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She Served in Navy Blue

Joyce Edgar

Iowa State College

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“OF ALL my experiences in the Waves, I got my greatest satisfaction at an anti-submarine base,” says Miss Mary Rex, assistant director of personnel. “After hearing the slogan, *Join the Waves to release a man for sea duty*, I actually watched the officer I replaced go to sea.” Miss Rex is back on the campus after serving as a lieutenant. “I joined the Waves because I felt there was a definite place in the war for women,” stated Miss Rex.

Entering the Waves when it was still in its infancy, Miss Rex saw the system develop from an untried idea into an efficient working unit. In the beginning all of the officers in charge were men, but women proved themselves capable leaders. The navy officers were generally skeptical of a woman’s place in *this man’s navy*, but the women proved their worth and finally were doing such impossible tasks as teaching navigation in the air as well as in the classroom. Even the job of teaching new Wave recruits the intricacies of military drill was taken over by Waves themselves.

“Women prefer not to remain in military service, although they did an excellent job, and for the most part, enjoyed themselves,” says Miss Rex.

“As much as we enjoyed being in the Waves we did become a little tired of regimentation and took to wearing frilly undergarments and nightgowns as a sort of release,” admitted Miss Rex.

Mayor La Guardia, Eleanor Roosevelt and the late Franklin Delano Roosevelt are a few of the noted personalities who visited the Wave barracks where she was stationed.

Serving as a company commander at a Wave midshipman school, her first training class was at Northampton, Massachusetts, in the fall of 1942. It was her responsibility to make Waves out of civilians in the shortest time possible.

She was transferred to Hunter College, New York City, in February, 1943, and took charge of 2500 women. She assumed the position of a regimental commander and her regiment was chosen to pass in review for Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. Later Miss Rex was privileged to meet and talk with China’s First Lady.

Her most interesting experience while in the Waves, according to Miss Rex, was her counselling work in Washington, D. C., where she was transferred in the fall of 1943. As counselor and officer in charge of the Wave barracks, it was her duty to listen to everyone’s problems and advise them.

“Some of the stories I was told and the problems women had really put a chuckle into my day,” laughed Miss Rex.

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Her first real navy assignment came in May, 1944, when she went to the Navy Frontier Base, Little Creek, Virginia, as aide to the commanding officer. The base was a training and operating base for anti-submarine warfare and operated under the strictest secrecy.

The base at Little Creek was closed last summer. While Miss Rex was waiting for a transfer, the navy point system went into effect and she became a civilian.

“One interesting experience I remember was the time a nearby army base invited 300 girls over for a Christmas eve party,” laughed Miss Rex. “During the evening, storms blocked all roads, and the girls were forced to spend the night there. With no provision for women at the base, all the officers had to vacate their comfortable quarters for the Waves, much to the enlisted men’s delight.”

Another incident Miss Rex relates is the time she took 450 Waves to New York for a war bond drive and a Wave recruiting program. The day was hot and sultry and while Al Smith was expounding on the patriotism of the hale and hardy servicewomen before him, 30 of the women fainted from the heat.

The outstanding value of the experience, Miss Rex believes, was the people she met and the friendships she made. “I met old friends from Iowa State who were in the Waves, besides countless new ones.”