

HISTORY
OF THE
WAVES

NO. 24

DORIS WILLIAMS NEMITZ

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Interviewee: Doris Williams Nemitz

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: April 12, 1995

C: This is the first oral history interview with Doris Nemitz at her home in North Kingstown. Today's date is April 12, 1995.

Mrs. Nemitz, I'm very pleased that you consented to be interviewed for our program on the WAVES in World War II. I'd like to begin questioning by asking you where and when you were born.

N: I was born in Providence, RI in May 1924.

C: What did your father do for a living?

N: My father was a registered pharmacist. He owned his own drug store in Providence. He was also a state representative to the general assembly.

C: What did your mother do for a living?

N: My mother was a homemaker.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

N: I had one brother, Ira, Jr., and one sister Rita.

C: Were you the middle child?

N: I was the youngest.

C: Did you go to elementary school in Providence?

N: Yes, I did. Parochial schools.

C: Did you go to high school there as well?

N: St. Xavier's Academy in Providence.

C: When did you graduate from high school?

N: 1942.

C: So the war was in full swing by that time. What were your post high school plans? Did you go to college, or did you go to work?

N: I had intended to go to college. I took an exam and was accepted at Rhode Island College of Education in Providence and

went there for a year. I left to become a secretary. I went to Edgewood Secretarial School.

C: Where was that?

N: That was in Edgewood, RI.

C: Did you not like Rhode Island College?

N: I didn't really have the ambition to be a school teacher and that was their primary purpose. It was, at that time, a teacher's normal school.

C: Yes, yes, it was. How long did you spend at Edgewood?

N: It was a year course. Every day for a year. After school I went to work in a defense plant, Walsh Kaiser Shipyard. It was right in Cranston.

C: What did you do there?

N: I did secretarial work there in the template storage area. That was very interesting.

C: Did you continue that after you graduated from Edgewood?

N: No. When I graduated I left and went to work for the Juilliard Mills as a secretary.

C: And where were they?

N: In Providence, nearer to my home.

C: What did they make?

N: They were famous wool people. Woolen yarn imported from Australia and Canada.

C: Oh, my heavens. Well they're gone with the wind now, aren't they? Like so many of the mills. Did you like that position?

N: Not as much as I liked the shipyard work. It was more confining; it was a small office.

C: How long did you stay there?

N: Less than 6 months.

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

N: My father was in World War I in the Navy, because it was wartime. He wasn't a career Navy person.

N: He was stationed in Newport also.

C: Were any of your relatives in the service in World War II?

N: Only cousins. My cousin Rosetta Desrosiers was in the Coast Guard.

C: Did she join around the same time you did?

N: She joined sooner than I.

C: Did you hear anything about service life from her? Did she write to you at all?

N: Yes. She like it very much. There were an awful lot of meetings to acquaint people with the activities of the service people, of the WACS, the women Marines, the Navy. I guess recruiting type of meetings to get people to know more about the different women's organizations they could join.

C: Did you go to any of these?

N: I did, yes. I went to one for the Marines and I went to one for the Navy WAVES.

C: And they were in Providence?

N: Yes.

C: How interesting. I hadn't heard of that kind of experience before. Had any of your friends joined the service? High School friends?

N: Two neighbors joined the WAVES before I did.

C: Did you hear positive things about the WAVES or did you feel positively about them after these recruiting meetings?

N: I felt positive after I joined. Really, when I think back I joined not knowing really too much about it. There were a lot of movies out that hit on patriotism and I think I had strong feelings of duty. And I did know a couple of high school friends who had died in the war, and it was just the beginning of the war. They were killed in the service.

C: Before we get into your joining the WAVES, do you remember where you were on December 7, 1941--the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

N: No. I don't.

C: Do you remember your reaction at all to the bombing, or the reaction of those around you?

N: I can remember my family sitting around the radio when the President came on to talk about it, but when I actually heard the news I don't remember where I was. We were devastated when we heard it. We could not believe it. It just seemed like such a terrible thing.

C: When did you decide to join the WAVES? Do you remember the month and the year?

N: Well, it was way before I was old enough--maybe five months before I was 20. And you did have to be 20 to join.

C: So did you have to wait until your 20th birthday to join?

N: Yes.

C: What year was that?

N: That was 1944.

C: 1944 that you joined. What is the reason that you would give for your joining the WAVES?

N: I would say patriotism. I thought I could help. There was a slogan, you know, "Release a Man for Duty." We just all thought we'd have desk jobs, something of that type. I'd found out later

there were lots of jobs for women who went into in the service that I wasn't aware of. I ended up with a desk job. People went in as gunner's mates and everything else. There were so many facilities open to them.

C: That's true, and you found that out when you did join. Where did you enlist?

N: We had to go to Boston, Massachusetts, to enlist because we didn't have any enlisting places in Providence.

C: Did you go by yourself to Boston?

N: I did. Well, I went with my mother, and we spent the day in Boston.

C: Did you go by train?

N: Yes.

C: Most of the girls seemed to have gone with their mothers to join up. What procedures did you have to follow to enlist? What did you have to do when you went to the recruiting station?

N: Well, you had to show proof that you were a graduate of high school and you had a physical, a very thorough physical.

C: Did you have to take any aptitude tests?

N: I don't remember ever taking an aptitude test.

C: When did they let you know that you were accepted in the WAVES?

N: That I don't recall.

C: Was it shortly thereafter?

N: I think it was.

C: How did your parents feel about your joining the WAVES?

N: My mother thought it was a great opportunity for me. My father--I guess he felt he was going to lose me--I was going to go so far away, so that's why I chose Newport as my first choice. When I finished schooling in the Navy I came back to Newport, and I was lucky to get it.

C: But your father didn't prevent you from joining?

N: No.

C: They signed the papers then?

N: Yes.

C: Was there any publicity in the local papers about your joining?

N: No. Only later on, the Outlet Company in downtown Providence wrote to all our parents and asked for pictures of us and they displayed them in the Outlet windows for sort of an observance of all the local people that were in the service.

C: That's a great idea. Good publicity for the war effort and good support for the war effort. Well, you found out about your acceptance in the WAVES, and what was the next step? Where did you go for training and indoctrination?

N: To Hunter College in New York. We stayed in dormitory-type facilities there. I remember it was hot weather; it was August; it was very hot in New York City and we had to march to the armory to get our clothes, our service clothes.

C: So you were there about August 1944. How long was the training and indoctrination period for you?

N: It was only six weeks.

C: And you said you lived in the dorms. Special apartments were set aside. How many roommates did you have there?

N: I had three others. There were two double bunk beds in my room.

C: And you just had that little room? That was yours.

N: Yes.

C: Were you responsible for keeping it clean?

N: We were. White glove inspections.

C: No dust! Do you remember any of these roommates that you were with or where they were from?

N: No.

C: So you didn't really make any lasting friendships with those girls. Did you make any lasting friendships with anybody during that indoctrination and training period?

N: Not at Hunter. I left Providence with a girl from Pawtucket. We boarded the train the same day to go to Hunter College. She has since died. After we got there, I never saw her again, so I

don't know what building she ended up in. Our paths never crossed again. Years later I was working at Rhode Island Hospital, and I used to have to go through the patient charts. She was a patient there and she was dying, but we had never had contact with each other and I don't know where she ended up in her service years or how long she was in. She's been dead more than 20 years.

C: Isn't that something. Kind of an odd way to link up with somebody, at least recognize their name. But there must have been an awful lot of recruits there at Hunter so it would be difficult to find somebody. You spent six weeks there and you took classes during the day. Do you remember what kinds of courses you were taking?

N: They were naval indoctrination courses. We took identification of aircraft, boats and a short history of the Navy. We had calisthenics that I had never had before. I'd gone to a Catholic high school, but that was a case of doing just hands on shoulders and up over your head. We didn't have large gymnasiums or sports at school, so it was quite a different thing for me when I got there and had to do the exercises. I was not prepared for that.

C: Were they vigorous?

N: Yes, very. And as I said, it was August; it was extremely hot. We did a lot of marching.

C: Oh yes, to and from classes.

N: And also there were drills that we had to get out on the field.

C: Did you enjoy the classes that you took there?

N: Yes. We had very good instructors. I think you enjoy classes if you have somebody who is really clear and concise.

C: Were they men or women instructors?

N: Women.

C: Women instructors--WAVES who had been trained, I guess. Did you have examinations?

N: Yes, we did.

C: And obviously everybody passed, or you passed, most people passed. Did you find the classes easy or difficult?

N: I didn't think they were difficult.

C: Did you think the material was challenging?

N: It was more interesting than challenging. It was just something I hadn't studied before.

C: Did you get any homework at night?

N: No.

C: So you had your nights free. Do you remember if you had to march and review and drill every week?

N: Yes, we did. And we marched every time we went to eat or to pick up uniforms. We had to go to Kings Armory which was quite a distance away. We did have parade drills on the weekend. On our last weekend there, they let us have liberty. My mother and my sister came to New York so we could go into town and see shows.

C: Yes, to see something of the city before you departed. But the rest of the time did you have any free time on a Saturday or a Sunday?

N: No.

C: Did you have classes on Saturday?

N: We had cleaning the barracks, as they called it. It was very much like an apartment in New York City. It was a third floor walkup, and they were really strict about cleaning. I guess because it was summer time and because there was so many of us in a building, you wouldn't believe the dirt. For all the cleaning we did it was terribly dirty, but New York City was a dirty place. We also had to work in the mess hall.

C: Oh, you did. What did you do in the mess hall?

N: Yes. Well, sometimes it was just a case of clearing off trays, washing dishes. Everybody had the duty of doing that at some time or other.

C: Oh really. So they hadn't hired people to do that work, they used you to do it.

N: Yes.

C: Oh that's interesting, I didn't know that. What did you think of the mess hall cuisine, so to speak?

N: I didn't like it at Hunter. Of course, we ate off these large tin trays. That was something I could never get used to.

C: Right, kind of Navy issue. Did you have any opportunity for any recreation there at all?

N: None that I recall. We never had a dance, you know, a USO dance or anything that came to our area.

C: Did you ever have an opportunity to go to church during that time period?

N: We did. There was a law in the Navy at that time that you had to go to whatever church you were a member of. We marched to the church. It was in a building in New York City.

C: It wasn't on the campus then?

N: No, it wasn't. It was a regular church that we just went to at a specified time as a group.

C: So you went everywhere you went as a group. Did you have any trouble adjusting to military life during the six weeks indoctrination period?

N: No, I didn't.

C: You just kind of fell right into it?

N: I did. Yes.

C: Did you like the discipline of military life?

N: It was very much like the discipline I had going to parochial schools. We wore uniforms; we didn't have our choice of studies. If we were in a classical course, we took it. If we were in a commercial course, we took all the subjects that went with that. Pretty much you did what was laid out for you. That's the way the Navy was.

C: Yes. Absolutely. So it was an easy transition for you?

N: Yes.

C: Did you like being on your own and being away from home?

N: I think I missed home.

C: So you were a little homesick, perhaps, during that timeframe.

N: I remember getting packages. I was only away for six weeks, but I remember fruit cakes and different packages coming to me.

C: Did you write letters home during this timeframe about your experiences?

N: Yes.

C: Did your mother save any of these?

N: No.

C: That's unfortunate, because they would have been great as source material for that timeframe.

N: I always was sorry I didn't save a letter from my father too, because he wrote me such a lovely letter, but because we were moving and we had such small quarters I kept nothing.

C: Did you like wearing the military uniforms?

N: I didn't mind at all.

C: Did you learn the WAVES song when you were there?

N: Yes.

C: Do you remember any of the words to that.

N: "WAVES as a Navy, there's a ship sailing down the bay"--that song?

C: Yes.

N: And then there was, of course, the Navy hymn Eternal Father.

C: Did you ever have to sing those songs?

N: Yes.

C: On what occasion did you sing those?

N: When you had asked before about recreation, I think we gathered together in large assembly hall and we'd just sing songs because there were no televisions in those days, everything was radio. So we just had a sing-along.

C: That's great. That is a form of recreation then. Was that spontaneous, or was it planned?

N: No, that was organized.

C: Everything was organized--nothing spontaneous. Did you ever have the opportunity to meet Captain Amsden who was from Jamestown? He was head of Hunter College Boot Camp.

N: No.

C: Did you have a graduation ceremony when you finished the six weeks indoctrination and training?

N: No.

C: How were you selected for your specialty?

N: Probably based on the schooling that I had, because I went to Yeoman School, which is secretarial school, and I had completed a course in Rhode Island.

C: Did you express any preference for any specialty when you were asked?

N: No.

C: After you graduated, after the six weeks was over we're now about late September, 1944, did you need any additional training in your specialty? You were chosen to be a yeoman.

N: And we were sent to Cedar Falls, Iowa to school.

C: And what university was there?

N: State Teachers College in Iowa. It was either going to be a two-month or a three-month course and I did it in two months because I had the background in it. Some took the three months.

C: Where was this in Iowa--north, south, east, west?

N: Northern Iowa.

C: How did you get to Iowa from New York?

N: They laughingly called it cattle train. We went by train and there were triple bunks. It was a long ride. We went to Cedar Rapids, I believe, by train and then by bus the rest of the way to Cedar Falls.

C: It must at least have been two or three days to get out there.

N: It was a long ride, yes.

C: Were there solely WAVES on this train?

N: Yes, it was all of us just going to that facility.

C: Do you remember anything about the train ride?

N: Only that I was fortunate in that I wasn't in one of the triple decker bunks. I was in a section that had the pullman berths and I couldn't believe what the other girls were in--it was really horrible, one bunk on top of the other and it was hot on the train.

C: No air conditioning.

N: No, not in those days.

C: Do you remember if you did anything on the train? Did you sing?

N: There was a lot of singing; there was a lot of crossword puzzles done, and a lot of reading and a lot of just getting acquainted with people who, most of them, you never saw again anyhow because we were all separated when we got there according to our status and what we were going to take up there.

C: Did you have a feeling from the training at Hunter that there was a feeling of camaraderie and a esprit de corps among the WAVES that you met?

N: Yes, yes definitely.

C: Good! Well, here you are at Cedar Falls, Iowa, miles from RI and the East Coast, what were your impressions of Iowa state when you got there?

N: It was a lovely college. A nice small town that we were able to go into. There was a photographer--all of us went to have our picture taken in order to send our pictures home in uniform, a lovely little bakery and hairdressers, barber shop, things like that that a small town would have, a college town. The food was excellent on the college grounds. I guess we ate the same as what the coeds ate. It was mostly coeds there, too, because most of the men were not in college, they were all off to war. There was a very limited man supply at the college. And there, too, we went to church as a group. They had a church right on the college grounds and we marched, whatever our faith was, we marched to those services.

C: Did you live in dorms on the campus?

N: Yes.

C: Were you segregated from the coeds?

N: Yes, we were apart from the people that were going to the college. We were four to a room there. I was in a room (my name was Williams then) and I was in a room with three people whose

name was Williams and one girl whose name was Weed. We went alphabetically. Weed, Williams, Williams, and Williams.

C: Sounds like a law firm. Do you remember any of those gals?

N: Yes, because we were together for two months there and Virginia Williams ended up going to Hawaii, Shirley Williams went out west; and Princess Pat Weed, was a twin; her sister was also in the WAVES there, but she was in another room because it just happened to split up the alphabet--Rosemary Weed. They were from Illinois and I never did hear from them again.

C: Did you ever keep in contact with the other Williams gals?

N: Only briefly, and then as they shipped around I lost track of them.

C: Was it a congenial group?

N: Yes, it was a very nice group of girls.

C: You were there for two months. Did you go to class every day?

N: Yes we did. Every weekday.

C: And you had the weekends off?

N: Yes. That's when we used to go into town. I took a bus ride one day, with a group, into Waterloo, Iowa, We went to different towns around Iowa, as far as we could go. We had limits to how far we could leave the campus.

C: Oh I see, so they set rules as to distance.

N: Yes, they would advise us where we could go, how far we could travel.

C: I guess you couldn't be away for the night. You had to go back to the dorms. Was there any dating going on?

N: No.

C: Of course, there probably weren't too many men around as you said, and you were way out in Iowa so you had to pal around with the girls. What kinds of classes did you take at Iowa State?

N: Well, it was a brush-up on typing, shorthand, filing. We also had identification of Navy planes, not only Navy planes but Russian, German, other aircraft, other ships.

C: Were the instructors men or women?

N: Lady WAVES. WAVE officers or specialists. We had a lot of marching, a lot of calisthenics.

C: So they kept you in good shape physically. Did you have to take any tests at all? Do you remember?

N: Yes, we were tested weekly.

C: While you were at Iowa State taking the two-month course did anything unusual happen, or anything interesting or exciting or different during this timeframe?

N: The thing that I remember most was when we took a bus ride into Waterloo, Iowa. The bus driver led a guided tour. He pointed out a house in Waterloo that had five gold stars hanging in the window. A gold star at that time meant you lost someone in your family. It was the home of the Sullivans who lost five sons in the war in the Navy on the same ship. I can never forget that--that little old house with the five stars hanging in the window.

C: Yes, that is so famous; it's amazing that you saw that, because everybody knows about that family. That was very, very sobering at that time. Did you keep up with the war news at all? Did you know what was going on in the theaters of the war?

N: No, we didn't when we were in Iowa. We didn't see a newspaper at all.

C: Did you go to movies there?

N: No. There was no movie cinema in Cedar Falls at all that I can recall.

C: Because the newsreels would have given you some update on the war, so you were kind of cut off from news.

N: For the couple of months anyhow.

C: Did you write to your parents during this timeframe?

N: Yes, and they wrote me. My friends were all very good at writing to me.

C: That's great. So you kept up a lively correspondence. Did you encounter any discipline problems at all, or did you hear of any discipline problems at that time with any of the WAVES?

N: No, I didn't. There was one girl who always wore boots and we were surprised that she got away with wearing the boots. On her off time, but she always wore boots around. She is one that didn't graduate when we did or leave when we did, so I never knew

what happened to her, whether that was a disciplinary problem or not. That was as serious as it got. In those days wearing boots was quite out of the ordinary, but she was just a free spirit and she showed up at the meetings or whatever in boots all the time. No one ever said she couldn't wear them, but I just don't know whatever happened to her.

C: So no disciplinary problems among the WAVES?

N: None that I heard of.

C: Well, after the two months in Cedar Falls, where were you assigned and did you have a choice in your assignment?

N: We did have a choice. We were allowed to put down three choices and my three choices were local. I wanted Newport or Quonset Point (that had a large facility) or New York.

C: And what did you get?

N: I got my first choice of Newport, so I ended up at the Naval Operating Base in Newport in the communications office.

C: Did you choose Newport for any special reason?

N: Just because it was close to home.

C: And you may have a chance to go home during that timeframe.
What was your rate when you were sent to Newport, RI?

N: Seaman.

C: This must have been around December.

N: It was November, close to Thanksgiving.

C: Late November 1944 that you came to Newport, RI. Where did you work? What office did you work in?

N: The communications office right in the Naval Operating Base.

C: Where was that physically on the base?

N: It was beside the War College.

C: The Communications Station.

N: Later on, it was called the little White House when President Eisenhower visited Newport. It's gone now.

C: That was the Communications Station. I've been there twenty years and I remember it. It was a white wooden building.

N: And the men that were stationed at Naval Operating Base lived in the facility. They lived down below. We were on the first deck with the communications, the radio shack and the teletype machines, and Captain Pennypacker was commanding officer of the facility. Topside were the officers who did Top Secret work with the messages that came through the first deck. We did decoding, but it wasn't Top Secret. If it was a Top Secret message that came in, it was sent topside to the officers. They worked behind closed doors.

C: You must have had a secret clearance.

N: If I did, I wasn't aware of it.

C: Did you do the actual decoding?

N: Only if it wasn't Top Secret. It was decoding--we had a little machine.

C: How did that work?

N: We had a new code every day; it was a leaflet you might call it, with the new code and we had a stylus that we pushed down these figures on the machine and it would decode for us according to the day's plan, or what was being used for that particular day for the code.

C: Well, isn't that interesting. Was that the only thing that you did?

N: We accepted the messages from the radio shack which was right there, the teletype that took message from the ships close by, from the signal tower that was right on the grounds of the War College there, and we directed the different communications to whatever office it had to go to, or for the civilian facility it had to go to.

C: That sounds like quite a responsible job.

N: It was a very interesting job.

C: Did you work with other WAVES there?

N: There were two of us to a shift because it was around the clock work. We worked two days, then we would come back for the next shift which would be two evenings of an eight-hour shift. Then we would have time off and come back for two nights. We all worked that way, so there were two WAVES working at a time at the desk in the communications office.

C: And eight-hours shift each time.

N: Yes. Then there were also the WAVE officers upstairs. And Commander Pennypacker had a secretary who was a WAVE and she was in his office. Most of them were young enlisted men at the radio shack. We had one WAVE who worked the radio shack, but most were the young men. The civilians worked the teletype machines and they were under the direction of our Navy man, but they were civil service workers who operated the teletype machines.

C: That's kind of fascinating, very interesting work. Did you find it exciting and interesting and challenging?

N: Yes, I did.

C: Where did you live on the base? Where was the WAVES barracks?

N: It was down on the waterfront. It was a big white building. I think there were 100 of us to a deck.

C: How many decks?

N: Two floors. We had three double bunk beds to what they called a cubicle and one very small wooden cabinet that held our clothes and formed the basis of each cubicle. It was the background for the next group of three double bunks.

C: So it was one long room then?

N: It was one open room, which was difficult for us who had to work nights at times, because most worked a day job. But when we were on our night shift, we had to sleep days. It was very difficult to sleep in that big open room because a lot of the girls came home for lunch, came home to do their laundry, whatever at lunch time. It was noisy at that time. They opened up one room at the very end finally when some communications WAVES were having a difficult time trying to get rest, and they said we could all live in that. But that didn't work out any better because we were still in with people working different shifts, so it still meant that there was activity in the room. I didn't move into this special room. I stayed out with the friends that I had gotten to share the cubicle with.

C: Do you remember who those people were that you shared the cubicle with?

N: Yes.

C: Who were they?

N: One was Claire Tobin. I have shown you pictures of her. She was from Arlington, Massachusetts. One was Katie Koulcuardis.

She was a gal from Connecticut; Margaret Craig from Waterbury, Connecticut; Helen Battin who was from Newport.

C: I wonder if she's still here.

N: Some of them have married. Helen Battin, I know, married before I even was discharged and I don't even remember what her name is now.

C: So those were basically the people that you shared the cubicle with. Have you maintained any contact with them over the years?

N: They came to my wedding and visited me at my home years ago when I lived in Providence.

C: Fantastic.

N: Claire Tobin took a job as a civil servant and went to Japan and she was gone a while and then she got very ill. I don't know where she is now. You know when you move; I've moved several times. I keep checking my WAVES books to see if maybe they're members of one of the WAVE organization, but the names haven't occurred of those girls that I was so close to.

C: Yes, you just don't know. It's very hard. I don't know if every state has a chapter, but I imagine they have a unit at least. Every state should. Well, Newport was quite a different place in those days than it is today. There's been a lot of changes. What was the base like in those days?

N: We had a chapel on the base--not the same one that's there today--and we had what they called "Barracks B", which held the heating system, and I remember it having a fire, maybe 1945, and it controlled the heat to our barracks. We lost the heat; it was winter and we had no heat so my friends and I took a room at the Viking Hotel until that got straightened out.

C: You did? You were allowed to do that?

N: Oh, yes. I could have lived at home if I wanted then. There were no restrictions as to where we lived.

C: Oh really! Why did you choose to live in the barracks then?

N: Well, Providence would have been quite a bus ride every day. A very sad thing happened in December. I came to Newport in November. My brother died and he was only 26 years old, and it was a sudden death. My brother had been married and had a child. His widow and son came to live with my parents, so it would have been a little crowded at home. My sister was a school teacher

and she was still at home at the time; she hadn't married. So that would have been a problem.

C: Sure. It makes sense living in the WAVES barracks.

N: But I did go home the first year. I think I was home every weekend that I had a full weekend off. I did go home then.

C: Did you have to work Saturdays at all?

N: Yes, we did. No matter what it was if it was the way our shift rotated two days on, two evenings on, and then whenever our days off came. Sometimes it would be a weekend. Sometimes we'd work Easter, Christmas, whatever, if it just worked out that way, because it was an office that was open all the time.

C: Sure. So you would have some weekends off or the middle of the week off. It just depends. Did you have a mess hall in the WAVES barracks?

N: Yes. The building next door to us, on the first deck, had a mess hall and I think topside in that building some sailors lived. Maybe they were the mess cooks or whatever, but we did have a mess hall.

C: Did you have to march to work?

N: No.

C: That portion of your activity was over. Did they provide any recreation on the base for you?

N: Oh, there was a lot. They used to have a USO. They used to come on and put on shows, and the Navy had their own band. They had groups that performed for us. And then, of course, Newport had theaters and what not right in town. There was always a dance or something in Newport itself.

C: Did the USO have a canteen in Newport?

N: Yes, it did.

C: Do you remember where that was located? What street? Was it Thames Street downtown?

N: It wasn't Thames, it was maybe Touro Street.

C: Did you go down there to the Canteen?

N: Yes. I remember sometimes they'd have a palmist; they had dances and nice times there; playing cards and doing different things. I was there six months and I started dating, so I didn't really go too much to the USO things.

C: What kind of dates did you go on? Where did you go?

N: We went to the movies a lot. Went to the beach in the summer. We rented bikes and we rode bikes. I think it was a whole groups of us there, but it was only one young sailor that had a car. No one had a car; there was no gas anyhow. Once in awhile we'd all pile into the car and go somewhere.

C: And there was gas rationing then, too.

N: We didn't go far. We stayed in Newport always. When I went home it was always by bus.

C: Did you date sailors there?

N: Yes, officers and enlisted.

C: Did you have any serious romances there?

N: Yes. I became engaged to the man I married, who was a signalman there. He worked in the signal tower. We met through work, because he communicated to my office from the signal tower. He also lived in the building where we worked. It was the barracks for any male enlisted connected with NOB.

C: Where was he from?

N: Philadelphia.

C: Oh, so from another state. Was he just in for the duration of the war or did he continue in service?

N: He had joined because of the war and he had been in five invasions and this was his final tour after he had been through so much.

C: Was he in the Pacific?

N: He was in the Atlantic--Anzio and Sicily, North Africa and Italy.

C: Oh that's fascinating. Was he wounded at all?

N: No.

C: Luckily. But they gave him a better assignment after that. Do you remember what Newport itself was like in those days? Was it full of service people?

N: It seemed to be. A lot of servicemen.

C: Did you get any impressions of how the townsfolk reacted to the Navy in Newport?

N: I think they were very indifferent to them.

C: What makes you say that?

N: Because a few of the men would come back and say how they had gotten involved in something in town that annoyed them. I myself, nothing ever bothered me, and, of course, I was a Rhode Islander to begin with. That could, maybe you know, people from different areas of the country did not care for New England. I don't know.

C: Maybe that made a difference. You understood Rhode Island. Did anything unusual happen during this assignment?

N: Not that I recall.

C: Anything amusing?

N: The biggest thing, as I said, was that Barracks B burned down that housed our heating units. It didn't last that long. I really don't know how they got it back so soon because we weren't without heat for that long a time for such a big house. We were right on the waterfront and it was very cold. I do remember that. It was very cold when it happened.

C: Oh, sure. With the wind off the bay. Did you feel, during this service in Newport, that you were discriminated against in any way because you were a female?

N: No.

C: How were your working relations with the sailors and Captain Pennypacker?

N: They were all the most wonderful bunch of people, everyone of them.

C: So no discrimination? No hostility? No harassment?

N: They treated us wonderfully. You never heard them do or say anything that would be harassment, like today.

C: You were commenting on the sailors and the men that you worked with both civilians and military.

N: I had the greatest respect for all of them.

C: And they were a good bunch of people?

N: Very good bunch.

C: Do you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of purpose and esprit de corps in Newport?

N: Yes, I do.

C: How long were you in this assignment at the communications station?

N: I was there the whole time I was in the service until I got out in May of '46. We had the point system. You got out according to how many points you accrued after the war ended. Because when we signed up we were in for the duration of the war and six months. They had a way of working it out so that most of us all went to Boston and were discharged around the same time.

C: In May '46?

N: Yes.

C: So you stayed a little bit longer than the six months?

N: Yes.

C: And you were in Newport up to that point in time?

N: Yes, I was. I never asked for a change of billet. I liked it there. It was my first choice and I was pleased with it.

C: Do you remember where you were on VJ Day on August 15, 1945?

N: I was working.

C: What was your reaction to the news that the war was over?

N: We couldn't believe it. We really couldn't believe, it and the next day was the Catholic observance of a Holy Day and I remember all the young men going off to church and I said; "oh, how nice they're all going because the war ended." They laughed. They said to me, "Boy, you've been working too long; you forgot it was a Holy Day." But there was just kissing and hugging all over the place when that happened. Everybody was so happy.

C: Did you go out and celebrate at all that night?

N: No, I didn't. I know a lot of them did, because I was working when they all came back in, but I think I might have been working the second shift that night.

C: So there was a lot of jubilation. I just wondered how Newport celebrated. Do you remember what your rate and your pay was when you mustered out of the Navy?

N: I think it was \$78.00 a month. I was a Yeoman Third Class.

C: Were you happy or sad to leave the Navy.

N: I wasn't sad to leave because I was engaged and I was going to be getting married the following year, but I was sad as the different ones were leaving all the time--the men that were leaving because they were getting discharged--I felt a loss that way. And then when I and four of my close friends all ended up in Boston, and that was a goodbye there in Boston. I was unhappy about that just because you don't know when you're going to see them again, and you were close when you lived with somebody for a year and a half. Everybody went on to different things.

C: Would you have considered remaining in the Navy if you could have?

N: I could have. The reason I didn't was I was engaged. The man I was engaged to was out before I was.

C: He was discharged?

N: Yes. I knew that my father and mother were thinking I was going to come out once the war was ended. When I look back on it now I'm sort of sorry I didn't stay in because I did like it, but

maybe things wouldn't have stayed the same as it was in wartime when I was there.

C: Did you ever have a chance to meet or to see Mildred MacAfee who was the WAVES director?

N: No.

C: Did you feel that the WAVES was a smoothly run organization?

N: Yes, I did.

C: Probably by 1944 they had ironed out any problems that they had. Did the WAVES meet your expectations?

N: Yes.

C: Did you think that the WAVES provided you with any opportunities that you would not have had in civilian life?

N: Not in my particular field. I think I would have gone into the secretarial line anyhow.

C: Do you feel that you were challenged or that you had learned many new things during this time frame?

N: What I learned I couldn't use in another area, the decoding and navy procedures. It was something that was just critical to that particular job.

C: Highly specialized.

N: The typing even was different. It was more like the Western Union typing. You used all caps. You didn't use periods, commas or any punctuation, and everything was done in capital letters. It was a special typewriter. And a manual typewriter--not like today's typewriters--not even electric--it was just a manual typewriter.

C: Right, I remember those old things. They're antiques now. You have to pound away on them. Did the WAVES experience and the war change or redirect your life in any way?

N: I suppose it did, and I'm not aware of how it did, but it certainly must have.

C: Did the war make you feel more independent and self-reliant?

N: Yes.

C: Do you think the WAVES experience broadened your horizons in any way?

N: It did because I met people from all over, from one coast to the other, from all different backgrounds, some from the hills of Kentucky. I guess my life was more sheltered. I went to two schools in my whole life. I went nine grades to a Catholic school and then three more years of private high school. It was just that nobody was out of my own area, both religious-wise or community-wise.

C: Did you like this broadening experience and meeting new people?

N: Yes. I think it's so necessary.

C: Oh it is; I fully agree with you. Did you have any career ambitions as a result of military service?

N: No, I didn't. The man I married didn't want me to work after marriage, so I gave up the civilian job I had. I went to work for the telephone company, after I got out of the service, in the business office.

C: Where was that?

N: In downtown Providence, RI.

C: Where were you married and when?

N: I was married in 1947, July, in Providence.

C: Did you live there after the war?

N: I lived in Providence.

C: Did you feel that what women were expected to do and to be changed when the war was over, or do you think women were going to go back to being housewives as they had been?

N: No. I think so many more were for careers.

C: Because of the war experience?

N: At least the friends that I had made right there in Newport, all were career women.

C: Oh, that's interesting. And they pursued careers after the war. After the war you said you worked in the telephone company for a little bit and after you were married did you not work.

N: That's right and I started having a family. I had four children.

C: How would you sum up your WAVES experience and its significance for you and your life?

N: Well, I look back and I'm very proud of the time I spent in. I don't know if anybody else would think I did a great job, but I was pleased with what I did. I know I worked hard.

C: Oh that's great! Are you a member of the Ocean State WAVES?

N: Yes. I was the first treasurer.

C: Oh, you were? When was the organization founded?

N: Just about four years ago.

C: Okay, so it's relatively new.

N: Rosetta Desrosiers was its first president and I was the first treasurer. We were in for two years. "National" does not want you in office more than two years and a new group came in and now their time is up, so that's why I'm saying it's about four years, because there is a new group going in this June.

C: Have you attended any of their conferences of both the national and of the local meetings?

N: I go to the local, I haven't gone out of state to any of the conferences. I've gone to the memorials at the Cathedral in the Pines that one of the other units sponsored and, they have a

memorial service for those members who have died. It's in New Hampshire. As for the conferences, I haven't gone to any out of state.

C: One of the gals mentioned that they did have WAVES reunions in the post-war period. Did you go to any of those?

N: Yes, I went to a WAVES reunion that was in Boston and I did meet my friends there.

C: When was that?

N: Oh my, I was expecting my second child at the time, so I'm going to say it was 1949. It was at a hotel in Boston and that was before we heard about the WAVES organizations. That was just a regular WAVES reunion.

C: How is that organized? Did they have special events or just meetings or was it just social?

N: It was just social. It was a planned dinner. We got together that way. We met in our hotel rooms, those that were planning to meet when we got to Boston. But there weren't any activities like now. The national organization that we have now, the WAVES National group, they have several days of convention. This was different. This was just a reunion day and a dinner in

the evening. We stayed overnight, but that was it. Just one overnight that we made plans for ourselves.

C: Did you meet up with the group from Newport or from Cedar Falls?

N: Newport. Because they were really New England girls, too. They were Connecticut and Massachusetts predominantly.

C: Do you have any other comments on your service in the WAVES?

N: No. I wish I could remember more. Fifty years is a long time. You lose so much with all the different things that go on in your life.

C: That's true. It's not easy, but I want to thank you very much for participating in our program on the WAVES in World War II. We'll have this transcribed and sent over to you for editing. Thank you.

N: Thank you for honoring us this way.

C: You're welcome!

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