

Life in Woods Hole Village During World War II

Susan Fletcher Witzell

Martha Hilton wrote in her diary that the blackout started on April 28th, 1942. The entire shoreline of Buzzards Bay was darkened to protect the convoys of merchant ships and their military escorts as they lined up in order at night in an anchorage marked by buoys. The ships then left Buzzards Bay through the Cape Cod Canal to rendezvous with other ships waiting in Boston harbor for the hazardous voyage across the Atlantic to Great Britain. The first convoy, BX21, with 27 ships, left on May 29th, 1942. In late May 1942 a Port Director's Office was established in Woods Hole

and Sandwich to route and dispatch convoys utilizing Buzzards Bay as a protected assembly area. Lt. Commander Archibald D. Turnbull was Port Captain.

The Navy began to take control over a good portion of the Woods Hole waterfront. A Navy Section Base, under construction since October 1941, was established in Woods Hole in March 1942 with headquarters in the Fisheries buildings and surrounding area, including the old Coast Guard Base (the Coast Guard had moved to Little Harbor in 1939



View of the Fisheries and MBL buildings at the corner of West and Water Streets, taken from Great Harbor, circa 1938-1954. In the foreground is the Fisheries small boat basin, the Fisheries Residence on the right and the Laboratory on the left. One of two beacons is near the laboratory building. Also on the left is the brick heating plant and a water tower. In the background center is the MBL Mess Hall (left) and dormitory (right); other MBL buildings are on the right background of the photo. Courtesy WHHC.

when it merged with the Lighthouse Service). The base was officially commissioned by Lieutenant Commander Daniel F. Larkin. A fence was built near the end of Water Street, just beyond the present MBL Street, with a gate and a guard shack manned by Marines. Unauthorized people and civilians were not allowed access to that section of Woods Hole during this period. As more military personnel arrived they took over various buildings of the Marine Biological Laboratory, including the mess hall, obliging the MBL to use the Woods Hole Inn for its students and scientists when they arrived for the summer session. Other MBL buildings utilized were the old lecture hall, the botany building, the Homestead (where MBL employees had been housed) and the apartment house on West Street. A square brick heating plant and two long wooden buildings, one of which was a hospital, were located where the Aquarium is now. Patrol boats were tied up at the dock. Photos taken at this period show a jumble of small sheds and structures surrounding the larger Fisheries buildings and piles of coal next to the heating plant.

A pigeon loft for breeding, training and maintaining carrier pigeons for Navy communications was also located near the shore on the northern edge of the Fisheries/Navy area. There were three small sheds with wire cages on the outside. One section was for breeding, one was for flying pigeons and the center section was "sick bay". Supervised by Lieutenant Donald Comstock, a member of the American Pigeon Racing Union, the loft had three sailors trained as assistants.

Peak numbers of Navy personnel during the period reached about 500. The Port Director's Office had about 20 commissioned officers; enlisted personnel utilized in Sandwich were provided by Section Base Woods Hole, a situation which occasionally led to conflicts of scheduling and discipline. The families of Naval officers serving in Woods Hole were housed in the summer season in the nearby Breakwater Hotel.

Mr. & Mrs. Francis D. Bartow lent their Penzance home in 1942 for use as a clubhouse for the officers, a very necessary organization in any Navy town.

Marines have generally been the guards for Navy bases. The Marine contingent in Woods Hole numbered twenty-eight, with one or two First Sergeants or a Corporal. Their barracks was the second floor of a former MBL building just east of the Mess Hall (which was on the corner of West¹ and Water Streets) right near the gate they guarded. They were also responsible for guarding the Navy dock in Great Harbor and the MBL dock off Water Street. There were two YP boats and one PT boat at the Navy Base for the Marines and a Captain's gig, which they used. Occasionally an alarm would sound in the barracks from Naushon or Nonamessett and they would go over in the gig to check up on things. They did calisthenics daily and marched through the town; the sergeant or corporal did a cadence but the men did not join in; they were very disciplined and well-behaved on duty.

Martha Hilton wrote that on July 3, 1942, Water Street was roped off and the wardens and police began to guard the area. Everyone thought that a boat had been torpedoed off the coast and that they were going to bring in casualties. This was not a rumor and in fact Ray D. Wells, the director of Civil Defense had been called to the Navy base at three o'clock that afternoon and told to prepare to accommodate survivors of a merchant vessel that had been torpedoed 150 miles off the coast.² The Red Cross and the Civil Defense began to organize their workers and volunteers: civil defense wardens, auxiliary police and the state guard, doctors, nurses and ambulances reported for duty. The Woods Hole Fire Station became the headquarters for the whole operation and Captain George Ferris arranged with Lieutenant Commander Daniel Larkin to transfer the fire equipment to a neighboring Navy garage. The Red Cross also requested the use of the Community Hall and so the



View north from the roof of the Fisheries, 1944, showing the Navy pigeon loft sheds and cages. Albatross/West Street is at the right and Great Harbor on the left. Courtesy Carlotta Cross.

Saturday dance which was to be held that night was canceled. The Service Club and canteen were closed. The whole village stayed up until one in the morning but it seemed to be a false rumor. There had been thick fog all along the coast and this delayed the rescue vessel by five hours. About noon the next day (July 4th), the rescue ship arrived in the harbor, escorted by the Coast Guard. A doctor was taken out to treat very badly wounded men and at three o'clock the ship and its 31 survivors docked at the Navy Base. Five of the most seriously wounded were taken off in ambulances to a Marine hospital. The Woods Hole women volunteers in the canteen began to make beef stew at four o'clock and at six-thirty, the 26 remaining men, exhausted and wearing an odd assortment of misfit clothing arrived to eat supper. They spent the night on cots in the Community Hall and were fed breakfast by the ladies next morning. In order to give the men clothing for their trip home, the stores of those who sold shoes and other wearing apparel in Falmouth were opened by special request of Mr. Lawrence of the Red Cross on July 5th.

British sailors, along with American sailors, Coast Guardsmen and salvage workers were guests at the Service Club about a week later and Woods Hole residents who were born and raised in England joined the party. The British sailors impressed everyone with their singing and dancing ability, especially in the jitterbug.

On July 9th, the steamer NAUSHON blew its horn goodbye and left to be used in the war. In August, the NEW BEDFORD was also requisitioned by the War Department. They were both assigned to the British government, painted gray and went overseas in a convoy of similar vessels which was attacked by German submarines. Since they were of very shallow draft, torpedoes aimed at them apparently went underneath their hulls and neither was harmed. The NEW BEDFORD was sent back to pick up survivors from the water. After their arrival in England, the NAUSHON was converted to a hospital ship (Number 49) and both were later in the thick of the action in the invasion of Normandy in June 1944.



ASTERIAS and ANTON DOHRN in the small boat basin at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution dock, winter 1942. Courtesy George Tirey.

In August 1942, the 36th Texas Division under Colonel Frank A. Keating came to Camp Edwards and Washburn Island from Florida for training with the Engineer Amphibian Command. In November, the Texas unit arrived in Woods Hole to load their landing craft on railroad flat cars for the return trip to Florida. They had been doing amphibious landing practice on Washburn Island; the landing craft came by water from Waquoit Bay and were driven up on the beach at Juniper Point. According to Mary James Lyons, they worked all night long in the railroad yard and the whole area was lit up by big floodlights, apparently in spite of the blackout. In March 1943, the Texas Division left Camp Edwards for North Africa

and spearheaded the invasion at Salerno in September. The friendly Texas boys had been very popular and lived with families all over the area, there had been marriages with local girls and there was much concern about their war involvement. There were many casualties in Italy.

Two coastal defense units were constructed by the Army on the higher points of Naushon for submarine surveillance with a detachment of 6 to 8 men each. In Woods Hole a temporary wooden barracks and several auxiliary buildings were built on Juniper Point on land belonging to the Bradleys, relations of the Cranes, in 1943.



Guard shack at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, 1945. From left to right: an unidentified Coast Guard officer, Epply (in straw hat), Columbus Iselin, John Slifko, and the guard, Harry Handy. Courtesy WHOI Archives.

In April 1943, six newly commissioned WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service) officers were assigned to the Port Director's office to work with communications. Part of a class of 500 WAVES from Smith College and Mount Holyoke, five of the six were from Massachusetts. At first they lived with Mr. and Mrs. Alphonse Blanchard, Jr. on Millfield Street but later moved to the Walter O. Luscombe, Jr. house on the corner of Church Street. Local girls went into the services also. Barbara and Patty Berg went into the Coast Guard Women's Reserve (SPARS: Semper Paratus) and Charlotte McKenzie and Adeline Goffin enlisted in the WAVES.

On the opposite corner of Church Street was the Rectory of the Church of the Messiah, occupied in 1941 and 1942 by a group of hell-raising bachelors working at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. The minister of the Church of the Messiah at that time was the Reverend Robert Wood Nicholson, a bachelor, who moved into a small cottage on Juniper Point while the Rectory was run as a sort of boarding house.³ The New Years parties given by the fellows during those years were quite notorious and the mantelpiece in the house was lined with bottles the morning after; in addition, an infamous "Artillery Punch" was served, made by Val Worthington after an "old family recipe". There were also parties with music

given by the residents a couple of times a year. "Pop" Schroeder played banjo, his son Bill played mandolin, Maurice "Doc" Ewing was on trombone and his brother John was on clarinet. Bob McCurdy, Wendell Lehmann or sometimes Val Worthington played the piano. Two Woods Hole teenagers joined the group: John Thompson played trumpet and his friend Marshy Cross played the drums. Marsh had bought his first drum set at age 14, taking the boat to New Bedford and paying seventy-five dollars for the drums he found in a pawn shop. He also played at the 4 O'Clock Grill on Scranton Avenue in Falmouth, popular with soldiers, sailors and Marines. Many brawls took place there between the proud 36th Division Texas soldiers and other servicemen; this kept the MPs very busy. Marshy ended up leaving his drum set at the Rectory as the noise wasn't welcome at home. After 1942, when some of the original occupants went into the Armed Services, a more sedate group of young men lived at the Rectory for the rest of the war.

George "Rusty" Tirey came up from Texas to join John Ewing and D.H. "Jidge" Shurbet, Jr. in working as hey-yous and gofers at WHOI in 1941. His brother Ray eventually came up too. They lived at the Rectory on Church Street and were part of the original fun-loving group, becoming infamous for their practical jokes. These four boys—the Texas teenagers—had grown up in a town in the Texas Panhandle. Woods Hole was quite different for them; they wore Levis and cowboy boots instead of the khakis and moccasins of the local kids and it took them about six months to fit in and become real friends with the local guys. But eventually they were playing basketball, Ping-Pong and learning to ice skate with Norman and Elwood Eldridge and Steve McInnis on Nobska Pond. They went to Lowey's Drugstore and hung around with the rest of the kids and were also invited by Jim and Mary Lowey to their home to play poker. Al Vine and his wife, Joe Worzel and the Berg family were very helpful to these young visitors and occasionally let them borrow a car to go to Falmouth on dates.

Woods Hole's Water Street of the early forties had the Methodist Church and a restaurant and a barbershop located where the modern Fishmonger is today at the east side of the bridge. The restaurant was called The Twin Door and run by a family from New Bedford in the summers. The barbershop was owned by Al Blanchard; Sherman Eldridge was the barber. The other side of Water Street (after the Candle House and the MBL service buildings) had Thompson's Clothing Store, the A&P, Hilton's boatyard building, Tsiknas's grocery store (the present Food Buoy), a liquor store owned by Robert Corcoran, Lowey's Drugstore, the Cap'n Kidd, the Rendezvous bar, then the bridge and on the other side, a taxi stand, Rowe's Drugstore, the Sea Garden Restaurant, the Frawley house and the Shiverick house on the corner. Eddie Swift's hardware store was around the corner on School Street where the kids helping out at WHOI were sometimes sent for supplies. There was just one WHOI building (the Main building, now known as Bigelow or Old Main), the Penzance Garage, still privately owned in 1941 but in 1943 taken over by the Institution (now incorporated into the rear of Smith Building) and a pump house on the dock which supplied salt water to tanks in the attic and basement of Bigelow and taps throughout the building. Also in the basement was the carpenter shop run by Stanley Eldridge (Sherman was his father and Norman and Elwood his sons) and the supply room where John Thompson, Marshy Cross and Paul Dingwell worked. There were four boats: the ketch ATLANTIS, the ANTON DOHRN, the ASTERIAS and the schooner RELIANCE. The RELIANCE was used by the Navy Seven project for underwater explosives research.

The Texans worked in the machine shop and did carpentry, worked on BTs (bathythermographs), underwater cameras and light and sound transmission. They instructed Navy officers who showed up for training in the workings of the BTs. Some of the local boys who worked there also were Jimmy and Frank

Cavanaugh, Carly Wing, Norman and Elwood Eldridge, Steve McInnis, Pete Bailey and Dick Alberts, whose father had owned the Penzance Garage before the Oceanographic took it over. There was a lot of cooperation between the boatmen at WHOI and the inexperienced landlubber scientists and technicians which made their work out on the water possible.

Much of the research work for the Navy at this time was secret and security was much stricter than it is now, when almost anyone can wander in off the street. A barbed wire fence, gate and wooden guard shack were installed on each end of the building here, too, and everyone who worked here had to display a badge to gain entrance. Harry Handy was the guard. The Navy Seven or Underwater Explosives Research Laboratory took over the top floor. Research was being done on anti-fouling paints and on the fouling organisms that caused the problems. Waves were studied to predict the effect of breakers on amphibious landing operations. Temperature distribution in the surface layers of the North Atlantic was analyzed, as well as air turbulence and convection over the ocean. SONAR, with the accompanying development of the BT was developed. To relieve the intensity and pressure of this research, a "talent show" with humorous skits and monologues known as the Oceanographic Follies was presented on February 19th, 1945. Otherwise dignified scientists and researchers performed. There were lots of jokes about the study of waves and WAVES and a typical day at WHOI, preferably Payday.

The blackout imposed upon the village had a rather strange effect, especially on scientists and researchers who had been coming to Woods Hole before the war and were used to the long summer evenings and the busy activities of a summer resort town. George Clarke remembered that the long dark winter seemed even longer. "... a great many houses could be used only in the summer and are closed down and other busi-

ness activities, so that there's much less glow from artificial lights reflecting downward and giving some illumination. When all of those were out in the winter and then black curtains were put in all the windows, it reduced the light even farther. Beyond that, a cylinder of black metal was put around each of the street lights so that instead of the lights spreading out laterally for some distance as it ordinarily would, there was nothing but a bright spot of light immediately below each street light, so that as one walked along the road at night one would go from one bright spot to the next, as if orienting from one lighthouse to another lighthouse." Blackout shields also were placed on auto headlights covering the top half of the lens to prevent upward directed light from being seen. Air raid wardens were supposed to enforce the blackout in the village. They all wore World War I flat metal army helmets and carried flashlights. Training sessions held at the Fisheries prepared them for their duties. George Frawley was the warden for the main part of Woods Hole; the Berg sisters patrolled the Crow Hill area (High Street), Thure Blomberg had to look after all of Gansett, and Jeff Allen was the warden for Penzance. Anyone who had to do work along the shore had to carry a photo identification card issued by the Coast Guard authorizing their presence, for the beaches were off limits at night or in any foggy weather during the war.

The Section Base Woods Hole was decommissioned on October 1, 1943. The Marines and personnel from the base began to leave the village in May and June of 1943 and by October, the gate and fence were gone and there was only the pigeon loft, the heating plant, the little hospital building and its twin. The Port Director's Office was then located solely in Sandwich and continued to control convoy assembly in Massachusetts Bay when convoys began to assemble outside Boston Harbor. They also controlled wartime traffic in the Canal. By mid-1945, 61,895,000 tons of shipping had gone through Cape Cod Canal.



Navy Crash Boat C39069 in Great Harbor with the rigging of the WHOI ketch ATLANTIS on the left.
Courtesy Warren E. Witzell.

In stormy weather, in December of 1943, the first Navy "P" boat or "crash" boat (No. C39069) arrived in Woods Hole and was stationed at the Fisheries dock in Great Harbor. Its commanding officer was Lieutenant John Korf. Its crew, who had been retrieving practice torpedoes near Provincetown and the Sandwich end of the Canal, was under the impression that they were in Woods Hole village simply to get out of bad weather and that this was a temporary location for the boat. When informed that this little fishing village with 2 bars and a few stores was to be their home for a period of time, they were disappointed and wondered what in the world there was to do for fun.

The Section Base with its fence and Marine guard shack were gone but the boats (a second one—No. C18352—arrived about six months later) became a new Navy presence in Woods Hole. The C39069 was known locally by its call sign "Charlie" and the other one was named "Butch". The boats were 110 feet long and carried a crew of 17 each (2 officers and 15 enlisted men). They had originally been Army boats and were equipped with small hospital facilities. The crash boats were attached to a Carrier Service Unit (CASU 22) at Quonset Naval Air Station in Rhode Island and one of their functions was to tow a target 2000 feet behind their stern. Naval airmen and gun-



Some of the crew of Navy Crash Boat C39069 near the Candle House, Water Street. From left to right: Warren E. "Whitey" Witzell, George Emery, "Little Ben", "Chief" Lauder and J.P. Mello. Courtesy Warren E. Witzell.

ners in air planes such as F4Us (Corsairs), F6Fs (Hellcats), TBFs (Grumman Avengers), TBMs (GM Avengers), PBYs (Catalinas), SBDs (Dauntless dive bombers) and SB2Cs (Helldivers) then flew over and dropped bombs for practice. In January of 1944, Quonset Naval Air Station took over Otis Field at Camp Edwards as an auxiliary field; another air field on Martha's Vineyard had just been completed by the Navy. Hyannis, Nantucket, Westerly, R.I. air fields and Bar Harbor, Rockland and Lewiston, Maine were also subsidiary Navy fields whose squadrons utilized these targets. Water bombs, which were about 50 pounds and which had no explosives, were dropped by Navy bombers on the Weepeckets. Vineyard

Sound was used for smoke bombs, which were small. Larger bombs (500 to 1000 pounds) were dropped over a target area southwest of Nomans Land, a small island on the south side of Martha's Vineyard. This was dangerous duty. The crash boats were sometimes hit by shrapnel and had portholes blown out by inaccurate bombing. However, the boats used the same target for the entire length of their stay in Woods Hole—an interesting commentary on the accuracy of the bombers. Their second function was to pick up downed airmen who had the misfortune to crash during one of these exercises. SB2Cs crashed more often than other planes. One of them went straight down off Nobska Light; the pilot and gunner did not sur-

vive. Years later the wreckage of this plane was discovered by a diver checking the electrical cable to Martha's Vineyard. In June 1944 the crew of the C18352 witnessed a midair collision between two planes from Otis Squadron 81. One of the pilots parachuted out and was picked up immediately by the boat. The crew and its officers received a commendation from the commanding officer at Otis. The boats also would occasionally take out crates of homing pigeons from the loft and release them at sea for training exercises. After the Hurricane of September 14, 1944, the crews of the two boats helped salvage the ketch ATLANTIS which had broken loose (she had been tied up at the Fisheries dock) and had gone aground in Great Harbor near Ram Island. In October of 1944 the officers and crew of both vessels received commendations from Commander Gordon Rowe of Quonset Naval Air Station for their work in rescuing two aviators forced down in very rough weather.

In addition to the two Navy crash boats, two Army crash boats, essentially the same in equipment and crew, were stationed at the Fisheries/Navy dock facilities during 1944 and remained as well until the end of the war in 1945.

In April 1945, James W. Cowin, a signalman from the crash boat C39069, rigged a salvaged metal lifeboat with a sail and, with Boatswain's Mate Carl O. Hornfeld, went out into Great Harbor for a trial run. The boat capsized; Hornfeld survived but Cowin drowned in the severely cold water. His body was recovered four days later by the Oceanographic schooner RELIANCE. Cowin's young wife and baby daughter remained living on Gardiner Road after this tragedy.⁴

Recreation for the sailors, Marines and Coast Guard men as limited in a village like Woods Hole. There were 2 bars: the Cap'n Kidd and the Rendezvous next door (both squeezed into the space now occupied by

The Black Duck restaurant). The Rendezvous was a rough and tumble bar and had a very shady reputation. It was run by Mrs. Leonie Augusta who was always in trouble with the ABC officials. The nail keg seats with their leather-covered cushions occasionally were thrown through the windows! The Coast Guard and the Marines did not always get along with one another in the bar and when the Coast Guard became too confrontational they were told to leave. Mrs. Augusta also ran the summertime Sea Garden restaurant on the other side of the bridge. There were several



Frank Glynn and friend in front of Lowey's Drugstore, Water Street, Woods Hole; signs for the Rendezvous are visible behind them; the Methodist Church can be seen in its original position in the background, righthand side. Private collection.

restaurants and sandwich shops; Grace Kenerson Witzell worked in the summer in Parker's Sandwich Shop next to the Post Office. In the summer of 1942 the sandwich shop supplied the Coast Guard Base because they did not have a mess; there were about 35 sailors and officers. Grace recalls: "It was just like a big happy family — they paid their bill once a month and if we were lucky they might give us a buck—but it wasn't very often." Other girls who worked in Parker's were Ruth Weeks Metell, Molly Lehy Mann, Jean Stuart, Gracie Hammond, Terry Sheehan and one of the Berg girls. It was just a summer restaurant, so after school Grace worked in Lowey's drugstore which was where



June Spencer near the James Grill. Private collection.

the Cap'n Kidd is now. Almost every night someone from the Navy Base would call up and order 20 hot dogs and 40 or more hamburgers to supplement their mess food. They sold lots of ice cream and hamburgers to fellows returning to the base after a night on the town. Lowey's had a juke box and a pinball machine which was very busy. The store stayed open until one or two in the morning; then Jim would give a ride home to the girls who worked for him.

Dot Rogers worked in Rowe's Drugstore and had extra gas rations so that she could travel around to Percy Rowe's three other drugstores. After she closed up at night she had to take the cash up to his store in Falmouth and often gave rides to her friends from the MBL embryology labs where she had worked in the thirties. Stan Eldridge's wife worked there in the summers and so did one of the Berg girls in 1941 and 1942. Dot recalls the time the underwater explosives tested by the Oceanographic blew out the plate glass windows in Rowe's, the Twin Door and the barber-shop. Angry owners and locals gathered in Rowe's, which was always an active center of gossip and rumors. A fellow from the Oceanographic walked into this hornet's nest and told the muttering folks gathered there that perhaps they shouldn't complain too much as "the bomb" that blew out their windows would be the sort dropped on Germany the next day! The explosives tests caused all sorts of other rumors about bomb testing during this period.

The James Grill, located where the Leaside is presently, was a popular restaurant, especially for the people taking the trains and the ferries. During the War, James' served Naval officers their meals during the period before their mess was built. The Navy sent personnel over from the Base to wait on the officers. Mary James Lyons received special orders from Commander Clark to get food over and above rationing limits.

The fishermen who sold their fish to Sam Cahoon were asked to keep their eyes open for foreign ships or

anything unusual going on at sea, since the possibility of German submarines being off the coast was on everyone's mind (and indeed there were submarines off Cape Cod). Other fishmarkets and fishermen were selling their fish on the black market and getting higher prices but Sam refused to do this. He paid his men all year round whether there was work or not, and did not like to take in black market profits to supplement their wages. Some of the fishing boats were commandeered by the Navy for patrol service, one in particular being the PRISCILLA V, which had just been built.

Of course the servicemen were very popular with local young ladies, some preferring sailors, others Marines



Grace Kenerson in front of Lowey's Drugstore. Courtesy Grace Witzell.

and still others the fellows at the pigeon loft! Dances were held upstairs in the Woods Hole Community Hall on Tuesdays and Fridays and were chaperoned by members of the Woods Hole Woman's Club. Dorothy Soule, Chris Stuart and Dorothy Berg were the chaperones most of the time. The local Navy band provided the music and after their drummer was transferred out, Marshy Cross took over the drums. The band, with Marshy going along too, would also play at the Camp Edwards Officers club and the NCO club. When Marsh left to join the Marines in 1944, his bass drum was left behind at the Community Hall and was found in 1955 by custodian Joseph P. Goudreau and reclaimed by its owner. At the dances, sandwiches and coffee were served at intermission. The basement became the Service Club with the Canteen run by Sid Peck. During the week it was open to play pingpong, pool and read. After the Navy Section Base closed, taking its personnel off to other duties, the Navy band was gone too. A jukebox was installed downstairs and dances were held only on Fridays. The pool playing and ping pong continued but the local girls very much missed the big dances held upstairs with the Navy band.

There were SPs (Shore Patrol) in Woods Hole but no MPs (Military Police). The Marines would run in platoon formation up the State Road in the morning and used to walk a patrol through the village and the surrounding residential areas. One of their favorite routes was along High Street where Barbara, Patty and Beverly Berg lived, as well as other popular young ladies such as Mary Cavanaugh and Charlotte McKenzie. They also used to swim over to the Woods Hole Yacht Club on Great Harbor to flirt with girls hanging around. Coast Guard seamen were known to jump off their ships at Nobska and swim into the base in Little Harbor.

A date was a taxi ride to Falmouth to go to the movies for one dollar or to go bowling. Wright's taxi stand near the bridge was kept very busy by the servicemen. The golf course was a favorite gathering place for



Members of the Navy band. Courtesy Grace K. Witzell.

young folks to watch the convoys. Since the villagers never knew when the ships were going to leave, people would rush up to the highest point on the golf course the next morning to see if they were gone. Some of the young folk living on the Buzzards Bay shore would row out to the ships to talk to the young British sailors. Constance Morgan Allard who spent her summers in Woods Hole as a child, used to swim with her family off the Lillie dock on Buzzards Bay off Gardiner Road. Karl Lillie was blind and very sensitive to vibrations in the water; he was able to sense when the screws of the convoy ships began to turn to begin their trip through the Canal. When this happened he would direct the children to get out of the water in order to avoid a supposed danger from undertows.

During the war, mothers, sisters and those left at home waited anxiously for news from their husbands

and brothers and sons fighting abroad. The Boston train came in at six in the evening, the mail was rushed up to the Woods Hole Post Office and everyone gathered impatiently outside. It was a time to talk with friends and acquaintances and hear the latest news and gossip. When the mail had been sorted and was ready to be picked up, the postmen flashed the lights and the crowd rushed in; by then it was about seven o'clock.

Gas rationing affected everyone's ability to travel and changed how they obtained food and supplies, which were also rationed. Miss Tinkham kept a couple of goats to supply milk for her innumerable cats. Housewives walked or bicycled to the A&P, to Louis' Store (Tsiknas's), to Higgins' Market and Sam Cahoon's in Woods Hole. Sometimes they called Falmouth to Ten Acres and Swifts Market, which would then deliver



Sailors with local young ladies on the Woods Hole drawbridge. Private collection.

the order. The precious gas ration could then be used for other things. Martha Allen married Norman (Jeff) Allen in 1943 and lived in one of the Do-Re-Mi houses on the shore of the Eel Pond (the site is now occupied by the MBL's Swope Center). Her neighbors in the area were the Packards, the Woodcocks, the Jessups, Jerry Paine, Clarence Chase, the Mellors, the Senates, the Neals, the Veeders, the Kahlers, the Bumpuses, the Vincents and Joe Worzel and his family. Martha became a Gray Lady⁵ at Camp Edwards and saved her ration for that trip. Her friend Mr. Kidder used some of his gas ration to take a dozen of her convalescing soldiers from the Camp out for a trip on

his cruiser "The Goose". "They were literally scared. Having crossed the Atlantic twice safely, they wanted no more. By the time they came in, having had their luncheon, and the sight of Nobska, they were wondering how much it would cost to own a boat. It was very, very good therapy."

Inevitably, friendships and love affairs with the servicemen led to marriages for the local girls and these young men. A lot of the men at Camp Edwards were killed on the first day on D-Day in Normandy and the sad calls came to newly married wives. Some girls moved away after the war to the homes of their new husbands or where work was available; some stayed in Woods Hole and Falmouth and the young men from other places who came for a year or two to the little village became part of the local life, becoming fishermen, working at the scientific institutions, the Steamship Authority and many other places.

What is left of Woods Hole of the war? In the fifties, the former Coast Guard building (WAVES barracks) still left at the Fisheries was moved to the north a few hundred feet and became office space for the Fisheries. The adjacent building was cut in two and moved to F.R. Lillie Road and reconstructed for use as summer cottages (they are still recognizable as wartime construction). The fifty-four hurricane damaged the larger Fisheries buildings and the lovely old shingled Victorian structures were demolished to make way for modern glass and brick offices and an aquarium. The coastal defense structures on Juniper Point were auctioned off. Vast changes occurred in Woods Hole during the fifties. Three of the buildings east of the drawbridge on the north side (Rowe's, the Sea Garden restaurant and the Frawley house) were demolished and the Shiverick house was moved around the corner to School Street. The space created by this became a parking lot and later most of the area was used for the site of the new Redfield building constructed specifically for WHOI's biology and chemistry departments.

Shiverick became the location for the Institution's computer center. The Methodist Church on the opposite side of Water Street was also moved in 1949 to School Street to land donated by Dr. & Mrs. Redfield and used for some years by its congregation in the new location; eventually the Woods Hole Methodists merged with the Methodists in Falmouth and the little church became another well-used WHOI building. It is quite difficult for anyone who has become a resident of Woods Hole in recent years to imagine the village during wartime years. But for those who do remember, it is remarkably unchanged.

Susan Fletcher Witzell was born in New York City and grew up in Summit, New Jersey. After graduating with a B.A. in Art and Art History from Milwaukee-Downer College in 1962, she worked as an art and photo editor at several major publishing companies in New York. She moved to Woods Hole in 1972 and worked as an engineering draftsman at WHOI for many years. She is the Membership Chairman of the Woods Hole Historical Collection. Susan and her husband Nick have made their home in Quissett since 1977.

Notes

1. West Street is presently called Albatross Street
2. The ship was the SS ALEXANDER MACOMB, a 7,129 ton American freighter. She was sunk by a German submarine-launched torpedo. Of the crew of 66, 10 men were lost, and the 56 survivors were taken to Woods Hole and Halifax, Nova Scotia by rescue vessels.
3. Mr. Nicholson resigned as Rector in 1943 to enter the Navy. There was no minister at the Church of the Messiah until 1944 when the Reverend George Elliott of Fairhaven came to fill the position; he was there until 1951.
4. Jimmy Cowin's widow Carlotta married Marshy Cross in 1947.
5. Gray Ladies were volunteer aides in the convalescent hospital at Camp Edwards.

Do-Re-Mi houses and the town dock on the Eel Pond, 1943.
Photo by Norman Allen. Courtesy WHHC.

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