

Author of *The Way to London*

ALIX RICKLOFF



THE GIRLS

★ ★ ★ *in* ★ ★ ★

NAVY BLUE

A Novel



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Book Club Guide

The Girls in Navy Blue

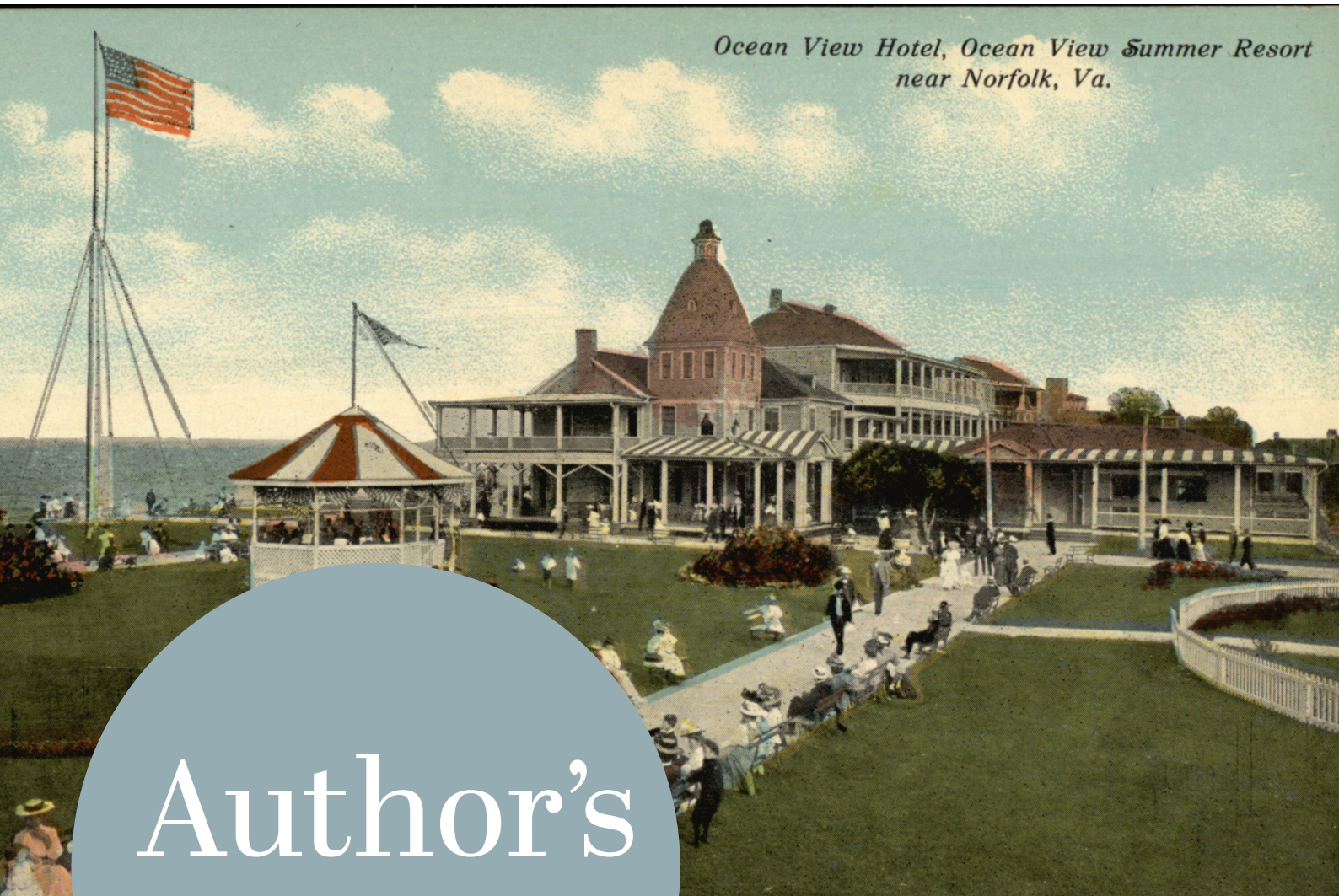


Dear Readers

I'm so glad you've chosen *THE GIRLS IN NAVY BLUE* for your book club. To help with your evening, I've put together some extras to make it as fun and informative as possible. Included in this guide is an author's note to give you a peek into what inspired me to write the book as well as a deeper dive into the history behind the "yeomanettes". I've also made sure to offer up discussion questions to get the conversation moving. And last, but not least, there are some yummy recipes to liven up the book party.

Enjoy and happy reading!

Alix



Author's Note

I stumbled on the story of the Navy's yeomanettes quite by accident.

Reading an article about Joy Bright Hancock's involvement with WWII's Navy WAVES, I discovered that she actually began her military service as a yeomanette in the Naval Coast Defense Reserve in 1917. This was the first I'd ever heard of these women despite the fact that over 10,000 of them served between March 1917 and January 1922.

Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels could be said to have been the mastermind behind this unprecedented idea. Seeing war on the horizon and realizing how badly undermanned the US Navy was, he noted that nowhere in the regulations for land service did it state the recruit had to be male. Well aware of the number of women already working in clerical positions within the government, he chose to open the doors to them as a way to free up men for ship duty and more closely control the allocation of these women where they would be most valuable.

In March of 1917, the announcement was made. Within a month, hundreds had raced to join up becoming yeomen (f) or as they were nicknamed much to their chagrin "yeomanettes". The bulk of these new recruits were assigned to clerical positions, but they also served as switchboard operators, couriers, supply drivers, munitions workers, fingerprint experts, camouflage designers, and even worked in naval intelligence.

There were many reasons why women raced to join the Navy. Some viewed it as a chance for adventure and new opportunities. Others joined in solidarity with husbands, brothers, or sons already off fighting. Those involved in the suffrage movement hoped the success of the yeomanettes would push the government to-

ward finally granting women the right to vote. But all of them were driven by patriotism and a desire to do their bit for the war effort.

Ocean View, the small bayside resort community outside Norfolk Virginia, was an obvious choice to set the story. Hampton Roads, Virginia already had a long proud naval history, but the war brought a rapid expansion to the area with the opening of the NOB (naval operating base) at Sewells Point north of Norfolk and the construction of five Army embarkation camps where over half a million soldiers took ship for France. Over 1,000 yeomen (f) scattered mainly between the Portsmouth shipyard, the naval hospital, and the NOB (naval operating base) served as part of the 5th Naval District.

The anti-German sentiment that drives much of the conflict in the story, while far more virulent in the Midwest, was a nationwide issue amplified by groups like the National Security League and the American Defense Society. These groups saw the German communities' strong sense of cultural identity as a threat. Local groups formed to "monitor" their German neighbors and root out any possible spies, saboteurs, or anyone seen as not "patriotic" enough.

Many used this super patriotism as a way to gain power in political circles. One such leader was Reverend Newell Dwight Hillis, a New York Congregationalist minister who made a name for himself as a crusader against immorality and whose virulent anti-German speeches packed theatres and lecture halls. Pastor Prothero was very loosely inspired by Pastor Hillis, and the words I've attributed to Viv's father in the book are taken directly from some of Hillis's speeches and writings.

While I invented the explosion at the Portsmouth shipyard and the vandalism of the German church, the fire in downtown Norfolk did occur in January 1918 and destroyed nearly two city blocks. More than twenty-three men were arrested in the panic that followed as officials hunted for German saboteurs, though it turned out the fire was accidental in origin.

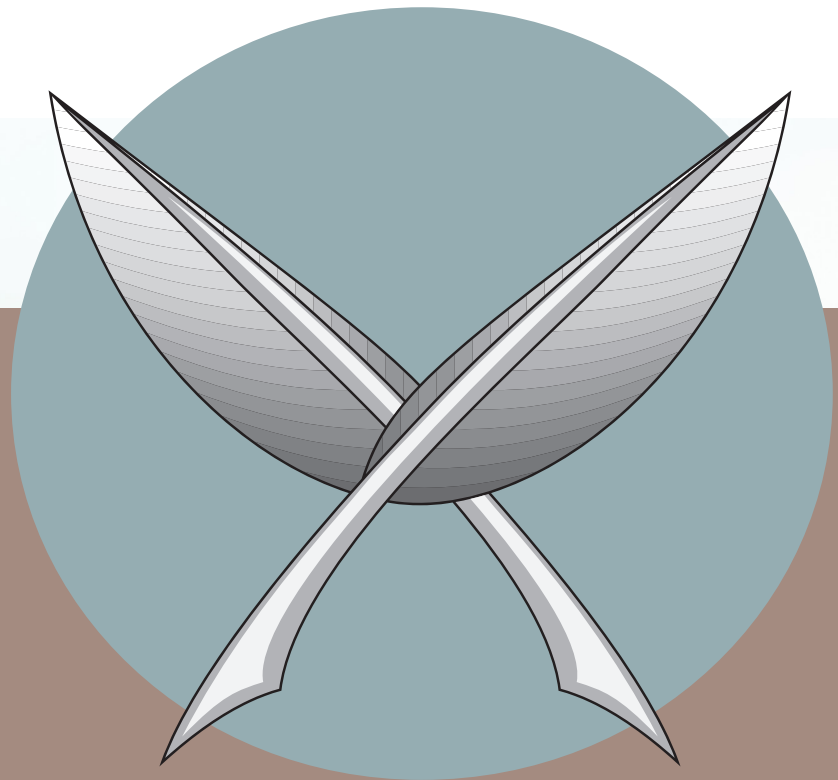
In writing this book, I took great inspiration from the wonderful stories told by the yeomanettes themselves and collected by historians Jean Ebbert, Marie-Beth Hall, and Regina Akers, and even my initial inspirational yeomanette Joy Bright Hancock. Where I could, I've included many incidents prompted by actual experiences including the frustration and disarray of early parade practices, the confusion over shipboard assignments, and the animosity shown to the female recruits by some naval officers.

Lieutenant Dumfries is an amalgamation of many of these officers who were skeptical of these new women recruits. Both his behavior and many of his words, including blaming poor Alice Roosevelt, were taken from one yeomanette's description of an interview with her commanding officer. Later, he gives his permission to allow Viv to attend a dance out of uniform with a quip about hunting and fishing. This quote was taken from Gavin's *American Women in WWI* and was too good not to include. The mix-up in orders for ship duty actually happened to Joy Bright Hancock during her time as a yeomanette stationed in New Jersey. The uncertainty around marriage which makes Marjory sneak off to the courthouse without telling anyone was commented on by more than one yeomanette interviewed.



My own family history also inspired a character in the book. While I was researching and writing the story, my mother came across my grandfather's WWI ID tag. Russell Goode served as a pharmacist's mate on a hospital ship during the war. While I never met him, I was overwhelmed by the sense of connection I felt upon receiving such a treasure and knew immediately he deserved a part in my story. I hope he doesn't mind my dramatic liberties, but I'm sure that if placed in such a situation, he would surely have risen to the occasion.

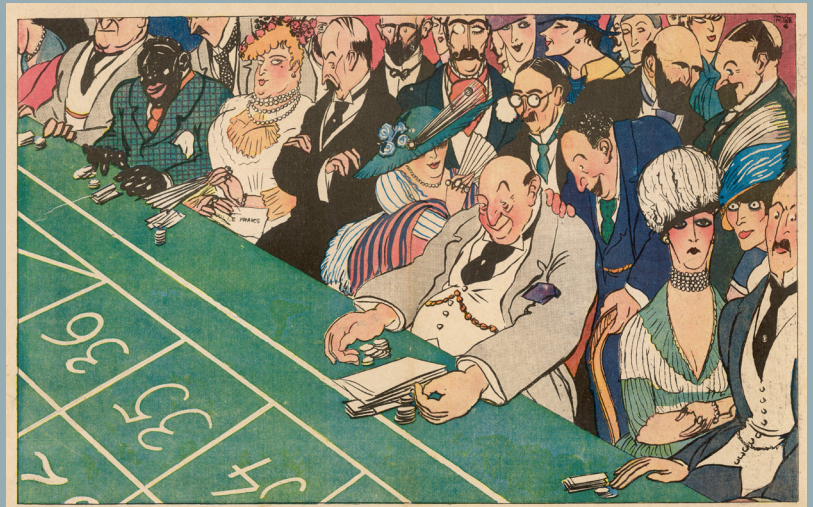
I end the book with a poem. This melancholy ode to the yeomanette's gallantry and courage was penned in 1919 by yeomanette E. Lyle Macleod, discovered in yeomanette Helen Dunbar McCreary Burns's scrapbook and published in Lettie Gavin's book *American Women In World War I; They Also Served*. The words beautifully sum up the experience of these women who looked back on their service with pride in a job well done and wistfulness at a time gone by.



Discussion Questions

1. The yeomanettes were the first women to serve in the US military in a non-nursing capacity. Did you know about them before reading this book? If not, what most surprised you about their service? If you were already familiar with them, did you learn anything that you didn't know before?
2. Which of the three yeomanettes did you most connect with; Viv, Marjory, or Blanche? Why? What drew you to them?
3. Sisterhood and the importance of "found family" is a major theme in the book. Can you think of scenes where this was best illustrated by the author? What did you think of the various female relationships in the book?
4. Peggy and Viv both wrestle with lost faith. Did you understand their reasons? Did you feel it was restored by the end?
5. The beach cottage becomes a refuge for Viv, Blanche, and Peggy. Do you have a favorite place that signifies home and family? Explain why.
6. We see prejudice in various forms throughout the book; from subtle sexism to deadly violence. How did these acts of intolerance affect and change the characters? Were there moments when they could have fought back? Why do you think they didn't?
7. Blanche begins the book as the strong one of the three. Was there a specific scene in which you saw that begin to change? Did you still feel she was the strongest by the end? Why or why not?
8. For many women, their service in the Navy was a first taste of independence. What was your first taste of independence? Discuss how it made you feel.
9. A family secret lies at the heart of the story, but many of the characters keep secrets. Did you understand why they kept silent? Which of the secrets surprised you the most? Were everyone's secrets revealed by the end?
10. The book deals with a deadly pandemic as well as bigotry and ethnic violence; both issues that remain timely today. Where do you see parallels? Where do you see differences?

Drinks & treats



The book takes place in 1918 Norfolk, VA so of course I had to include some local Tidewater recipes as well as some Prohibition-era cocktails, but you'll see as you read that just because alcohol was technically illegal didn't mean it wasn't available if you knew where to look.

Country Ham Biscuits

- 2 cups flour
 - 4 teaspoons baking powder
 - 2 tablespoons shortening
 - 3/4 cup milk
 - 1/2 cup Finely minced country ham
1. Sift flour and baking powder. Mix with the minced country ham. Cut in shortening with a pastry blender until all have the consistency of meal.
 2. Add milk, handling as little as possible. Pat out with hands or roll on a sheet of waxed paper dusted with flour.
 3. Cut with a biscuit cutter and bake in a hot 425-degree oven until browned.

Drinks & treats

Crab Dip

- 1 lb crab meat
 - 8 oz package cream cheese, room temperature
 - 2 tbsp butter
 - ½ cup minced onions
 - ½ cup diced green pepper
 - ¾ cup shredded cheddar cheese
 - Old Bay seasoning to taste
 - ¼ cup sherry
1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
 2. Saute onion and pepper.
 3. Mix crab and cream cheese.
 4. Stir in onions, green pepper and rest of the ingredients. Mix well and bake for 30 minutes.
 5. Serve warm, with slices of sourdough bread, crackers, tortilla chips or chopped cold veggies.



Popcorn Balls (taken from a 1918 wartime cookbook)

- 1 cup molasses
- 1 tbsp margarine
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 1/4 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt

Boil molasses and margarine 3 minutes. Add sugar. Boil until it threads very slightly. Remove from heat. Add baking soda. Poor over 4 qts popcorn. Shape. Place on wax paper.



ENCORE UNE LÉGENDE QUI S'EN VA!
— ... Il n'a pas mangé les bougies !...

(Dessin de Leroo.)

Drinks & treats

Champagne Cocktail

- 1 pint sparkling grape juice
- 1 pint carbonated water
- 1 tsp Angostura bitters
- Mint sprig

Mix ingredients. Pour in glass. Garnish with mint sprig

Anchors Away

(for those who want that speakeasy kick)

- 50 ml gin
- 25 ml Cointreau
- 25 ml sweet vermouth
- 25 ml orange juice
- Soda water

Combine the gin, Cointreau, vermouth, and orange juice. Pour into glass over ice. Top with soda water. Garnish with an orange slice. Garnish with one raspberry.

Raspberry Bee's Knees

- 1 oz filtered water
- 1/2 oz lemon
- 1/2 oz honey
- 2 raspberries + 1 raspberry for garnish

Shake ingredients with ice and strain into glass with two raspberries. Top with soda water. Garnish with one raspberry.



Author Bio

Critically acclaimed author of historical fiction, Alix Rickloff's family tree includes a knight who fought during the Wars of the Roses (his brass rubbing hangs in her dining room) and a soldier who sided with Charles I during the English Civil War (hence the family's hasty emigration to America). With inspiration like that, what else could she do but start writing her own stories? She lives in Maryland in a house that's seen its own share of history so when she's not writing, she can usually be found trying to keep it from falling down. *THE GIRLS IN NAVY BLUE* is her latest release.