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Woman Remembers Service as WWII Navy Gunnery Instructor

Bob Aaron
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Sept. 5, 1995

Contact: Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181***Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*****Woman Remembers Service as WWII Navy Gunnery Instructor****Editor's Note:** Colleen Costigan Welch resides at 2201 Valley, Manhattan Beach, Calif.

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--What was it like for a 20-year-old women to teach gunnery to sailors in World War II? Just ask Colleen Costigan Welch.

Welch described her duty as a WAVE (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services) as "extremely unusual," adding that before classes at a Newport, R.I., navy base, "I stayed in the office until the bell rang. I'd come out and the men almost fainted. They didn't expect a woman to teach gunnery."

Welch's wartime experiences are recounted in the Fall, 1995, edition of *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine* in an article, "A Change in Plans: IWU and the War," marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. The article, written by Bob Aaron, IWU's director of public relations, is attached to this news release.

Instruction often took place with sailors seated on bleachers with an artillery piece in front. A simulator--akin to today's video games--was used to help sharpen marksmanship. Gunnery training also involved firing at target sleeves pulled by airplanes, and practicing with shipboard guns.

Welch, a retired high school teacher, graduated from IWU in 1946.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls 1,860 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. The university's endowment is valued at more than \$100 million. A \$25 million Center for Natural Science Learning and Research opened Aug. 28. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 164 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition. *101 of the Best Values in America's Colleges and Universities* calls IWU "undoubtedly one of the finest small colleges in the country," adding, "Illinois Wesleyan has surged to national prominence on the basis of its reputation as a school with a rock-solid academic program."