, one stands out among them all because it was probably the least publicized and most unique — loran.

With the birth of this new long range aid to navigation in October 1942, it was not yet a household word for the Coast Guard. In fact, it was a secret. During this time of war,

any kind of military communications was hush-hush enough — but loran was a word that was only said behind locked doors.

In 1943, headquarters decided that loran monitoring stations in the continental United States should be crewed by SPARs. The SPAR operators were to stand watch 24 hours a day. This job entailed recording measurements every two minutes of the radio signals transmitted from two shore-based stations. The signals were picked up by a receiver-indicator installed on ships and planes, enabling them to calculate their exact position.

The new concept of women in loran that was proposed by headquarters became a reality when the Coast Guard established its first loran station crewed with women in Chatham, Mass.

Following a two-month loran operations and maintenance course at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, LTJG Vera Hamerschlag was assigned as the commanding officer of the Chatham station.

"Later, 11 enlisted SPARS were assigned to a one-week course in operations only," Hamerschlag said. "The selection of these SPARs was unique, to say the least. Loran was so hush-hush that not even the training officer had any conception of what the duties of these SPARs would be, nor what their qualifications should be."

The SPARs assigned to Chatham were volunteers with a sense of adventure for an unknown job.

When Hamerschlag reported to Chatham, it was crewed 100 percent by men. Within one month, it was turned over to 100 percent SPARs, except for one male radio technician. This sole technician joined his shipmates in overseas duty six months after the SPARs took over.

Hamerschlag was not only the CO of the 50- by 30-foot station, she was the opera-

Ratings held by SPARs in World War II

The SPARs of World War II held a variety of ratings. Most of the abbreviations for ratings are not the same as modern abbreviations. The manner in which they wrote them was also different. For example, if a woman was a second class yeoman, it would have been written Y2c.

For the specialist rates, a letter inside the rating badge symbol indicated what specialty the woman held.

Boatswain's Mate	BM
Coxswain	Cox.
Gunner's Mate	GM
Quartermaster	QM
Surfman	Surf.
Seaman*	S-2c.
Electrician's Mate	EM
Radioman	RM
Carpenter's Mate	CM
Radio Technician	RT
Radarman	Rdm
Motor Machinist Mate	MoMM
Fireman	F
Parachute Rigger	PR
Storekeeper	SK
Ship's Serviceman (Barber)	SSMB
Ship's Serviceman (Laundryman)	SSML
Ship's Serviceman (Tailor)	SSMT
Pharmacists Mate	PhM
Hospital Apprentice	HA
Musician	Mus
Bugler	Bug
Specialist (Public Relations)	Sp(PR)
Specialist (Transportation)	Sp(TR)
Specialist (Classification Interviewer)	Sp(C)
Specialist (IBM Operator)	Sp(I)
Specialist (Mail)	Sp(M)
Specialist (Recruiting)	Sp(R)
Specialist (Teacher)	Sp(T)
Specialist (Welfare)	Sp(W)
Specialist (Miscellaneous)	Sp(X)(MSC)
Specialist (Control Tower Operator)	Sp(X0)(Y)
Specialist (Intelligence)	Sp(X)(INT)
Specialist (Engineering Draftsman)	Sp(X)(ED)
Specialist (Hydrographic Draftsman)	Sp(X)(HYD)
Specialist (Switchboard Operator)	Sp(X)(SB)
Ship's Cook	SC
Steward	St
Specialist (Artist)	Sp(X)(VA)
Specialist (Typewriter Repairman)	Sp(X)(TYP)
Aerographer's Mate	AerM
Photographer's Mate	PhoM
Yeoman	Y

** A seaman rating badge was established during the war for the Women's Reserve in the Navy and the Coast Guard.*

Additional reading

The following publications provide information about the Coast Guard Women's Reserve of World War II.

- Lyne, Mary C. and Arthur, Kay. *Three Years Behind the Mast: The Story of the United States Coast Guard SPARS.* N.p.: No publisher, no date, 126 pp.
- Schuon, Karl and Lyons, Ronald D. *Servicewomen and What They Do.* New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1964 xii, 288 pp.
- U.S. Coast Guard. *Facts About SPARS.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Coast Guard, 1943, 22 pp.
- U.S. Coast Guard Public Information Division. *The Coast Guard at War Volume XXII Women's Reserve.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Coast Guard, 1946, 259 pp.

tions officer, engineering officer, medical officer, barracks officer, personnel officer, training officer and even the *captain of the head* for the 11-SPAR crew.

In the station building, which provided sleeping quarters, a recreation room, office space, an operations room, a repair shop and sleeping space, Hamerschlag and her crew became experts in plumbing, coal heating and emergency generators.

"I remember the feeling I had when I looked at the 125-foot mast for the station's antenna and wondered which SPAR would climb the rigging if something went wrong," Hamerschlag said. "I asked the CO I was replacing who took care of it. His nonchalant answer was not to worry since nothing would happen to it short of a hurricane."

Chatham's head SPAR said esprit de corps kept the unit together.

"The human element of the work kept it from getting dull and routine for the operators," she said. "The thought that we were participating in a system that was playing such an important part in winning the war gave us a feeling of being as close to the front lines as it was possible for SPARs."

Loran Station Chatham is believed to have been, at that time, the only all-woman station of its kind in the world.

World War II ends

Although the SPARs were serving in a wide variety of jobs including the non-traditional loran field and they were meeting critical needs of the service, their time was not forever. The Women's Reserve was not established to be a permanent branch of the service, but was intended to be activated during the war and remain for six months afterward.

This day finally came for the SPARs. They had reached the goal toward which they and millions of other service men and women had been working. World War II was over.

Following V-J day in August 1945, the demobilization effort began and SPARs were discharged gradually along with the reserve men.

Known also as the *big day*, discharge day loomed in the distance for the SPARs. As that day arrived for each woman, there would be many things about the service the SPARs would miss — comradeship; the feeling of belonging; a few special friends who shared gripes, good times and clean shirts; and the tremendous thrill of being a part of the nation's military forces, Arthur said.

The recruiting line the SPARs were fed was coming true: They had made new friends, seen new places, learned new things and took pride in the uniform they wore.

"Along with our GI shirts and regulation oxfords, we were taking away many tangible things that should be of value to us for the rest of our lives — increased tolerance, a new sense of self confidence, a better idea of how to live and work with all kinds of people, and a keener recognition of our responsibility as world citizens," Arthur said.

10,000 SPARs say goodbye to the Coast Guard

On June 30, 1946, the SPAR demobilization-completion day came and the 10,000 members of the Coast Guard Women's Reserve departed the service in the same spirit with which they entered — with patriotism for a country they loved and helped to defend, and faithfulness to their Coast Guard which they served with pride and dedication. •

Editor's Note: *Although the SPARs of World War II left the service at the end of the war, 40 officers and enlisted women were recalled to active duty during the Korean War. Approximately 24 remained on extended active duty until retirement. Another 200 women also volunteered to return to the Women's Reserve on extended active duty in the 1950s. Most of them also stayed until retirement.*

Semper Paratus

From Aztec shore to Arctic Zone,
To Europe and Far East,
The Flag is carried by our ships
In times of war and peace;
And never have we struck it yet
In spite of foemen's might,
Who cheered our crews and cheered again
For showing how to fight.

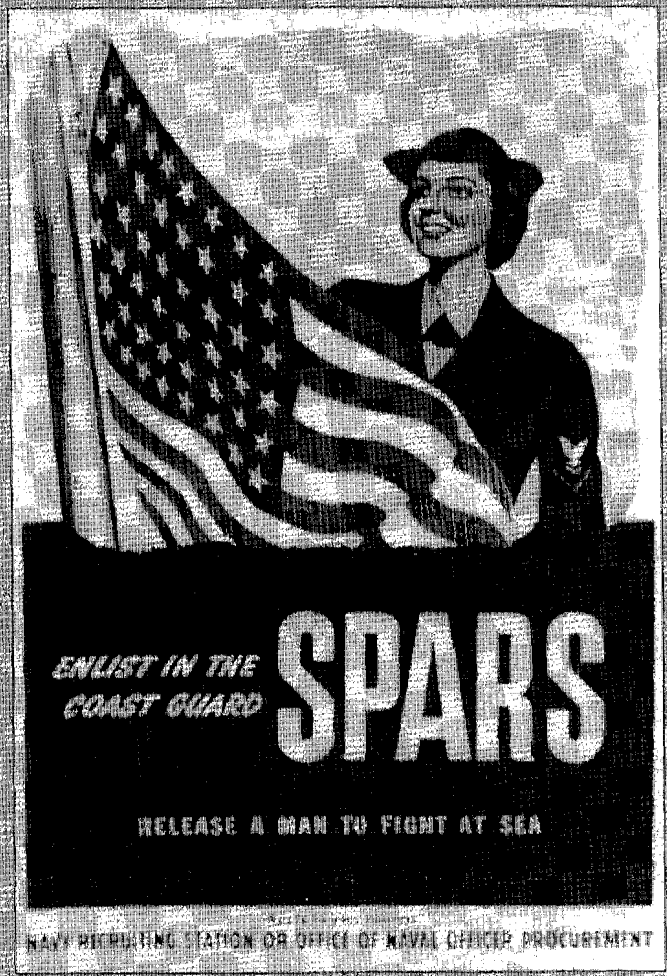
So here's the Coast Guard marching song,
We sing on land or sea.
Through surf and storm and howling gale,
High shall our purpose be.
"Semper Paratus" is our guide,
Our fame, our glory, too,
To fight to save or fight and die!
Aye! Coast Guard, we are for you.

Surveyor and Narcissus,
The Eagle and Dispatch,
The Hudson and the Tampa,
The names are hard to match;
From Barrow's shoes to Paraguay,
Great Lakes or ocean's wave,
The Coast Guard fought through storms and wind
To punish or to save.

Aye, we've been "Always Ready"
To do, to fight, or die
Write glory to the shield we wear
In letters to the sky.
To sink the foe or save the maimed
Our mission and our pride,
We'll carry on 'til Kingdom Come
Ideals for which we've died.

— Francis Van Boskerck, CAPT, USCG

U.S. COAST
SERVE WITH
WOMEN'S RESERVE · U.S. COAST GUAR
APPLY NEAREST OFFICE OF NAVAL OFFICER PROCUREMEN


ENLIST IN THE
COAST GUARD
SPARS
RELEASE A MAN TO FIGHT AT SEA
NAVY RECRUITING STATION OR OFFICE OF NAVAL OFFICER PROCUREMENT

ENLIST WITH
COAST GUARD
SPARS

WOMEN'S RESERVE