

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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OF THE
WAVES

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ESTHER FRITZ VILLENEUVE

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The History of the WAVES

Interviewee: Esther Villeneuve

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: November 2, 1995

C: This is the first interview with Esther Villeneuve at her home in Pawtucket, RI. Today's date is November 2, 1995.

Esther, I'm very pleased that you've consented to have this interview on your experiences in the WAVES in World War II. You told me before that you're now the President of the Ocean State WAVES Unit, which is great, and I'm sure you're looking forward to a busy and active year with the unit. But I'd like to double back a little bit and get some background on you before we launch into the WAVES experience in the Second World War. I'd like to ask you when and where you were born?

V: I was born on a farm near Titonka, Iowa, and I was born September 21, 1922.

C: What did your father do for a living?

V: He was a farmer. We had everything on the farm, horses, cows, pigs, guineas, and chickens. But it's much different now. You have to specialize in one particular thing. But at that time

my father wanted to make sure that he had land for each one of us children.

C: Was it a large farm?

V: It was a half a section and that was enough for four. See, there were five of us. So when I came along they had to buy another 80 acres so that we'd all inherit the same--80 acres. But that is not sufficient today.

C: So it would have been a 400 acre farm which sounds very large.

V: Here it does.

C: What did your mother do?

V: Well, she was a homekeeper and she did canning and sewing and baking and, you know, what all mothers do.

C: Well, there's a lot to do on a farm.

V: And Ladies Aid, so she kept busy.

C: Did you work at all on the farm in your youth?

V: No. Because we moved to town when I was seven because my father was retiring and my brother took over the farm. But my greatest experience being on the farm was in the summer when the thresher (the man with the threshing machine) would come into the yard with his big black tractor and it made so much put-put-put noise it scared the heart out of a little girl. That's my biggest remembrance of being on a farm. So I really didn't do any farming. I did go to a one-room schoolhouse.

C: Oh, that's interesting.

V: We had to walk a mile to school and so my first three years were spent in a one-room schoolhouse.

C: It must have been a country school then. It had all the grades?

V: All the grades.

C: Where did you end up going to high school?

V: Titonka High School.

C: How large was that town?

V: 650 people.

C: Can you place it in Iowa for me?

V: It's in northern Iowa. It would be between Algona, which is the county seat, and Mason City where I went to work later. We were about twenty miles from the Minnesota border. But it was good farming country.

C: What year did you graduate from high school?

V: 1940.

C: What track did you follow in high school?

V: Just general, because being a small high school most everything was quite general. Those who intended to go to college took a foreign language. I graduated with a class of twenty-nine which was the largest class at that time.

C: Twenty-nine students? Where did you go to work after graduation?

V: I wanted to go to college, but then my father died. I stayed home and worked in the telephone office. The switchboard consisted of little doors that dropped when someone called central and then the operator picked up a plug and attached it to the board and said, "Number, please." When the operator was told

the number, she picked up another plug opposite the one that she used to put it into another little hole and you'd ring the number on that line. There might be twelve people on that line and you'd go by a code, short and a long, two shorts. That was fun.

C: Sounds complicated.

V: It was really fun. So I worked there the first year and then I went away to school at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, where I took a business course. I had wanted to be a nurse (I guess I was attracted to the uniform), but two days before I was going away to school my boss came in and said, "Well, why don't you take up business. Then you could come back and work in the telephone office." Well, I thought that was great because I really liked working in the telephone office. So that's what I did.

C: How long were you at the school?

V: Wartburg College? Just one year. I got a business certificate so then when I came out I went to work at Pfaff's Baking Company in the bookkeeping department.

C: Was that in Mason City?

V: Yes.

C: So you wanted to live away from your family?

V: I lived at the Y. It was only a block away and I met a lot of nice girls there.

C: Well, that was quite respectable. That's what people did in those days, living at the Y. It was a safe place. Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

V: Yes, I was at college and I was with my roommates and it was quite a shock. I mean everybody was very, very sad, and we'd sit thinking about all the boys that would have to go.

C: Yes, it was a shock, I'm sure to everybody. Did any of your family ever serve in the Navy?

V: No. My brother served in the Army.

C: Did any of your friends and relatives join the service after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941?

V: Oh, yes many of my friends. In fact, one of my friends was on the ARIZONA at Pearl Harbor.

C: That was tragic--the sinking of the ARIZONA. How did you hear about the WAVES?

V: When I was working at the bakery one of the men's daughters came in with her uniform and she was so thrilled about it and she talked to us about it. My girlfriend and I thought, this is the thing that we wanted to do. She talked her cousin into joining and I talked my friend, who was at Titonka working in a bank, into it. So the four of us joined at the same time and we were sworn in on Navy Day. It was October 27th, I believe, in Mason City, Iowa, in 1943.

C: Just a little bit after the WAVES were formed. 1942 was when the legislation was passed. Why did you think the Navy was more attractive than any of the other services?

V: I really don't know. I guess it was this girl's influence on us.

C: What did your mother think about your joining? Was she pro or con?

V: She was kind of sad, because she was alone, because my father had died and, you know, a mother hates to see her children go away and then my brother, of course, had already gone in in '42.

C: So she had two children in the service at this point in time? Where did you go to enlist?

V: We enlisted at Mason City, Iowa, and that's where we were sworn in.

C: Did you have to take any tests before you enlisted?

V: We had a physical and we had a test that we had to do.

C: An intelligence test or aptitude test. Did you find these difficult or did you think they were easy?

V: I can't remember; it's so long ago.

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

V: Oh, yes. There was in the hometown paper, *Titonka Topic*. Local girls enlist in the Navy and it was also in the Mason City paper. Of course, we had our pictures in the paper being sworn in.

C: It must have been big stuff in those days.

V: We had quite a group that joined at that particular time.

C: Did you have any parties or send offs before you went to Hunter College?

V: Yes, before we went into the service.

C: Right, before you went into the women's training school.

V: Yes, we did. I lived at the Y and the girls had a party for me. They had an organization and I was vice president and we had a tea and I poured, the royal sendoff.

C: How did you get from Mason City, Iowa, to Hunter College in New York?

V: We were sent on a train.

C: Were you sent all together with other WAVES?

V: With other WAVES, but the girls that I signed with and wanted to be with they were all on different trains. We went to Chicago and luckily we all met in Chicago and then we stuck together like glue. Hand in hand, or one in front of the other so that we would be together, and we were together at Hunter in the same apartment.

C: Oh that's great! And then you took the train from Chicago to Hunter. Do you remember what your impression of New York City was when you got off?

V: Not really other than it was awfully big and I remember seeing a lot of tanks. I think they took us around the long way. I remember seeing a lot of oil tanks and all that sort of thing. You really didn't know where you were going to end up. You know, the apartments, of course, to us were very big and living in a small town. The apartments were nice. I think there were ten girls in an apartment complex.

C: Oh, ten girls in an apartment.

V: Yes, and then we would have blackouts and we would have to sit in the hall. There was one girl that didn't want to go. I mean she signed up, but she cried and cried because she wanted to get out.

C: Did she get out?

V: Yes.

C: Ultimately she did. It wasn't for her then. I wondered if some people had made a mistake in their choice. Were you homesick at all during the six week training and indoctrination period?

V: I don't think so because I had my friends with me.

C: Did you write letters home to your mother?

V: Oh yes, always. I always wrote every week.

C: That's great!

V: It was kind of depressing because we were there at Christmas time and we had to bring a newspaper and sit on them in the gymnasium floor while we sang Christmas carols. That was a little depressing, but I know we did have a good dinner and which kind of made up for it. I guess every group got to go to New York City on leave for a weekend and that was great.

C: What did you see when you went on this leave weekend?

V: We went to Radio City. I think the first place we went to was a hotel that told us where to go. The ladies there were very kind and they told us where to go to get food reasonable. I know one place was Hamburger Haven and we had a real great hamburger and then we went to see the Statue of Liberty, of course. That was very impressive because I knew my father was one of the first people to see it when he came across and then we went to the Empire State Building. We did quite a bit in that one weekend.

C: Did you go with your friends?

V: Yes.

C: Do you remember who your roommates were at Hunter?

V: Just the four that came with me from Mason City. That was Bonnie Burton and Ruby Anderson and Geraldine Bruns. I can remember one more; there was Carolyn Rego and I don't know where she went after that time.

C: You had a very busy schedule, I'm sure, at Hunter.

V: Oh yes, marching and classes.

C: What did you think of the classes? Did you find them challenging, easy, difficult?

V: Well, there was a lot to remember because being from Iowa you don't hear about the Navy. Learning all the insignias and writings and all of that. So it was a bit of a challenge.

C: Did you get tested on this material?

V: I don't remember being tested there. I know when we went to Milledgeville we were tested, but I don't recall being tested at Hunter.

C: Did you like marching and drilling?

V: It was kind of tiring because I remember my feet hurt so much and keeping in step because you thought that was just the thing you had to do and some of the leaders were kind of rough. We had physical education.

C: Oh, you did? What kind of activity did you engage in there?

V: Just plain exercises and building yourself up.

C: Do you remember what platoon you were in?

V: I remember at Milledgeville but not at Hunter. Perhaps I have it in my book.

C: Did you participate in regimental reviews on Saturdays?

V: Oh, yes, and you'd be amazed at the amount of girls that passed out.

C: Oh really?

V: Yes.

C: You were there in the winter and you had to go out in the cold to do that.

V: I guess some just were not physically fit because standing at attention for a long time or at ease.

C: That's interesting. I hadn't heard that. Did you have any trouble at all adjusting to military life and the rules and regulations?

V: No. I don't think so because my parents were quite strict.

C: So you were used to the discipline.

V: There were so many things going on that were new, that were exciting, so I really enjoyed it.

C: Did you like the Navy uniform?

V: Loved it. And I still love navy blue as you can see.

C: And you still have your uniforms. Both your dress white and your navy blue. They're in great condition. Did you like being on your own and being independent during this six week period?

V: I guess I really didn't feel I was on my own because I worked with friends so we kind of helped each other.

C: Do you remember how your day was structured during basic training?

V: Got up very early and what was hard was getting ten girls in the bathroom and dressed to go to breakfast at the same time.

C: Did you march to class?

V: Yes. You marched everywhere.

C: What did you think of the Navy food?

V: I put on a lot of weight.

C: Oh, you did?! It must have been good because a lot of the gals mentioned the tin trays and that was kind of a shock.

V: That was very different.

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

V: Oh yes, you learned a lot of songs. That was fun.

C: Did you have to sing at all while marching?

V: Yes.

C: Do you remember what songs you sang while you marched?

V: No. Hup two, three, four, WAVES of the Navy and Anchors
Away.

C: Did you have an opportunity to participate in any extra
curricular activities there, like the songsters or the newspaper?

V: Not at Hunter. My girlfriend wanted me to because I sang in
the choir at church, but I didn't want to leave my friends.

C: Did you have to attend church when you were at Hunter? Was
that mandatory?

V: I don't think it was. I can't really remember having a
chaplain or going to church when we were at Hunter. Later on
when went to Milledgeville and other places we went to church.

C: Did you ever meet Mildred MacAfee? Did she ever come to
Hunter while you were there? The Director of the WAVES.

V: I don't believe so.

C: Did you ever see Captain Amsden who was head of the training school?

V: Perhaps but I guess it didn't register. I can remember seeing Kate Smith.

C: Where was she?

V: They had entertainment for us once in awhile. Some got to see Frank Sinatra, but I got to see Kate Smith. She was good. I wanted to see Frank Sinatra but Kate was nice.

C: Did she come to the Hunter College?

V: Yes. It was somewhere at Hunter College.

C: Oh that's good. So the Navy did provide some entertainment for you.

V: Yes, they did.

C: How were you selected for the storekeeper rate?

V: Having a business background and working in bookkeeping. I guess that's why I was chosen to go to Milledgeville. My friend Gerry, she had gone to office training and she worked in a bank,

had practically the same knowledge. So it was great that we got to both be sent to Milledgeville.

C: Did you have to take any tests to determine what rate you would be selected for?

V: I don't know. All I remember is you're seeing your name up there. This is where you're going, and it took us three days to get from New York to Milledgeville, Georgia.

C: How did you go?

V: On the train.

C: In a group of WAVES?

V: Yes, but it was very, very slow, and then it was rainy and dismal so it was really a dreary trip and then we get off at Milledgeville and they have this little depot and this red mud. We're walking and we're thinking, oh, what are we getting ourselves into now. But we ended up at Sanford Hall which was a beautiful southern dorm with these big white columns and that was nice.

C: That was Milledgeville State College for Women, wasn't it, where you were domiciled?

V: Yes, it was.

C: Did anything amusing happen on the trip down?

V: No, I can't think of anything.

C: How long were you at Milledgeville at the storekeeper's school?

V: Three months.

C: That's quite a long time. Do you remember what kinds of classes you took and what kinds of things you learned?

V: We learned a lot of different things that we didn't use after we got out, but I remember one of the instructors was Miss Robertson and I can't think of the other one, although I do have her picture. Then we had two officers. One was Ensign Borgerding and she was a very strict blonde. She was killed in North Dakota in a train wreck shortly after. We did really have to study a lot at that time. Keeping our room clean was, I mean, you had to have it so that if the officer came in with a white glove and wiped under your bed and if she saw anything dirty it was demerits and you had to stay in or whatever. But it was nice there. We could go bicycling, and sometimes we could get out of our uniform and get into some relaxing clothes.

C: So you were there in the winter.

V: Sort of. I think we got there in January and we were there until March. But it was a beautiful time because the flowers came out very early. Milledgeville wasn't much of a town.

C: Very small, I imagine.

V: Yes.

C: Were your instructors WAVES?

V: Yes.

C: Did you find the courses that you had to take to prepare you to be a storekeeper challenging or interesting?

V: Yes, because we learned how to figure the Navy pay.

C: You went with one special friend there. Did you live with her in the dorm?

V: No I didn't. They separated us.

C: How many roommates did you have?

V: I had one roommate from Pennsylvania, Ellie Dunn, and I had one from Texas we called Willa Farrell and Betty Franks from Cincinnati. So it was kind of nice to meet different people. But Gerry and I would get together whenever we had a chance to go out. It's nice to learn to live with other people. That's one thing that's nice. When I went away to school we were all Lutherans and you kind of get a warped mind, but when you go away with other people you learn their traits and what they're thinking and that's what life is all about--learning about other people.

C: It's a broadening experience to meet people from all over the country who are interested in serving and doing the same thing. Do you remember what you did socially or athletically there?

V: There wasn't too much to do. We probably went to the movies or go downtown, but there wasn't much of a town. You'll find this kind of odd. Gerry and I would go to the cemetery to read the epitaph on the stones. That's fascinating, you know, that they might have three sons named John, John, John. It might sound funny to you, but even today I find it fascinating to go to an old cemetery and read the stones.

C: Lots of people do. They're very interested in that and in preserving these old cemeteries. Did you have any chance to

interact with the townsfolk there? How did they respond to the WAVES?

V: I don't think we had much to do with them. I can't remember them ever having us for any social activity. We did go to church. My friend and I went to the Episcopal Church and sometimes went to the Baptist Church. She was Methodist, I was Lutheran, so we just branched off.

C: Do you know how many women were being trained at Milledgeville when you were there? Was it hundreds, would you say?

V: I would say maybe 300. I know my troop number was 812 and I'll have to check with Tina to see what the number was. I know we were the last class to receive a rating, like a petty officer's rating. After that they had to work their way up and that was kind of difficult, but we went out of there as 3rd class storekeepers.

C: Oh I see, so you did have a rating. Do you remember how much your pay was?

V: \$78.

C: Did you save this money or did you spend it?

V: I sent some home for savings bonds, but the rest I spent.

C: Was that for two weeks pay or a month?

V: I'm quite sure it was for a month. We had our food and we received a clothing allowance.

C: So you really didn't have that much to spend it on. After the three months were over, did you have a graduation ceremony or a promotion ceremony or anything like that at Milledgeville?

V: I think we did have something, but I can't really recall.

C: Did anything unusual happen there? Amusing, exciting, out of the ordinary?

V: Well, no, but it was how we were being picked to go somewhere else. You could either put down I want to be stationed with my friend or I want to go to a certain place or so forth.

C: So you had sort of a choice?

V: Yes, a little one. So Gerry and I wanted to be together so they sent us to Norfolk, Virginia, which was the last place that we ever wanted to go.

C: Why?

V: You know what we did? We went out and we ate a candy bar in the street. That was tabu. WAVES don't eat on the street. I imagine they couldn't have smoked on the street either. I don't know.

C: I don't think so.

V: Well, anyway that's what Gerry and I did. We were very upset.

C: But why didn't you want to go to Norfolk?

V: I guess it was the talk about there's so many sailors there and drunkenness. You know, you hear so many stories.

C: So you heard bad things about Norfolk?

V: But the base was very nice.

C: When did you leave for Norfolk and how did you get there?

V: We had a short leave so Gerry and I went home to Titonka. We were so proud because there was another girl that was kind of

in a high class section of our town and Gerry and I outrated her so we were proud of that. We went to Norfolk on a train.

C: Did you go with other WAVES again?

V: No. I think Gerry and I went by ourselves.

C: From Iowa to Norfolk. That must have been a long trip.

V: I guess a couple of days. Where were you domiciled in Norfolk? Where did you live?

V: We had barracks.

C: Can you describe that situation?

V: Well, it was cubicles. You had partitions, but between them there were four bunks and at the end of your bunk you had like a little cupboard and that's where you had to put everything. We did have a desk between the two bunks. I don't know who decided who was going to get the upper bunk, but we got along very well. Gerry and I were lucky to be in the cubicle and we had two other nice girls. They were yeomen. That was Ann Cooper and Vola Thompson. Really great people.

C: How many gals were in this barracks? Do you have any idea?
Was it enormous?

V: Yes, it was quite big, but there were several WAVE barracks.

C: Where were the showers and the johns?

V: They were down the hall. But we did have privacy in our showers. I'm quite sure we had privacy. It was just a curtain. Of course you had to jump naked into the shower, but you did have your privacy.

C: Did you like this form of communal living?

V: No, that was a little hard to get used to.

C: Where were you assigned in Norfolk?

V: In the small craft dispersing office in building 138.

C: What did you do there?

V: Figured pay for small craft and also Gerry and I sat next to the counter. I don't know if that's why we were picked to wait on people that came in with their papers. Officers would come for their travel pay. They would get paid so much a day, per

diem. But an enlisted person would come with their traveling pay and they got so much a mile. So I can still remember that it's 578 miles from Boston to Norfolk because I did it so many times and it's 1,042 from Norfolk to Miami, Florida. We did it so often. I really enjoyed it. It was kind of hard at first because different dialects. There was a fellow trying to tell me what to type something and he says "are naught." How do I spell naught? Of course I know not n o t, but "are naught." How do I type that?

C: You had to get used to different accents. How many hours a day did you work?

V: We worked from 8 o'clock to 5:00. At 8:00 in the morning we had to be standing at attention at our desks because the Marines next door played the Star Spangled Banner and we had to be at our desks at that time. We had three officers. We had Lieutenant Brehm who had been injured. I guess that's how he became head of our office. Then we had a Lieutenant (jg) Moore. He was very nice. Then we had a Hawaiian officer, Mr. Forrest, who came up through the ranks and he was like a father image to us. We didn't like the food at the WAVES barracks so the boys ate at building five, and, oh, they had great cooks so he got us to eat over in building five. He'd take turns taking a couple of WAVES and he would go out to pay the sailors on the ships.

C: Oh, so you actually went on the ships.

V: Yes, we did. Sometimes he would take us aboard to have dinner. He was very nice.

C: How many were in your office? Were there other WAVES there too?

V: Yes. We had about eight WAVES in our office. We worked with the men. Like one would figure something and somebody else would check it.

C: Were you very busy?

V: Very busy. When the war was on we worked every day, every third night and every other weekend. So we really worked.

C: You certainly did.

V: But after the war was over it was like 8-5 and no weekends.

C: After VJ Day in August. Did you make any lasting friendships during this assignment?

V: Well, I think so. I met my husband.

C: Oh great! Now what was he doing and how did you meet him?

V: I met him at a party. His group had invited all of the girls in the dispersing office. It was on a ferry and we were aboard the ferry and that's when I was introduced to him. I first met him when he came to my roommate's wedding which was in the barracks. We had a nice living room. And my roommate was married at the Chapel, but had the reception at the WAVES barracks.

C: Now what years was that?

V: I would say 1944.

C: So at that point WAVES were allowed to marry because before they were not.

V: I think so. I think at one time once they were married they had to get out.

C: Right. Then they eased up the rules. So you met him at your roommate's wedding.

V: That was the first time he took me home.

C: Where was he from?

V: Rhode Island.

C: Where in Rhode Island?

V: Pawtucket.

C: Oh, just right where we are now. What was his rate or job?

V: He was a carpenter's mate. But he had to take my roommate home, too, because I had promised. You didn't walk alone on the base and I had promised that I would walk home with her. So the three of us walked home. That was my first date with him.

C: And then on the ferry?

V: Oh, that was first. That was when I first met him, but I really didn't go with him. I was with someone else at that time.

C: I see. Then did you go together steadily after that point?

V: Quite steadily.

C: Was he on the base permanently?

V: Yes.

C: So he wasn't attached to a ship and going out.

V: And if the girls wanted to go anywhere they would say, well, incidentally, they called me Fritzy. That was my nickname. They'd say, "Fritzy, ask Herbie to take you here or there", because they knew if he took me he'd talk the other fellows into taking their girls. But that was their way of getting somewhere, if we wanted to go to a dance at the hotel or something. Get Herbie to take you.

C: Did he have a car?

V: No.

C: So how did you get around? By bus or taxi?

V: Well, we did a lot on the base.

C: Oh, you did?

V: We walked on the base. You took the streetcar down to Norfolk.

C: Did you go into town often?

V: No, not too often. But we'd go out to eat different places and Gerry and I had decided that we were going to learn to eat seafood because we had never had it. I love it today.

C: Yes, it's great once you get used to it. Did any other girls have an opportunity to date quite a bit there?

V: Oh, yes. I only met Herbie probably the last year that I was there. I went with other fellows.

C: So there was always something going on. Did the Navy plan any activities for people on base?

V: Service Force always had some parties and at Christmas we always had a special dinner and on Thanksgiving and things like that. But we got to go to Virginia Beach which wasn't far and maybe on a Sunday some of us girls would go to Williamsburg. I know a couple of weekends Gerry and I went to Washington to meet Ruby and Bonnie, our other friends from Iowa. We got to see quite a bit.

C: That's good. Did you attend a church in Norfolk.

V: Yes. We went to the protestant chapel on the base. Captain Claypool was the chaplain there and I have a book that he has written, "God on the Battle Wagon." He was aboard the SOUTH

DAKOTA. I guess he's had a lot of other stations, also, but I think Norfolk was one of his last stations before coming to Providence.

C: Did you find him inspiring?

V: He was very inspiring. Being non-denominational, I felt he was very good.

C: Did you do anything athletically? Did you engage in any sports at Norfolk?

V: Yes. We had softball, swimming.

C: Did you get involved in any extracurricular activities like songsters?

V: We had a chorus and I sang in the WAVES chorus for the anniversary.

C: What anniversary?

V: It was one of the WAVE anniversaries.

C: Oh, probably the founding of the WAVES. It was on July 30, 1942, that the legislation was passed.

V: This was in '44.

C: What did you like about your assignment in Norfolk?

V: Well, I liked working with figures. One of the nice things is that when we went to work in the morning we'd walk by pier seven and see all the ships. That was really nice.

C: It was a huge base. Is there anything you disliked about Norfolk and your assignment?

V: When we wanted to go downtown. There were so many, many people, and if you wanted to go to Hampton Roads we'd have to take the ferry. There would be so many drunken sailors that would get aboard ship. I mean that part I didn't like. I know one time we wanted to go to the hospital to visit some friends and there's all these drunken sailors. Now I was with another fellow at this time and we went over to Portsmouth and coming back they threw a sailor over.

C: Overboard?

V: Yes, they never did find him.

C: Oh for heaven's sake--that's crazy.

V: It is. So, of course, the boy that I was with--they didn't question him because they knew he was with me, but I mean those things happened.

C: I guess they did. Did you keep up with news about the war through the newspapers or movie reels during this timeframe?

V: Well, not that we sat down and read the newspaper that much, but we did keep up with what was going on because in March of '45 I got a telephone call that my brother had been killed.

C: Oh, no. Oh, dear.

V: First we got the message that he was missing and they called me a week later and told me that he had been killed.

C: That's sad. Now where was he? In what theater?

V: He was in the Battle of the Bulge.

C: So that must have been a very sad time period for you when you heard about your brother's death.

V: Yes, it was. Then my mother had a nervous breakdown and I had to go home and we had to make arrangements for her to go to a

hospital which was kind of sad and I had to sign for her and they had something new--shock therapy--which sounds kind of bad.

C: I've heard about it.

V: But I don't think they use that now. It helped her a great deal. When she came out she forgot all the bad things and she was her jolly old self. But it was very depressing because I know when my brother went away in the service she would say, we're not celebrating Christmas until he comes home. Well, he never came home.

C: Do you think the war triggered, or his death triggered this?

V: Oh, yes, because she was by herself.

C: I guess there were many sad times for other people, too.

V: Oh, yes. I mean whenever they would hear--you kind of shared their sadness.

C: Their grief. Yes, that was a sad time for many people.

V: Well, then you shared their happiness, too.

C: Of course. It works both ways. What was your reaction to the death of FDR in April 1945? Do you remember that event?

V: Yes. We didn't think Truman was going to make it. We really hadn't heard of him that much, but he did terrific things and now I think he's one of the greatest presidents because he really did a lot.

C: Yes. He was an uncertain quantity then.

V: He was very outspoken, but he got things done.

C: Was there any ceremonies or memorials for FDR on base?

V: I think at the chapel but not as far as days off or anything.

D: Do you remember if there was any special celebration around VE Day in May '45? Victory over Europe?

V: Gerry and I were back home at that time so we were celebrating. All the stores were closed. Of course, it wasn't that big hoopla, but I know when the war was over in Germany I was on the base and...

C: You mean in Japan? VE Day is war in Europe.

V: Yes. Well, when that was over we got on the bus and we just drove around. We were very, very happy. But when the war was over in Japan Gerry and I were home on leave at that time.

C: Oh, that's August '45. So that was a big celebration, wasn't it?

V: It was. We were all very happy.

C: I'm sure you were. Do you know how your town celebrated?

V: They closed the stores and I know they rang the bells at church and had a special service at church.

C: Did you return to Norfolk after that?

V: Yes. There was an opportunity to go to California to be stationed, but then I had met Herbie so I didn't want to go. There was another girl that wanted to go to California to see her boyfriend so she and Gerry went out to California.

C: And you stayed behind in Norfolk. How long were you there after the war ended?

V: 'til April the next year when I was mustered out.

C: April '46 then. How did you feel about leaving the Navy?

V: I was very happy to get out, but if my mother had been okay I think I would have signed over for another six months to make chief, but I was kind of hesitant. So I was happy to get out.

C: So you got out at what rate?

V: Storekeeper First Class (\$96.00 a month).

C: Did you experience any discrimination or harassment when you were in the service at all from the men?

V: No.

C: So you think you were well treated?

V: And even they used to say these things like sailors and dogs keep off the grass at Norfolk, but I didn't witness that because I met a family when I went to a church in Norfolk and they had me and another girl out for dinner and they were very nice to us.

C: That's very nice. So you did interact with the townsfolk.

V: We did go on picnics in the park. Some of the fellows had their wives there and you met them at the park. The azaleas were beautiful, of course.

C: Oh, yes. Spring in the South is lovely. Did you have any preconceived expectations when you entered the WAVES of what you were getting into?

V: No. We just went in for the fact that we were there to help so that the fellas could be relieved to go overseas.

C: I do think patriotism was at an all time high.

V: It certainly was.

C: And did you feel it was your patriotic duty to go in?

V: Yes, I did.

C: Do you remember if the WAVES were thought of highly by those in the outside world, or women in the military, in general? What did people think of them?

V: I don't know whether they did or not.

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

V: Yes, I did. I mean they ordered us around as if they knew what they were doing.

C: Did you know of anyone who was asked to leave the WAVES because of pregnancy or for disciplinary reasons?

V: I do know a girl that did get out when she was pregnant, but she was married. She went home to get married. I guess she had an argument with her boyfriend before she came in and that's why she joined and then they made up and she'd keep going home and going home and hoping to get pregnant and she did get out.

C: Did you notice any disciplinary problems or were the WAVES cooperative?

V: Not in the group of girls that I was with, but there were some girls that worked in transportation. Sometimes they would drink or, you know, but when they were transferred out of that department they straightened themselves out. So there were some that didn't behave.

C: Did the WAVES have a strong sense of esprit corps or camaraderie?

V: Yes, absolutely. We were proud to be WAVES.

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

V: Well, like going to Milledgeville and learning something different, and I suppose that knowledge could be used later.

C: Did the WAVES experience in World War II change or redirect your life in any way?

V: It certainly did because here I am in Rhode Island and I wouldn't have gotten out of Iowa I don't think unless I had joined the WAVES.

C: That's good to know. When were you married may I ask?

V: 1947.

C: So that was about a year after you got out. Was your husband out of the Navy then?

V: Yes. He got out a few weeks after I did.

C: So where did you go back to after you got out?

V: I went back to Iowa to make sure my mother was okay before I came out here.

C: Did you work at all during that timeframe in Iowa?

V: Yes, I went back to the telephone company in Mason City. I didn't go where I had been in Titonka. I did work for awhile in Mason City.

C: Did your husband go back to Pawtucket?

V: Yes.

C: Where were you married?

V: We were married here in Rhode Island because at that time, you know Protestants and Catholics did not marry. It was a no-no.

C: Oh that's right, yes.

V: My mother was very, very against it, where his mother kind of went along with it. We had to be married in the rectory because we weren't allowed to get married in the church.

C: Oh, I see. In the Catholic rectory then.

V: But still today he goes to the Catholic church and I go to the Lutheran church and the two boys were raised Catholic and the two girls were raised Protestant.

C: Oh, so that's how you split.

V: And we have discussions about religion and it doesn't matter.

C: Yes, it doesn't interfere with your relationship.

V: In fact, we have a little Jewish daughter-in-law which is really precious. We have all nationalities in our family now.

C: So it's a real mix. That's very good. How did you feel about coming to Rhode Island? Were you excited about it?

V: I didn't like it when I first came because when you're in a small town you know everyone and everyone knows you and everyone's nice to you. But here I didn't know very many people, only Herb's family. That was it. It was very difficult to go out. I was very homesick when I first came here.

C: I'm sure. Did you work at all after you were married here in Rhode Island?

V: Yes. I worked at Brown & Sharpe for awhile because there was someone living in his mother's duplex that worked at Brown & Sharpe and he got me a job. Then I went to work for Shartenbergs because it was closer to home. I worked there until I got pregnant. Then when I was home I took correspondence courses and I took a real estate course. Then I went into real estate, but it was a little difficult working in real estate and having small children so I kind of closed that out until Kevin was about five. Then I went to work at the BVG&E Employees Credit Union. There I was for twenty-five years.

C: That's quite a long time. When did you start working full time again?

V: I didn't work full time. I just worked part time at the credit union but that was very interesting because it was working with figures again. That was just my cup of tea. You'd have to balance the books at the end of the month and, of course, it's all different now. It's done with computers. Back then you did it the long way.

C: Do you think the war made you more independent and self-reliant?

V: Absolutely.

C: Do you think it broadened your horizons?

V: Oh, yes. I mean if you're brought up into a community that has only one religion and then you go out into the world and you find out that other people are just as good as you are, maybe better, and you learn from it.

C: Well, that's good. It was a learning experience. Did you take advantage of the GI Bill at all?

V: Yes, I took a correspondence course.

C: In what field was the correspondence course?

V: Salesmanship and Sales Management. I think I helped my husband get his job at the Gas & Electric Company because I wrote the letter for him. You have to be self-confident. That's one thing I learned from that course; you have to sell yourself. You have to make people want you.

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

V: I think so because before you were always in the home and now we've found that we had an opportunity to work outside the home.

C: I think a lot of women did do that after the war. Did you maintain long term any friendships you had made in the service?

V: Yes, I still keep in contact with one of my roommates in Springfield, Mass. and I have another friend I forgot to tell you that Herb and I were attendants at their wedding. I thought one night that she was going to tell me that she and Woody had broken up instead she said, "Will you and Herbie be our attendants? We're getting married." So we did and I still keep in contact with her. In fact, she just made me a beautiful blouse. We're both into crafts and I make something and send it to her and she makes something and sends it to me.

C: Where does she live?

V: She's from Chicago originally but her husband died and this man that she met, his wife died. He came home to his class reunion and they got together and a couple of years later they married, so six months she lives in Chicago and six months she lives in Arizona. We keep writing back and forth.

C: What happened to your roommate from Iowa that you were so close to?

V: Gerry went to California and she liked that very much. She married out there and she was working on her boat and evidently

the fumes got to her because she drowned. I know she was an excellent swimmer. That's one thing I had to learn was how to swim when we were in bootcamp. That was hard. I had to dive.

C: Did you know how to swim before that?

V: No.

C: Oh, so you had to learn.

V: Oh, yes. There was one poor girl that just couldn't do it. She stood in the corner and cried. But I did make it, but do you know that I still don't know how to really swim. I can stay up but not actually swim.

C: They really tried to make you physically fit. Did you receive any medals for your WAVES service?

V: I got a Good Conduct medal and I think I have one other I can show you later.

C: Did you attend any WAVES reunions that were held immediately after the war? I know there were several.

V: No, I didn't have that opportunity because we didn't have the money, or if they had them, I didn't know about them.

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

V: Well, meeting my husband and learning how to live with other people.

C: You're a member of WAVES National in your state chapter, do you remember what year the state chapter was organized?

V: 1991. Janice Wilson from Connecticut came and I guess there was something in the newspaper and so we met at Johnson & Wales and organized our unit. I was the first secretary and Rosetta Derosiers was the first president.

C: So have you held offices continually in the organization since 1991?

V: Yes, I have. I've been a secretary and vice president.

C: Is that office for one year?

V: Yes.

C: What activities have you planned for the unit?

V: We just had a luncheon at the Country Buffet in Seekonk and we had a speaker, but our most exciting project is now coming up, our 5th New England conference in Newport, R.I. in 1997. The girls have been busy making things, you know, favors for the table.

C: When will that be?

V: 1997 in April.

C: So that's about a year and a half.

V: It'll come before you know it.

C: Where is it going to be held in Newport?

V: At the Viking Hotel.

C: Oh, great, and now that is the National?

V: No. This is just the New England Conference.

C: And how many will come about? Do you know?

V: We expect a couple of hundred. But the National will be next year in Boston in September and there will be about 500 people there.

C: That would be fantastic.

V: And of course we'll help with that, too.

C: Oh, certainly.

V: One of the things that I want to do, besides the conference, is to really help other WAVES that need help. You know visiting people in the home or in the VA Hospital. I think that's one of our things we must do.

C: Have you attended WAVES National conventions?

V: Yes.

C: And where did you go?

V: We went to Norfolk, Virginia, Tina and I, but that really wasn't connected with WAVES National, but it was like a 50th anniversary and we had a great time. The National Convention that we went to was in Milwaukee.

C: When was that?

V: That was last year.

C: Oh. So you're very, very active in this organization which is great.

V: I enjoy it. Ginny Hanson went with us last year to the convention. I think we'll have a bigger contingent when we go to Boston since we're close.

C: Yes, the New England area. You should get a lot of good representation from here. Do you have anything else to add to this interview?

V: Well, I just hope it keeps going. We are getting more members and I want it to be that they enjoy coming to the meetings.

C: Certainly. There's a great bond, I think, between the WAVES. A lot of camaraderie and a great bond between them. I wish you luck with your presidency and thank you so much for taking the time out for this interview.

V: It was great that you came. I enjoyed it.

C: I enjoyed it very much, too, and we'll transcribe it and send you your copy.

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