

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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WAVES

NO. 24

EDITH SMITH

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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Interviewee: Edith Smith

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: May 23, 1995

C: Mrs. Smith, I'm so glad you were able to come to the War College today for the interview on your very interesting career, part of which was in Newport, RI, at the Naval Torpedo Station. But before we launch into you career in the WAVES, I wonder if you could tell me where and when you were born.

S: I was born May 2, 1924 in Woonsocket, RI.

C: What did your father do for a living?

S: My father managed a sporting goods store.

C: And what did your mother do?

S: My mother was a housewife.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

S: I have one sister and one brother.

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

S: I went to Andrews Street School, Woonsocket, RI and Woonsocket High School.

C: When did you graduate from high school?

S: I graduated in June 1941.

C: Before the war had even begun. What kind of a course did you take in high school and what were your career aims?

S: I took a business course in high school.

C: And I assume you wanted to work in the business world?

S: Yes.

C: Where were you employed after you graduated from high school?

S: I worked in the office of the Slatersville Finishing Company, Slatersville, RI.

C: Sounds like something to do with a mill.

S: Yes, it was, and they made mosquito netting for the war, plus numerous other things. They also finished cloth.

C: They were still operative back in those days, the mills. They've kind of departed by now.

S: It closed many years ago. I was in the payroll department.

C: Did you figure payroll obviously for the workers?

S: Yes, I was one of Nora's assistants. I also kept a record of the War Bond Payroll deductions (which was quite popular during that period).

C: Did you like this work?

S: I did. I liked business work very much.

C: Did you stay there until you enlisted in the Navy?

S: Yes. I graduated when I was 17 and I worked there 3 years, and joined the Navy when I was 20.

C: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941?

S: Yes. It was a Sunday afternoon and my girlfriend and I were in the Stadium Theater in Woonsocket, RI. We were coming out of the theater and she saw a friend of hers whom she liked quite well--her boyfriend, so to speak--and he told us, "the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." "Well, where was Pearl Harbor?" we said. We had to stop and think, and Raymond said, "Hawaii. Isn't that terrible! That's very close to California," and the conversation went on from there.

C: Were you shocked by this?

S: We were very shocked. We were 18 years old. I think we had a different outlook perhaps than a person 35 or 40.

C: I'm sure you did.

S: But I think Raymond was the one who was a little shaky. He knew he would have to be going off to service.

C: That's right because the women really hadn't had any military experience in our country before then so it wasn't a threat to them.

S: But I couldn't wait to get home to tell my mother and dad. She had married my father during World War I.

C: In World War II there would be a lot more war brides, too.

S: Yes, her two daughters.

C: Exactly. You stayed at your job until 1944. I'm kind of interested in finding out how you heard about the WAVES and why you decided to join the Navy.

S: I guess it was the poster at the Post Office showing a girl saying goodbye to her sailor. The poster read: "Join the WAVES and bring your loved one home sooner." I favored the Navy because I had met Jimmy and he had just enlisted in the Navy.

C: Can you tell us who Jimmy was?

S: Well, when I was eighteen we were on vacation at Hampton Beach. I went to the dance one night at the casino and he asked me to dance and that's how I met Jimmy. The Summer of '42.

C: Right, just like the movie. Where was Jimmy from?

S: (A little different from the movie.) He was from Norwood, Massachusetts.

C: Was he in the Navy when you met him?

S: No, he was a civilian. He had just signed up for a six year hitch.

C: Did you start going together after that dance?

S: Yes, and we wrote letters and he came to my home as he could come by train to Woonsocket from Norwood. We just kept on seeing each other as he was stationed at the Newport Naval Training Station.

C: What was your future husband training in?

S: After his 6 week boot camp he was assigned to Motor Torpedo Boats, "PT Boats." He was stationed at Melville, R.I.

C: So you had a romance with someone who was in the Navy prior to your joining the Navy. Was your brother in the service?

S: No, not at the time. He was two years younger than I and he graduated in '43 from High School and joined the Army-Air Force.

C: You had, of course, to wait until you were 20 to join the WAVES.

S: Yes. You could join the WACS at eighteen, I believe, but the WAVES had to wait until they were twenty.



C: Did any of your friends, any of your girlfriends, enlist in the WAVES?

S: Yes, I did have a girlfriend who was a year older than I. She joined the WAVES.

C: But your inspiration, of course, came from the poster and from your boyfriend being involved in the Navy. How did your parents feel about your enlisting?

S: Well, my mother said to me, "I hate to see you leave home, but no matter where you are assigned, I'm sure you will choose your friends wisely."

C: That's a wonderful tribute. Was your father supportive?

S: He went along with my mother. They hated to see me go. My sister had just had a baby and she was living at home with mother and dad as her husband was in the Pacific, and she said, "oh, Edith, you'll miss Gail growing up." And I said I know but.... I just felt as though I had to do something. It seemed as though the war was going to go on and on and on forever. Not that I lost my faith, but I just felt I wanted to help out. Everybody was going in that patriotic direction. Everyone was going somewhere. The streets were empty. I belonged to the Business

Women's Club at the "Y" and we would go to dances on Saturday nights and...

C: Where were the men? There weren't any.

S: I was in a bowling league and also writing letters every night. My sister and I would push back the lace tablecloth on my mother's dining room table and we'd sit down and write our letters; then we'd pin up our hair with bobby pins and suffer all night with sore heads with those bobby pins; then we had to get ready for work the next day and it would start again. Reading the morning newspaper and listening to Gabriel Heater on the radio news in the evening. My father was a faithful follower of Mr. Heater's.

C: Did you write to your brother and to your brother-in-law and friends, your boyfriend?

S: Yes, I did.

C: So you were busy writing lots of letter. Too bad we don't have some of those letters. That's what a lot of people want to collect today.

S: I wish I had kept the V-mails and letters. The boys used V-mail. They consisted of short messages and to the point.

C: The V-grams. They're marvelous. Well, you decided to enlist in the WAVES and where did you have to go to enlist?

S: I had to go to Boston, the First Naval District.

C: Did you take the train?

S: I took the train from Blackstone Station, which was right over the border from Woonsocket and went into Boston.

C: Did you go by yourself?

S: No, my mother went with me.

C: I know a lot of the ladies had their mothers go with them, which is kind of interesting. Well, you marched into this recruiting station, and what procedures did you have to follow to enlist? What did you have to do once you got there?

S: Sort of give them your life history as I'm doing now.

C: Do you remember having to take any tests?

S: We did have to take tests, an IQ test and a physical.

C: Were you sworn in that day?

S: Oh, no. They sent me a letter as to when the swearing in would take place.

C: Did you remember what timeframe that was? What year and month you were sworn in?

S: That was in '44. It was in the summer. My departing date was November 16, 1944. They also sent me a list of all things to bring and what not to bring.

C: Right, you had to wait a few months before you went to bootcamp. Was there any publicity in the local papers about your joining the WAVES?

S: Yes--a picture with a write-up about my enlisting, and also about my brother being in the Army Air Force, so my folks could hang two stars in their window.

C: Well, come November you were off. How did you feel about leaving your job?

S: There were twenty-five girls in the office and they were just wonderful people. It was like a big family, I knew I would miss them. I was taking on something different and just couldn't wait to get going.

C: Oh I'm sure. So you were happy then?

S: Yes. I was in a happy frame. Mixed emotions.

C: You set off for your boot camp, so to speak, your training and indoctrination. Where did you go for bootcamp?

S: I went to Hunter College in the Bronx, New York.

C: And for what length of time?

S: Six weeks basic training.

C: How did you get down from Woonsocket to New York?

S: My father walked me to the bus stop (in Woonsocket) and we said goodbye. I had said goodbye to my mother at home. In those days you walked everywhere. I went to the Providence terminal and we were to meet under a special sign in the terminal and all the girls were gathering and there was one girl in charge of it all, a future WAVE. She seemed older and more experienced. We all were in our civilian clothes with our suitcases and it didn't take long to get to know each other. We had a brown bag lunch given to us to eat on the train. It was early morning and we were on the train to New York. I sat with three girls and I do

have their names in my scrapbook. You know, I never met up with those girls again.

C: But they were all local girls?

S: Yes.

C: Oh isn't that interesting that you went en masse to New York.

S: Yes. Upon arriving in New York City, we got on the subway to Hunter College in the Bronx. Our new clothing was distributed to us at the armory on the campus.

C: So you had to be processed there, I assume.

S: Oh, yes. That was quite a day.

C: And you got your clothing you mentioned.

S: Yes. Uniforms, etc., etc.

C: It's whatever you needed. How did you feel when you landed in New York City and after this first day?

S: They kept you so busy you didn't have time to think. It was just wonderful. While I was in the armory, they mentioned having

a singing platoon. All interested in joining were to form another line and one by one sing a few bars of any tune. I can't remember what I sang but I then became a member of the singing platoon. There were two platoons, 3832 and 3831, approximately forty girls in each. We practiced a good part of the time, which did take us away from marching. It turned out to be a good deal, although we didn't miss out on the basic training and the Naval History, etc.

C: Tell us more about this singing platoon. What was the purpose behind it?

S: To entertain the recruits. Any entertainment on the Base, we were always there, and we had our music ready and we just sang our hearts out. Ray Charles was our director; he was the Ray Charles who was music director and arranger for Perry Como.

C: What kind of songs did you sing? Were they the popular ones of the period?

S: Popular songs of the period.

C: And basically for WAVES entertainment. Did you have any other opportunities to perform publicly with this singing platoon?

S: Yes. We were told we were going to sing on the NBC radio show with Perry Como.

C: That must have been a thrill.

S: It was a thrill. The practising began. We were to sing backup to all his songs on his 15 minute program. I called my mother to make sure she called all our relatives. I guess everybody was listening that night. We took the subway to New York City from the Bronx, got off the subway and at four abreast, literally marched down the street to the NBC studio. I can't remember how far a march that was but we made it. The traffic stopped and the people were standing still and, clapping on the sidewalk. It was really a thrill. Once in the studio, Perry came on and said, "I love ya WAVES, I love ya." We all screamed!!! Then we got the red light to be quiet and the program began. One of our favorites was the "Lord's Prayer." That was just wonderful. The arrangements were super. Then he sang "Jingle Bells" and we sang the backup. It was just a thrill. We could have bought that record for \$5.00, not many girls could afford to buy it. That was a lot of money in those days. I do have regrets about not being able to purchase that record.

C: It was. As you said, it was like \$50.



S: Right, but I wish I had that record today.

C: That would have been a wonderful record of your singing as part of this group.

S: Yes. And of course no one could tape it at home. We didn't have such things.

C: Were you an alto or soprano?

S: Alto.

C: So that was quite an unusual happening during this six weeks.

S: We were the envy of Hunter College that night, because he was quite popular in '44.

C: Oh, he was. He was a popular singer of that period. Did you have to attend classes, too, during this timeframe?

S: Oh yes, we attended classes learning all about the Navy--very interesting. Keeping up with the war--current events. I loved that the most, as my friend Jimmy was in Europe.

C: I was going to ask you if you kept up with the news about the war.

S: Oh yes, that was a special class.

C: Did you have to march and drill much during this timeframe, or were you excused from it?

S: We were always practicing, but we had to march wherever we had to go. We'd always sing when we marched. I don't know if the other platoons did, but we did. We always sang. What great marching songs we learned.

C: Living up to your reputation as a singing platoon.

S: Right. In the rain and in the snow because we were there in the winter. We had the proper gear to wear so we were warm.

C: Did you make any lasting friendship during this initial training period?

S: Not from boot camp, but one of the girls I met at the Torpedo Station lives in Sacramento, California, and I always write to her at Christmas time; we always exchange a long letter with our card. She has four sons and I have one son, and, of course, now she has many grandchildren. I have two, one of each. Since joining Ocean State Waves #118, I met Ruth Crompton who was stationed at TorpSta, and from Pawtucket, R.I.

C: That's great! So that was from your Newport days. Did you like your living arrangements? Did you get used to them at Hunter.

S: Oh, yes. We had three bunk beds in our room, six to a room. They told us we were all going to have an "admiral" at the bottom of our bed. Well, that scared us a little, but the extra blanket was the admiral! In Building "M," we were on the fourth floor (no elevators). More exercise! Oh yes, one bathroom for the six girls. We all had so many shelves to stow our gear and we shared the closet space.

C: Oh, for heavens sake! Did you have to do any work in the dorm?

S: We had to take turns scrubbing the floors. We had to keep our clothes folded just so. Inspection was weekly.

C: Did you pass inspection?

S: Most of the time. We had to make our beds a certain way-- "square the sheets" and fold the "admiral" just so. Spit and shine was our motto.

C: Did you have any trouble at all adjusting to military life during the six weeks?

S: No. I just enjoyed it, everything fell into place. It was a well organized Navy. Always somewhere to go, no time to think.

C: So that kept you very trim then.

S: Yes, it did. The food was so good and the cooks made their own bread. I'd always wrap a few extra slices for bedtime.

C: Did you like being on your own, so to speak, for this six weeks?

S: You're on your own, but 39 other girls just followed the rules and never asked "why." We didn't have time to ask "why."

C: Did you feel homesick at all?

S: No I wasn't. I'd write my letters every chance I got; we were kept so busy--no time to think. It was my first Christmas away from home and on Christmas Eve they showed the movie "Meet Me in St. Louis" with Judy Garland; there wasn't a dry-eye in the platoon. That was such a family oriented picture.

C: Did you like the discipline of military life?

S: Yes. It didn't bother me at all.

C: Because it was vastly different than being a civilian and having your job.

S: I sort of expected we had to obey orders. So I programmed myself.

C: Did you like wearing the uniforms?

S: I loved the uniform, but it was a number of years before I wore Navy blue after being discharged.

C: Did you have any time off during basic training, any liberty, any leave?

S: Yes. We had one weekend during the six weeks. My mother and father came to New York City, which was a thrill for them, and I met them at the hotel. We went to Radio City Music Hall and saw "National Velvet" with Elizabeth Taylor, along with the Christmas show with the Rockettes. That movie is now considered a classic!

C: Yes, it is a classic.

S: We went shopping and sightseeing but the show stands out in my memory.

C: Right, that would have been Christmas time that you were just about finishing up there. Did you get any leave after you left the Bronx?

S: No, we went right to our training. I was chosen to go to Oklahoma A&M in Stillwater, Oklahoma, for yeoman training.

C: How were you selected for this specialty? Did you have any input into it?

S: I don't have any idea. Perhaps because I had three years training in an office they sent me to yeoman school.

C: That makes sense based on your past training. So this was a period of additional training. How did you get out from New York to Stillwater, Oklahoma?

S: They put us on a train one night advising us we were going via Canada. I look at the map on occasion and wonder how I ever got to Oklahoma via Canada.

C: You did go via Canada then?

S: Yes. We went through Canada. We touched it somehow or other. We must have gone the northern route, wouldn't you say?

C: Absolutely.

S: It was quite a cow train.

C: Do you remember what the atmosphere on the train was like and what you did?

S: Well, I know I was on the fourth bunk. They were four high. It was very uncomfortable. But we just laughed about it. It seemed everybody could handle it. At any station stop, there would be coffee and donuts or soda or whatever provided by the Red Cross.

C: Yes, they supported the people in the military. Well, when you got to Stillwater, Oklahoma, you were going to be trained as a yeoman. Can you tell me anything about the campus and where you lived on the campus?

S: It was just a beautiful place. We lived in Willard Hall. It had all maple furniture I remember. Everything was just lovely and neat and clean and there were four girls to a room there. Two bunkbeds, and two double desks.

C: Less crowded. How long was your stay in Oklahoma?

S: Three months training.

C: Intensive training. How was your day structured during that timeframe?

S: We went to school from eight to four every day. We'd have Saturdays and Sundays off. You couldn't leave the campus. Once in a while you would be able to go to Oklahoma City or Tulsa with a special pass. Those were the two cities we visited. We'd take a bus, maybe six of us would go together.

C: Just seeing the sights?

S: Yes. At the bus station the Indians would be sitting there in their Indian garb with the long braids in their hair. Sunday was a big day for them. They just sat in the bus station and watched the goings on.

C: Peculiar type of recreation. Anyway were any of the Indians on the campus?

S: Yes, they were going to college on the campus. They had a special section of the campus. We never did know where they were, but we were told that the Indians were going to college there. Military service was voluntary for them. A number of Indians did enlist.



C: You were totally segregated, I would assume, from the rest of the students.

S: The Navy had taken over the entire college. There weren't any students, other than the Indians.

C: Oh, I see. I thought maybe there were others attending at the same time.

S: Not to my knowledge. We never did see any civilians. I could be wrong.

C: What kind of classes did you take during this three month training?

S: Shorthand, typewriting, current events again and then we had a memory course which was marvelous. They taught us how to speed read, how to study and how to memorize. We had business training--the Navy way. They have their own way of doing things. We also had gymnastics.

C: Did you have to march and drill in Oklahoma as well?

S: Yes, we did that. Everywhere we went we had to march. They had bicycles also. We could ride bikes on the campus. We had many regimental reviews.

C: What did that consist of?

S: It consisted of all the officers and recruits marching either in the armory, if it was a bad day, or on the outside at the stadium area.

C: That's interesting and then you would be reviewed. Would you be marked or graded on this or pass or fail?

S: I suppose so. I never heard anything bad about us, so I assume we passed. It was just a wonderful time. We had a beautiful lounge at the college and there was always a piano player. One of the girls would play and we'd sing. It was just comfortable, just a beautiful experience. The food was so good at the college; all vegetables were from the nearby farms.

C: Would you say there was a lot of camaraderie and good feeling among the WAVES?

S: Yes.

C: Was there a lot of patriotism?

S: A lot of patriotism and everyone had a different story to tell as to why they were there. Some had POWs in their family,

so many sad stories, so many happy stories, but so much patriotism.

C: It's amazing.

S: The whole country...

C: Yes, was pulling together then. Did the Navy offer you any social activities during this timeframe? Did they plan any dances or anything like that?

S: We had shows at Stillwater. There were dances at the USOs in Oklahoma City and in Tulsa that we visited. Many soldiers in that area and Air Force.

S: There was a radio school at another college nearby. We never seemed to get together.

C: That's good. Well, you weren't looking for male companionship. You were busy writing to your beau then.

S: That's right, but he didn't mind if I went out dancing. I'm sure he did if he had a chance. It took at least four weeks before a letter got through.

C: Really, it was that long?

S: Three or four weeks.

C: After you finished in Stillwater, where were you assigned next?

S: We had a choice of where we would like to go. I knew I wanted to go to the East Coast, so I asked for New York, Washington or Boston. I was chosen to go to Boston and thrilled about it because I knew my boyfriend was in Europe and he would be coming back to Melville, RI, the PT Boat base. I figured if I were somewhere on the East Coast we could get together somehow or other. I arrived in Boston and they told me they had one open billet for Newport, RI, at the Naval Torpedo Station on Goat Island. Well, I had to hold back! I could have screamed with joy, but I just played it cool and said, "Yes, that's fine." They told me to leave immediately and to get a bus to Providence at Park Square.

C: What a wonderful coincidence.

S: So I got on the bus and went directly to Providence, then changed buses and on to Newport.

C: Oh, you did? Did you report in immediately?

S: Yes. I had to report to the Torpedo Station on Goat Island. I must have had instructions as to how to get there. Getting on the ferry, I showed my orders to the Marine guard and he told me which building I was to report to. It was the "Marina Pub," (as they call it today). It was the Personnel Office on the second floor.

C: That you reported to?

S: That I reported to.

C: Right. Now we have to make sure that everybody understands the Torpedo Station was on Goat Island at that time. It wasn't in Newport.

S: Yes. I had to take the ferry boat over.

C: Right! What was your rate at that time?

S: I was a seaman second class but upon arriving and working in personnel I tried for yeoman third class. They told me I would get that right away because of my training at Stillwater and I did. I had it within weeks.

C: When you reported to Newport, RI and to the Torpedo Station what was your job? What was your assignment there?

S: I was receiving and discharging yeomen. I handled all personnel being transferred to other stations and received personnel being transferred to TorpSta, also personnel being discharged. There must have been six or seven girls in the office. It was a very busy office and very interesting. At the end of the day, the girls brought me over to Perry Mill, my new home.

C: And those were all WAVES, I assume.

S: They were all WAVES, yes. We had one Chief, George Lacky. He was the office manager. Over him was a WAVE Ensign and Lieutenant Simmons (male) was our Executive Officer.

C: It's interesting that you lived in Perry Mill because it is a condo and restaurant building now.

S: Yes. It's really very classy. It was just an old mill at the time, but very neat and clean and we had a security guard at the front entrance.

C: They must have converted it.

S: They converted it and we had lovely rooms, two girls to a room, twin beds and each had a bureau and the showers and the bathrooms were down the hall. We all shared those facilities.

One great big room. Just women. Just WAVES lived on the second floor and civilian girls who worked for the government lived on the first floor. There was always someone on guard duty there. The doors were always locked.

C: You were well protected. Were dining facilities there?

S: No, we always ate at the base. We ate at the Torpedo Station Mess Hall. There was a tailor shop set up at the base also. The tailor was a cute little man and he used to adjust our outfits. He would say, "you want it tighter than that. Your uniform is too loose."

C: Do you remember who your roommate was from Perry Mill days?

S: Althea Newton from Springfield, Mass. She was married after the war, '46, and we lost track of each other.

C: That's very interesting. I wasn't aware that Perry Mill had been converted to a WAVES barracks.

S: They did a fine job. We thought it was very nice, but, of course, it wasn't as nice as it is now. But that is progress.

C: I know. It's changed entirely. Did you like your job in the personnel department?

S: It was a very interesting job. I liked it very much.

C: How many hours a day did you work?

S: We worked 8:00-5:00.

C: Did you work on Saturdays at all?

S: We had to stand four hour watches working in the Library at the TorpSta on a Saturday, Sunday, or an evening. A schedule was posted each month.

C: Oh I see, so were you doing some sort of library work?

S: Yes.

C: But the Navy called it a "watch." That's very interesting.

S: According to another schedule, we would have to inspect the TorpSta on a Sat. A.M. The captain would lead and everything he liked or didn't like would be noted by the WAVE during the inspection. He had two officers and one sailor with him, his aides, I presume. After inspection, the WAVE would type all the notes and have it sent over to the Captain who in turn had the problems taken care of.



C: Were you the only one or were there other WAVES?

S: No, we all had a turn. Maybe it was once every two months because there must have been eight or ten girls. The WAVES never looked forward to that duty. In today's terms, I would call it "stressful," but we all survived!

C: It must have been a command inspection.

S: Yes. Very nervous; we were very nervous doing this because we had to write a report from our notes. The Captain walked so fast and talked so fast and complained about everything.

C: Can you describe what conditions were like at the Naval Torpedo Station? Was it busy and bustling back and forth?

S: The only time I ever saw the Torpedo Station was during these inspections. You see, we worked at our office in a separate building and never went into the factory where they were making the torpedoes. We went in daily to eat at the Mess Hall or go to the tailor if need be and, of course, on payday.

C: Right, so you really had no contact then.

S: No, no contact at all, except when I went on inspection. They did work seven days a week over there, so it was bustling.

C: Can you tell me how the townsfolk in Newport reacted to the Navy presence there, because it was enormous during the war? What did you observe?

S: I found that everyone was very friendly; however, housing was hard to come by. We finally found a two-room apartment, after we were married on Tilley Avenue with Mr. and Mrs. Farrell; they were lovely people. Mr. Farrell was a fireman out at Melville, so my husband went back and forth to work with him.

C: Did you notice any negative feeling on the part of the townsfolk toward the Navy at all?

S: Well, I suppose there was some, but we never ran into it. They say, the signs years ago, read: "Dogs and sailors keep off the grass." The girls and I seemed to find only good people. I only have good things to say about Newport. I loved my job, I liked the Navy, my boyfriend came home from Europe safe and sound and we were married and we lived in Newport and I was close to my folks (Woonsocket) and he was close to his folks (Norwood, Ma.).

C: Did you have any time for recreation during this time?

S: We used to go to dances, and movies.

C: Was there a USO in Newport?

S: The Masonic Temple held dances. I can't remember a USO. I remember the Seaman's Institute; my husband and I played pool there.

C: Or a canteen or anything like that?

S: It seems as though there must have been one, you could go to a dance every night in the week, if you could keep up with it. There was always something going on. On weekends I would always go home because I was so close. Just jump on the bus and go home. My mother said all my money was going into the bus company. After we were married, one weekend we'd stay with my folks and one weekend with his folks.

C: Speaking of money, do you remember what you made?

S: Yes. I remember as yeoman third class, I made \$78 per month. My husband was a second class motor machinist mate and he made \$96 a month. We were never broke, always had plenty. We didn't have a car and we each ate our meals at our own base.

C: Probably wasn't terribly much but anyway you had most of your needs taken care of when you were there. Did you ever get a chance to come up here to the Newport Naval Base?

S: Yes. On my job I would have to deliver special messages. I was picked up in a "gig"--I guess they called them "captain's gigs"--ride to the training station on the boat and deliver the message, then ride back. I had no idea what was in the envelope. I also remember there was no conversation exchanged between the seamen and me on my ride up and back.

C: Right, secret messages.

S: Secret messages; that was a thrill, just being out on the water.

C: In the midst of all of your work and time in Newport you were married, weren't you?

S: Yes, my husband came back at the end of May and I met him in Providence and we bought my diamond in Providence.

C: We're on the second side of the tape now and you were mentioning that your husband came home in May of 1945 from the war.

S: '45 yes, from Europe--the European theater. He called me and we met in Providence and we became engaged; it was May 30th and we decided to get married June 3, the following Sunday. He had a 30-day leave so we didn't want to waste any time. Well, of

course, we had to go to Norwood to his folks and then to my folks and, of course, I had to call the minister and get everything arranged with him and he said 2:00 PM on Sunday would be fine. It was June 3, 1945 that we were married.

C: So you had to get a wedding together very quickly.

S: Yes, we did and everyone it seemed was overseas. My sister was home so she was my matron of honor and my husband's brother had just come back from Guadalcanal. He was recuperating in Bayonne, New Jersey at the hospital, but they let him have that weekend off. He wasn't wounded or anything; they just kept him there for a checkup. Jimmy's younger sister was at the wedding, my mother and father and Jimmy's mother and father. There were nine of us. My brother was in the Pacific and my brother-in-law was in the Pacific, and Jimmy's second brother, Ray, was in Texas. We were married in the minister's home, "The Manse," in Woonsocket.

C: Did you wear your uniform?

S: Yes, I wore my white uniform.

C: That must have been lovely.

S: I had my uniform altered by our tailor on the base. He was thrilled to do that job. The while uniform was lovely. It cost \$14.00. It was a gabardine material--a lovely material.

C: Prices were so different during those days. You still stayed in the Navy for a little while after your wedding?

S: Yes, five more months. The chief advised me before my wedding, as my husband was due a 30-day leave, I could also have a 30-day leave as I was marrying a returning vet. That's one of the laws that I didn't know about. All the girls were saying, boy, what a way to get a 30-day leave!!!

C: So you did take it?

S: Oh, yes, I took it.

C: And then you came back in early July.

S: That's right. Paid leave.

C: That's wonderful, and you got your little room with the Farrells during this timeframe, I assume.

S: No, at first we could only get a room. We lived in just one room in Mrs. White's home. She was a lovely lady. We shared the

bath with another Navy couple across the hall. We did find an apartment after awhile with the Farrells.

C: That's great and you continued working at the Torpedo Station?

S: Yes, I did. And then when the war was over, let me see, the first war was over in Europe in May.

C: VE Day was in May.

S: Was May 8. The other one was VJ Day in August.

C: VJ Day is about the 14th or 15th of August.

S: Yes, that was in August.

C: Do you remember what your reaction to that was--to the end of the war?

S: Oh, this city went wild! It was wonderful. The first thing we did was to find a church; it was the Catholic church on Main Street. The church was packed. People were coming in and out in droves. We just went in to pray and to give thanks. The streets were mobbed with people. It was elbow to elbow. No cars. It seemed everyone was walking. Thames Street was bustling. It was

just one big party. Everyone was your friend whether you knew them or not. Jimmy and I were with another couple, a friend of his from the PT Boat base and his wife. They were from North Dakota. We were with them late into the night.

C: Just walking around?

S: Just walking around and stopping and eating and doing one thing or another and just everybody was ..... it was unexplainable, the excitement in this city.....

C: Sure because there was such a close connection to the war.

S: All the churches were packed, I must tell you. Everyone was in the church.

C: That's great. I'm very interested in finding out how people celebrated during that timeframe. It's very interesting that you had those comments on Newport celebrating in that way.

S: But it was a happy time and the people were very friendly.

C: That's great. Well, you stayed in the Navy for a couple of months more after VJ Day.



S: Yes. After VJ Day they passed a law for the WAVES, if you had served one year in the Navy, and were married, you would receive an honorable discharge. That's how I was discharged.

C: When were you discharged?

S: I was honorably discharged November 16, 1945, one year from the day I went in, November 16, 1944.

C: Isn't that amazing!

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

S: Well, I was so happy that Jimmy had come back safe and sound, happy that we were married, but I did love the Navy and I loved my job but that was the new law, remember, we volunteered for the duration. I had a lot to be thankful for.

C: So you took advantage of it?

S: Yes, I now belong to Ocean State WAVES #118 and we all say, "why didn't we stay in?" Well, they didn't need us; our job was done.

C: That's right they didn't want you until the Women's Armed Services Integration Act was passed in July 1948.

C: Did you ever have a chance to meet Mildred MacAfee, the Director of the WAVES?

S: No, I didn't. Four girls that I worked with in the Personnel Office went to Boston one day as Mildred MacAfee was going to be honored with her husband who was Reverend Horton. I have a picture of the girls with Reverend and Captain MacAfee Horton.

C: That's great!

S: They were just thrilled to pieces to meet her. She was just a wonderful woman.

C: I'm sure she was. She just died last October, I believe, at the age of 94. So she lived a long life. I'll ask a few more questions about the WAVES as an organization in general. Did you find it a smoothly run organization?

S: Very smoothly run. Just exceptional. The instructors at Hunter and Stillwater (Oklahoma) A&M were just super people.

C: Were they mainly women or men teaching you at Oklahoma A&M?

S: Civilian men at Stillwater and Navy personnel at Hunter.

C: Did you notice any discipline problems in the WAVES? Did you ever run across any discipline problems?

S: At the Bronx during a psychiatry exam one girl just couldn't take it. I can't remember the question they asked her, but she just completely fainted. We never saw that girl again. They just quietly let her go home I guess. It just wasn't what she had anticipated. I don't know what she thought it was going to be like.

C: Did anybody have to be disciplined for any reason, breaking the rules or not coming in at 9:00 or anything?

S: Not to my knowledge. I always followed the rules; I don't know what went on after hours.

C: Do you find that the WAVES experience in the war changed or redirected your life in any way?

S: It made me more independent.

C: Do you think the war made you more self-reliant as a result of being in the WAVES and being on your own?

S: I think so. It was all for the best, an education and a great experience.

C: Did your WAVES service have any impact on any career ambitions that you had? Did you want to pursue a career as a result of the WAVES?

S: No, I was happy to be married. Jimmy was in for a total of eleven years, so I just went where he was when I could and I always found myself an office job.

C: Oh, so you were a Navy wife for awhile?

S: For four years. He was discharged in 1948; joined the Inactive Reserve, and was recalled for two years during the Korean War.

C: Where were you stationed during those time periods?

S: When he went out to sea, I would stay home with my folks. When he'd come into port he was at Norfolk, VA most of the time. We lived down there for one year and, of course, Newport.

C: Did Norfolk have a bad reputation?

S: It did, but we found it to be a lovely city and more friendly people we met down there. We just hit it right. I worked at the Naval Station in the personnel office. They were hiring all the time. Very, very busy down there. Every Sunday we'd pack a

lunch and take the bus to Virginia Beach. That was a beautiful beach.

C: Sure, because the Navy was still going strong. I think I asked you before if you maintained any friendships that you had made in the service after you left the Navy.

S: Just one WAVE; she's from Sacramento, California, and I keep in touch with her by mail. Lois Woods Gack.

C: Well, we covered your marriage right at the tail end of the war and then your husband's service in the Navy through 1948 and after 1948 he got out of the service, I assume, and where did you settle?

S: We settled in Norwood, Mass. We bought a house in Norwood, a four room Cape and he worked for Bird & Son, but he always stayed in the Inactive Reserve for security reasons, and I'll be darned if he wasn't called back in for the Korean War.

C: Oh, my heavens, when was he recalled?

S: He had to serve two years in the Navy. I think that was in the 50s. They called him right away and, of course, at the time we didn't have any children, but it was just so upsetting. It just upset our lives, but we survived. He didn't have to go to

Korea. He went on a training cruise down in the Islands, the Caribbean, and from there they went to Greenland, called "Operation Blue Jay." It was Thule, Greenland and they were building an air base on the ice (to protect us from the Russians).

C: Well, thank heavens he didn't go to Korea.

S: He was on an APA; he didn't go to Korea.

C: And you stayed back in Norwood, I assume.

S: Yes, but when the ship pulled into Norfolk I went down there. My in-laws kept an eye on our home and I took a leave of absence from my job.

C: Did you work during this time frame when he was recalled to the inactive reserves?

S: Yes, I worked for Kendall Mills in Walpole in the stenographic department. (They made diapers.) I worked in Rice's Department Store when I went to Norfolk, Va.

C: Did you continue working after that?

S: Yes, I always did.

C: How did you end up in Seekonk?

S: My husband was transferred to the Balfour Company in Attleboro so we moved to be closer to his work. Our son was born in 1960, after 15 years of marriage. He was an angel from heaven!! He was thirty-five yesterday, the 22nd of May 1995.

C: Is he in the area?

S: Yes. He lives in Warwick. He is married and they have two children, four year old Brittany and fifteen month old, Christopher.

C: That's wonderful. Did you continue working after he was born?

S: No, not for quite a while. When he was in junior high I started back again part time.

C: Where did you work then?

S: I worked for the Balfour Company.

C: When did you retire?

S: When I was sixty-two. So that's about nine years ago.

C: You mentioned that you're a member of the Ocean State WAVES and WAVES National, a member of both. Do you find this association with the former WAVES valuable and worthwhile?

S: I think it is; it keeps us advised on all the new laws for women veterans.

C: Have you gone to any of their conferences or conventions?

S: No, I haven't. We go to the "PT Boaters" Convention and it seems one a year is enough.

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

S: I just think it was a great experience and I'm so happy that I enlisted. I have no regrets. It was an education.

C: That's great! Do you have anything else to add to the interview?

S: I think you covered everything. You have a way with your questions that helped me remember. On June 3, 1995, Jim and I will be celebrating our 50th Wedding Anniversary.



C: Well, you've done a marvelous job and I want to thank you, Mrs. Smith, for taking the time out of your schedule to come down to Newport and to be interviewed on your experience as a WAVE in World War II. Thank you very much.

S: Thank you, Evelyn.

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