

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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OF THE
WAVES

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BENNY LYONS

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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Interviewee: Benny Lyons

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: January 25, 1996

C: This is the first oral history interview with Benny Lyons for our oral history program on the WAVES in World War II. Today's date is January 25, 1996. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I'm the curator of the Naval Historical Collection and the interview is being held in my office in Mahan Hall at the War College. Benny, I'm so pleased that you were able to come in today to conduct this interview with me on your career in the WAVES in World War II. I'd like to begin by asking you where and when you were born?

L: I was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on September 21, 1923.

C: What did your father do for a living?

L: My father was a graduate of the University of Copenhagen as a mechanical engineer, and because at that time there was no mass production in Denmark, his goal was always to come to the United States. He was an inventor as well, and that's why we came here.

C: When did you come to the US?

L: 1929, A bad time to come.

C: Right, the beginning of the Depression.

C: Where did you settle in the US?

L: We went to Rockford, Illinois first, where my father's best friend in college had immigrated previously and he started to work there, as a draftsman, not as an engineer right at first.

C: Did you stay there? Did you spend your growing up years in Rockford?

L: No, we stayed there for a few years, but as my father's reputation became better known and as opportunities opened for him, we moved quite frequently. I never lived anywhere more than five years, so we lived many places.

C: That eased your transition into the Navy, I guess.

L: It did, and it eased my transition into becoming a Navy wife.

C: Right.

L: How to move.

C: Exactly. When did you graduate from high school and where did you graduate from high school?

L: We went back to Rockford. We were living in Rockford and I did graduate. My senior year I spent at High School in Rockford, Illinois, and it was 1941.

C: Oh, 1941, just before the war broke out. Did you have any brothers or sisters? I meant to ask you that.

L: No, I didn't have any. I wanted an older brother but that was not possible.

C: Did you decide to go to college after graduation from high school?

L: I always assumed I would, yes. I wanted to be a zoologist.

C: Oh, how interesting.

L: It would have been. It didn't work.

C: Where did you go to college?

L: Well, we had moved away and we moved away again, but I fell in love with a small college in Rockford, Illinois, called Rockford College; it was the second oldest women's college in the country and had only an enrollment of three hundred students but a very fine reputation. So I went back there to go to college.

C: And you stayed for how many years?

L: Two.

C: And that would have brought you up to 1943 and of course the war was in full swing then. Did your family have any Navy connections at all?

L: None, whatsoever.

C: Do you remember, just to back track a little bit, where you were when Pearl Harbor was bombed and what your reaction was?

L: I was riding on a bus in Rockford going somewhere. I don't remember where I was going or what. But I do remember that I was on a bus when somebody got on the bus and said that Pearl Harbor had just been bombed.

C: Were you shocked or surprised?

L: Oh, yes. Although my father seemed to think that we were going to go to war, I don't remember how he knew that or why. He was a very intelligent, thoughtful man, but somewhere he had a premonition that this was going to happen.

C: Right. After the war began and you were in college, did you keep up with news about the war at all? You were young.

L: I really didn't, no. I really didn't. I can honestly say no.

C: How did you hear about the WAVES?

L: Well, I was home for the summer, then living in Indiana, and I went to hear a Navy recruiter.

C: Oh, that's interesting.

L: And I came home and told my parents that that was what I was going to do when I was old enough. So my mother went right down and talked to the Navy recruiter about what sort of thing her daughter was getting into. She didn't like it at all. She didn't know what in the world that was. And she was assured that it was a perfectly respectable thing to do.

C: So you had to wait until you were twenty to join.

L: Yes, that September.

C: What attracted you to the Navy, let's say, vis-a-vis the army?

L: The recruiter. I didn't know anything about the Army or Navy; there was no Air Force. I just knew that was a way that I could help.

C: Was the recruiter a man?

L: A woman.

C: A woman. Oh, I see. That's interesting; she must have given a very good presentation.

L: She did. There were some men on the stage with her as I recall. But the head person who gave the talk was a woman.

C: Well, that's great. When did you enlist?

L: The day that I was old enough.

C: So that would have been.

L: You remember Denmark was invaded in April and we then could have no more contact with our relatives, except through a cousin of mine who was working at the embassy in Switzerland and so we got very little news, but we got some through her. And that was one of the reasons I wanted to win the war, so to speak.

C: That's great. Patriotism and, of course, your homeland.

L: Indeed.

C: That's great. Do you remember where you went to enlist?

L: Fort Wayne, Indiana.

C: And what was the procedure there? Do you remember what you had to do or what the regime was?

L: I remember I was sworn in there. I remember a lot of paperwork. I don't think there were tests there. I don't recall it clearly. But my main recollection were my mother and daddy and I went to see a play.

C: Oh, so they took you. Oh, good. Because most of the ladies went with their mothers when they went to enlist. You must have been sworn in that very day. Was there any publicity in your local newspaper about your joining the WAVES?

L: We lived in a town of 5,000 population, so, yes, there was just a little announcement.

C: How did your father feel about your enlistment?

L: I think that he thought it was a good idea.

C: Did your mother come around because she was initially against it.

L: Yes. She did, after she spoke with the recruiters and I was at that time thinking that I would go into something like hospital corpsman. That's what I had in my mind, and she thought that would be wonderful training and I could do some good there.

C: Sure, absolutely. Well, you were sent off to the Bronx, New York.

L: That's right.

C: To do your initial training and indoctrination. How did you get there from Illinois?

L: It was on the train, but I don't remember the train ride very much, except that it was an overnight train ride and I had an upper bunk and that's about all I remember.

C: Did you go with other WAVES?

L: No.

C: Oh, you went alone. Oh, I see. That's interesting. And you had to find your way to Hunter College once you got there. Do you remember what your initial impression was of the Hunter campus now transformed by the U.S. Navy?

L: Well, it was a disappointment to me, because I thought it might be spread out the way Rockford College was. It was a very lovely treed campus and this was not the case. Where we were was just an ugly, urban, campus.

C: Right. Had you been to New York City before?

L: Well, yes. When we arrived in the country we came through New York, and I think we visited an uncle or a distant relative there one time, but, no, I had never spent any time in New York at all.

C: Where did you live at Hunter? Do you remember the apartment buildings that were converted?

L: No, I can picture the room, but I can picture nothing else.

C: Did you have roommates there?

L: Yes, I think I had three other roommates.

C: Did you make any lasting friendships from that initial experience?

L: Yes, immediately, some of them are in here.

C: Great. Do you remember how your day was structured at Hunter?

L: I don't know. All I remember is blisters on the feet. I remember lectures; I remember tests. I don't remember clearly. Much of it was such a huge adjustment.

C: In what way? Did you have any trouble adjusting to military life?

L: No, I didn't have any trouble at all. I found some friends and we had things in common. We, on our little bit of time off, would go together to the parks, to the museum and walked our legs off and I just remember the blisters. I remember singing as we marched and how much better, how much easier it was to do it if we sang. So there was spirit. There was good spirit.

C: Oh that's good. There's a lot of camaraderie among the gals. Did you like the marching?

L: Yes, if we sang, I did. If the shoes fit, I did.

C: Did you have physical education at all while you were there or any exercises that you had to do? Swimming?

L: No, I don't think so.

C: Or anything?

L: No, not that I remember? We might have, Evelyn; I just don't remember.

C: I just wondered if there were any extra curricula activities that you might have participated in?

L: No, I think we pretty much fell into bed every night exhausted.

C: Do you remember the white glove inspections?

L: Oh, yes, I remember them. Yes, I remember cleaning one of the officers quarters with another girl and we found some false teeth in the bathroom and we were just laughing over these funny

things and making them chew when we looked up and here was the lady to whom the teeth belonged.

C: Oh, no. Did you get any demerits?

L: No, she was very ashamed about the whole thing. We shouldn't have made fun of false teeth, I guess. I remember how embarrassed we were and she was, oh, my, she blushed ten shades of red.

C: Right, but you had to keep your own room spic and span as well.

L: Yes, and everybody had to take turns cleaning the long lavatories, and that was the worst duty.

C: I guess. Cleaning the latrines. Did anything unusual or memorable happen during this six weeks time frame?

L: Well, yes, I was suppose to wake up early and wake up the mess detail one morning and I was so tired, I was so sleepy that I didn't wake up in time and nobody got breakfast because they chose to sleep. Since I didn't wake them up, they had a good excuse and they slept in and everything was very late that morning and it was my fault and that's why I was cleaning that lady's quarters.

C: Oh, I see that was your punishment for that. Did you ever have a chance to meet Captain Amsden who was head of the training school?

L: No, we heard of him. Oh, I'll tell you another funny thing that happened. We had wonderful concerts. People came to Hunter College to entertain the WAVES. And we had, I was a great lover of violin music and I had studied violin, my father played violin and we always had good music in the house and what was his name Yasha Heifitz came. And I was ecstatic. That was wonderful. Then Frank Sinatra came and I had a front row seat, but do you know for that concert we were not allowed to attend unless we kept on our white gloves, because people would go so crazy they wanted to keep the noise level down when we applauded Frank Sinatra.

C: Oh, I see he was the heartthrob of that generation.

L: Yes, exactly. He was a skinny fellow, but I don't know people seemed to just melt.

C: Right, they loved him.

L: Yes.

C: Oh, that's great. I hadn't heard of that before.
Entertainment for the WAVES. Did you have a graduation or
ceremony there?

L: We must have, but I don't remember it. I was just so excited
to be going on to the next new adventure.

C: Did you ever have a chance to meet Mildred McAfee, the
director?

L: No, she was someone to be so admired in her years, but we saw
her, but we never met her.

C: Oh, you did see her.

L: I think she spoke probably at our graduation.

C: She may have.

L: Maybe.

C: Well, you went on to a very interesting specialty. How were
you chosen for this specialty? How did that occur?

L: Well, we were tested at Hunter College extensively, and it
seemed the needs of the service, of course, came first. But then

again where your aptitude is, where you test the best is where you would go. So I ended up not being a hospital corpsman, but it seemed that I had mechanical ability. And so that's why I was sent to the specialty that I was.

C: And you were going to be a Link Trainer Instructor.

L: That's right, not a link trainer.

C: No, not a link trainer. I'll never forget that. A link trainer instructor, and where were you ordered?

L: Atlanta, Georgia.

C: At the naval air station there, I presume.

L: Yes. NAS. That's right.

C: NAS Atlanta. Do you remember how you got there?

L: No, I don't remember. But I got there.

C: Right, you got there. And you were going to be trained for a certain period of time.

L: Four months.

C: Four months there. What kind of courses and what kind of training did you undergo there?

L: Oh, we had courses in navigation, in aerodynamics; we were taught how, believe it or not, to disassemble and reassemble a link trainer with all of the instruments on the instrument panel. Because the thought was supposedly we were sent to oh, say Alaska, and there was no one there qualified, we had to learn it, not to imbed it in our minds, but at least to know how to do it, to have done it once and to know where to go to find out how to do it through manuals and stuff, should the need arise. Oh, we were given, I don't know why, but we were given some courses in airplane recognition.

C: Oh, yes.

L: A lot of this was just overall.

C: Sure.

L: But navigation and the methods used in navigation were the thrust of the course.

C: Sure. Were your instructors men?

L: Yes, they were civil service instructors.

C: Oh, they were?

L: Yes, they were men who had been doing this as a career.

C: Oh, that's interesting. Did you have classes Monday through Friday?

L: Yes. Six days a week.

C: Oh, six days a week.

L: We had Sunday off.

C: That was very rigorous then.

L: It was at that time. I guess we were needed.

C: How many gals were in training there? Do you remember how large your class was in particular? Was it alot? It was such a highly regarded specialty.

L: I really don't think there were more than twenty-five.

C: Yes.

L: I could be wrong, but I don't really remember. It seems to me it was not a big group. No. It was also a school for air controllers.

C: Oh, air traffic controllers.

L: Yes, air traffic controllers.

C: And some of the gals did that.

L: And also the mechanic schools I believe, was there in Atlanta. Some of the gals did that. We didn't have any classes together with any of them.

C: Where did you live? Did you live on base?

L: Yes. I lived on base in the barracks.

C: Were they one long barrack or did you have cubicles?

L: No, we were in rooms. Pretty much the same type of room when we finally got to our squadrons. Four to a room, two tier bunks, comfortable, two desks, shared a closet with another girl. Spartan but not uncomfortable. We did not spend a lot of time there.

C: What time frame were you there during the year? Was it summer or winter?

L: It wasn't summer.

C: You would have remembered that, the heat, I'm sure, in Atlanta.

L: Yes, a 100° while in Atlanta, the heat. No, it must have been, it was definitely. It would have been winter.

C: Did you have any opportunities for recreation?

L: Oh, yes.

C: And what would you do?

L: We loved to go to Mammy Chantie and have dinner, Mammy Chantie on Peachtree Street.

C: Sounds very Atlanta.

L: Yes, it's still there, I'll bet 'cha.

C: Did you have an opportunity to date anyone there?

L: Yes, there was the Passion Pit. They called the hotel in town. I don't remember. I thought of it the other day. Now I can't remember. There was a big hotel and it's still there; it's a famous old landmark but it had a little place where you could have drinks and dance. And yes, we'd just go, a bunch of us would go there and before you knew it we'd be dancing. We never got to know anybody or I didn't know anybody, there that I ever made a lasting friendship with or anything, but it was fun.

C: Great. So you spent four months there and did you have any graduation ceremony when you finished your training?

L: Isn't that funny, I don't remember any graduation ceremonies at all. I must have just taken them for granted; they didn't impress me.

C: Do you remember what your rate was?

L: SP2C. Specialist Technician Second Class.

C: Right. Well, you finished this training and at the end of it did you feel competent enough to instruct? Did you feel ready to go out into the field?

L: Yes, I must say the training was excellent. I didn't feel competent to take apart a link trainer again but as far as the

navigational methods were concerned, yes, I was pretty well taught and assimilated, and I think I felt a little apprehensive about it maybe, because we went to an operating squadron and not to Pensacola to pilots in training. I was a little afraid they might know more than I did.

C: Sure. Anyway you were ready to go into the fray. Did you have any input into where you were going to be stationed?

L: None, whatsoever.

C: And where were you sent after the course?

L: Jacksonville, Florida, to a PBV squadron.

C: And what exactly was a PBV?

L: The work boat of the Navy. It was an old airplane, but it came back. It was a big lumbering four engine plane, with a blister on either side, for the gunners. It was a seaplane, although they could modify; it the PBV-5A was modified so that it could land on land or sea. But the squadron we were in was just PBVs. And they were seaplanes. And we were allowed to fly them for three or four hours every month. We were not allowed to take off or to land but just to get the feel of the airplane.

C: Oh, I see so you'd go up with a pilot.

L: Oh, yes. To see how the instruments worked when you were in a real airplane in the air, or in turbulence. It helped a lot and it was just like driving a truck. A little delayed reaction, you'd turn the wheel and then you'd wait a minute and then it went eer fly to where you could bank and turn and so on and climb and descend.

C: That must have been thrilling.

L: It was, but a very slow airplane, not exciting. On the other hand, we and the multi-engine link trainer room were not envious of the girls who were in the fighter plane because there were many casualties and we almost never lost anybody.

C: Oh, that's good.

L: But they did. So the planes might have been slow but they were certainly safer, not like the bombers.

C: Safer and steadier. That's interesting. Now when you went to Jacksonville, do you remember how your day was structured. What exactly did you teach these fellows, who you said were pilots already?

L: They were there for refreshing. It was required and still is that every pilot have a certain number of hours every so often. I don't know exactly what it is now. But, well, we set up problems. We had a desk and on that desk was what we called a crab and then we had a chart. And the pilot climbed into the little moc-up, the airplane with all of the instruments there and he was given a navigational problem to do--to get from point A to point B. And according to what he did, the crab would move on the chart.

C: Oh, I see.

L: To see if he could get from point A to point B with the use of various signals and different kinds from different towers, or there were many different ways that he could navigate.

C: It sounds complicated.

L: Well, it was, but it was learnable. Then it had a little step on it so when you first got the pilot, into the link, you could step up on that little step and right around with him and show him what happened, when you do this the nose goes down, you will descend and this is the instrument that shows you at what rate you are descending and simple little things like that. You could ride around and point this out to him. But then you put the hood over and went back to the desk and went through the

procedure with him. Toward the end of the war, I guess, the last few months they had built the most wonderful moc-ups of the exact cross section of a PBV navigator compartment that you would walk into and think that you were in a PBV, and it had motion. You felt the motion the way you felt it in the link trainer, but it was more realistic. We took the training in those, but we never got to use it as the war ended, fortunately.

C: Yes. You didn't have that opportunity.

L: No, that was an exciting thing. It must have cost billions of dollars to make. Maybe they're using them now. I guess they are.

C: Oh, that's fascinating. How many fellows were in a refresher course like this?

L: Oh, I don't know how many were in it.

C: How many did you train? One on one?

L: We had seven students a day; each of us had seven students a day, one per hour.

C: Oh, I see that's how you did it.

L: And we worked seven days a week and had the eighth day off.

C: I see, so that was a rigorous schedule.

L: It was rigorous. It was, but some of it was fun. For example, we didn't have only PBY pilots, we had the Naval Academy when they graduated. Every year those who had not passed the test or were not going to become pilots would come down to us and oh, we hated it because then we had to salute a lot. They really demanded that respect, these new little ensigns did.

C: And they weren't going to be pilots.

L: They were not, but they needed an orientation into flight training.

C: Oh, I see.

L: So they were at Jacksonville for one month instead of taking a midshipman cruise, which they couldn't do because of the war. They sent them to Jacksonville and gave them an orientation in flight training. And that's how I met my husband.

C: Oh, so he was just a recent graduate from the Academy.

L: And his eyes were down from all that studying, so he didn't pass the eye exam and that's how I met him. I had him for two hours and I got him both hours that he was assigned to the link trainer instruction.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting.

L: Yes, I thought it was.

C: Did he ever become a pilot?

L: Oh, yes.

C: That's what I thought. But his eyes.

L: It was a temporary thing. I mean, that his eyes were down so.

C: Fortunately, he went back to 20/20 vision.

L: That's right.

C: I guess that's what you needed, didn't you?

L: Oh, yes, you couldn't use corrective lenses. They were stricter then then they are now. They should a multi-engine

pilot why couldn't he wear glasses? But not then. I guess they had enough young blood, young healthy men.

C: In order to fill the ranks. You never lost anybody, fortunately.

L: No, we did. I will say we had a couple of people who came back from the Pacific and became instructors, navigation instructors, who seemed to be to me to be sort of shell shocked or I don't know, what do they call it, fatigued. Something wrong, something syndrome, but who did seem to be a little shaken up by their experiences there. There were planes lost in the Pacific, but what I was referring to when I spoke about the fighter pilots was in the training. We never lost anybody in Jacksonville.

C: In training. Oh, I see.

L: Oh, yes, we did lose PBV's in combat, but not in the training process.

C: Oh, that's good, so you were in a little safer training process than with fighter pilots. How did the men react to your teaching them?

L: What are you doing tonight? You had to be very stern. No, really once they realized that there was something of value that we could give them in the way of training, they were very cooperative. You know there's a cross section of nice young men, the cream of the crop, we thought, and all kinds, but they treated us with respect. They really did.

C: So no discrimination or nastiness?

L: No, not that I ever noticed, no.

C: It was a different world then. A little more mannered than this age. What did you like about this assignment?

L: I felt I was doing some good.

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

L: I would have liked a little more time off, yes. And, I didn't like the fact that one would make friends with somebody and then never see them again. They'd go off and they would either be killed or they would, and you met so many, so many that the few you really became close to you hated to see them go, but they were passing through.

C: Exactly. Didn't anything unusual or amusing happen during this time frame?

L: I suppose a lot of things.

C: Is there anything outstanding that comes to mind that you could remember?

L: We had lots of fun; we sang a lot.

C: What did you do for recreation?

L: We sang. We would fix dinner. We'd have those four navigation instructors over who lived nearby and their mothers and their girlfriends or whoever, and we'd fix creamed chipped beef on toast, because it didn't take any points.

C: Well, can you tell us, Benny, about your living arrangements, which were a little different than previous ones and about the gals you lived with and where you were?

L: Yes, we had to stand duty every fourth night on the base and stay in our barracks and I had a very good friend that had come with me from Atlanta. We met two other young women and we seemed to like to do the same things and we just liked each other. And we didn't necessarily like the girls that were in our rooms. All

the other girls that we were rooming with they were not always very thoughtful when we wanted to sleep, or they didn't carry their share of the burden, when it was time to clean, so we decided to see if we could rent a little house off the base and we found a little house, a little inexpensive house that we could afford and moved into that. It was a furnished house and a very simple one, but it certainly made life a lot easier for us. We could come home and be ourselves and relax and have a place to ✓ entertain our friends. We didn't have to go out to a bar, or you didn't have to be taken to an expensive dinner. We could just see our friends there. And we had the nicest group of friends there and we sang. A couple of the fellows had gone to Yale. One had been in the Yale Glee Club. And so he taught us a lot of songs that were lots of fun to sing and we thought we were just wonderful. We thought we sounded like one big choir when we sang and so that was a large part of the recreation. Another part was we found a little place out on the beach where we could play golf; the fees were very low for service people. It was a very fancy place called the Inn at Ponte Vedra and I played golf. Some of those fellows, our friends, we played golf a lot and so the others played tennis and we could afford to stay there overnight, if our nights off coincided. And we could trade around so that we didn't have to stand duty at different times, but I'd have an overnight sometimes there. That was a God send and when our parents would come to visit, which they did, they stayed out there and it was a very pleasant place.

C: That's great. Now did you date your husband when he was there?

L: Yes. He was in the link trainer for orientation and flight training and he was standing on the step and for two hours he'd work within the link trainer. I was standing on the step going around, saying this does this when you do that and he'd say, "Where are you from?" I'd say, well, you better pay attention and this and this, and he'd say, "Where'd you go to college?" He wasn't a bit interested in that, but it turns out he had his own private pilot's license and he got it in Dallas on his time off. He knew more than I did. So anyhow he asked me out that night. After the second hour, the next day it was, then we went to a hotel and we had a nice dinner and a nice time and talked very easily to one another and I came home and my friends were waiting up to see how'd it go, so I did a somersault on the floor. I said I've just met the man I'm going to marry.

C: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

L: Yes.

C: Woman's intuition.

L: Yes, I believed it.

C: I wonder if he felt the same way?

L: No, he didn't. He liked me a lot, but he had a \$100 bet that he wasn't going to get married for two years. He lost that bet but, no, that was not in his plan at all. But by about the fourth or fifth date, and we dated every night then.

C: Oh, you did?

L: Yes. We went horseback riding. We couldn't do anything. We had a lot of fun. I thought he was getting serious when he told me about how much insurance he had.

C: Oh, my lord.

L: Yes, and he asked me what I thought about some fiancées of Naval Academy graduates who like to wear miniatures, miniatures of the Naval Academy ring as an engagement ring and others would rather have a diamond ring. So I guess it was in his mind, but he didn't say anything. No, he didn't say anything.

C: Then he took right off after the month, didn't he?

L: He took off and went home on leave, and evidently told them down there that he was going to marry me. He came back on his way to checking in. He came up here to Newport to the pre-

commissioning, school for the Leyte aircraft carrier was being built. And we went to see St. Augustine, an interesting old town, not far from Jacksonville, an old, old town, a good walking town. And so we went there and we had dinner in a little place and I'll never forget that's when he proposed and we sat under the stairs; it was an old house so the stairs went down and there was a phone under the stairway and we had to crouch under there and make our long distance calls to call my mom and dad and his mom and dad and say guess what? Guess what? We just got engaged. We're going to get married.

C: And that's after about six weeks?

L: Yes.

C: Wow, that was quick.

L: Yes, we were married in '46.

C: And this happened in '45.

L: Yes. Summer of '45. And we were married in '46. We were going to wait two years, but we couldn't. We didn't want to.

C: The war was over by then and things had settled down.

L: We each had to save \$400 first though.

C: That was your goal.

L: That was our goal; that was a lot of money.

C: You're not kidding, in those days. Do you remember what your pay was at all when you were in the WAVES?

L: I've been trying to remember that and I can't remember. I can't remember.

C: Probably not too much at all.

L: No, it wasn't much at all.

C: Now, where did he serve in the war?

L: Well, he graduated in June, then the war ended.

C: Oh.

L: He was class of '46 and they graduated a year early; they were accelerated so he graduated in 1945.

C: So you met him in the Summer of '45 and all this happened in the Summer of '45 and the war was over in August. That's right.

L: Exactly.

C: Exactly. Did you keep up with news about the war through the newspapers at this time, when you were a like trainer instructor?

L: I can't say that we did. We were more interested to a certain extent, but we didn't follow certain battles, or we didn't follow the war. We tended more to follow our friends, our students, where they were, what was happening there and it was more word of mouth. We didn't have a lot of time to listen to the radio or anything.

C: That's right. Working seven days a week is hard.

L: Yes.

C: Did you have any time for leave during your time period in Jacksonville?

L: Yes.

C: Did you take leave and go off any where?

L: Well, I'd go home and see my parents, yes, that's all.

C: Did you ever write letters home to your parents about your experience as a WAVE?

L: Oh, yes.

C: Do you have any of these?

L: No, I don't.

C: Oh, how unfortunate.

L: But as I told you our parents did come to visit and that was wonderful, bringing meat stamps with them. We could buy meat.

C: Oh, that's right, because rationing was in effect then.

L: That's right. That's why I said chipped creamed beef on toast, because it didn't take any stamps.

C: Right.

L: But my mother came, this was to Atlanta, it was before Christmas, and she came to stay and she was so shocked because she had to get in a cab and sit on a sailor's lap, because you

just didn't get a cab and just go somewhere. You got in a cab as many as could pile in there and she had to sit on somebody she hadn't even been introduced to and sit on his lap all the way to the place and it was then that my mother and father decided to give me a car for my birthday.

C: Oh, so you had a car in Jacksonville.

L: Oh, yes. They gave me a little Nash. It was easy on gas, that's why they got me it. It was rationed as well. They gave me a little club coupe. I don't think they make them anymore, so I wouldn't have to sit on a strange sailor's lap going in and out of town.

C: Oh, that's great. Well, you must have been very popular.

L: Well, I wasn't the only one. We all had cars.

C: Oh, really?

L: Yes, we did. One of us had an old Packard always something wrong with them. Oh, but we really spent a lot of our weekends washing cars. We'd wash them clean. Pride and joy.

C: I bet. Did the link trainer instructors feel a special camaraderie among themselves because they were such a unique group?

L: Of course, yes, we did. We had other friends. I had one or two that were air controllers and a couple of girls who were mechanics there, too. Real nice girls but we lived together there in one section of the barracks and we were just together more. We had more in common, it seemed to me.

C: Do you remember the death of FDR in April '45.

L: Very well, yes.

C: Do you remember what your reaction was to that? Or the reaction of those at the base? Anything special that happened?

L: Well, I just remember it being discussed a lot. And wondering what effect it would have and you know being very sad. It wasn't the same feeling we had when JFK was shot. It was quiet different. But you do tend to remember where you were. I think it was pay day. In fact, we were in the hangar standing in line to pick up our pay.

C: Isn't that interesting. Do you remember VE Day in May of '45.

L: Yes, I do. We also had as students, we had some of the Free French and they were charmers. They were so interesting and so sweet to us and they seemed to have money and they could treat us to nice dinners and so we'd go out in a bunch to the same place I mentioned before the Inn at Ponte Vedra and I remember rolling up, this was not VE Day, this was when Paris was liberated. We were having a party and we rolled up our slacks and we went walking in the surf and singing La Marsellaise. They were so happy; they were so happy. No, VE Day that was with the Brazilians.

C: No, VE Day was Victory Europe.

L: Yes, VE Day was when we were with the Brazilians.

C: Oh, you were with the Brazilians.

L: Yes.

C: Oh, so that was another group that came.

L: Yes, we also had some of the Brazilians come through and they brought their wives. And I had had some French. I could speak no Portuguese. The wives could speak no English, but because I could speak a little French, not very much, I think I had three years or something, I was invited to go to dinner with the man

who was the commanding officer of this contingent of Brazilians and his wife and because we could converse a little bit and she was sort of lonesome--I think stuck in a hotel not being able to speak English--but we were at a wonderful restaurant, again one that was in a private home. Maybe it was just a war time thing, but that's where we were when we heard about VE Day. We were in that restaurant and all that. She understood what was going on then. Everybody was buying drinks for everybody else, and we started to think about going home. We knew it wasn't going to be long.

C: And VJ Day, of course, was next and that was really a big celebration. Did you celebrate on that occasion in August?

L: Yes, but I don't remember. I imagine it was just us then, because I don't have any remembrance of a big celebration. I think we probably just stayed home and just went whoopie. It was wonderful.

C: Right.

L: And started making plans for going home.

C: That's right. Because you were thinking about being discharged. Where and when were you discharged from the Navy?

L: I drove to Memphis, Tennessee, and all I can remember is finding this hotel that I was supposed to go to in downtown Memphis and they had people there and I was discharged there. And drove on home. I picked up hitchhikers right and left.

C: You were brave.

L: Oh, I was stupid or brave, but you did in those days because gas was rationed.

C: That's right.

L: And it might have been risky, but I had some nice people. I picked up nice young men, who were also going home and who helped me drive because I was driving straight through.

C: And alone. Were you happy to leave the WAVES?

L: Of course. We were happy we won the war.

C: And you had plans.

L: Yes, I had plans. I had planned to go back to college, but because I had got engaged I didn't see any point in starting that until I knew where I was going to be located.

C: Did you receive any medals for your service in the WAVES?

L: A ruptured duck.

C: What was your highest rank?

L: It was SP2C First Class.

C: I got that.

L: Yes. Chief's exams were moving on the horizon and beginning to be studied for just as the war ended and so was celestial navigation. That was an intriguing thing that I was also thinking about doing that. That would have meant going to Honolulu, though.

C: There was a school up here at Quonset, I believe, in celestial navigation.

L: They would have sent us to Hawaii.

C: Very interesting. Did you have any preconceived expectations when you entered the WAVES, about what you were getting into or what to expect?

L: I simply thought that I'd be working in a hospital somewhere, a Navy Hospital.

C: Did you find the WAVES a smoothly run organizations? Did you notice any glitches?

L: Human nature, you tend to forget the bad and remember the good. I have no bad memories.

C: That's good.

L: I don't. It was a different era.

C: It was.

L: We all had the same goal. We were all pulling together for the same purpose and I think it was run very well, indeed.

C: Did you know of any discipline problems either at Hunter or at Atlanta, or Jacksonville.

L: Well, we heard about them. I didn't know of any first hand, gossip maybe. I don't recall any problems. We had a fine bunch of young women. Maybe I was lucky but nobody had any problems that I know of. Nobody got into big trouble, except that time I

overslept and nobody got breakfast, but we were pretty innocent I think when I look back.

C: Definitely.

L: No, I don't think anybody got into trouble that I know of.

C: What opportunities did the WAVES provide you that you wouldn't have had in civilian life?

L: That's pretty obvious. I wouldn't be a Navy wife.

C: Did you feel that you were challenged in your job?

L: Oh, yes, constantly. It was constantly changing. Navigation methods were constantly changing. We perhaps should have had some courses in, I don't know, psychology or something like that to go along with the teaching part of it; it would have helped a little bit because most of us had never taught anything before and we were teaching a skill we should have had a little bit of that. But there wasn't time.

C: Oh, no, absolutely not.

L: No.

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

L: Absolutely.

C: Did you think that it broaden your horizons?

L: Absolutely.

C: Did you have any career ambitions as a result?

L: Well, I wanted to learn to fly on the GI bill. I mean to take off and land. I already knew how to fly, but how to take off and land; I did not know how to do that.

C: Did you ever accomplish that?

L: Oh, pretty much. Ken and I, we had our own little airplane for about eight years until a couple of years ago and we had great fun. I never did take off or land that one, though because it was a little single engine plane, but I would have been able to take over if Ken had ever had any problems or experienced a heart attack, something like that. I could have done that.

C: Oh that's great. Where did you go on this little craft?

L: Oh, we went to the Bahamas a couple of times. We flew to Martha's Vineyard for lunch. And that was fun. Went to Canada quite a bit. We went to Florida. The farthest west we ever got was to Texas to visit family. We'd go to Dallas and oh, that was such fun. Flying over the coast from Florida to Texas. It's a wonderful experience because your low in the little one engine plane. You're really low enough that you can see things that you don't see on the ground. But you'd want to go down at the ground and take a better look at them sometimes, too.

C: Well, that's great. You had flying experience after. Did you maintain any service friendships after you were discharged?

L: Yes. The three girls that I lived with and the four older instructors that I've mentioned before, officers, the guys who lived together in their house kept up with all of them.

C: That's great.

L: And got to know their wives as they married and we never all had a reunion. We really would have liked to, but we were scattered all over the country, in California, we were everywhere. We were not from any one locale, but we did talk on the phone and still write long letters at Christmas.

C: That's great. Did you attend any WAVES reunions after the war? I know there were some in the East.

L: No.

C: Where did you settle after the war? When you returned home to Rockford?

L: My parents had moved to California, so I went to California with them and San Jose. Ken, after he went through the pre-commissioning training for that carrier the LEYTE, then he could get leave and he came West and we were married there in July of '46 and we went to Norfolk. Two months later he went to sea for six months.

C: Oh, boy, so you were alone.

L: I went back to California.

C: Oh, you did.

L: I looked into taking flying lessons under the GI Bill of Rights, and or is that what they call it?

C: Yes.

L: GI Bill.

C: GI Bill.

L: Well, anyway, there was such a long waiting list that I thought that I can't do this. I don't know anybody here. I'll just go home again, so I took the train back until he came back.

C: Did you find that your WAVES experience helped you in your life as a Navy wife? Did it contribute in any way to an understanding of the Navy or Navy ways?

L: Well, very little. There were some things I knew that maybe other wives didn't know, but they weren't valuable to our lives then. Maybe I understood Ken a little more when he went to flight training. I know I did that. No, I don't think I did.

C: Did you find the responsibilities of being a Navy wife a challenge?

L: Oh, indeed.

C: And in what ways did you find yourself challenged?

L: The separations, the moves were difficult, but moving out is sad but your going to move in some place and that's kind of,

that's nest building, and that's nice. You're building something. You're accomplishing something that was fun.

C: Did you ever find the responsibilities of being a Navy wife overwhelming in any way?

L: Yes. Ken had been sent to MIT for two years for a degree in Electronics Engineering and so we lived together with other naval officers in Cambridge and had our first two children up there. Then he had orders to a carrier on the west coast as ships company; he was not yet a pilot. We drove cross country with a three month old and a fifteen month old in a car. We built a cage for the baby in the back seat so that the fifteen month old wouldn't poke her eyes out. It had a screen over the top and we could lift it up and feed the baby. But we drove across country visiting family along the way. And reported in to the base late one afternoon and found out the ship was sailing the next morning, so, we went next to the chaplains office and the chaplain found us a quonset hut that we could move right into, half of a quonset hut, over in Oakland. So we went over there, stopping at a grocery on the way. And Ken moved me in and very tearful, farewell the next morning and guess why they were going to sea? They were making a movie. They had Hollywood actors aboard. I can't remember their names now. That's why they went to sea and there I was and sure enough he came in then a couple of weeks later and everything was fine. I managed fine. We

talked to people around and got orientated, but then they took off for a four month cruise. And then everything went wrong. Our little son was out with a ham sandwich in his hand. He was attacked by a bunch of dogs and they had to give him the rabies treatment at the hospital, so I had to go to the phone with the little baby in my arms, a little girl, and to the phone down on the corner and call every night and see how he was, because in those days they would not allow you to see the children in the children's ward. They claimed it upset them too much when parents left again, so I had to call every day for three weeks he was there yes, that was painful. Then he came home and he was fine, a little chastened but he was fine and my little daughter got pneumonia and so I had to take her to the hospital and if she didn't go and pick up infant diarrhea. In those days it was a scourge in the infants' ward. And she got it. This is not interesting.

C: But it tells me about your life.

L: That's when I felt overwhelmed.

C: Right.

L: Again, I had to walk the now two year old, whatever, up to the phone and fine out how she was and she was there. She nearly died, for three weeks.

C: Oh, my Lord.

L: Yes, but that happens in the Navy every time they go to sea. That's when the car breaks down, or the kids get in an accident, or something happens.

C: A crisis.

L: So it probably was pretty typical. But that was my first real experience at feeling overwhelmed.

C: Problems to cope with alone. And serious problems.

L: Yes, away from anybody that you knew.

C: Did the Navy have any support groups though to help the wives cope in those days?

L: Not then, no.

C: No. And how long was your husband in the Navy?

L: Twenty-eight years.

C: Almost a thirty year career.

L: Yes. Moved twenty-eight times.

C: Oh, you did.

L: Of course, that's not every year.

C: No.

L: We did stay one place for five years.

C: Where was that?

L: That was in Norfolk, of course.

C: Did you ever go to Europe or abroad?

L: Yes. Ken was a Chinese linguist. He was sent to the intelligence school and at the toss of the coin he got Chinese as a language instead of French. He almost left the Navy at that point.

C: Such a difficult language. Impossible.

L: Oh, yes. It was eighteen months, twelve hours a day, no let up. Couldn't get sick.

C: Monterey, was he at Monterey?

L: No, no this was in Washington.

C: Oh I see. That's where they had it.

L: Yes, Washington. First the intelligence school, which is nine months and then, depending on the language, Ken's was fifteen months for the Chinese and then he was sent to Taiwan where he was Assistant Naval Attaché for air for two years there.

C: And you lived there?

L: Yes, it was fortunate because he was sent someplace where he could use his language. Some people were not. They were just put in a pool, you know, so many Russian linguists and they can translate in the Pentagon or something, but we were lucky. We went where he could really use the language.

C: Did you travel much in the Orient?

L: Well, we went to Japan and Hong Kong several times because the Naval Attaché in Hong Kong didn't have an airplane and he was a pilot so somebody had to fly the airplane to Hong Kong so that he could get his three hours per month in to maintain his skills

and so there were empty seats and they sort of took turns. We could go there and Japan. That's all.

C: That's great. It's always nice to have a foreign experience.

L: Well, it was great. It was a nice experience.

C: Did your children respond well to the moves and changes of school.

L: One didn't. The older child was more of an introvert, shy young man, and he hated to move, but the other two were outgoing and made friends immediately, but until they did the three of them drew a little closer every move we made. They were their own best friends for a little while. Then they found there place.

C: Sometimes that's hard.

L: Yes.

C: Did any of them join the Navy.

L: Oh yes, yes. Our youngest one wanted to go to the Naval Academy; however, he had had some intestinal bleeding and they thought it was from playing touch football, but they suspect that

it might be an ulcer so he could not be admitted to the Naval Academy, so he just went to college and got in the back way by going through flight training program and he became a navy pilot, too, and just retired last year.

C: Oh, good, so one of them joined.

L: Yes, and the other one our daughter, Mary, of course, she said she'd never marry a navy man, never go through what you've gone through. She did.

C: Oh, so she's moving around, too, now.

L: No, well here husband retired last year as well.

C: Oh, I see.

L: Yes, your talking to an old lady here.

C: They were probably in for twenty years.

L: They retired at twenty years.

C: Did they have any organizations later on, any Navy Wives Club's or activities during your service time frame?

L: Oh, yes, oh yes. That was my godsend. That's when I got away once a month and went to a lunch with the girls. Oh, yes, the squadrons were close, particularly when we were in squadrons, but also there were classmates, Ken's classmates, wherever we went. We'd have monthly meetings and he'd see old friends and I would, too, and, yes, we helped each other. Absolutely couldn't have got through twenty-eight years in the Navy without the wives. You couldn't when your husbands were gone.

C: Yes, a lot of the time.

L: Yes, oh we all helped each other. We all did and we helped the enlisted wives. We tried to help them, too, because a lot of them were so young. So we'd organize, if there wasn't an enlisted wives group, most everybody I know would see to it that there was one when we left.

C: Oh, that's good. That's great. What were the benefits or the disadvantages of being a Navy wife? What did you see as a benefit and as a disadvantage, if any?

L: Well, obviously the benefits outweigh the disadvantages or nobody would stick it out. I think friendships mean more. You go through a lot together. I think friendships were deeper because we needed each other. And, of course, the travel; you've got to like to travel; you've got to like new challenges and

meeting new people and getting to know a new part of the country or a new country. I dragged the teenagers around Europe, our three teenagers, and they did not want to go oh, no way, too much fun in the summer, but Ken said, "I've made this Med trip so many times you've got to see it before I get out." This is the time. So I rented the house, took the children and bought a car over there and put them in school in Naples to finish the last two months, there was an American school that we could put them in, and as soon as they finished I put them in the little car and we followed the ship. It was a carrier. We followed it all over the Mediterranean and then I ended up in Denmark. And shipped the car home, so they could meet their Danish relatives.

C: Oh, yes, I was going to say . . .

L: So those are the advantages, I think, the travel, the friendships. Yes, it's broadening, of course, it is and you learn to be independent. You learn how to change a tire.

C: That's tough to do.

L: That's right. No, but I think when we went to the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk Virginia, of course, after we got back from Taiwan, it was an all service school and the Army wives would say to the Navy wives I don't know how you do it your husband gone for how long. How do you do it? We really admire

you. And we would just put our shoulders back and stand up a little taller and we'd feel real proud.

C: And the Navy has better ports, than the Army posts, so you had some advantages in being in nice coastal places.

L: Yes.

C: How did you end up in Newport, Rhode Island, Benny?

L: Oh, Ken had come here to be a student in '63 and '64 and we loved it and when we left we all cried when we left on the ferry boat to go to our new duty station. The kids had made friends and so we thought we'll never come back here again. No airplanes here. Nothing for Ken to do here and he came back a year later. He had orders back, a year and a half because he had an air group. He was given an air group on a carrier and got orders back to be on staff of the War College. So he came back and he was on the staff, the best part of the staff, we thought, NCC with the foreign students and, of course, he'd adopt a Chinese officer and I'd adopt a Danish officer and we'd have good times, and it was a small group so that they could fit in each others homes.

C: What year was this do you remember?

L: This was '66 and '67. It was also a small enough group that a lot of Newporters who were interested in them would invite the foreign officers and we'd come along on their coat tails so we managed to meet some civilians here, which we were not always able to do and so we had civilian friends here. Then Ken got over and away again and we cried again, but then he got orders to command WASP over at Quonset Point and we were spending a lot of time going back and forth over here and we decided what we would do, we'd find a piece of land up the road from our friends the Sturdamans, our good pals, they've been so good to NCC and so good to me. I used to go lobstering with Ted when Ken was at sea and I'd go work in Barbie's garden and we loved being there. We found a little piece of land on Indian Avenue and thought we'd build a little summer house there, a little house, and rent it to War College students and then maybe come back for a month every summer and the kids liked that because all of their friends, they all three graduated from high school here at Rogers.

C: Oh, they did.

L: And I think that's where they feel they have roots, wherever they graduate from high school. They have lasting friendships there.

C: Absolutely.

L: It turned out we built the house. Ken stood out on the deck looking over to Little Compton and said I'm going to find a job on this little island. I don't want to leave here. And he did. That's how we got to remain in Newport.

C: When did he retire?

L: '73.

C: Oh, so, that was a good twenty years ago.

L: It went by like that.

C: Yes, and you've been here ever since.

L: Ever since.

C: You're really entrenched in the community.

L: Yes.

C: A part of it.

L: Oh yes, there's so much to do. We love it. We never get to do everything. There's so much going on. You don't get to go to every lecture, every concert, there's just so many interesting

things to do in this town and you don't have to drive far to do it.

C: That's right. That's what's so nice. It's compact.

L: Our friends that come from Washington or elsewhere to visit us really do envy us that, that we are in such a small area. So much to do.

C: And the traffic is not as horrendous as the district.

L: That's right. But do you know, Evelyn, there was only one street light on the island when we moved here in '63 and to go to War College there was only one.

C: My heavens, that's amazing.

L: Isn't that amazing.

C: Newport has changed during the last twenty years quite a bit.

L: Yes.

C: It's really blossomed. Well, do you have any other remarks that you would like to make about your life and career as a WAVE or as a Navy wife?

L: Oh, no. I've enjoyed chatting with you a lot, but I don't have anything much to say other than I've felt that I've had a pretty lucky life. I've had a wonderful time. I've met some wonderful people. Oh, no, I can't imagine living any other way. I think I would have felt deprived.

C: Right.

L: I do regret that I never did get my college degree. I took lots of courses later, but I never went for that final degree. But that's my only regret.

C: Well, that's great. I want to thank you very much, Benny, for coming in today and sharing your memories of life in the WAVES and as a Navy wife with me. We'll get this transcribed and off to you.

L: Oh, if it's worth anything.

C: Oh, it is.

L: It's been fun.

C: It's been great fun. Thank you.