

History
of the
WAVES in World War II

No. 20
Virginia Copeland Smith

Oral History Program
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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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Interviewee: Mrs. Virginia C. Smith

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: January 20, 1995

C: This is the first oral history interview with Virginia Smith. I am at her home at Esmond, Rhode Island in the Village Apartments. Today's date is January 20, 1995. It's a Friday. Virginia Smith served in the WAVES in the Hospital Corps, and I'm going to interview her today on her career and a little background prior to that and after that.

Virginia, I'm so glad you consented to this interview on your career in the WAVES. You're the President of the Ocean State WAVES, and we'll get to that later, but I want to ask you a few background questions before we get into the WAVES.

What was your birth date and where were you born?

S: I was born in North Attleboro, Mass., and I was born on April 12, 1924.

C: What did your father do for a living?

S: My father was the Postmaster from Plainville, Massachusetts.

C: And what did your mother do for a living? Did she work?

S: My mother was a school teacher in the North Attleboro School System.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

S: No. I had no brothers or sisters, just a cousin that my mother brought up as a sister.

C: Where did you go to elementary school and high school?

S: North Attleboro Elementary School and North Attleboro High School.

C: Did you go to college after graduation?

S: Yes, I did. I went to Westbrook Junior College in Portland, Maine, which has now become a full fledged college and is heading toward university status.

C: It was a junior college then, wasn't it?

S: At that time, yes.

C: What did you prepare for there?

S: I prepared for occupational therapy. I did not continue, because we didn't have the finances to send me on. You have to have a four year college degree, and, then, you have to go two more years in a school in Boston, which was the only school in the country at that time.

C: And so it was a long program.

S: Yes, it was a long program. So I really had just an introduction to it at this two year college.

C: When did you graduate? What year did you graduate in?

S: 1944.

C: The war was in full swing by that time.

S: Yes, it was.

C: Did your family have any Navy connections at all?

S: No.

C: Totally devoid of any naval officers. Do you remember when Pearl Harbor occurred? And, do you remember what your reaction was to it?

S: Yes. I think I was, I was upset. I can't say I was horrified at the time because I didn't really know or realized the full extent of what was happening, politically or nationally; it was just a terrible disaster to us at that time, and we wanted to do our share of what could be done to help.

C: How did you hear about the WAVES?

S: How did I hear about the WAVES? Uhm!

C: Do you remember how you heard about them, or what you had heard about them?

S: I suppose there were posters around, you know, join the Navy, join the Army, or there were enlisted posters and enlistment personnel speaking. I don't recall anything specific.

C: Okay. But somehow you had heard about them through the media. Why did you decide to join?

S: Why did I decide to join?

C: In 1944, I assume. What motivated you? You were about 20.

S: Well, I couldn't complete the education needed to go into the field that I thought I wanted to go into, and actually I felt unqualified to do an awful lot. I wasn't really a secretary. There weren't that many jobs for women back in those days. They were very scarce, and I didn't feel qualified to do an awful lot. I thought, well, I guess the service would be a nice place to be. A friend of mind. Oh, I remember. There was a friend of my mother's whose daughter went in, and she had graduated, and she went in as an ensign, and we were down to see her. Her name was Collista. Collista Elliot, and we went down to her home, and she had laid out her uniform that she had just gotten. And, oh! I guess that must have just thrilled me to death, and I thought, well, I guess that was what I wanted to go into, if I were going to go into the service. I wanted to go into the Navy from looking at that beautiful uniform that she had laid out on the bed. I remember that now. I'd forgotten that little fact.

C: Oh, that's interesting. When did you join? What year and month did you enlist?

S: I joined, I think I went in in December.

C: Of 1944?

S: Yes. In December of 1944.

C: What did you do between June and December? Do you remember?
After graduation.

S: Well, I was a waterfront director at a girl's camp - swimming
director at a girl's camp up in Maine. Camp Capisicanti up in.
It was Lake Capisicanti. Anyway, that's what I did.

C: And, then you made the decision.

S: I organized the waterfront program for them. Then, I came
back in September. I guess I began thinking about doing some-
thing with myself, and

C: Then the WAVES was what you were going to do.

S: Right.

C: Where did you enlist? Where did you go to enlist?

S: In Boston, Massachusetts.

C: Did you have to take any tests to join?

S: I had to have my mother's permission to join. I was not of age to join. And I don't recall whether, I must have taken some tests, but I don't recall taking any.

C: Physical exams, I'm sure.

S: Oh yes. Physical exams.

C: Probably some sort of aptitude tests.

S: I know that when they sent us down to boot camp in the Bronx in New York my mother was sure that I wasn't going to be warm enough in those Navy clothes. And she sent a fur coat down with me which they promptly had me return. And she sent down brass polish for my brass buttons which, of course, I didn't have because I was enlisted personnel. And she sent down towels because she was sure that all those girls in the service were not very nice girls; and, therefore, I would need my own towels to keep myself nice and clean which they promptly returned home. I had a very, very green upbringing. Very close, closely watched. As a matter of fact, I didn't even know what size clothing I wore. My mother had purchased all of my clothing my whole life. And in the Navy, they give you \$200 at the beginning of a long, long table and send you down to pick out all your clothes - your underwear, and everything right down the line. And at the end, you pay them back with the \$200 that they gave you because it's all

gone. And as I stopped at each section, she would say, "Well, what size blouse do you wear?" "I don't know." "What size bra do you wear?" "I don't know." "What size panties do you wear?" "I don't know." I didn't know my sizes on anything. I totally relied on my mother to purchase all of my clothes, and it was just rather bad for me for knowing sizes.

C: Oh, that's very interesting.

S: Except, I had to get four pairs of shoes before they could fit me to a pair of shoes that fitted properly because I didn't know my size, widths, even.

C: Sure, sure. So trial and error. Did your mother have any reservations about your joining the WAVES?

S: If she did, she did not say so. My father was extremely proud. He was very, very proud. As a matter of fact, after we got to boot camp and I had gotten my shots, and my arms were very sore, and we had inspections where they would come in and check how our clothes were laid out. They had to be laid out a certain way in the cupboards. You had to have the gloves here, and your brush there, and your toothbrush here, and your panties here, like this. And everything had to be shipshape and the cupboards open when they came in for an inspection. And, my roommate had borrowed a comb at the last ... oh, I got to comb my hair; and

instead of putting it back on the shelf, she shoved it in the pocket of my housecoat hanging on the door because that was the closest to her, where she was standing. And so, therefore, I got some demerits. Well, demerits made me swab the decks down from the top floor down to the bottom; and when I got to the bottom, I decided to call my father. And, I was telling him my plight, and I was shedding a few tears about how my arms hurt because I had just gotten my shots that morning. And he said, "Ha, ha, ha, welcome to the service my dear." He thought it was very funny. I didn't think it was funny at all.

C: No sympathy.

S: I thought it was terrible.

C: And so your parents approved of your enlistment?

S: Yes, yes.

C: Was there any announcement in the North Attleboro papers about your joining up?

S: Yes, yes, there was, but I don't happen to have any clippings or anything. I know I had scrapbooks full of all kinds of things, but it seemed by the time I got into the service I was so

thrilled to be in the service, I was too busy being thrilled to be saving things about going in.

C: Were you inducted in Boston?

S: Yes, I was.

C: December 1944. How did you feel about leaving home? Were you excited or were you kind of anticipating?

S: I was excited. I was used to leaving home. I was not prone to homesickness because most of my life I had been here, there, and everywhere. What with my mother being a teacher, she had me off to camp in the summertime, or she took courses and things like that, so I was always off somewhere it seems.

C: So you weren't homesick, and you had left home.

S: No. I was used to it.

C: Now, where did you go for your basic training for your six weeks of indoctrination?

S: To the Bronx - Hunter College.

C: What did your training consist of? Do you remember at all what kind of classes you had or what your daily regime was?

S: Marching, marching, marching. Eating in the mess hall with big tin trays where they plopped everything on the trays.

C: Was the food good?

S: I like to eat, so I guess whatever they had I would consider it good because I would like to eat. I remember they made me head of the group, my section, that marches because I came from Massachusetts and they said Massachusetts people had the clearest diction of any one in the whole country. The only problem that we had was what with our "R's" and I had to learn to say "Forward March" which I was used to saying "Forward March." So, of course, I had to learn to pronounce my "R's" more distinctly.

C: Who selected you for that, for the headship of your brigade, probably?

S: I guess it must have been the chief who is in charge of that section. They were broken down. You had a chief, and then you had the (I've forgotten what they called us now), but we had to call cadence, and we had to line the girls up, and I remember when we used to go to the canteen. We'd have a break to go to the canteen, and ...

C: Was the canteen right on the campus?

S: Yes, and we could make telephone calls. You'd line up and get a chit to make a telephone call, and they'd call your number, and you'd have x number of. It was a free call home, and you'd have a certain amount of minutes to make that call, and then the next person would be allowed to come in, and there were like five little booths where you stepped into and made your call. And, I also remember the canteen, my favorite spot. They had a donut making machine that was like a (I've forgotten what they call them now, too many years ago), they used to pick the donuts out of the hot fat with like a drumstick, and then they'd line them up in these wired trays, and in the canteen they would serve a hot donut in the bottom of a cup, a scoop of ice cream on top, and put a whole ... of what they call wet walnuts and syrup on top of that. And that was the end, the living end. Everybody wanted to have this hot donut with ice cream and walnuts. So as far as what, mainly what we did ... marching and getting that donut at boot camp.

C: Did you march every day?

S: Oh yes. We marched a lot.

C: To class and from class.

S: I presumed the classes were sort of an indoctrination as far as ... I vaguely remember diagrams of airplanes, war ships on the walls, and they were telling us, you know, port and starboard, and front end and back end.

C: Bow and stern.

S: The bow and stern, and things like that. They were generalities really that were to familiarize us with the galley and the head so that we could refer to things with Navy lingo, as it was learning how to talk Navy.

C: Right. The terminology.

S: The terminology, right.

C: Exactly.

S: I remember when they posted, you know, how they gave you a chance. They did give us aptitude tests for what we would go into in the service. They had said that I would be a good link trainer or I could be in with the band because I use to play a musical instrument.

C: What did you play?

S: I used to play the cello and I could travel with the Navy band if I wanted and be a cellist. All I wanted was the Hospital Corps.

C: Why did you want the Hospital Corps?

S: Well, number one, I heard the bunks were extremely comfortable. They were thicker than the bunks that anybody else slept in because you slept in hospital beds because you were in the Hospital Corps. Whereas, the other Navy, the other part of the Navy slept in bunks like we slept on in boot camp. They were about half the thickness, and I also heard that they had very, very good food in the Hospital Corps because they put out good food for the ill men. So, therefore, we would have good food. So now my two comforts were taken cared of - sleeping and eating - and then I did like medicine.

C: Oh! That's good. Now, were you identified from these aptitude tests as someone who would fit in the Hospital Corps?

S: Apparently, yes. They said that I had an artistic, mechanical; strong artistic, mechanical ability, and they very much wanted me to be link trainer more than anything.

C: Now, what is a link trainer? Can you tell us?

S: A link trainer teaches the pilots to fly the airplanes. They have these - they look like grey metal boats. The pilot-to-be would sit inside this metal boat and he would have to operate instruments that would fly the plane, and you would do things that would make the plane say dip or roll over, and he had to straighten it up or he had to settle it on a deck, and he had to take off from a deck, and he had to learn to fly the plane through a link trainer. That was his basic introduction, I would assume, to flying as I didn't really go into it, so I'm not that familiar with it, but I did have a knowledge of it.

C: Oh! That's very interesting. Well, let's get back a little bit to things at the Bronx. Did you find your indoctrination courses challenging? Do you remember whether you found them challenging or easy?

S: Probably, I think. I was at a stage where I was kind of, I found everything a challenge. I loved life. I still do. I'm a terrible optimist.

C: That's wonderful.

S: My glass is always half full. Never half empty.

C: That's great.

S: A cockeyed optimist. I think if I got sent to prison and I looked out through the bars I would see the stars right through the mud.

C: That's great. That's a wonderful way to be. So you had absolutely no adjustment problems at the Bronx?

S: No. I found everything great, interesting, and could see enough and do enough, and whatever they allowed me to do and see, I did.

C: Can you tell us about your living accommodations during this training period? How many gals did you bunk with as roommates?

S: I believe there were four bunks to a room, two lowers and two uppers; and when you made your beds, you had to be sure that the sheets were drawn tight enough that they could bounce a quarter on. This was not a fallacy; this was a true fact. They would come in with their white glove inspections. Many times they would try to bounce the quarter on the sheets of your bed, and you couldn't have any Irish pennants, and Irish pennants were if you didn't tuck your sheets in properly, little pieces would come down through the springs of your bunks and show, and they were called Irish pennants, and you had to be sure and have no Irish pennants showing under your bunks. And they did do white glove inspections. They did come in, and they did touch every-

thing with their white gloves, and there had better not be a speck of dust anywhere.

C: Were these surprise inspections?

S: Yes, as a rule. Sometimes you knew they were coming. I would say most of the time you knew they were coming, but every once in a while they would pull a surprise inspection, but when you knew they were coming you tried to have everything. Because no one can have everything perfect 100% of the time. So that's why when they, why they usually let you know they were coming because, you know, I said they were a surprise. They usually let you know because you had to make sure that you had no Irish pen-nants. That your sheets were taut enough for them to ...

C: And everything was clean, clean, clean.

S: Yes, everything had to be in its place. You would have an order of the day in the morning telling what to wear. We had what they called havelocks, rain havelocks. They were plastic things that fit over our hats that had the removable crowns. The crown would snap in. You'd have a seersucker crown and you wore your seersucker uniform. You'd have a navy blue one for winter when you wore your navy blue. You'd have a white one for summer when you wore your white, and you had these rain havelocks that fit over these hats that had brims. They were not the overseas

hats that you see here that I showed you. They were, I think I have some pictures somewhere of the other hats with the snap-down brims, and you had beautiful overcoats. Our suits were made in Mainbocker. They were gorgeous. Our pocketbooks were beautiful. They were made in the most wonderful soft leather. Carried mine for years after I got out of the service, and I'm losing track of what I started to say, I wanted to tell you something now ...

C: You're talking about ...

S: Oh! All right. The uniform of the day. We had been issued snuggies.

C: What were they?

S: Snuggies were knit pants. They were knit pants that came down, snuggled your legs down to your knees, and in real cold weather such as we ran into in the Bronx, believe me, if you were marching and your eyes teared a little bit you had icicles hanging off your eyelashes.

C: It was a cold winter then in '44.

S: Very cold. There was a reservoir there that we used to have to march by, and the winds, the cold winds, would whip across that reservoir and it would be bitter, bitter cold, and sometimes

the order of the day would be to wear your snuggies, and that would be so you would be properly warm. Once you got out of boot camp, you could throw the snuggies away if you wished. But, up to that point, when they put up the - I forgot what I said now - with something of the day.

C: The order of the day.

S: The order of the day you were told what to wear, what color uniform to wear, what kind of clothing to wear, a heavy coat or an outer coat, or a ... We had lovely heavy winter leather gloves. They were lined, and we had galoshes that we wore that used to be clipped over some kind of, you hooked it on to another ... this thing that stuck up, and then you snapped down this thing on top of a ladder-like thing and that closed your galoshes.

C: What kind of stockings did you wear, because this was a time of rationing and lack of material?

S: As far as I remember, back in those days there were cotton. They were horrible things. We couldn't wait to get out of boot camps so that maybe we could get some black market silk stockings, and silk stocking those days were very different from the nylon stockings that they have today. Silk stockings were very gossamer; they ran very easily, they had seams. You had to be

sure you get the seams straight on the back of your leg, and if you didn't have stockings, you had to use leg paint and try to put a seam in or some kind of a pencil at the back of your leg.

C: My heavens! Do you remember who your roommates were at the Bronx? Do you recall where they were from or who they were?

S: The leader, the chief, her name was Cohen. Was it Evelyn Cohen? Or Rosen, Rosen, I think it was Rosen. Some of the names are on the back of the picture. No, because I'm confusing roommates with roommates I was fond of at when I was in the Hospital Corps.

C: Oh, okay. That's fine.

S: It's kind of coming and going, but I can't really remember.

C: Yes, but you got along with them didn't you?

S: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We had a great time. In fact, the girls used to get very angry at me in the morning because I would wake up and I would be happy and singing, and feeling fine, and the usual phrase that I got greeted with was, "Oh! Shut up!", because they didn't feel too good when they got up.

C: Oh.

S: But I always seemed ... I enjoyed military life ... so therefore I was wide awake early in the morning and happy and I can remember getting going ... and they had these old brass faucets, and it used to please me no end, believe it, to polish those old faucets and bring them up so they shone like a nigger's heel. Oh, we mustn't say that. In those days, that was an expression which is no longer accepted today.

C: That's right.

S: And I haven't any prejudices. It just was a phrase that came out.

C: So, you were assigned certain little duties, I guess, in the dorm?

S: I would guess so. Yes, because like I said, for punishment one time I got assigned to swab down the decks from the top floor down. I can't remember any other duties that I got assigned though.

C: What time do they wake you up in the morning? Were you up early?

S: Well, again, it's hard to remember because after I got out of boot camp and went to St. Albans, we got pulled out of St.

Albans. We got sent to boot camp for training for this rehabilitation school, and then I went from there to Brooklyn, New York Hospital so I'm trying to ... I can't assimilate the two times back at Hunter when one is meshing in with the other.

C: That's okay. Did you have any time off at all during the six weeks indoctrination to see the sights of New York? Did you get any free time, any liberty, so to speak?

S: I don't recall. I know that the time when I was there at rehabilitation school is much more vivid than when I was there at boot camp.

C: Okay.

S: I was there at the time the war ended in this rehabilitation school when ... We probably want to get into that later.

C: No, we'll get into that and try to in chronological order. Did you have a graduation ceremony when boot camp was over?

S: I believe we did. I believe that's what those pictures are from. We had a regimental review. I remember. Oh, as a matter of fact, I have a book that I forgot to pull out for you that I have from when I was a Hunter which you will have lots of things in it that you might be interested in.

C: Oh, absolutely!

S: It shows the regiment reviews in the summer time and in the winter time.

C: Oh, that would be great.

S: I'll pull that out.

C: Yes, that would be wonderful.

S: I've got to remember where that's tucked.

C: Did you have a chance to meet Captain Amsden at all? He was the head of the WAVES boot camp in New York.

S: I didn't meet him, no. But he probably was at the regimental review in the stands. Somebody important over there.

C: Right. Did you ever see Mildred MacAfee? Did she ever come to Camp Hunter as they called it.

S: If she did, I don't recall.

C: She died this September as you know.

S: Yes, yes, I know.

C: Do you remember what you received for compensation at all during basic training?

S: No, I don't. It must have been very little. I don't really remember. No.

C: But you didn't have the opportunity to buy too much any way.

S: Well, the main thing that I bought was when I went down to the canteen I wanted those donuts. And, maybe I bought some film for the camera. Like I said, I know I had to go out and buy three more pair of shoes because they didn't fit. I don't really recall. I know. I wasn't too bothered by boot camp.

C: So, you would sum it up as a good experience.

S: Oh, definitely, definitely.

C: Something you really enjoyed.

S: Too bad everybody can't go through it. Sometimes I think it's very wise, some of these foreign countries, they put their young people right into a tour of duty in the military, and when they come out they're ready to go to college. They're ready to

learn. They know that there's discipline in the world, and they have learned to accept it whereas I think a lot of our young people, they're not ready, they're not ready to accept discipline, and I think that's why we had that whole generation that was so against anybody that wanted them to do anything right. They just were going to rebel no matter what, and they lost an awful lot of important time in their life rebelling against the system.

C: I think you're right about that. They're more mature. They've grown up, and they've experienced.

S: Oh yes. I think that everybody that was in the service ... We had a common bond that. I think that's why there's such a strong bond between people that were in the military today because they realize that it was something that was important. We learned something important. We learned to get along with other people. We learned to accept responsibility. We learned to take orders, and it was hard for all of us. I think most of the people were not as fortunate as I was because I had learned discipline in my own home with the type of parents that I had. It was always that, well, your parents are public servants and you have to set an example. So for me, it might have been a little bit easier, but I'm sure, some of the other girls, it was a difficult lesson for them to learn.

C: Oh sure. Did you feel that there was an esprit de corps and camaraderie among the WAVES at Camp Hunter?

S: You know that's funny you call it Camp Hunter because I don't ever recall calling it Camp Hunter.

C: Well. I've seen that term in the books. Maybe you didn't use it then, but it.

S: Yes. It seems to me it was WAVES Training Center or something to that effect.

C: Yes.

S: Well, any way. Did I feel there was a camaraderie?

C: At the boot camp, at the training center.

S: Oh yes, I think there was. I think there was. The girls wanted to be together. You had made some friends there, and when you got stationed you were hoping you would get stationed together, you know. One of my girlfriend's names just popped into my head - Bernice. What was her last name? Maybe it will come later.

C: Yes. Right.

S: Bernice and I had hoped we would be stationed together.

C: So you made close friends within the WAVES at that time at the training center. Did you have any choice regarding your duty station or your specialty after graduation from the WAVES Training Center? You told me about the tasks in which you were good in, but did you have any say in where you were going to be placed.

S: Yes, yes, yes. Apparently we did, because I kept insisting that I wanted to be in the Hospital Corps, and they said if that was where you want to be, why, that's where you will be. I didn't know just which area I would be stationed in. We didn't have a say about that, but we did have a say as to what field we would go into.

C: Good. And you chose, as you said, the Hospital Corps. Well, where were you assigned after you finished your training?

S: I was assigned to St. Albans Naval Hospital on Long Island in New York.

C: And, what were you doing there? What was your job?

S: Well, I stated out as Apprentice Seaman, and I had to learn a lot of little things about the hospital. I can remember them

teaching us to give injections, and they would hold - the nurse that was training us - would hold an orange up against her arm and inject it with a syringe filled with water, and she said, "We use these because it feels very much like injecting a person." So we had to learn that, and then we had to learn to pull, aspirate the syringe, so that we would make sure we were not in their vessel because you couldn't be putting medicine in someone's blood vessel. A little blood in it, you had to learn to handle those properly, and you had to learn the different kinds where you went just under the skin or deep in to the muscle. A lot of fun with the buttocks when it came time, because that was like a dart board. You could use these big, huge syringes, two-in needles, and really kapunct.

C: They hurt more in those days.

S: Yes. And we had to learn about bed pans. We had what they called hoppers which I didn't know anything about because when I got assigned to a ward ... I'll backtrack a little bit. The first ward I got assigned to happened to be gonorrhoea and syphilis.

C: Oh, God.

S: And, of course, here I am green as grass, and my mother was sure that I was going to get in with this kind of person, and I

remember being on the ward and this big, huge, black man passed out at my feet. He must have weighed 300 lbs. and went about six foot seven, and I was petrified. I looked at him, and I thought to myself, "I'm not picking him up." And I kept calling for another corpsman. There were other corpsmen on the ward as well as myself, and they were males. And he came over, and he said, "Well, you silly WAVE, just pick him up and put him in bed." I said, "I'm not touching him." So he picked him up, and the next day I found myself on a different ward. Now, the next ward ...

C: Well, you couldn't do that heavy work. I mean that's strictly man's work.

S: Oh, no! That was expected of us.

C: Oh, was it?

S: Oh, that was expected of us. We were expected to do everything the men did.

C: Even lifting.

S: Oh, yes. In exercising and things like that, when they had physical fitness programs, we had to do just what the men did. We were right up there with the men. We were out there with men drilling. We did everything the men did as far as that type of

thing. So, we were expected ... There were no exceptions. If you had your period, there was no softness. Well, you know, too bad for you. Ah, no. You did it. You did it regardless what your physical state was. The next ward that I got assigned to was the measles, mumps, and pneumonia, and we had 40 some odd patients on a ward. And, there would be maybe a nurse, maybe a couple corpsmen per ward. And, when it came time, you would have 48 back rubs. There were 48 beds. There were 48 in a ward. You would have 48 back rubs you would have to give. There would be 48 bed pans that would have to be emptied. There would be 48 medications that had to be handed out. We were allowed to do everything except catheterize a male. We catheterized females; we gave shots; we gave medications; we gave bed baths; we gave back rubs; we scrubbed floors; we mopped floors; we polished floors; we polished furniture. We did everything under the sun, and this particular day one of the nurses said to me, "Collect all the bed pans and get them cleaned up." So, I went to every bed, and I collected all the bed pans on a big gurney which is a stretcher, and they were all covered over with little pieces of cloth that looked like mattress ticking. And, I got down to the - I forgot what they called the room - but anyway where you clean things, and I was emptying the bed pans into the toilet. Then, I was over at the sink, and I was scrubbing with brushes, and scrubbing and scrubbing. Then, apparently, I was gone for much too long, because the first thing I knew a corpsman was sent down to find out what was taking me so long. And, I said, "Well, these are

hard to scrub out you know. You got to have them clean." And, he just said, "For heaven's sake, put them in the hopper." And, I said, "What's the hopper?" So he took me over to this machine or instrument that was against the wall. It was upright. He stepped on a pedal; down slapped the cover; you slid the bed pan under the cover; it closed up; emptied the bed pan; washed it out; clean it; sterilized it with steam; opened it up; and you took a hot, clean bed pan out - two seconds.

C: Oh, my word!

S: Two seconds, and I'd been scrubbing and no one had told me about the hopper. They'd forgotten to tell me about the hopper. Then the next problem I ran into. They sent me around to collect the ice bags. I came back to the nurses' station, and I said, "Well, nobody has an ice bag." She said, "Check under the covers. The mumps go down on the men, dearie." And, of course, they have what they called ..itis, where the testicles swell, and they had their ice bags on them. So then, I had to go around, and I knew then where the ice bags were, and collect the ice bags, and refresh their ice bags. And then another time, I didn't get caught on this one, but another corpsman did. They would send them out to get the Fallopian tubes; and, of course, you ... A Fallopian tube is a part of a female body structure, but they were out looking for ... tubes. Well, we had a few amusing incidents that would take place.

C: You did an awful lot of work of every kind, both professional and ...

S: Well, we did.

C: Unprofessional.

S: And, at one point, I was on a ward where there were, I guess this was at Brooklyn Naval Hospital. And, when I first went to Brooklyn Naval Hospital, I got stationed there after that rehab school.

C: Yes. We'll cover that later.

S: I'll tell you a couple more incidents ...

C: Sure. Oh, ...

S: that I remember.

C: How long were you at St. Albans? Do you remember, time wise? Months?

S: No. I know we were working. We had nice, nice times off. We were working though, prior to the nice times off, sixteen hours a day. We had to do double shifts because they had a

shortage of nurses. They had an outbreak of polio on the West Coast, and they took most of our nurses there.

C: So you were doing a lot of the nurses' work.

S: Yes, we were. And also at that time, that's when they put me in charge of the occupation therapy department, and I was scared to death because I hadn't really had enough training in it, but I was the only one that had any training at all, and the officer had gone with the nurses until they could secure another officer for that department. So, I was quite proud that I was allowed to be in charge of the department.

C: Did you get any time off during the sixteen hour shift? Was it straight or?

S: Oh no! It was a straight, straight sixteen hours. As a matter of fact, ah ...

C: You must have been exhausted.

S: I was. I was terribly exhausted, and, at one point, I had come back to my bunk and I went to step up on the chair. My roommate had laid all of her makeup and fingernail polishes and everything, and I couldn't quite step on the chair - just on the very edge of it. And before I actually got my fanny up onto the

bunk, I fell out of the bunk, and I landed on one knee and one collarbone, and the thump was so loud whoever was on duty down at the main deck heard it and came up to see what the commotion was, and that's when I went over to the infirmary, and the doctor was out to lunch. He had two hour lunch for himself, and I was in pain but I felt that, well, I'd better go back to work. So I left and it didn't get put into my record because I left to go back to work.

C: As a result of that, what happened?

S: Well, as a result of that, I now have a steel knee. I have a steel prosthesis in my right knee because I had one thing after another. The knee was very weak. I had several falls because of the weakness of the knee, and one fall they had to first remove the meniscus, and then it was followed up where the degeneration took place, and then they had to replace the total knee. And recently at one of my doctor's appointments, because I have arthritis, he had taken some x-rays, and he said, "At some time in your life, did you ever have a bad fall," he said, "where you injured your collarbone?" And I said, "Yes. When I fell out of my bunk." I said, "I landed in a knee-chest position on the floor. I guess I was trying to save myself," and he said, "Well, you broke your collarbone at some time or other in your life." So I must have had a broken collarbone along with this knee injury.

C: And you didn't even know it.

S: I didn't know. I knew I hurt. I knew I hurt, but we were ... In those days with everything being so short and working so many hours, we just, I thought that I had to get back to work, that I couldn't sit around waiting for a doctor to come back from lunch.

C: But it healed somehow, the collarbone?

S: Yes.

C: Because they strap you up today.

S: Yes. Well, no. It must have healed, but it shows up in the x-rays that it had been broken which surprised me. I didn't really realize that I had injured that.

C: That was very unfortunate.

S: Right. And I've been trying to locate someone, you know, that new of this fall because they tell me because it's not in my records that I cannot get anything for it. I can't even get a disability percentage.

C: I wonder if you could find out whether or not the duty officer is still alive?

S: Ah. Who that was. Yes, I remember her name, and I have it written down somewhere; yet, I can't remember it off hand, but I do remember her name.

C: Because, you know, you can write to the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri. You can ask for the person's service record and maybe - I don't know whether or not they have a current address for someone - they may or may not, but that's one way to try to find them.

S: Yes, it is. It is possible, I suppose.

C: Because you need that document.

S: Hatfield. Lieutenant Hatfield. That was her name. She was on at the time.

C: She may be alive. She may not. You just don't know.

S: Right. Especially, I mean, where I'm already 70, and, I'm sure at that time she was ...

C: A little older.

S: ... at least 8 or 10 years older than myself. So, it's possible that she's not in existence anymore.

C: You know, that's too bad, because you could have gotten compensation for that. But, you weren't thinking about that at that young age.

S: No, I wasn't.

C: That's for sure.

S: I had a disability compensation believe it or not - a 10% because I had my appendix out when I was in the service.

C: Oh, for heaven's sake.

S: So because I don't have my complete body when I got out of the service, I could get a small disability for that. I also wanted to have some dental work done, and I went to the place that they had in Providence at that time. It was on Hope Street. It was just a single house, and they said they couldn't do anything for female veterans at that time.

C: This was after the war.

S: After the war. Well now, of course, female veterans can go. You can get dental, but you had to have something done within a year of getting out of the service, but they wouldn't do anything for us. So that has been useless to us.

C: Yes, right, right. I heard that they wouldn't give you any pensions or medical benefits.

S: No. No. They wouldn't do much of anything for us back in those days which was a terrible shame.

C: Yes, it is. It is a shame. Did you live right in the hospital when you were at St. Albans.

S: Yes, we did. Yes, we did - right in the hospital. We had ... again, there was good food, but it was long, long hours. We would work two weeks at a time, and then we would get a weekend off. And we were working, like I said, sixteen hours a day.

C: Did you do anything or did you just sleep during that weekend off?

S: Oh, no. I went out. I used to go up to take the train to way out on Long Island, as far as I could go. Long Island was kind of an interesting place. There was a lot of USOs out there, and we could go, and we could play pool with some of the other

military personnel. We could usually, also, get into town. We'd take the trains into town, and the Jewish Welfare Board was the best for the service people.

C: The Jewish Welfare?

S: The Jewish Welfare was the best to all the people in the service. They would get ...

C: What was that?

S: Well, you would go, and then they would give you tickets to all the theater plays. You could go to any play. They would provide you with food. Sometimes, we went to the Hotel Roosevelt, and they would have a tea - tea and sandwiches - and an orchestra playing. We'd meet people and dance.

C: It sounds so elegant.

S: Oh, it was. That was lovely, but the Jewish Welfare Board did the most for us because my buddy and I used to like to go to plays, - Kaylin Towers. Hey, I remembered her name, Kaylin Towers - one of my buddies.

C: So, you would spend some time in New York City, then.

S: Yes. I think I spent more time in New York City than I did out on the island.

C: Well, do you remember where these USOs were out on the island? Do you remember what town, per chance? Somebody must have been stationed there, I imagine.

S: No, I don't. I know that in Brooklyn ... We also used to go into Brooklyn a lot.

C: Oh, really.

S: We used to go to the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, and there was a little place, a little restaurant we used to go to, and we had to go down and back, and they had these red and white plaid tablecloths, but they served delicious Italian pastries. Oh, and Abraham Strauss. They used to come to the barracks every month, one a month, and we would buy clothing from them, and I loved fancy nighties. I liked chiffon coats and things, and I also liked fresh flowers, and I was a great one for buying myself a gardenia corsage or something, and wearing it on my floating nighty around the barracks.

C: Very elegant, again.

S: Oh, yes. I didn't want to be in anything that was military once I was off duty. My military uniforms were for the while I was on duty, and the rest was ... Of course, we did have to wear uniforms when we went into town. We always were very proud. I remember once I went into town and that was in summer whites, and Kay and I stepped off the curbing behind this big bus, and all of a sudden he started up and, plup, all this stuff came out of the exhaust pipe and I was covered with ink spots like from head to toe. Oh! I was a mess. I had to go back because you couldn't be seen in town like that. You would be considered out of uniform.

C: Oh, no.

S: And, then, one time we performed, we wanted to perform a mock operation, and they decided that I was going to be the patient.

C: Was this in the hospital?

S: Yes. In the hospital. Oh yes, in the hospital, and they stretched me out on the table, and the operation was to pierce my ears.

C: Oh, no. They were far ahead of their time in those days.

S: Oh yes. We went through the whole thing. The draping and the whole bit, the mark for mock anesthesia and the whole bit. So I came out with pierced ears, and they had taken a Band-Aid and folded it up over the hole that they put in my ear, and I was marching around the hospital, and all of a sudden I got stopped by an SP. He said, "You're out of uniform." "What do you mean I was out of uniform?" "What have you got on your ears?" "Oh," I said, "Well, I just had my ears pierced, and those are Band-Aids." "Oh, alright." That was alright. So I didn't get arrested for that. Then, I used to have ... They told me the pupils in my eyes were much too big. Let in too much light, and I was given permission to wear sunglasses because of this. So, another time I got stopped by the SPs, and again I was told I was out of uniform, and I had to produce my little note and show them that I had permission to wear sunglasses. You weren't allowed to wear sunglasses in those days. And then another time I was off on leave, and I was up in Boston. My mother and father took me to the Ice Follies in Boston, and I had slacks on. And, the SPs stopped me again. Out of uniform again.

C: They were up in Boston, too - all over the place I guess.

S: And I said, "What, what, what now?" "What happened now?" "Well, you're not suppose to be wearing slacks." So he said, "Roll them up so they don't show under your overcoat," he said. So I had to go around with my slacks all rolled up under my over-

coat, and hope they didn't fall down. So they were very strict with us as far ... The SPs were very, very strict. I don't know whether they were picking on us because we were women. That thought didn't enter our heads. I don't think we've heard of or realized there was any discrimination in those days. You really didn't think of it. It's possible that they didn't want the women in the Navy, and they were going to find fault with us.

C: I know. That sounds logical.

S: And then there was a young man that I met. He was on some kind of a little boat out at one of the piers. He was in the Navy, but what he did, I don't know. I always saw him in his dungaree outfits. I used to get invited out there once in a while, and I thought that was great. Take the trains way out to the end of the island, and then go aboard this little boat to visit and have a ... The guys all thought it was great because they had a WAVE on board. Never entered my head, maybe, I could have gotten into trouble, but it seemed that they respected us. They didn't make any improper advances. The only time I remember an improper advance being made was, I did meet a sailor once. He called me up, and he said, "Grab your toothbrush, and I'll meet you at the ... I got a big bottle of Tabu for you." Well, needless to say, I didn't go. And I often wondered did I regret the fact that I never got that big bottle of Tabu or not.

C: That was a famous perfume in those days.

S: Yes, it was. Yes, it was.

C: Well, I think times were different, and people were more respectful in those days than they are now. So you had lots of social opportunities, and you seemed to have a lot of fun in that assignment.

S: We had our heavy workloads, but we also had fun. When we had a chance to get out, we did have fun.

C: You had your good times. Well, after St. Albans, well before that, let's double back. Where exactly was St. Albans on Long Island? Was it in a little town close to the city? I don't quite know its location. Queens, maybe?

S: No. You know I don't recall where it was.

C: What city it was in. I just was kind of wondering about that.

S: That's funny.

C: Yes.

S: I didn't keep any mail. I don't know why I didn't keep any mail.

C: Did you write a lot of letters home?

S: No. I was not a letter writer.

C: Did you call them?

S: I called on the telephone. When one time my mother was very aggravated with me, she sent me a long letter asking me a lot of questions, and my letter in reply to her was: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, yes, no, yes, no, yes, no, yes, no.

C: She got the answers. Maybe not quite as fully as she wanted to, but ... Well, anything else interesting about St. Albans before we go on to your next assignment?

S: I can't remember anymore.

C: Well, where were you assigned next after you finished at St. Albans?

S: Well, I got taken out of St. Albans to attend what they called a rehabilitation school.

C: And, where was that?

S: And that was again back at Hunter up in the Bronx, and there were three types of groups at this school. There was a group for the deaf, and a group for the blind, and a group of physical therapy, and a group for occupational therapy, and because we all had been either college graduates or had one or two years of college that were pulled out into this program, and those of us that were in occupational therapy got sent to Cornell Medical School for a concentrated one year course concentrated in a three month period, and the school said, the professor said, "No, you can't do it." And then they re-said, "Yes, you can." And, believe me, it was very concentrated. We had everything you can think of connected to medicine for a course thrown at us. And then, we also had everything you can think of as far as crafts are concerned thrown at us. I think I went to about 32 crafts school within the City of New York.

C: Oh, they farmed you out to different little crafts school that weren't Navy operated obviously?

S: No. No. They were paid. Courses were paid for by the Navy, but they were operated by civilians.

C: Do you remember what kind of crafts?

S: Yes, we had to learn bookbinding. We had to learn to make a book from scratch. We had to learn to tool leather. We had to learn pottery. We had to learn weaving. We had to learn knotting. We had to learn finger painting. Shaw Finger Painting School was where we went for that. We had to learn printing. Operating printing presses, and putting the print for the books and things in. I made a whole set of stationery for myself when I was there. Made a book. Make a pair of mittens in the ... We had to learn silk screen printing. There are so many. It's hard to remember them.

C: Why?

S: It was a very educational thing.

C: Very varied, too.

S: Yes, it was great.

C: Now. What was the point of this? How was this going to be used in your therapy?

S: The men that were injured in the service - those that became paraplegic or blind. We did not go to the blind school. They had another group that did the blind and the deaf. We were sent there to be exposed for a, like say for a one hour exposition, to

this school where the blind were taught to walk around and take care of themselves and, you know, to do things for themselves in a blind state. With the deaf, they were even taught to play baseball and football by running their hands along these strings out into the field, and they could run around the bases with their hands on ropes from one base to another, and the deaf were taught to dance. They had a floating dance floor, and they could feel the rhythm of the dance through their feet, and the physical therapy work was - I don't recall an awful lot about what we did in conjunction with physical therapy, whereas ours was occupational therapy. We had to teach them how to do crafts that would affect the muscles or nerves of their body when they were unaware. They felt they were just doing a craft, but whatever craft we had to teach them we had to know the physiological aspect of the body. What the nerves did, where the muscle started, where the end of what the nerves were, where they started, where they ended, and what they accomplished, and how we could assign some kind of craft that would rework that muscle, but they would be unconscious that they were working that muscle or that nerve, and this is what we did. The school was never completed. We taught paraplegics how to button and unbutton their shirts with one hand, how to tie and untie their shoes with one hand, how to, if they had no hands or arms, how to brush their teeth with their feet, and all this type of things so that they could get along in life without having to depend a great deal on someone else.

C: How long did all these schools, these crafts schools last?

S: The crafts schools. It was a three months course, and it was never quite completed because the war ended, and they ran out of funds so we never were allowed to complete the school, and at that time when the war ended, of course, there was bedlam.

C: It was August and ...

S: Yes, there was bedlam. We were up at Hunter at the time, and I remember the subways were stopped, and we marched down through the subway tunnels to Times Square. We were told where the live rail was and to be sure we didn't step on that, but there were throngs of us marching through the subway tunnels down to Times Square. So we marched from the Bronx for ourselves, down to Times Square and we were in Times Square at the time the big hullabaloo was going on.

C: VJ Day.

S: Everybody was there. Oh!

C: Can you describe that? And your feelings. And the feelings of the crowd.

S: It was ... There was absolute jubilation on everybody's part. You didn't care who you kissed, or who you hugged, or who hugged you, or who kissed you, and it was jumping and screaming, and hollering, and confetti and paper, and streamers, and you were jammed in there like sardines. You couldn't hardly breathe. It was just so jam packed. I don't remember how we got home. I don't know whether the subways ran again or whether we walked home. All I remember is all the extreme jubilation that went on. It really was something.

C: Marvelous.

S: It was marvelous.

C: Because you do see those pictures, you know, from that time frame and you can realize how jam packed it was, as you said.

S: Right.

C: So the war ended in August of '45, and you hadn't completed the school. Where were you sent next?

S: And, then, I got assigned to Brooklyn Naval Hospital.

C: What was your rate there? Do you remember what you were rated? You were Apprentice Seaman when you were at St. Albans.

S: Yeah, I think I was Pharmacist Mate First Class at that point. You had to take exams to get your rate to go up in grade, and I know I was. The Brooklyn Naval Hospital was very dark, several floors, a lot of dark brown marble, dark brown painted walls. My first case that I got assigned to was a young ensign that had been burned from head to toe, and he was completely encased in bandages, and the only thing that was opened was one little hole in his mouth, and I tried to read the newspaper to him, but you couldn't tell whether he could hear you or whether he knew what was going on or not because he couldn't move. He simply laid there like a mummy, and it was very quiet on one watch that I had on him. I was there all night, and he expelled some gas. Well, in the middle of the night when the hospital is deadly, deadly silent, I mean the silence is awful, and it frightened me. I didn't know what had happened to him because he made no sound or movement or anything. So I did get a fright at that time. We were exposed at that time to. They would have to dress these people. They would have to take these bandages off and debride the wounds where they'd scraped the dead flesh from them, and they called it "dirty surgery" simply because it all had to be discarded. It was considered dirty, and the odor would be terrible. I had a hard time getting along with the odor. I remember one time when I had to help with a young man that was in an iron lung.

C: Polio?

S: And when they took him out of the iron lung at certain ... They'd take him out for a certain while then they would put it back in, and see how long he could breathe without being in the iron lung. And, that was the first time that I saw a spinal tap down, and they had this long, huge needle. It must have been about four inches long, and when they ... I thought that they would insert the needle with the syringe on it, but they didn't. The surgeon would take the needle in his gloved hands and work it in so that he wouldn't injure any part of the spinal cord, and I didn't realize this, and I passed out when they did that. I also attended an autopsy with a patient that I took care of at one time. She was a lovely ... She was a wife of a young ensign, and they'd been overseas, and she developed some kind of a disease, and she aged. She was in her 20's, very early 20's, and she looked like a woman of 100 or so years old. Her skin was all leathery and dark brown, and her hair had fallen out, and her teeth had fallen out, and we were told when we gave her a shot to be aware because you'd have to press so hard to get through this leathery skin.

C: Sounds like leprosy or something.

S: The needle would go through unexpectedly; and when it went through, you'd be careful because she had no flesh; it would hit bone. So you didn't want to do that either. So, I was always very afraid to give her shots, but the family thought an awful

lot of her. The young husband would come in; and, as the door opened, there would be a big smile on his face for her, and as he left, the smile would fade. As the door was closing, his smile would be fading. This was a very hard watch for me, and they asked me to attend her autopsy which, again, I passed out.

C: Oh, I'm sure! I would too.

S: I mean, I was walking ...

C: Why, what joyful things they asked you to attend? It sounds awful.

S: You know, I was watching it, and they lost one of the organs, and they have to account for all the organs. They were fishing in this girl to get the organ. That was too much for me. I passed out again.

C: Oh, I'm sure you. How long were you at the Brooklyn Naval Hospital in these gory assignments?

S: I just can't remember. I know I had another watch all night, and I had slipped off my shoes, believe it or not, and put my feet up in the chair and proceeded to fall asleep, and an officer came in, and she said one bellow: "Go ... get on your feet." I stood up, and I shook my head, and she said, "Do you realize,"

she said, "that you have a watch on a mental patient and that he might get up and slit your throat while your sleeping." She said, "You go down to the galley," she said, "and you get yourself a cold glass of milk." And so, I didn't even put on my shoes. I was so frightened. I took off like a deer, and I went in Brooklyn Naval Hospital, the galleys had one cord in the middle of the kitchen to pull the light on, and the floors were black and white tile, real cold, cold, cold tile. So I padded in the middle of the floor, and I pulled the light, and here were hundreds of cockroaches, and they must have been about two inches long, and I let out a scream. Down she comes again, and boy she's going to give me the business. Well, fortunately, I didn't get a court martial or anything, but boy did I get a reprimand about being quiet in the hospital, and being asleep on watch, and I was very fortunate. She must have realized we were super tired. We were working very hard.

C: I was just going to ask you. Did they work you as hard there as they did at St. Albans?

S: Yes. Oh, yes. We worked. We worked very hard. We had one treat though. If you were on the watch all night, you could go down to the galley - the big galley where they serve all the main meals not just the kitchen galley on the ward - but the main place, and the cooks would give you a big bowl of ice cream and

fresh pieces of hot buttered toast at midnight. Oh man, that was good!

C: That sounds good.

S: Yes, that was good.

C: You needed that to keep you awake.

S: Yes. Yes. We enjoyed that.

C: Where did you live when you were at the Brooklyn Naval Hospital?

S: We lived off base, and we lived in these lovely apartment houses the Navy had taken over, and we'd be two or four of us in bunks, and again it was in Brooklyn so we were able to go around and see a lot of Brooklyn and, also, see the Saint George Hotel which was absolutely beautiful. You could go over there and go swimming, and they had sand along outside the swimming pool, and they had fake sun lamps, and they had fake palm trees, and it was like being in a paradise to go swimming over there. It was very, very nice at that time.

C: And this was after the war. This was after the war was over.

S: Yes. Yes. Yes. We got frozen over. We weren't allowed to get out of the service. They kept freezing us over because we were in the Hospital Corps.

C: And they needed you.

S: Yes, they needed us. We had to stay. And then from. They took us out of that billet, and they send us up to Manhattan Towers, and we were two to a room up there.

C: Do you remember why they took you out of the apartments?

S: I don't know whether they wanted to turn the apartments back into civilian apartments or not, but they changed us, where we were staying, and Manhattan Towers was very beautiful. It was way up town. It was a gorgeous place that they put us in, and we were only two to a room up there, and I remember a little incident that happened up there that was kind of amusing. My roommate was in the surgery end of it, and she came home, and she said, "Did you know," she said, "that if you put Argerole in your eyes," she said, "it goes right down your throat and treats the back of your throat." She said, "They don't have to put it in your nose." And I said, "You're kidding." Well anyway, she said, "Yeah, try it." Well, I had prepared a little surprise for us. I had gotten some bagels and cream cheese, and I had a set of dresser drawers. One of the drawers was a fake desk. You

pulled down the front and it made a desk. So I had this nice little lunch laid out for us with the bagels and the cream cheese, and I said, "Okay." So I'm leaning over the top of the dresser, and I'm putting the Argerole in the corners of my eyes. And, sure enough, I let out a yell; and when I did, dump over the bottle of Argerole all over our bagels and cream cheese. So we didn't get our nice surprise.

C: Oh, dear. That's too bad. Do you remember who your roommate was?

S: Evantodd, Kathryn Evantodd. I do remember that. Yes.

C: Were the gals just as enthusiastic at that point in time as the WAVES you worked with?

S: Yes, because it seemed as though things had let up a great deal. Things were a lot easier. We weren't working the long hours. We had much more time to do things, and I guess that's when I went to the Jewish Welfare Board, and they used to give us all the tickets to go to all the plays, and we would go to the Roosevelt Hotel and have tea and sandwiches, and a dance. There were many different things that we could do that were ... I don't ever remember going to the canteen that they talk about down there in New York. It seems that we were very busy going to plays and things like that instead.

C: You followed your own interests.

S: Yes.

C: Do you have anything else that's of interest regarding the Brooklyn Naval Hospital? You were a Pharmacist First Class at that point in time.

S: Oh yes. I kept taking my exams and kept going up. Well, I did get to be a Pharmacist Mate Second Class, but I was supposed to get another rate. I was supposed to go up to Chief, and I don't remember. Was it second class first, and first class last or I forgot the lineage of the rates.

C: I think first class would be last.

S: Yes. I've forgotten the lineage. I know I was to go to Chief, and I never did get my Chief's rating because we got sent home before I got my Chief's rating. I was very disappointed because I had taken the exam and passed it very well, but I never did get my Chief's rating.

C: Oh. That's too bad.

S: I got sent home. I was very disappointed in that.

C: Well, when were you mustered out of the service?

S: I think it was in September. I went in in December and got out in September.

C: September of '46.

S: September of '46. Yes.

C: So you were kept in just a year after the war then, and that wasn't that long.

S: No. No. That's why I don't recall doing an awful lot

C: Did you receive any medals for your WAVES service?

S: We received some citations, I guess. Things that were ... One that came from Congressman Martin. I received a nice letter from Governor Saltonstall. I received a nice from James Forrestal, the Secretary of the Navy at that time. I guess he was. And, we, of course, got our little ribbons. I got the Ruptured Duck. I got the American Theater Campaign Medal.

C: So, you got quite a few ...

S: We did get, I think, was it tax, would it have been Income Tax Deductions from the town?

C: I don't know.

S: A percentage. I think I got a percentage off my income taxes, a reduction from the town.

C: Oh, because you served in the WAVES. You were in the military service. I hadn't heard of that. How did you feel about leaving the Navy?

S: In one way, I was glad because we had been working, you know, a great deal. I loved it, but at the particular time that I was getting out I was kind of glad to get out. As a matter of fact, I didn't even consider joining the reserves because I was glad to be free of all the work that was taking place. I made a mistake. I should have gone in the reserves.

C: Oh, that's interesting.

S: My buddy went back to college and got her full degree, and she has now retired as a full commander for herself.

C: Was she in the reserves?

S: Yes. She went into the reserves, and she also went back to college and got her full degree, and then went back into the service after she got her degree.

C: Oh, I see, because women were allowed in the regular Navy as of 1948.

S: And I thought, "Gee, I could have been right there with her. What a fool I was."

C: Well, you just don't know at that point in time what was going to happen.

S: No, I know.

C: Did the WAVES meet all your expectations?

S: Oh, yes. Definitely. Definitely.

C: Do you think that the Navy provided you with opportunities that you would have not had in civilian life?

S: Definitely.

C: And what kinds of opportunities do you think they provided you?

S: Well, I'm sure I never would have been down in New York City going to all the plays and, you know, the experience in the hospital was quite a bit of experience that I never would have had unless I had gone into nurses' training, and we were given a pamphlet that said that we could go right into nurses' training when we got out as advanced students, and they gave us the duties that we would be capable of doing if we wanted to go into a medical field in the civilian life, which was a plus.

C: So, that's a definite. There would have been a career opportunity if you wanted to follow one.

S: Oh yes, it was a definite plus. Yes, and we could also go to school if we wanted to. We had the GI Bill of Rights, which I could have bought a home. There were many things that were, many advantages that were opened to us.

C: Yes.

S: And, as women, that was great because you wouldn't get that in civilian life.

C: Right. You were so restricted.

S: Right. But that came as a little goodie.

C: Yes, it certainly was a bonus. What impact did the WAVES experience have on your life? Did it change it in any way do you think? Was it a watershed or a turning point?

S: I don't think it had any. I don't feel at this age, as though it had any particular impact on my life. As I said, I was a person that loved life and was, loved to do different things. I don't think, for a long time, until I became a Civil Servant, I changed jobs about every two years. I'd stay about two years, and then I'd try to do something to advance myself or something. I got bored with what I was doing, and I'd try something else.

C: Did you maintain any WAVE friendships after you left the service?

S: Yes, I did. I maintained that close friendship with my friend, Kaylin Tower.

C: And, was she the gal that went to college?

S: Yes, she is.

C: And, where does she live now?

S: Well, unfortunately, I have lost contact with her and I'm quite upset about it. She got into some kind of government work

that was very, very secretive, and she couldn't even tell anybody where she was. I know at one time she was down in ... I think they called it Redstone.

C: Arsenal in Alabama.

S: Yes. I think that had something to do with nuclear weapons, and all of my information with her was cut off at that time. I was unable to correspond with her; and then the last time I saw her, she came up unexpectedly to my daughter's wedding. And, at that time, I had just started in my Civil Service work, and I had a brand new job, and I wasn't given any time off for my daughter's wedding. I simply had the day of the wedding off, and I didn't have time to visit with my friend, Kay; and, I think, I had one or two letters left that was somehow or other we never assumed real close contact again. We had letters but I heard that, from someone, that she had been working at Newark Airport in the control tower.

C: Oh, my word.

S: After she retired, she was working there, and, then after that, I could not. I wrote to where she used to live, and there was, address unknown, ... so I really don't know what happened to her. I would love to contact her. I keep thinking.

C: That's too bad.

S: Right now, I've kind of reached sort of a procrastinating stage where some things I do right away, and some things I put off.

C: Right. That's so true.

S: Some things I have to do because my grandmother used to say to me, "If you don't do it today, you'll never get to do it tomorrow." So, some things I do right away, and some things I don't.

C: Well, it's hard to track somebody down like that. Ginnie, are you a member of the Ocean State WAVES and WAVES National?

S: Yes, I am. I'm a charter member of WAVES National. Belonged way back in 1979. That's when I joined WAVES National, and I only joined Ocean State Unit 118 three years ago, I guess it is now, and, after my first year in, I became the president. I have been the president for two years, and I've enjoyed my tour as president. It will be over this coming June. I've accomplished a lot while I was president.

C: What did you accomplish? Do tell me.

S: Well, let's see. I obtained an American flag from a friend of mine that flew over the Arizona, and it has a plaque with it, and I obtained the State flag from the Secretary of State, Barbara Leonard, and I went and appeared before the local Smithfield board and obtained funds to appoint the flags with the poles and the tops at the busses and the fringe and the tassels so that we could march in parades. I arranged for us to go down and visit the National Cemetery at Otis, and I arranged for us to go to the Cemetery, the R.I. Veterans Cemetery. I helped design the banner that we carry.

C: What does the banner say?

S: It says, "Ocean State Unit 118, WAVES National." It has the WAVES National logo in the center of it; and, then, it says, "WAVES" on one side and it says, "Spars" on the other side, and it say, "Women Marines" across the bottom. Some reporters saw us in the parade and they felt that we were all Marines, and the women were a little upset about it because we don't even have a Marine that belongs to us. They have their own unit within the state. So, we covered up the Marines with some little WAVES, and should some join us, why, it's very easy to remove that piece that covers them up. I also set up what they call sillytax. I sent this out to every member, and it consists of say: How many grandchildren do you have? Well, you pay ten cents for each grandchild that you have. Do you own a boat? You pay a quarter

if you own a boat. Do you own a car? You pay a quarter if you own a car. And, it's a page of all these questions pertaining: How old are you? Are you a grandmother? Are you over such and such an age? Do you own a house? You pay according to what applies to you, and then you send the money in as part of a fundraiser for the Ocean State Unit. And then I wrote the prayer the Ocean State Unit uses. I have established several chairs that weren't in the Unit at the time that it was formed.

C: Chairs? What do you mean by that?

S: Well, like I mean, they didn't have a social chairman. They didn't have, you know, things like that. I've been setting up a telephone committee, working on a committee for that. I started, oh dear, I can't think of what it is right at the moment.

C: Oh, that's alright.

S: Well, anyway, there have been some things that I have instituted that it didn't have before.

C: Oh, you certainly sound like you've done an awful lot.

S: I've worked very hard for the Unit.

C: Oh, absolutely, and you hold six meetings a year?

S: Yes, we do. We hold six meetings a year.

C: And, what kind of activities does a Unit participate in?

S: Well, we march in the parade on Veterans Day and Memorial Day. We march in North Kingstown on Veterans Day, and I was asked to give a speech down there.

C: And, did you?

S: Yes, I did.

C: And, what was the substance of that?

S: Well, it was sort of a little poem. I talked about the men, their uniforms are now put away, but we haven't forgotten them. We remember. Sort of that type of theme.

C: That theme.

S: And, we were asked to march in the Memorial parade in Smithfield, and I was asked to give a little speech there, so I gave a little bit different speech there. It was sort of along the same lines, but it pertains to the veterans and the fact that we do remember them, and that ... We carried our flags that I had obtained which I felt very proud about doing. We've had maybe

about fifteen members march, and we were asked a repeat performance of the parade at North Kingstown, and we are going to be asked for a repeat performance at the parade in Smithfield. We were asked to march in the Bristol Parade, but we had to turn that down because we couldn't get a vehicle to carry the members in. I had gotten one for Smithfield from the janitor where I lived. He loaned us his red truck and carpeted the bed of it, and we put chairs in it, and we put flags on it. My husband drove us, so we had six members that were able to ride in that parade.

C: Well, that helps. It's a long trek.

S: Yes, that was rather nice. We had our girls marching in front, and we had the truck following which was nice. And then in the parade down in North Kingstown, I drove my car so that we could, you know, some of the girls could ride that are unable to march. The more would like to go. We also go to something that New Hampshire puts on at the Cathedral in the Pines where women veterans are honored up there at a service.

C: Is that at a certain time of year?

S: Yes, it is. It's usually in May, but May was very cold last year. There was a bitter wind, and we placed a wreath on the memorial, and we have a Scottish piper pipe us in, and we all

march in the different units. There, all the New England units meet, and are piped in, and then we have a reading from each - one person from each unit. And, that's usually ... They have a luncheon. It's a very nice affair.

C: That sounds very nice.

S: We have volunteers who go down to the Veterans Home in Bristol. Take gifts down there. We have some volunteers that participate at the VA Hospital, and we have a girl that has become a national advisory representative there - one of our members. Let me see. We donate pennies at each meeting where we call "Pennies for Patients." It was originally. Now, it's "Pennies for Women's Patients Needs." We feel that as long as we're women, instead of having it go to just any of the patients, it can go specifically for the women that need it. Maybe they needed a pair of slippers, or they might need some toothpaste or deodorant or something, so this is just to help them out if they're financially strapped and need a little help.

C: Oh, that's great. Well, you sound like you're very busy.

S: And, of course, we go to a national convention once a year, and it's on the even years, and then we go to a local unit conference once a year which is on the off years.

C: And now, have you attended these?

S: I have not been able to attend them. I am a little bit financially strapped, so I am unable to attend them because of my finances. I feel this very much. I feel this a great deal. I feel very sorry about it, but I can't.

C: Too bad they can't somehow raise money for that.

S: Well, we're such a small unit, and we don't have a big dues structure. Hopefully in the future as we grow, in fact, I might say that membership has grown. When I first became president, we had 23 members. We now have 48.

C: That's great.

S: A lot of the girls have come to me and said that they have become a member simply because of the way I run my meetings. I take a little timer with me, and I limit the business part of the meeting to one hour. And, I tell the girls, "Now, come on. Hurry up. Don't waste too much time talking. I've only got so much time left here of my meeting, and we still have a lot of things to cover. So ..."

C: That's good.

S: I usually have what I call a songbird, Tina McNeil. I have her sing the Navy Hymn at the end of the meeting which is very lovely. It's a very touching thing.

C: Very.

S: Now, we open the meeting with the prayer that I wrote, which I'm very proud of, and have gone to one or two of the units, and they think it's a very nice prayer.

C: Good.

S: Then we have either a coffee, and we have had one or two luncheons that we'd go to.

C: Well, that's great. You're very involved, and that sounds very interesting, and you've done an awful lot with this organization, and I hope it continues to grow. I know I just wrote a woman that I interviewed, I guess it was maybe two years ago in February, Eileen O'Connor - she's over in Jamestown, and I told her about your Unit. I told her you'd contact her. She wants to join. She was a WAVE in WWII and loved it as well. She was a yeoman.

S: I do hope she joins then.

C: Yes, yes. She probably knows other people, too. Well, I just want to pick up a little bit with post-WWII. Where did you settle after the war? Did you come back to Massachusetts?

S: Yes, I did. And I had many kinds of odds and ends of jobs. I did a lot of different things. I did end up, as I said, being a civil servant.

C: Where was that?

S: Well, I was in Davisville - the Sea Bee Base, and I started out as a telephone operator, and then that base rifted down to 208 people, and we got sent over to Quonset. And then Quonset had a big rift, and I then got put into a Supply Department, and I was a voucher examiner which I liked very much. Then they had another rift, and I could have stayed on in a temporary position, which would have again become a permanent position, but I was afraid. Someone had told me, "Don't ever take a temporary position because you never get out of it." So I let them muster me out, so to speak.

C: How many years were you in the Civil Service?

S: Twenty-one and a half all total.

C: Did you get a retirement for that?

S: Well, I went from Quonset. I took a job with Health, Education and Welfare at Social Security on a two-year term basis, so when that two-year term was up, I again had to apply because I heard of a job open at the Veterans Medical Center, and I went into medical records, because of my medical background. So I picked up the job at medical records which I was in for about six years, and I heard of an opening upstairs which wouldn't be the stress that I was under in medical records, because if you made an error (We used to elicit material out of the veteran's medical record and send it to insurance companies and things.) ... if we made a mistake, we were personally liable for a \$500 fine, so that was very stressful down there. Then I went upstairs; then I became what they called bed control clerk which doesn't sound like much, but you had to assign beds to patients. You had a lot of work to do, visited doctors, and with the nurses you had to know a diagnosis wherein that you didn't put a patient with something very contagious in a ward which was a surgical ward, so you had to juggle a lot with the beds. I was in charge of what they called airovac which was medical evacuations. If you had a person that came from Rhode Island and he was down in a hospital in Texas, you had to get him from that hospital in Texas up to a hospital closer to his home which would be the VA Hospital in Providence, and, if you had someone that was in - say they were injured and they were put into a civilian hospital outside and they were a veteran and you had to get them into the veterans

hospital. So I was working a great deal with social workers. That job I had up until I retired in 1985.

C: So twenty-one years would total out.

S: Twenty-one years would total out in Civil Service work. And prior to that I had done many different kinds of things. I had been a gal Friday. I had been a secretary. I had been a telephone operator. I had worked in a Five and Ten. I had worked in a factory. I had done jewelry work. I tried everything under the sun. I taught swimming along most of the way ... right up to what they call the American Red Cross Instructor to teach the instructors to become instructors.

C: So you were very good at that.

S: I was also in ... I belonged to a group called Harmony, Inc. - barbershop harmony. We used barbershop harmony. I was in that also for twenty-one years. And I was the international vice-president of that organization. I was on the board for six and a half years - the international board. I was on the local board for maybe a span of over about ten years. I've been very, very tied up. I belong to the Jaycees. I used to do a lot of work with the children at Halloween time. I used to work at the boys school teaching swimming aides to work at the girls school, teaching swimming. I used to work at several schools teaching

swimming. I did a lot of lifeguard duty. I was always into something - one or the other.

C: Something. It sounds like it, yes.

S: And I finally called a halt to just about everything, and said, "This poor old soul is getting tired. Let's quit."

C: Right. After a while, enough is enough. But you're in the WAVES now. Is that your main activity?

S: More or less, yes. I was the social director here where I lived for a while, and then they wanted me to become president. They elected me president, and, would you believe, I chickened out. I went through the whole ceremony, and then I didn't complete the deal. I chickened out. So then when I went into the WAVES, I wanted to prove myself, that I could be a president of something without chickening out. So that became a challenge for me, and I felt that I've accomplished what I wanted to.

S: I feel that I've conquered it, and I was, in fact, one of the girls recently said to me ... she said, "You're not going to be president next year." I said, "No. My term was up." She said, "Oh! What are we going to do." She said, "I just thought you'd be there forever. You're so good." And I thanked her for the compliment, but I'm sure that the girl who is going to take my

place. I'm pretty sure that they ... I know they only have one running for it.

C: Ginnie, you were just finishing up, I guess, on your many activities.

S: I was just saying that the girl that is going to replace me is a real crackerjack. She's a very lovely lady, and very capable. She can also, will be able, to attend the functions that I was unable to attend, which will be nice for the president to be able to do.

C: Did you or were you invited to the christening of the *U.S.S. Rhode Island*?

S: Oh yes, I was! And that was very, very exciting. I think that was one of the most exciting things that has happened to me Navy wise since I've been out of the Navy. We were able to go aboard, and we had applied at that time, they posted it in the papers for people to receive tickets - a group to receive tickets, and we were told that they had run out. We couldn't have it. So then, we received a nice letter inviting us to come down on a separate day ahead of the viewing, the original. So, several of us went down, and we had a preview, and we were invited aboard. It was a very leisurely stroll. It was very, very nice.

They showed us everything from top to bottom. I was amazed at the size of this great ship.

C: Well, I'm glad the WAVES got the recognition.

S: And I did get to go to the ceremonies as well. A friend of mine had extra tickets, and gave them to my husband and myself, and we were able to attend the ceremony. So we did not go aboard at that time because it was so crowded. I don't know how those people could have even appreciated what they were able to see because it was so crowded.

C: I had a preview of it. I wasn't invited to the actual ceremonies, but I had a preview of it. Virginia, how did you happen to settle in Rhode Island?

S: Through marriage to my husband.

C: When were you married, may I ask?

S: In January of 1960.

C: Did you have any children?

S: No. I had ... This was my second marriage.

C: Oh, I see.

S: So I did have a daughter by my first husband, and she was about ... was she eleven or twelve, I think, when I married my second husband, and he adopted her immediately within the first year.

C: Oh, that's great. So that brought you to Rhode Island from Massachusetts.

S: That brought me to Rhode Island.

C: Now, you're still very busy today. You mentioned that you work. I'd just like to have you briefly tell me the kind of work you do on Thursday.

S: Oh, okay.

C: Fine.

S: I can make it very brief. On Thursday, we deliver magazines. My husband delivers the magazines, and I sort of keep track of the financial end of it of what's happening to the money. It's usually a very long trip. We leave about 3:30 a.m. in the morning, and we get home around 2:30 in the afternoon. Put on about 239 miles.

C: Yes, very good. Well, you're leading a very, very busy life these days with all your activities, and I want to thank you very much for consenting to give me this interview and taking the time to recall all your memories of happy Navy days in the WAVES and WWII. We'll have this transcribed, and then I'll edit it and send you a copy for your library. Thank you very much.

S: Thank you very nicely. It was my pleasure.