

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

HISTORY
OF THE
WAVES

NO. 30
MARY LYNCH MCCOY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
1995

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Interviewee: Mary Lynch McCoy
Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak
Subject: The History of the WAVES
Date: August 2, 1995

C: This is the first oral interview with Mrs. Mary McCoy for our WAVES Oral History Project at the Naval War College. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I'm the curator of the Naval Historical Collection. Today's date is August 2, 1995, and we're conducting the interview at her home at 29 Vaughn Avenue in Newport, Rhode Island. Mrs. McCoy, I'm very pleased that you consented to be interviewed for our program on the WAVES in World War II, and I'm eager to hear about your naval career which, as you mentioned on the phone, extended a little bit beyond the war as well. I'd like to begin our interview with a few background questions. Can you tell me when you were born and where you were born?

M: I was born the seventeenth of August 1917 at Land's End. That's the name of the location down near Bailey's Beach. My father was the second gardener there.

C: And that was an estate, I assume?

M: Yes, it was. Governor Paquin's estate--at least his summer residence.

C: Did you live on the estate grounds?

M: Yes, but I didn't remember much about it since I was very, very small.

C: What did your mother do for a living?

M: My mother, when she first came to this country, worked for a family that also employed my aunt.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

M: I have a brother who is a biologist. He had a great deal of success with the Whooping Crane experiments, and he travelled a great deal. He had a plane called an L-5. I gathered it was very small, and he would go up to Alaska. He'd follow the migratory paths of the Canadian Geese and birds like that.

C: Interesting. Did you have any sisters?

M: I have two sisters--Catherine was an Army nurse. They called her Kip. And my sister Julie is the youngest in the family, and she is a teacher. She is still teaching. With six grandchildren at home, she preferred teaching in school.

C: Where did you spend your growing up years?

M: In Newport. I would say most of the time in Newport.

C: What elementary school did you go to?

M: St. Augustine's is around the corner. We were the third house from the school. That was my best job ever. I worked. I had a job there. I was the errand girl, and I was allowed to come to school a few minutes late, and I would take Sister Usivious's mail to the post office.

C: Oh, that's while you were in elementary school?

M: Yes. I had roller skates, so I could get up to the post office and back in a hurry.

C: Did you go to the local high school?

M: I went to a high school that had 120 students. It was connected to St. Joseph's Church.

C: Here in Newport?

M: Yes. The building is still there. It's an old wooden colonial.

C: I assume you decided to go to college after high school because you were an officer in the WAVES.

M: Yes.

C: Where did you go to college?

M: I went to Rhode Island College. It was a state-supported college, and entrance was by exam, more or less.

C: What did you major in there?

M: I would think English, probably.

C: Do you remember the year in which you graduated?

M: 1938.

C: Did you go to work after graduation from college?

M: They were short of teachers at that time, and five or six of us were hired right away.

C: Where did you teach?

M: At Mumford School which is off West Broadway. When you say where?

C: What school, I meant?

M: What school?

C: What school and what grade?

M: Mumford was named for one of the colonial settlers, and it was like a junior high school. It was all grade seven and grade eight. There might had been six of each one.

C: Did you like teaching?

M: Very much. I stayed. I retired in '83. While the girls were small, I did what Cindy expected me to do--stay home and keep people out of trouble, you know.

C: Now, you worked there, I assume, from 1938 until you joined the Navy, and when did you join the Navy?

M: I don't have exact dates. I haven't seen all that paperwork in a while, but it was October of '43, and I stayed until, I think, December of '52.

C: Wonderful! Did your family have any Navy connections?

M: Not to any great extent.

C: Were any of your relatives or friends in the Navy?

M: Not really.

C: How did you hear about the WAVES?

M: Well, I think perhaps the publicity given to them locally was what was on my mind.

C: Had you heard good things about the WAVES?

M: Yes. Some good, some not so good.

C: What good things had you heard? Do you remember? And what bad things?

M: Well, whenever I was out with my own friends--the group I'd gone to college with--if you stopped at any of the local

restaurants, there was a row of what we called bucket hats, and there was a row and all these young women who were very smartly dressed in their dark uniforms, and they weren't raucous or anything of that sort. They were very well behaved.

C: So you observed the WAVES in Newport?

M: Yes.

C: You said you had heard some bad things about them. What were they?

M: Well, I think there's a tendency on the part of many people to be critical of something they don't understand or maybe slightly jealous. Sometimes, it's a lot of each. I think even today you'll find there's prejudice, and there shouldn't be, but there is.

C: What was attractive about the Navy vis-à-vis the other services for you?

M: Well, in my case, I think it was a question of driving. I didn't, we did not have a car--our family, and if I could walk there I could get there. You know, it was that simple. Now, when you said.

C: What was attractive about the Navy? Why did you want to join the Navy instead of the Army?

M: Well, I can't say I liked the hat--the old bucket hat, but it really had a great deal of class, I thought.

C: Did you feel any sense of patriotism at this time? Did you want to serve in the war effort?

M: I think everybody was helping, and certainly we were in a position to see many of the things that needed doing.

C: You said you joined in October 1943. Why did you decide to leave your job teaching?

M: Well, I like teaching. I had taught for five years, and I taught Science and English, and I enjoyed it. I think if you visit in Ireland you'd find that there are more teachers than farmers in the family.

C: But you did want to leave your teaching post to join the Navy?

M: Leaving to join the Navy wasn't the primary motive. I liked what I was doing. I know it caused a great deal of concern and perhaps criticism of me, but the girls that I was friendly with

were delighted at it. They said, "Hey, this is good publicity for all of us."

C: So where did you enlist? Where did you have to go to enlist in the WAVES?

M: To Boston. And, that was an overnight trip. There was a WAVES barracks in the city, and so it was easy enough to get up there by bus and by taxi.

C: Now, what procedures did you have to follow to enlist?

M: You took a physical. We probably took some kind of written exam. I don't remember that, but there were physical exams. I questioned one thing. With the hospital they had down here, it seemed strange that I would have to bypass that and go to Boston, but perhaps that hadn't occurred to the man.

C: Well, then, everyone had to take a physical exam at the place of enlistment. Were you sworn in immediately? That very day?

M: I can't remember.

C: After that you returned to your home in Newport. When did you have to report for training?

M: I don't remember. It was the next month, and there wasn't much of a wait there.

C: Okay. November '43, then you probably reported. Was there any publicity in the local papers about your joining the WAVES?

M: There was. I don't think I saved a copy, but I do think there was one in the house at the time. My mother felt that perhaps they had gone overboard being critical, because I had a right to do whatever it was that I wanted within the law.

C: Well, that's what I was going to ask you next. How did your parents feel about your enlistment in the Navy?

M: My mother was delighted because, I think, she saw the whole picture, and she was very pleased that I would do that. My father was killed by a drunken driver when I was in the fourth grade, so my mother had worked really all of her life and I remember when my brother graduated from the boys school here, De la Salle, he said, "Now, I'm going out to get a job." And she said, "No. You are going to college. Your father and I decided that, so that's out of your hands." So John went to college.

C: So she approved of you enlistment in the Navy?

M: Oh, yes. I think we had more freedom perhaps than children who had two parents at home. My mother trusted us, and we could go on our own.

C: Oh, that's great! So you could make your own decisions, and you certainly were old enough to do so. Where did you report in November '43 for training and indoctrination?

M: My mother came home one day, and she said, "I met a young woman today," and she told me her name, and she said, "She going up to Northampton next week by bus, so she must be in the same group that you're in." So this proved to be the case, but there were just the two of us. We didn't know any of the other people on the bus, and they didn't know where we were going.

C: So you headed for Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts?

M: Right.

C: For your training. Did you leave from Newport?

M: We left, yes, from Newport and I guess we were routed via Boston. I don't remember now.

C: Well, when you arrived at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, what was your first impression of the place?

M: Oh, it's beautiful country. I think any time of year it would be impressive.

C: Where did you live during basic training?

M: The fourth floor of Gillette House and then we would march down the hill to the hotel for meals.

C: Oh, so you ate at the Northampton?

M: At the inn.

C: At the inn in Northampton. Oh, that's interesting. Did you have a roommate?

M: I had my friend on the bus who was my roommate. Her name was Barbara Grant, and Barbara was here this summer, I think. Her husband was one of the PT boat skippers. He was at the last reunion.

C: Oh yes, they had a reunion at the War College in June. Oh, that's great. Where is she located?

M: I'm not sure. I know she lived on, I think, Cranston Avenue, when she was growing up. Her father was military.

C: She was located in Newport then. Do you know where she is now?

M: No, I don't. I found her one year--that's a long time ago.

C: Certainly is. What kinds of classes did you take at Smith College?

M: Well, everybody took the same classes.

C: Do you remember what they were, in general? What types of things you learned?

M: I guess, perhaps, they were more or less courses for orientation, and they were interesting. You learned quite a bit from them really.

C: About the Navy, I assume.

M: Yes.

C: Did you have tests to take?

M: You were tested constantly. I think every time you turned around. But that was good because it reminded you that you had to pay attention when you were in class.

C: Did you like the discipline of military life that you were exposed to initially?

M: Yes. Having taught for five years, the discipline didn't bother me. It was a way of getting things done.

C: Oh, absolutely. Did you like the marching and drilling that you had to perform:

M: That was fun because the girls that were chosen to be in charge there very often were the ex-enlisted women, and they knew about the military, so they didn't kill you with this. I think they put quite a bit of humor into what they did. I felt the women were quite responsive.

C: Were your teachers men or women?

M: There were more women than there were men.

C: On the faculty?

M: Yes.

C: Of the naval training and indoctrination school?

M: Most of the men worried about: I have to get back to sea or I'll never get promoted.

C: It's true. What was your impression of the uniform that you were issued?

M: I liked the blues very much. They really are stunning uniforms. I don't like the black navy blue that they wear now. The one that we wore was much more flattering, I thought.

C: Did you like being on your own?

M: Yes, but I had been before, so that was easy enough.

C: Oh, had you lived on your own when you taught--not with your parents--not with your mother, I mean?

M: Oh, when we lived at my aunt's house, which is about three houses the other side of the church, we lived with my aunt and my mother. My mother worked, so my aunt kept track of us.

C: So this is actually the first time you were on your own away from family and independent?

M: No. During my time in college, one of the girls in my high school class had two maiden aunts that lived in Providence, and they had space in their home so they took, I think, it was three of us at a time.

C: Oh, so you lived with them too? Very good. Did you have any time off during basic training? Do you have any weekends off?

M: Wednesday afternoons, I remember, and weekends. Sometimes you could get to Boston, if you arranged your time well.

C: Did you ever get to Boston during this time frame?

M: Yes, I had an aunt and uncle who lived in Springfield which was quite close, and we would visit with them, and one of my friends was a Coast Guard girl who was from New York, I think, and Agnes was very friendly--a good mixer.

C: Did you have any social life during this time frame?

M: I wouldn't exactly call it social. There wasn't dating or things of that sort. You were so busy waiting for someone to come around the corner that needed to be saluted, so you'd pay attention to things like that.

C: Was there a can-do and enthusiastic spirit among the WAVE recruits that you met in Northampton?

M: I felt there was. They'd make up songs to go along with the marching, and some of them were just delightful, and some of them were very funny. And, I felt, certainly you were always busy enough. Any group of gals you bumped into would be very apt to invite you along with them.

C: Oh, that's good. So there was a camaraderie among this group of women?

M: Yes.

C: Your training was about six weeks.

M: Yes.

C: Did you have a graduation ceremony after your training was over?

M: They must have had one. I would think so.

C: And you were commissioned at that time, I assume, too?

M: Yes.

C: An ensign.

M: The First Naval District seemed to want its own bodies back, so we got as far as COMONE, 150 Causeway Street.

C: Well, I wanted to ask you where you were sent after you graduated from Northampton?

M: Well, the First Naval District was an old building. It had been there. We had the top floors of this building, and they had a communications setup there.

C: You were a communications officer then?

M: Yes.

C: And what did that entail?

M: This would be, I think, regular office skills that would help in moving information along. As soon as something came in, you would process it and sent it on its way.

C: Were there many WAVES in COMONE in Boston? Did you work with lots of them?

M: Yes. We worked on a rotating watch, and you knew the people on your own watch quite well.

C: What special qualities were needed for this assignment?

M: I would say just regular language skills.

C: Where did you live when you were working in Boston?

M: We lived in different places, some of them within walking distance of work, which was kind of nice because when you got off in the morning you could walk home and wake up a little bit.

C: Were these WAVE dormitories?

M: No. We had apartments that people who had space would give a list to the housing office, and you could go look at these places and decide what you wanted.

C: Oh! Did you live with other WAVES then? Did you have an apartment with somebody else?

M: Yes. I had a roommate named Robin Armstrong, and Robin and I have kept in touch, but she's in Boston. And she was the daughter of a clergyman, and her mother, Robin said, "You will

always find my mother in the local library. She reads constantly."

C: So she was your roommate. So you had to cook and take care of your own clothes and everything in this apartment situation?

M: Yes.

C: Do you remember who your CO was at the communications station?

M: There was a Ruth Andrews and Marion. Marion was a tall, young officer. She was lovely, and I should know her name. It will come to me about three in the morning.

C: Yea, right. So there were WAVES who were basically in charge of the COMONE where you worked. Did you need additional training in communications?

M: Well, from COMONE, I went up to Mount Holyoke, and that was near enough.

C: And, how were you chosen to go to Mount Holyoke?

M: We never knew. We never knew. I suppose they might have had test scores or something of that sort.

C: So you were just sent.

M: Yes.

C: Was this for a course in communications?

M: Yes. It would familiarize you with the other services, too, and it was a very interesting thing. I know one Christmas Eve our group was staying in the area, so the children in an orphanage in Holyoke invited us to come. These were little kids. They invited us to come to spend Christmas Eve with them, and they had gifts for us, and we taught them a little bit about marching and so forth and so on.

C: Interesting. How long was this course at Mount Holyoke?

M: I'm trying to remember. Maybe about four months. I'm guessing. Nineteen weeks.

C: That's quite a long time. And who were your instructors? Were they women again?

M: I can't, believe it or not, I can't remember. I would guess that it might be half and half.

C: Did you live in the dorms in Mount Holyoke?

M: We lived in dorms in North Rockefeller Hall. That was the name of our building, and our inspecting officer was a Coast Guard officer. Was her name Miss Murgard? I can't remember.

C: The Spars, I guess, were trained with the Navy women as well?

M: Yes. And the Marines, also. So that worked quite well.

C: Did you make any special friends there?

M: I think the gals that came to Boston with us were the ones we remembered best because one girl, Ruth, still is in the Washington area. She would come around every payday and say, "Okay, give me this, this, and this." What she would do is decide what our entertainment was going to be until next payday and how much money we owed her, and she'd run around and buy all these tickets for concerts and things of that sort, and it might be ballet whatever was in the city that was good entertainment.

C: Oh, I see, so you went up to the city from Holyoke for this special entertainment?

M: You could. Yes.

C: Oh, that's great. Did you take advantage of this?

M: Causeway is in the city.

C: I was talking about Mount Holyoke though. When you were at Mount Holyoke?

M: Yes. You could go into Boston or go to Springfield, the other way.

C: Where were you assigned after your course at Mount Holyoke?

M: Well, after Causeway the personnel officer left word that he wanted to see me. It was after a mid watch so I went to his office and he said that there was a billet open that. He said, "Now, I have to send someone, and none of the older officers want to go." So he said, "Because you're the most recent arrival, I'll be sending you." And I said, "Where am I going?" And he said, "Newport." So I tried not to laugh.

C: Your hometown?

M: Yes. So I said, "Oh, okay." So he gave me four days to get here. So when I reported in I had a little sunburn from Gooseberry Beach.

C: Right. It didn't take you four days to get to Newport from Boston.

M: No. But he said, "Nobody wants to go because it's not on the train line." And that was true. They didn't really have a train. You had to take a bus and then a train from Providence to get to New York.

C: Right.

M: And, they just felt I want to be right in Boston so the entertainment will come to me.

C: That's right. This is a little bit of an outpost, and you still can't get any place, to Providence, without taking a bus. So were you happy to come back to Newport?

M: Yes. I enjoyed it.

C: This was your home turf.

M: Yes.

C: Now where were you stationed on the Naval Base?

M: At the Navy Base, there is a little plot of land between the War College and the Training Station--where the museum is now, and the little place in the middle isn't there anymore, but it was the COMM Office, and it was also quarters for some of the

people who worked the watches with us, and I don't know why the little shrubs there were taken down. I'm sure whoever's in charge of landscaping the place had new ideas.

C: They did tear the COMMSTA down.

M: Yes.

C: Twenty years ago or so. But that's where you worked in that little building, and what did you do there?

M: Well, I was the Communications Officer, and that just entailed moving along all the paper, just getting the information out as quickly as you could.

C: Did you work with other WAVES there?

M: Yes.

C: Who was in charge of that?

M: There was a male communications officer who had the general oversight of the place, and then as they trained the younger people they in turn would replace him or her.

C: Did you enjoy that position?

M: I enjoyed it.

C: Did anything unusual happen during that time period?

M: Not really. Captain Pennypacker was our Captain. I forget what president we had at that time. I should know, but Captain Pennypacker needed some teletype equipment to go out to the ship to get the president's words off the way they should be. One night Secretary Forrestal had been at the base, and on his way home he stopped at a tiny little lunch place called the Rhode Island Lunch, and the next morning he wanted to know who had the watch the night before, and so I hadn't left yet, and I said, "I did." And, he said he had seen the base station wagon parked at the Rhode Island Lunch, and he just needed to know why. He was a very intelligent man, and so I said, "I authorized it." And they had been complaining about some of the food at the base, and I knew the Rhode Island Lunch was liveable. There was a Greek family that ran it at that time. It was convenient.

C: Was that explanation good enough for him?

M: Seemed to be. I said, "Well, I did." And there was no problem.

C: Oh, that's good. Did you have an opportunity to meet anybody else who was, more or less, famous?

M: Secretary Brown--John Nicholas Brown--had a home along the waterfront near Kings Park, and he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Air, and he was a very interesting man. He did a great deal, I think, for Rhode Island.

C: Where did you live during this assignment in Newport?

M: In Newport. Okay. Most of the time while I was at Newport I lived at home.

C: Oh, that was allowed?

M: Yes.

C: Because I know there was a WAVES barrack on base, and I imagine you could have lived there.

M: Yes.

C: Do you remember how many hours per day you worked at the COMMSTA in Newport?

M: Well, if you came in in the morning, you'd get there around 7:30 for an 8 o'clock watch, and you'd probably leave at 4.

C: Did you have to work on Saturdays?

M: If it was a rotating watch, you worked your time that way. One interesting thing about working watches, you got so it irritated you if there were a lot of people around. For example, when you came in to work the day watch, you'd say, "Oh Lordy, they're all in my way. I'll never get my work done today." But if you came in on a mid watch or an evening watch there was just your staff, and it was easier all the way around.

C: Was there a lot of message traffic coming through?

M: Yes, there was. And then it would get transferred out to the ships that were out in the bay.

C: Was a lot of the traffic from Washington, D.C.? Message traffic?

M: Both. There was, yes.

C: Was any of it confidential or secret?

M: Much of it was classified because that would ensure that it get where it was going promptly, and that worked quite well.

C: How did you interact with your other workers and the men and the women there? Did you feel that there was any discrimination against the WAVES?

M: I didn't feel that way. I think some, depending on where you fit age wise, I think some people can accept conditions that are not ideal, and they can ignore that and go ahead and do their work anyway. In other cases, I think if the people had never worked before, if they were right out of college, they might have, been a little uneasy about the work that was there.

C: But the men treated you well?

M: Yes, that wasn't a problem.

C: Oh, that's good.

M: Except one chief that sat across from me, and he smoked all the time, so I thought, well, I can either smoke back or I can ignore this so. Smoking back was not the way to go. Right?

C: What did you do for recreation during this assignment? Did the base provide any activities for the WAVES working there?

M: I'm sure they must have. I had an old bike in the garage, and I could bike to the beach, and my time was my own when I wasn't at work. So it worked out well.

C: Did you make any lasting friendships with other WAVES in Newport during this time?

M: The group in Boston. I had relieved a girl named Louise Platt and she went to law school, so when she wanted back in the Navy she heard that I was getting out, so we kept in touch. I was in Japan, and she was in the Boston/Washington/New York area, and when she came in I was still on duty out in Yokosuka, and we kept in touch two or three times a year.

C: Great! Well, that's fantastic.

M: She lives in Niantic, so that's an easy ride.

C: Right. Oh, that's great. What did you like about this assignment in Newport?

M: Well, much of it was familiar to me--at least the geographic area, so I knew what to expect, and I could anticipate a lot of things that would be happening.

C: Was there anything you disliked about your work at the COMMSTA?

M: Not really. You were too busy to spend time looking for slights. I don't mean that the women were never unfairly criticized. I'm sure they were, but that goes with almost any job.

C: What was Newport like during the war? Can you describe the atmosphere in the town?

M: It was very exciting. The casino on Bellevue Avenue was the second officers' club, and the upper level, and that was interesting because it was within walking distance of the town for many of the men had only one car in the family, and naturally their wives and children were apt to have the car while they were stationed on the ship so they could walk in and out of the Bellevue Avenue area quite easily.

C: Was this a gambling casino?

M: No. Part of the building--they talk about Canfield House as probably having been a gaming center. There certainly was enough money available for something of that sort to be successful.

C: But the casino was the building on the Travers block, you mean, on Bellevue?

M: Yes.

C: So that area was kind of a drawing card for the Navy. How did the Newporters react to the service men and women who inundated the town?

M: I guess your reaction would depend upon the point of contact. Some people had extra apartment space. They could make money on this, and this was appreciated by the families that they were able to help. I know everything was very expensive. My first teaching job in 1938 I had \$1400 a year. That was my salary, and, there were some teachers who weren't making that.

C: So Newport was still an expensive town during the wartime?

M: Very much so.

C: In World War II. Did you have an opportunity to socialize with any man during this time frame? Did a lot of the WAVES date?

M: There were plenty of them there. Yes, and I would say most of the men were gentlemen. Really. You had the right to pick your own friends, so if people were obnoxious you could just ignore them.

C: Where did you go on dates in Newport? What did people do?

M: Well, sometimes you'd go up to the Providence area, if there was a play of some sort. Boston was within driving distance. I think many people in good weather on weekends would take advantage of just the beauty of the place. It really is lovely.

C: But did you meet your husband during the war?

M: Yes. I met my husband in Japan. He had come in from the Pacific Fleet, and he was in the Operations Office.

C: Oh, good! We'll get to that when we get to Japan. Do you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of purpose and esprit de corps?

M: I think they had.

C: Did you keep up with news about the war during your service in the WAVES through newspapers, through newsreels?

M: Well, we had access to the *Nippon Times* and *The New York Times* would come out a couple of days after that, and wherever we lived we had present information. In Alaska, the radio wasn't on all day long the way it's apt to be around here. They've even shut the president off sometimes, and I guess that conserved energy. It's difficult to say.

C: How did you feel about the war--World War II?

M: I felt badly that you sent your best people off to war. You were killing off the people you needed to straighten out the

country, if it ever were going to be straightened out, and that's such a waste.

C: Where were you on VJ-Day, August 1945?

M: I think I was on a bus going to Providence. I was going back to work in Boston.

C: Had you been transferred from Newport?

M: Oh, yes. When Commander Taylor was looking for bodies.

C: When did you leave Newport then?

M: I'm trying to remember. There was a cutback like the one that is occurring now, and some of us who were kept on active duty were given orders to go to Washington. We were at 3801 Nebraska Avenue in Washington, and this day, I guess, I had been down visiting at home; and, as we went in through Barrington on the bus, there was a lot of activity there, and obviously something had happened, so we asked the bus driver, and he said, "The war is over." So everyone felt like running home.

C: Everyone was quite jubilant. How long were you in Newport stationed at the COMMSTA?

M: I don't know. I would guess it was about two years. Two years would be a normal tour.

C: You know I'm trying to get the time straight because if you joined in October '43, and you had trained and then worked at Boston, and then went to Mount Holyoke, the war would have been over. It would have been '46 by the time you left Newport.

M: Well, Holyoke was not a tour.

C: No, but you said you were there four months.

M: That's right. That would be about right.

C: So that would take you well into 1944. Well, the war ended in August '45, and most WAVES were in for the duration of the war and six months. Why did you decide to stay in the Navy after the war was over?

M: Well, I think I had made some friends that I enjoyed being with and so it was worth seeing through.

C: Because the Women Armed Services Integration Act was passed in 1948 making women part of the regular Navy, so you must have been in a kind of a reserve status through that time frame.

M: I think we were.

C: Can you tell me what your postwar assignments were?

M: In my case, let's see. Oh, I went to Carlisle Barracks for some more classes. That's in Pennsylvania.

C: Right. Now what kind of classes were you taking there? Do you remember what time frame it was?

M: It was kind of like.

C: We were mentioning Carlisle Barracks and when you were there,

M: Yes.

C: And why you were there.

M: Carlisle Barracks was Jim Thorpe country, and the Army was well entrenched there. Most of the classes that I took had to do with publicity and newspapers, that sort of thing, not the classified type of work that you would have had prior to that time.

C: Were you preparing for another assignment?

M: Yes. I was stationed still at Nebraska Avenue, and the courses up in Pennsylvania were part of that program.

C: What were you doing on Nebraska Avenue in Washington? Was it a communications position or something else?

M: It still is. It's been communications ever since the girls school left there. There was a private girls school there for quite a long time.

C: Who was your CO in Washington?

M: We had several of them. There was a Captain Hopper. We weren't apt to see them except on a good morning, good day status, you know. And Captain Hopper was busy pushing his pile of papers, too, I'm sure.

C: Were you handling message traffic on this job as well?

M: Sometimes, yes.

C: What kind of work were you doing besides that?

M: At Nebraska Avenue, that was mainly what we did and then a set of orders came in. Commander Joaquim called me down to his office, and he said I had orders to go to Japan, so there was a

little time there, a couple of weeks, to pack up my things and get ready.

C: Why were you being sent to Japan?

M: I'm not sure why I was chosen. I'm certain that there were quite a few of the other women who were as well prepared as I was for that.

C: Was this going to be a communications billet in Japan?

M: When I got to Japan, it was more like a, I think it's the kind of job an exec might have. My feeling was that--well, in fairness to everyone--I would say it was not a full-time job.

C: Where were you stationed?

M: This was at the Communications Annex.

C: In what town in Japan?

M: It was on the Base at Yokosuka. So I think there were about 70 officers there.

C: Were there many WAVES there?

M: No.

C: Was there anybody else besides you?

M: Later there was. In the beginning, I think perhaps because I had reported in to Yokosuka when they need a WAVE officer. It was easy to transfer me to a new location, so I was on the same base, and you just hop on the bus and get dropped off at building C, maybe C-70 was the name of it. I forget.

C: I assume you lived on the base then, too?

M: No. I lived in civilian quarters for awhile because they didn't have any WAVES there in the beginning, and then they got orders for about five or six women, and some of them lived in Hiyama which was off base, and some of them lived with friends they had met in the civilian quarters. There didn't seem to be any restrictions on where you lived.

C: Oh, that's interesting.

M: Yes.

C: What year was this?

M: Well, I got out in '52, I think.

C: So was it before this? Was it just prior to your getting out that you were sent to Japan?

M: Oh, I guess it was about a year. It would help me if I had a calendar. I lived in the quarters where the civilian women were, and that had some advantages, and then when the WAVE officers came out, we were able to help them in terms of if you live here there are these advantages and here this might be a little better for you and so forth and so on.

C: You mentioned that the job was kind of a part-time job?

M: That was my feeling. I think perhaps because when I worked around the clock I just felt that I was very busy all the time, and as I said, then it got so if the day people were around there were just too many people.

C: What watches did you work then? Rotating?

M: Worked days. No. I worked days at Yokosuka. I don't mean that they were not employed. I guess my feeling was you could get this done and do it rather quickly.

C: Oh, I see. It wasn't enough work to fill a full eight-hour day.

M: No. It wasn't.

C: What did you like about this assignment in Japan?

M: It was a chance to become a little familiar with Japanese customs, and I liked it. They were just beginning to allow a little crack where Americans could take part in the local activities. There was one very interesting thing. It's called the _____ and it was a festival where you had a rider, and he would have armor on of the kind that they would have in the Middle Ages, and he would come dashing down the hillside already to slaughter anything in his way, and the judges would decide who had done the best job of making this an exciting moment.

C: So you were able to watch these festivals?

M: Yes. Sumo, they had just allowed. I think the first sumo--I think he was American--but the fact that someone other than the Japanese was doing sumo really made news out there.

C: Did you sense any resentment on the part of the Japanese toward Americans?

M: I didn't feel that way.

C: Did you have much interaction with the Japanese?

M: I think my roommate Margaret had some contacts in Tokyo. There was a philosophy group. Our Captain Stillman belonged to this group, and he invited Margaret to go up to Tokyo to meet with some Japanese members of their group, and they were telling us how they felt when the city was being bombed, and you sort of felt in your own mind it was the only way to save anyone, but it really must have decimated them to have to rebuild that whole place.

C: You mentioned you met your husband in Japan?

M: Yes. He was stationed in our headquarters building, and he had come in from the Pacific coast. He had taught at the Naval Academy. He had taught chemistry. That tickled me because later when we had lived for quite awhile in New London, we moved back to Newport when Tim was out of the Navy by that time; at Salve, he had all women in his classes. They didn't have mixed groups at Salve at that time, so he found this quite different. So one day he came home--and this was the first week he had taught at Salve--and he said, "Well they do things differently down there. They say a prayer before their lesson." And I said, "Well that sounds familiar. We use to do that." And he said, "One of the girls was very nice. She realized I didn't know." He didn't know what was happening. So she said, "Mr. McCoy, would you like me to lead the prayer?" So that was done successfully.

C: So you met him in Japan?

M: Yes.

C: Was he career Navy?

M: He was career Navy. He was the class of '39.

C: At the Naval Academy?

M: At the Naval Academy.

C: How many years did he stay in?

M: He retired on 20, and I think he had always taught. He liked it, and he wanted to get out and do that.

C: When did you get married?

M: We were married out in Japan in '51, I think, and that was interesting, and I had turned in my resignation because woman officers were not allowed to have dependents under 21. I asked them what about male officers, but I didn't get a reply.

C: So your decision to marry ended your career in the Navy?

M: That's right. Oh, I thought it was a good decision, and I still agree.

C: Oh, that's great.

M: Tim passed away in '93, and he, I think he did some very nice things for the Navy. He was just a very quiet, very intelligent person.

C: Oh, that's great. So you were still affiliated with the Navy for a number of years after that, after your resignation?

M: That's right.

C: Where did you live on the Navy assignments?

M: I'm trying to think. Let's see. '52. Tim had gone to Purdue to take a course. This was a one-year program for retired military officers, and it depended upon the work. They all had graduate degrees, and then this was more or less to have them catch up with modern-day methods of teaching. He enjoyed that, and it was a very small group, so we got to know Indiana quite well, and the university itself is very nice to military people there.

C: You mentioned you lived in New London for awhile?

M: Yes. Tim had accepted a job at a junior college there, Mitchell Junior College, and he liked that. There were some Coast Guard officers retired who were teaching also in the program.

C: How did you happen to come back to your hometown, Newport?

M: The heat in Texas on a day like today would answer that question for all of us. It just isn't the right climate.

C: So you were stationed in Texas as well?

M: No, but Tim lived there, and he had grown up there.

C: Oh!

M: And his father raised cattle, and having visited as we would every time we had a change of orders, I think we realized that it was a little too hot for people to live there. Of course, Tim might say the same thing about the cold of New England.

C: Right.

M: When we lived in Alaska, though, the men would all go out fishing, and the weather never bothered him.

C: Interesting. During your service in the WAVES did you ever have a chance to meet Mildred MacAfee, the Director?

M: Yes.

C: Oh, where did you meet her and when?

M: Well, I fell out of a top bunk, and she happened to be inspecting our building. It was the one with four floors.

C: Where was this?

M: This was at Smith. And she was very well liked, and a lot of the gals in the program were friendly, and they said when Miss Mac came along, you know, they all wanted to be there for her. She did a good thing. I think the women in charge of the program were amazing, and they kept out of harm's way in a sense. They knew they didn't need any more publicity. Most of what they had was good, so they stayed with that.

C: Did you have any preconceived expectations when you entered the WAVES?

M: Not, no, not long-ranged.

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

M: I think it was. I have, someplace here there's a book that Captain Hancock wrote, and it explains a great deal of what she had done.

C: Were there any discipline problems in the WAVES that you knew of?

M: If there were, they got cleared up quickly. You would get angry at a male officer who was breathing down the throat of a young ex-enlisted woman. Some of them were. Well, they were a menace to themselves, I think. If you kept the girls busy and kept them happy, that was probably the best way to go.

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

M: Well, probably travel, and I said we were fortunate in that respect.

C: Did you feel you were challenged by your work in the WAVES?

M: I think so, because you could see different ways of doing things.

C: Did the WAVES experience and the war change or redirect your life in any way?

M: Probably it did. I guess we might have chosen some other spot in the U.S. or elsewhere to live.

C: But did the war make you more independent and self-reliant?

M: Too much so. Well, I think that's true of many. As I said, at home where my father had passed away, we were allowed to do things perhaps that were too challenging for many women, but as I said, we could do them because we had done them before. I'm amazed when my girls come in, and Eileen, the youngest one, had bought a house where she lives in Wisconsin, and she built a bathroom. She took a course in electricity. She took a course in wiring and plumbing, and then when she was all through building her bathroom, she had the inspectors come and tell her what was right about it and what was wrong about it, and we got quite a kick out of it. She was very proud of her work, though.

C: Oh, women can do anything then. Did the WAVES experience broaden your horizons?

M: I think it probably did, and sometimes I would not have seen what started the situation. In other words, someone might be almost a missionary in the way he or she conducted his life, and if you talk to them a little bit you'd find out that they did have very unusual lives, but they were coping with them quite well.

C: Did you feel that what women were expected to do and to be changed when the war was over?

M: Yes, because here now you have women going out the door to gainful employment, and the gainful is becoming also a necessary part of their lives, and I think particularly now these last twenty to twenty-five years you have women being included more fully in the progress that's being made.

C: Are you a member of the Ocean State WAVES or WAVES National?

M: I have been, and as I said we both know Mary, but I found that, as I said, I do volunteer work in Girl Scouting, and the timing wasn't the best for both of them.

C: Did you resume a career after your marriage?

M: I retired from the Navy in '52, and then I went back to work in '66, I think it was. We had moved back home, and in Middletown there was a teacher whom I had worked with before and she said they were really desperate for experienced teachers, and she asked me if I had time for this, and I said, "Give me a couple of months to unpack and by that time school will be open again and see how it goes." I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it very much.

C: Where did you teach when you returned to Newport in 1966?

M: I taught at Mumford in the beginning. That was part of the Newport system, and then the following year I was offered a job in Middletown, which had a better salary than the one in Newport, and that worked out quite well for me.

C: Did you teach in a junior high in Middletown?

M: No. In Middletown, I was at Berkeley-Peckham which was a school. I think it was third, fourth, and fifth, but then I seem to see a six grade looming there. I'm trying to think what the exact. We were really an all-Navy school at that point in time, and it was great because we could do remedial work, get all the kids in the town who, because they had moved so much, really needed help, and they worked. They really did work. They did great work.

C: When did you retire from teaching?

M: I retired from teaching in 1983.

C: You mentioned that you have four daughters and that one of them was in the Navy. Did you encourage your girls to join the Navy?

M: Yes. I guess I talked too much, but the girls are strong-minded as is their mother, so some of us shared a little bit on either side, but Cindy is our oldest girl, and she's a dental hygienist, and she feels that all mothers should stay home and take care of their children and not work outside the home. So, of course, we talk a lot about that. The next one is Sheila who just finished twenty years in the Navy, and Sheila's thinking is not quite like Cindy's. Then the next one is Phoebe, and Phoebe works in New Hampshire in a very beautiful area with a lake. The dogs can go swimming anytime they want to, and Phoebe got her Master's growing better tomatoes. Her paper was on growing better tomatoes, and she is assistant manager of a Pearl Vision Store in New Hampshire. So we're still waiting for the better tomatoes, but that will come. Phoebe is a very interesting person. She's very quiet. I guess she has to be quiet because she is in the middle as it were.

C: And your other daughter? You mentioned you have four.

M: Eileen. She's the youngest one. She works in a recreation management job in Wisconsin.

C: Oh, so they're spread out all over the place.

M: Yes. These last two weeks have been hectic because they've been in and out, in, out.

C: Oh, that's very nice, so one of them did follow in your footsteps and joined the Navy?

M: That's right.

C: Is she still in now?

M: Yes. No one knows what the cutback is going to bring. Some of her friends who have gotten out have become consultants in various fields. One of her friends has triplets, and we laughed at that. She very much wanted to be pregnant, and was, and was very surprised when the triplets came along. So she made Captain, and I think is planning to get out this summer.

C: That's her friend. Right?

M: Yes, her friend.

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

M: I think the Navy could have gone along beautifully without me, and I am delighted that I've had the experiences I have had. Sheila called me about two weeks ago. She had been home at the time the PT boat skippers were in town having a reunion, and she was at the Viking, and this man up there was pacing back and

forth waiting for the shuttle. He was afraid the shuttle would come, and he wouldn't get his plane in Providence, so she said to him, "No." She said, "The system is good." She said, "That's how I come and go all the time." He couldn't believe that she would talk to a stranger, and she said, "You're not a stranger." She said, "I know. The paper says you're here for your reunion. It might be the last one because the people are leaving the planet rather quickly."

C: Did you feel the Navy had an impact on your life?

M: I think it did because I speak up whenever I feel it will help the situation. Normally, I wouldn't. I would just let everything go, but for me, it's been interesting. I have had many pleasant moments with people I have seen again from time to time, and I think our kids feel the same way. Of course, I remember once when we lived in New London, the Sound Lab, military, was also there, and a little girl whose father was skipper, this little girl had grown up to be eighteen and of marriageable age, and her mother said, "The sad thing is she doesn't have a friend from the old years to be here on her wedding day." So you do lose out on some things.

C: Moving around, I guess, has its impact.

M: Yes.

C: Do you have any other comments to make on your WAVES service?

M: I don't think so. I enjoyed it, and I think if we're in a situation like that again, it can be managed. It can be managed quite carefully, but as I said, "War is such a waste."

C: Do you get a pension from the Navy because of your service?

M: I don't. No. If I had stayed in twenty years. I was in nine years. If I had stayed in twenty years, or if I had added civilian time, civilian-military time to that, I would get a pension. But it's a wonderful opportunity to tell young women that that is available because there aren't many places in industry where you can retire after twenty years.

C: Well, that's true. I want to thank you very much for your comments on your WAVE career in World War II. We will get this transcribed and then send a copy to you for editing. Thank you very much.

M: Well, I want to thank you. I've certainly enjoyed this.

INDEX

Alaska, 2

Bailey's Beach, Newport, RI, 1

Boston, Massachusetts, 9, 16, 18, 19, 22, 24, 34

Brown, John Nicholas, 27

Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 36, 37

Forrestal, James, 26

Japan, 33, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44

MacAfee, Mildred, 46

Mitchell Junior College, 45

Mount Holyoke College, 20, 21, 23, 35

Naval War College, 12, 25

Newport, Rhode Island, 1, 3, 4, 9, 11, 13, 23, 24, 27, 30, 33, 34

Northampton, Massachusetts, 11, 12, 16, 18

Ocean State WAVES, 49

Rhode Island College, 4

St. Augustine's Church, 3

St. Joseph's Church, 3

Smith College, 11, 13, 46

United States Naval Academy, 43

United States Navy, 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 32, 50, 52

VJ Day, 34

Washington, DC, 28, 35, 37

WAVES, 1, 6, 7, 10, 18, 19, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36,
39, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 54, 55

WAVES National, 49

World War II, 1, 4, 32, 34, 55

Yokosuka, Japan, 30, 39, 40