

1994

Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook

Georgia Sadler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Sadler, Georgia (1994) "Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 47 : No. 3 , Article 31.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol47/iss3/31>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

between 1545 and 1791. This beautifully produced book, slip-cased and oblong in shape, presents each print on its own page followed by a detailed description on the facing page. The compiler has transcribed, and where necessary obtained a translation of, the text appearing on the original prints and has listed with it the artists, publishers, and other relevant details. Dr. Sari Hornstein has provided a readable general introduction to the events of naval history, supplementing it with twenty one-page essays apportioned throughout the volume, giving background and explanations of the wars and battles depicted. The illustrations are arranged in rough chronological order according to the subject depicted. At the end of the book, there is a concordance of catalog and accession numbers, and also indices to subjects, ships, artists, and publishers.

The casual user of this catalog may easily be led astray by its organization. One must look closely to determine exactly how old an illustration is. While the subjects may stretch as far back as 1514, there is no print here made before 1599. Some, indeed, are nineteenth-century conjectures, revealing the romanticism of the Victorian era. While such depictions are relatively obvious to the practiced eye, the uninitiated will, in some cases, have to ponder long and hard to determine what is or is not a contemporary print. With a little effort, they may be able to answer their question by reference to the dates in the artist index, but dates are not given in all cases for the books in which prints appeared or for their publishers and print sellers. In addition, there are a

number of cases in which users of this volume could have benefited from the editor's learned conjecture as to dating, paper marks, type of print, use, or place of origin. In addition, one hopes that future volumes in so beautiful a series of books will expand beyond the basics of naval history to include essays on changing printmaking techniques and their use by naval artists, choices of theme and subject matter, schools of artists and publishers, political propaganda techniques, reflections on taste and interpretation, as well as the uses and limitations of naval prints as historical evidence.

For this early period, the Robinson Collection does not provide, by any means, an exhaustive catalog for the entire field of European naval prints in the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Nevertheless, the book is representative of many important aspects of it. The scholarship and beauty of this pilot volume make an important contribution to the study of naval iconography. One looks forward to future volumes of this series in the hope that they will not only do the valuable and important service of beautifully and accurately reproducing naval prints but also further our understanding and analysis of them.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
Naval War College

Ebbert, Jean and Hall, Marie-Beth.
*Crossed Currents: Navy Women from
WWI to Tailhook*. New York:
Brassey's (US), 1993. 356pp. \$24
On 21 March 1917 Loretta Perfectus
Walsh was sworn into the Naval

168 Naval War College Review

Reserve, becoming the first non-nurse woman in an American military service. With her, Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall begin the first published history of women in the Navy. It is the story of two currents: the Navy's gradual inclusion of women (as it attempts to balance changing realities with traditional values), and the struggle of women to find acceptance in a male-dominated profession and their frustration as their aspirations outpace their slowly widening opportunities.

Crossed Currents focuses on line officers and enlisted women and does not cover the Nurse Corps. It begins with the almost 12,000 female yeomen who served in World War I and moves on through the service of nearly 86,000 WAVES in World War II. The authors show how the first women in the regular Navy, who were few in numbers, struggled to survive the "peace" of the Korean War and the Vietnam conflict. The book continues by examining the opportunities that began to expand for the increasing numbers of women in the early 1970s. It chronicles women's advances as they became commanding officers, rear admirals, ships' crew members, and aircraft pilots, and it concludes with a look at contemporary issues, including a straightforward account of Tailhook.

Both authors have long-standing ties with the Navy and are well informed observers. Ebbert is a former naval officer who is the author of naval books and a columnist for *Navy Times*. Hall is the daughter of a naval officer and the mother of two more.

The authors spent years poring through documents in the Naval Historical Center, the National Archives, and the Division of Naval History at the Smithsonian Institution, among other places. They delved into little-known memoirs, newspaper and magazine stories, articles in professional journals, oral histories at the U.S. Naval Institute, and in addition they interviewed a number of women. With this vast amount of information they could have written a very long, dry treatise, but instead they concentrated on major themes that enable the events to flow without getting bogged down in minutiae. Nevertheless, enough details are included to make even the most knowledgeable reader say occasionally, "I didn't know that!" The authors also provide the "why" behind events and policies. There are a few factual errors, but they are minor and do not adversely affect the overall quality of the book.

Ebbert and Hall have effectively used their research to put faces on the history. That first woman who enlisted, Loretta Perfectus Walsh, had worked as a civilian clerk in the naval recruiting station in Philadelphia. Mildred MacAfee, the first director of the WAVES, objected when the Navy tried to put red, white, and blue stripes on women officers' uniforms. Kathleen Amick worked in her uncle's small North Carolina store, enlisted in the Navy in 1943, and was an aviation machinist's mate and later an aviation electrician's mate. She was one of the first women to be selected to Master Chief Petty Officer. Fran McKee, the first woman

line rear admiral, faced the realities of serving during the 1950s and 1960s, when women had to either accept the Navy's parameters or go home.

Ebbert and Hall are evenhanded in their treatment of both the women and the Navy. They understand the women's views and their frustrations but are not radical feminists who arbitrarily bash the Navy. In their description of the inequities that the Navy has imposed on women, they also show the genuine professional concerns beneath the Navy's cautious attitudes and decisions. They point out the Navy's reluctance in accepting women in certain roles while acknowledging the service's innovations, commitment, and pride in its women.

Crossed Currents is a highly readable and interesting history of Navy women. It fills a void in naval history and should be read by everyone in, or interested in, the U.S. Navy.

GEORGIA SADLER
Captain, U.S. Navy, Retired
Arlington, Virginia

Holm, Jeanne. *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1992. 544pp. \$27.50 (originally published 1982)

About eleven years ago, I sat at the same dinner table as General Jeanne Holm. Although that was my sole personal contact with her, when I read her revised and updated book on women in the military service I met there an old friend—or rather, a group of old friends.

Holm entered the Air Force as an enlisted truck driver and rose to the grade

of major general—through thirty-three years of action, hard work, change, war, and uneasy peace—with a rock-solid sense of the capabilities of America's women. In her book she chronicles from its beginnings the uniformed service of American women. Her style is easy and well presented. In short, the book is a "good read."

Holm has provided a valuable and thorough history of women in the military. She readily addresses issues of national concern, such as drafting women, women in combat, sexual harassment, and battlefield casualties, and also the absurdly inconsequential issues that sometimes seem important to bureaucracies, such as black or tan uniform stockings. She speaks with particular authority on the decisions in the late 1960s to assign women to the Republic of Vietnam, and on the negative responses of some field units in the Pacific and Southeast Asian theaters. For example, when one of the services sent a woman to fill a public affairs billet, the local personnel officer tried to cancel her orders: he said that she could not deal with the "aggressive newsmen" in Vietnam. Only when told that some of the reporters and camera crew were women did the personnel officer back down.

This work was originally published in 1982. The revision includes sections on Grenada, Panama, and Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and it brings us into the last decade of the twentieth century. Along the way, some minds have been changed, and some opponents of women in the military have begun to