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DOLORES M. (DEMO) MAILLETTE

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After required physical and mental tests in Detroit in January 1944, the Navy decided to publicize my enlistment by swearing me into the WAVES in my home town of Bay City, Michigan. This was done on 4 February 1944, and the Bay City Times ran a picture and article, stating that I was "the first woman sworn into the Navy in Bay City," although many of our local girls were already serving in the military.

I left for boot camp at Hunter College on 7 March 1944 with two other enlistees from Bay City. We joined many others at the New York Central station in Detroit and our troop train continued to add more cars filled with future WAVES from all over the United States as we traveled to NYC. We got our first taste of military life as we took turns standing watch during the night.

After six weeks of boot camp, I was sent to yeoman school at Oklahoma A & M College, Stillwater, where I honed the secretarial skills I had studied at Bay City Business College and learned the "Navy way" of doing things. Our troop train traveled through Canada on the way to Stillwater and we later received "overseas pay" for that trip. One of my most memorable memories of Stillwater was being awakened in the pre-dawn hours on 6 June 1944 to listen to radio broadcasts of the Normandy invasion. Several shipmates were crying for loved ones taking part in the landings on the beaches.

After three months, with a new Yeoman Third Class rating, I was sent to the Bureau of Ordnance in Washington, D.C. Six of us were sent to Dictaphone school before we began work in the Dictaphone pool where we transcribed work for several sections of BuOrd. After security clearance, I was assigned to

top secret work, recording conferences with 4-star admirals and transcribing research on ballistic missiles.

Each Saturday morning, BuOrd military personnel stood inspection facing the Reflecting Pool behind the Main Navy Building on Constitution Avenue. Admiral Hussey, Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance was often the inspecting officer.

I was billeted at the Roosevelt Hotel on 16th and V Streets with 300 other WAVES. Former guest suites held six or more WAVES, and we received subsistence pay for meals.

The Roosevelt Hotel still accommodated paying guests, and weekends often found it filled with servicemen on leave from the many nearby camps. However, we WAVES were under strict military discipline....full uniform when we left our rooms, reporting to the Officer-of-the-Day for leave, no men allowed on floors reserved for the women, etc. My "bunk" was a Murphy bed that I had to pull out of the wall each night. I was transferred to WAVE Quarters D at Massachusetts and Nebraska Avenues for the last six months of my enlistment.

There was much to do in Washington D.C. .. USOs, biking, theater, restaurants, sightseeing. I met Vice-President Harry Truman, Bess and Margaret at a USO function, and was in DC when President Roosevelt died.

Many servicewomen traveled to nearby beaches on weekend leave, but most of my trips were to New York City where I stayed at the Whitney Mansion behind St. Patrick's Cathedral for 50 cents a night. This gorgeous home, filled with crystal chandeliers and parquet floors had been turned over to servicewomen from countries all over the world.

After discharge in April 1946, I returned to Bay City and resumed secretarial work. I joined the Navy Reserve unit with weekly drills and 2-4 weeks of active duty at Great Lakes, IL. One of those times I was invited to fly over Chicago in a Navy SN-J with another Reservist acquiring flying time. I was honorably discharged in 1953 as YN1, waiting for an opening as YNC. At that time I was pregnant with the first of my six children, and thus, unable to complete time for retirement.

After twelve years as a housewife and mother, I returned to work for the Bay City Public Schools, and retired in 1987 as secretary to a high school principal. - *Dolores Maillette*



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