

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

HISTORY
OF THE
WAVES

NO. 33

M. CATHERINE KEENAN SULLIVAN

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

1996

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Interviewee: M. Catherine Keenan Sullivan

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: January 10, 1996

C: This is the first oral history interview with M. Catherine Sullivan. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. Today's date is January 10, 1996, and I'm interviewing her for the WAVES in World War II Oral History Project. I want to thank you Mrs. Sullivan for taking time out of your schedule today to meet with me and discuss your career in the WAVES in World War II and your Navy experiences. I'd like to begin by asking you where and when you were born?

S: In Providence, Rhode Island, in July 1924.

C: What did your father do for a living?

S: He was a captain on the Providence Fire Department.

C: Did you mother work at all?

S: Later, she worked--after we were going to school and fairly well grown. She didn't work in her profession, though. She was a graduate of Rhode Island School of Design (jewelry design), and had a Masters Degree in Education from Columbia University. She didn't teach or design jewelry. She did clerical work. She had been a yeomannette in the First World War, and she went back to work with that training into the Office of Price Administration during World War II.

C: Oh, that's interesting. As you mentioned to me when we were talking, your children have this graphic arts bent, and I think you must have inherited it from your mother.

S: That's where it all came from, yes.

C: How interesting. Did she ever design any jewelry on her own?

S: This ring that I am wearing was of her design.

C: Oh, that's beautiful.

S: My father told me of my mother's designing the ring. They bought the diamonds from a female diamond broker. And, we're talking about 1918. I don't think there were too many women in that field but, evidently, there were some.

C: Interesting. Do you know how she happened to join the Navy as a yeoman (F) in World War I? Did she ever speak of that?

S: I think it was a bit of a joke. She and her girlfriend went to enlist together. My mother wasn't really much of a typist, and, the way I understand it, her friend took the typing test for her.

C: They fudged it.

S: Yes.

C: Isn't that interesting? Where was your mother born and where did she live?

S: She was born in Rhode Island, also,--Providence, Rhode Island, and always lived in Providence. She and my father were children going to school together--kindergarten.

C: So they knew each other all their lives.

S: Yes, and then after World War I, they were married.

C: Well, that's very interesting. Do you know where she was stationed in World War I?

S: Yes. She was stationed at New London, Connecticut. It wasn't a submarine base in those days. I don't know just what it was. I'm not sure that it was a training station, but she was evidently assigned to naval the library there. She set up the Dewey Decimal system in the library.

C: Oh, that's interesting. Do you know when she joined?

S: No, I don't--except for those papers.

C: I think it said May 1918.

S: 1918. I don't know.

C: Which is about five months before the war ended.

S: Yes. I don't know. I'm surprised that it was so late, because it had such a big impact on her life. Her sister, was a few years younger, left her profession as a school teacher and went to work in Washington, D.C. to aid the war effort. So they were, evidently, very much involved in World War I. My grandmother was very forward-thinking for that era to allow her daughters these adventures. Even in World War II, you know, some parents didn't want their daughters to enlist; and here my grandmother, who was very conventional, allowed had two daughters to leave home.

C: That is most unusual in 1918, because people just didn't leave home. Mobility and transportation weren't like they are today, so it was difficult.

S: Well, she was very broad-minded. She came from Ireland when she was eleven years old, but she, evidently, felt it was a good experience--go for it, you know.

C: Yes, well she emigrated, so that was a very daring thing to do. Going to the unknown, so maybe she felt that her daughters should have a similar type of broadening experience. Was the second daughter, your aunt, in the Navy or did she work as a civilian?

S: No. She was a civilian worker.

C: Worked as a civilian.

S: In Washington.

C: Do you know what kind of an impact the Navy experience had on your mother's life?

S: Oh, yes! She was very proud of it. She was a founder of the Rhode Island Women's Post of the American Legion. I will say, I think that her fellow members became her closest friends

through life. They had gotten together sometime in the early '30s--quite early thirties, I think. They became her close circle of friends.

C: Oh, that's interesting. The bonding from the war.

S: Oh, very much so.

C: That experience continued.

S: Yes. I feel that same way about this unit of the Waves National. There's a lovely feeling at meetings that you're just not attending a nice, polite tea party; you're there with friends that you can really talk with. We don't share any common experiences, except that we were in the Navy. Maybe it's that there's a certain kind of person enlists or volunteers or generally gives of themselves.

C: I think so.

S: They are a little freer.

C: So you have that camaraderie based on the experience of the Navy, but in all different specialties. That's very good. That's very interesting. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

S: I have two sisters, but neither one of them was interested in the Navy. My younger sister was still in high school, and my older sister was at Pembroke College at the time.

C: Did they join the Navy or the services?

S: No. I don't think they had an inclination to do so.

C: When did you graduate from high school?

S: 1942. You know the movie, "Summer of '42." That was us. June 1942.'

C: What did you prepare to do after high school?

S: Secretarial work. I took a number of college courses around Rhode Island, but I was pleased to be a secretary right from the beginning. I went to work for the Rent Bureau of the OPA. This office dealt with the administration of rental property and the freezing of rents.

C: In Providence?

S: In Providence. Then I enlisted in the Navy.

C: So you were in civil service first.

S: Yes. Well, I was waiting for my 20th birthday to enlist.

C: Absolutely. Did any of your friends join the Navy?

S: No, but I had a friend who joined the WAC, and we got together in Washington one weekend. I was surprised how regimented their lives were. Once we were out of yeoman school or boot camp, it was work from 8 to 4:30 or whatever your schedule was, but there was no mustering or marching through the day.

C: Oh, did the WACS have that?

S: Yes. They had to march to and from lunch.

C: Oh, even on their jobs?

S: Yes.

C: So they were strictly regimented and regulated?

S: Oh, yes, at least my friend was in her camp. They were treated like soldiers, and we were treated like ladies.

C: Oh, that's good. That's a good comment. Can you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor occurred, December 7, 1941?

S: Oh, yes. There was a young man visiting at the house. He was that day stationed at Ft. Deven, Mass. His unit had been an Army bivouac in Roger Williams Park over the 4th of July holidays, my father had wanted to see the bivouac, and we three daughters went with him, and we met this young sargeant from Oklahoma. He came courting, from Fort Devens that Pearl Harbor weekend. My father gave us use of his car. We had on--the car radio that he had to report back immediately; and that Pearl Harbor had been bombed but none of us knew where Pearl Harbor was or what it was.

C: No. I wouldn't think you did.

S: No we had no idea.

C: Well, when you found what had occurred, what was your reaction? Do you remember how you felt about it?

S: Well, really, you were in sort of a panic, an excitement, you know. I was working for the OPA then in downtown Providence in the Hospital Trust building which is a high-rise, and you could see down the river from our office. Within a few days, there was a big fire at the Walsh-Kaiser shipyard which was doing defense work. The word was that the fire had been sabotage. It wasn't, but everyone assumed so. So soon, after Pearl Harbor, everyone was on edge.

C: That's interesting. Did you keep up with news about the war before you enlisted in the Navy?

S: Yes, because it was quite a while. I was in high school, before I enlisted, in 1944. When President Roosevelt declared war, I remember the day. I was in the school cafeteria, and you could have heard a pin drop. All the radios in the building, were on and everyone realized it was a very serious matter. I really had two more years in wartime before I was old enough to enlist.

C: Absolutely. What had you heard about the WAVES before you enlisted?

S: Well, the *Providence Journal* had an interview with my mother when the WAVES were first organized. I think it was either June or July of '42.

C: Exactly. July of '42.

S: July of '42, and I was sworn in in July '44, on the anniversary. I didn't really know anything about the new group, but I didn't have any fears about it either. My mother had been in the Navy. If she made out all right, I would make out all right, also.

C: Did the fact that your mother was in the Navy influence you to join the Navy, let's say, versus the Army or the Coast Guard?

S: Oh, yes. Very much so.

C: Did you think the Navy was more attractive than joining the WACS or the SPARS or the Marines?

S: Yes. I thought the uniform, of course, was really very nice. It felt good to wear, and I felt good to wear it. Even today, when I see a young woman in the Navy uniform, I think that it is very smart. I just loved every bit of it. But other than that, I can't think of anything that influenced me. I didn't study about it, I got brochures because I was looking forward to enlisting, and I wanted to know as much as I could about it. In July 1943, girlfriend of mine and I had gone to Hampton Beach for our first vacation after graduating from high school. There was a recruiting trailer right on the beach, and so, of course, I went in and talked with the WAVE on duty I wasn't at that time old enough to enlist. But, later, after being sworn in in Boston, I was in a very large draft going by train to Hunter College for boot camp. The WAVE who was the recruiter at Hampton Beach was the one in charge of the draft. Quite a coincidence.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting? And I imagine you left from Providence.

S: Yes, I was in charge of the group, of five.

C: Oh! How did that happen?

S: I don't know. Just that you had a little star beside your name, and you're the one.

C: Oh, I see. Just kind of picked to be responsible for those four other girls.

S: Yes.

C: Oh, that's interesting. You said you did go to Boston to enlist?

S: Yes. That was the recruiting office.

C: Did you have to take tests there?

S: Oh, yes.

C: And physical exams?

S: Yes, I remember there was a very striking young woman in our group. She was trying to enlist in the WAVES. We heard she had a punctured eardrum, or something like that, and she really had

wanted to go into the Marines but wasn't accepted. Well, she wasn't accepted for the WAVES either. I felt so badly for her because, she would have been an asset. She really was a bright, young woman.

C: Oh, that's too bad. I guess they did reject people because of health reasons or whatever. Was there any publicity about your joining the WAVES in the local papers?

S: There was a story in 1942 about my mother's experience as a Yeomanette and about her three daughters, and I had said that was looking forward to enlisting, but in '44 everybody was in the war effort one way or another.

C: Right.

S: No big deal, no news.

C: How did your parents feel about your enlistment?

S: They were very happy. My orders were already in the mail when my mother died very suddenly. She was only fifty-three. She came home from work one night and vomited blood, and in a week she was gone. We were a close family. It was very hard, because my father was having trouble accepting her death, and I was leaving, but he wanted me to go, and I went.

C: Yes. That must have been a very difficult time for you?

S: It was very difficult, yes.

C: Well, how did you get to Hunter College, to boot camp?

S: Well, that was by train from Providence. Evidently the enlistees had come down from the upper New England states into Boston, and, stayed overnight. Then the train was made up in Boston and picked up enlistees through Rhode Island, Connecticut into New York. It was a huge group, several passenger cars. When we got off the train, we were in Hobaker rail yard. We had to take a ferry into Manhattan and a subway out to Hunter College in the Bronx. It was quite an experience for small-town girls. Yes. I'm not that familiar with New York, and then off the ferry and on to the subway out to Hunter College. Well, most of us had never been on the subway, and there were so many of us, and you were afraid that you'd be separated from the group you were suppose to be with. It was quite a thing. New York was pretty bustling for us.

C: I was going to say that. I was going to ask you had you ever been there before, because it's kind of overwhelming.

S: I'd been there with my parents to the World's Fair in 1939. We'd gone up for a week, but, you had your parents with us there. They know what they're doing, so you don't think about it.

C: Sure. That's right, but when you're on your own. Well, you arrived at Hunter College which from all the pictures I've seen was a lovely place.

S: Yes.

C: In the Bronx, and that was where you were going to trained in boot camp for six weeks. Can you tell me where you lived during this time frame? What were your accommodations like and your roommates?

S: Evidently all the apartment houses in the general area of Hunter College had been taken over by the Navy as barracks. I think they were either four, maybe six stories high, and four apartments on each floor. The apartments were pretty bare. Each room had two bunk beds, a table, and a few straight chairs. We were tired all the time because we were kept so busy. Most of the girls, that I was barracked with at Hunter were from New England--a couple from Boston, a girl from Vermont, one from New Hampshire, I can't remember anything that wasn't pleasant. Everything just worked out very well. We sang every place we went. When you marched, you sang. That was one thing I remember

of boot camp. No matter where you went, everybody sang as they marched.

C: The WAVES song.

S: Oh, yes. All kinds of WAVES songs, marching songs, and other songs that any group of young people would know.

C: Sure.

S: It amazed me when they were paying us at boot camp. We would go into one building; and into a big network of underground tunnels after being paid, you would come out of another building several buildings away. The plan was changed each payday, because they didn't want anyone to know where the paymaster was. It was such a large amount money involved. Not that we individually were paid; a great deal I think it was twenty dollars a month, something like that. There was a big reservoir there at Hunter College, and I remember that it was so nice to march by that. It wasn't just down a road with apartment houses. It was pleasant by a nice, big body of water.

C: What time of year were you there?

S: I was there in October.

C: Oh, October.

S: Yes. I think it was October 3rd.

C: There was a little gap between the time you signed up and the time you were sent for training?

S: Yes. So many young women had enlisted through ComONE Boston, and Hunter college could only process so many at a time. We had to wait our turn.

C: But you were there at a good time of the year?

S: Yes.

C: For six weeks.

S: Yes.

C: Do you remember how your day went? How was it regimented?

S: Yes. At 6:00 in the morning--a member of Ship's Company threw her head in the door, and called, "Rise and shine," but, immediately--before you brushed your teeth, before you did anything--you went out into the corridor in your pajamas and robe to muster (count off), to be sure that everyone was there. You

just had to sound off so that it was known that everyone was present. Then you went back to the room, washed and dressed, and made up the bunk. Then we marched off to breakfast. After breakfast, we marched back to the room to pick up and put away things that might have been left out (adrift) to leave the room shipshape. Then we marched to class. The subjects that we studied in class were unusual. How to distinguish aeroplanes and ships, the number of people on each kind of ship, the ratings and ranks at Navy personnel, and insignia.

C: Ship identification, I guess, and would you ever be doing that?

S: No. No way. At Quonset we saw some planes, but you only knew the type of planes that your friends flew. I remember the SB-2C, the tail went up like a circle. My WAVE friends and I chummed around with a group of crewmen from a squadron--that flew 5B2C. Outside of that, I didn't know anything about planes.

C: Did you find the classes that you took challenging or easy or difficult?

S: Oh, we had to pay attention. You had to know what you were doing. I remember I had a notebook with copious notes, and really looked them over, just in case--I can't remember that we did have a test, but I was ready for one if they did have one.

C: Do you remember if your instructors were men or women?

S: As far as I remember, they were all women. One of the ensigns in the barracks that I was in--was from Rhode Island. I didn't speak to her, but I did know her brother.

C: Oh, how interesting.

S: The WAVE officers were very nice. They were very terse. If you saw them off duty, they would chat and were nice. I suppose with a group of women if they weren't terse, there would be conversation when there shouldn't be conversation.

C: Right. Exactly.

S: Yes, so I think they did a very good job.

C: Well, they were very professional in their demeanor.

S: Yes.

C: Did you have any trouble at all adjusting to military life and the discipline of it during this boot camp time period?

S: No. It was what you were there for. That's the way they wanted things done, so you did them that way. There were some of

the older girls who had difficulty though. I think the age limit was thirty-five. There was one woman who had been a schoolteacher, and she probably was in her early thirties, I know she soon had a very difficult time, and she soon dropped out. I think there were only two in our whole large group that dropped out. They were both older women. I imagine it was too hard to give up your independence. I had always lived at home, so I never really had a lot of independence.

C: Yes.

S: You had no time to stop and think about anything. You just kept moving. It was like a treadmill--but fun!

C: Right. Very, very busy. Did you like to march and drill?

S: Yes! Whereas individually, you probably wouldn't care particularly how you marched, the group was rated on total performance so you made sure that you did what you were supposed to do when you were supposed to do it so that the line was just perfect. Our group was rated high. There was great esprit.

C: Good.

S: Tremendous spirit.

C: A lot of camaraderie.

S: That's right, and for the good of the group.

C: Oh, that's great. Yes, they have to draw that team spirit.

S: You're right.

C: Which is so important. Did you have any physical education during this time frame?

S: Oh, yes. I was not a physical education person. We had the use of it it was a beautiful gym I don't remember that the regimen was particularly strenuous. I remember a couple of things were of value. On your back with your knees bent. A WAVE instructor told us that it was the most comfortable, position for women, to lie. Years later, when I was pregnant, I was glad that I knew that. It was a big help.

C: You learned something there. Did you have to pass a swimming test at all?

S: We didn't have swimming at Hunter, but we did at yeoman school in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Atlantic coast are not much as swimmers due to the surf. Swimmers are from lakes but not from the ocean.

C: Oh, yes.

S: In the ocean, you jump the waves.

C: Exactly. You don't swim in it.

S: Although I was very used to the water and not at all afraid of the water, I really had no technique in swimming. I just barely passed.

C: I thought that they would make you pass the swimming test.

S: Yes.

C: Did you get involved at all in any extracurricular activities there? Some of the women have said they were with a WAVES singing group, and somebody else said they worked on a newspaper. I just wondered if everyone had that opportunity.

S: Yes. We arrived at Yeoman school just before Thanksgiving, and we left, in early January, so we were there for the holidays.

C: You mean at Hunter?

S: No. At Cedar Falls.

C: Oh, I was talking about Hunter.

S: Oh, at Hunter, there was no time anything!

C: No time for anything. When we weren't marching, drilling, studying, etc., we had laundry to do and uniforms to care for, letter writing. And movies on occasion.

S: No. Some groups were held over. If you weren't due at your next billet for a couple weeks, you would be held over in ship's company, at Hunter and perhaps have some time, but I went right on to yeoman school.

C: Did you have an opportunity at all to see New York during that time frame?

S: We had a weekend liberty, and my father and my two sisters came to New York. They stayed in a hotel. There was something wrong with the food at Hunter that Friday, and all the WAVES in New York City on liberty were ill--all over the city, including me.

C: Wasn't that bizarre?

S: Yes. My family were supposed to go out to dinner, but we had dinner in the room on Saturday, and my father took me back to

Hunter in a cab. The next morning, Sunday, I came into the city from Hunter, and I felt better. We spent the day together, and we went out to dinner before they went back.

C: It must have been something at Hunter that went around?

S: Yes. It had to be.

C: Well, that's too bad. Do you remember meeting Captain William Amsden? He was head of the Hunter College, WAVES Training School.

S: No.

C: He's from Jamestown.

S: Oh! He probably was in the regional that we had.

C: Did you have your regimental reviews on Saturdays?

S: Oh, yes. Oh, that was very important. Everyone took it very seriously, you know. You didn't want your group to be marked down because you hadn't done your part.

C: The proper moves, I guess.

S: Yes.

C: Did your regiment ever win? Was it a competition?

S: We never lost. I would have remembered if we were marked down, but we weren't. We always did well.

C: Oh, that's good. Do you remember if there ever was a graduation ceremony at Hunter?

S: I don't remember that. There was just the final review, and you were the senior company. I remember the way the sections would march pass each other. There would be a number of sections going toward the mess hall and a number coming back. There was a young woman in another company, and she was in the front row of her section, so you couldn't miss her. God, she must have been six foot tall. She wasn't fat by any means, but she must have weighed almost 180. She was a big woman, and we heard that she was from a real ranch, or a cotton farm.

C: Plantation or something?

S: She worked in the fields. We were all city girls from New England, and were fascinated by her. She did fine; before we left there, her roommates, had given her a permanent wave and introduced her to makeup.

C: Spruced her up.

S: Yes. She was beginning to look like one of the girls, but she really looked, right out of the fields those first few weeks.

C: Oh, for heaven's sake.

S: Nice girl, you know. I'm not putting her down, but just the appearance was very different.

C: Well, I guess you met all kinds of people in the Navy and in your training period, and she was a different person from a different part of the country that you became exposed to. How were you chosen for your specialty?

S: We did take aptitude tests. When you had your placement interview, the person interviewing you had all your scores. You were asked to list your preferences as to what you would like to do. Actually, I could have gotten any of the three I chose.

C: What did you put down for? Do you remember?

S: First was yeoman, second was the Navy Post Office, and third was cryptography--(coding).

C: Oh, isn't that interesting.

S: Yes.

C: Oh, I didn't know that.

S: But when we enlisted, we went in to do what we could do best to help the war effort. If they had to train me for another couple of months, that would have been a waste of time and money because I already had secretarial skills. I just had to know how the Navy did things. The wise thing was to go to yeoman school. There was a three month course offered, but the two months course at Cedar Falls was what I needed, I was then ready to go out on assignment'.

C: You selected that because of your previous experience.

S: Yes.

C: Can you tell me if you have a break between boot camp and your next assignment, your two month training at Cedar Falls, Iowa?

S: No. I didn't get home on leave until after yeoman school. The billets posted were for all over the country--but because my mother had died just before I left, I wanted to get back to Rhode Island. There was an opening at Quonset, and I opted for that.

C: Sure. Can you tell me about yeoman school? I wonder how you got out there. It's quite a distance to Cedar Falls, Iowa.

S: Oh, yes. That was quite an experience. We traveled on a real troop train. It was not really an essential troop train, so we had to take what cars were available. Some of the girls were in deluxe roomettes, and I was fortunate enough to be in what they called a "cattle car". The seat was the first bunk, the back of the seat swung up and was the second bunk, and suspended from the overhead was a third bunk, and that's the one I was in-- the third bunk up.

C: How did you get up there? Did they have a ladder?

S: No. I think you just put your feet on the first bunk, and--

C: Boosted yourself up.

S: Right. There wasn't much room between you and the overhead. It was difficult, too, in the daytime. The three girls had slept in the first and second and third bunks. In daytime, they sat on that first bunk as a Sofa. There was no sprawling or spreading out. We had a dining car on the train. The dining tables and seats were available after mealtime so that some girls did go in there and sit, talk, and write letters.

C: Sure.

S: They needed someone for watch, so I volunteered one night, and that was an experience.

C: What did you have to do on watch?

S: Well, you had to be awake, and you were in your bathrobe, and it was freezing. It really was cold. And there was a male-- I guess he was our Shore patrol--who went through the train periodically he checked to see there was somebody on watch. That's all. Nothing happened. Nobody could get off or run.

C: Right. Where would you go?

S: That's right. But I guess it was done to know that everybody was all right. That nobody was sick or something like that.

C: How long did it take you to get out there?

S: It was two nights and into the third day.

C: It was quite a trek--halfway across the country.

S: We stopped at Marion. I think Marion, Ohio.

C: There's such a place.

S: I never forgot it. Of course, we didn't get off, but we were stopped there. Women came with big bushel baskets of apples for us. We were well enough fed, but there was terrible boredom, and they brought these baskets of apples. I thought it was a very nice thing to do. So I never forgot Marion. In later years, I met someone from Marion and told her how much that kindness was appreciated.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting? It must have been farm country out there.'

S: Flat! Flat! My goodness, was it flat.

C: Well, you finally arrived at Cedar Falls, Iowa, and where were you domiciled there?

S: Oh, we were barracked in the State Teachers College in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Lovely, lovely, little town. Like a college town, and the college was on the hill, and very, very, pretty.

C: I imagine you had dorms there.

S: Yes. Real dormitory rooms there.

C: Taking over the dorms there. What courses did you take? In yeoman school?

S: The group I was with was the brush-up group, and we were taking dictation at, I think, 300 words a minute, and I was typing at 85 words per minute when I left. These were not electric typewriters.

C: That's very fast.

S: You're not even thinking. When you're typing that fast, you're not even thinking.

C: You can't.

S: No, the letters are coming into your brain, and then to your fingers. It's single spaced down one side of the paper and a third of the way to a half down the other side.

C: That's awfully fast.

S: Yes. It was fast. But we worked. And, of course, we never had a call to type that fast.

C: I was going to say, You probably wouldn't in the Navy. You wouldn't be doing anything at that speed. But, anyway, you took courses for two months then.

S: Yes. Well, of course, we learned all the personnel forms. How to make out personnel forms, and how to do the personnel jackets for the Navy personnel. Everybody in the navy has a personnel jacket with all their data in it,--transfers, promotions, etc. What else?

C: Were you tested at all?

S: Oh! Every day. Yes. A lot of Navy forms, peculiar things to Navy, the little things. The WAVE officer who gave typing class taught us to line up all information in a block (like name, address, for example). You go in a couple of letters so that all lines are blocked. Since then I've always blocked where possible on forms. I was a 20 year old kid then and through my working years retired as an executive secretary. My work always looked professional. People would comment, and it was that extra finishing that made the difference. We had dictation and transcription of shorthand everyday--which was, in its way, a test.

C: Yes. The Navy's responsible for that.

S: Yes. Very much so.

C: Oh, isn't that great?

S: Yes.

C: Were the instructors WAVES again?

S: Yes. They were. Some were enlisted, and some were officers. There was no time for reading a newspaper. On Saturday mornings, we would go into the assembly hall. WAVE officers--I think they must have been school teachers--briefed us on all the news through the week.

C: That's interesting.

S: I think they were school teachers, and this was a big assembly. All the young women were in uniform. When the WAVE officer came out on stage to start the program, all assembled would sing that little children's song, "Good morning to you. Good morning to you. We're all in our places with bright shiny faces etc." This whole room full of adults--singing and always off key. It was never in key. Purposely.

C: Oh, that's interesting. I was going to ask you if you had kept up with news about the war via newspapers?

S: No, but that was time of the Battle of the Bulge; and, of course, all the news was bad. It was just that particular time that we were there, and everything was down beat.

C: Right. Now, did you spend Thanksgiving and Christmas in Cedar Falls?

S: Yes.

C: Anything special that the Navy provided for you during those holidays?

S: Oh, yes! They did everything to make it pleasant for us. The dining room was the school cafeteria, and it was manned by women of the neighborhood--motherly types. The food was truly as if it had been cooked in someone's kitchen.

C: Wonderful.

S: Of course, we were out in Iowa with the corn, the pork, and dairy products. Oh, everything was fantastic. The least of the meals was very, very good. And the town people were very nice. My sisters had sent me a package for Christmas (a box within a box). They had taken a regular, sturdy, cardboard box, and taped the cover to the back so that it opened like a chest, and then they wrapped the whole thing in Christmas wrapping paper. All

the gifts were separately wrapped and placed inside. Well, of course, there's no place in a barracks to put gifts. If you have things from home, there's a closet to place them in good order. This box was so nicely done that I was allowed to keep it out in the room. You couldn't have gotten it into the cupboard anyway.

C: Right.

S: Four girls were using the cupboard, but they let me keep the chest of gifts out because it ...

C: Oh, isn't that nice.

S: Was so festive.

C: Do you remember who you roomed with?

S: Yes. There was Marjorie Halderman. She was from Philadelphia. She was a quiet girl, but she looked like a model. She was slender and smart looking. And Helen Heinz. She was from Pennsylvania, and she was a very bright girl. These girls were all nice. There was a little girl from Evanston, Illinois. She was so taken with herself. She creamed her face every night, and she got demerits because her pillowcase was greasy, from the cream. The WAVE officer came in and said, "Whose pillow is this?" ... whether it's vanishing cream or whatever the dickens

it was, that's not kosher. Where everything is a totally new experience, and you're meeting all these new people, and there are so many new things happening ... how she remained so involved with herself I just couldn't believe.

C: Beautifying. Did you have the white glove inspections there?

S: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, Helen Heinz was tall. She was the closest one to the closet, during inspection. Of course, a closet was open for inspection too. The shoe polish--the liquid shoe polish--was just inside the door, and Helen could reach in and get the bottle of shoe polish as we were lined up. We all did the fronts of our shoes, and then she'd put the bottle back. When the officers came in, our shoes were all nice and shiny on our feet.

C: Oh, isn't that a riot? Did you have any time off at Cedar Falls to explore the area?

S: You wouldn't have enough time to go into the town.

C: Not even on weekends?

S: Oh, yes. On the weekend, we did. There was a USO there, and, of course, it was all women. The Yeoman school was the only

military installation. Between your last class and having your supper, we could go on "the hill." It was like any college town. There were little stores, around the college and there was a photographers shop. She did pictures for almost all the WAVES, because we were in our new uniforms, so we felt pretty special. I had my ice skates sent out from home. Helen Heinz had her skates sent out, also the air is so dry--very cold, but very dry--and we would skate on the pond at the school.

C: Oh, how nice.

S: As I say, it was during the holiday time. There was a young woman who evidently had quite a background in music. She put up a sign-up slip to organize a group to sing the Latin Mass. I'd always gone to catechism; but I never went to parochial school. I really knew just a few hymns in latin, but I thought that would be a nice thing to do. We met a couple of times a week and she taught us the Mass in Latin. On Christmas day, the priest came to the campus for the Catholic Mass. Now, in Rhode Island, the population is predominantly Catholic. You never think of yourself as a minority; but out there in Iowa this priest was of a minority. He said Mass in several churches in neighboring towns.

S: And he had never had anyone sing the Mass. And here was this whole group singing the Mass. One of the girls was an

accomplished soloist, and he asked her to come to his church to sing for his congregation on Christmas Day. I think she sang a cappella because there wasn't even an organ. He was so thrilled that his church had this experience. That was nice.

C: That was great. I was going to ask you about religion, and if you had the opportunity to attend church while you were at both boot camp and at the yeoman school?

S: Oh, yes.

C: The Navy did make provisions for that. I would think they would.

S: Oh, yes.

C: Well, how would you sum up your experience at Cedar Falls?

S: Oh, it was great! It was great. It was a good feeling. It was more relaxed than boot camp. You had your classes to go to, but after that you were free. You weren't rushed. You were really free pretty much for the rest of the evening, and we only had inspection on Saturday. Weekends, oh, goodness, there were movies back-to-back. There were movies in the afternoon and again in the evening. Some WAVES went into the next town; some went into Cedar Rapids. I never ventured off. There was enough

going on right there for me without going in to what really would be like a small town. I don't think Cedar Rapids is that big.

C: No. Before the tape, you mentioned that one of the gals did go into Cedar Rapids. Can you mention how the townsfolk reacted to her?

S: Yes. Cedar Rapids had an influx every weekend of WAVES. I would assume that they were well-mannered, fairly well educated young women. I don't know how some of them may have acted, but a very nice, very sweet, very innocent, girl had gone in to town with another WAVE, and she had practically been pushed off the sidewalk, she had overheard comments about WAVES, and she came back to the barracks in tears. I don't know what the town's experience had been. I had gone to the USO in Cedar Falls. They had presented something like a high tea for us, and the WAVES acted as though they were, comfortable with that's is we chattered and enjoyed our time together, but nothing raucous. There was some drinking on Saturday nights evidently for the ones who had gone to town because they came back a little giggly. I don't know what the town's experience in Cedar Rapids was, but this very lovely girl was really hurt by her experience.

C: Do you know what the general attitude of the public was toward women in the service in those days? Do you think it was any different in World War II than it was after?

S: I don't know. I never really had any trouble; remarks made, but I never took offense because I knew that every WAVE I knew was someone that I could bring home to my family. I did bring WAVES home from Quonset. They were just like the girls that I palled with at home. I knew that we were all right, but I'm sure we all heard remarks. It was too bad because we were making an effort to do the right thing.

C: No. It was a national emergency as you mentioned before, so people were drawn in because of that. When you finished Cedar Falls, you were ordered to Quonset Point, Rhode Island--right here in the neighborhood--and what type of work did you do there and for whom did you work?

S: I was a yeoman in a group called Naval Air Bases. The skipper of Quonset Point was Commodore Dixie Kiefer. Now there was Naval Air Station, Quonset Point, but we were NAB (Naval Air Bases, Quonset Point), and the skipper was in charge not only of Quonset, but all the air bases in COMONE--and that included way up through Maine and the little islands, the tiny, little stations. The man that I worked for was a Chief Ship's Clerk, I patted myself on the back for paying attention at boot camp. When I reported at the office the first time, he was wearing the green airman's uniform on. He had the broken stripe, on his arm, so I knew he wasn't an ensign, and he had the feathers, on his insignia. I knew that he was a Chief Ship's Clerk, Chief Warrant

Officer. All the drafts of unassigned men coming into Naval Air Stations in New England went through that office. Mr. Cook would assign them to the different Naval Air Stations and Auxiliary Air Stations. There were Filipinos and some Black men in the drafts. If they seemed to be well mannered, Mr. Cook would suggest to them that perhaps they would like to work in the Bachelor Officers Quarters, which, would be a really good assignment and a nice place to work compared to what was available to them in those days. I thought that was an interesting point that he cared enough to want them to be well situated as long as there was a place open for them.

C: Did you work with other WAVES in that office?

S: Oh, yes. It was a small unit. It was in the administration building, and the WAVE that I was most friendly with was secretary to Commodore Dixie Kiefer. He was considered a very nice person.

C: He was killed. Wasn't he?

S: Yes. A plane crash.

C: Right. I assume they had barracks for the WAVES at Quonset.

S: We had four barracks, and they really were barracks.

C: What were they like?

S: There was a quarterdeck when you came into the barracks. It was a small office-type area. It had a desk where you signed in and out, and the WAVE quartermaster was stationed there. That's a right-arm rate which is unusual for women, I think. The barracks proper was really like one great big room. The partitions went off a central corridor, but they didn't have doors to them. They were just partitions separating units, and the partitions did not go to the overhead. There were two bunk beds in each cubicle, against each wall, and the grandest cupboard--a built-in closet--just perfect. The drawers were just the size for your shirts, and smaller compartments for your ties and your caps, and somebody knew what they were doing when they designed that. Afterwards, when I had children, I wished I had a few of those.

C: That's right.

S: In the back there was a beauty shop, and there was also a tremendous laundry room with everything that you could ask for. There was a second floor. Our barracks was burned one night. Really, it was closer to five or six o'clock in the morning.

C: Were you in it?

S: Yes. I don't know just where the fire was. They alerted us and you just went out. Even from boot camp, you were trained to put on your shoes. You had to take a blanket, and your coat. And you went with nothing else. That's how we exited, and they fitted us into the empty cubicles in other barracks. Later on, we went back for our clothes, but they never did open that barracks again.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting. You were crammed into the other.

S: Not really. No. There was space available.

C: Do you know about how many WAVES were at Quonset Point at that time?

S: Yes. About 400. The reason I know is because my office had the sheets of personnel for all the Naval Air Bases and what the complement was. The reason I remember 400 is because it was about the same number of WAVES as there were Black men; but we had these very nice barracks, and they lived in Quonset Huts outside the nice brick barracks that the white sailors had. Ours were wooden barracks, temporary structures. As a matter of fact, they're all gone. We were down at Quonset a few weeks ago. From the administration building we would shortcut through a walkway, to the dining hall past these rows of Quonset Huts. I thought to

myself, I wonder if they're awfully hot in the summer and awfully cold in winter.

C: Probably.

S: That's the way we treated our people in those days.

C: That's right.

S: It's a shame.

C: How many hours a day did you work?

S: From 8:00 to 4:30.

C: Did you work on Saturdays?

S: Only if you were, on duty and that would be--about once a month. I think you just had to be on the station. You couldn't leave the station. If they wanted you, you would be available but I don't remember really working on any weekends down there. When Commander Dixie Kiefer came, the war was over, or just about. After V-J Day, in the summer, on alternate days, you would leave the office at 2:30 instead of 4:30. There was a beach on the far side of Quonset Point, and we could go down to swim.

C: Oh, isn't that nice.

S: It was just one of the kind things that he did for us. The war was over, and mostly all the men at Quonset at that time had come back from overseas duty. The men who hadn't done sea duty were shipped out to relieve people in the Pacific.

C: Was it a bustling base when you were there? You were there in '45, weren't you?

S: Yes.

C: Can you tell me when you arrived there?

S: Yes. I got there in the snow, at the end of January.

C: '45?

S: I was there on V-J Day, too, and that was crazy, crazy, crazy.

C: How did you celebrate on V-J Day?

S: Well, everything that moved on the base--all kinds of contraptions that we didn't know of,--snow removal things, everything, was decorated with toilet paper. They drove around

and around and around with the horns blowing. We had a WAVES recreation hall, which was great. Draft beer, which I guess isn't that good because it's not aged, was served in the Men's Rec Hall. The WAVES Cave served bottled beer, much preferred, and the WAVES Cave was crazy that night. Everybody was on base but a friend of mine had gone into Providence, because she didn't know it was going to be V-J Day. It was in the late afternoon, and she saw how out of hand everything was getting in Providence, so she went to the bus station to come back. She was alarmed.

C: Sure.

S: And there was a sailor there--at the bus station. He was out of it from drinking. His friend propped him up against the wheel of a bus. Now these are like large interstate busses. She couldn't get anybody to settle down and pay attention when she said, "Get him away from the wheel." When that bus left, he'd go right under the next wheel, and she was frantic trying to get someone to pay attention and help her. Someone finally did.

C: Oh, my Lord.

S: She came right back, and we had a grand time down there. It was fun, but nothing stupid.

C: No, not as raucous as Providence or some of the other cities. Can you tell me what your rate was when you were at Quonset?

S: At Quonset, I got to second class. Oh, no! I must have been first class. It was too busy a group in Washington to be testing people for ratings, so I must have been first class when I went down to Washington.

C: Oh, great! Do you remember what you pay was at all during that time frame as a first class?

S: No. I don't, but it was enough.

C: Yes, to get by. Did you date any of the airmen when you were at Quonset?

S: Oh, sure, but you dated in groups. If you met somebody nice and he had some friends, you introduced them to your friends, and then you went as a group. There was a tremendous indoor swimming pool at Quonset that they used for training pilots. It had the nets for the sailors to learn to go up at the side of a ship; they would drop the whole net over, the side into the water for the sailors to climb up on.

C: Climb up.

S: They had a dilbert dunkers that was like an aircraft fusilage. It actually went into the water, and the pilot had to escape out of the cockpit of the plane. It was really a big pool. There would be nobody else there. We'd be in the pool about five o'clock in the afternoon, before we went to supper. The width of the pool was the length of an olympic pool.

C: Oh, heavens. It sounds tremendous.

S: Yes. On our latest trip to Quonset we noticed that the pool building has been razed.

C: Where did you go on these group activity kind of dates?

S: We went to the WAVES Cave mostly. We would go swimming. What else did we do? Until six o'clock, WAVES could go into the men's rec hall because it was used as a soda fountain during the day. We would meet there with the group, and later move over to the WAVES Cave. There was music at the Cave, and we'd dance.

C: Oh, how nice?

S: Yes. It was fun. When a few WAVES would approach the cave, there would always be a few sailors outside who wanted to come in because the beer was better. Generally, they'll be invited in.

C: Sure. Of course.

S: There was a young man--at Quonset who had been in high school with me, but I didn't know him. We recognized each other, at Quonset. He had come into Providence on liberty, wearing an official flight jacket, but he was enlisted. I guess he and his squadron had been through the worst. He was considered out of uniform, and was cited by the Shore Patrol. He was confined to the base for thirty days. For the next month, he spent every evening in the cave with us.

C: Do you remember who your roommate was?

S: Yes. She was a girl from North Dakota. That's very desolate, country. She was a Finnish girl. I remember she drank. It was like a religion. Oh, no! I mean coffee. She drank, as practically a religion,--eighth cups of coffee a day. She wouldn't go to bed at night unless she had that eight cup of coffee.

C: Oh, my word.

S: It would have put me on the ceiling, cause in those days we didn't have decaf.

C: Right.

S: She was secretary to the officer in charge of Ships Service. She liked that job. She was good at it. She went home on leave to a family wedding,--and she met a distant relative, I think his family had moved to California. They corresponded by mail. After discharge, she went out to California, and they got married.

C: Oh, for heaven's sake!

S: Yes.

C: Isn't that interesting?

S: Well, I'm glad to know she didn't go back to North Dakota.

C: Oh, you're right. It's farm country and desolate.

S: Yes.

C: Did you ever have a chance to go home during this time frame? You were so close.

S: Oh! I didn't have time to go home.

C: Oh. You were nearby.

S: I'd go home at least once every other week. Sometimes I'd go home after work, and then come back to base the same evening. Maybe my sister or father would drive me back I brought WAVES home with me. One night we had dinner party at home for my friends. I wasn't even there to help. When I think of the nerve of myself to march home with ten or twelve of us WAVES and sailors that I worked with. They were not stationed near their homes, so they were pleased to be in a family situation. One of the boys played our piano, and we sang. It was like prewar--the whole neighborhood gang. I think they enjoyed being away from the Navy for an evening.

C: Oh, that's great.

S: Yes.

C: That sounds very, very nice.

S: It was.

C: Do you remember what you did or how you felt, what your reaction was to the death of FDR in April '45?

S: Oh, yes.

C: And how the base reacted to that?

S: Oh, yes. I remember. It was sad. He had reviewed us in the regimental review at Hunter.

C: FDR?

S: Yes.

C: Himself?

S: Yes, because he was in the car.

C: Yes. '

S: Of course, we didn't know he couldn't walk. We just knew that he had polio, but we didn't know that he couldn't get out of the car.

C: That's right.

S: I didn't know that until fairly recently.

C: That's right. It was kept a secret.

S: Yes.

S: That made his death a little more personal. Okay, you knew how many thousands of girls here on review; but still, he was at our review. Yes. But I know everyone was down. They had special services, too. I remember going to them.

C: Did she ever come to your reviews, Eleanor Roosevelt?

S: No. I don't remember that. I remember him.

C: Isn't that interesting? Did you ever have a chance to meet Mildred MacAfee Horton?

S: No.

C: She was the director of the WAVES?

S: I knew Captain MacAfee was director, but I never met her or was in her presence.

C: Yes, because Eleanor Roosevelt and Mildred MacAfee Horton showed up at certain places, certain times where the WAVES were, and some of the gals did see her, but not that many. When the war was over in August 1945, you were still in the Navy.

S: I stayed on a special extension of enlistment. All these people who had seen active duty had to be discharged and

replaced, so I figured I had nothing else to do; so I shipped over. I think my separation was July 23, something like that, '47.

C: Did you stay at Quonset after the war was over?

S: No. I went to Washington D.C. to a special group. The orders came through. Personnel can order you by name or rate specifically; they know your degree of ability because you've gone through that specialty school. No one in the Washington D.C. barracks knew anything; about the unit. They never heard of it. There were only--about fifty Navy people total in the whole unit.

C: Well, what was it connected with this special group?

S: It was in the Department of Interior. It was called Coal Mines Administration.

C: I wonder how the Navy got involved in that?

S: John L. Lewis was president of the United Mine Workers of America. There was some question of his taking the miners out on strike, so the Navy went in and actually seized the coal mines. I was secretary to a Commander who actually went down to be sort of a pseudo-mayor of a coal mining town; I couldn't go with him.

He asked me to go, but where an enlisted WAVE was working, you needed a WAVE officer.

C: Oh, I see.

S: The young sailor who worked with us, and he was just a youngster--I don't think he was more than eighteen or nineteen at the time--went down with the commander, to the coal field. The commander was a lawyer, and his field was public and labor relations. There were a number of civilian people in this unit. Captain Carlinson was in charge. Most of the officers and high-level civilians were Princeton grads. I guess when he had to pick this select group to work with, he picked people he knew he could depend on. The civilian higher level-men and the naval officers were in either law or public and labor relations. The man who came in to take Commander Griffin's place--a man summered at Newport. I mean, they really "summered at Newport." He was a "dollar-a-year man," and very, very bright, his field was labor relations also. It was very, very interesting work.

C: That sounds fascinating.

S: Yes.

C: How long did that job last? How long were you with the Department of the Interior in the Navy?

S: I think it was about a year. Oh, I'm not sure. It was the summer of '46 to the summer of '47.

C: Did you live in a WAVES barracks in Washington?

S: Yes. In West Potomac Park, right on the Potomac River, and it was beautiful. You could walk to the Interior Bldg which was directly across from the Navy Department. And we all walked to work; in bad weather, we took a bus. Our barracks, Patomac Park, was much more sophisticated than Quonset. The partition did not go to the overhead and you didn't have doors, but there was just one bunk bed in each. There was a long double dressing table with a mirror over it, and there was a little chair with a chintz pillow. There were chintz curtains that were wild.

S: Well, they say it was just like the civilian barracks in West Potomac Park and Arlington, Virginia, but they had doors on their cubicles, but it was the same thing all over again. You moved in and there were always nice people. You just fit in with another group of nice people.

C: Marvelous.

S: It was great, yes.

C: So you stayed in Washington for a year?

S: For a year.

C: What did you like about the job, and what did you dislike about it, if anything?

S: Well, there was an awful lot of pressure. There was an awful lot of pressure, because it was a unit that worked in crisis. It's only reason for being was because of crisis. I was secretary to Commander Griffin, Labor Relations, and then Mr. Dailey, so I did all the dictation and transcription, and the mail was great in volume. I supervised two other enlisted in their work. There was a crisis one night. We had gone into work at eight o'clock in the morning. We were sent out for supper at four thirty but to be back at six. We were in the office until two or three the next morning doing various jobs. It was like a hurry-up-and-wait thing. A special letter had to go to all the coal mines in the country and the unions that worked for them. It had to go out that night, and I remember well.

C: There were no Xerox machines. Thermofax, maybe.

S: They did something, because they got it all out. But then, it all had to be collated then, the letters had to be, put into alphabetical order. The Captain was in the room, and we were all given a stack of letters which we put into alphabetical order. They would orally go through the A's. You had to be alert to

know where your "A" came in and speak up so that they would be checked off the list. Then the whole pile would be in full alphabetical order. There was a 18 year old sailor in the room. He was falling asleep. He missed one of the calls. The boy next to him noticed his head; nodding the skipper was very short with him sleeping sailor. I was surprised at that. It was something that, one minute after the job was completed, they could say, "Gee, this was out of place." They could put it in the proper place. It was just as if we were on ship, and every single thing you do is important to everybody else.

C: Oh, sure. You've got to be right on target there.

S: I was surprised. I knew it was a crisis, but it wasn't life or death.

C: No.

S: But it was a good thing for the young man. He learned then that tired or no, everybody's tired, and the job must be done.

C: Sure. You've got to be alert.

S: Yes.

C: You had a very hectic, very pressured, very busy time then.

S: Yes, it was. Then the work of the unit wound down. Oh! John L. Lewis came. He was brought into the underground garage. He came up in a special elevator, but we knew he was going to be on a certain floor. Many of the enlisted went to that floor, and everyone, of course, and had a paper in their hands. They were doing something official, Mr. Lewis realized that these were young people from all over the country. He went past us with his guards and the Navy officers, and then, he turned around and waved to us, which was a very nice thing to do.

C: Photo opportunity.

S: We all felt we had been close to John L. Lewis. Something to remember.

C: He was quite a figure in those days.

S: Yes, he was. I remember the men in labor relations were talking about him. They said that while his wife was alive, she was his counterbalance, but after she died, he went heavy overboard in the unions. He lost perspective, I guess.

C: How was that coal strike settled? Do you remember? I don't. I remember hearing about it.

S: I don't know either, but I know they disbanded the unit. I suppose it came out all right.

C: Did you get any time off during that period to go back home, or vacation, or was it steady work?

S: No. I remember coming home a couple of weekends. I don't remember taking leave then though. I don't think anybody took leave then.

C: Kind of a crisis situation, as you said.

S: Yes.

C: When did you complete this assignment with the Department of the Interior in the Navy?

S: That was, June of '47. All the discharge centers were closed. I was separated at Naval Hospital, Bethesda, Maryland. I was there for four or five days.

C: What was the procedure for being demobilized or discharged?

S: There were all kinds of papers, to complete. You had to have a physical exam because the Navy had to be sure that you were healthy going off duty. And it was pleasant there at the

Navy hospital. The grounds were beautifully kept. It was nice to have that period to get down off the stress, because this was a pastoral area.

C: Were you out of the Navy for good then, or did you join the reserves when the opportunity came?

S: Oh, yes. I wasn't really separated until the middle of July, which made it almost exactly three years of service. When I returned home, I went to Bryant College for a year. There was a fellow there who belonged to the Reserve Unit at Fields Point. I joined the Reserves, and we met on Monday nights. After I left Bryant College, I was asked to go on extended duty. I was at Fields Point, I think, for a couple of months.

C: What were you doing there?

S: Well, They used to send the Reserves out on cruises training then.

C: Oh, I see.

S: I helped the chief in the office get all their, personnel jackets in order because the Reserves have time to do only so much. Some units really didn't have trained yeomen. Any work you could take off their hands, would help. You could prepare

records for a draft of fifty men in an morning, whereas it would have taken them a unit Yeoman several weeks to get the work done.

C: Oh, sure.

S: There again it was the same situation. I could only be on extended duty because there wasn't a WAVE officer at Fields Point Reserve Training Center. The nearest one would be in Quonset. After that, I went back to a civilian secretarial position.

C: Did you disaffiliate from the Reserves at that point in time?

S: Yes. I thought I had, but my discharge didn't come through until 1953, and I was expecting my second child then.

C: A little bit late.

S: I wasn't even married when I had left. I was engaged to be married.

C: Did you meet your husband in the service?

S: No. I met my husband as a neighbor, and I went on the first date with him when I was sixteen. I didn't realize it, but he was twenty-one years old at that time. We did a lot of dating in

the neighborhood in our crowd, but we didn't go to each other's school affairs, because that was a big, big difference in age at that time. I was a high school senior and he was a college senior.

C: Yes.

S: He graduated from Providence College the year I graduated from Hope High School. When I would come home on leave we would go out. It was just one of those things. It wasn't time yet.

C: Right. Was he in the service at all?

S: No. He was 4-F. He had a very bad back. Women and children before him.

C: Yes.

S: And he felt very badly. He worked at the shipyard, and he was embarrassed. What could he do? He thought he was going in the Navy. He was amazed. Evidently, while he was in college, he had been injured on a diving board. He'd jumped up to dive but, as he came down, his spine hit the board.

C: Does that bother him now?

S: No. But he rarely stood up straight. He looked rather casual, kind of slouched. When he was in the hospital after his stroke in 1991, the nurses--several of them--said to me, "Your husband's a really tall man. I had never thought so. I always wore flats when out with him. Then, when he started in physical therapy, he started walking properly. He was tall.

C: Oh, isn't that something? That's amazing. When did you finally marry?

S: In 1950. My husband says that's cause it's an easy year to remember as your anniversary. But everybody, everyone in our crowd was being married in '50. Those who had come back from service and gone to school under the GI Bill were graduating and working. Ready for marriage.

C: Sure. Back to some of your Navy experiences, I have a few questions about that. Did you ever feel that you were discriminated against by any of the men that you associated with or worked for while you were in the Navy?

S: Oh, no. I was always treated as a lady. Even the young sailors that you didn't really know, but hundreds and hundreds of them on the base, were always very pleasant. Never anything.

C: So, no harassment, no discrimination?

S: Oh, no. The men's beer hall at Quonset had a ticket booth that sold chits for beer. The manager needed people to man that booth. Three or four of us WAVES took duty for a couple of nights a week. We were the only women from six o'clock till ten o'clock in this room full of men who were drinking beer. Never a problem.

C: Oh, isn't that amazing.

S: When sailors saw that you weren't busy, they'd come up, and start talking. You had never met them before, but you'd chat with them.' I don't have any bad memories of harrassment. A young man told me that he wouldn't let his sister go in the WAVES, but, you know, he didn't say it insultingly. It was a fact of his life.

C: Yes. Maybe more protective. That kind of thing.

S: Yes.

C: Well, that's good to know. Did you receive any medals for your service?

S: Yes. What was it? Everybody got them.

C: Good Conduct?

S: I was thinking I should write for that. I'm short about seven days because I was sworn in on the 30th of July 1944, and I think it was the 23rd of July 1947 that I was separated. Oh, yes, but I got that time in the Reserves. I should write. Well, anyway, I know I deserve it. There were two that we had. There was the American Theater and there was something else.

C: Maybe the Victory Medal.

S: Victory Medal. That was it.

C: Great!

S: I don't even know where they are.

C: You probably kept them somewhere. Did you have any preconceived expectations when you entered the WAVES of what it was going to be like?

S: No, I really didn't. Therefore, I wasn't disappointed.

C: Right. It met your expectations.

S: Yes.

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

S: Yes. Very, very well run. I know no glitches any place in. The whole Navy system. You know how they said, "The Navy Way." Well, to me that means something different. It means the right way to do it; and if you do it the Navy way, it will be done right.

C: Oh, good. That's a great comment. You mentioned just a few discipline problems--not even really discipline problems at Hunter when people, two gals, were asked to leave because they couldn't adjust to the military.

S: Yes.

C: Did you notice any other discipline problems?

S: I think that they asked to leave.

C: Oh, they asked to leave. Did you know of anybody else in any of your experiences later who was asked to leave the Navy?

S: When I was just about ready to leave Washington, I bumped into a girl in the corridor, I had known her from someplace. I can't remember if it was Quonset, or if she was one of the ones that had been in the draft when we went on the train to boot camp, but it was a girl that I had known in the Navy someplace before. She was being court martialed. She had been in

Personnel, and she was selling ratings, I thought to myself how stupid she had been.

C: She actually was selling them for money?

S: Taking money to sell ratings.

C: Isn't that something?

S: Yes.

C: Catherine, I was going to ask you if you knew of any WAVE who was asked to leave because of pregnancy or because of homosexual activity?

S: The WAVES barracks in Washington was a long corridor with wings off it, and a friend was at the telephone waiting for a call to go through. So, I stopped and was chatting with her. She started to cry. She was expecting, and he was a married man. She was very close to being able to take the necessary time with her leave, but the Navy somehow or other wouldn't extend that extra time. I felt so badly for her. Well, of course, my morals and ethics were that you don't go with a married man, but he was an officer that she worked for. She was his secretary, and she was a kid--a real kid. And I don't know what ever happened to her, but I'm sure that she was discharged. I assumed she went

home. I hope she went home. I don't know where else she would have gone. Did I mention about the other girl who had been selling?

C: Yes. Selling the ratings.

S: Was the tape running? I didn't know if the tape was on.

C: Yes. Right. Selling ratings.

S: Yes. So, I'm sure she was discharged.

C: Oh, absolutely!

S: My cubicle was the last one down on the left of one of these wings off the main corridor in the barracks; and beyond that there was a sitting room. It was almost like a sun room. It had a lot of windows in it, and it had a settee and some comfortable chairs, and I think it had a little carpet on the floor. That's where you could go to sit and read or write letters. Well, there was a girl bunked diagonally across from me, and she was very boyish; but I thought she was just tom boyish. And just before I left--maybe two weeks before I was being seperated--we were called separately into the WAVES officer's office. She asked me if I had noted anything peculiar. And, in my innocence, I said, "No. ... so and so is a real tomboy, but I'm sure she's just a

tomboy. I've never seen anything." Well, that was fine. I had two more weeks of living there, and things that had never occurred to me as being out-of-the-way suddenly took on a whole different meaning, and I knew that she was really much too involved with one of the other girls. The other girl had no family. Several girls in the Navy that I met had no parents and their grandparents were gone, and they had no siblings, so they were really alone, and this girl was like that. And they had become much too close, so a day or two before I left I went in to see the WAVE officer again, and I told her, "Yes, I think there is a problem." But I had no other experience. The idea of it. That was like an awakening for me.

C: Sure. Yes.

S: That even such a thing existed.

C: Existed. Exactly, in those days. That's kind of interesting. Do you think that the WAVES provided you with opportunities that you would not have had in civilian life?

S: Oh, yes. I worked with some very interesting, bright men-- the officers that I worked with, and the girls that I met from all over the country. The confidence it gave me to tackle a job that before I'd probably think that I wasn't capable of.

C: Well, that's great. Did you feel you were challenged in the Navy?

S: Oh, yes! The first job at Quonset, no. Even the dictation was very ordinary. But when I got to Washington, I was only there about a week and a half, and I was called to take dictation from an officer other than my boss whose WAVE had suddenly broken into tears and wanted to go home. He really had a lot of work, and I sat down, I think it was something like forty-five pages of dictation that I took. Just sat there, and sat there, and sat there; and, of course, this was a new project to me. I didn't know the vocabulary of it yet; but he was very kind. He said, "Just double-space it and leave a blank where necessary." There weren't too many blanks. Some of the words were really foreign to me. He thanked me for the completed work. It was baptism by fire.

C: Right.

S: It made me think afterwards--well, you can do it.

C: Yes. Certainly. Did the WAVES experience in the war change or redirect your life in the postwar period in any way?

S: From then on I had confidence in myself on any job I would undertake. But, actually, I fitted right back into my old

civilian life. I was married in '50, and we had five children. So my whole life changed. The service became just a wonderful memory. I'm sure it didn't influence the way I thought of things but probably in the way I ~~acted~~^{acted}--more confidently.

C: Do you feel that the war and the experience in the WAVES made you more independent and self-reliant?

S: Oh, yes. No question. Before I enlisted, my grandmother lived with us, and I never even washed out my stockings. If she saw them there, she rinsed them out. We wore 100% cotton dresses in those days, and she would iron them for me. I won't say we were spoiled. We were three girls, and we had our things we had to do. We were not brought up in a family that spoiled children, but my life was made easy by my grandmother. It didn't take long to learn to take care of yourself and your possessions.

C: Yes. And then you had to start doing things for yourself. Did you maintain any service friendships after you were discharged?

S: No. I wrote to a friend for a while, and I met her at the first American Legion Convention in New York City after the war. I made an engagement and spent some time with Margie Pike. She was from Brooklyn, and she worked for a big insurance company in

New York. She was the WAVE who was secretary to Commodore Dixie Kiefer.

C: Oh, yes.

S: But that was the last time. We exchanged cards, and then...

C: People drift away. Did you attend any WAVES reunions after the war? I heard they had a couple in Boston and New York.

S: No. I was too involved with family. My family is spread over a big period. They were twelve years apart from the oldest to the youngest, and you don't leave them when they're young, so I just never did. As a matter of fact, I didn't even know there was a WAVES National Organization until we were in Florida in 1987. We used to go down for the month of March. There's not much to do in the morning, so I was reading the West Palm Beach paper. I was reading the announcements, and I noted WAVES in bold letters, and then the story about WAVES National. I sent a letter off to the PO box; and by the time, I left Florida, I had a reply back referring me to *Old Ironsides* in Boston.

C: Oh, that group?

S: Yes. Oh, in the meantime, after my children were all in school, I went with Metropolitan Life. I was secretary to the

medical director. There were two doctors, two nurses, and an office staff of about four or five. I had known one of the girls in high school. She had been in the WAVES, too. After my return from Florida, we used to go to Boston together to the *Old Ironsides'* meetings.

C: . Oh, I see.

S: Then my husband had a stroke; her husband developed cancer, and he died this summer.

C: Oh, dear.

S: Yes. So, she hasn't transferred down yet. I wouldn't be surprised that she will, but, right now, she's still grieving.

C: Of course. Well, you are a member of the Ocean State WAVES now, aren't you?

S: Oh, yes. I'm treasurer. I got that by default.

C: Oh! What happened?

S: I was head of the nominating committee, and I couldn't find anyone to take the job, I was ashamed to tell the president I couldn't provide her with a slate, so I said I'd take it.

C: Good. Great. I've been interviewing WAVES and Esther Villeneuve suggested you.

S: Yes.

C: ... and you suggested Muriel Tweedly. You're a member of the National as well as the Ocean State unit?

S: Yes.

C: Have you ever been to any WAVES National conventions?

S: No, but the next one is in Boston; and, as I say, my husband had a stroke four years ago. He walks with a walker; but if we go into a crowd, we use the wheelchair. We've been on a cruise and everything. It doesn't keep us home, but I am very selective as to what we do.

C: Sure.

S: When the Ocean State unit is to host the New England conference next year in Newport, we will definitely go for the whole time. We'll stay at the hotel.

C: Oh, good, good! I'll have to go there, too.

S: You'll know us all.

C: I'll know you all, and I may even find some new people to interview. Can you give me your thoughts on the Ocean State unit and what it means for you?

S: Yes. For one thing, it caught me, I guess, at the right time because the worst was over with Sully, but we still cannot really be very social. His speech prevents him from holding a meaningful conversation, and most men shy away. They don't know how to handle a man who's had a stroke, and has a speech problem so that we're not into the couple's thing.

C: Right.

S: Our meetings are held at the Veterans Hospital which means it's accessible, I don't have to take him with me but I am more comfortable not leaving him alone. So he comes to the meetings, and he's made welcome at the meetings.

C: Oh, great!

S: And most of the women will take a minute to come over and say hello to him and chat for a minute or so, he doesn't know the names, but he ...

S: Knows the personalities.

S: He enjoys being at the meetings, and they make him feel part of the group.

C: Oh, good!

S: So that is very nice.

C: You mentioned the camaraderie among this group of women who served.

S: Yes. I don't know why it is because our backgrounds are different. We did not have common experiences in the WAVES, but there's just that openness about them. And even with the timid, ones, there is this nice feeling. I feel at home with the group.

C: Good.

S: But you know what's funny? Sully has difficulty making himself understood now, but if we meet new people, we are not ten minutes into a conversation but he's telling them, "My wife was in the WAVES."

C: Oh, isn't that interesting?

S: Yes. He's very proud of that.

C: Oh, that's great!

S: I wouldn't think to say it unless there was some reason for it to come up.

C: Sure.

S: But he makes a point of it and he's very proud.

C: Oh, that's great! That's a plus. If you don't have anything else to comment on or to say, then we can bring the interview to a close, and I want to thank you very, very much for giving up your morning and contributing to our Oral History Program on the WAVES in World War II. I've enjoyed it.

S: Well, I enjoyed it too. Thank you.

C: You're welcome.

Index

American Legion Convention, 72
Arlington, VA, 56
Bryant College, 61
California, 50
Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 38, 39
Coal Mines Administration, 54
Columbia University, 2
Department of the Interior, 54, 60
Dewey Decimal System, 4
Evanston, Illinois, 35
Filipinos, 41
Florida, 73, 74
Fort Devens, MA, 9
GI Bill, 64
Heinz, Helen, 35, 36, 37
Hope High School, 63
Ireland, 5
Kiefer, Dixie, 40, 41, 44, 73
Latin, 37
Lewis, John L.
Maine, 40
McAfee, Mildred, 53
Metropolitan Life, 73, 74
Naval Air Bases, 40, 43
Naval Air Station, 40, 41

Naval Hospital, Bethesda, MD, 60
Navy Department, 56
New London, CT, 4
Newport, RI, 55, 75
North Dakota, 49, 50
Ocean State WAVES, 74, 75, 76
Office of Price Administration, 2, 7, 9
Old Ironsides, 73
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 8, 9
Pembroke College, 7
Pennsylvania, 35
Pike, Margie, 72
Potomac River, 56
Princeton University, 55
Providence College, 63
Providence Fire Department, 1
Providence, RI, 1, 3, 7, 9, 11, 14, 46, 47, 49
Reserve Unit, Fields Point, 61, 62
Rhode Island, 3, 7, 14, 19, 37
Rhode Island Hospital Trust Bank, 9
Rhode Island School of Design, 2
Rhode Island Women's Post of the American Legion, 5
Roger Williams Park, 9
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 53
Sullivan, Catherine, 1, 68
"Summer of '42", 7

Tweedly, Muriel, 75

United Mine Workers of America, 54

United States Army, 9, 11

United States Navy, 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, 18, 27, 32, 34, 38, 51, 53, 54, 55, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67, 68, 70, 71

Veterans Hospital, 75

Victory Medal, 66

Villeneuve, Esther, 75

V-J Day, 44, 45, 46

USO, 36, 39

Walsh-Kaiser, 9

Washington, D.C., 4, 5, 8, 47, 54, 56, 67

WACS, 8, 11

WAVES, 1, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 46, 48, 51, 53, 55, 56, 65, 66, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 77, 78

WAVES Cave, 48

WAVES National, 6

WAVES National Organization, 71, 75

West Palm Beach, FL, 73

West Potomac Park, 56

World War II, 1, 2, 4, 39, 78

World War II, 2, 3, 4

Yeoman School, 36