

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES IN WORLD WAR II

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NO. 22

DORIS MCKERSIE O'TOOLE

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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Interviewee: Doris O'Toole

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: March 9, 1995

C: This is the first oral history interview with Doris O'Toole. Today's date is March 9th, 1995. I'm interviewing her at her home on Bedlow Avenue in Newport, Rhode Island. This is for the history of the WAVES in World War II oral history project at the Naval War College. Mrs. O'Toole, I am very happy that you consented to be interviewed for us on your reminiscences of WAVE service in World War II. I would like to begin by asking you a few background questions before we get into the WAVES portion of the interview. Can I ask you when and where you were born?

O: I was born at the St. Joseph's Hospital in Paterson, New Jersey on May 28th, 1923.

C: What did your father do for a living?

O: My father was a letter carrier.

C: And did your mother have an occupation?

O: No. She took care of the house.

C: She was a homemaker. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

O: I have a younger sister, five years younger than I.

C: Did you spend your growing up years in Paterson, New Jersey?

O: No, I spent them in Haledon, New Jersey. That's a little town north of Paterson.

C: Did you go to elementary school and high school there?

O: I went to elementary school at Haledon Grammar School and I graduated from Paterson Central High School in 1941.

C: Did you go to work after high school?

O: Yes.

C: And where did you work?

O: I worked at Wright-Aeronautical Corporation.

C: What did they make?

O: Airplanes.

C: Oh, and where were they located?

O: I think in Woodbridge, New Jersey.

C: What did you do?

O: I maintained electrical equipment.

C: You maintained electrical equipment?

O: That's correct, yes.

C: That sounds very interesting. Did you like this job?

O: Not particularly.

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

O: No. My father was in the Army Medical Corps, but he was a secretary. He was trained as a secretary.

C: And was that during World War I?

O: That's correct.

C: Interesting. Well, when you graduated from high school in June 1941, the war had not begun yet, but shortly thereafter, December 7th 1941, Pearl Harbor was bombed. Do you remember your reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the reaction of those around you?

O: Where I was and what I did?

C: Yes.

O: My girlfriend and I were going to visit her aunt in North Haledon, and we were sitting at the radio when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

C: And what was your reaction? How did you feel?

O: Well, we were flabbergasted. I don't think we really realized the impact of it at the moment.

C: Yes, but you were flabbergasted. How long did you continue working at Wright Aeronautical after the war began in 1941?

O: Until I was inducted into the Navy.

C: And how did you hear about the WAVES?

O: Well, you hear about all of these things all over the place.

C: But you don't remember whether it was a newspaper or a poster?

O: No, I don't remember whether it was a poster or anything like that.

C: It was just general information. Had you heard anything specific about the WAVES?

O: Well, I wanted to join one of the services.

C: Oh, you did. Why did you feel you wanted to join?

O: Well, I thought I would get away from the boredom of the job and maybe do something worthwhile.

C: Those are very good reasons. When did you enlist in the WAVES? Do you remember the year and month?

O: Well, I'm sure I enlisted the day after I was twenty years old, which would be, maybe, say the 1st of June.

C: In 1943?

O: 1943. That's correct.

C: Because the WAVES, at least the legislation was signed on July 30th 1942, so it would have to have been after that. Do you remember where you went to enlist?

O: Pine Street, New York City.

C: That was a recruiting station.

O: That's correct.

C: What procedures did you have to follow to enlist?

O: Well, first of all, you filled out these papers and I think they called you back, had a physical, and so forth and so on. Then they set a date for you to come in. I came in on July the 15th or 13th, or something like that. Not too much time passed.

C: Right, between your initial enlistment procedure and your mustering in. So you say it was about July 1943 that you joined

the WAVES. Was there any publicity in the local papers about your joining the WAVES?

O: There might have been publicity in local papers. At that time my cousin was the city editor.

C: Oh, there was no problem; you did get in.

O: So I think there was something.

C: How did your parents feel about your enlistment? Were they pro? Con?

O: Well, I don't think they realized how "dangerous" it could be to a young girl going to the service. I think they were rather naive about it, so they granted me permission.

C: I guess people didn't realize what that entailed. Now where did you set out for training and indoctrination school?

O: We first went to Hunter College, New York, for basic training. Then I was sent to the hospital in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina for training.

C: Well, let's just double back to Hunter College a little bit. I wanted to ask a few questions about that basic training, which was about six weeks in length.

O: Yes, wait a minute. I don't even think it was six weeks at that time; they were trying to push people through.

C: Oh really, quicker than that?

O: Yes, I think it was quicker than that, maybe three weeks or something like that. Now, I'm not positive. I think they had a very definite need for people at that particular time.

C: Yes. They were pushing a lot of people through the school. Were you living in the dorms then, the converted apartments during your training?

O: That's correct, yes.

C: How many to a room? How many roommates did you have?

O: Oh, I don't remember. All I remember is that I was the only one that didn't come from Washington state.

C: Oh, so you were with a group of gals from. . .

O: Young women from Washington state.

C: Were they a friendly group?

O: Oh, yes. We were a busy group though.

C: What were you busy doing all day?

O: Being indoctrinated into the history of the Navy, marching, discipline, that sort of stuff.

C: Do you remember any of these roommates and their reaction to the WAVES?

O: Oh, no.

C: Did you keep in contact with them at all?

O: Not those particular people.

C: Did you enjoy the classes that you took?

O: I took it as a great adventure, I think. So that got you over the initial period. You weren't particularly scared about it.

C: Did you find the classes challenging? Easy?

O: I would say I felt them challenging and interesting.

C: Were your instructors men or women?

O: I got a feeling most of them were men.

C: Did you ever meet Captain Amsden who was head of the boot camp at Hunter College?

O: Never.'

C: He was from Jamestown, Rhode Island, that's why I asked, not that your connection was with Newport at that time. Did you have any trouble adjusting to military life?

O: Not particularly.

C: Did you like the discipline of military life?

O: Well, I don't think military discipline was much easier than my mother's.

C: So you were disciplined at home.

O: That's correct, yes.

C: Kind of kept in line. Did you like being on your own?

O: Yes.

C: What did you like about being on your own?

O: I just liked being on my own.

C: Did you like wearing the uniforms that were issued?

O: Yes, but I didn't relish in it.

C: Because the navy uniforms were very nice.

O: They are nice looking. I just donated mine to the hospital.

C: Oh, which hospital?

O: The Veterans Hospital.

C: Oh, the Veterans Hospital here. Oh, that's fantastic!
There's a great interest now in collecting uniforms and
memorabilia of women who served in the Navy, the Army, whatever,
in World War II. That's great.

O: And that's fifty years without being eaten by moths or anything else like that, in fairly good condition.

C: That's fantastic.

O: So, I'm not going to take it with me.

C: No, that is fantastic; I'm glad you did that. Did you have any time off during basic training at Hunter?

O: I might have. I might have gone home, say for a weekend or something. I don't remember though.

C: Yes. You were close by. Did you do anything specific for recreation or did you have time for that during basic training?

O: I don't remember.

C: Did you like the marching?

O: Yes, but I didn't have appropriate shoes; I had high heels on.

C: Oh, really. You didn't get the navy issue shoes?

O: For a while we marched with what we had until the shoes came through.

C: Oh, I see, so you had to wait a little bit of time to get the proper uniform.

O: Yes.

C: Oh.

O: I guess that was one of the things they did was dress you.

C: Yes, they did they gave you all the . . .

O: But it didn't come immediately.

C: Right, I guess they were just . . .

O: I learned to march in heels.

C: Your feet must have hurt.

O: Well, I think we were young and we could take a lot.

C: Probably. How were you selected for your specialty and what was your specialty?

O: I was just a hospital corpsman. When you come to think of it, you take aptitude tests. I think that the people with the higher scores, went into the hospital corps.

C: Was there any specific rate that you had in the hospital corps? Were you a pharmacist's mate?

O: I was a pharmacist's mate second class.

C: Did you have to take any additional training to become a pharmacist's mate?

O: Oh, yes. We took a couple of months training at Camp Lejeune Naval Hospital. I don't know how long it lasted. Maybe one to three months. Then I got a leave to go home and then was stationed at Charleston, South Carolina.

C: So you were in Fayetteville, North Carolina, for a couple of months.

O: That's correct. Yes.

C: And how did you get down there?

O: Oh, we had the most interesting train up you ever imagined. But I think it was resurrected from the 1890's; it had straw

seats. You know they took over all the old relics that they could possibly find and converted them. Then they were used to carry people or troops, whatever.

C: Yes. I know they must have had to do that during war time. Was it a troop train of all WAVES, all women?

O: No, I think it was mostly a train, and I don't know if it was specifically a troop train. It was going from Washington, D.C. to Florida and Charleston. There's this place where people went off at Charleston. No, first they went to Camp Lejeune. How they got there I don't know. I remember the train; it was hot. And the seats were made out of. . .

C: I think you said straw?

O: Straw, no.

C: Kind of a horse hair or something?

O: No. Caning.

C: Oh, I see.

O: They were made out of caning.

C: Were there other WAVES on this train with you to Fayetteville?

O: I didn't meet them until I got off.

C: Oh, so you were kind of there on your own.

O: Yes, we kind of left them at North Carolina.

C: Well, you're going to Fayetteville first.

O: I don't think anybody went with me from the hospital. Wait a minute, we went from the hospital, then we got leave for a couple of weeks. I went home, and I went from home to Charleston, South Carolina.

C: Well, let's get back to Fayetteville first. You said you spent a couple of month training there as a pharmacist's mate. Do you remember anything about that training? What did you have to learn, and what kind of classes did you have to take?

O: Oh, they were very concentrated, and we had to learn some anatomy and stuff like that. How to work on a ward and probably to carry out a bed pan or stuff like that.

C: Oh, so you had to do all those kinds of things as a pharmacist's mate.

O: Anatomy and physiology. We learned how to give medicines.

C: Oh, you must have learned some chemistry, I would think?

O: Well, chemistry, I don't think so. We learned a little pharmacology; maybe they called it materia medica at that particular time. That's how to give pills and maybe simple math, on how to give morphine tablets and stuff like that. They put a morphine tablet and a spoon of alcohol and dissolve it, then put it in a needle, and then shove it in somebody, stuff like that.

C: Yes. Things like that, that you would need for your full time job when you got to Charleston. Do you remember where you lived in Fayetteville?

O: I didn't live in Fayetteville.

C: Did you live in a barracks?

O: No, I lived in Camp Lejeune. That's not Fayetteville.

C: Oh, Camp Lejeune. Did you live in a barracks in Camp Lejeune?

O: Yes. We lived in a barracks right across the way from the hospital. I remember the drill sergeant there.

C: What about the drill sergeant?

O: He was OK, except he had a _____ initials.

C: Oh, how bizarre. Did you have to march to classes?

O: No, we had to march at least twice a day.

C: Oh, as part of your training. Do you remember what time you had to get up in the morning? Reveille? Was it early?

O: Really early.

C: And then you went to breakfast, I assume.

O: I don't remember the routine. We might have had drill before breakfast.

C: Do you remember what the navy food was like: Do you remember what your reaction to the cuisine was?

O: No, I don't remember. I would think that it was better food, served poorly, than what we were used to getting at home.

C: So, did you have classes in the morning and afternoon?

O: Oh, yes.

C: Did you have homework?

O: Oh, yes. They kept you really busy.

C: Were there tests at the end?

O: I think there were tests all the way through. And then there were tests at the end.

C: Your final exams and you had to graduate from that school. Did you have any time off on weekends when you were in Camp Lejeune?

O: We might have, but it might have been every other weekend. In the Hospital Corps our hours were much longer than a WAVE who worked as a storekeeper or a yeoman.

C: You had an extended day then. Did you have any social life there?

O: Oh, yes. There were so many men and so few women, sometimes we had three dates on a Sunday.

C: Oh, my heavens; you had to really juggle your schedule.

O: That's right, but we were young and rather innocent at the time.

C: Where did they go for dates in this little town?

O: Oh, the town, sometimes we got into Wilmington, North Carolina.

C: That's on the coast.

O: Well, Camp Lejeune is on the coast, it's not Fayetteville, though. It's Camp Lejeune and the nearest town would be Wilmington, North Carolina. We would go there, and at that time, it was a particularly little Southern town. It didn't particularly like people from that service. You could almost feel it.

C: Oh, really.

O: Oh, yes. Even though they earned their living from the people, they were very leery of them.

C: Oh, I see.

O: But Camp Lejeune is a great big Marine Corps base.

C: Yes, it is. Oh, isn't that odd? So you had a very busy time there then if you were working and then socializing on the weekends. Did you make any lasting friendships among the other WAVES when you were in North Carolina?

O: Come to think of it, there were a couple of girls that went down to the Navy dispensary with me from there. They were midwesterners; I don't know where they are now. One's name was Luzer and ones name was Manges. We hit Charleston about the same time.

C: Was there anything unusual or interesting that happened during your training in Camp Lejeune?

O: I don't think so; it was just regular training.

C: Did you get your rate as a pharmacist's mate second class?

O: Rate?

C: Right. Did you get your rate?

O: I got a second class out of school.

C: When you were out of school?

O: Yes, you see they needed people like us.

C: Sure. Was there a graduation ceremony there?

O: I don't believe so. There might have been a little one or something like that.

C: And after that you were assigned to Charleston?

O: Yes, the Naval Dispensary at Charleston where I stayed my entire career.

C: How did you get to Charleston from Camp Lejeune?

O: Actually, I went from Camp Lejeune on leave from two weeks to New Jersey; from New Jersey I went to Charleston, South Carolina.

C: Did you go by train?

O: Yes.

C: Was it a WAVE train or did you go independently?

O: I would think it was the regular train. Their regular train was almost complete with military personnel at that particular time.

C: Oh, sure.

O: And then another one of these old uncomfortable cars. It was hot and it was smoky.

C: Oh, gosh, you had a long trip down south.

O: Yes, no sleeping facilities. You know, we were healthy.

C: And young and you could cope with that.

O: That's right.

C: Type of thing. Do you remember what year and month you landed in Charleston?

O: Well, let's see, it was in the fall of 1943. A good guess would be October.

C: Of 1943?

O: Yes.

C: And you were assigned to the Naval Dispensary as you said. What did you do there?

O: First, I worked in the regular dispensary. The newest Naval Dispensary did not handle many military people; it handled the accidents that occurred on people that were building the ships.

C: Oh, I see, so you were training civilian personnel.

O: That's right. For minor illnesses and injuries on the job. We also treated the Marine Corps barracks, which was not too far away and stuff. Essentially our job was the personnel at the shipyard.

C: And they were turning out navy ships, I'm sure, as fast as they could.

O: I don't know that they were turning out navy ships; they were renovating, if any of them had holes in them, stuff like that.

C: Oh, repair facility.

O: Repair facility more than building ships.

C: Oh, I see. Now was the dispensary right on the Charleston Naval Base?

O: Oh, yes. Very prominently located on the naval base. Maybe a half a mile from the main gate and a half a mile from the big docks.

C: Did you work long hours during that time frame?

O: Yes, we did.

C: More than eight hours a day?

O: Well, I would think that we would maybe work eight hours a day one day and twelve the next; on for one weekend and off the next.

C: Oh, I see, so you rotated weekends. You had a very busy schedule.

O: Oh, yes.

C: Now, what exactly did you do there? Did you treat these patients, or did you just dispense medicine? Did you do the whole gamut of things?

O: Over time, I did the whole gamut. But at first, I think we just treated the people in the emergency room type thing in those

days. The people who came in with injuries or maybe a headache or something like that.

C: Oh, I see. Did you work with other WAVES?

O: There were other WAVES there, but I think that mostly I worked with the men.

C: Oh, really. The other Navy personnel assigned.

O: Personnel. We trained the sailors who were medics that were going to the Fleet Marine Corps while we were working there on little minor things.

C: Oh, that's interesting that you did that; you helped to train some of the men then.

O: That were going to go with the Marines.

C: Sure, oh, that's wonderful, so the WAVES had lots of responsibility beyond just doing the job, the teaching aspect of it was very interesting.

O: More we taught them by watching them than anything else.

C: Right, than actual instruction, by example, which is very good. Do you remember who your superior was? Who you reported to?

O: Well, when I first got in the Navy it was a chief, then there was me, and then there were the people that were on the hospital premises. The chief owned a funeral home in Jersey City, New Jersey. I think he was a little sadistic and he gave me a real rough time.

C: Oh, he did.

O: Oh, yes.

C: Do you think he was harsh on you or hard on you?

O: Well, he didn't quite know what to do with a woman.

C: Oh, I have often asked the ladies if they felt there was any discrimination against them because they were women in the service, or ill treatment.

O: It was the particular personality of the man. His name was Murphy, and I think if your an undertaker, you see life from a very different perspective than most.

C: Now was he located at Charleston Naval Base?

O: Yes.

C: So he was your superior there. He kind of gave you a hard time. Did you feel that any of the other men were not accepting of women in the service?

O: Well, I think they all resented it at that particular time. But I don't think they blatantly showed it.

C: Why do you say you think they resented it but didn't show it? Was it just kind of a feeling that you got?

O: Yes, yes. You see the girls that were secretaries were accepted as secretaries in civilian life, and they didn't have that much problem. But the girls, like me, who went into the medical corps, it was different. Then we had problems with the nurses.

C: Oh, you mean the Navy nurses?

O: Yes. I think they were a bit resentful.

C: Oh, you think they were too?

O: It wasn't sexual; it was just that we were in some ways stealing the thunder.

C: Right, that was what I was going to say, intruding on their profession.

O: Even though they were officers, you know.

C: So there was that gulf between the officers and the enlisted ranks.

O: Oh, yes, there was a great gulf between the men.

C: You didn't socialize with them or they with you.

O: Oh no, we weren't allowed to.

C: Where did you live when you were in Charleston?

O: When I first arrived in Charleston, there were not that many women. We took over the old chiefs' barracks. I can remember it being hot and feeling sticky, stuff like that. I came in with my suitcases and there was the water fountain. The sign on the water fountain says do not spit in sink, so it didn't quite make my day. After a while we left the chiefs' barracks and went to the Noisette Creek Barracks with Dot Midgley. She had her job

later on; I was about a year ahead of her, about a year older than she is.

C: Yes, she gave us some photographs of the Noisette Creek Barracks, which I just put up in an exhibit on the WAVES in World War II.

O: Well, I have them somewhere myself.

C: That's great, we would appreciate your donating them or at least having us make copies of those photographs or any letters that you have for our collection. Was the chiefs' barracks a wooden barracks, where you lived first?

O: Yes.

C: Did you have your own separate room or were you just lined up in a row in a huge room?

O: I don't remember the first one we went to. I think it was a dormitory set up. When I went to the Noisette Creek Barracks, we had three people in a room downstairs. Of course, we were the oldest and we were the ones highest in rank at that particular time.

C: Oh, so you shared a room with three other gals. Do you remember where they were from?

O: Manges came from, wait a minute, I have a set of friends. I have one friend from Denver, but she didn't live there, Rosemary Foley, but she lived upstairs in the dormitory. May Lezare came from somewhere in Indiana and Shirley Manges came from Detroit. Then I had another friend, Catherine Butterhof and she came from, you know I can't remember the name, it's that Little Ferry, it's Little something New Jersey and its Egg Harbor, New Jersey. She lived in a plain barrack almost as I did. I lived mostly downstairs.

C: Did they have recreation facilities there? A living room or whatever?

O: Oh yes, they did. They had a living room and then they had a place called WAVE Haven. It was a little building all alone in the back you could go to, to do what you wanted to do off hours, but we didn't have too many off hours.

C: So they had a living room there at WAVE Haven.

O: Whatever was available in the way of recreation. Of course, no TV or something like that.

C: No, TV didn't exist then; you had your radio or whatever.

O: They had sewing machines and stuff like that.

C: Oh, that's interesting, so you could do some sewing?

O: Yes, which I did.

C: Oh, you did. What kinds of things did you make?

O: Oh, I would just make housecoats or nightgowns or something like that.'

C: Did you pal around with these women that you got to know? Did you go places with them off duty?

O: Oh, yes. I had two particular friends, Catherine Butterhof and Rosemary Foley, and it would be hard for most people to separate us. We had a lot of fun then. They were good kids.

C: Oh, great. What did you do for recreation and fun in Charleston?

O: Oh, we'd go out and eat in the restaurants. Charleston, in particular areas, was a lovely city. And then we'd go downtown

to Battery Park; we'd go to the movies; we'd go to the theater; they did have things for us, shows every so often.

C: Did they have any USO shows that you went to?

O: I don't remember the USO shows.

C: Or any USO canteens or anything in Charleston?

O: No, but I can remember when we got off of work at 10:00 at night, we went outside the gate to someplace called Black Maggie's and had bacon and eggs. We could eat all we wanted and not gain any weight.

C: Oh, that's wonderful. I guess that's youth. How was the food on the base? Did you eat in the dormitory there? The Noisette Barracks?

O: Yes. Yes. We had breakfast there, if you can imagine having baked beans three different ways for breakfast, they had it.

C: Oh, baked beans. Southern cuisine, I guess.

O: Navy.

C: Navy beans, of course. Oh my word, that's kind of different.

O: Oh, yes. Or maybe, two different kinds for breakfast.

C: Did you eat dinners there too?

O: Yes, I think we ate dinners there. If we worked late we ate in the chiefs' mess near the base because Noisette Creek was a little far; you had to take a bus to get there.

C: Oh, you did from your work?

O: Yes, it's not that close, but we had our supper or lunch at the chiefs' mess.

C: Oh, I see.

O: And, once again, they had the food that you couldn't get in civilian life, but it wasn't unrecognizable because of the way it's cooked.

C: Oh, it was cooked in a different fashion than what you were used to.

O: It was cooked for a lot of people.

C: Yes, massive cooking. Did you get used to the climate in Charleston? How did you feel about the heat in this time frame of no air conditioning?

O: Well, I've always been heat sensitive, and probably not that much then, but I think that from June until October I had complete prickly heat. It is hot and humid down there, especially with no air conditioning.

C: It must have been terrible in those days. Did they have fans in the hospital or in the barrack?

O: I don't believe so, but they know how to deal with the windows. They keep the shades down in the daytime and the windows closed. When it becomes night, they opened the shades and opened the windows so the breeze comes in and then in the morning. They did a pretty good job on that.

C: Oh, that's good. Trying to keep the inside cool by that fashion. But being there in the dead of summer when it's so hot and humid must have been terrible. Did you have any treatment for the prickly heat?

O: No.

C: You just had to exist.

O: Well, I don't think there's a treatment for everything.

C: Little powders or something. You must have worn the summer uniform during that time frame. What was that like?

O: Well, we had fatigues.

C: Oh, you did.

O: They were cotton you had to iron them. And they were blue.

C: Oh, that's interesting.

O: Maybe I have a picture somewhere, but I haven't gotten to it. We had to wear stockings at all times. In fact, I got in trouble at a captain's mass because it was hot in the summer and I had this pancake makeup, I didn't apply it correctly, and they found out I wasn't wearing stockings where everyone else was getting away with this.

C: Oh, they were?

O: Yes, their stockings were not nice nylons. They were heavy rayon things that were clingy in the hot weather.

C: Oh, so you put the pancake makeup on and they kind of discovered that you didn't have stockings.

O: Yes, that was a regulation to wear stockings; it was rather a stupid regulation. So I had a captain's mast; I don't have a perfect record because of that.

C: What did they do at the captain's mast, and what did they say to you?

O: I don't know. I guess I got extra duty. I don't remember.

C: Oh, extra duty for that, but you had to be called up in front of them.

O: Yes, that's right. And it was perfectly obvious I didn't do a good job on the back of my leg. But everybody else was doing it and they didn't get caught.

C: Oh dear, you had to be the one caught. That's unfortunate. Do you remember who turned you in?

O: I don't know. I don't think Dotty Midgley remembers this, but this is true.

C: Yes, she mentioned that.

O: I think it was somebody in the barracks who turned me in.

C: Oh, I see.

O: Yes.

C: Did you have a WAVE officer in the barracks, as a house mother so to speak?

O: Yes, we had a WAVE officer, but I don't remember her name. Dot Midgley knows her really well.

C: Oh, she does. And what did she do, this officer? What was she responsible for?

O: I think she was responsible for the running of the barracks.

C: Keeping everybody in line?

O: Yes.

C: Did you have to sign out or sign in when you left?

O: Oh yes. I think you had to sign in or out, but I don't think you had any particular hours as to when to come in. You could stay out all night if you wished.

C: Oh really?

O: Oh, yes.

C: That was liberal.

O: This is different for women in those days.

C: Yes, that was different because people were pretty protected.

O: We weren't protected.

C: No, I mean rules were a little stricter then, I would think. .

O: Oh, yes, but I can remember staying out with a couple of chiefs all night.

C: Oh, for heaven sakes. Getting back to social life, did you have many dates there; were there a lot of men around to socialize with?

O: Oh, you could have as many dates as you wanted to. I guess at the beginning I had a lot of them. But then after awhile you didn't have so many.

C: Maybe the men came and went, too.

O: Yes.

C: New crews coming in all the time. Did the navy sponsor any dances or recreation for you during that time?

O: Not for us, but for the ships. You see the ships were leaving and they would have a ship's party and we could go if we wanted to go.

C: Oh, I see.

O: That kind of thing.

C: Did you go to many of these ships' parties?

O: No. I'm not that much of a social creature, I don't believe.

C: But you did have some dates down there. What did they do for dates? Where did you go?

O: Oh, we probably went to the movies and we probably went to eat out at Black Maggie's. That's about all I guess.

C: Were you aware of the segregation in the South, being in Charleston, a southern city?

O: Oh, yes.

C: How did you react to that? You know the different drinking fountains and toilet facilities and alike. Did you remember having any reaction or thinking it was different?

O: It was different, but I was so involved in what I was doing that I did not notice such things.

C: I see.

O: Except for one time I went to the beach and got sunburnt and then I got tan, and they were reluctant to put me in front of the bus because I looked so dark. That's the truth, yes.

C: Oh, really. Isn't that interesting, so they questioned you.

O: Yes, but I think the navy uniform meant I wasn't black. But I was dark.

C: Yes, so you went to the beach as part of recreation, too.

O: Oh, yes, if we could find somebody who could drive a car. Cars were rare.

C: That's right, because gas was rationed.

O: Oh, I think there might have been times that a group was run to the beach, you know, stuff like that.

C: Maybe they had a bus or something?

O: Yes, a run to the beach.

C: Yes. What beach did you go to? Do you remember the name of it?

O: Isle of Palms and Folly Beach. And, you know, the funny part of it is, I was back there five, six years ago and a nice, great beach it used to be. Now there were just little rocks. Erosion took the whole beach away.

C: Yes. I think they had a hurricane down there too, a couple of years ago.

O: Yes, but this is before the hurricane.

C: Oh, I see.

O: Maybe a year before the hurricane, but where Folly Beach used to be great big wide expanse and you could almost run a car up. Now it was just rocks. The complete beach was eroded.

C: That's unfortunate. Did anything interesting or unusual happen during your hospital corps service in Charleston? Do you remember any incidents?

O: I can remember that we vaccinated the whole town against small pox.

C: Oh, there must have been a small pox scare then.

O: There was a scare.

C: That must have been a real job.

O: Well, it was really mechanized. I mean somebody had sort of like a needle and you put the needle on the skin, made an abrasion, and you have somebody come in with an iodine swab and swab it, then somebody did that and then somebody wiped it off and then somebody recorded it, so it was really mass produced.

C: Right. A production line there.

O: And it went very quickly when it was organized. I do believe that they inoculated the whole town.

C: Oh, my heavens. That's quite something. When did you muster out of the WAVES. When did you leave Charleston?

O: December the 5th, 1945.

C: But VE day had occurred in May and VJ day in August. Do you remember what your reaction was to the end of the war in August of 1945?

O: Relief. We were all so happy. We were all happy that this was over and we could get home, and they promised me a college education at a college where I wanted to go to, so I really figured that this was over and a new life would start.

C: That's interesting. Did you celebrate at all on VJ Day?

O: I think we got surrounded in town and had to be brought home by the military police.

C: Oh, did the towns folk kind of overwhelm you?

O: It wasn't the town; it was all the other service people because it wasn't only Charleston Naval Base. There was an Army Air Force Base there and a couple of other bases, Coast Guard. I can remember it was so crowded and stuff that a friend of mine was in the military police and he thought that there could be trouble so we went home by police car.

C: Rescued from the mobs down there, I'm sure. What were the people doing down there? How were they celebrating?

O: They were acting the same way that they were acting in Times Square. Everybody was a little giddy and a little bit crazy.

C: Must have been quite a celebration.

O: It sure was. Let me mention about the girls that were in the service. Even today they are more cooperative, less bitchy than most women as a whole. I can see it in the WAVES National organization. I'm not a wheeler or dealer. In fact, at this particular time I am not well, but I mean they cooperate and they cooperate in the barracks. It's amazing how little trouble they had among each other in the Navy, in the Navy Barracks and stuff. I've never seen that happen anywhere else in a group of women.

C: So the WAVES were a cooperative group then?

O: They all pitched with everybody else and each other. There wasn't that constant pettiness or friction. At least I didn't feel or notice it. And I think I pick these things up quickly.

C: Oh, sure. How did these gals feel about the WAVES organization per se? Were they gung ho? Was there a lot of esprit de corps, a lot of patriotism at that time frame?

O: I don't know. I think there was a moderate degree of it. I don't think there was any great patriotism.

C: OK. Do you remember what your pay was when you were in Charleston?

O: I remember when I left I was making \$100 month with room and board, and when I got back I took a job for three months before I went to college, I was making \$25 a week and, of course, there weren't any of these fringe benefits back then.

C: No. Because you got your meals for free in the WAVES and your lodging. You didn't have to pay for that.

O: Plus your health, too.

C: Yes. Your medical care was taken care of by the Navy. Did you save your money or did you spend it on anything?

O: I saved a bit.

C: And did you spend the rest on your recreation or your personal needs?

O: Some recreation, some personal needs, yes. I bought what I felt like buying.

C: Sure. Did you write letters home to your parents during this time frame?

O: Yes, I did.

C: Did you describe your daily activities in these letters?

O: Yes, I don't know that I have them. I'm fearing that I threw them out.

C: That's too bad because as I told you before we are seeking letters to add to our collection.

O: My mother died just about four years ago at the age of 96. And she had these, but you know she was in New Jersey and we had to clean the house. I don't know what happened to them. I do know that I saved my father's stuff.

C: Yes, we talked about that.

O: I might have saved some of my mother's, but I will give them to you when I find them.

C: Oh, certainly, thank you so much. You're so generous to do that. Well, you mustered out of the Navy, as you said, in December 1945. Did you have to go to any particular station?

O: I was mustered out at the same place I came in, Pine Street, New York.

C: Oh, OK. So you had to go over there.

O: I think they gave me travel expenses. Ninety-five cents.

C: Prices were so much different in those days. Were you happy or sad to leave the Navy?

O: I guess I was sort of sad to leave the Navy because I think I left a marvelous adventure. At the same time, I was very anxious to get started on the next phase of my life.

C: Exactly, the next phase of your life. Did you ever have a chance, during your years in the WAVES, to meet or to see Mildred McAfee, who was head of the WAVES?

O: I don't believe so.

C: She just died in September at the age of 94. Did you feel that the WAVES was a smoothly run organization?

O: Yes, I did. I think it was a very well run organization.

C: Did you encounter, or any of the girls encounter, any discipline problems in the barracks?

O: Oh, I'm sure there were discipline problems, but they weren't earth shaking.

C: I just wondered if anybody was asked to leave the WAVES because of discipline problems.

O: Oh, I'm sure that happened; we didn't hear about it. On the whole, I would say that it wasn't that much.

C: Did you know of anyone getting pregnant out of wedlock in the WAVES and having to go away?

O: Yes, I did, I think she disappeared.

C: They would have to disappear. Did you have any preconceived expectations of what the WAVES was going to be like when you joined?

O: No.

C: Did it meet your expectations of adventure and getting away from the dull routine? Did you feel you were challenged in the

WAVES and that you were given jobs that you could do successfully?

O: Yes. I think that when we got out of the WAVES we had the feeling that we could accomplish anything that we started. We did a lot of things that we never knew we could there.

C: That's wonderful, so it was confidence building.

O: Yes. Yes, until you hit civilian life again.

C: Did you maintain any friendships permanently that you had made in the service? Do you keep in contact with any of these gals?

O: Yes, I did, but the person died when she was 55 years old, and she was about five or six years older than I was. I had another friend in Connecticut that I kept up contact with, but we parted our ways because we didn't see things the same way. And, of course, there is Dotty Midgley and there's Bobbie Mueller. I can't remember her name. She was in the Navy with me. She was in the Hospital Corps, who lives in Brooklyn, Connecticut and we see each other from time to time, but my good friend died of cancer.

C: Oh, that's too bad. Did you meet Dot Midgley when you were in Charleston?

O: No, I didn't know Dot Midgley until I was here at a WAVE meeting. She asked me where I was stationed and I said Charleston. She said, "Noisette Creek." I said, "yes." She said, "I was in the office."

C: She was a recreation specialist. Did you think that the WAVES experience changed or redirected your life in anyway?

O: Oh, I think the WAVES experience greatly enlarged the scope of my life. I got to go to college. I had a profession. I didn't think the same way as when I was brought up in a small New Jersey town. It was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had.

C: That's a wonderful comment. That is great. Where did you go to college after you got out of the WAVES?

O: I went to a mill type set up. I went to Rutgers College of Pharmacy in north New Jersey. That was a day college and it was in the heart of Newark, New Jersey. If you knew anything about Newark, it's lousy. I got my degree there and then I went on a fellowship and got a masters degree at the University Colorado, which was a marvelous thing.

C: Was your masters in pharmacology?

O: Yes, actually it's in pharmacy, but I didn't take any pharmacy courses, just pharmacology courses. Yes, and then I went to work for Charles Pfizer as a research assistant and left as a research scientist.

C: Oh that's fantastic. Charles Pfizer in New London or Groton?

O: We started out in Monmouth, New Jersey, and they moved all their plants up here, so I came along and I got to Groton that way.

C: Oh, that's wonderful. So the WAVES experience as a pharmacist actually inspired you to follow this career.

O: It's something I've always wanted to do, but we didn't have money.

C: Did the Navy pay for your college education?

O: Yes, it did. I owe a great deal to the Navy and to the WAVES.

C: That is wonderful. When did you start working at Pfizer, may I ask?

O: In 1954.

C: And when did you leave Pfizer?

O: 1969.

C: So you spent a good fifteen years in Pfizer as a research person. What kind of work was that? Can you elaborate just a little bit?

O: I worked in the toxicology department. We tested drugs for their side effects and before a drug is approved it has to go through certain scheduling. You have to test it in rats. You have to test in dogs. You have to test for any side effects that may occur and that was our job. I didn't do the physical thing. I did the chemistry for them.

C: Oh, that's fascinating. You said you got a master's degree in pharmacy at Colorado. Now did Pfizer pay for that?

O: No, I paid for it.

C: Yourself. Did you go immediately after the Rutgers experience or did you work after?

O: I worked for Rutgers University for a couple of years after I graduated from college, then I went on a fellowship to the University of Colorado, then I went to Pfizer.

C: That's fascinating. What a career. You found your way eventually to Groton. Can I ask you if you met your husband in the service?

O: No, I met my ex-husband at a dedication of the new building at Pfizer and Pfizer opened up this research place. We were there a year before they dedicated it. And he was a town physician.

C: Oh, I see he was the town physician for Groton.

O: Yes, well, he had a practicing partner.

C: Oh, I see. Did you have any children?

O: I have one neurologically damaged child.

C: Oh, that's too bad, sorry.

O: Oh, that's alright. If I can say it that way to anybody, I'm OK.

C: Right. Can I just ask you the date of your marriage, the year?

O: Yes, sure, September the 30th, 1961.

C: So, it was a little bit after the war and you had achieved a lot of your career aims after that.

O: Marriage was not a viable alternative. I loved my job. I was one of the lucky ones.

C: Oh, that's great. You sound like you had a very interesting career. Can I ask how you ended up in Newport, Rhode Island?

O: Well, I got a divorce and I got a settlement, but the settlement would not take me through my life. I knew that somewhere along the line I would have to be dependent on somebody, so I took the money and I bought this house that has three families in it, so it helps support me. Plus the social security.

C: Oh, yes.

O: So it supports me. It has always been partially rented at least, so I do fairly well.

C: When did you come to Newport?

O: Nine years ago.

C: Oh, just nine years ago.

O: Well, I'm not even considered anywhere near being a native yet.

C: Oh, no. You have to wait a couple of more years for that. So I assume you didn't work after you came to Newport?

O: No.

C: The nine years ago would have only been 1986.

O: Yes, that's right.

C: When did you join the Ocean State WAVES?

O: I was just trying to remember, but I don't know the exact date, a couple of years ago, maybe three years when they opened.

C: So your a member of the Ocean State WAVES and WAVES National, too?

O: They're both the same thing.

C: Right, right, you have to be; one is the national and one is the local. Have you attended any of their conferences or conventions?

O: I was suppose to go in April to a convention, but I can't go because I've been sick.

C: Right, I guess they have the upcoming one. Tina McNeil mentioned she's going up to Vermont, I think, in April.

O: Who's this?

C: Tina McNeil. She's the governor.

O: Oh, yes. I had been planning to do it, but I got pneumonia and stuff like that and complications, so I can't go.

C: Oh, dear, sorry to hear that. Can you sum up your WAVES experience for me and it's significance for you in your life? Do you have anything else to add on that?

O: Well, I think that joining the Navy was one of the most important things I did. I wasn't thinking about rewards. But I certainly got them from joining the service. I grew. I matured. I think that from my background I would never have the chance to grow up the way I did. Well, it did it took me a while to grow up, but I grew up.

C: Oh, that's wonderful. The WAVES helped in a maturing experience?

O: Oh, yes, it was to me. The WAVES was anything you wanted it to be, you know. It was your attitude. It could be a frustrating experience or it could be an adventure. I think most of the girls in the service made it an adventure. And they have something in common that I don't think too many women have in common.

C: That's true. I think there's a bonding among the WAVES, and it was a very special time in our history.

O: Yes, it was a very special, special time in our history. Wasn't it? When I joined the WAVES we weren't thinking of winning, we were pretty much sure that we were going to lose that war. I think that was the attitude. Oh, yes, in 1943, the Germans were all over Europe, and the Japs were taking over the Pacific. I think the Japs started to lose ground at that point,

but we didn't know it. It was after the Battle of Midway, 1942. Then after that the Pacific became ours. We didn't realize those things; it was a very low time for the United States.

C: It was. Did you have much access to newspapers at that time frame? Did you follow the war when you were in the WAVES via the news?

O: I had a newspaper somewhere that says Roosevelt is dead. And my mother sent it to me, you know, if that's what you mean.

C: Well, 'no. I meant while you were in the WAVES in Noisette Creek Barracks, did you read a lot of newspapers? Did you see the news reels?

O: I didn't have time for any of that stuff. We didn't have time.

C: Yes. You were so busy that you didn't have the time for that. Well, I want to thank you very, very much for giving us your wonderful reminiscences of your time as a pharmacist's mate in the Navy in World War II. I will have these reminiscences transcribed and a typescript made up; we'll edit it, then give you a copy for your records. Thank you so much.

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