

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, R.I.

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES IN WORLD WAR II

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OF THE  
WAVES IN WORLD WAR II

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EILEEN O'CONNOR

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TAPE 1

Naval War College  
Newport, Rhode Island  
Oral History Program

The History of the WAVES  
During World War II

Interviewee: Eileen F. O'Connor  
Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak  
Subject: The History of the WAVES During World War II  
Date: February 24, 1993

C: This is an oral history interview with Eileen O'Connor regarding her participation in the WAVES in World War II. Today's date is February 24, 1993. We are conducting the interview at her home at 79 Green Lane in Jamestown, RI.

Eileen, I'm very happy that you decided to give this interview on the WAVES; I know it'll be worthwhile for our Oral History Program. I want to begin with a few questions about your life before the WAVES and my first question is: Where were you born?

O: I was born in Jamestown, R.I. on March 9, 1922. I am an original native. There are only a few of us left.

C: Did your family have a connection with the Navy at all?

O: Anyone living in Jamestown had a connection with the Navy. There were a number of naval officers who lived in Jamestown that we were friendly with; my brother Tom joined the Navy in 1938. My brother Frank joined the Navy in 1943, the same year I joined the Navy WAVES.

C: Can you name any of these naval officers that you came in contact with during your early years in Jamestown? Do you remember anybody in particular? Just to set the social scene here.

O: Oh yes, there were many who lived in Jamestown year round and many summered only. Commodore Cary Magruder, Admiral Taussig, Admiral Fiske, Admiral Andrews, Admiral Wadleigh, Captain Amsden, Captain Clay, Captain S hackford, Captain Kaiser, Captain Kittinger and others too numerous to list. Captain William Amsden was appointed the first Commanding Officer of the WAVES. Most of the officers made their home in the Shoreby Hill area of Jamestown. It is also my understanding that Admiral Halsey spent a summer in Jamestown.

C: Did you have any encounters with any of these people as a youth, because we know the Navy summered here as well during the 20s and the 30s?

O: I was just a little girl at that time, but my mother was a newspaper reporter and she conferred with the Navy officers quite a bit for information for her newspaper stories. She and my father knew all of the officers who lived in Jamestown and were very friendly with them.

C: What paper was she with?

O: She was with the Newport Daily News and later with the Providence Journal.

C: Oh, how interesting. That's kind of a unique career for a woman of that time period.

O: Yes, in addition to bringing up five children.

C: When was Admiral Halsey in Jamestown?

O: In the 1930s, around 1934, 1935. In that time frame. Those were the years that Newport was homeport for the Atlantic Fleet.

C: He was probably attending the War College then, I would think.

O: That I don't remember. I just knew he was staying in Jamestown. There were probably others that I don't remember, but

I do not want to forget another famous admiral, Admiral Fiske, who I believe invented the torpedo. He always wore a frock coat. When I was babysitting on summer afternoons, Admiral Fiske always walked along the shore and waited for me to finish my chores. Then we walked to his hotel where we wished each other a good night. He walked up the stairs of his hotel and sat on the porch in his rocking chair looking out at the Bay. I rode my bicycle the rest of the way home. He was a very pleasant man and we shared many stories.

C: Well, Jamestown was quite a social colony in the 20s and 30s for the Navy. Some of them remained, I guess, and settled here, but others just came for the summer or lived here when they had a connection with the base. How did they get across the bay in those days? There wasn't any Newport Bridge.

O: Travelling across Narragansett Bay was by ferry, Governor Carr, which was everyone's favorite boat. It had walnut benches in the cabins and also outdoors on the deck. In the winter the cabins were heated adequately. Another ferry was the Hammonton. When the West ferry shut down in the winter, the Governor Carr went to dry dock. The Hammonton would be placed in service at the East ferry until the Governor Carr returned from overhaul. There were also other boats that serviced Jamestown and Newport, namely the Beavertail and the Jamestown. I don't remember any other boats, but there were probably others.

C: So they plied the waters winter and summer then?

O: Yes, they plied the waters all summer and all winter. Occasionally, during extremely rough water, the schedules would be cancelled.

C: It was the only way for Jamestowners to get off the island.

O: That is correct. At times during the winter the upper bay was choked with ice. Large chunks of ice floated down from the Providence River, to the bay, and also there were times we were sent home from school early because of the clogging of ice in the bay and especially in the ferry slips. At that time Jamestown students attended Rogers High School in Newport.

C: That would be a problem. Occasionally, I guess, it would ice over. Well, getting back to your family, you said your mother was a newspaper reporter. Was your father in any way connected with the Navy?

O: Yes. He worked at the Naval Torpedo Station on Goat Island.

C: Oh, so that was a strong Navy connection there, too.

O: Yes, he was master machinist.

C: So that was on Goat Island in Newport. Where did you attend schools?

O: I went to Newport and attended Rogers High School.

C: All Jamestownners went there?

O: All Jamestownners went to Newport to the high school. Most of them went to the public school (Rogers) in Newport and some of the boys attended the Roman Catholic School--an all-boy school--in Newport.

C: When did you graduate from there?

O: I graduated from Rogers in 1939.

C: That was at the end of the Depression. Did you go to work immediately after that after your graduation?

O: Yes, I worked as a dental assistant in Jamestown for one summer. In the fall my parents sent me to the Newport Secretarial School, where I gained expertise in all phases of office management.

C: How long was that course?



O: Two years. I got a job while I was still in school at a lawyer's office in Newport. It was to be a temporary job. I worked for Mr. Libby until I joined the WAVES on 30 June 1943. I went on active duty 15 July 1943.

C: And what was his name?

O: Mr. Joseph Libby.

C: So you had to commute every day then from Jamestown to Newport for that position.

O: Yes, everyday. The fare on the ferry was \$.15 per trip. A book of 20 tickets could be purchased for \$2.00.

C: How did you hear about the WAVES? Because they were founded at the end of July, at least legislation was enacted at the end of July 1942, establishing the WAVES.

O: That's right, and I left home to go on active duty 15 July 1943. I was 21 years old, which was the required age for joining the WAVES. I became very ill with scarlet fever. Most of the time I listened to the radio and heard on every program "THE NAVY NEEDS YOU."

C: Oh yes, the famous poster.

O: Yes. One day I said to my mother, "I think I'll join the WAVES when I get better." I thought surely she would not want her little girl to leave home but she encouraged me to join.

C: Why did she think it would be great? Did you have any idea?

O: Well, I was quite a homebody and she just felt that I should get out and do something for myself. She thought it would be a great opportunity for me to get away from Jamestown, to broaden my life, and that's what happened. After I got better, I went back to school to finish my courses and also to end my career with Mr. Libby. Everyday my mother would ask if I got my application for the WAVES. And everyday I would say "not yet." I thought there was plenty of time to get it. One day I was on my way to the ferry in Newport, I saw my father coming off the ferry. He stopped to chat with me and then suggested I go with him to the Post Office to get my application for the WAVES. I thought to myself, this is a put up job. The two of us walked to the Post Office where I requested an application to join the WAVES.

That evening my father suggested we fill out my application. I filled it out that evening and my father mailed it in Newport the next morning.

C: Oh, to the regional office. Now what year was this? And what month? Do you remember?

O: That would have to be April 1943.

C: Were there any entrance requirements for the WAVES, other than the age requirement that you mentioned, the age of 21?

O: Other than the age requirement of 21, we had to be in good health. Our teeth especially had to be in excellent condition.

C: How long did it take for them to act on your application? When did you hear from the WAVES?

O: I went to Boston for aptitude tests and a physical on June 30, 1943.

C: So you had to take aptitude tests in Boston?

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O: Yes, we had to take the aptitude tests and also a physical, and out of about 50 to 100 who were there taking the exams, there were about eight of us sworn in on 30 June 1943.

C: Oh, really. Sworn in immediately after the test?

O: Sworn in immediately.

C: And you were one of those sworn in?

O: I was one of them.

C: I wonder why they did that.

O: I don't really know. I think many of the girls may have failed their intelligence tests, and also failed their physical. There may have been other reasons too that so many failed.

C: So immediately after you passed the physical and the aptitude you were sworn in?

O: Yes, when all procedures were completed I came home with the good news that I was accepted in the WAVES and not only accepted, but sworn into, the WAVES that day.

C: Were you excited about that?

O: I was. I was really looking forward to it. I thought it was one of the great things in my life up to that point and it still is the greatest thing in my life.

C: Oh, how wonderful! How long was it before you actually left Jamestown to join?

O: I left on July 15, 1943.

C: So you had about a two week break to prepare yourself for entrance in the WAVES. When you were inducted (just to jump back a little bit) did you have to take an oath? Did you have to swear allegiance?

O: Yes, we did.

C: So that was part of it then?

O. Yes. Another thing that was part of it too, my father knew the Commandant of the 1st Naval District. He used to live in Jamestown. His name is Captain Shackford. My father, of course, knew him. My father called him on the phone and told him that his "little girl" was in Boston to join the WAVES, so I was not able to fail. After we were sworn in and were told we could go home, the lieutenant, who was in charge of us for the day called me aside and said that Captain Shackford would like to see me in his office. I went to Captain Shackford's office and he told me that my father was very worried that I wouldn't get into the WAVES. He told my father not to worry that I would be sworn into the Navy that day. He was very nice to me. He put on his coat; and asked me if I were going home or if I were going to stay in Boston for the evening. I told him I was going straight home. He drove me to South Station, put me on the train, and welcomed me into the Navy. I thanked him for his help.

C: Oh that's great! That's a very interesting and unique story and a Jamestown connection. That's fascinating. So for the next two weeks you prepared yourself to go.

O: Yes, I had a list of what I needed and I packed them all in my suitcase. During my last week at home I had all kinds of parties that my friends gave me. We had a real nice time. It was two weeks that I shall always remember.

C: Where were you assigned? Where was your basic training, I assume?

O: Basic training was at Hunter College in the Bronx, New York.

C: Just what did your training consist of?

O: We were there approximately six weeks and training consisted of studying indoctrination into the Navy. We learned seamanship, Navy etiquette, procedures, the history of the Navy, etc. We also had to take aptitude tests. After lessons were over the Marines taught the WAVES the art of precision drill.

C: Why did you think it was fun to drill and march?

O: Drilling was totally foreign to me. It made me realize that I was really part of the military. I enjoyed learning the intricate formations. I loved it!

C: Did you sing while you marched or did you just march?

O: The WAVES lived in apartment buildings in the Bronx, NY We marched from our apartment building to our classes at Hunter. The Navy had taken over a number of apartment buildings to house the WAVES. We formed on the street and then we marched to our buildings where we had classes as well as the mess hall. Wherever we had to go we had to march. We couldn't go by ourselves anywhere. I do not recall singing at boot camp.

C: So you were always with a group.

O: We were always with a group. We couldn't go with less than four.

C: And even with four you had to march?

O: Even with four we had to march.

C: How far were the apartments from the main campus? Were they distant?

O: It was a very short distance. We just had to walk up a block and maybe down two blocks. The blocks in New York are a lot different than the blocks in Rhode Island. They were long blocks, but we didn't mind.

C: What was the area like near Hunter? Was it a good area?

O: It was very nice. Hunter College was in a nice area at that time. There was nothing to fear. However, we were not allowed out after classes, drills, or any entertainment that was provided for us.

C: Did you have a roommate?

O: One apartment consisted of two rooms. There were three bunk beds in each room making six WAVES in each room, totalling twelve in one apartment with one bathroom, one washing machine and one iron.

C: Oh, that's cramped quarters.

O: Very cramped, but it was fun.

C: Well, you were young.

O: Yes, we were young and naive.



C: Where were these people from that you roomed with? Do you remember?

O: Just about everywhere. We had very little time to get acquainted with our roommates. I remember only one from Troy, N.Y. Perhaps I remember her because I had never encountered anyone like her!

C: Did you bring any personal items with you to Hunter? Could you?

O: The only thing we were able to keep was an identification bracelet and a wristwatch. Everything else had to be returned home such as the civilian clothes we wore to Hunter College, and all jewelry had to be sent home.

C: That was with your uniform?

O: That was with the uniform. No earrings, no other kind of jewelry. We were allowed to use makeup. Our hair had to be off the collar.

C: Did you have inspections of your quarters at all? Did you have to keep them neat and clean?

O: Oh yes, every single day we had inspection of our quarters in boot camp. But it was simple to keep them clean.

C: Did you have a kitchen there in your apartment?

O: No. I think at one time there was a kitchen there but everything was disconnected. As a matter of fact, it had been removed, not just disconnected.

C: Did you have any other kind of physical training other than marching and drilling during the six weeks indoctrination? Did you have gym, so to speak, and physical education?

O: I don't believe we did. Probably physical education was replaced by drilling. I liked drilling best.

C: But you did have classes during the day?

O: Yes, we had classes during the day.

C: Do you remember what time you had to report to classes and what time they ceased in the evening?

O: We had a regular schedule of getting up at six o'clock, showered, getting dressed, and made our beds and left our rooms presentable. We mustered out on the street and marched to the

mess hall for breakfast. After breakfast, we went directly to classes. On Saturdays, we had parade and review and then we'd break for lunch. The end of the day was our drill period. By that time we were pretty tired; we were not allowed liberty except on Sunday. We were allowed a few hours to go into New York or wherever we wanted to go. We had to be certain we would be back on time.

C: So, you were kept on a pretty tight rein? What did you do in the evenings?

O: Studied. And everyone talked about home and our future.

C: Did you have tests to study for?

O: We had tests. We did a lot of studying. One Friday (I think this is an interesting item) we were in the mess hall for lunch. All of us had our tin trays in our hands when a lady came in, picked up a tray and stood in line. She went to the end of the line and then one of the officers brought her through the mess line; to our surprise it was Eleanor Roosevelt. She greeted us individually and gave all of us her lovely smile.

C: Oh, for heaven sakes! So you saw Eleanor. Did you recognize her?

O: Absolutely, yes we all recognized her. She was so lovely and so beautiful and gracious. She took her tin tray, went through the mess line, and sat down wherever she saw a seat and had lunch with us. That was one of the highlights in boot camp. She seemed as though she was one of us.

C: Well, you know that's what they say. Eleanor was everywhere. You never knew where she'd turn up.

O: She sure was everywhere. The next day was a Saturday and we had the dress parade and review. She inspected us. She was so lovely. She was smiling. She had a beautiful smile. She really was nice. We all loved her.

C: Do you have any comments on the food? What was that like? What was Navy food like?..

O: The food was great. I have absolutely no complaint about the food. We had something different every day at every breakfast, lunch and dinner. We could have had as much as we wanted just as long as we ate it. I can't say anything but good about the food that we were served, and we ate well.

C: Who were your instructors? Were they men or were they women, Eileen?

O: We had women instructors, WAVES. Each day, after class, Marines took us in hand and taught us how to march. It was fun.

C: That's interesting. Well, they were good at keeping you in line there. Who was the CO or was there a CO at Hunter (head of the WAVES at Hunter)?

O: We had a CO. This is amusing too. We saw our CO one day in an automobile, and everyone was awed. Adhering to Navy etiquette we saluted him. Two days before we were to leave we had our orders issued for our next assignment. I was ordered to Pharmacist School in Milledgeville, Georgia. The lieutenant who was in charge of us asked to see me. I wondered why. She told me the commanding officer wanted to see me in his office. I didn't know who the commanding officer was nor his name. I knew there was a commanding officer, and I had saluted him as he rode in his car. I went to his office, knocked on his door, and heard a voice say, "come in." I opened the door, walked in, and I saw Captain Amsden from Jamestown.

C: Oh, for heaven sakes.

O: He lived in the Shoreby Hill area. He greeted me and invited me to sit down. He invited me to have a drink. I, of course, declined.

C: Had you met him in Jamestown, or seen him around?

O: No I had not. A friend of my mother's knew him well, called him Bill, wrote him a note saying Eileen O'Connor from Jamestown, a good friend of hers, is one of your WAVES. He invited me to come up to his office. Captain Amsden asked me if I had received my orders and I told him "yes." He asked me where I was going and, I said I had been assigned to the Hospital Corpsman School in Milledgeville, Georgia. He said, "Oh, you'll like that." I replied, "No I won't."

C: Did he ask you why?

O: He said, "You wouldn't like that?" "You'd make a good hospital corpsman." I told him that I would not make a good hospital corpsman, that I didn't like that type of work. He asked me, "Well, where did you want to go? Where were you expecting to go?" I told him I wanted to go to the Yeoman School in Stillwater, Oklahoma. I told him that my parents had just finished paying a great deal of money to have me educated to be a good secretary and I knew that I could be a good yeoman and I also knew that I wouldn't be a good hospital corpsman. He told me if he had only known earlier he could have had my orders changed to Stillwater. I told him that I understood. A short time later I said goodbye, and told him I was happy to meet him. He replied that we would meet again in Jamestown. He told me

that he was going to retire and live in Jamestown. I went back to the barracks. The following day we were to leave bootcamp and the lieutenant in charge called me to her office and said there was a change of orders and she handed me my new orders to Yeoman School, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

C: Wonderful! It pays to complain. You got your orders changed.

O: Yes my orders were changed. It was a complete surprise. We arrived in Stillwater, Oklahoma, about 7 p.m. My friend, Beth Toomey, met me as I walked into Willard Hall, the dormitory I was to live in for three months.

C: Well, I just want to finish the training portion up a little bit. It was six weeks long as you said. Did you have tests at the end and were you graded at Hunter?

O: I must have passed because the Navy kept me. The Navy did not keep everybody. I must have been graded or I would have been discharged. I was unaware of grading.

C: What rate or rank did you come in as, I guess it was rate?

O: Apprentice Seaman. We remained Apprentice Seamen until we graduated from Yeoman School.

C: And when you graduated, what rate were you?

O: When I graduated from Yeoman School I was promoted to Yeoman, Third Class.

C: And what kind of uniforms did you wear as an Apprentice Seaman?

O: We were issued many blue cotton gabardine uniforms--shirt, jacket. The jacket had a fouled anchor over a three-bladed propeller pinned to the lapels. Navy blue buttons with anchor kept the jacket closed. Two white cotton short sleeved shirts and a black rayon tie tied in a square knot at the throat with tails about eight inches long were issued as well as light brown, cotton lisle stockings and black oxford shoes that laced with a bow knot. The shoes had a medium heel. We wore a hat with a white crown, with a navy blue brim that turned up in back and turned down in front with a band about 1 1/2 or 2 inches with the words U.S. NAVY in gold printing. White gloves, and our purse was black genuine leather with a black strap word over the head and across the front of the uniform resting on the opposite hip.

Few changes were made in our winter uniform. Our skirt and jacket were the same design made of worsted wool. We wore navy blue long sleeved shirts that buttoned at the wrist and a light blue tie. Our hat had a blue crown instead of white. We wore



the same black leather bag and black gloves in whatever material we liked. Also the same shoes and lisle stockings.

For winter dress we were issued a marine blue long sleeved shirt with black tie. That was the only change.

C: Did you wear the havelock during the rain? That's the piece of material that comes down and covers your hat.

O: The havelock was made to cover the hat and was worn when it rained or snowed. It draped over the shoulders and snapped under the chin. They were nice and very useful. Warm in the winter.

For recreation we were issued light blue tennis dresses with undershorts to match. They had a collar with a V-neckline. We were allowed to wear ankle socks and sneakers or any non-regulation shoes when we participated in exercise such as tennis, bicycling, etc. We were also permitted to wear slacks or any other decent sport clothes.

C: What is lisle?

O: It is a light weight cotton material. Warmer than rayon but not as attractive.

C: I saw your picture. It was attractive.

C: I assume you weren't able to carry umbrellas; that was against regulation.

O: Yes, you are correct. We were not allowed umbrellas.

C: Who was the designed of the WAVE uniform?

O: Mainbocher designed our uniforms. The summer uniform was re-designed. It was a gray and white striped seersucker, a one piece dress divided at the waist with a thick band of some material and had a blousy top. It had a front pleat in the skirt. Not very pretty. They were hot.

C: Did you have an overcoat in the winter?

O: Yes, we had an overcoat. Not like the bridge coats that you see the Navy women wearing today. We had a gabardine coat with a wool lining in it for winter wear. In the summer we removed the lining and wore it as a raincoat. The blue always ran onto our white shirts.

C: The dye wasn't fast, that's for sure. Did you have to pay for your uniforms, or was it Navy issue?

O: The only uniforms the WAVES had to pay for were their white dress uniforms. They were optional. They were very good looking--really outstanding.

C: Did you receive any pay during this time period? '

O: \$50.00 a month. That was the basic pay of an apprentice seaman.

C: Do you remember how many were in your class at Hunter, because this was a six week period?

O: No, I don't because we were spread out in all different apartment buildings. I don't really know. I wouldn't even hazard a guess. On review, we filled one-half of a football field.

C: You mentioned before that you were very, very busy during basic training and you had very little leave during this time period and, I assume, not much social life.

O: Not too much, No. We were all tired after the day.

C: Did you ever take advantage of the Sunday time that you had off and what did you do during that time off?

O: Yes, we had one Sunday off. I went into New York and met friends who lived in N.Y. and spent most of the summers in Jamestown. I went to Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral and then afterwards my friends took me sightseeing around New York, then to a supper and returned me to Hunter.

C: New York City was a different place in those days.

O: Yes. It was safe.

C: Yes, it was safe.

O: You were able to walk around the streets and not be frightened of attack.

C: But you did get out of Hunter anyway and went into the "big City."

O: Yes, and we were sure to be back on time.

C: What would have happened if you weren't? Was there a system of punishment or discipline?

O: There would be punishment, but we did not take any chances so I have no idea what the punishment would be. Probably KP duty.

C: Did the Navy provide for you any recreational activities during the basic training at all? Or was it strictly work and classes and drill?

O: There was a well known band that came to Hunter and entertained us one evening. Sammy Kaye keeps coming to mind. I don't recall for certain, but I think it was he.

C: Did they provide any religious opportunities for you?

O: We were allowed to go to church and encouraged to go. Yes, definitely. Catholic Mass and services for other denominations was held on campus.

C: What was your opinion of this indoctrination period, this basic training? Did you feel it was valuable? Did you learn a lot?

O: I learned more about the Navy than I thought there was to learn. I liked basic training; and the regime. I met many nice girls. We all got along. I have no complaint about basic training.

C: Did you have a graduation ceremony after you finished your training?

O: No, not at Hunter College. We were just handed our orders.

C: No, nothing there, no ceremony? Did you get a certificate or any indication that you'd completed basic training, any formal certificate?

O: No. The only thing that was given to us was our orders and wished good luck. I was happy to have orders to Stillwater, Oklahoma.

C: Maybe it was just strictly business and then go on to the next assignment.

O: It was; it was wartime. Remember they didn't have paper to waste to give us diplomas or any other memorabilia showing we went through basic training.

C: Well, you told us the story of how you got assigned to Yeoman School in Stillwater, Oklahoma, which was very interesting. Can you tell us about this assignment, about the Yeoman School? When did you go and how long did you stay there and what did you study?

O: What was your first question?

C: How long did you stay in Stillwater?

O: Three months. We took the troop train to Oklahoma; we stopped in St. Louis, saw the Gateway to the West and had dinner.

C: Did you go independently, Eileen? Did you go on your own?

O: Oh, no, we did not go independently, unfortunately. We went on this horrible troop train. Because it was summer the windows were opened and the smoke that was so black from the engine came in through the windows; we could hardly breathe. There were four people sitting in a seat. Two facing two. It took two nights and three days to arrive in Oklahoma. The train we were on was an old steamer. It was so hot and uncomfortable. No one was able to sleep very well and no one was able to wash. We had to keep the windows open as we had no air. There was no air conditioning in those days. Our face, our hair, our shirts, our uniform were filled with soot from the engine. Along the way, the train stopped and some nice ladies passed out lemonade and cookies to us. I don't remember how long the troop train was.

C: Were men on the troop train as well?

O: No, no. Just women. No one is going to throw us together with men. The WAVES were a sheltered group. The troop train was specifically hired to go to Stillwater with WAVES only.

C: No, when you said troop train I think of men going on a troop train or mixed group probably in separate cars, but it was solely for the WAVES going to Oklahoma.

O: I wish I could remember the stops that we made. I remember we stopped in St. Louis for dinner one of the nights, another time we stopped in Kansas City, and there we also were met also with ladies with lemonade and cookies. They were a very welcome sight. We thought they were very nice to do that. I was very grateful to them. The hardest part of the trip was trying to sleep. Very difficult.

C: The ladies were very patriotic.

O: Yes, and I wish they knew how much we enjoyed having that cold lemonade after breathing all that smoke that came through the windows. Our nostrils were filled with it. At night we picked up the benches (the seats) of the train and put them lengthwise on the frame and we slept the best we could. It was an uncomfortable trip but everyone was happy as we got closer to Stillwater. We sang all the songs we learned at boot camp and the time passed.

C: So you arrived in Oklahoma.



O: We arrived in Oklahoma; it was about 7 p.m. It was after the dinner hour but the kitchen had remained open for us. Beth Toomey, my friend from Jamestown, met me at the door and it was so good to see someone I knew from home. We had a nice reunion and she showed me where the showers were. We were happy to feel clean again. We had been issued two white shirts when we were at Hunter College. Uniform items were in short supply. As we approached Stillwater we turned our shirt inside out to get some semblance of white, but there just wasn't any. When we arrived in Oklahoma we looked as though we had just come from the coal mines. The Indian ladies washed and ironed our shirts for \$.20 each. They were starched and sparkling white when they were returned to us.

C: Was there special accommodation or base or whatever there?

O: We were housed at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. The Navy had taken over two student dormitories to be used for barracks for the WAVES. I lived in Willard Hall. The dormitories were made of red brick with a large porch with porch furniture. The quarterdeck was, of course, at the door. A huge beautifully furnished lounge was used to hold dances.

C: Did you have a roommate there?

O: Four. There were two double bunk beds in each room and two desks with chairs. Also two closets to hang our clothes and put our shoes. Our luggage was stored in a storage vault.

C: Did you bring any civilian clothes with you?

O: We were not allowed to have civilian clothes. All our civilian clothes were sent home by mail while we were at Hunter College.

C: So you were in Oklahoma for three months. What was your daily routine there?

O: Our daily routine, if I can remember correctly, was reville at 6 o'clock in the morning. We arose, showered, dressed, and made our beds and ate a well prepared breakfast. The meals were prepared by the Indian ladies who lived in the area of Stillwater. The food couldn't have been better. The meals were wonderful and picturesque. It was cafeteria style. After breakfast we gathered our books to use during classes. We carried them in our left hand. We mustered on the parade ground and attendance was taken. Afterwards we marched to our classes in platoon formation to the beat of a drum played by one of the WAVES in our platoon. While attending Yeoman School we were trained in all types of office procedures relative to the Navy that we might be faced with wherever our future assignments would

take us. We became very proficient in all our procedures relating to our Yeoman rating. When our day of formal schooling was ended we had time before dinner to exercise. Among the sports that were popular were volleyball, softball, bicycling, tennis and badminton. After sports drill we had time to shower. We had dinner at 5 p.m. After dinner we had an hour to ourselves. We had study from 7:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m.. If we were not able to shower before dinner we showered after study hour.

C: How long were your classes per day? Was it morning and afternoon both?

O: We went to class at 9:00 a.m. Each class lasted one hour. Our morning session ended at 11:30. Our afternoon session began at 1:00 p.m. and ended at 4:00 p.m. We had study hour from 7:00 until 9:00.

C: Were there lights out at a certain time?

O: At 10:00 p.m..

C: But you did have a lights out policy?

O: Yes, it was 10:00 p.m.. An officer would always take bed check. The spare time would be spent writing letters home to parents, relatives and friends.

C: Did you write home often? Would you say daily, weekly?

O: Oh yes, I did write as often as I could. My father would be very upset if he didn't receive a letter at least once or twice a week. I didn't want him to be worried. However, he worried about all of us. I had one brother in the Pacific and another brother off the coast of Africa. If I were not able to write, I telephoned and I never reversed the charges.

C: Did you receive mail from home regularly too? Did your parents write to you regularly?

O: Oh yes, all the time. Even my brother who was against having me join the WAVES, wrote to me regularly from the South Pacific.

C: Why was he against it?

O: He didn't know any better at the time. He was in the South Pacific and was unaware what the WAVES were doing for the war effort. He was in the Battles of the Solomon Islands, Bismarck Archipelago, Coral Sea and Midway. He was a Chief Aviation Machinist Mate.

C: Anti-women in the service. Was that his attitude?

O: No, he was NOT anti-women in the service. It wasn't like him to have that attitude. He was always very protective of me and probably thought I no longer would need his protection. He wrote me a letter after I was in the Navy telling me how proud he was of me. We always had a close relationship as brother and sister. I still have the letter he wrote me.

C: That would be great to donate to the archives because it gives a man's view at that time period, of women entering the Navy, because that was new. The Yeomanettes were in the WWI but they were a little different; it wasn't a permanent situation which was what the WAVES developed into.

O: He told me he was very proud of me and how happy he was for me. He told me I would make a good Navy WAVE and I had joined the right service. When he returned from the Pacific I went on leave for 10 days to be with him. He was so happy to show me off to his friends.

C: Do you know who was head of the Yeoman School out in Oklahoma, in Stillwater? Was it a woman who was the head of it or a man?

O: I know it was a WAVE officer but do not recall her name. There was also a male Marine to teach us intricate drill formations. There was a Radioman School in Stillwater and also an Army Engineer School. So there were men there, but we had no contact with them whatsoever.

C: No, I realize that, but Captain Amsden was CO over at Hunter, that's why I was asking.

O: It definitely was a woman officer who was Commanding Officer of the Yeoman School.

C: Well, did you have any time off during this training period of three months?

O: Yes, we did. We had time off after we had exams which was every Saturday morning from 9-11. After exams there was personal inspection on the field. The inspecting officer looked for picky things such as long shoelaces. They were government issue so there was no choice in length. She checked to make sure our hair was off the collar of the uniform, that the seams in our stockings were perfectly straight. (In those days stockings had a seam up the back.) Our shoes were always shined and our uniform was always cleaned and pressed.

C: Did you always pass muster? Were you ever called down for your uniform being out of order?

O: Yes, I always passed muster and no I was never called down because my uniform was out of order. Every Saturday morning we mustered on the parade field. At that time we had personal inspection to be sure that our shoes were shined and our clothes were cleaned and pressed and that our hats were clean. The Indian ladies laundered them. After the inspection we marched to whatever building we were having our written exams in. Our exams covered the work of the previous week. The platoon who had the highest average had Wednesday afternoon off and was allowed to go off campus.

C: Fantastic. Do you know how many were in a platoon by the way? Do you remember at all?

O: Oh, I don't recall; maybe 30, but that is guessing.

C: So did your platoon ever win?

O: Yes, we did. I am proud to say the platoon I was in had the most Wednesday afternoons off.

C: Fabulous. What did you do during that time in Stillwater?

O: We went downtown and had an ice cream cabinet, or what is also known as a milkshake. They were so thick with ice cream we had to eat it with a spoon rather than drink it through a straw. We went through the stores and looked at the clothes. We liked our uniform best. Once in awhile we would go to a movie. We then returned to the campus and Willard Hall for dinner and study. Willard Hall was the name of the Oklahoma State University dormitory where we were quartered.

C: Were you there in the summer time? Or was it the late summer, I believe?

O: Yes, in the heat of the summer.

C: That's what I wanted to ask about.

O: We were there from August to the first of November. It was extremely hot. We had tans through our shirts. It was a dry heat and was not oppressive like New England. We had Saturday afternoons off after our personal inspection and after room inspection. During one of the room inspections, a WAVE was told the soles of her shoes were dirty. On Friday night our room was scrubbed. After we finished cleaning we put our shoes just inside the door and we'd walk around in our stocking feet, because we didn't want to make any marks on the polished floor. When we finished the room was spotless. It shined. We exchanged



tasks so that one person didn't have the hardest work to do every week. Everyone cooperated with the tasks and we all got along real well because of our system. After inspection we had lunch.

C: So you had Saturday afternoons off after that?

O: Yes. We had Saturday afternoon until 9 p.m. and all day Sunday until 6:00 p.m..

C: So did you go into town during that time period, too?

O: Oh yes, we always bought a milkshake. Stillwater was a very small town; it had one main street. It had nice stores. We walked around the town more than anything else. We'd see the Indians standing with sober faces; no expression, no smiling. They were quite intimidating. One evening the Sioux tribe had a pow wow at the University in the animal husbandry building. It was a huge arena. They performed all their Indian dances; we were all invited to attend free of charge. I don't know whether they were putting it on just for the WAVES or not, but we were all there. Their intricate Indian dances, the smoking of the peace pipe, their wigwams, their beautifully beaded clothes were a nice thing to see. They displayed, to sell, their Indian-made wares such as their beaded necklaces, bracelets, small purses, etc. Their work was beautiful. They also had a great deal of turquoise.

C: How much were you paid then? Were you still \$50.00 a month?

O: Yes, we still received \$50.00 a month. We had to be careful spending our money in order to pay for our railroad ticket home at the end of three months. From Oklahoma to Kingston, R.I. was not inexpensive. I wouldn't think of writing home to ask my parents for money. I would deny myself first.

C: Oh, I see.

O: We couldn't fly on a plane; they didn't have the planes in those days. They were serving in the war effort. We had to go by train, I don't remember how much it cost me but it was quite a bit. I saved all but what we spent on our snacks and a movie on Wednesday afternoons and the buying of a few little Indian things for souvenirs to give as presents to all the family. I had to save the rest of my money to buy my train ticket. Oklahoma is a long a way from Rhode Island. On Sunday afternoons we went bicycle riding in all the heat with Mary Zalesak from New York.

C: These were the days of pre-air conditioning, too.

O: Yes, we didn't have any air conditioning at all. We did have bicycles to ride and we rode them through the countryside no matter how hot. There was a pond on the campus of the building named Theta Pond with willow trees around it. That was out of

bounds for us. I believe because the ASTP (Army students) met girls beside the pond. Also, the college students gathered at Theta Pond as well.

C: Oh, so you were kept on a certain part of the campus?

O: Yes, we were protected. The pond was the only restriction.

C: Oh, I see, segregated from the other students meaning ASTP (Army engineer students).

O: Yes. As I said before they would meet girls at Theta Pond, not necessarily Oklahoma State University students. It was summer time, but even in September and October we didn't see very many students.

C: Did you make any lasting friendships from the Oklahoma State experience?

O: Yes, I still see Mary (Zalesak) Ferrante quite frequently. She lives in Poughkeepsie, New York, and we also keep in touch by telephone. She visits often. She and her husband, Pat, have visited me often in Jamestown. I also keep in touch with Marie Ryan from Boston. I met her in Washington, D.C. She visits with me in Jamestown whenever she can. I visited another WAVE friend Mary Ashworth, who lives in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. She and

her husband also has visited me in R.I. I correspond frequently with Loretta Pankau who lives in St. Joseph, Missouri. She is planning to visit me next summer. She spent Christmas with me one year at my home. Another very good friend, Harriet Johns, known as "Johnny," came to visit every summer from Illinois. She was a great friend and my family loved her. She died in the early 1960s. I really miss her.

C: There's a WAVES organization, I believe.

O: Yes, there are many all over the country. Are there any in Rhode Island?

C: I think there is. I have some addresses. There is a local chapter in Rhode Island. Did you have a graduation ceremony from Stillwater when you completed your three month course?

O: I do not remember any formal graduation exercises. We received our orders and I guess that was it. We did have a class photograph taken. I prize that very much. Most important, I received my promotion to Yeoman Third Class--a very important promotion and \$78 a month.

C: Where were you ordered to after Stillwater?

O: I was ordered to Washington, D.C., with assignment to the Family Allowance Section in the Bureau of Naval Personnel in Arlington, Virginia.

C: Did you have a break? Did you have leave between this? How long was the leave?

O: Yes, I had leave, It was 10 days.

C: What did you do with this leave period?

O: I went home. The day after I arrived home my mother and I went to Newport on the ferry Governor Carr to have a portrait picture of me taken in my uniform. After that I visited friends and relatives who thought my uniform was great. All of them had to try on my hat. Of course I had to tell them about training and how much I liked being in the Navy.

C: How long did the trip take you?

O: It took us overnight. We left Stillwater for Chicago where we changed trains. We had enough time in Chicago to go to the Loop and to visit Marshall Field's large department store. A WAVE from our class who lived in Chicago escorted us around the city. We found our way back to the railroad station and we boarded the train. We spent overnight on the train. The

Conductor gave me a pillow and a blanket. We arrived in New York the next morning and changed trains for Providence, R.I., and home.

C: Were you traveling on a troop train again?

O: No. We were traveling on our own. It was not a troop train as everyone was off in different directions.

C: How did you make it from New York to Jamestown? Was there a train to Providence?

O: I boarded the train from New York to Providence and then a bus from Providence to Newport. As I got off the bus in Newport, a sailor asked me where I was going. When I told him I was going to the ferry he said, "I'll carry your suitcase for you." I was very grateful. He had never seen a WAVE. When we arrived at the ferry, he put down my suitcase, shook hands and wished me well. I wished him well, too. The ferry left Newport at 4:30. My sister Margaret, who was such a beautiful girl, was waiting for the same ferry. My family did not know I was arriving that day. My father also was getting the ferry so we had out reunion in Newport. All my family was happy to see me. It was the first time they saw me in uniform.

C: Oh, you hadn't alerted them?

O: No. I wasn't sure at the time when I would arrive. My sister Margaret saw me as she walked to the ferry and just stopped and shouted, "Eileen!" She was so happy to see me. My sister Margaret and I were very close sisters. We were hardly went anywhere without the other.

C: Were you in uniform then? Traveling in uniform?

O: Oh, yes. We didn't have any civilian clothes whatsoever. We had to send them home when we were boots.

C: Did they even give you regulation underwear, I meant to ask?

O: Oh no, no, we furnished our own underwear. I always wore nice underwear. I have never worn a petticoat or slip without lace on it and I still don't to this day.

C: So you came home and you stayed for a short time?

O: Yes, for ten days. My mother wanted a portrait picture of me in uniform so we went to Newport and had my picture taken at Ernst Studio. She was very proud of me. One day as she walked by the studio she saw my portrait in the window flanked on each side by a Navy officer.

C: Yes, I think a lot of people had pictures taken in uniforms in those days. It was the popular thing to do.

O: My parents were very proud to have a daughter in the Navy.

C: Oh yes, it was kind of a unique thing to do. Was there anybody else from Jamestown that had joined that you knew of?

O: Yes, my good friend, Beth Toomey (Sullivan). Beth Toomey had completed her basic training at Hunter. I met her in Stillwater. She was waiting for me at the door when I arrived. She knew I was coming. It was good to see her. She had received her orders to Washington, D.C., and was leaving Stillwater soon. She showed me the location of the showers and then showed me the way to the mess hall where dinner was served.

C: Was your vacation exciting, or interesting, or relaxing?

O: It wasn't too relaxing because my mother had to take me here and there to show me off. I was glad to be home and I let her revel in her glory. She was a good mother. She was excited to have a daughter in the Navy as well as two sons; I couldn't spoil her happiness. She was very proud of all her children. There were five of us.



C: Well, your ten days were over and you were on your way to Washington, I assume, by train again. What billet were you going to? What was your job?

O: I was a yeoman. We arrived in the late evening. I was assigned to BuPers but did not know what job I was going to be assigned until the following day.

C: Bureau of Naval Personnel then?

O: Yes, Bureau of Naval Personnel. I didn't know beyond that. When I arrived in D.C. I learned that there wasn't any room for us at Arlington Farms where the WAVES were billeted. We had to be taken to the Naval Air Station at Anacostia.

C: Were there barracks there?

O: We stayed in regular barracks. I was happy when a room became available at Arlington Farms.

C: What were they like?

O: They were regular barracks that the men had to vacate, so it was just one big room with a lot of beds.

C: Oh, real barracks style?

O: Yes, real barracks style. We were there only three days though so we were able to put up with it.

C: No privacy.

O: A little privacy. The food was very good but not like Oklahoma. I never had a complaint with Navy food. We had to do mess duty.

C: Oh, now what did that consist of?

O: The same food that you had at home. Always well balanced meals. We were also assigned KP duty. That consisted of having the dishes washed and stacked and, well, kitchen work.

C: You had to do it.

O: I enjoyed it, too. While I washed dishes I sang to my heart's content.

C: So you were there for just three days?

O: Just about three days. Until they found room for us at Arlington Farms.

C: Now, what was Arlington Farms?

O: Arlington Farms was a group of buildings, named after states, that housed civilian girls who worked for the government. Every state in the Union was represented. The government leased several buildings to house the WAVES. I was in Florida Hall. It had a very attractive lounge. A desk was manned at all times by the Officer-of-the-Day. Mail was received at the desk. There was a little variety shop where one could purchase candy, cookies, coffee, tea, magazines, newspapers, etc. There were several wings off each side of the lounge. There were two floors. We were assigned rooms in Arlington Farms that we called barracks. The rooms were cubicles. There was no door. If we wanted privacy, we tucked a blanket underneath a mattress of the bunk bed and draped it across the front of the cubicle and attached it to the door of a closet. That way we had a little privacy. When anyone saw a blanket across the front of a cubicle they knew the occupant wanted privacy--writing letters, studying for the next highest rate, or just to read.

C: Oh, so in other words, no door.

O: There was no door.

C: And how many were in that room?

O: There were two WAVES in a cubicle. There was carpet on the floor and a desk, a chair, a table and a lamp, and two closets. We were not allowed to hang anything on the walls.

C: Real spartan.

O: Yes, it was sparse. We didn't need any more than that. We were happy with what we had. I had a crucifix that I hung on the wall. They made me take it down. I don't think they could do that today.

C: Who was your roommate, do you remember?

O: Oh yes! My roommate was Harriet Johns from Alton, Illinois. The first roommate was a WAVE by the name of Doris Elberg from Chicago, Illinois. I associated with many girls: Loretta Pankau from St. Joseph, Missouri; Marie Ryan from Boston, Mass; Barbara Allen from Maine; Mary Donnelly from Lake Placid, N.Y.; Mary Nyland from Philadelphia; Mary Ferrante from Poughkeepsie, NY; Angie Cinelli from Newport; Beth Toomey from Jamestown, and others. We had a fine time; it was great. Harriet Johns, Marie Ryan, Mary Ferrante and Mary Donnelly have all come to Jamestown at various times to visit, and we still keep in touch.

C: What was your position? What was your billet, and your job that you ultimately went to after you settled in at Arlington Farm?

O: I was a Yeoman Third Class assigned to the Bureau of Naval Personnel in the Family Allowance section typing page 9's.

C: What is that?

O: In all Navy enlisted personnel service records there is a page 9. It is a continuous history of your life in the Navy. All your actions are recorded such as captain's mast, court-martials, medals and awards received for heroism, changes in rate, martial status, etc. It is all recorded on page 9. Everyone who has been in the Navy is familiar with page 9.

C: Was that an eight hour a day job?

O: Yes, it was an eight hour a day job.

C: How did you get into Washington from Arlington?

O: The Bureau of Naval Personnel was not in Washington. It was in Arlington, Va. We travelled by bus. Many people from Washington working in Arlington drove their own cars. If they saw any WAVE waiting for the bus at a bus stop they would stop

and give us a ride to BUPERS. One day I was typing the page 9's and I felt a tap on my shoulder. A WAVE lieutenant told me that Captain MacAfee would like to see me in her office. I thought, "What have I done?"

C: She was the CO of the Navy WAVES. She was senior to everyone--enlisted and officers.

O: Captain MacAfee was the commander of the WAVES, the highest ranking woman in the military. She was the only woman, at that time, to hold the rank of Captain.

C: And she was located in Washington?

O: Yes, at the Bureau of Naval Personnel. I reported to her office and she told me I was being taken out of Family Allowance. I thought, why me?

C: How long had you been in Family Allowance?

O: I was in Family Allowance about three weeks. A very short time. She told me that there was a temporary duty assignment in the Secretary of the Navy's Office in the main Navy Department on Constitution Avenue in Washington and told me I had been selected to fill that billet.

C: I'll bet you were flabbergasted.

O: Yes, I was. I thought, why me?

C: Did you ever ask her that?

O: No, I didn't. I thought I had better keep those thoughts to myself. She told me that it was only for ten days. At the end of ten days I had to return to BUPERS. She also told me if I did a good job she would give me a better billet than what I had in Family Allowance. I thanked her for her confidence and I hoped I would be worthy of the challenge. She said that they may want to keep me, but I had to return to BUPERS in ten days. She told me if I did a good job with the Survey Board she would see that I got a better job when I returned.

C: What was your impression of her?

O: She was a woman whom you liked immediately. She was a very pleasant woman and most capable and easy to talk with. She was imbued with confidence, one whom you would be proud to serve under.

C: Did you meet James Forrestal?

O: No. I went to the floor where SECNAV's offices were located and all the doors were closed and no names on the doors. I didn't know which one to open. I thought the thing to do was knock on a door and I was invited to come in. I was surprised to see Admiral Andrews from Jamestown.

C: I know, it's typical Washington. You go into the Senate office buildings and the doors are all closed.

O: I said, "Admiral Andrews!, What are you doing here?" I knew him when he lived in Jamestown. He laughed; he thought it was a big joke. He said, "I might ask you, what are you doing here?" I told him I was reporting for temporary duty for 10 days in his office. He said he was happy to have me and asked me if I had a needle and thread that the button on his coat was coming off. I told him I did not. His Flag Lieutenant took charge and showed me my desk. He taught me my first lesson, and that was NEVER say NO to an Admiral! He told me to find a needle and thread and sew the button on his coat. In all my years I have never forgotten that lesson. I was very grateful to the Flag Lieutenant.

C: An important lesson.

O: And it was a very worthwhile lesson too. I went into the halls and again all the doors were closed. I opened a door and to my relief there were WAVE officers. I told them I needed a



needle and thread and why. They produced them and I returned to Vice Admiral Andrews office and asked him if I could sew the button on his coat. He thanked me and said the button was fine. I believed he was testing my resourcefulness.

C: Do you think he had selected you personally for this position?

O: I don't know. My thought was that Captain Amsden was in touch with him and told him I was at BUPERS. They lived next door to one another on Shoreby Hill in Jamestown. I know they were very good friends.

C: That sounds plausible, really.

O: Yes, I always thought that. I thought that Captain Andrews was in touch with Captain MacAfee.

TAPE 2

Naval War College  
Newport, Rhode Island  
Oral History Program

The History of the WAVES  
During World War II

Interviewee: Eileen F. O'Connor  
Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak  
Subject: The History of the WAVES During World War II  
Date: March 4, 1993

This is the second oral history interview with Eileen O'Connor on the WAVES. We are conducting the interview at her home at 79 Green Lane in Jamestown, R.I. This is March 4, 1993.

C: Eileen, I believe we left off with talking about your temporary ten-day assignment with the Secretary of Navy's Office working for Vice Admiral Andrews. Can you tell me what he headed and what you did there for that ten days?

O: Vice Admiral Andrews was senior Officer of the Naval Manpower Survey Board housed in the Main Navy Building on Constitution Avenue in Washington. I was assigned by Captain MacAfee in BUPERS to temporary duty for ten days to that Board. I made charts showing where the men were on duty in the field and where there were shortages of men in specific areas and if so what to do about it. I kept records and typed reports for the Admiral regarding the Navy's manpower and movements. At the end of ten

days I told the Officer-in-Charge that my temporary duty was over and my orders were to return to BUPERS. I thanked the officers for the opportunity to work for them and told them I was happy to have served with them. They called BUPERS and asked Captain MacAfee if she would have my orders changed to permanent duty attached to the Naval Manpower Survey Board.

C: And then after that ten days?

O: After ten days, I was detached from temporary duty and reported to Captain MacAfee's office. Admiral Andrews wanted to keep me, but Captain MacAfee said I had to go back to BUPERS. I returned to Captain MacAfee's office. She thanked me for doing a good job at the Naval Manpower Survey Board. She kept her promise to assign me to a better billet when I returned to BUPERS. I was assigned as Yeoman to the Detail Officer in the Chaplain's Division, a most desirable billet.

C: What month was this or year? Do you remember?

O: It was in early December 1943. I looked forward to being home for Christmas. A directive was distributed notifying all Commanding Officers that only 10% of the Navy personnel in each office could be given leave for Christmas. Because there were only two WAVES attached to the Naval Manpower Survey Board, we were told both of us could take leave to be home for Christmas.

I returned to BuPers where I was assigned to the Chaplain's Division. I requested leave for Christmas and the Assistant Director of the Chaplain's Division said, "No." I went home anyway.

C: Where was the chaplain's office located?

O: The Chaplain's Division was located in the eighth wing of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Arlington, Virginia. Arlington is across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. The Potomac River is spanned by the Memorial Bridge.

C: Oh, so you worked in Arlington, then?

O: Yes.

C: For whom did you work and when did you report?

O: The first chaplain I worked for was Chaplain Boslet. He was the Detail Officer in the Chaplain's Division. The Detail Officer had the responsibility of ordering the chaplains wherever they were needed. There were also other duties attached to the billet. I reported to the Chaplain's Division just before Christmas, 1943.

C: Oh, it is interesting that a chaplain would be doing this kind of work, a detailee.

O: Yes, they were doing that kind of work. That was more of an expertise billet: Only a chaplain would know where to send chaplains for duty. It was a most demanding billet.

C: Oh, I see, they were assigning chaplains. I'm sorry. That makes sense.

O: It was chaplains only. I stayed with Chaplain Boslet until he transferred to sea duty on the USS Missouri.

C: What did you do when you worked for him?

O: I was his yeoman. I typed the proposed duty stations where the chaplains were to be assigned. He also dictated all letters written to the chaplains in the field plus the district chaplains as well as to the Military Ordinariate. The Military Ordinariate was headed by Cardinal Spellman in New York.

C: What was the Military Ordinariate? I've never heard of that term.

O: The Military Ordinariate is now known as the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA. Ordinariate is a title equivalent to

Bishop. The Military Ordinariate was based in New York but has been moved to Washington, D.C. Records are kept of Catholic Chaplains serving in the Armed Forces. In addition, they keep administrative records of all the Sacraments performed by the Chaplains such as baptism, First Communion, confirmation, marriage, and Last Rites. The Military Ordinariate is set up by the dioceses to take care of Catholic Chaplains only serving in the military.

C: They were actually military rank as well.

O: No, they were not military. They are priests, monsignors and a bishop as head.

C: That's kind of interesting. Did you get any sense or feeling of what things were like out on the front lines from the letters that you wrote or from what they wrote back to your office?

O: Yes. Especially after the battle of Iwo Jima; Chaplain George Rosso, the Detail Chaplain for whom I worked, ordered 12 Catholic, 12 Protestant, and 12 Jewish Chaplains to the Pacific. I was the only time he ordered so many chaplains to one place at the same time. I anticipated that President Roosevelt was preparing for the invasion of Japan and was expecting a large number of casualties. It was scary. I think and hope you agree that the incident I am going to relate should be recorded in an

oral history regarding a Chaplain: Chaplain Joseph O'Callahan was the Catholic Chaplain aboard the USS Franklin, a CV (aircraft carrier) operating in the South Pacific when it took a kamikaze hit. The damage was devastating. Chaplain O'Callahan gave solace and comfort to all the sick, injured, and dying. He administered the Sacrament of Extreme Unction now known as the anointing of the Sick to all the men, injured and dying. Chaos reigned. When Chaplain O'Callahan finished attending to the injured and dying and could not do more for them, he manned one of the guns on the carrier, and when he was not manning the gun he hosed down the fires that ran rampant. His act of manning a gun is against Navy regulations. He was immediately ordered to report to the Chaplain's Division in Washington where he was severely reprimanded.

NO CHAPLAIN--PROTESTANT, CATHOLIC OR JEWISH--is allowed to man a gun.

After Chaplain O'Callahan was so severely reprimanded--at BUPERS the reprimand was recorded in his official jacket (service record). The Head of the Medals and Commendations Department, who is responsible for the awarding of medals to heroes, commended him for his bravery after he was reprimanded. Chaplain O'Callahan was awarded the Congressional medal of Honor. The Medal is awarded in the name of Congress for conspicuous

gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty in action with an enemy.

By awarding a medal after a reprimand, it nullifies the reprimand and it is removed from his jacket (service record).

I believe Chaplain O'Callahan is the only chaplain who has received the nation's highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor.

A song was written which evolved from his action aboard the Franklin during the attack. Chaplains were called Sky Pilots whether they were Catholic, Protestant or Jewish.

Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition words and music by Frank Laesser (1942):

Down went the gunner; a bullet was his fate.  
Down went the gunner; and then the gunner's mate.  
Up jumped the sky pilot, gave the boys a look  
And manned the gun himself as he laid aside the Book  
Shouting:

"Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition!  
Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition!



Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition, and we'll all stay free!"

"Praise the Lord and swing into position  
Can't afford to sit around a' wishin'

Praise the Lord, we're all between perdition and the deep blue sea!"

Yes, the sky pilot said it. You've got to give him credit, for a son-of-a-gun of a gunner was he, shouting:

"Praise the Lord; we're on a mighty mission.  
All aboard! We're not a goin' fishin'.

Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition, and we'll all stay free!"

C: Well, that's interesting. So you at least had a sense from that, that outstanding event, of Chaplain O'Callahan. Well, did you work for and stay in the Chaplain's Division?

O: I held duty in the Chaplain's Division until I was discharged in 1947. I worked for, after Chaplain Boslet left for the Missouri, Chaplain John F. Robinson, who became the Detail Chaplain. I was his yeoman until Chaplain Robinson left for overseas duty, Chaplain George A. Rosso was nominated to relieve him as the Detail Chaplain.

C: How long were they usually on sea duty? Do you know? Was there any pattern as to how long they were on sea duty? Was their assignment a year or two?

O: I really can't say. It varied. I had a favorite phrase that I should use now and that is: "It depends upon the need of the service." I used it many time when chaplains called and asked where their next duty would be. I also added, "You can be sure you request will be given every consideration." I always asked them what their preference in duty station was just to let them know their request would be considered. Sometimes their request would be granted but most of the time it was impossible. As I said, "It depends upon the need of the service." I don't remember that. If you wish me to guess, I would guess about 6-12 months. I may be wrong.

C: I just wonder how often they were rotated.

O: If they were on sea duty, I'll make a guess, approximately 12 months.

C: How long did you work? How many hours a day in Arlington?

O: We had it quite nice. We worked from 0800 to 1630. We had a half hour for lunch, but because of the hordes of people our lunch was extended 15 minutes, making a total of 45 minutes for

lunch. Very often I walked over to our Navy Mess Hall just across the street, to have lunch. The food was much better than the cafeteria. We were never reprimanded if we were late getting back from lunch. Neither did we take advantage of the chaplain's good nature. Because the chaplains were so caring and so thoughtful, we did our best to be on time all the time and they knew it and appreciated all the work we did for them.

C: Where was the Personnel building located in Arlington?

O: It was across the street from Arlington Cemetery, and up the hill from the Pentagon building. The few times we were not busy we watched funerals being conducted in Arlington Cemetery from our windows in BUPERS.

C: Oh, I see. Now, you were still out in Arlington Farms at that time.

O: Yes, we lived in Arlington Farms. There were a number of buildings built and used for housing the civilian girls who worked for the government. After the WAVES were established, some of the buildings were taken by the Navy to house the WAVES. All the buildings were named after the states of the U.S. I lived in Florida Hall.

Chaplain Robinson, who at the time was the Detail Officer, received orders to go overseas. On his way the plane crashed

into the Blue Ridge Mountains. In all his pain, he crawled on his hands and knees and gave the Last Rites of the Catholic Church to all the passengers. He then wrote a note to his Mom and Dad that read, "Dear Mom and Dad, I have had time to say my prayers." He tucked that note in his belt and he died. He was a good man, a good Chaplain, a good Detail Officer, and everyone liked him very much, and we were most saddened when we learned of his death. Another WAVE and myself attended his funeral in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.

C: Oh, what a tragedy.

O: It was a tragedy. The Chaplains also travelled to the School of Navy Chaplains, located in Williamsburg, Virginia, to lecture at the student chaplains' graduation exercises. One Sunday, Chaplain Robinson was scheduled to lecture at the graduation exercises at the Chaplain School and he asked me if I would like to ride to Williamsburg. Of course, I was delighted. He told me to bring a friend with me. While he lectured, my friend, Loretta Pankau, and I visited all the colonial exhibits. It was a very interesting and enjoyable day. We had dinner at the College of William and Mary. After Chaplain Robinson departed the Division, he was replaced by Chaplain George A, Rosso. I was his yeoman the rest of the time I was in the Navy. I liked him very much. It was a joy working for him. Quite often he gave me tickets to the concerts at Constitution Hall and the National Theater.

During the summer, the wives of the non-Catholic Chaplains would use some of their ration tickets and buy the makings for a picnic. The Catholic Chaplains would pitch in money for the wives to use to buy what they needed for the picnic. The chaplain invited all of the military and civilian employees who worked in the Chaplain's Division to picnics at Rock Creek Park in Washington. The WAVES and civilian girls played tennis and baseball while the Chaplains built a fire and the wives set the table and arranged the food. The Chaplains did the cooking. We were served by the Chaplains. They wouldn't let us do any work. I was happy about "no work."

C: Oh, how nice. What was your last assignment with the Chaplain's Corps? What year was it in?

O: The last assignment I had was Chief Yeoman to the Chief of Navy Chaplains, Rear Admiral William N. Thomas, (CHC) USN. It was 1947.

C: Oh, so you stayed with them a good four years.

O: Yes, I did.

C: I was going to ask you about promotions. Did any come along the way?

O: When I was sworn into the Navy I became Apprentice Seaman (AS). When I left boot camp I was Seaman 2nd class. I graduated from Yeoman School and was given the rate Yeoman 3rd class. After exams for the next highest rate I became Yeoman 2nd class. A freeze was imposed on 1st class. When it was lifted I became 1st class and on the same day was promoted to Chief Yeoman.

When I arrived for duty in the Chaplains Division in December 1943 I was a Yeoman 3rd class. To be promoted we had to take written exams covering secretarial duties. We also had to take written exams in Seamanship even though we did not have to practice seamanship. After spending six months as a third class yeoman, I took the exams for second class yeoman. Just after I was notified of my promotion to second class, the ratings were frozen. There was absolutely no chance for promotion. However, I continued studying for my first class yeoman rating. World War II ended in August 1945 after the signing of the peace treaty on board the Missouri. There were so many men returning from the Pacific waiting to be discharged that BUPERS issued an ALNAV stating that if yeomen would extend their enlistment for one year, they would be automatically promoted to the next highest rating. I liked the offer. I applied for a six-week extension and took my first class exam. When I learned I had passed the exam, I extended my enlistment one year and became Chief Yeoman.

C: You were well provided for then.

O: We certainly were. We had a wonderful time. I love the Navy and loved the Chaplains.

C: Did you find the Chaplains easy to work for?

O: Yes, I did. In my opinion they were the best. They were very considerate. If they thought for a minute that I was not feeling well, they would say, "I think you need your mother. Take 10 days and go home."

C: Oh, how nice.

O: If I had a bad cold or if I were sick in any way, the chaplains sent me home. They would always say, "I think you need your mother." They thought it was a good joke--and we would laugh and I would go home.

C: Oh, great. Back to the Farms, you mean, Arlington Farms.

O: No, not to Arlington Farms--to Jamestown. The WAVES were never allowed to stay in their rooms if they were ill. Everyone had to go to sick bay and stay until a doctor told you when you could go back to duty. The care was excellent.

C: Oh.

O: Other times the chaplains would say, "Eileen, you haven't seen your mother in a long time. I think you ought to go home."

C: They're very spontaneous. That they would let you go.

O: I hardly ever had to ask if I could be granted leave. The chaplains always suggested I take leave. I never asked for a day or afternoon off.

C: How much leave time did you get during that time period? Do you know, what the leave was?

O: We had a total of 30 days leave per year.

C: Did you exceed the 30 days?

O: No. If I exceeded the 30 days leave, I didn't know it. I took leave whenever the chaplains suggested and the few times that I asked. One of the few times was when my brother, Tom, came home from the Pacific in 1944. When I saw him I just flew into his arms. He had such harrowing experiences in the campaigns. It was good to see him alive.

C: And that included weekends, too. Didn't it? With the Navy it usually does.



O: Weekends consisted of Sunday for religious services, rest and recreation. We had Sundays to ourselves. We did work Saturdays. The civilians also worked the same days the WAVES worked, Monday through Saturday.

C: Oh, okay. You just mentioned before I interjected that you liked working for the chaplains very much.

O: I enjoyed the duty immensely. It was a joy to go to work in the morning. I must say it was the best job I ever had. There was no jealousy, no back-biting, just pleasantness.

C: Oh, that's great. But you said you worked very hard.

O: Yes, we did work hard, but the work was pleasant, and more than that the work was appreciated; we were always being thanked for this and thanked for that, and when we worked extra hard getting orders, letters etc. out for deadlines, the chaplains would go to the cafeteria and bring back a gallon of ice cream. You couldn't help but love them.

C: Yes, people say it's very nice working for the chaplains. They're more considerate than others.

O: I feel that I had the best duty of any Navy WAVE.

C: That's wonderful. How large was the office? Was there another WAVE in there besides you?

O: Oh, yes. I believe there were seven enlisted WAVES, 1 male chief, 2 sailors, and 7 civilians. These figures are approximate.

C: Did any promotions come along the way in your career and if so how did they occur?

O: An enlisted WAVE had to be in her rate 6 months before she was eligible to take the exam for the next highest rate.

C: Qualifying exams?

O: Yes. Everyone had to take exams to qualify for promotion. Seamanship was also included as a part of the exam.

C: Even though, it was unrelated? You were land lubbers.

O: Unrelated as it was. The rest of it was simple enough. We were just not accustomed to seamanship, but we had to pass the seamanship exam as well as our expertise. The only boat experience I had was sailing boats in Narragansett Bay and riding the ferry boat to Jamestown/Newport.

C: So did you make second?

O: Yes, I made second class and then the ratings were frozen.

C: Why was that?

O: I don't know, maybe it had to do with the budget, or perhaps there were enough yeomen. All the Navy personnel were frozen in their rates.

C: Do you remember what the pay was for the third or second class rate? Do you have any idea?

O: Apprentice seaman and seamen 2nd class received \$50 a month, third class, received \$78 a month, second class, received \$96 a month; the rates were frozen, when I was second class and they were frozen up to the time the war ended. No one received promotions. After the war ended, hundreds of men were wanting to get out of the Navy. BUPERS did not have enough WAVES to process the men's orders to relieve them from the Navy duty. A directive was sent through the Bureau (I don't know if this was throughout the Navy), giving the WAVES a choice of either accepting discharge or extending their enlistment. The Bureau requested the WAVES to extend their enlistment for one year and those who extended would be promoted to the next highest rate with no examination. They really needed yeoman.

C: Now, did you want to extend?

O: Yes. I did not have anything planned and I was eligible for first class, but if I extended a year I would not be able to make chief so I extended for six weeks. I studied and took the exam for first class, and passed. The day I made first class I extended for one year and made chief.

C: Oh, how interesting.

O: I made chief the same day, I made first class. I never collected a 1st class salary.

C: Isn't that something. Do you remember what the pay was for chief?

O: It was \$150 a month.

C: That was worth it. Oh, yes, that's quite an increase.

O: I'm not sure what the first class pay was because I never was in the rate long enough--about one-half hour. The Chaplain were quite pleased and presented me with my Chief Yeoman's rating badge and other appropriate gifts. Chaplain Rosso gave me his cross that he wore on his uniform. The Chaplain also sent one of the men to the cafeteria for ice cream. We had a good party.

C: You just jumped from second class.

O: Yes, I did. From second to chief, actually, but I did have to take the exam for first class.

C: Did you have to take the exam for chief or was it just automatic?

O: No, that was an automatic raise, because they were in dire need of yeomen to process the men coming back from the war. They had to offer us a goodie to stay and being promoted to the next rate with no exam was certainly a successful enticement.

C: So, with that rate, did you stay with the chaplains or did you move to another office?

O: I stayed with the chaplains. I was relieved of active duty in May 1947.

C: You got out, I think you said, in May '47.

O: I got out in May '47. We were placed on terminal leave.

C: And what does that mean?

O: That means, you were not out of the Navy per se until your leave was used. We had 60 days on the books.

C: So, what did you do during that time period? Could you go home or could you . . . ?

O: The first thing we did, a friend of mine (my roommate), who was in the WAVES with me I decided we should take a trip. We thought we would go to Puerto Rico. The powers that be would not let us go to Puerto Rico.

C: Why?

O: Conditions, political, sanitary, accommodations were not good. I asked if we could go to Hawaii. We were not allowed to go there. The powers that be again told us, no. Perhaps because there were so many men still returning to the U.S. and also the destruction in Hawaii probably had not been cleared, transportation had not been stabilized, etc.

C: Yes. Pearl Harbor.

O: I asked the Officer-in-Charge (OINC) where could we go and he told us either New Foundland or Bermuda. There wasn't much choice. We didn't have a hard time making up our minds; we

decided to go to Bermuda. We learned that the night before we were to leave, . . . I probably shouldn't say this.

C: Oh, that's all right. Be brave.

O: The night before we left we met some WAVES who had just returned from Bermuda. They asked us if we had reservations. We told them we did not but were sure of getting accommodations on arrival. They told us that we had to have the name of the hotel where we were going to stay typed on our orders before we could leave the U.S. They told us they wouldn't let us on the plane with no accommodations. They gave us the name of White Horse Tavern in Hamilton, Bermuda. After dinner as we walked around the base we saw two chiefs. We went into the building and asked if we could use a typewriter. I told him I didn't want him to disturb his work. He showed us a typewriter in another room and I typed the name of our hotel and address. Then I took Johnny's orders from her and typed the same address on her orders. The next morning we had no trouble as we presented our orders to be checked for accuracy. When we arrived in Bermuda we learned the hotel was in St. George and not Hamilton, the main city.

C: Well, what did you do for accommodations in Bermuda?

O: That was a funny thing, too. The only thing we knew was the fact we were on a bus heading for Hamilton with no reservations.

We got on a bus to ride into Hamilton. There were two WAVE Officers sitting in back of us discussing what reservation they would take, whether they would take whatever they had in Hamilton or to go into Invurie. As they were discussing which reservation to take, I turned around and I asked if I would have whatever reservation they were not going to use. They gave us the reservation at a hotel in Hamilton and they took the Invurie. We were happy to know we had a place to sleep.

C: Well, there was a Naval Air Station in Bermuda; that's probably where you landed.

O: Yes, that's where we landed.

C: How was your flight? Flying in 1946 was quite an adventure.

O: We flew on a Navy plane that was equipped with bucket seats-- the Naval Air Transportation Service (NATS) out of Patuxent River. We were able to put up with that for a couple of hours. It wasn't too bad, and it was free. Coming home was a different story. We ran through a terrible thunderstorm. Even though we were above it, we could really see those black, angry clouds and the flashes of light and the plane ride was extremely bumpy.

C: Yes, but you made it.



O: We made it.

C: What did you do after this lovely vacation? You were still in the Navy.

O: Yes, we were still in the Navy on inactive duty. We stayed a few extra days in Washington. It was difficult for us to leave Washington, our friends, and the chaplains who were so good to us. To this day we still keep in touch--not only at Christmas time but all year. To name a few of our friends: Mary (Zalesak) Ferrante from Poughkeepsie, N.Y.; Mary (Donnelly) Ashworth from Lake Placid; Marie Ryan from Boston; Loretta (Pankau) Pankewicz from St. Joseph, Missouri; Harriet Johns from Illinois; Beth (Toomey) Sullivan from Newport. They often come to Jamestown to visit with me.

C: Oh, okay. So you just spent the rest of your time at home. Did you have any departure ceremonies of any sort when you left or was it just plain detaching? Nothing special?

O: We had a ceremony in the Chief of Navy Chaplain's office with all the WAVES and civilians. The Chief of Navy Chaplains showered me with accolades and told me how much he was going to miss me. We had ice cream and other refreshments that the chaplains' wives had made for the occasion. He wrote a letter of recommendation in case I ever needed one. Chaplain Rosso gave me

a gold cross that he wore on his uniform. It was a very special day for me and sad too.

C: Was there any ceremony when you made chief?

O: Not officially. I wasn't able to wear a Chiefs rating badge because no one ever makes chief in four years. I did get the pay. The Navy did not have any women's chiefs rating badges made as no WAVE was expected to make chief in such a short time. The men's rating badges were too large to be worn on the wome's unifom sleeve. We had to wait about 1 1/2 months for our badges. However, I made a chiefs rating badge by cutting a slit in the crow's legs, took the red stripe from a 3rd class, rating badge, cut it in half, and inserted the stripe on each side of the leg of the eagle and sewed a few stitches on the legs for the eagle and I had a chiefs rating badge. That part of the chiefs badge is called the rocker. We did have ice cream and cookies made, of course, by the Chaplain's wives. They were really marvelous to us.

C: Yes, I imagine so. You mentioned some of the social events that the Navy Chaplains organized. The picnic that they planned for you and the tickets you used to get. Was there anything that the Navy organized for WAVES in particular in that time period?

O: Yes, they did. They gave tennis lessons, ping pong, they organized a tour of the White House. We saw many things on the tour in the White House that are omitted on a tour for the public. For instance, the swimming pool in the passageway--when the pool is not in use by the President, it is covered by the wooden flooring. Never would you think that part of the floor could be lifted to expose a swimming pool. They also organized dances in the reception room in the barracks.

C: Did you ever have the chance to socialize with Navy and military men in Washington?

O: Yes, we had the chance with enlisted men as well as officers. It was very much unlike today; the men respected us. We went out on dates with some of the men who worked in my girlfriend's office. Our dates consisted of going to a movie or dinner. After a movie, we were taken for a snack before being taken back to the barracks.

C: Right. Simple and innocent.

O: It was always a good, clean time for all of us. The sailors and officers we went out with respected us. We all had a good time. There was nothing to fear like "Tailhook."

C: I imagine most of the men though were at the front.

O: There were still a lot of men in D.C. If anyone wanted to date, there was no problem. We went ice skating frequently at the Chevy Chase Ice Rink in Maryland and U-line arena in D.C. One evening, when we went ice skating, a young man asked me to ice skate during the couples skating period. He was a professional ice skater in the hockey league in Washington. He gave me a few good pointers on my skating. We had a good time. We often went swimming, too, at Wardman-Park Hotel and another exclusive hotel that I can't remember the name of.

C: So your other social life was with the WAVES whom you knew and lived with.

O: They had dances every once in awhile. There were absolutely no molestations as there are today. We also met some airline hostesses who worked out of National Airport (now Dulles Airport). They lived in Alexandria. We we invited to their apartment where we watched football games. Airline pilots often had dinner with us. After dinner we would sit in a circle on the floor and play "Hearts," a card game that sometimes lasted all night. Just friends and no advances. Just good, clean fun.

C: Did your duty assignments meet your expectations?

O: I didn't know what to expect and I was prepared for just about anything. I liked everything-even typing the page 9's.

C: Do you feel that the Navy gave women opportunities that they would not have had in civilian life?

O: Definitely. I feel that Navy life broadened a great many of the WAVES. Opportunities were many and responsibilities had to be met realistically. The WAVES were able to travel within limits set by the Navy. We could go to New York or Philadelphia to the theater. The WAVES learned responsibility.

C: So travel was one thing.

O: Travel was great. We would never have been able to go many places if we were not in the Service. We certainly saw a lot of Washington. We visited all the memorials, and museums; Rock Creek Park and Zoo were popular. We visited the Smithsonian Institution (the National Art Gallery and Natural Science Building); Ford Theater, where Lincoln was shot, and the house where he died. I don't think we missed anything while we were stationed there. We made the most of our opportunities.

C: And you also met people from many different places.

O: Yes, we did. I met people from California to Rhode Island, and from Florida to Maine.

C: Where were your special friends from?

O: Harriet Johns, who was known as Johnny, was from Rockford, Illinois. She came to Jamestown every year to visit until her death in 1963. Others were from Lake Placid, and Poughkeepsie, New York. We still keep in contact by phone and visits. Others were from New Jersey, California, Georgia, Louisiana and Maine-- just about from every state in the union. Missouri--I have a very good friend in Missouri who is planning to visit me soon. Others in Boston, Minnesota, and other states.

C: Now, did they feel, did they ever discuss the WAVES with you? Did they feel the same way that you did?

O: Yes, they did.

C: That it was a positive experience.

O: I think that all the people I knew felt that it was a very positive experience and enjoyed the opportunity and were proud to be WAVES in the United States Navy.

C: So you would say the WAVES met your expectations?

O: They were the happiest days of my life.

C: That's wonderful. That's quite a tribute. Could you have stayed in the WAVES after 1947?

O: Yes, we had that privilege of staying. At that time no one knew what the Navy was going to do with the WAVES. I don't think they considered making them a part of the permanent Navy at that time. Not knowing what was going to happen to us, I felt I should take my honorable discharge and become established in the civilian world. Shortly after that they did make the WAVES a permanent part of the Navy. They are not called WAVES anymore. They are U.S. Naval Personnel.

C: Right. That term went by the boards.

O: Yes, they did. The WAVES were established as an emergency service only during World War II.

C: That's right--for war time. But I think it was around 1948 it became permanent or incorporated in the Navy. Something like that. Do you feel the experience in the WAVES changed your life in any way, the course, the direction of it, your interests?

O: It broadened my outlook a great deal. I wasn't shy anymore. I just enjoyed it so much and everything was positive wherever I went. It was great.

C: Did you receive a pension from the WAVES?

O: No. When the WAVES became a permanent part of the U.S. Navy and served 30 years (later reduced to 20 years service) they received a pension whenever they retired.

C: Was Mildred McAfee still the Head of the WAVES when you detached in May '46?

O: Yes.

C: Did you have any other contact with her after your initial encounter?

O: No, I never did.

C: Did you feel that the WAVES was a smoothly run organization during your time period there?

O: Absolutely, very much so.

C: Did you notice any problems, any snafus with the organization during your time period?

O: None, whatsoever. I didn't find any fault at all. If there were any problems, I was not aware of them and neither were any of the WAVES I associated with.



C: Prejudiced pro, which is good. Did you return to your former job and geographic area after you detached?

O: I did not return to my former job; the lawyer for whom I had worked had died. I did return to Rhode Island. I went back to school.

C: Oh, where did you go?

O: I went back to business school to take a refresher course in secretarial work order to become acclimated into civilian procedures of being a good secretary.

C: Where was that?

O: In Newport. After that I went to work at the Chamber of Commerce in Newport. One day I received a telephone call at work asking me if I would be interested in a job at the Naval War College, Logistics Library.

C: Oh, who gave you this call? Who made the call?

O: Mr. Ernest Messier was calling. He was Chief Supervisor of the civilian employees. I don't remember his correct title.

C: Was this for a civil service position?

O: Yes, it was.

C: Did you have to take a test for it?

O: Yes, I had to take the Civil Service test.

C: Did you respond positively to this request?

O: Absolutely, that was getting me back, more or less, into the Navy.

C: Is that basically why you responded positively--because you wanted to be associated with the Navy?

O: That was part of it; the other part was security, and they paid well at the time. I felt it was the best thing for me.

C: How long did you stay at the Chamber of Commerce?

O: About three or four months. I stayed with the Chamber until I learned I was accepted at the Naval War College.

C: Oh, it was very short term then after you returned. And where did you work after you took the Civil Service test and were accepted?

O: I worked in the Logistics Library at the Naval War College.

C: And where was that located?

O: That was located in Sims Hall.

C: And who was the Head of that?

O: Mr. John F. DiNapoli of Boston and Newport.

C: Of the Logistics Library.

O: Yes, of the Logistics Library.

C: How large was the staff? Of the Logistics Library?

O: Commander Williams was the Officer-in-Charge of the Logistics Library. Mr. John DiNapoli was the Head of the civilians who worked in the Logistics Library; Catherine Smith and I were the only stenographers. I learned a great deal about library work from Mr. DiNapoli. He taught me many things about library work and was not afraid to impart his knowledge to anyone. He was very intelligent and very helpful to all. I believe he was a loss to the Naval War College.

C: Did you have an occasion to meet Admiral Henry E. Eccles, who was involved with Logistics?

O: He was Head of the Logistics Department. Yes, we knew him quite well.

C: Involved with him because, as you said, he headed the Logistics Department.

O: He visited the Library every day and certainly made use of it.

C: What was your impression of him?

O: He was very brilliant with a good sense of humor. He was a very nice gentleman.

C: Yes, he was. He was a great Logistician.

C: Eileen, we were mentioning your civilian career and the fact that you had joined the Civil Service and had worked in the Logistics Library at the Naval War College in Sims Hall, and I wanted to ask you what you did there and how long you stayed at the Logistics Library?

O: I stayed in the Logistics Library about five years. I answered reference questions that any of the officers asked and helped locate material relevant to their studies; I shelved books, typed library cards and displayed current newspapers and made sure they were on tables everyday; I shelved books and other materials, answered the telephone, etc.

C: Where did you transfer next?

O: I became secretary to Mrs. Emily Heffernan, Head of the Naval War College Library; her secretary was leaving. I was asked to come and replace her secretary. I worked in Mrs. Heffernan's office; the secretary's desk was located there. I typed book orders, I received mail and packages and unpacked the books-- brought the books to the cataloger, after Mrs. Heffernan examined them, to be cataloged. There were many telephone calls from staff officers that I referred to Mrs. Heffernan.

C: Did you enjoy working in her office?

O: Yes, I enjoyed working in her office very much. We became very good friends and she still calls me on the telephone once in awhile. She is 94 years old now, and is still able to get out and about. She is one terrific lady and the Naval War College was fortunate to have her here to head the library. She was missed by the students when she retired.

C: Did you enjoy your contact with the students, or did you have much contact with the actual students?

O: I didn't have too much contact with them at first, but whenever the Circulation Librarian went on leave, I sat at her place at her desk and displayed the magazines and newspapers on the tables and filed the circulation slips and waited on the staff and students who I also needed to help. If I could not answer their questions I referred them to one of the Reference Librarians. Mrs. Heffernan, was very good to me. She thought I had potential. She suggested that I go to Salve Regina College to take courses in Library Science and I did. I left work at 9:00 a.m. to go to Salve and stay until noontime in class. I came back to Mahan Library and worked for the afternoon. It took a lot of time in the evenings studying and preparing for the next class, but I enjoyed Salve.

C: Did this opportunity for education at Salve give you the opportunity to move on at the War College in the Library?

O: Yes, it did. From secretary in Mrs. Heffernan's office, I became a Librarian Assistant.

C: Where did you work then?

O: I worked at the Circulation Desk in the Reference Department. Mrs. Rotchford and Mrs. Alexander were very helpful and taught me how to use reference books, etc. They were most intelligent and not afraid to impart their knowledge to benefit me. They were two super ladies. I became a Librarian. I was then moved from the Circulation Desk in the Reference Room to the Classified Library. Mabel Smith was head of Classified Library at the time; Barbara McGann was clerk, and I was Reference Librarian.

C: What did you do there?

O: I took care of circulation, new materials coming in, waiting on the students, answering their questions and helping them to use the catalogs. I also selected material for bibliographies for the students.

C: How long did you stay in the Classified Library?

O: Until I retired in 1984.

C: How many years was that in total that you were in the Classified Library? Do you remember when you went to the Classified Library?

O: I reported to the Classified Library in 1958.

C: Did you enjoy your career at the Naval War College? How would you sum it up if you had to?

O: I enjoyed a lot of it. There were some things that were not too pleasant, but I will not go into that. But I did enjoy working in the Library with most of the people. I ignored the unpleasantness, as it was entirely unnecessary.

C: Good, you were back in the Navy again in a civilian capacity. Well, let's skip back into your WAVE experiences and see if there's anything else you want to add to them. We had mentioned that I think that you were out in Oklahoma and I think you wanted to add something to that experience--when you were at the Yeoman School.

O: I have always enjoyed telling the following true story. The platoon I was in at Stillwater, Oklahoma, was selected as being the best platoon of all the WAVE platoons in Yeoman School. We were invited to perform a precision drill between halves of a football game in competition with sailors attending a Radioman's School at Stillwater. They were in competition against the WAVES. We were about to perform when I became aware I did not have my white gloves. The football game had not been very exciting. I ran the length of the field to retrieve my gloves. While I was running, I heard a very loud cheer from the spectators in the stands across the field. I know I had missed



the best play of the game. I retrieved my gloves and ran to join my platoon. Another loud cheer from the opposite side of the field and again thought I had missed another play as the cheering on the opposite side of the field continued. I had to get back in formation. The sailors whom we were competing were walking down the field and I went through the middle of them pushing them out of my way. Another loud cheer came from across the field I reached my platoon as they started to march on the field. We did our precision drill on the field and the WAVES won the contest. A few days later I read in the newspaper, the Daily Oklahoman, about the football game and about the most spectacular run of the afternoon that was made by an unknown WAVE who apparently left her white gloves in the stands. She ran down the field tossing the sailors around like duck pins. It was the best run of the afternoon.

C: That's very amusing.

O: Yes, it was amusing; it wasn't at the time. I was happy to have my white gloves and to be able to be in the drill.

C: Did you win the drill?

O: Yes. Yes, we were always the best, much better than the men.

C: Oh, that's great. You got a little publicity out of it.

O: Yes, I was surprised when I saw the newspaper article. One of the WAVES was reading the paper before class and handed it to me to read. I sent the story home.

C: Your moment in the sun, so to speak.

O: The WAVES said, "Glad to have you in our platoon, O'Connor."

C: Oh, that's amusing. Well, I think, there are a few other things we want to mention about Washington, too. I believe we mentioned that you lived in Arlington Farms, and I want to emphasize the fact that things were a little different in those days. You had curfews, I believe, or at least hours.

O: When we participated in sports or if we were wearing civilian clothes, our curfew was over at 11 p.m. For those who were in uniform the curfew was over at midnight. At those hours there was always an officer standing at the entrance door checking the time of your arrival. One evening, after skating at Chevy Chase Ice Rink for two hours, we decided that wasn't enough. We then went to U-line arena to skate a few more hours. We were so engrossed in the skating and the music we lost track of time. I happened to look at my watch. It was 1040. We changed into our shoes, grabbed a cab and I told the driver we had to be in at 11 and to please hurry. If we didn't make it on time we would be hanged; if we had an accident we would be excused. We made it to

Arlington Farms with only one minute to spare. I am sure the cab driver was much relieved to get us back on time and probably thought that he wouldn't see us again. Cab fare was only \$.20 at the time for WAVES. I don't know if civilians had to pay more.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting that they made the distinction.

O: Yes, I know of no one who objected to it.

C: Would you get demerits if you didn't arrive on time?

O: I'm not exactly sure what we would get. We were not on the demerit system.

C: Lucky. Did you have to sign in and sign out?

O: Yes, we did. Our check in/check out slip was on a bulletin board as you entered the hallway to the rooms.

C: Oh, you were talking about the residence halls; you were in Florida and how they were constructed.

O: As you went in the front door there was a large lounge furnished very attractively. On one side was a counter that was manned at all times. Our mailboxes were in back of the counter. The O.D. had an office in back of the counter also. As far as

construction went, they looked as though they would collapse from a gust of wind. They didn't look very strong. Apparently the construction was adequate because they lasted a number of years.

C: Did you have a dining hall within your residence?

O: No, we did not. Our mess hall was located at the very end of our complex. A very short walk.

C: Was it common mess for everyone?

O: The mess hall was for Navy personnel only. We would stand in line with our tin trays in hand and select the food we wished to eat. There was always a choice. The food was excellent. The Chiefs' mess was separate from the regular mess. Sailors waited on all the chiefs. There were white cloth tablecloths and white cloth napkins at each place. We ate from china plates rather than tin trays. Sailors told us the menu being offered. We made our selection, and they would get the food and serve us. We never had to stand in line again nor eat off the tin tray.

C: Did you have to do any housework in your little cubicle? Did you have to keep it up to snuff?

O: Yes, we had to make our beds everyday, and dust our cubicles once a week for inspection while we were at Arlington Farms.

There were women who were hired to clean the heads, the laundry room, and the hallways. We kept our cubicles neat and clean; we did not have to do much cleaning, nor did we have to do any K.P. duty.

C: Oh, that's good. I was going to ask you another question about the residence. Did you have a gym there or any physical education facilities or any pool at Arlington Farms?

O: We had no pool. We had tennis courts and had permission to use the pools at the Wardman-Park Hotel on Connecticut Avenue and also a pool at another hotel that I don't recall. The pool was free of charge to enlisted personnel.

C: So this must have been a very large complex. Do you remember if there were 50 buildings, 48 buildings?

O: We moved out of Arlington Farms and into new barracks named WAVE Quarters K. It was located across from Fort Myers, an Army installation and one side of the complex was BUPERS. The cubicles were much larger, housing four WAVES in one cubicle. We were relieved of housework. Cleaning ladies were hired by the Navy to come in everyday do all the heavy work. We just had to make our beds. In the complex we had a recreation hall, Mass was said there everyday. We also had a well-equipped sick bay and a Ship's store where we could buy whatever.

After a period of time we moved to barracks at West Potomac Park in Washington, located at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial. We lived there until we were discharged. The barracks were similar to Arlington Farms.

C: Getting back to your Washington experience. Was there anything unusual that happened during that time frame, a memorable experience?

O: Oh, yes, we were invited to visit the White House. It was a special occasion and a group of us went over. We were all dressed up in our best uniforms, we were ironed and we were pressed and we had white gloves on and the white gloves were not forgotten. They showed us the swimming pool. They told us it was covered by a floor and all they had to do was swing back the floor to uncover the pool when needed. We were taken to the Blue Room, Green Room all the rooms and the room where President Roosevelt gave his fireside chats from. And it was very interesting and enjoyable. We also visited the kitchens. We were not served cookies. Nor were we invited to the second floor living quarters. We went in and saw the State Dining Room and the dishes that they used with the President's seal on them. I wish I could remember everything about it because it was the most outstanding incident that we experienced.

C: Did you meet any people who were passing through your chaplains' office in Washington, D.C.? Anybody memorable or anything unusual in that context?

O: Yes, there were many officers, chaplains who came through the office. One was a Catholic chaplain from Providence; I have met him since I have been discharged. Another famous man that I met was Cardinal Spellman. He visited the Chaplains' Division and all of us met him personally and kissed his ring.

C: Did any of these people have any personal contact with you? Did they take you out or anything like that?

O: Yes, there were some. A chaplain from Providence took me out for dinner. Also, Chaplain Sweeney, from Newport. He visited the Division and because he was from Newport and knew my sister we became friends. He invited me for dinner. Chaplain Rosso and Chaplain Casey had a dinner party for the WAVES at their house. They cooked dinner. Another time he invited a group of us to dinner at the Raleigh Hotel and also they invited me and my girlfriend to dinner at O'Donnell's and a movie. When the chaplains took us out they always invited another chaplain.

C: I don't think you mentioned anyone in particular but you just said that some people passed through.

O: There was one man who was called in for reprimand, and I didn't actually realize that I was not supposed to talk to him at all because he was being punished and given the silent treatment. I always talked to them anyway. I went out to dinner with him. I had quite a few invitations for dinner from those who were coming through the division. Chaplain Goldberg was a very prominent chaplain from New York. He was the most wonderful person you'd want to meet. On Jewish holidays, he came to Washington laden with all these lovely, beautiful, delicious Jewish pastries. We'd have a party in the division. Chaplain Ribicoff was a student at the War College, and I asked him if he knew Chaplain Goldberg. He was surprised I knew him. I told him he used to come to the Chaplains' Division often and we always look forward to his visits. He suggested I write to Chaplain Goldberg as he might like to hear from me. I was surprised he was still living. He told me he was now in his 90's and he winters in Palm Beach and he also has an apartment on Park Avenue in New York. He gave me his address and I did write him a letter. Chaplain Goldberg was so happy that someone from the Division in by gone days remembered him; I still have his letter. He said that my letter just cheered him up so much; he was so happy to receive it, and he told me to write future letters to his home in Park Avenue. He also told me he was writing a book. It was a very nice, friendly letter and you knew that he really appreciated receiving my little note.



C: Oh, great, great. So you maintained that connection or at least you discovered that connection at the War College.

O: Yes, through Chaplain Ribicoff. Chaplain Ribicoff was a chaplain who was in Lebanon.

C: Is there anything else you want to say in conclusion about your WAVE experience? Or anything you think we've missed?

O: Just that the time I spent in the Navy were the happiest days of my life.

C: Oh, that's wonderful. Very positive.

O: I loved the Navy and still do.

C: That's great. Well, I thank you very much for sharing your reminiscence of WAVE life with me.

O: My pleasure, believe me. It was fun going back, thinking about all the things that we used to do in the WAVES.

C: Well, thank you very much. I'm sure it will be a fine addition to our oral history program.

C: Oh, Eileen, I meant to ask you: Did you receive any medals for your World War II service?

O: Yes, I did. I received the American Campaign Ribbon, the Victory Medal of World War II, and the Good Conduct Medal.

C: What did you receive those for? Was there any specific distinction?

O: The American Campaign Ribbon would be for service in wartime for America; the Victory Medal is self-explanatory; and the Good Conduct Medal was for being good, and not getting caught.

C: Okay. Thank you very much.

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