

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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JEAN LETT MACDONALD

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Interviewee: Jean Lett Macdonald

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: August 22, 1996

C: This is the first oral history with Mrs. Jean Macdonald. The interview is being conducted at her home on Poppasquash Road in Bristol, RI, for the WAVES in World War II Oral History project. Today's date is August 22, 1996. Jean, I want to thank you so much for allowing me to come to your home and interview you for the Naval War College's Oral History Program on the WAVES in WWII. You had a very unique and interesting career in the WAVES for two and a half years--different from anybody else I've interviewed. I wanted to begin the interview by asking you a few personal questions about your background. I would like to begin by asking you where and when you were born.

M: I was born in Ashland, Ohio, on June 12, 1918.

C: What did your father do for a living in Ashland, Ohio?

M: He was an advertising executive with Faultless Rubber Company.

C: And what did your mother do?

M: She was a housewife.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

M: I have two brothers. My older brother, Bob, who was in the Air Corps as an enlisted man, was a lawyer and my younger brother was in the Air Corps as an officer. My older brother always said the war was his vacation.

C: Did you spend your growing up years in Ashland?

M: I did.

C: Did you graduate from high school there?

M: I did.

C: What year was that?

M: 1936.

C: Did you go to college?

M: I did.

C: Where did you attend?

M: Ashland University. It used to give me an inferiority complex when I filled out a questionnaire because it sounded as though I had never left the city limits.

C: What did you major in at Ashland University?

M: English and American History.

C: Did you work at all after graduation?

M: I was a teacher in Ashland High School.

C: Did you like that?

M: Loved it! Didn't expect to, but loved it.

C: Did your family have any Navy connections at all?

M: None.

C: Can you remember where you were on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

M: I was at home with my family and we were listening to the radio.

C: What was your reaction to the news?

M: You knew it was coming.

C: Interesting. Were you shocked?

M: No, I don't remember being shocked; it was just we had listened through the invasion of the low countries in Europe and it seemed inevitable that something would happen. I had gone

to Ashland University which was a very isolationist college, but I was more influenced by my father's intelligence than I was by a lot of the professors.

C: Did you keep up with news about the war after Pearl Harbor and before you joined the WAVES?

M: Yes. I don't know exactly when my older brother went into the service but he was in fairly early. My younger brother was in college at Western Reserve University when he joined the Army Air Corps. They were both in the European Theater and overseas, so I certainly did follow the news.

C: In the early years.

M: I certainly did follow it.

C: Absolutely, with two people in the Army Air Corps. How did you hear about the WAVES? Do you remember?

M: I have no idea. I did try to enlist a year before I joined, but I didn't weigh enough.

C: Yes, they did have the restrictions as to height and to weight, so you were turned down at that point in time.

M: Right.

C: What did you find was attractive about the Navy and the WAVES vice joining the WACS or the SPARS?

M: It just seemed a more elite organization.

C: I think the Navy has that reputation and so do navies all over the world. You attempted at first to join the Navy, I assume, in 1942?

M: Right.

C: And you tried again ...

M: I think it was the spring of 1943 that I submitted my application.

C: You obviously heard in a positive way. Where did you have to go to enlist?

M: Cleveland, I believe.

C: That would have been the nearest big city to you?

M: Yes.

C: Were any of your friends or fellow teachers joining at this time?

M: No.

C: What would you say motivated you to join the WAVES?

M: I did not want to work in a factory. I felt that I wanted to do more than I was for the war effort and I think that's the reason.

C: So you would say that patriotism was a motivating factor and to do something for your country?

M: Probably. And both of my brothers immediately wrote when they heard I was joining and said, "why can't you be Rosie the Riveter". They did not approve of women in the service.

C: Did they say why they didn't approve?

M: No.

C: It was just a gut reaction. I think that was true of a lot of men in those days and still is in many instances. How did your parents feel about your joining the WAVES?

M: They were very permissive. They put up no objections.

C: That's great. So you had their full cooperation. Do you remember what procedure you had to follow when you went to Cleveland to sign up?

M: I was interviewed and had a physical. That's about all I remember.

C: You probably had to take tests of some sort I would imagine.

M: I don't remember tests.

C: Were you sworn in at that point in time?

M: Yes.

C: So this would have been the spring of 1943. Was there any publicity about your joining in the local newspapers?

M: Oh, yes, I'm sure there was.

C: They often did that in small towns. Can you tell me what the reaction of your friends, your relatives, or men you were going out with was to your joining the service?

M: They were mixed, I would say. Some thought I was crazy; others thought she'll do what she wants to do, and I didn't find too many negative comments.

C: That's good. So everyone was more or less positive, though a few negatives. You had to make your way to the U.S. Naval Midshipmen's School at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.

M: Mount Holyoke.

C: Oh, you went to Mount Holyoke first? That's interesting.

M: I think it was one of the old classes that had four weeks at Holyoke and four weeks at Smith.

C: That is different.

M: Yes. I well remember it because I was a teacher and a lot of my students came to see me off and I was, by my orders, on the Erie Railroad, which is primarily freight cars, and only the Navy would do it that way. I think I transferred in New York and in those days when you traveled you wore hat and gloves, and as I got off the train at South Hadley all the little urchins would stand and say, "you'll be sorry." I was wondering then if I would be.

C: I know other gals who heard the same thing when they got off the train. What month was this?

M: August.

C: So there was quite a break between your signing up and actually going in. There you were at Mount Holyoke for your initial training for four weeks and then Smith later on. Do you remember what your first four weeks were like and what your initial impressions were of Holyoke?

M: I certainly do. I had never lived in a dormitory and I enjoyed my privacy. After two days I can remember calling my father saying, "I think, Dad, if you could get me out of this it would be a good idea". It's true. Two days later when he called I said, "No, it's okay". In the mean time, he had talked to his Congressman and he was going to get his little girl home.

C: He was working on it. I guess you got used to it and very quickly, indeed. Did you have a number of roommates at that time?

M: I think I was in a four-bedroom at Holyoke. I think only two at Smith.

C: So you had to room with a number of people and use common facilities and all the rest.

M: Absolutely. Water turned off and the water turned on in the showers.

C: Short showers that they made people take. Did you making any lasting friendships during that short period?

M: No, I really didn't. There was no one I kept up with after that.

C: But were the girls from all over the country?

M: All over.

C: Do you remember how your days was structured during that time?

M: I remember more of Smith in that all classes seemed to happen at opposite ends of the campus and, as you know, it's quite a big campus. You would march from one end of the campus and then back for another class. I kept thinking they could organize this a little better, but I think they thought it was good exercise.

C: You certainly were forced to march and you were marching in formation, weren't you?

M: Always.

C: Do you remember what types of classes you had to take at either place?

M: Aircraft recognition was one. There were some math courses, health and hygiene. I don't remember learning anything substantial.

C: Did you find them more easy than difficult?

M: Yes.

C: Did you like the discipline of military life?

M: Not particularly.

C: Because your day was very structured, I imagine.

M: You had no freedom. I wasn't used to it, but it didn't bother me terribly after a while.

C: Right, you had been out in the world.

M: I adjusted.

C: Adjusted quickly. Did you have any physical education courses there?

M: Yes. We had exercises and I had fudged about the fact that I was susceptible to dysmenorrhea, disabling cramps, and I did not have a period during the eight weeks of training, which was very handy, and I think the exercises helped because I never suffered again after that. So it paid to lie, I guess.

C: Maybe strengthening your abdominal muscles or something would have helped. Do you remember why you were transferred after four weeks to the Smith College Campus?

M: My whole unit was transferred and I don't know why. They didn't tell you why.

C: I wondered if it had leaked out or something. But, anyway, where did you live at Smith?
Did you live in dorms or a hotel?

M: We lived in the hotel.

C: Northampton Hotel.

M: At Wiggins Tavern was the first time I had ever had pie for breakfast. I remember that.

C: All the girls said the meals were good there.

M: They were excellent. We were well fed.

C: Did you ever have a chance to meet Captain Under^{wood}~~hill~~ who was the head of the U.S.
Naval Midshipmen's School?

M: I never met him. Possibly at graduation. He wasn't at any training.

C: Did you have any time off during the weekends, during that eight weeks?

M: I think one of my roommates and I went out to dinner, the movies, but we had no
transportation. It was just all be in the Navy.

C: Right. All work and very little play at that time. You graduated after eight weeks and got
your commission. Do you remember anything unusual or memorable during this eight week
training period? Did anything outstanding happen?

M: Not that I can remember.

C: Did you ever meet Mildred McAfee, the WAVES director?

M: I did, but it was after I was in New York and it was some kind of ceremony. Possibly it was 4th of July or something of that sort.

C: So she had come down for that. After you finished your initial training, your bootcamp, so to speak, Midshipmen's School, where were you assigned?

M: Office of Naval Office Procurement in New York City, and I was delighted because I had many friends in New York and I had spent a lot of time there. My mother and father both were from New York City, and I was the only one out of the class that was assigned to that office. There were others who were assigned to the... (where did Mary work?)

C: She worked at Eastern Sea Frontier.

M: Yes, but I can't remember...

C: Ninety Church Street.

M: Ninety Church. We were at 33 Pine or 40 Wall.

C: Down on the Wall Street Section in lower New York. Did you request this assignment or was it just sheer luck of the draw that you were sent down there?

M: It just happened.

C: Where did you live during this timeframe?

M: In the beginning, I lived with an aunt and uncle up in Riverdale. That was quite a commute, because I had to take the bus to the subway and the subway to Wall Street. Then Phyllis Partridge, who was an Army brat, and I found a wonderful apartment in Greenwich Village. It was very arty and I was going home on leave for three days and she moved in. I didn't even have time to go to the apartment when I got off the train. I had to go right to the office. I can still see Phyllis marching in with a match box. I said, "What are you doing?" She said, "don't even talk to me. I'm on my way to the medical office." It had bed bugs. So that didn't last.

I did live in the village and my roommate was my immediate superior. Her name was Lieutenant Robin Selle. That was both good and bad. Robin had been a math teach in Pleasantville, New York, and I think she was divorced at that time, and she was a brilliant woman and looked a lot like Gloria Swanson. She had the heaviest walk I've ever known in a female and was a little bit close with her money. It got so she would send this yeoman or that one for coffee or something and they would come to me at the end of the week and say, "Robin owes me such and such," and I would have to get it for them. That became routine.

C: As long as she paid her debts, I guess. So that worked out.

M: It didn't work out.

C: Can you tell me what kind of work you were doing?

M: Started right in interviewing.

C: Now you were interviewing whom?

M: Both enlisted and officer personnel. I don't know if anyone else brought this up but because I was a procurement officer I was sent on a lot of speaking engagements and some of them were in the heart of Harlem and we accepted no Black women as officers, but you didn't say that.

C: But that was your intent and purpose not to.

M: We were not allowed to do so. It was a very tight rope that you walked when you went into those situations. But I will say when they changed their policy it was completely across the board and there was no more discrimination.

C: In 1944, I believe, they did start to accept Black women as officers and also they entered as enlisted about that time, too.

M: Right. And you never said that was the reason. It was either your qualifications aren't up to what's needed or physically you're not acceptable.

C: Where did you go for these speaking engagements in Harlem?

M: Wherever I was sent.

C: Would you go to the YWCA?

M: No, they were more service organizations, like the Rotary Club or Superintendents of Education meetings. It was a little hairy, because you were always alone.

C: Right. You were going by yourself into these areas. And you were meeting other women at that. You were recruiting before other women, weren't you? They were women's organizations, basically. That must have been tricky. Where else did you go to recruit?

M: When did I start in Connecticut? Does it say in that history?

C: It said October 1943 assigned as officer in charge of a seven member recruiting unit for the state of Connecticut.

M: That was fairly soon.

C: So you started first in New York City. And then I guess you were one of the seven responsible for the state of Connecticut?

M: Right. And we usually traveled as a group. Our headquarters were the recruiting offices, and there were all different kinds of chiefs in charge of recruiting officers. Some were very civil, some were not, and headquartered there and then you made your arrangements through the different service organizations for speaking trips and set up times for interviews. We did not have the final say. That was done in New York.

C: You must have marked them as far as their acceptability.

M: There was one chief in Bridgeport, Chief Enright, who was a salty old chief and one girl we rejected came back with her mother and he was listening to us. He looked over and he said, "Lady, your daughter is a pig, that's why she's not going into the Navy." So we ran into things like that and you had to smooth that over.

C: Did you basically reject people because they didn't meet the criteria, be it physical or educational background, or whatever?

M: Right. It was a pretty select group.

C: Did you have lots of women applying for entrance into the WAVES?

M: Oh, yes, we did.

C: Did you accept more than you rejected?

M: I wouldn't say we did. Sometimes it depended on the area. In Stamford, we accepted quite a high number, in New Britain probably not as many, and New Haven, many more acceptances. It was in pockets.

C: Did you have a quota that you had to make?

M: No.

C: You didn't have to take so many from each state then. It was just who was qualified.

M: And then the final decision would be made in New York.

C: Who was the superior officer in New York?

M: Lieutenant Selle was the top WAVE. Captain Castleman was in charge of the entire office, which included lots of men.

C: Did you have to stay overnight on these trips?

M: Yes. We had our own station wagon and we were busy at least six days of the week and then did our laundry or whatever on the seventh.

C: So you lived in that area for the six weeks?

M: Yes. In hotels, for the whole time that I was up there.

C: And then you just moved on to another city or whatever for a week or so. That's fascinating.

M: We spoke in theaters. We spoke in supper groups. Wherever we could open our mouths we went.

C: And you had to organize this, of course, through the recruiting office.

M: And who would fit in better where.

C: What did your little speech consist of? Do you remember what you had to tell them?

M: What positions the WAVES could aspire to, what the training was like, what their contribution was going to be. There was no set speech.

C: You had to tell them the particulars. Did you like that?

M: We had a good time. It changed. The group was not always the same and I remember some more vividly than others. We had one girl who was from Pittsburgh and she was

married and her husband was overseas and she absolutely exuded some kind of an attraction and we would be followed by men when Christine was in the group. We had quite a time keeping her under control, but we had to.

C: Was she seeking out the men?

M: It was not apparent, but it was always there.

C: How long were you involved in recruiting in Connecticut? Do you remember the time frame?

M: It seems to me it was a full year, if not longer.

C: It says here through almost August 1944, so you did this on a continual basis then for that ten-month time period. You must have been rather successful at this.

M: That's why this was written up because it was requested from Washington.

C: I was just mentioning that you were very successful in Connecticut then because you apparently had to submit a report to the Navy Department on the methods employed in your successful recruiting activities in Connecticut. This was requested by Admiral Randall Jacobs who was the Chief of Naval Personnel in Washington. Did you author the report yourself?

M: No.

C: I assume it was your superiors then that did that. But you and your group who were out in Connecticut must have done a wonderful job.

M: We did. I think we had a good area, but we worked hard and we left no stone unturned and everybody was willing. It occupied a great deal of your time almost exclusively.

C: Right. As you said, it was six days a week.

M: At least. Sometimes seven. And you had to travel. But there were funny things that happened.

C: Do tell us.

M: We always had a Navy station wagon and we would go into a restaurant and when we came out there was this officious looking man standing there and he said, "You left the Navy vehicle with the doors unlocked." And I said, "Yes, we did." And he said, "Anything could have been stolen." I said, "But that's the whole purpose." It was filled with literature about the WAVES and anyone who helped themselves would just help us out. So he backed off.

I was alone for some reason on a Sunday. I was in Norwich, Connecticut, at the Norwich Inn, as a matter of fact. And I thought I would go to church. When I opened the door and the whole corridor was full of sailors, so I backed in and didn't go to church. I waited because there was just too many. There were a lot of incidents.

C: Oh, I'm sure. And you lived in close quarters with the other gals that were doing this.

M: I don't remember ever an occasion where I had to ask someone to be removed who wasn't working out. They were all good.

C: And you got along well, because you were probably from similar backgrounds.

M: One of my recruiters was from Montgomery, Alabama, Jeannie Tate, and she was at least fifteen years older than I was, but she didn't object. Orders were orders and she was a good friend.

C: And you were in charge of the group then?

M: Yes, I was in charge.

C: Do you know how you got appointed to be in charge of the group? And why you were?

M: No.

C: Maybe your teaching background had something to do with it.

M: Probably.

C: Were any of the other gals teachers who did this?

M: Let me try to think. I only know that in the New York office Robin had been a math teacher. Martha Farmer, I think, might have been a physical education teacher. Those are the two that I can remember were teachers.

C: Did you keep up with any of these seven gals that you went out with?

M: Yes. Mary Williams, Irene Reynolds, Chris Lawrence, Irene Ernest for awhile. Then it petered out.

C: It sounded like a very interesting experience and most unusual. A different kind of war for you. We're now in August 1944, and at this point in time what were you assigned to do?

M: We were in Darien and it was a men's group. Everybody didn't go to the same place, but there were two of the girls with me. And I was heckled. I had never had that experience, so I replied and smoothed it over. Again, same man, and when I got back to New York sometime later I was called into Captain Castleman's office and he said they wanted me to be on "Voice of America," and the heckler was Roy DeGroot who was in charge of "Voice of America" so he wanted to see how I reacted under fire, I guess. For quite a while I was going to the studio. It wasn't exclusive. I had to go to the office, but I also was going to the broadcasting studio on Madison Avenue and I was making records with Roy DeGroot, Taylor Deems, who used to be the announcer for the opera, and Arthur Godfrey.

C: And you were making records?

M: For overseas.

C: What did these records consist of?

M: About life in America. How the war was progressing as far as the feeling of the country. I have no idea what we talked about. I don't have any of the records.

C: That would be wonderful to have. Was it a conversational type of situation, back and forth, give and take? That's fascinating. You were so lucky.

M: I was just good.

C: And good. You must have been good, of course, to do this kind of thing.

M: I can remember that Arthur Godfrey's manager was a man named Dinty Doyle. My fiancé and he used to meet at Grand Central Station while we were busy doing something else, so they got along famously.

C: Did you like working with these men?

M: Oh, sure. It was fascinating.

C: Oh, it must have been fascinating.

M: Roy DeGroot, later, I never kept up with him, but he became, I think, a food editor in the *Times Magazine* section.

C: And Arthur Godfrey, of course. Everybody knew him. Was he pleasant to work with?

M: Wonderful. Couldn't have been better.

C: How often did you go to the station on Madison Avenue? Was this a daily thing for a while, or was it once a week, or what?

M: It was more like once a week.

C: This was kind of an added duty, making recordings. It is too bad you don't have any. They would be collector's items. They've got to be in some archives somewhere. Anyway,

that was another interesting aspect, but you also were asked to instruct the New York state and New Jersey recruiters in the techniques you used in Connecticut. Can you tell me what you did in that regard?

M: I haven't the faintest notion of what I did. I told them what we did. I didn't go all over New York state. They came to me. Albany, Buffalo, Jersey City, and points north and south. It was just telling them what our techniques were and how important it was to get along with the recruiting staff in the stations.

C: That sounded very interesting. I hope they profited; I'm sure they did profit by this. You also have down here in your resume that you trained junior officers in interviewing and classification methods.

M: Replacement officers that would come in to the Naval Officer Procurement to do the job there that we had been doing, because some went on to do what I was doing in other areas and that's primarily what it was.

C: In-service training, more or less. And, of course, you were responsible for writing the letters of rejection, screening applicants and official letters to naval activities as part of this program. So that was a very, very busy time period in your life. Now when you were back in New York, did you live in Greenwich Village? You were more or less stationary at that time.

M: Yes, and then I moved with Robin to Brooklyn, although we had a nice apartment in Greenwich Village, but it had the bathtub in the kitchen area and it was just not ideal. There

was a nice apartment in Brooklyn; two of the girls that had it were leaving. It was an easy commute. It was the first stop from Wall Street into Brooklyn.

C: Did you have a chance for social life during that time frame, the August 1944-April 1945 time frame?

M: Oh, yes. Our evenings were our own and weekends pretty much.

C: What did you do in New York City for fun?

M: We went to dances at the English-Speaking Union. I had a suitor at that point. He was an older man and went to any place that I wanted to go whether it was The Copacabana or whatever. I remember him saying to my mother that he thought the way to my heart was through my stomach. I had a good appetite. So I saw a good bit of him. I was doing what any single woman in New York would be doing, I guess.

C: It was a very different place at that time, fifty years ago than it is now, and I guess more conducive to moving around without too much difficulty.

M: When I lived in Riverdale, I thought nothing about walking through the park at night. I had never been molested. It was much safer then.

C: Did you ever encounter any of the native New Yorkers and how they reacted to the WAVES? Did you get any feedback from the locals?

M: No, I would say, never.

C: Did any organizations in New York sponsor events or give out tickets to the WAVES?

M: No.

C: None that you knew of. Did you ever date any military men during this time frame?

M: That's where I met my husband.

C: He wasn't the older man, was he?

M: No.

C: Oh, that was somebody else. So you met your husband in New York?

M: Yes. He was a yeoman in the New Haven recruiting station, and we did not date until I went back to New York and he called me. So time went on and we got married.

C: You were an officer and he was enlisted. Was there any trouble with that?

M: Never had any, except when we went to my home. We went to a local priest because we were going to get married in New York City, but we had to get permission from the local parish. And the priest said to us, "I didn't know that there was fraternization allowed between the services." And Mac said, "Well, that's sort of a weak word for what we have in mind." So that stopped that right there.

C: They didn't allow it and they still don't. So you met him when you were recruiting in New Haven. That's interesting. Was he from Connecticut?

M: From Boston. The Commanding Officer of the New Haven station, Larry Nelson, often had us to his home. Mac was sort of an exceptional person.

C: He must have been, obviously. How long did your courtship go on for before you married?

M: When I went back to New York was when he and I got together, so it was about a year.

C: The little letter that I have says you were married in April 1945 at St. Patrick's, which was even before you got out of the service.

M: Well, my parents - my father was Episcopalian and my mother was Catholic - and as a child I wanted to see the church where they were married. It was gone. So I decided that nothing was going to remove St. Patrick's, so we were married in the Lady Chapel, which is a small chapel in the church.

C: So many women that I've interviewed met their husbands during the war when they were in the WAVES. It was about the only place you could, I imagine.

M: You really didn't see too much of anyone else. I was an exception because I had lived in New York. I knew New York so I had friends there.

C: And all the men were in the service. They had left the hometowns. Did you write letters home about your experiences to your parents?

M: I was a faithful correspondent.

C: It's too bad we don't have those.

M: I have only letters from my husband.

C: But he didn't save your letters to him?

M: My husband? I don't think so. I didn't come across them.

C: Let's get on with your career, because in April 1945 you were promoted to officer-in-charge of all publicity for the Third Naval District Procurement Office. This is quite a promotion.

M: Well, from the responsibility standpoint.

C: What was your responsibility?

M: What did I do? I trained officers and enlisted personnel in direct mail methods, intensive follow-ups and publicity methods. You would train personnel for working in public booths, at rallies, exhibitions, at the radio networks and before public assemblies. I guess that's what I did.

C: More of the same, except you were now the officer-in-charge of that, so you had lots of WAVES working for you.

M: And don't forget V-E Day was about that time.

C: Yes. I was going to ask you about that.

M: We were on our honeymoon as a matter of fact. I was in New York City for V-J Day.

C: We can get to that, but V-E Day came a little bit before. What was your rank when you were promoted to officer-in-charge for all publicity?

M: I was just a LTJG.

C: Did you ever get promoted to lieutenant?

M: I thought I was promoted to full lieutenant on my discharge.

C: That may have been the case. Sometimes they did that. From August to November...

M: Oh, that was a deadly period.

C: ...1945, you were at this last assignment in New York. Were you out of the office much?

M: No. At that point for several, what seemed like years, but it was months, we had to strip files, return birth certificates, marriage certificates and it didn't matter what your rank was, we were all engaged in that sort of activity. It was being demobilized.

C: Right. Winding down. So you were doing some clerical work and obviously you're recruiting must have fallen off a little bit after V-E Day, which was May of 1945.

M: Positively.

C: Do you remember what your reaction was to V-E Day in May of 1945? You said you were on your honeymoon.

M: Delighted. Especially since both my brothers were in the European Theater, so, of course, it was wonderful.

C: Okay, we can pick up in 1945. I wondered if you had any special reaction or noted any reactions to the death of FDR in April 1945 both in your office and in New York City?

M: Absolutely. I was in Connecticut for some reason at that point and someone said that Franklin had died. I couldn't believe it, although obviously he was not well. It was a very sad time. I had no idea that Harry Truman could come anywhere close to filling his shoes, which he did.

C: He did. Many people felt like that. It was a sad time for the country. Did you ever get a chance to see Franklin D. Roosevelt or Eleanor Roosevelt?

M: I saw Eleanor Roosevelt some years later. Franklin Roosevelt I saw in Cleveland at the train station just as a bystander. Let me see. The presidents, ones I have seen personally, not that I had any contact with them, would have been FDR, Lyndon Johnson, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy and that's it.

C: Can you tell me what your reaction was to VJ-Day, August 14, 1945?

M: We were in Times Square and I lost my shoes I remember, because it was so jam packed and jubilant and happy and wild. It was wonderful.

C: Were you there with another group of WAVES or with your husband?

M: I think I was with my husband at that point in time.

C: Where was he stationed?

M: In New Haven.

C: Still in New Haven.

M: He commuted.

C: You lived in New York City, I assume. You were part of that crowd and the famous pictures that we see.

M: Now they're saying it was posed, I read recently.

C: Yes, the famous shot. How did you feel about the end of the war?

M: I was ready. I did not believe in the dropping of the Atom Bomb and I'm still not sure that I do, but apparently it saved a number of lives and it was just horrifying to me to think of the devastation, so that meant that that was over.

C: How did you feel about leaving the Navy, about being separated in November 1945?

M: That came about because my husband was out and he was going to law school in New York. This seems ridiculous, but I was asked to transfer to Washington and write a history of the WAVES.

C: Wonderful! How interesting! Did your commanding officer ask?

M: He called me in to say that that was possible. I didn't do it because of being married. And I had a wonderful position lined up. Have you ever heard of the Howard Rusk Institute of the Crippled and Disabled in New York City?

C: No, I haven't.

M: It's famous. I was to undergo a training period of six months to be in that organization. I found out I was pregnant. Today, I would have gone ahead and had the training, but then I felt, I can't do this to him, so I didn't.

C: Well, you were quite busy. You had gotten yourself lined up. How interesting to write the history of the WAVES.

M: I don't think it's ever been done. I think there has been some effort with the enlisted people but I don't know of anyone that's ever done the officers.

C: Well, not per se, and not by the Navy that I know of. There have been books that have come out recently - women writing about their own experiences and there's been a history of women in the Navy written by Jean Ebbert, but no comprehensive history of the WAVES. There's been interviews of all the women in leadership positions, like Mildred McAfee Horton and Tova Wiley and all the others back in the 1970s.

You were separated from the Navy in November 1945. Where did the separation process occur?

M: In New York.

C: Do you remember any of the steps in that process? Did they give you counseling, tell you how to return to civilian life?

M: No, nothing.

C: You actually weren't discharged until a couple of years later.

M: That's right. I had not gone to any physical examinations. I was called once and I was pregnant, so I just didn't show up. Finally, I had to admit that I had a child and that was over and out.

C: Right. Would you have wanted to stay in the WAVES if you had the opportunity?

M: If I hadn't been married, I might have.

C: And if they allowed women to stay in the service, which they didn't at that point in time.

Did you feel that the WAVES met your expectations?

M: In my position, I seldom saw any productivity because they were just funneling through, so I really couldn't comment on that. I know they did a great deal in codes, but I never saw them in action.

C: Do you feel that the WAVES was a smoothly run organization?

M: Yes, I do.

C: Did you know of any discipline problems in the WAVES? Did you encounter any among the group of people that you knew?

M: None.

C: Because I was going to ask if anyone was asked to leave because of pregnancy or homosexuality. Do you think that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit-de-corps?

M: I do.

C: Did you find that the WAVES provided you with opportunities that you wouldn't have had in civilian life?

M: To some degree. I had never been in charge of other people before, so that was different. I found that I could live without having all of my amenities taken care of for me. I had to do it myself, so in that respect, yes.

C: So it was kind of a maturing experience in that regard. Did you feel that your jobs in the WAVES challenged you?

M: Sometimes.

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

M: Yes. The fact that I had really decided that I really didn't want to be married. I loved teaching. I was going to go and get a further degree, so it did.

C: Absolutely. It changed your ideas about marriage and about, well, at that point in time it was difficult to pursue a career if you were married, unfortunately.

M: Even as teachers.

C: Oh, yes, women, once they were married with children, they stayed home. Do you think that service in the WAVES broadened your horizons vis-a-vis travel, people, new situations?

M: It sure did. Every situation is a learning situation.

C: Did you maintain any service friendships after you were discharged?

M: Yes, a number of them and all but one are dead. Robin Selle's dead and has been dead for some time. Ann Tabasco died last year and Ann Fairleigh Burke is still a good friend. She lives in California. Mary Williams. Quite a few.... I'm getting old.

C: That time frame. I want to catch their memories. Did you ever attend any WAVES reunions after the war?

M: I never did.

C: There were several, I think, in Boston. I don't know if they were totally enlisted or not.

M: The ones I heard about were.

C: That's what I thought. Where did you settle after the war?--Immediately after.

M: You said that women stayed home. I did not stay home. My husband was in law school.

C: Was that in New York City?

M: Yes. And I took a civil service examination and I was appointed a training officer in the civil service. I worked from the time Gina was two or three months old until she was two and one half.

C: That was most unusual.

M: It certainly was.

C: Did you have to get child care?

M: Of course.

C: And who did you choose for this in a big city?

M: At one point I became hysterical because Gina was slow to talk and I said it was because Mac was from Boston, I was from Ohio, her nursemaid was a South Carolinian, and we lived in Brooklyn, so how in the world would the child ever learn how to talk.

C: All these different accents.

M: Apparently that was one of the reasons I was selected, going back, for the Voice of America was because I did not have a regional accent. I had both parents who were Easterners. We visited alot in the East. Apparently that's what it was.

C: Yes, that usually is. Where was the civil service office in New York City?

M: Seventh Avenue.

C: So you were training other individuals....

M: No. I was overseeing people that were in a training situation.

C: I see.

M: As to whether they were fitting in and how well they were getting along. A number of them were being retrained and I had to visit factories where they were learning a trade.

C: That sounds very interesting.

M: It was.

C: Very challenging. It was most unusual because I was going...

M: Now that was not approved of by my family.

C: By your parents, you mean?

M: Yes.

C: How did your husband feel about it?

M: He was perfectly satisfied.

C: So what women were expected to do and to be changed a little bit for you when the war was over. You did not go back to the home and hearth.

M: Not right away .

C: Not right away even though you had a newborn child. You arranged for child care in 1946.

M: Essie Thorn. I can still see her. A big, tall, black, wonderful woman and all she did was take care of the baby. I did the marketing. I did the cooking. I did everything.

C: Did she live in?

M: No.

C: Did you find that difficult? Were you stressed out by it?

M: Well, I never would think that I was until my mother would come to visit. Jean, I don't know how you're doing this. Jean, I can't believe this. And I thought how am I doing it? I don't know how I'm doing it either.

C: But somehow you do it. Of course, you were young at that point in time. Why did you finally decide to give up your civil service career?

M: I guess it was when my husband graduated and had a position. His first position was with an oil company in New York City and we moved from Brooklyn to Stuyvesant Town, which was a complex. So, from then on I went where he went.

C: So he moved around. You said you lived in many different places. When did you finally end up in Rhode Island?

M: Well, let me see. 1965. By that time my husband was in commercial real estate. Bus stops, malls, that sort of thing.

C: Developing?

M: Yes. We lived in Lima, Ohio, and he had been there with Standard Oil of Ohio and he left that to go in business with another man, so we were looking for property on the water. And I said that's when I lost my religion, because there would be these beautiful monasteries and convents on the water and nobody ever outside. I would think what a waste. So my husband--my mother was quite ill--so Mac came East to see if he could find a place for the summer for us and Bristol was where we came.

C: Isn't that amazing, because it's so unknown among most people.

M: He answered an ad in the *Wall Street Journal* by a family that we came to know very well. They were taking all their children to Scotland for that summer so we had their home.

C: I see, in exchange. That's how you discovered Bristol. And you've been here ever since I assume.

M: No. It was only a summer house for quite a while until about probably 1967. I had thought at that point, Rod was at Brown, Angus was at Choate, Gina was married. We always

wanted a place where the children could come not just to see us, but to enjoy themselves and that seemed like a good answer, which it was.

C: The lovely property that you had here. Did you work at all after your experience with the civil service? Your husband was moving, you said. Your husband got a job in New York City.

M: Right. And then there was Curtiss-Wright in New Jersey, and the next one was with Electric Boat in Groton, Connecticut, and then he went from there to Lima. He went out of Electric Boat because he crossed swords with then Admiral Rickover.

C: Oh, wow! He's a famous one. Many people have crossed swords with him. He had quite a reputation. You did have three children. Did any of those children ever join the Navy?

M: No.

C: Did you ever talk to them about your experiences as a WAVE?

M: Probably.

C: Did you ever work at all after this?

M: I taught one year in Lima because they wanted to introduce French at this high school and it was only good for half a day. I could not teach French, but I could take English for the other half day. So for one or two years I did that. I enjoyed it. It was good. But Mac did not like the fact that when he wanted me to go with him someplace I was committed.

C: Do you have any other comments on your WAVES service? Anything that comes to mind now? Any experience or anything outstanding or amusing that happened during this whole time frame that we may have skipped or missed?

M: No, I really don't. It was a good experience and I've never been sorry that I did it.

C: Good. I was going to ask you what its significance was for you and how you felt about your overall experience. It was very positive. I want to thank you very much for this very interesting interview.

M: There's a lot that I don't remember.

C: Well, that was fifty years ago. Thank you very much, Mrs. Macdonald.

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