



MARIANA REED CLASS OF 1934

By Pat Knasinski

With war looming in 1941, a bill was introduced to congress for the creation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, "for the purpose of making available to the national defense the knowledge, skill, and special training of women of the nation." The attack on Pearl Harbor prompted President Roosevelt to sign the bill into law. Over 35,000 women from all over the country applied for less than 1,000 positions in the Corps. One of the few selected was Mariana Reed, a graduate of Winchester High School in 1934.

Mariana, now 100 years old, lived her entire life in Winchester, a town founded by her pioneer great-great grandfather, Paul Way, in 1816 before Indiana became a state. The daughter of Charles and Leona Reed, she grew up on East South Street in Winchester, across the street from Winchester High School, known then as Central School. It was there she was student for all but 2 ½ years of her schooling. Her father ran the family business and town gathering spot, Reed's Drug Store on the courthouse square.

Mariana still remembers her middle school years at Francis E. Willard School and her favorite teacher, Miss Nora Ford's Audubon Society.

Mariana says of those days, "I wore dresses to school but not on Saturday."

Her favorite high school teacher was Jessie Strong who roomed at Mariana's grandmother's house on East Franklin Street when it was the custom that all women teachers be single. This required them to live in housing provided by the community. Mildred Whyte, another of Mariana's favorite teachers, taught her to read and write poetry. Mariana produced a booklet of her poems during her senior year, and a few years ago, she published a compendium of her personal works, *A Flight of Years, 1927-2000*.

As a young girl, Mariana joined the Girl Scouts and remained a member for the rest of her life. Today the Randolph County Historical Society houses her uniforms and scout memorabilia. She holds the distinction of being the oldest living Girl Scout in the State of Indiana.

Following her graduation from Winchester High School in 1934, Mariana attended Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio, a school now part of Miami University. At a time when few women obtained degrees, she earned a 4-year Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1938. After graduation, she returned to Winchester where she was employed by the *Winchester News Gazette* as the Society Editor. In addition to covering the usual weddings and engagements, she kept the community informed about the daily card games in Winchester's many bridge clubs.

It was in 1939 when the war began that would change the world and the life of the young newspaper woman from Randolph County. In late 1942, Mariana resigned from *The Gazette* and went to Indianapolis to enlist in the newly formed Women's Army Corps.

"I just knew I had to go to war as soon as the WAC's were formed," Mariana said.

Basic Training took her to Des Moines, Iowa. From there she crossed the country by rail to her next assignment, Fort Devens, Massachusetts, where she was trained as an Administration School worker. The newly formed service organization did not have facilities for the women, and Mariana was housed with other WACs in a horse stable that had been converted to a women's dormitory. At Fort Devens, she was offered the opportunity to become an officer, but she turned a commission down because of a second offer which would take her to Europe. On Easter Sunday 1944, Mariana was ferried up the Hudson River from New York City to board the Queen Mary and sail to the European War Theatre. On the Atlantic crossing, the women were housed 18 to a stateroom, sleeping in six triple-deck hammocks.

"In spite of the crowded quarters," Mariana said. "I slept the best I had ever slept."

Eight days later the Queen Mary docked in Scotland. From there she took the train to Cheltenham, England where she supported the war effort with the clerical work she performed. After the liberation of Paris, Mariana was transferred across the English Channel to the "City of Lights" where she was assigned to the Casualty Division under the direction of the Adjutant General. Mariana loved being in the beautiful French city, but her work keeping records of America's war casualties was grim.

"When I had the information for the last page of a soldier's papers," she said, "I knew he was dead."

After a year and a half in Europe, she returned to the United States and was discharged from the WACs at Ft. Dix, New Jersey. From there, she rode the train to Indiana where her car was waiting for her at the local station.

“It was wonderful to drive home from the Winchester train station,” Mariana said, remembering a time 72 years before.

Mariana continued to serve her country as a civilian, working in the Randolph County auditor’s office. There she assisted soldiers returning from war in their transition to civilian life.

“The boys from Union City who lived in Ohio had a post-war pension which the Indiana boys did not yet have,” Mariana said. “I assisted many of these young men with obtaining signed affidavits to prove their residency in order to receive their pension.”

In 1950 when her post-war effort was completed, Mariana accepted a position with the Ward Insurance Agency. She remained with the agency until her retirement 34 years later.

Mariana Reed is the very essence of Winchester. Her life has been deeply woven into the fabric of the town her ancestor founded. She embraced the opportunities made available to her by its schools and quiet bucolic life, opportunities that allowed her to serve her community and country in times of both war and peace.

At 100 years of age, Mariana still fondly remembers hearing the school bell ring every day, calling her to class.