

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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OF THE
WAVES

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JUNE NESBITT GIBBS

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Interviewee: June N. Gibbs

Interviewer: Dr. Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: March 26, 1996

C: This is the first oral history with Mrs. June Gibbs, who served in the WAVES in World War II. The interview is being conducted in her home at 163 Riverview Avenue in Middletown, Rhode Island. Today's date is March 26, 1996. June, I'm very pleased that you consented to be interviewed for our WAVES in World War II oral history program at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. I'd like to begin our interview by asking you when and where were you born?

G: In Newton, Massachusetts, on June 13th 1922.

C: What did your father do for a living?

G: My father, who died when I was 12, was a wholesale produce dealer. He used to take his truck into Boston and pick up fresh vegetables and bring them out and distribute them to various markets; this was before the days of supermarkets and big trucks and so forth.

C: Right, it was another world then. What did your mother do?

G: My mother was a homemaker, until my father died and then she went to work at a bank as a teller.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

G: One sister.

C: Was she older or younger?

G: Five years older.

C: Did you spend your growing up years in Newton, Massachusetts?

G: Yes.

C: When and where did you graduate from High School?

G: Newton High School, 1939.

C: Just as the depression was waning.

G: Yes.

C: Did you want to go to college?

G: Yes.

C: Where did you decide to go?

G: Wellesley.

C: Did you live at Wellesley, which was nearby?

G: My first two years I commuted, and my last two years I lived there.

C: On the campus?

G: Yes.

C: What was your major?

G: Math.

C: Oh! Good for you. That's daunting. Who was president of Wellesley when you attended?

G: Mildred McAfee Horton, actually she was Mildred McAfee then.

C: Right, at that time. She was the future director of the WAVES. What year did you graduate in?

G: 1943.

C: Did you have any career plans after your graduation?

G: Yes, and for a special reason. When I was at Wellesley, they had a secret training course in cryptography and it was interesting because I didn't know anything about it and I happened to go to my math professor one day with a question, something had come up that I was interested in and it had to do with cryptography, and the next thing I knew I was being

contacted to see if I wanted to be part of this course. I discovered my roommate had been doing it for a few weeks, and so I joined the group, and very hush-hush, as I say, my roommate had been doing it and I didn't even know it. So, anyway, when we completed the course we were offered the opportunity then to go in to work in Washington as civilians or to go into the Navy and work as cryptographers.

C: Oh, how interesting.

G: So that's how I came to do what I did.

C: Yes. Did your family have any navy connections at all?

G: No.

C: Were any of your friends or relatives in the service in 1943?

G: Well, of course, everybody started to join. That was the beginning of our generation going in, so alot of my friends were in the service.

C: Did you join the navy then immediately after graduation?

G: I had to wait for orders, and so I went, in July, back to the camp job that I had. And then during the month of July I got my orders to report to, I can't remember whether it was Northampton, I guess it was Northampton first and then Holyoke. I went two or three weeks to each. I can't remember how long, but

anyway I was indoctrinated and trained at those ^uto places.

C: So that was in 1943?

G: I left around the first of August to go up there.

C: To Smith College in Northampton. Did you have to take any tests prior to your joining the Navy? Do you remember if you had to take any I.Q. tests or aptitude tests?

G: I don't remember. I really honestly don't remember.

C: You probably had to take a physical though, I'm sure.

G: Yes, I think so.

C: Was there any publicity about your joining the navy in the local newspapers?

G: I can't remember that either.

C: How did your mother feel about this decision? Was she pro or con?

G: Oh, I think she was very proud. It was very funny because my mother had said when the war had started in 1941 how glad she was that she had daughters and not sons. And then it wound up with her daughter, my sister, going to the South Pacific with the Red Cross, and I went into the Navy, except that I was in Washington the whole time and it wasn't very dangerous.

C: No, it wasn't dangerous, but that's very interesting. What

was attractive about the navy to you, vice any other service?

G: I think I've always leaned towards the navy. I think even if it hadn't come about the way it did, if I had a choice, I probably would have picked the navy anyway.

C: Over the others.

G: Yes.

C: Well, you spent a little bit of time you said, at Smith College at the United States Naval Midshipmens School. Did you live on the campus at that point in time?

G: I don't know. All I can remember is when we were in Smith, I was at both Smith and Holyoke, and when we were at Smith that tavern up there that we went to.

C: Wiggins Tavern.

G: Wiggins Tavern fed us, and the food was so good. And then we went to Holyoke and we got dormitory food and it wasn't anywhere near as good.

C: Now at Smith you were just trained and indoctrinated into the navy.

G: I think so, yes, and I don't even remember what the difference was.

C: You weren't taking any special courses. Do you remember your

reaction to marching and drilling, because I'm sure you had to do that?

G: Oh, I always liked to march.

C: So that was no problem.

G: That was no problem. I still, every time there is a parade and I'm invited to march, I march.

C: Did you find your classes challenging at Smith?

G: I just don't have any memory at all of that.

C: Did you keep in contact at all with any of your roommates at Smith? You must have had roommates.

G: No, I don't have any recollection of who was there when I was there.

C: Well, after you were indoctrinated and trained at Smith you went on to Mount Holyoke, which, as I understood, was a training school for communicators.

G: Well, that was probably right. Because I went into cryptography. I was in the Naval Communications annex and that was part of communications; it was communications intelligence.

C: Right. A lot of the officers seemed to go into communications. That's where they were.

G: But there were two distinct branches of communications, communicating, and communications and researching and so forth. I think there was a gulf between the two, so that the majority of communications officers were going into sending messages and receiving them.

C: Right. Not anything as complex as cryptography that you went into.

G: No, you're right, but we did have the training of communications.

C: Yes, I think that is where that occurred. After you finished this training period, where were you assigned?

G: I was assigned to Washington, but at about that point I got the flu, so we were home on leave. We had five days of leave after we got through. Since I was sick, I was not able to go down with the group that had graduated from Holyoke at the same time, and for me it was fortuitous, because that group went to the Japanese section. I remember that I went to my own doctor who prescribed sulfur. I had a temperature of 102. I was really miserable, but he prescribed sulfur and my temperature dropped rapidly, and I was at home and the doorbell rang, and it was a physician from the Boston Navy yard coming to check up on me.

C: To see if you were telling the truth.

G: To see if I was really sick, and upon finding out that I had

no temperature, he said to get on the next train, so I did, and I was fine, but it meant that I went all by myself, as far as checking in went, and I was assigned to the German section, which, I think, was alot more interesting. I really enjoyed that.

C: And this was in the Navy Communications Annex?

G: Yes.

C: In Washington?

G: Yes, the corner of Massachusetts and Nebraska Avenue.

C: Well, what kind of work did you do there? When you said you were in the German section, what were you doing?

G: We were breaking the German code almost every day. We worked round the clock. I worked shifts for the first eight months I was down there: morning, then afternoon, then night a week at a time.

C: Seven days in a row?

G: No, we had five days on and two days off. The German encoded messages were divided into groups of five letters. The Germans were so systematic that at the same time each day they would send a message to the submarines with a weather report from the Bay of Biscayne. There were certain ways they had of phrasing it. We would line up that text against the coded messages. The computer would rapidly try every combination and

wheel setting until it found ones that fit. The ENIGMA (as the machine was called) had five wheels. The first wheel moved every letter, the second every twenty six letters, and the third wheel went every six hundred and seventy six letters as you typed in the message. You had to find out what wheels had been used. The last two wheels were the same for a month. The first three changed every day. The computer would give us possible wheels and settings which fit the short piece of message we were trying. We would then further test each of these manually until we hit on the correct one. As I said earlier, we were successful almost daily. Having read one message we could read all the rest that day.

C: Oh that's amazing.

G: It really was. It really was amazing. What had happened, as I'm told, was that they had captured a Polish submarine, which had a machine on it.

C: Oh, I see.

G: And that's the way they got the machine. It was intriguing.

C: Oh, it must have been, and were there only WAVES working on this?

G: A lot of them, yes, and there were men, too. My boss was a man.

C: Naval officer.

G: Naval officer, right.

C: Did you find that taxing?

G: No, it was fun. It was really fun. You'd walk in and say "what's up, what's down, and what's running?"

C: Oh, how interesting. Well, that's fantastic, and you got hits. I guess you worked together as a team, obviously.

G: Yes. We also had a translation department, so when we got the message out, we would send it up to them. One of my roommates was in the translation department, and the others were in the same section that I was.

C: Did you find the course at Wellesley helped you?

G: I don't know if it really did; it gave you a feeling of what you were doing, but that's about it.

C: So you were really baptized with fire when you went.

G: Yes, yes, but it was pretty systematized.

C: Well, that must have been fantastic. Do you remember who the boss was?

G: His name was Lt Cdr Randolph Church. I've since learned that after the war, he went out to Monterey and taught at the Navy graduate school out there. Just recently we've been out to visit

friends, and I asked about him. I asked what happened to Dr. Church, and was told he'd died.

C: How interesting. Do you remember what your rank and pay was during that time frame?

G: I started out as an ensign and at some point I was promoted to J.G. I don't remember when, but it's probably in the papers.

C: Right, so you were a Lieutenant (j.g.).

G: Yes.

C: Do you know how many WAVES worked in your office?

G: I don't.

C: What did you like about your assignment?

G: Oh, it was fun. It was like playing a game everyday.

C: A challenge, I guess.

G: Yes. It's sort of like doing crossword puzzles; it was really fascinating because of the introduction to computers. This was a binary that would try every possible combination faster than you could think. It was really interesting to be exposed to that. There was one other type of computer we had, and I can't even remember now what it was or what we used it for.

C: Were they huge things?

G: Oh, they took up rooms.

C: Oh, that's what I imagine because I remember them from the 50's and they had these punch cards.

G: Yes, I think it was a Mark. I remember the Mark II and the Mark IV that they had at Harvard. I think maybe it was that type. I don't know.

C: They were like that in their very early beginnings.

G: Yes, it really was.

C: Most people didn't even know about them, I guess.

G: That's right.

C: But they were useful in your work. Was there an aura of crisis about your work in cryptology?

G: Well, certainly an urgency. I was told that having broken the submarine code was what saved a lot of ships. They'd had tremendous losses in the Atlantic, and once they broke the submarine code, they knew where the submarines were and could protect themselves better.

C: Yes, there were alot of losses in our merchant shipping.

G: So the urgency of being sure you got all these messages was always there.

C: Did you dislike anything about this assignment?

G: I don't think so. I was young and enthusiastic.

C: Not jaded yet.

G: Not jaded.

C: Did anything amusing or interesting happen during your work?

G: I can't think of anything specific.

C: Where did you live in Washington, D.C.?

G: When I first went down, I lived in a place called McLean Gardens, which was very close to the Naval Communications Annex. There was something very funny that happened with my housing. I got down there and, as I say, I came all alone, because none of the group that I had graduated with were down there. But I had a lot of friends, a lot of Wellesley graduates went into the WAVES, a lot of my classmates went in at the same time. But none of them wound up in the same section. One of my very best friends was down there as a civilian working for one of the departments, and she had gone to school with a woman who was a yeoman in the navy. Brilliant gal, she wound up editing the newspaper for Patuxent River Naval Air Base. She was very creative. So I got to my quarters in McLean Gardens.

C: Was it an apartment?

G: It was just a room. When I got to my room, I had this phone call. She said, "This is Madeline Holmes. I've been assigned to

you as orderly". Gosh, I'd never heard of anything like that before. And I'd never heard the name, and she said "would you like me to come over, sir?" So, I said, "I think that will be lovely." Turned out it was my good friend who had put her up to it. We became fast friends.

C: That's great. Did you ultimately move out of this situation?

G: Yes, I don't remember how long I stayed. I got together with some of the women that were working in the same area that I was, and we rented a house. It was a lovely house.

C: In Washington, D.C.?

G: In Washington, within walking distance of the Annex. The man who owned it was a Coast Guardsman. His family had gone to join him, and they rented it to us. Unfortunately, they came back, so we had to move eventually, but we found another place.

C: Did you have a car at that point in time?

G: I brought my car down somewhere along the line, but I didn't have it at first.

C: Oh, that's good, so that gave you more mobility.

G: Oh, yes.

C: Did you ever take off on weekends with your WAVE friends?

G: I'm sure we did, but I don't remember now where. The only

time I remember was on V-J day. We all took off.

C: Yes, I was going to ask you about that later. What did you do for recreation on your time off? Did you do anything special?

G: I sang in the choir at the National Cathedral for a little while. I wasn't so good, but it was kind of fun, and we walked and I think I went ice skating there. I also went to the Capitol to watch Congress in action.

C: What was war time Washington like? What was the atmosphere like?

G: Busy. I can remember driving along and not thinking anything of picking up a couple of sailors to give them a ride. If they were walking and I was driving, I'd give them a ride. You felt very safe. You didn't feel threatened at all in Washington in those days.

C: It was a different city.

G: It sure was.

C: Did you have any opportunities to date any naval officers or anyone else in the service? There were enough of them around.

G: Oh, yes. We used to entertain. One of my roommates was a wonderful cook, so we used to have parties. I really learned to cook from my roommates in Washington.

C: Did you keep up with the war through newspapers and

newsreels?

G: Oh, yes. We had a big map on our wall. Of course, Marty's (one roommate) husband was in the Canadian Army and Don (whom I later married) was in Europe. One of my roommates was married and she didn't stay. She left fairly soon. Yes, we were very conscious.

C: Did you write letters home about your experiences?

G: I used to write my mother all the time.

C: Do you have any of these? Because these are a good source for information on women in World War II.

G: I looked up in the attic, and I looked under the cupboard drawer where I keep some of these things, and the only thing I found were Don's letters to me. I've got all those letters.

C: From the war?

G: Yes.

C: Oh, that's fabulous. Very interesting.

G: I'm sure my mother must have saved my letters but I don't know what happened to them.

C: Did you meet your husband during the war?

G: No. No, I had met him before.

C: Were you writing to him when he was in Europe?

G: Yes. He left in the spring of 1942 and didn't get back until 1945.

C: And he was in the Army?

G: Yes.

C: During your career in the WAVES, did you spend most of it in Washington D.C., or did you have any other billets? Were you ever transferred?

G: No, all of it in the same place.

C: In the Navy Communications Annex. Did you experience any harassment or ill treatment by the men?

G: No.

C: Did you ever feel that you were discriminated against by anyone?

G: No.

C: Did you ever have a chance to meet or see Franklin D. Roosevelt?

G: Saw him. I mean, you know, you watched parades and so forth, but I never met him.

C: Did you ever have a chance to see Eleanor Roosevelt, or have

any contact with her because she was involved with the WAVES?

G: No, none at all.

C: Of course you had contact with Mildred McAfee when she was president of Wellesley.

G: Yes, wonderful woman.

C: Can you make any comments about her? What was your opinion of her?

G: Just tremendous stature. She really was a remarkable woman. Our senior year, at graduation, Madam Chiang-Kai Shek was back; it was her twenty-fifth. And in those days we weren't allowed to wear slacks on campus.

C: Oh, no, of course not; it was entirely different.

G: But Madam Chiang-Kai Shek appeared in slacks. Beautiful slacks. And a gorgeous fur jacket, and so, of course, there was a lot of talk on campus, and Mildred McAfee handled it beautifully. She said, "any of you who think you look as well in slacks as Madam Shek can wear them." There was nobody. I thought that was handling it rather well. She was a gracious lady, she really was. Very bright, and I think that's why so many of the Wellesley graduates admired her and followed her into the Navy.

C: I would think so because she was a role model and an example for them.

G: Very much so. She only died a little while ago.

C: I know, at age 94. I think it was September of 1994 that she died in New Hampshire. Did you ever see her or have any contact with her when she was the director of the WAVES?

G: No, I don't think I did at all.

C: She was probably very busy with her duties.

G: Yes.

C: Do you remember what your reaction was to V-E Day which was May of 1945?

G: Oh, great relief! Of course because my future husband was in the European theater. I don't remember the day at all. I remember V-J Day better.

C: Right, I think that was celebrated a little bit more because it meant the end of the war. Do you remember that day in Washington D.C., and the reaction of people to V-J Day?

G: Oh, mostly the whole place went crazy. The one thing that I still remember very clearly was that all the trees were draped with toilet paper. I don't know why but people must have thought that was the thing to do, decorate. Everywhere you looked people had thrown rolls of toilet paper over the trees.

C: That's amazing. How did you and the people in your office celebrate?

G: Oh, we just all took off. They released everybody who wasn't absolutely essential and we took off for the coast of Maryland. I said I wanted to be near the salt water. So we went to some honkey tonk town and we got rooms over a beer hall. And I remember we had beer for breakfast.

C: Well, I imagine you were thrilled and pleased...

G: Absolutely.

C: ..that the war had ended. After August 1945, you continued in the navy, in the same department, I assume.

G: Yes.

C: What were you doing then?

G: To go back a ways, I had discovered that the Germans were so systematic, that in picking the three wheels for the next day, they had a system. I did a diagram and discovered they tended to go as far away as they could from the one they had used the day before. In other words, if you'd set up a grid with all the numbers on them, then they would jump like this, which allowed us to limit the number of tries we had to make. In other words, we could direct our tries in a better way, and as a result of that I had been put on a special desk and I went on straight days then.

C: Working an eight hour shift.

G: Yes. I had the cutest Yeoman. She was just darling, Annette

Charbenneau. I don't know where she is now. But she was a neat little gal. The Germans used the same machine in Southeast Asia in communications, and so we were put to work trying to break some of the diplomatic messages that were sent then. I don't remember how successful we were then, but when the war ended I was assigned to see whether, given the proper message, (help with a correct message), you could break the American code, so I proved that you could do that, which was not very encouraging.

C: Right.

G: But that was what I did after the war was over until I left.

C: Breaking the American Code?

G: Yes, you had to have a lot of help, but granted you probably would get some help with what the messages were saying, so if you had that, you could do it.

C: That's amazing, did you ever hear of Edwin Layton, who was involved in cryptology?

G: Doesn't ring a bell.

C: He was very involved in breaking the code at Midway and Pearl Harbor.

G: That would have been the Japanese code.

C: Right.

G: Have you ever heard that story about Walter Winchell?

C: No, I don't think so.

G: That was a really horrible story. They were reading the Japanese code, at the time I think it was the Battle of Midway. And as a result it made a big difference. And Walter Winchell was a commander in the Naval Reserves and a real big mouth. He discovered this, and he used it, and immediately the Japanese changed their code.

C: Oh, they would.

G: It was a real, real horror show.

C: That's unfortunate.

G: Yes. They had to start all over again from scratch; he should have been court martialed and killed.

C: Oh, yes, for that, absolutely.

G: He really should have been.

C: That's unforgivable. But anyway, this Edwin Layton, whose papers we have in the archives, was very involved in Hawaii. He was with FRUPAC, involved in breaking the Japanese code.

G: Oh, Hawaii. We had a Chief who lived next door to us in the second house we had who swore that they were breaking that code before Pearl Harbor, and said that they had all sorts of

information that was never made public.

C: Right, maybe they were.

G: I tend to believe him. I mean this guy was a code clerk, and I tend to believe him.

C: They probably knew it was coming and just....

G: It was not properly handled.

C: Anyway, how long did you stay in the Navy after V-J Day?

G: Just until January.

C: So it was somewhere around the duration and six months.

G: Because we were married on the 8th of December 1945.

C: Right. Where were you married?

G: In West Newton, Massachusetts.

C: And you were still in the WAVES then, obviously.

G: Yes.

C: Did you wear a gown?

G: Oh, yes.

C: Not your uniform?

G: No.

C: And you had to return to Washington, I assume.

G: Yes, just for a short time.

C: Were you discharged in Washington?

G: Yes.

C: Do you remember anything about the discharge process? Was it easy to accomplish?

G: I think so. I think maybe that's why there's a copy of my marriage certificate in here, because I needed that. I think at that time you could get discharged if you were married.

C: Yes, most people did.

G: Yes, so I think that was as simple as that, provided proof of marriage. My husband kids me. He said when he married me he thought I was going to stay in the Navy, and he'd have an easy life. I'd be an Admiral. He says that, but he doesn't mean it.

C: Well, you would have to wait a few years before you could join again. But anyway, you were released, discharged in January 1946. Did you receive any medals for your service?

G: Yes, I think the Naval Communications Annex got the citation, the Unit Citation, and I suppose the American theater. Would that be the one?

C: Yes, that tends to be the one of the victory medals,

something like that. What was the highest rank you attained in the Navy?

G: Lieutenant Junior Grade.

C: Do you remember what your pay was at that time?

G: I don't. Isn't that terrible, except I know I was wealthier than I'd ever been in my life.

C: Oh, okay. I was going to ask you if it was enough to live on.

G: Oh, it was wonderful, because I really struggled to get through college, with my father dead, and my mother working. I laugh, you know they talk about single parent families, and what a terrible thing it is, and it never dawned on me until about a year ago that I was one of the single parent families.

C: That's right.

G: I mean that was it. My father died. You just went on.

C: And women had to work.

G: Well, you know, you didn't have much money.

C: That's right. That's true.

G: And then my mother remarried, so that helped.

C: Did she continue working after?

G: No.

C: Oh, she returned to the home?

G: Yes.

C: Were you happy or sad to leave the navy?

G: Well, I think that because I was going to go home and make my own home I was very happy.

C: Of course. Did you have any preconceived expectation when you entered the WAVES, when you first joined?

G: No, I don't think so. I think there was a job to do and I knew what I was doing, and going to do and who knows how it was going to work out.

C: It was an adventure, I guess.

G: It was an adventure.

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

G: Well, you know.....

C: From your point of view, in the Communications Annex.

G: Yes, I think so. I wasn't being run by the WAVES in a way. Our office was a smoothly run office, but it wasn't run by the WAVES. In other words, we were just part of the navy.

C: And that was a smoothly run operation.

G: It was. Yes.

C: Did you ever encounter any discipline problems among the WAVES, in your training, or in your work in Washington?

G: No, I don't remember that I did.

C: Was anyone ever asked to leave because of pregnancy?

G: Not that I remember. I'm sure they would have been if they were pregnant. In those days, that was automatic.

C: Some of the enlisted woman mentioned that they had heard of some of them being removed because of that. Did you ever encounter any evidence of homosexuality?

G: No, I didn't. Not at all.

C: What was the relationship between the WAVE officers and the WAVE enlisted that you mentioned you worked with?

G: We were pretty egalitarian in our office. We all had a job to do. I don't remember that we socialized alot. But in a business office, you wouldn't necessarily be going out to dinner with your secretary. But, as I said, the clerk that I had was such a neat gal.

C: Did you ever keep in contact with your roommates from Washington?

G: Yes, the one who was married to the Canadian I hear from every year. They came down and visited us once. Another one who was a wonderful girl, but has since died, but I kept in touch with her until she died. Jan Haxton, I haven't kept in touch with. I also hear from the one who was a translator. She is a college professor.

C: Were any of these girls from Wellesley?

G: No. None of the ones I lived with was.

C: Do you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit-de-corps?

G: I think most of us had a strong sense of esprit-de-corps as far as the navy went. And, also, I think there was that among us.

C: Did you sense a lot of patriotism among the women?

G: Yes. You sensed patriotism amongst everyone in those days. It was the right thing, it was exciting.

C: Right, there weren't any divisions during WWII.

G: No, no.

C: Did you think that the WAVES provided you with new opportunities that you would not have had in civilian life?

G: Oh, yes. I mean the job I had I never would have had in civilian life.

C: Did you feel you were challenged on your job?

G: Yes, definitely.

C: Everyday was a new challenge.

G: Yes.

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

G: I don't really think so. You know, as far as that goes, I can't think of any specific thing.

C: Did the war make you more independent and self reliant?
Did joining the navy make you more independent and self reliant?

G: Oh, I think so, because it was the first time that I'd ever lived away from home, except for going to summer camp. And I learned to cook, and I learned to change washers on a faucet. My roommates were very, very good. Boy, two of them were wonderful cooks. I learned alot from them.

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

G: I think we took two steps back probably after the war. And it's been a long time catching up. One very interesting thing, which has nothing to do with the WAVES, but I've been acting on a permanent commission on child care, and the struggle to get businesses to recognize the need for childcare and suddenly we

realize that during the Second World War, most of the plants had child care, because they were recruiting women; they needed them desperately. And so they were willing to provide child care so that the women could work. And then after the war that dropped and it hasn't been until fairly recently that we've really put the heat on to make them recognize that women are in the workforce and that they really do have to have good convenient child care.

C: Absolutely, that kind of help and support. Well, I think, as you said, they were needed then. You really felt that women were needed for the war effort, so that made a difference.

G: Yes, it did.

C: That was interesting.

G: But I think that the same thing happened with the women. Women were given responsible jobs and then all of a sudden, they didn't need them.

C: Right, and these responsible jobs went away.

G: Yes.

C: Did you pursue any career ambitions after you were married, and after you left the service?

G: I worked for awhile for the Naval Ordnance Division of Eastman Kodak. I went back to school. My husband was in library

school; he went to library school the year after we were married.

C: Where did he go?

G: He went to Simmons. And so I went back to school because I thought, gee, I'd like to get the same vacations, and I had the G.I. Bill so I went to Boston University and got a masters in math. That was my big mistake. I should have gone to law school. It was much harder, but nobody talked about that in those days.

C: No, and it was very difficult for women to get into law school until the late 60's, early 70's. You practically had to fight your way in.

G: Yes, that's right.

C: And they accepted maybe one or two. Oh, that was interesting, so you benefited from the G.I. Bill, which is one of the few benefits women got as a result of serving in World War II.

G: It was fun. I enjoyed it, but as I said, I'd have fought and gotten into law school.

C: Did you ever use your math in any career situation after you got your masters?

G: Yes, my husband's first job was in Rochester, at the public library. I went to work for Eastman Kodak, they had a Naval Ordnance Division, and we were studying the tracks of the Dove

missile so I did some work on that. And then, when we moved to Newport, two years later, I looked around. I wanted a part time job, not a full time job, and I couldn't seem to find any. I tried a few places, but I didn't seem to find anything, so I just went along and became a full time volunteer.

C: How did you get involved in politics, and when?

G: My friend that used to live in the house across the street got me involved in 1952 to go doorbell ringing for Eisenhower, and that was my first experience. Funny part is that we did all our doorbell ringing over in the Anchorage and most of those people weren't registered to vote here. We were also campaigning for a local senate campaign, but anyway that was my introduction and then from there on she kept me involved.

C: And you are still involved today?

G: Yes.

C: You are a senator today in the state senate.

G: Yes. I was elected to the town council. For years I had thought you were just supposed to help good candidates get elected. Finally, they formed a womens' political caucus in Rhode Island, and I was fairly active. I was on the campaign and candidates committee, and I was busy telling all these women how they should run for office, so, finally, someone said to me that if it is such a good idea, June, then why don't you do it?

C: And when did you first run for office?

G: In 1974. I ran for town council. I was the only Republican, and the only woman elected that year. I was the first woman ever to win a seat on the town council.

C: In Middletown, Rhode Island.

G: Yes.

C: When did you first run for the state senate?

G: 1984.

C: And you've been in for the last twelve years.

G: Yes.

C: How long is that term?

G: Two years.

C: You run every two years.

G: Yes, I haven't had an opponent for the last three elections so that makes it a little easier.

C: Right, to get back to your Navy situation, did you ever hear of, or attend any WAVES reunions after the war?

G: No, I think I got notices about some, but I have never gone.

C: Yes, there were several in Boston that were organized after

the war. Could you sum up your Naval career and its significance for you and your life?

G: Oh, that's a very difficult question. I look back, and I am delighted I served in the Navy. And I still have a real affection for the Navy. I go over to the Navy Base for ceremonies and I'm very impressed. I just have great, great respect for naval officers and the navy in general. I think it was an appropriate thing for me to do, as my first job out of college, and in those days, it was the appropriate thing to do to serve because of the war, and I'm very proud of it. I really am.

C: Do you have anything else you want to add to the interview about your experiences or your two and a half year service? Is there anything we have overlooked or missed?

G: I don't think so, except maybe some of my political interest came from the fact that when I was working watches, I used to go over and sit in the Senate, because we got the time off. I spent alot of time over at the Capitol when I was in Washington.

C: Oh, how interesting, that's good to know. Did you ever meet or see any senators or representatives that were outstanding speaking or debating on anything that you were especially impressed by?

G: I don't remember anything specific. I still remember David I. Walsh, who said: "unless you can prove to me that we can not win the war unless we send our women in the Navy overseas, then I

will never vote for it." He was senator from Massachusetts, and, I think, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and had a great deal of influence.

C: Right. Women were sent abroad to Alaska and Hawaii in late 1944.

G: Yes, but not to war zones.

C: No, not to war zones. That was off the continental United States.

G: Yes, but that was about all.

C: Yes, that was it.

G: But he was adamant.

C: But I think times were different then.

G: They sure were!

C: People weren't willing to accept women in different situations.

G: I have to say, I've just always felt that women should be able to do anything that they can do, I mean, obviously, some women are better at things than men are. And, if that's the case, they ought to be able to do them.

C: Exactly, but that was not a very popular notion in 1945.

G: No, not at all, not at all. I object to stereotyping.

C: Well, I want to thank you very much for your reminiscences of your service in the WAVES in World War II, Mrs. Gibbs, and we will have this transcribed, and I'll send it to you to edit. Thank you very much.

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