

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

HISTORY
OF THE
WAVES

NO. 27

GABRIELLE C. POULIOT

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

1995

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Interviewee: Gabrielle C. Pouliot

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: June 7, 1995

C: This is the first oral history interview with Gabrielle Pouliot. Today's date is June 7, 1995. I'm conducting the interview at her home on Hunt Street in Central Falls, Rhode Island. Gabrielle, I'm very pleased that you consented to have this interview on your career in the WAVES during World War II and your subsequent navy career in the Reserves. This will add quite a bit to the historical record and to our understanding of the WAVES and their place in our history on this 50th anniversary of WWII. I'd like to begin questioning by asking you where you were born.

P: I was born in Winnipegosis, Manitoba, Canada.

C: And when were you born? What year?

P: July 17, 1913.

C: What did your father do for a living in Manitoba?

P: He was a lumberjack.

C: And what did your mother do?

P: My mother was a housewife.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

P: Yes, I had four brothers, and three sisters.

C: So there were eight of you in the family.

P: Eight of us.

C: Did you spend your growing up years in Manitoba?

P: I lived in Manitoba until 1923. I was ten years old when I came here.

C: So you went to school in Manitoba Elementary School?

P: No, I didn't because they had all Indians and half breeds there, way up north in Canada, in the northwestern part of Manitoba. I was only ten years old and they must have started school later. Oh, yes, I did, because I was in the fourth grade

for English when I came here and I had no French because it's all English in Manitoba. That's right. I don't remember.

C: Did you speak French at all at home?

P: We would answer my mother in French. That's all we could do is answer her and it was sort of a slang French that we spoke. Like I said, we just knew what she taught us.

C: A dialect, maybe.

P: Yes. She came from Quebec City so she couldn't talk English until she went to Manitoba and then she learned her English there. And my father, of course, he could talk English because he was a lumberjack and had always been with people from other places that could. But we learned our French here; we went to French school. You're ten years old, you're in the baby room, the kindergarten for French.

C: Well, that must have been an interesting life, a very rural and remote existence.

P: Yes, it was. Yes, we went back when I retired; my sister and I went back to Winnipegosis to see what it was like because we didn't remember too much of it because she was seven years old and I was ten and nothing had changed. The Indians were still

there. The half breeds were still there. No businesses of any kind all. There were fishermen. There were just fishermen there, and they made nets for the fishes and all that stuff. But nothing had changed. There was one restaurant and it opened up for an hour around noon time, and they had one bar or hotel with sawdust on the floor like you see in the western movies. So nothing had changed. After three days there, we were ready to come home.

C: Oh, I'm sure.

P: There was nothing. We were going to rent a car and then we didn't. We were bogged down because you could walk around the town in about five minutes.

C: Do you remember what you did during your growing up years in Manitoba? What did you do for recreation, for example?

P: We had a skating rink in back of our yard. There was a little lake there and it was a skating rink. It was just the normal things of going to school and playing with children. It was all the different nationalities; they came down from the Yukon and they'd go right down into Manitoba so it was all of the different nationalities. I know I had learned some Indian and Ukrainian. They still have a Ukrainian church there. We were very happy. We lived a very happy life out there.

C: Oh, that's great. What prompted your family to come to Central Falls?

P: Well, my father could see no future up there, just fishing. And my mother had two brothers that lived here in Central Falls. So he said, "Why don't you come over here". He said, "You could be a carpenter." So he came ahead with my oldest brother and my brother got a job in J&P Coats in Pawtucket and my father became a carpenter. And in six months he wrote to my mother and he said, "Sell everything and come here" and he said, "Don't bring any winter clothes. This is all summer here."

C: Well, not quite.

P: Because over there it was forty below zero all the winter time; it was very cold. The first winter we were here we had about ten feet of snow.

C: Rhode Island can be cold. Did you go to school here in Central Falls?

P: Oh, yes. I was in the fourth grade for English. I went to a parochial school. I was in the fourth grade for English and French in the kindergarten. But in one year's time I got caught up with both of them. I loved it. I thought French was very

interesting, although they didn't like the French I spoke, but I learned it all anyway.

C: Did you go to high school here?

P: Yes. Central Falls High School.

C: Did you graduate?

P: Yes, 1933. I went to business school after that.

C: Where did you go to business school?

P: Tabbutt Hubbard in Pawtucket.

C: What were you training to be?

P: A stenographer.

C: Did you get a job after you attended business school?

P: Yes. At Wardwell Braiding Company over here on High Street. Her son had graduated from there and she figured that all students that went to Tabbutt Hubbard were the best, so she hired me and I was in the office there and had a good job.

C: Did you enjoy the work that you did?

P: I loved it. It was more of a family business. We'd have an hour and a half for lunch. It was very nice. The office staff consisted of only twelve people.

C: What did they make there?

P: Braiding machines.

C: Braiding machine.

P: Wardwell Braiding Machine. They made machines for all over the country. It's still there on High Street in Central Falls.

C: How long did you work there before you joined the WAVES?

P: I went there after the WAVES in 1948.

C: Oh, you went there after. I thought you went there after high school.

P: No, after high school I went to J.P. Coats. And from J.P. Coats I went into the WAVES in 1944.

C: Let's get into that. I think there was some confusion on what I had asked you. You joined the WAVES in 1944. How did you hear about the WAVES?

P: Well, war had broken out and J&P Coats was converting all their thread, that was a threadmill, and they were converting everything into this war needed material. There was a lot of dust and things because everything had to be gassed and strengthened. I kept coughing and coughing and I said, "I'm going to get TB here." So, my brother had gone into the Navy, and if you quit your job you wouldn't be able to come back to your job during the wartime. But if you went into the service, when you came back they had to give you back your job. So one day I said, "that's what I'm going to do." So I took the train and went to Boston at the North Station there and they interviewed me. One thing I was worried about was my stomach. I had a very bad stomach. I was very nervous but they were going to reject me on account of my bunions. I said, "oh, no, my stomach." They didn't worry about that, but they said they'd be doing a lot of marching. I said, "oh, my bunions don't bother me." Nothing would have bothered me then.

C: Why did you decide to join the navy vis-a-vis the other services, the WACS or the WASPS or the SPARS? Why did you pick the Navy?

P: Well, I thought they had a better looking uniform. And like I said, I always loved the Navy, Navy blue. I didn't like the khakis and all the other branches of the service.

C: Did you feel any sense of patriotism?

P: Well, I guess in a sense there was some patriotism. Like I said, I just wanted to get away from my job. I thought it would be fascinating to go into the Navy and see the world, you know, like the navy tells you--to see the world. My family was poor and I would have never been able to go anywhere, so I figured this way here I'm going to be able to see the world by going into the Navy. That was my big thing. I loved to travel.

C: Oh, so travel was a motivation, too.

P: Yes.

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

P: Well, like I said, I didn't ask my mother. I said to my mother I'm going to Boston shopping. Because I knew she would have said no, so I went and then when I passed I came home and I said, "Ma, I'm in the Navy." "What?", said my mother. I didn't need her consent because I was over 21 years old.

C: Now, that was 1944. Do you remember what month that was in '44.

P: The month of May.

C: Oh, May of '44.

P: Yes, May 5th 1944.

C: How did your father feel about your joining the Navy?

P: It didn't bother him.

C: But you didn't need permission, did you?

P: No, because I was over twenty-one. So I didn't need permission. If you were over twenty, you could go in without your parents' permission, as long as you had two years of high school.

C: Yes. You must have been thirty-one. Were you born in 1913?

P: That's right, thirty-one.

C: You were thirty-one.

P: I joked about being thirty-nine for so long that I forgot my real age.

C: You were thirty-one when you joined.

P: Ok, thirty-one because I had worked ten years in J.P. Coats.

C: You were a stenographer in J.P. Coats then, weren't you?

P: No. I was a stenographer in Wardwell Braiding Co.

C: What were you in J.P. Coats?

P: I was a reel tender. We put the thread on the reeder and made skeins of thread to be put on spools. Well, everybody worked at J.P. Coats at that time.

C: Sure. You wanted to leave that job and you did.

P: I wanted to better myself.

C: Of course. Was there any publicity in the local papers about your joining the WAVES?

P: Well, that interview that I had at the station WEAN in Providence, R.I.

C: Well, that's kind of interesting. Tell us about this interview and how it came about?

P: Well, the recruiter from Pawtucket where I applied and I went to the recruiting station naturally and when he found out he said, "We've got to have you on our radio. You're one of the first ones to go from Central Falls," so that's when he had me on Station WEAN and had that interview and asked me the questions why I had gone in. And he said, "Her mother's here and she was so happy. My mother had tears going down her cheek, but it wasn't because she was happy. It was because I was going away. I forget what the questions were that he asked me, but anyway it was all about why did I join and what did I intend to do and all this stuff.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters in the military service? You mentioned one brother in the Navy.

P: My oldest brother was in the Army, and the other brother was in the Coast Guard.

C: And did any of your sisters join?

P: No, because when I joined nobody else could leave because somebody had to stay home and help out at home.

C: Oh, yes, yes. Well, you enlisted on May 5th 1944. When did you leave for basic training at Hunter College?

P: About a month later they called me in to go on active duty.

C: And how did you get down to Hunter?

P: By train. We all met in Providence. There was a group from Boston and we met at the train station in Providence and went straight to Hunter College from there.

C: Were you homesick at all when you left?

P: Well, I was sick going down and so when I got over there and I had to carry my suitcases in Grand Central Station and nobody was helping me I said, "oh, this is not the life for me. I'm going home." And they said, "You're in the Navy now" and "You have no choice." The girls were helping me because I was sick almost all the way from Providence to New York.

C: Was it car sickness or train sickness?

P: It was train sickness.

C: Oh, dear, you couldn't quit now because you couldn't get out of the Navy and had to follow through.

P: No, I was stuck then.

C: Well, you got to Hunter College. Can you tell me about your experience there? Where did you live during basic training?

P: Well, they had all these different buildings and I was in building G, twelve of us, two rooms, and it's strange but they had six Catholics on one side and the others were from different denominations or religions. The girls that were on the other side all smoked. And we didn't smoke, but it's funny how they had separated us and there were mostly nurses, I think. There were six nurses and they used to baby me. I must have been a big baby; they were always taking care of me because I was always sick.

C: Oh, dear. Do you remember any of your roommates from this period of time?

P: Yes, I still correspond with one of them. She lives in Florida now. Frances King was from Kentucky and then Helen Dearduff was from New Castle, Indiana. I still correspond with her. The one I corresponded with the most was Hazel Anderson from upstate New York.

C: What were your impressions of Hunter College?

P: Well, I thought it was a very beautiful place and I enjoyed it very much.

C: Can you tell me what kind of classes you took there?

P: We took clerical classes and we had to read all about the Navy ships and the planes and all the lingo that goes with the Navy that you're unfamiliar with, and you had to learn all about that. You marched to school every morning and you'd go to breakfast and then you'd go to school and you didn't come back until the end of the day.

C: So, you had a very, very full day.

P: Yes. We were very tired at the end of the day.

C: Did you have homework at night to do?

P: No, we didn't have any homework at night. They would try to have us go to a movie so that we wouldn't be lonesome. Even if you'd say, "No, I don't want to go. I'm too tired." You had to go. They just wanted to get you out so you wouldn't feel lonesome or anything like that.

C: Oh, I see. So, they encouraged social activities. Did they have any organized sports for you?

P: During the day, of course, you would have all the calisthenics and swimming classes.

C: Did you have to do these things?

P: You had to participate in some kind of activity.

C: Oh, you had to do it; it was mandatory.

P: Yes.

C: Did you find your classroom experience challenging, the courses that you took?

P: Yes, I loved it. I always loved school.

C: Did you find it easy?

P: Yes. Nothing was that hard.

C: Did you have tests to take at the end?

P: I guess we were tested on some of the things we studied. That's fifty years ago.

C: Do you remember what company you were in?

P: Yes. Regiment thirty-five and Company 5621.

C: Did you like marching and drilling?

P: Yes. I always loved marching. I always loved parades and things like that. I guess I was more on the patriotic side.

C: Did you have any trouble at all adjusting to military life during this six week period?

P: No, no. I always found it very fascinating. We were a nice group of girls together and we were so busy that we didn't have time to be lonesome. I didn't anyway.

C: Was there anything you didn't like about military life?

P: No, I don't think so.

C: Did you like the food they served?

P: Oh, the food was very good. I'm pretty good at adjusting to anything and to me the food was very good. I liked it.

C: Did you like being on your own, away from your parents?

P: That didn't bother me.

C: What did you think of the uniforms that you wore?

P: They were beautiful. I loved the Navy uniform. And I didn't even need to have them adjusted or anything because everything fit perfect. I liked it.

C: Great. Did you have to attend church? Was this mandatory?

P: I think you had to go to one of the churches. It didn't matter what denomination, but I think you had to go because everybody had to go.

C: You were telling me about one incident that happened there when you were marching to church. Can you tell us about it?

P: Well, I was leading the marching in this platoon and we were going along, left, right, left, right, and all of a sudden we came to this big puddle of water and I couldn't think of what command to give and so I just threw my hands up in the air and I said, "Stop, stop," because otherwise we would have gone right through the puddle, because when your marching you've got to listen to the command and keep doing it.

C: Did anyone challenge you on that?

P: Well, when we got to church we were still giggling from our experience. We weren't very quiet at the Mass and so the officer said, "That's no way to lead a platoon." I said, "Well, we had to put an experience down here," so then I was taught to learn to give commands.

C: Were you the leader of the platoon then?

P: Yes.

C: Was that a permanent position or did it rotate?

P: We were only there six weeks. That was only on Sundays when we'd go to church.

C: So you led the group on Sundays then. How were you selected for that?

P: Maybe they thought I was older than some of the girls because most of them were in there twenties when they went in. Maybe I gave orders good or made them toe the mark.

C: Oh, those are good reasons for selecting you. Did you have any weekends off during basic training?

P: No. The six weeks you were there you didn't leave the compound, and then when you graduated that was the day you went into New York and then that's when your families all came down and saw you graduate. That was the only weekend we had off.

C: Did your family come down?

P: My sister came down with two of her girlfriends.

C: Did you celebrate after that in any way?

P: We went into New York and we took in a movie and the sights in New York. They stayed that weekend. This was on a Saturday and they stayed Sunday and they went home Monday morning. I had to come back. I couldn't stay over night, but they stayed in a hotel in New York and the next day I went and met them again. But they were only there for two days.

C: Right. So you had a little celebration after that. While you were in basic training were there any extra curricular activities that you participated in?

P: I didn't. They would take one group and assign you to it. Like I never got to learn how to swim in the Navy, because by the time they got to my group the six weeks were over. They would take so many to swim and so I never learned how to swim. I did

the same thing in New York. I'd start swimming and first thing you'd know I'd be on the third shift from midnight to eight and so I'd lose out again.

C: Oh, I see. So you didn't have that special opportunity. Were you aware of any discipline problems in the WAVES barracks? Was there anybody who was disciplined for any reason.

P: No, everybody in our platoon toed the mark. They were a nice group. I never saw anybody get disciplined. That happens mostly with men, but the women are more timid. Well, I don't know about today's women, but in those days the women would pay more attention to their superiors than they do nowadays.

C: That's very, very true. Well, when you graduated what was your rate and what field were you going into?

P: Well, everybody was sent to different places and I was the only one that was left and I said, "oh, my gosh, I'm going to be sent to the kitchen, and to the galley, and I thought in Hunter's galley there was a lot of cockroaches there and all these places, these big restaurants, so I went to my barracks and I was there and I was crying I said, "Oh, my God." Me, that's afraid of a fly. About eight-thirty that night they called for me and she said, "You've been shipped to Manhattan Towers in New York." I'm telling you, it didn't take me five minutes to get dressed.

C: What was Manhattan Towers?

P: That was the receiving center for all District One, like Boston, all New England. Anybody that came in that worked at the Fleet Post Office or St. Alban's Hospital they got sent to Manhattan Towers. We were a thousand WAVES there.

C: Did you check people in? Was that your job?

P: That was our ship's company. I was sent there and assigned to ship's company, which meant I worked in the building. And you checked people in and you made the tours at night. I used to be mostly receiving the mail, like when you go into a hotel the clerk that's there. Well, that's what I would do.

C: You'd be kind of like a hotel clerk then?

P: Yes.

C: Was it a hotel, too?

P: It was formerly a hotel. But the Navy took it over. And we were a thousand WAVES there and in the morning between six and seven that elevator was going because these girls worked all around New York. All the places in New York.

C: So, in other words, it was a dormitory for the WAVES.

P: No, it was a receiving station.

C: Oh, a receiving station. Oh, okay.

P: These 1,000 WAVES that worked, they worked all around New York. Like at St. Alban's Hospital, there were a lot of girls working there and the Fleet Post Office had a lot of people working there and different other places around New York that when they had taken over they worked in all these different places. At Manhattan Towers alone we were maybe fifty to a hundred people with ship's company. Some of them worked in the laundry, others worked in the mess hall, different parts of the building; it was a twenty-four story building. Commander Von der Heyde was stationed there.

C: What was your rate?

P: When I came out I was only a seaman. By the time I left I was a petty officer 2nd class. I was there 3 years. The war was over in '45 so we just stayed there and then it became a discharge center for all the District One people and they came from all over to be discharged from New York. Then when we got them all discharged I was sent to Brooklyn Naval Hospital and I was a supervisor there for the Corps WAVES.

C: Ok, let's double back a little bit. You spent a couple of years at Manhattan Towers at the receiving station there. Can you tell me how many hours per day you worked there?

P: Eight hours. And then every once in awhile you'd have extra duty. You'd have four hours extra duty which, like if you were on the shift from 8-4, well, maybe that night from midnight to four in the morning you would have extra duty. You'd have this every once in a while. Your regular work day was eight hours.

C: Did you have to work on Saturdays and Sundays?

P: Oh, yes. You went around the clock. You worked seven days on say the first shift or the second shift or the third shift and then you'd have maybe two days off and then just start over again. You kept rotating.

C: What did you do on your days off?

P: I toured New York. I had a touring book from New York that said, "See New York in seven days," but it took me three years. But I really saw New York. There was very little of New York that I didn't see.

C: That's great. Did you have many female friends, WAVE friends, when you working in this situation in Manhattan Towers?

P: We were about ten of us. On weekends we would go to these different touring places that would always invite the WAVES to go there. And we always had a bus full to go there. Like we went to Bear Mountain, New York and then we'd go to the park in New Jersey, but we'd always go as a group.

C: Did you ever go to any USO's or canteens?

P: Oh, yes, I never missed anything. I'd go to all the plays and to the hockey games. We'd get all these free tickets. New York was wonderful to the service people. If you went to a restaurant, if there was a line a mile long, they would call you and bring you in. They were terrific to them.

C: So they really appreciated your service.

P: Every time. We were always invited to all these big affairs, like they'd have these big spring balls and everything, everybody would be in gowns and we'd go in our uniform. So you never had to dress up. But they were very good to the Navy. You see the Navy was stationed right there in New York.

C: Do you know what street Manhattan Towers was on?

P: It was on Broadway at Seventy-Sixth Street. Well, we were 34 blocks away. So we were right near Times Square.

C: Where did you live when you were stationed there?

P: I lived on the 24th floor of Manhattan Towers.

C: Right in the building.

P: That's where Manhattan Towers was.

C: You lived right in the building. Yes, that's what I thought. Did you have any social life with men? Did you have any opportunity to date anybody there?

P: Oh, yes, very much. The first day I had gone for a ticket. On that Sunday afternoon I went to a radio show, I think near Times Square. I was all alone because I didn't know anybody. I just got there that night. And so I'm sitting there and these two fellows were sitting in front of me and they had popcorn and they kept offering me popcorn and I kept saying no. I was kind of bashful and so when the show was all over, they said, "Where are you going from here? You want to come with us?" And I said, "No, I'm going back to the barracks." He said, "come with us. We're going to go and eat at one of the restaurants near Grand Central Station. They were very nice and so we went to eat and then we went way up Mount Washington; it was a place off Riverside Drive and it was like a Mexican place and they had Mass there about three o'clock in the afternoon. So this fellow here

was a native New Yorker, one of them, and he knew New York like the back of his hand. And he could switch from one subway to another, and you could go about twenty-five miles on a nickel. And we spent the afternoon together. From then on, I went out with him all the time I was there.

C: Oh, how interesting.

P: He used to inlay linoleum and he'd inlay linoleum on Riverside Drive to all these ritzy apartments and he'd say, "Come on over and say you're my sister." And so I'd go over with one of my friends and he'd show us all the beautiful apartments. So I went out with him all the time I was there.

C: And he was a civilian.

P: Yes. And my sister would come down, and if I was on duty he would take her to the nightclub. Very polite. He was a very nice fellow. So I went out with him all the time I was in New York and then when I went to Brooklyn I met a merchant marine there and he was the fellow that wanted to see New York. And, of course, I loved nightclubs and I loved dancing and so he said, "Would you show me New York?" We went to every nightclub that was around and he was loaded with money because he had been in the merchant marines two or three years. And he was from right outside of New York. I think it was Garden City or something.

C: Right near Long Island.

P: Yes, that's where he lived and so he'd be there every time I had time off. We'd go out and go to a different nightclub. We'd go to these different places to eat, go swimming, so they were the men I had in New York.

C: Well, that's fabulous. You really had a good time for yourself then.

P: I did. I did very well.

C: Did you ever go to any USO dances?

P: Yes. Well, not in New York, because in New York there's a big Roseland ballroom near Times Square someplace and we'd go dancing there every Saturday. Then when I went to Brooklyn then we would still go to New York. Roseland Ballroom--that was a beautiful place. We'd go dancing there. When I went to Brooklyn, I was with this fellow. I was very busy.

C: It sounds like you had a very, very busy social life.

P: I loved to go out and I loved dancing and I liked to travel. Any time there was anything going on I was there.

C: Great. Can you describe your room at the Manhattan Towers and your roommates?

P: It's a hotel and we had civilian people cleaning our room-- maids. Naturally the rooms were very nice and my roommate was this little girl from New Castle, Indiana. We had a double bunk and I had the bottom bunk for a long time, then she started having back trouble and so I had to sleep on the top bunk. But she was a very nice girl. She still writes to me.

C: Oh, that's great! Do you remember what your pay was at this time period? How much you got a month?

P: It must have been around twenty dollars; it wasn't very much.

C: But did you feel you could exist on it?

P: I did very well. Like I said, I, also, had somebody who paid my fare when I went out. And I used to send an allotment home. Oh, it was sixty dollars. I used to send sixty dollars home and then the Navy would match it. The Navy would send \$120.00 to my mother.

C: Oh, was she a widow at this time?

P: No, but, like I said, we didn't have much money and in '44 the pays weren't too high. And so I had to help out at home and so that's what it was; it was sixty dollars. I remember now because I would send sixty and they would send \$120 to my mother.

C: Oh, isn't that great. I didn't know they matched it.

P: I did very well. God, I used to buy all my clothes in Saks Fifth Avenue and I had beautiful clothes. And I don't think I owed anything because I'm not one to have debts. So I did very well, like I said; it never cost me anything to go out because I always had somebody to take me out.

C: When you worked at Manhattan Towers did you work with other WAVES?

P: Yes. I told you there were about 100 that worked in the place.

C: Did you work with any men, too?

P: There were no men at Manhattan Towers, strictly WAVES.

C: Strictly a WAVES operation then.

P: Yes.

C: You were in New York when the war ended on VJ Day. Can you tell me where you were when the announcement was made in August '45 and what your reaction was to the end of the war?

P: Well, that day they told us the war might end that day. So, I had a date and we went to a movie in Times Square and everything was going along fine until we started hearing the whistles and the sirens going and everything. I said, "Oohh," I said, "the war must be over." Let's get out of here." He said, "watch the movie," and so I was itching to get out so when we got out then we got floored. Everybody was drunk and grabbing you and kissing you and you had to fight your way until you got out of Times Square. I even lost my boyfriend there. It was thirty blocks. I walked to Manhattan Towers and when I got there I had lost my hat. So the shore patrol said, "Where's your hat?" I said, "Oh God, it was off in Times Square. I said everybody was going crazy." She said, "You shouldn't have been out," so anyway when I got there everybody was celebrating. We all went to Central Park in New York which was only three or four blocks and we celebrated there all night, dancing and drinking and we spent the night. We came back at six in the morning. But that was a wild night.

C: Oh, it sounds it.

P: But no rough stuff. I mean people were just having a good time.

C: Right. What was your personal reaction to the end of the war?

P: Very happy about it. Because it didn't affect me in any way, because I was still staying in the Navy. It didn't affect me in any way. I was happy it was over and the boys would be coming home.

C: During the time when you were in New York, did you write letters at all to your parents?

P: Oh, yes. I called my mother every weekend. I used to come home almost every weekend. If I didn't have any duty, because it was only two hundred miles, so I'd come home all the time and I would write letters to everybody. I'm quite a letter writer.

C: Did you keep any diary of your service in the WAVES?

P: Yes, I kept all the pictures that I took in the WAVES and who I went, where I went, and what I did, my reactions to the different places that I went.

C: Well, after the war was over you worked. You still worked at Manhattan Towers for a while.

P: Yes. Until I went to Brooklyn. Well, when Manhattan Towers got decommissioned, when everyone was discharged, then I was sent to Brooklyn Naval Hospital as a Master of Arms there for the Corps WAVES that work at the hospital.

C: Now, what is a Master of Arms? What does that entail?

P: It's like a supervisor. You're in charge of the girls. I had forty girls that lived in that building. I was in charge of them. They had to keep their rooms clean and on weekends make sure that everything was ready for inspection on Saturday, and that there was no rough stuff going on. You were the supervisor of the building. I loved it. Every morning I'd go through the hospital and it was mostly cancer patients that were there. There was a young fellow that had come back from war and I'd go through the hospital and I'd go have coffee with a tailor, a civilian tailor, that lived there and then I'd pick up the mail and I'd make any reports that I had to make and I'd come back to the barracks and inspect the barracks and that was it. The rest of the time was my own. When you worked in the hospital they had an open gangway which meant if you didn't have duty that day you could go out anytime you wanted to. You didn't need any permission. But the Corps WAVES never had open gangway. They

could only go out certain days or something like that. It was kind of a tough place to be working. You know for the Corps WAVES it was hard work because if they had a patient that was dying or something they had to stay in there until that patient died. And they did have civilians in there, too, besides the men that were there, because I remember somebody, one night one lady was having a baby and the girl dropped the baby and she was in a lot of trouble. I don't remember the other part of it.

C: What was your rate at that time?

P: I was a second class petty officer.

C: Did you have any disciplinary problems with these forty WAVES that you were responsible for?

P: Few, but I handled them. My best girlfriend that I'd go dancing with all the time thought that she'd be able to get away with anything so she'd spend her evenings, when she'd get in, and she'd be reading all night long and so she wouldn't clean her room. So the few times she did it I opened her room in the morning to check her room. God, nothing was dusted or anything so I cleaned it. I wasn't going to punish the whole barracks for her and so I said to her, "Well, you know what you're going to get punished for. I had to do your room." She said, "So what, you have nothing else to do." And I said, "Well, I said, you

were suppose to do it and so I said, "This Friday you're going to clean the shower room." "You'll have to clean the whole thing." "I will not." I said, "Oh, yes you will or else you'll be put on report." So she gave me a bad time, but when I insisted I was going to put her on report she did it. She never did it again.

C: And that was your friend.

P: Yes. I was firm. You know you couldn't let anybody get away with it because you had to treat everybody the same way. And so she learned her lesson then.

C: You lived in the same barracks, didn't you, with them?

P: Yes. Yes. They had like a two-story building on the hospital grounds. I was a supervisor so I was on one room and she was a switchboard operator; we were the only girls that weren't nurses. The others were all nurses. We were the only two sent there after Manhattan Towers closed.

C: Where was it located in Brooklyn?

P: In the Bronx on Flushing Avenue, I think it is. It's right where all the ships were. The shipyard is right down there and everything and it was a pretty big hospital. Like I said, it was

mostly cancer patients, all these young fellows that were there had returned from the war.

C: How long were you there?

P: About a year, I think. I got discharged in June of '47.

C: And where were you discharged?

P: From Brooklyn, N.Y.

C: Oh, from Brooklyn. How did you feel about leaving the Navy in 1947?

P: I didn't really have any reaction to it because I was coming home. I figured I'd go to business school and become a stenographer. I'd better myself. I had had a place in the mill before, so I didn't want to go back to the mill and so I went to business school and then I joined a Reserve unit in Pawtucket which was a Naval Reserve station, and we'd go to drills once a week in Pawtucket.

C: Well, let's just double back a little bit. I have a few more questions about the WAVES and the Navy during your active service through 1947. Did you ever have a chance to meet Mildred MacAfee, the WAVES director.

P: I don't think so.

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

P: Oh, yes. Well, like I said, it seemed that people were more disciplined in those days; they didn't resent it. And if they did, they kept it to themselves. But today they would have fought back by suing this one and suing that one. But we were more timid and we believed in our superiors. What they said, we did. I don't remember ever having any big problem. Like I said, with a thousand WAVES, if somebody went out at night, you were supposed to be back by midnight unless you had a special pass. And if some of them went out and then let somebody in and didn't come back, well, then, they got punished with extra duty. But I never really saw any big problems.

C: Well, that's great that with all those women there weren't many problems.

P: Like I said, I think people were more afraid of their superiors then they are today.

C: I think that's true; they were more willing to abide by authorities.

P: Yes, I mean, even if they weren't when they went in, they learned that they had to toe the mark or else you'd get extra duty. You'd get punished. So, you know, nobody wanted to be punished.

C: What opportunities did the WAVES provide you that you would have not had in civilian life?

P: Well, I would never have been able to go to business school and become a stenographer. Being in three years, the service paid for my business school for two years.

C: Oh, that's fabulous.

P: I became a stenographer. And so I always had an office job after that.

C: So the wartime experience in the WAVES opened up doors for you. Do you think the war and your experience in the WAVES made you more independent and self reliant?

P: Well, I guess so. I've always been a pretty independent person. But I mean, I think, well, when I came out I was more used to taking care of my own affairs. But it never made me resent my parents or say, well, I'm going to move out, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that. I always loved to be at home

with my parents. We had a very nice family life and so we enjoyed our home.

C: That's wonderful. That's a nice comment. Do you feel that the WAVES broadened your horizons in the sense that you met new people and traveled?

P: It sure did. I traveled all the way from Florida to Seattle, Washington with the Navy. Like when I had a vacation or time off--you had fourteen days a year that you had time off--and so I would pick out these different places and, of course, when you travelled with the Navy it didn't cost you anything. And on the trains it was always half fare, mostly half fare on everything you did. And after I came out, I was in the Navy for twenty-one years and so I would get two weeks training duty a year and so I always picked out a place that I wanted to see. If they could allow it, they would let me go. I got to travel all over the United States.

C: Oh, that's great. When you were discharged in 1947 you came back to Central Falls and you said you went to secretarial school for two years. Where did you work after that?

P: Wardwell Braiding Company. It was a big braiding company.

C: Did you stay there throughout your entire work career?

P: No, I worked there seventeen years and then I went to another place which was a better place. But I was always in office work. So I always had office work all the time. I liked that.

C: Why did you decide to join a Reserve unit in 1947?

P: Like I said, I think I was patriotic in a way, even though I didn't think so, and one day I was downtown and I saw this little WAVE walking down and I said, "Gee, what is she doing in uniform," because the war was all over, and so I just looked at her and then I saw her again and so I stopped her and I said, "How come you're in uniform?" I said, "Is there a Navy place around here?" and she said, "Well, I belong on School Street in Pawtucket," and I said, "What do you do there?" She told me they had a Training Station there. I said, "Oh," she said, "Well, come down next Tuesday and you can join." I said, "Oooh, terrific." Like I said, I always loved the military. And so I went there and it was only one night a week that you worked there and I did office work there also.

C: What was your rate when you joined?

P: I was still a Petty Officer Second-Class. When I was in Brooklyn I passed my test for First-Class, but I was getting out in June when our ratings came out. During the war, if they didn't have a billet for you you didn't get it. You had to wait

until there was a billet open. So this girl and I both took it and we both passed and so I said to the commander, "Give it to her. I'm getting out. I don't need this." And so she gave it to her and somehow they didn't put it on my record. They goofed up on a lot of things like that. Like I said, they lost three years of my record anyway. And then when I got out and I was belonging to these different units I'd take a test and I don't know what happened, but I would black out. The night before I would study and I knew every answer by heart. Then would come the exam and I'd black out.

C: Your not a test taker.

P: No. I found that out. In school, I was very good but not then. So I never went up any higher than Second-Class.

C: Very good. Well, you were in the Reserve unit in Pawtucket and you were doing yeoman work once a week. Were there any other women in that unit?

P: Only one other WAVE was in there at that time. She's the one that I met in Pawtucket. I think there was only the two of us. The rest were all men.

C: Did you feel discriminated against in any way?

P: No, the men were very nice. There was a chief that was in charge, then a commander. In the Navy, they were always very good to the women.

C: So you were never harassed or picked on or anything?

P: Like when I went from Quonset to Washington, when I called up the station to tell them that I was there they sent a car down to come and get me and they were always very good, very polite, always very nice to the girls. The men felt that we were helping them out. The men were always very nice to us.

C: Well, that's good.

P: Like today you hear of discrimination, but I never felt discriminated against. I mean even your Southerners didn't like the Negroes. A lot of the Southerners would never want to work with one. But somehow they handled that. I know I had a friend; she was a Negro, and she was very neat. All her clothes were always starched and she was very nice.

C: She was in the WAVES.

P: Yes. And we'd play basketball in different places. Washington was awful for discrimination. It shouldn't had been, but it was. Some places would say, well, if you have a colored

person on your team, they wouldn't want to play so we wouldn't play. And if you'd stop to a place to eat, she'd have to wait outside. And this girl, she was from New York I think and she felt really hurt because they never discriminated against in New York, but she took it very well. She felt hurt, but we'd go in and get her her food, and she was a good basketball player. That was the only place that discriminated. And I'd say, "How can Washington be like that." I was used to New York and we'd never pay any difference, but they did around there. But the men were very nice to the girls. I never saw any man really be angry at you for doing your job that they should have been doing or something like that. Because the girls would do office work anyway.

C: Right, they weren't challenging them in the jobs that they held.

P: No, so they didn't feel that way.

C: Come 1951, you were recalled to active duty during the Korean War.

P: That's right.

C: Where were you assigned?

P: Well, I was in Pawtucket at the Training Station in Pawtucket at that time. And so they'd send me to Quonset Point over here, and then from there I went to Washington, D.C.

C: What was your job then? What were you doing?

P: Well, I was assigned to Arlington Barracks which was right near the Pentagon and I was a master-at-arms over there. I was always doing master-at-arms work. I'd be in charge of the barracks and work right in the place. The other girls would be working at the Pentagon and the Bureau of Naval Personnel and Naval Air Station and all these other places. We were 1,500 WAVES there.

C: Huge barracks.

P: They were barracks that we had there. It was a beautiful place. It was right across from Arlington Cemetery. So that was another great place to work. And the men, like we were 1,500 women, 1,500 men on that station. The men were down the hill and we were up the hill. And the men always did all the guards at the gate and all that stuff. The women didn't do that.

C: So you had to make sure that the barracks were neat and clean and monitor the girls.

P: Oh, yes. Well, I worked in the main building mostly. I didn't work in the barracks. I was a Second-Class and a lot of them that were there were just seamen. They'd be working there. My girlfriend and I were both Second-Class and we both worked in the main building doing office work.

C: I see. How many years were you there on active duty?

P: In Washington, I was there two years from '51 to '53 and we had a lot of activity there like craft work. We'd do a lot of tool making, leather craft, and we'd have a lot of drilling, well, not drilling because once you were out you only drilled when you were in training, but we'd exercise outside and we'd go walking around Arlington Cemetery, especially in the Fall when the leaves looked beautiful there and we were in the Pentagon all the time. A lot of the girls worked in the Pentagon and Washington was a beautiful place to work.

C: How did you feel about the Korean War?

P: Well, I didn't see any difference because, you know, we didn't go overseas or anything so it was the same that we did in the first place because we were working in the office. But it wasn't any different than it was when you were in World War II.

C: Did you write letters home during this time period?

P: Oh, I'd write letters home and I'd call up all the time. I always made sure I called my mother every week.

C: Did you ever get a chance to have any leave during this two year period?

P: We'd always have fourteen days a year.

C: Where did you go on this leave? Did you travel with other WAVES?

P: No. I'd come home and I'd take my mother to Canada or we always had some place the family would be going. Because she always looked forward to going to Canada every year, so she'd say, "Well, when you get your time off were going to be going to Canada." The only time I went with the WAVES is when I went to San Diego, California. That was on my terminal leave. Besides that I never went with the WAVES. But like I said, we were so near to home. There were all girls that came from different parts of the country that I wouldn't be visiting now.

C: Did you make any lasting friendships from this two year period in the Navy?

P: Yes, I still have three girls that I write to. And they've come down to visit me and I went to Chicago, Illinois, to visit

one of them. I had gone to a wedding of her brother there. Then I have another one from Decatur, Illinois and we'll always correspond. She came down also. The one from Seattle, Washington, she was a very close friend of mine in Washington. She was from Kentucky. Now she's way up in Seattle, Washington.

C: Well, that's great that you still maintain these connections and made friendships there. Did you have any social life there? Any dating?

P: In Washington?

C: Yes.

P: Oh, yes. Same thing. In Washington, there was no big dance hall that you could go to. But what they would do on Saturday nights, they had a lot of social dances in nearby bases and on Saturday nights they'd have dances and so they'd have a bus pick you up and take you there. We'd have an escort with us and we were there to dance with the boys. They would take you there and bring you back.

C: Oh, very, very nice.

P: In Washington, I had met this cop, well, his uncle was a cop and he was a travelling salesman. That's right. And one

afternoon, we were in Washington having dinner, my girlfriend and I, and these two fellows wanted to send us a drink and when I said, "No, we don't want to be bothered with nobody." And so the waitress said they just want to buy you a drink I said, "No, we don't want to be bothered" and so after a while they came around and we didn't want to tell them that we were in the service because you never know how some people feel about it. So anyway they came over and they sat with us and this guy said he was a travelling salesman and I said, "I don't want anything to do with you." And his uncle was a cop in Washington. They were both living in Washington. I said, "I just bought a car, and I said, "We've got our own car," so we made a date anyway and we went out with them the two years that we were there. My girlfriend was going out with the cop and I was going out with the traveling salesman. And he was so cute. He'd drive me crazy. He'd come to the barracks and all the girls were trying to make him. And, of course, a travelling salesman has such a personality, you know, and I'd say to him, "I think I'm going to tell you to stay outside the gate," and he'd love to come there. They took us all around Washington and really showed us around. They were two nice guys. It was his uncle, but he was almost the same age. You know there wasn't a big difference.

C: Oh, that's interesting. You had a lot of good times then in the service.

P: Oh, yes.

C: When were you discharged from Washington?

P: I think it was in February of '53.

C: Did you go back home to Central Falls?

P: Oh, yes. I came back to Central Falls and I joined the unit in Pawtucket again. I went to Wardwell Braiding Co. They had me come back there.

C: How long did you stay in the unit in Pawtucket?

P: I stayed there until I was retired. They closed the place in Pawtucket, so then I had to join in Providence.

C: Do you remember when that was? What year?

P: Maybe I was there about ten years, from '63, and then I went into Providence. And they had a mobilization unit and a lot of officers would come to finish their time for their twenty years or something like that. And they'd come to the unit in Providence. It was all men. Well, I had one girl, one girl with us. And we were very friendly. There was three of us. But that's all we were was three girls. The rest were all men. And

that was very fascinating because they'd have a lot of parties. Every year we'd have two weeks training. For our two weeks training, we'd go to Boston, the mobilization unit, and we'd all stay at the Essex Hotel there. We stayed there only on the weekend, but during the week each one would take his car one day. When it came time for my car, one of the fellows would drive my car into Boston because you'd have to fight that Rte 128 and we had to leave at six-thirty or else we'd never make it for eight you know. And then on the weekend we'd be ending our tour of duty, we'd have a big party on Saturday night and so we'd stay over on the weekend. We'd be about maybe twenty or thirty of us that would be going on the two weeks training there.

C: And where did you do your yearly training of two weeks?

P: You could pick out any place you wanted to. One time I went to Burlington, Vermont. I had asked for Florida. Another time I went to Washington.

C: Well, no, this is for just a weekend. Didn't you drill one weekend a month?

P: No, just one day.

C: Oh, one day a week; it must have been different then.

P: It was one day a week.

C: But did you get your opportunity to take your two weeks yearly training in spots other than Boston.

P: Yes.

C: And where did you do that?

P: Well, I went to Burlington, Vermont, one time and I had put in for Florida, I think, but over there some guy had an appendicitis attack and so they needed somebody there so they brought me to Burlington. And I was the only girl there. They had never had any women. It was a training station right on Lake Champlain. It was beautiful.

C: Did you do clerical work there.

P: Yes. In the Navy, I always did clerical work. They didn't do mens' jobs. Of course, we weren't aboard any ship. We couldn't go on ships during World War II. They can now but we couldn't. The only ones that went on ships in World War II were the nurses. But the rest of the girls, they just did clerical work.

C: When did you finally retire from the Navy? Can you tell me what year that was?

P: Yes. In 1973 I retired and I retired from Providence. I had twenty-three years, but they lost two or three years of my record and so I finally ended up with twenty-one years.

C: Now did you get a pension from this?

P: Yes. I get a pension.

C: How would you sum up your naval career? What would you say about its significance for you and for your life?

P: Well, to me it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. And it was a very exciting life. Like I said, I was so active. Maybe some people wouldn't be that excited about Navy life, but I loved to travel and I used to love to go out and go to all these parties and things so to me it was a very exciting life. You wouldn't have had that opportunity around here that you would have in New York. And New York at that time, it wasn't like it is today. You got off duty at twelve o'clock at night and go to a movie in Times Square and walk down and walk back and think nothing of it.

C: It was a safer world.

P: It was. There was never any attacks like today or drug problems.

C: Why did you say it was the best thing that you did?

P: About going into the navy?

C: Yes.

P: Because I think if I hadn't gone into the Navy I would have worked in a mill the rest of my life and I wouldn't have had all these opportunities and met all these wonderful people and have all these nice friends that I have. You know when you look back at it you say, when I was in the Navy I did this, when I was in the Navy I did that. It was a very exciting life.

C: Do you have anything else to add about your career any other comments you want to make?

P: No, I think I've just about covered everything.

C: Well, thank you very much for the interview, Gabrielle. It's been very interesting. You're one of the few women who stayed on in the Reserves, so that makes you very unique.

P: What I wanted to straighten you out with when you said my name, you said Gabrielle Pouliot. It's *Pouliot*.

C: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm mispronouncing it.

P: And you said that I joined in Pawtucket, but I joined from Central Falls. I came from Central Falls, not Pawtucket.

C: Oh, sorry. I'll correct that. Thank you very much.