

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Naval War College
Newport, Rhode Island

Oral History Program

The History of the WAVES

Interviewee: Jane Rembowski Scheck

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subj: The History of the WAVES

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C: This is the first oral history interview with Jane R. Scheck. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. Today's date is May 23, 1996. The interview is being conducted in my office at the Naval War College. Jane, I'm so pleased that you called me to conduct this interview with you regarding your experience in the WAVES in World War II. I'd like to begin by asking you where and when you were born?

S: I was born in 1923, September 23rd in Detroit, Michigan.

C: What did your father do for a living?

S: My father worked for the John Hancock Insurance Company; however, he was a history buff, and he read history and philosophy and got to be very interested in the Liberal Arts.

C: Oh, great! What did your mother do?

S: My mother stayed home. She was a very, very serious housekeeper and gardener, and I think she thought that a nice job for a girl would be to be a nurse or a secretary.

C: That's so true in those days.

S: Right.

C: And twenty, thirty years beyond as well. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

S: Yes. I had a brother who was very bright. Had nothing but all A's, and also a lot of fun, but, unfortunately, he contracted multiple sclerosis at the age of 21, and it came and went, came and went as MS does for a number of years. He worked for General Motors, the General Motors' Future Technology Division. I forget what it was called, but he did die at age 34.

C: Oh, that's sad. That is too bad. Where did you spend your growing up years?

S: Right in Detroit, Michigan. This was before--well, I would say--before the war, and Detroit was an entirely different city than it is now.

C: Absolutely, absolutely. When and where did you go to high school?

S: I went to a very large high school, and a very beautiful one. I was amazed when I went back a few years ago and looked at the tiles and the fanciness of the building. But in the 30's, I guess, when things were much cheaper. Anyway, it was Mackenzie High School, and it was very beautiful and had a swimming pool and all kinds of fancy designs, and everything that we don't do today.

C: Exactly. They were beautifully built then. When did you graduate from high school?

S: I graduated from high school in June 1940.

C: So you were just seventeen then.

S: I was sixteen.

C: Oh, sixteen.

S: Naturally, I wouldn't be seventeen until September.

C: Okay. That was very young.

S: Yes. It was. I had skipped a couple of half grades on the way up.

C: Where did you go to college?

S: I started out at Michigan State College, which is now Michigan State University, and a huge institution, and I started out thinking I should take something practical like Home Economics, which I did, but, after one year of weighing mayonnaise and counting calories, I decided I was not getting an education. The interesting thing though is they knew everything about food sources then than they do now. The only thing they didn't know was cholesterol. That was not known until the sixties.

C: Right.

S: But it wasn't popularized then the way it is now.

C: No. You're so correct. Well, what did you decide to do after your freshman year and your disillusionment with Home Economics?

S: I decided to transfer to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and take journalism which I was very interested in.

C: Had you worked on school newspapers before?

S: Actually no. I had not. Actually, maybe it was after I got into Michigan and ran into this one professor who was very dynamic that I decided to major in journalism.

C: Now, I assume your family was very supportive of your going to college?

S: My father particularly. I don't think my mother was quite as supportive, but my father was. Yes.

C: Oh, that's good. Did your family have any Navy connections at all, in any way?

S: None whatever, but what happened was that one of my dearest friends who was, I believe, a year ahead of me and from New York joined the Navy--the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School--and that's what gave me the idea.

C: Oh, that's good.

S: Yes.

C: When did you graduate from the University of Michigan?

S: I graduated in February of '44 because I had gone to summer school one semester and that was the summer school I met my future husband.

C: Oh. Now. what was he doing in Michigan?

S: He was in the ASTP (the Army Specialized Training Program). They inducted young college students and sent them around to various colleges before they were sent overseas. He was an engineering student, and so he was taking more engineering at Michigan, which he thought was a snap compared to Cal Tech where he came from.

C: So he hadn't graduated yet from college?

S: He had not graduated from college, but he was sent over in June of '44 to England and then eventually backed up the DDay troops.

C: Was he in the Army?

S: He was in the Army, and he went all the way to the Elbe, and Eisenhower had made the decision to pull back and let the Russians take Eastern Europe, which the men who fought for it didn't take to very well.

C: I can imagine. Do you remember where you were--just to backtrack a little--where you were when Pearl Harbor was bombed, and what your reaction was?

S: Yes. Yes. I was at the University of Michigan in Jordan Hall. It was the freshmen dorm, I believe. It must have been because I remember we all gathered in the hall and sat down and listened to the housemother's radio when Roosevelt was speaking the day after Pearl Harbor and declared war.

C: Did you keep up with war news before you enlisted in the Navy? While you were at college?

S: No, not particularly. College was kind of a life of its own where you were interested in your professors, your friends, the sports, the assignments, the homework, and I really didn't keep up with it.

C: Interesting that the impetus to join the WAVES came from this friend.

S: Came from the friend, and also I had vague ideas of joining the Navy to see the world.

C: Oh, really. Was patriotism a factor at all in your decision?

S: Oh, yes. Oh, very definitely.

C: Okay. Did any of your friends join other than this one gal that proceeded you in the WAVES? Did any of your classmates join that you were close to?

S: Let me see. I believe there was one, and I can't remember whether I knew her before or after the Navy, but she was from Rochester, New York. I can't remember. The only one that I really remember is Janet Singer, who was the sister of a dear friend of mine. In fact, the two sisters roomed in the same hall. I didn't.

C: How did your parents feel about your decision to join the Navy?

S: Well, they felt very good about it. My father said, "Where else could a young college graduate," I'm sure he was thinking a girl at that time, "make \$254 a month and travel?"

C: No place else. Not at that time.

S: Really, really.

C: Where did you go to enlist? Do you remember what city you had to go to?

S: Yes. The Hotel Book Cadillac in Detroit which was sort of a luxury Detroit hotel, and I was interviewed there and given an IQ Test, and I remember the interviewing officer said, "Well, there isn't much to talk about except college is there?" And I thought, oh boy, I'll never make it, but I did.

C: Were you sworn in at that point in time or did you have to come back?

S: I think I had to come back to be sworn in later.

C: Was there any publicity about your joining in the Detroit press?

S: No. No. Not really. We weren't socially prominent, and I suppose that if we had sent in pictures and an announcement it would have been in because it was fairly unusual at that point, but it never occurred to us.

C: Some of those smaller papers, I guess, would take care of that.

S: Oh, yes, the smaller papers are very good about that. Yes.

C: But the large metropolitan ones would be very different. How did you get to the U.S. Naval Midshipmen's School in Northampton? Did you go with WAVES on a train, or did you go individually?

S: I went on the train. I met a few other WAVES on that train. Maybe that was where I met my other friend, Betty Exner, on the train, and people didn't fly in those days--not much. And we went on the train, I remember, and I remember being hauled out of bed at seven o'clock because we were there, and I didn't expect it to be so soon.

C: What was your initial impression of Smith College in the U.S. Naval Midshipmen's School, Women Reserve?

S: Oh, I thought it was lovely. I thought the college was lovely. We didn't see much of the students, but I do remember meeting one on campus, and she seemed kind of up in the clouds mentally, and she said to me, "Oh, you're one of those municipal girls, aren't you?"

C: I wonder what she meant by that?

S: Well, she didn't know. She knew that you know there were a group in the uniform, and she just seemed very ethereal and poetic, and not quite with it.

C: Where were you domiciled during your training period?

S: Oh, that wonderful hotel, Northampton, which I'm sure is still there--a very famous old place; and the mistress of the hotel would talk to us. She was a charming New England lady, and she had all kinds of oriental objects d'art from her family. She had had ship captains in her family.

C: How interesting.

S: Oh, she was just a really prototype New England lady.

C: Do you know how many roommates you had in this time frame?

S: I think I had three. There were four of us.

C: Four to a room, then. And did you eat in the Northampton Hotel? You messed there?

S: We ate in the Northampton Hotel, and the Navy Mess was one and the same as those elegant Northampton menus. I can tell you. Lobster baked in sherry wine. That was a Sunday, but the food was absolutely fabulous.

C: Oh, that's great! Now, you were there in wintertime. You began your training in '44?

S: Yes.

C: And New England winters are pretty harsh at that point in time.

S: Yes, they are.

C: Do you remember how your day was structured?

S: Ah, well. The first thing we did was go out and march on the quadrangle. Then we went to breakfast, and then we had classes, and there was always a notice board where we had to go and check messages and any changes in our schedule. I remember people crowding in front of the notice board, and once I gave up and said, "Well, everybody will tell me. I really don't have to stand in line to read this, but sometimes you did." But we had first marching, then breakfast, then classes.

C: Do you remember if your instructors were WAVES?

S: Oh! They were. Mildred MacAfee. She was there.

C: Oh, do you remember meeting her.

S: Yes.

C: Were you personally introduced?

S: I believe so. I remember her speaking to us. She was there. Yes, she was, and then there were others who were officials at women's colleges mostly who became our instructors.

C: How would you rate the quality of instruction?

S: Oh, I thought it was very good. Of course, our instruction was in naval history; it was spotting aircraft and ships. That was fun. And, what else?

C: Probably Navy protocol . . .

S: Yes. Oh, yes, definitely.

C: Were you tested?

S: Oh, yes. There's quite a bit in my letters about examinations coming up. Oh, yes, we were.

C: Did you have any trouble adjusting to military life at all?

S: Well, I thought I did. I mean I did a great deal of complaining, but it was fun having to rush every minute to do the next thing.

C: What did you think of the marching and drilling? Did you like it?

S: I liked it. I really liked it. It was rhythmic. It was exercise, and I enjoyed it.

C: Did you have to tote a gun?

S: Yes. Once. I guess I remember this. My husband said he remembers before he went overseas he came to visit the campus, and he remembers my leading the march with a gun on my hip, but I don't think it was loaded. I really don't.

C: Okay. Did you like the discipline of military life? Did you adjust easily to that?

S: Yes and no. I think I may not have adjusted so easily, but then I missed it later. I really liked it once I got use to it.

C: Did you have physical education there as well besides the marching and drilling?

S: I believe we had gym. Yes, I believe so. I think so.

C: Did you find that the young women at the Midshipmen's School had a sense of camaraderie?

S: Oh, yes. Oh, I think so, yes.

C: Did you have any time off during this time frame at Midshipmen's School, any weekends off?

S: We did have weekends off, because I remember bicycling to Amherst. I remember going swimming, although I don't remember exactly where. Yes. We did have weekends off.

C: So you could go around the area?

S: I don't know. Maybe not Saturday mornings.

C: Did you have drills on Saturday morning at all?

S: I don't remember, but I think we probably did.

C: I know the enlisted women did. They had a drill on Saturday morning. Did anything unusual or memorable happen during your eight weeks at Midshipmen's School? Anything that you can recall?

S: Unusual?

C: Or interesting, or any event that stands out?

S: Well, I remember. One of the things I remember, as I said, the Head, the Mistress of the Northampton Hotel talking to us about her family and the shipping treasures that her ancestors had brought back, and I remember Mildred McAfee very well, and I remember--let's see, what else? I remember the history course about Admiral Mahan whom I'd never heard of before, but it was very interesting.

C: You were exposed to Mahan?

S: Yes, and I remember the bicycling to Amherst which was a beautiful thing to do, and I remember certain friends.

C: Did you maintain any friendships from that time frame?

S: From the Navy. Yes, I did for quite a while after. I maintained my friendship with the sister of the girl who was my inspiration to go into the Navy. The latter had married and gone down to Texas. I've maintained my friendship with her sister who was sort of the connection between us and who introduced my husband to me. I also kept my friendship for several years with the other student I met on the train--Betty Exner from Rochester; but then, I lost track of her. I kept writing and lost track. I heard that she did get a divorce, and move, and married again, and all that.

C: Right. It is hard to keep track of these people after so many years.

S: It is hard, yes.

C: After you graduated or were commissioned, I should say, from Northampton, where were you sent next?

S: I was sent to communications school. First of all, we had leave, and I went to New York and met my mother and my father, and had a very nice time. New York was still a wonderful city. You didn't have all the problems they have now. It had some problems sure, but not the way it has today. Then, I went on to Holyoke to communications school, and, to tell you the truth, I don't remember much about those communications courses. We were able to pick what we wanted, and I checked communications, and I don't remember what some of the other choices were. We couldn't be sure of getting it, but we could indicate a choice.

C: Oh, that's good.

S: And, yes, we could, and I went to Holyoke, and was there for two months, I believe, in communications school. And then I was sent to Washington in July--steamy Washington in July.

C: Yes. Where were you assigned in Washington in July of '44?

S: To the Naval Communications Annex out at Massachusetts and Nebraska Avenue, and should I say what they were doing at this point?

C: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

S: It was super SECRET then. We couldn't even hint at what we were doing, but this was the outfit that was breaking the Japanese code.

C: Fascinating.

S: Yes. I used to thank God I wasn't a codebreaker, because it seemed to me they worked with worse abstracts than math, and they used to say they'd have to get up and get a drink of water just to clear their heads, but I was very fortunate--at least it was considered fortunate--I was put in the in-office work. All the messages came in in English, and we'd read the Japanese messages, and then we had to retype them; and, at that point, I should say here that the WAVE officers were only allowed to type, and the male officers of the same rank were allowed to take those messages, do research on them, and make comments. And that was the thoughtful part of the business, but the WAVES were women, and they were only good for typing.

C: Oh, dear. So at that point in time you felt a little resentment?

S: I was very resentful, and also we worked days, evenings, and midnights in a rotating shift, so that I could never make contact with any of my old friends, so I felt quite lonely, and I remember I used to go down on my hours off, which rotated, down to the National Art Gallery, and I really enjoyed going through there, and then, eventually, I got use to it, and my friend and the sister of the WAVE that I had known came down with a therapist at Walter Reed Hospital, and we roomed together in McLean Gardens which is still a famous housing project there at Wisconsin and, oh dear, it's the corner of Wisconsin. It's very northwest, maybe Wisconsin and Nebraska.

C: Oh, that's interesting.

S: McLean Gardens. It's still there, and it was named after Evelyn McLean who owned the Hope Diamond.

C: Oh, yes.

S: Yes.

C: Where did you live prior to this time?

S: In the Officers' hut--just a gray, clapboard building on the base which was WAVE Quarters D. It was called WAVE Quarters D, as in dog, and it was just a wooden building with separate rooms in it.

C: Where was that located?

S: Now that was just across from the Communications Annex.--just across, yes.

C: Oh, so they domiciled, I would assume, all the WAVES that worked at the Communications Annex there, and the officers.

S: Yes. But the officers did have the privilege of moving out.

C: Right, because so many of them did, I noticed, who were stationed in Washington.

S: Yes. Some of them got houses together. Five or six would get houses, and, eventually, my college friend came down, and we roomed together in McLean Gardens. McLean Gardens did have apartments, but that was for married people.

C: Oh, that's great. So you worked eight hour watches, as you said, rotating watches. Did you have to work on Saturdays?

S: Oh, yes. That went right through. I think we changed.

C: Was that a seven day rotation?

S: I'm trying to remember the rotation. I believe, at first, it was two, two, and two, and that was really upsetting physiologically. You know that two, two, and two--very upsetting. And then, I think, the rotation got longer, and then, finally, I can't remember when we went on days. It must have been toward the end of the war. It was at the end of the war when we still had another year in the service. We went on days, and that was heaven to be able to be up and sleeping when the rest of the world was.

C: I assume there were other WAVES in your office?

S: Oh, yes. Very much so.

C: Did these other women feel the same way that you did about the type of work that they were doing--merely typing? Did you ever discuss this?

S: If they did, maybe in a joking way, but if they did, they didn't show it. And I guess I tried not to show it either, because the idea was that it was the war effort, and we were all supposed to, you know, do our part without complaining.

C: Right. Exactly. Were there men? Well, there obviously were men in your office.

S: Oh, definitely, definitely. A lot of Ivy League college graduates that were reserve officers.

C: How were you treated by the men?

S: Very well by the reserve officers; however, there was one old sea dog, a Commander Lyons, who had enlisted at the age of fifteen. How he did it, I don't know, but he did it. And he'd spent a long time out on a Pacific island alone with a radio listening to Japanese messages, and he was a rugged soul, and he just thought it was scandalous that women could be naval officers. You know, if we didn't behave exactly up to snuff. I feel sorry for the poor man now in retrospect, he would say, "But you girls are naval *officers*." Of course to him that meant a long climb through the ranks and years and years and years of "yes sirring." And he married a Russian. He had married a Russian lady. I don't know where he met her, probably in the twenties. He spent some time in Japan because he pronounced Hiroshima and Nagasaki not the way we pronounce it, but the way the Japanese pronounce it. He used to say, "If I had a son, I would write him a letter, to be opened every 25 years, and it would say, "Watch out the those g_d_ Japs?"

C: Did he give you any flack though? Did he discriminate against you?

S: Oh, he did. Oh, sure, sure. I think the discrimination was rank, but I can't give you any except if I would leave my typewriter in the middle of the night to go to the ladies' room he would wait until I got to the door and then call, "Miss Rembowski, come back."

C: What did you like about this assignment, if anything?

S: Oh, I liked, let me see. I think I've given you what I didn't like.

C: What you didn't like.

S: A pretty nice picture of what I didn't like. What I did like—I liked most of the other people there very much; in particular, the reserve officers--men and women, and there was one darling commander of the regular Navy who couldn't have been nicer. He was just as nice as the other one was nasty, and he certainly improved my opinion of regular naval officers. He said even though he had been a rebel, the Navy had been awfully good to him; and his name was Commander--oh, I can't remember it.

C: Well, that's okay.

S: But he was nice, and he said, "I hear you're the liberal in the office." I was politically liberal at that point, and I thought that Russia was doing a great thing. Well, you see, we were fed all that propaganda. Once Russia joined the war on our side, then all of a sudden it was wonderful, and he said, "They take life very seriously over there. I don't think you'd like it."

C: Yes, I can understand.

S: But we were great friends.

C: Sure. Was there an aura of crisis about your work?

S: Oh, yes! Oh, yes. Because the messages were divided into Top Secret Urgent, and Urgent, and Top Secret Ultra. You just had to stay there until all those messages were typed. Yes, there was, definitely. And, then, the poor routine ones would pile up a foot high on the desk, and you never had time to get to them. They were usually about Marus, which were the Japanese merchant ships sailing from island to island.

C: Was your clearance a Secret one at that point or was it Top Secret?

S: Oh, yes. The FBI had to come around and investigate me and all that kind of thing. And one of my friends said, "I guess you're pure as the driven snow."

C: Yes, they do investigate quite thoroughly for that kind of assignment. Did you feel you were making a contribution to the war effort?

S: Oh, sure. Oh, yes. I just wanted to make more of a contribution. I wanted to be allowed to do research and not just type.

C: Oh, I can understand that.

S: Yes. I could have gone to business school for that. I didn't have to go to college.

C: Yes. To learn to think, and to make judgments. What was your rank at that point in time?

S: I was an ensign until, let's see, I was commissioned as an ensign in May of '44, and I was an ensign until, let's see, December of '45, I believe, and in the fullness of time I became a lieutenant (j.g.).

C: Oh, that was the rank you ultimately achieved.

S: Right.

C: Well, you mentioned that you liked to go the National Gallery on your time off. Did you do anything else for recreation in Washington, D.C. during your years there?

S: Ah! Let me see. Oh, yes. I'm sure I did. There was a nice Officers' Club down on Connecticut Avenue that we used to go to, the girls together, and what else? Washington was such a beautiful city at that point, just riding the buses and the street cars all around, and there was a nice little restaurant on Connecticut I used to like to stop in, and I used to like to walk downtown which you could do then. Garfinkels Department Store had beautiful windows, but I did like the National Gallery very much. I made one trip to the Library of Congress; and, unfortunately, either the section was closed or the books were not available, that I was looking for. I just thought the Library of Congress would have everything, and I remember going to the Ballet Russe one night at Constitution Hall with my roommate and her fiancé and we used to go out to dinner alot, I mean the girls. Well, in the first place, it was what seven women to every man in Washington, literally, and we used to go out to dinner alot. But the thing is the food on the Navy Base, I think I was still on the Navy Base at that point, the food was so fabulous. They would offer us five or six full breakfasts that you could have your choice of. The Navy really spoiled us people. The food was wonderful, and we'd go out to dinner alot for entertainment.

C: Oh, sure.

S: And, I began gaining weight--about ten pounds.

C: Oh, that's interesting. Did wartime Washington have an aura of hustle and bustle about it?

S: Yes. Yes, it did, and also it had an aura. People all said at the time it's the city of lost souls, because everybody who came was only there for a short time and going out again, but it was still a very exciting city, and the northwest section of homes was so beautiful, and do you know that I've been there in the last few years, and they're exactly as they were before. Nothing has deteriorated. They look exactly the same, and just as beautiful as they did (What?) fifty, forty years ago? Fifty years ago? Amazing.

C: No. That area hasn't changed.

S: I remember going to the National Cathedral for services. That was very beautiful--a couple of times.

C: Yes.

S: And there was quite a bit to see and do. I spent an awful lot of time writing letters though. I can see that now. I don't see how I had time to do anything but that.

C: I was going to ask you about that. To whom did you write letters?

S: Well, I suppose I wrote to my friends, and I know I wrote to my folks, but the letters that my husband and I saved were the ones he wrote to me and I wrote to him, and I have letters from the time I graduated

until the end of the war, and my being released, and right up until our marriage. I wrote so many, and they were so long, that I think I must have spent most of my free time writing letters.

C: Oh, I can believe it. It was a very popular thing to do then, and you have a wonderful record of your time frame.

S: You do have a record.

C: So don't ever let them go astray.

S: No. Thank you.

C: Keep them.

S: They say that if children are not interested in what their parents do, the grandchildren always are.

C: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. So, your romance, I assume, was a serious one at this point in time?

S: Well, I didn't really know. Yes. I guess so, but he was overseas and I was in Washington. We didn't know how long the war would last, and, of course, he belonged out West, and had to go back to school out there, and I had ambitions of going into journalism, and we really didn't know how we were going to work all this out. But with a little creative planning, we did.

C: Oh, that's great. I was going to ask you, as kind of an entrée, did you date other people in Washington?

S: Every once in a while I would meet someone at the Officers' Club, but when we went, if we went out from there, we would go out in groups. Really. No. I didn't really date anyone else in Washington. No.

C: As you said the numbers were overwhelming--seven women to one man.

S: Oh, yes. Oh, very definitely.

C: Not in your favor at all.

S: No. No.

C: Can you comment about the attitude of just men, not necessarily Navy men or military men, but just the population, the male population and their attitude, if you know it, toward women in the service?

S: I suppose I didn't know many men who were not military. I suppose I didn't come in contact with many who were not military men, but I think around Washington that there were women in the service was pretty well accepted. I mean, after all, they were there. They may not have been allowed the same privileges for their rank that the men were, but they were there.

C: So at least men in the Washington area were accepting. I'm asking that question because some of the gals said that the general public looked askance at women in the military, at least that was their perception.

S: Well, there was that. Yes. That is true, and I think--I don't know about the men because I didn't know that many men--but I think the women did. I think that the civilian women did. Yes.

C: Looked at you as kind of questionable character wise.

S: Yes, yes, right.

C: That's a common perception. Did you ever have a chance to see FDR or Eleanor Roosevelt?

S: Yes. Eleanor spoke to us once at the Base, and she was a very lovely lady, and she sounded exactly as she always sounds when you hear her records. She did speak to us once. And I was delighted to have the opportunity. Roosevelt. I only stood on Pennsylvania Avenue as his funeral carriage passed by. We were just hundreds deep along the avenue. It was a terrible loss at the time. Really.

C: Yes. I wondered what your reaction was to the death of FDR because you were there.

S: There's something in my letters there. I had written to my now husband that that I had actually felt inside the way the public was supposed to feel to demonstrate on the outside, and I said, "One doesn't always, but this time I really did." I think there were two or three days when the radio stations played nothing but dirges, and I just felt it was very appropriate. Now, I remember saying in my letter to him that there were people who turned down the blinds and danced and drank and all that sort of thing during that weekend, but I felt completely in line with the public mourning.

C: Absolutely. That was quite a blow. Where were you on VE Day and what was your reaction in May of '45?

S: VE Day?

C: Victory over Europe.

S: Yes. Victory over Europe. You know my clearest memory is of VJ Day, and I don't have a very clear memory, but I was probably in the office.

C: I wondered if there was any public reaction to VE Day?

S: Oh, very much so! Oh, I think so. I was playing tennis on the tennis courts at McLean Gardens or had just finished when I heard about it.

C: Do you mean VE Day or VJ Day?

S: Oh, VJ Day.

C: Okay, VJ Day.

S: Yes.

C: Then the reaction to VEDay wasn't as prominent and spectacular?

S: I don't think it was as prominent because, well, of course, it was in Paris, it was possibly in New York, but the war was going on. You see my now husband was in the troops that were brought home from Europe, given a month's leave, and then were being sent to the Pacific to take Tokyo. Many people feel that Truman was justified in dropping the bomb because the Japanese would have defended those islands till the last man I think. So I think that it was more spectacular in August.

C: Yes. How did you celebrate and what was your reaction at that point in time?

S: How did we celebrate?

C: VJ Day--August.

S: You know, I remember a friend coming up and telling me, but I do not remember a celebration. I don't remember. We knew it was coming though because we were cracking the Japanese messages, and it was funny. They would give up island by island, spot by spot. It wasn't just one announcement, but for several days beforehand there were commanders giving up.

C: And you would have privy to that information, of course.

S: Yes.

C: Well, that's interesting to know. What were your feelings about the end of the war? How did you feel about it personally?

S: Well, I thought it was wonderful, and then we had to face decisions. What were we going to do now? What were we going to do next? I wasn't engaged at that point, I don't believe. I think it was some months later that I became engaged, but was still in the Navy until the following July of '46, and married in August of '46 at my home at Detroit, and went out to California to continue with school. We were both on the GI Bill.

C: We'll just double back a little bit to your last year in the Navy, post-VJ Day. You mentioned you stayed in through July '46. Were you doing the same kind of work again at the Navy Annex?

S: We were doing the same kind of work, but the women were allowed, now that the war was over, the women were allowed to be commentators and do a search on these messages. We had also started some research on Russia and what the Russians were doing because there were those officials who were very much worried about what Russia was going to do next, of what the Soviets were going to do next and what the intention was.

C: Absolutely. I think so because they probably realized that after the end of the war that they might have a problem with them.

S: Well, we had the bomb, and they had it very soon after. I remember the message coming in that Russia had exploded the bomb. They had it very soon after so that one of the commanders, the one I was most fond of, shocked me. I was very young and tender hearted, and he said, "While we're ahead we ought to take a bomb and just blow the top off the Kremlin while we're ahead." I said, "Oh, commander." Oh goodness, I wish I could remember his name. "You wouldn't do that." "Oh, yes, I would."

C: Interesting. So you stayed on doing the same kind of work through July '46?

S: That's right.

C: When did you intend to come back from the European theater?

S: He came back in the summer of '45, and he got himself discharged at, was it Fort Meade, in Maryland? Is there a Fort Meade in Maryland? Yes, and he proceeded to live with some of my naval officer friends in the men's dormitory who were very generous and gave him a room, and he stayed there for a few weeks, and we got engaged and then he had to go on home, which was Albuquerque, New Mexico. His grandmother had died, and the family needed him for a lot of stuff because she left property, etc., and then he went to Cal Tech and that would have been, let's see, . . . back in '45. I supposed he reentered Cal Tech in Pasadena that September, and we were married the following August.

C: So you kept in contact via letters then?

S: We kept in contact via letters. I also had already been out to Albuquerque, I believe, to meet his family, and then he drove the long way back to Detroit, and we were married, and took a weekend on the boat to Niagara Falls because that was something that my mother's generation they did, and she suggested that, and then we took, started on the long drive to California.

C: Where were you discharged from the Navy?

S: We were never discharged. We were only separated.

C: Okay.

S: And I was discharged, let's see, after the Korean War started I got a letter asking me when I could be back in Washington. In one week, in three weeks, in three months, and whatever, and I said I was a hardship case because I was putting my husband through law school. At that point, I was a writer for the Voice of America, and I didn't hear from them. But that was only "if we need you, how soon can you be

back?", which gave me some pause at that point, and then, in '54, I had my first child, and I was informed that I had myself ineligible.

C: Probably ineligible. You're right.

S: Ineligible for duty, and so I was discharged in '54.

C: But you were separated, then, originally in '46?

S: Yes.

C: Was that in Washington?

S: Yes.

C: Do you remember any steps you had to follow in the separation process?

S: I don't believe so. Now I have my official records with me, but I believe that the records were really just handed to us. I don't remember. I don't remember going to any office and being officially discharged.

C: Or being given a physical exam, or instructions on how to return to civilian life, or anything like that?

S: No. Nothing like that. Nothing like that.

C: Oh, okay. Okay. Fine. Did you receive any medals at all for your service?

S: Yes. American Theater. I think that was, maybe a couple, but one was American Theater, and that's all I remembered--American Theater of Operations.

C: Right. Were you happy or sad to leave the Navy? How did you feel about it?

S: Well, I think I was sad to leave in the short run, but I did not want to stay in. There were a couple of women in our office who decided to stay in, and I thought how sad. They don't have any lives to go to.

C: Well, you were looking forward to a new life

S: A new life, and marriage, and going to California, etc., and also going back to school, because there was a great deal in our letter about what I was going to do in journalism, and, you know, I didn't think it would work out, but it did. I got my Masters, as I said, in International Relations.

C: Now that was on the GI Bill?

S: On the GI Bill while my husband finished his Bachelor's at Cal Tech. Then, we moved to New York where he was accepted at Columbia Law School and where I wanted to go into journalism. And I worked on Max Ascoli's *Reporter Magazine*, which was a very fine magazine which won a Pulitzer Prize, but it only lasted for 20 years, the magazine. I worked there for a year and then I moved on to the Voice of America as a writer on the China desk. So, I did get into journalism of a kind, and I did manage to put my husband--well, of course, he also had the GI Bill, but we needed more than that to put him through law school--and it all worked out. But in those days in Washington, looking forward to it, I didn't know how geographically or career wise it was going to work out but it did.

C: It did. Isn't that amazing?

S: It is amazing.

C: It is, and you had a very interesting time as a journalist in these two positions.

S: Yes, I did.

C: It sounds very unique for that time frame.

S: Well, I pounded the pavements in New York for three months. I had a Master's in International Relations. I had had a commission in the Navy, and I took a job as a typist on Max Ascoli's magazine because I figured it was intellectual. It was brilliant. It was going places, and this is where I wanted to be. In the meantime, *Time Magazine* called me three times for a job as researcher. At that time, women could only be researchers. They could not be writers, and that irritated me and inflamed so much that I refused to go, and took a job as a typist instead because I felt that I could work my way up, which I did.

C: Oh, that's good. Things hadn't changed too much when I graduated from college either. Women could only be researchers at *Time*.

S: Yes. that's right.

C: And that was twenty years later so.

S: Yes. Oh, *Time* was one of the last bastions.

C: Yes. Last holdout.

S: Oh, yes. I should say so.

C: Well, you sound as if you had a very interesting career. You mentioned you had your first child in 1954.

S: I was over thirty, and at that point some people said to me: "Jane, don't you feel you were too old to have a baby?" And, when I think of what they're doing today, and then I had another in '58.

C: '54.

S: '54, another in '58, and my last--let's see--in '61, so I was 30 to 37 was when I had my children which was like ten years later than most people of my generation.

C: Oh, absolutely.

S: Yes, but I was so determined to have some kind of career before I started (having babies) and, in that respect, I was born 30 years too soon, but when I look now and see, I think it's difficult. I think it's difficult for women to be raising children, especially if they try to work full-time.

C: Oh, it is.

S: The conflicts are terrible, but at least the right is there.

C: Absolutely. Absolutely, and that's so good.

S: Yes.

C: Well, back to a few questions about the WAVES and your experience. Did you have any preconceived expectations when you entered the WAVES about what opportunities would be opened for you?

S: I just thought that I was going to see the world. I don't know why because I saw Washington, D.C., and I didn't expect to end up as a typist. But, no. I just was open to whatever would come, and I thought it was all going to be marvelous, and, you know, after a year or so of getting use to it, it was.

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

S: Yes. I think so. I think so. Of course once we got to working, the men were running things. But no. I think that Smith College and Holyoke were very well run. I did have one roommate at Smith who was lucky enough. She was from California, and she was lucky enough to be assigned to an Air Base. She was the only one. I don't know what she was doing but we thought, "Oh, how glamorous. How wonderful."

C: Did you ever have any knowledge of any discipline problems in the WAVES?

S: Well, you know, not discipline problems, but there was a sad case. It was Admiral King's daughter, and she was uncoordinated, and she could not march. I mean she just couldn't get her feet together.

C: Was she in your group?

S: Yes. She was in my group at Smith. I don't know what happened to her. I really don't. I don't think she was sent home. I remember her talking about all the traveling that she and her siblings used to do with her father, and how he would make them get out the encyclopedia and read about each country that they were going to. She was a lovely girl, but she just needed extra help, and she just couldn't march. She just couldn't get her feet together. It's a terrible thing to say because I remember that so clearly, but I don't remember whether she graduated or whether she was commissioned, or whether they found something else.

C: Oh, well, that would stand out, because, of course, she was a CNO's daughter.

S: Oh, Admiral King. Yes.

C: You remember that.

S: Yes. I should say.

C: Did you ever meet him, or Nimitz, or Spruance, or any of the others?

S: One of them after the war came to the office, one of the big admirals in the Pacific, whether it was Halsey, or Nimitz, or Spruance, and he said, "You were worth a fleet."

C: Oh, that's fabulous!

S: Yes.

C: That's a wonderful comment. Did you ever hear of anyone having to leave the Navy, the women, because of pregnancy or homosexuality?

S: No. There was one woman working in our office, but she wasn't even a WAVE. What they gave her a job for I don't know, but she was an officer's wife, and she was pregnant, and she must have been forty, and, at that point, it was just very embarrassing to have anybody pregnant in an office. I don't remember any discipline problems whatever. There must have been some that I didn't know about, but I certainly never ran across anything.

C: Well. Yes. I think there were probably less in the officer corps, because they were so homogeneous.

S: Yes. That's right. There may have been in the enlisted.

C: Did you find that the war and your experience in the WAVES made you more independent and self-reliant?

S: Well, I suppose it did, because it got me away from home; and from then on, I went on with my own life except for visits. But whether self-reliant, I'm not sure because we were so used to being programmed and told what to do.

C: Do you think that the WAVES' experience and the war changed or redirected your life in any way?

S: It certainly redirected my life toward an international outlook which I hadn't before.

C: Oh, that's good. That's very interesting.

S: Yes.

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

S: May I have the question again, please.

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

S: Ah! Well, there was that. I didn't do it, but there was that change where women who had been in the factories and in the services and everything, all of a sudden were expected to stay home. The togetherness of the fifties and to stay home with your children which was still pretty much engraved in all of us. I must say that there is one incident that just came back to me. This particular commander who had been the old sea dog enlisting at the age of fifteen --how he resented the WAVES really came out. One day we were moving the office. Whether we were moving files out, I really don't think the actual rooms changed, but there was a lot of moving to be done, and he told the women officers to show up in working coveralls and the men in dress blues. And he had the men stand around while the women did the heavy work, and picked up lint off the floor. He'd see one piece of lint, "Miss Rembowski, pick that up." I mean, I just knew that if I expressed what I thought I'd be kicked out of the Navy with a bad reference, but this happened. This actually happened.

C: So the women were there to do the heavy work?

S: The women were there to do the heavy work, and the men in dress blues with paper.

C: Overseeing you?

S: Oh, yes. Taking notes.

C: That was very bad.

S: Oh, it was, and you'd think it was Japan in the Middle Ages.

C: Right.

S: I mean you go to Japan, and the women carry the trunks in and the male hotel owner greets you, and the women carry your bags.

C: Right. Those who don't have the strength to do that kind of work are given it, which is very odd. I asked you about your service friendships before, and you said you maintained a few after you were separated from the service.

S: Yes. I remember it was hard to do because we all went to different geographical locations. I went to California. I remember I wrote long letters.

C: Could you sum up your naval career and its significance for you and your life?

S: Well, I was very proud of having been in the Navy, and I still am. There were some unpleasant experiences at first, but I was really proud of it, and I think it has meant a lot to me fifty years later moving to Newport because I've made contact with the Navy again, and I'm so glad I did. Of course, we go to the Navy lectures, and we joined the Navy League, and I sponsor foreign naval officers. You know, take them around, and have them over, and take them out on our boat--things like that. I think that it has enriched my

life very much, though there was a long period of raising children when it didn't seem relevant at all, but now it is.

C: Oh, yes. Isn't that interesting and a very fine comment. Do you have any other comments, Jane, that you want to make? Anything that we've missed or skipped over?

S: I'll probably think of them when I go home, but I think we've been quite thorough, and I must say that it was. I'm very glad that I went back through all of those old letters, because that was the instigation for my going back through, through my life there, and being able to remember so many things. It's kind of like coming full circle. I'm really glad to have done this.

C: Right. Oh, that's great! Well, I want to thank you so much for coming in today and giving me your time to conduct this interview, and we'll have it transcribed and give it to you for some editing.

S: Thank you. Thank you.

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