

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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NO. 46

LUISA COSTAGLIOLA WHITE

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

INTERVIEWEE: LUISA COSTAGLIOLA WHITE

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

DATE: NOVEMBER 6, 1996

C: This is the first oral history interview with Luisa White, who is an officer in the Ocean State WAVES. She was a Link trainer instructor in WWII. The interview is being conducted in my office at the Naval War College Naval Historical Collection. Today's date is November 6, 1996. Luisa, I'm very pleased that you came down from Providence this morning, practically at the crack of dawn, to get here. And I thank you for bringing all the material with you, letters and photographs, which are a great documentation of your career in the WAVES. I'd like to begin our interview by asking you where you were born and when you were born.

W: I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on the 7th of April in 1924.

C: What did your father do for a living there?

W: My father was employed at the Merchants Cold Storage in Providence as a receiving clerk.

C: And what did your mother do?

W: My mother was at home. She raised six children, of which I was number four.

C: How many of those were brothers or sisters?

W: We were three boys and three girls. I have two older brothers and one older sister. And then after me came a brother and sister, twins, five years younger than I.

C: Wow! Well, that was a big family.

W: That was.

C: Where did you spend your growing-up years?

W: We lived in Providence in the Cranston Street area. I went to local schools. I graduated from Central High School in January of 1942.

C: Where did you go to work after graduation?

W: I went to work at Shepard's Store in Providence in the Better Dress Department, and I worked there for two, three years, until I joined the Navy.

C: What was your position there?

W: I was a sales clerk.

C: Did you enjoy that?

W: Oh, yes. Yes, I enjoyed meeting people and talking with people.

C: Shepard's was a big department store in those days, wasn't it?

W: Yes. But I guess it's gone now. Closed down.

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

W: Yes. My oldest brother, Frank Costagliola, was a graduate of Annapolis. He graduated in 1941, just before Pearl Harbor. He was in Pearl Harbor when the attack occurred in December of that year. He was aboard the U.S.S. Phoenix. He was an ensign at the time. And their ship was very lucky that it wasn't hit. They zigzagged out of the harbor, and were immediately assigned to go down to Australia and stay there until the fleet could be reassembled.

C: He was lucky. Well, we talked about his reminiscences, and we'd love to have a copy of that.

W: He told us that he was shaving that morning, getting ready to go to church. And they heard the planes go overhead and someone recognized that they were Japanese planes. And then the bombing started to occur across everything. And so they immediately everybody just mobilized to get the ship moving and out of dock, even though a lot of the people assigned to the ship were on shore on overnight leave because it was a weekend.

C: They were left behind.

W: They were left behind.

C: Did any of your other brothers or sisters either join the Navy or other services?

W: My second oldest brother, Michael, was a graduate of Webb Institute of Naval Architecture, and he served during the war at a shipyard in Philadelphia, launching Liberty ships, so he had a connection with the Navy.

C: So he had a Naval connection, too, in a civilian capacity.

W: Well, we had a grandfather on my mother's side who had a long family history of connections with the sea, and he told us many sea stories when we were growing up, about his days at sea aboard the old clipper ships.

C: Wow!

W: So we kind of all gyrated towards the Navy.

C: Yes, you kind of imbibed that, I guess, and went to the Navy. Did any of your friends join the service at this time frame in '42?

W: None of my girlfriends joined the service. Of course, all the young men that we knew were in the service. There were very few that were exempt because of medical in those days.

C: Yes. It was kind of a wholesale conscription. Do you remember your reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and where you were, and how you heard about it?

W: We were home on Sunday afternoon when the news came over the radio. And I remember that my mother was just in shock because we knew that my brother was there. And it was a couple of weeks after that until we heard from him and knew that he was safe, so it was kind of rough for a couple of weeks afterwards.

C: Oh, I can imagine, wondering about his fate and what had happened.

W: Yes.

C: Did you keep up with news about the war before you enlisted in the WAVES?

W: It was difficult to keep up with the news because everything was censored so badly. We heard things, you know. Walter Winchell would tell us things. We listened to the radio. We listened to as much news as we could. But everything was so restricted that it was difficult to get an accurate picture of what was happening. The newspapers would tell us if there was a big victory, but you never heard what actually happened to certain--ships were never named, people were never named. Of course, there was a list in the paper every day of people that were on the death list--that had died in action.

C: Yes. So it was kind of a grim time.

W: It was a grim time, and everybody tried to share news. But then again, you couldn't mention too much about where actual people were because you were not supposed to do that. "Loose lips sink ships."

C: Right.

W: That slogan was all over the place.

C: Oh, was it?

W: So all you could do is say, "Have you heard from Frank?" or "Have you heard from John?" or "What do you hear from So-and-so?" And that's how you tried to keep up with your own people that you knew in the service.

C: How did you hear about the WAVES? Do you remember how you first were attracted to them or heard about them?

W: I honestly don't remember, except that I got it into my head at some point that this was what I wanted to do.

C: Do you know what was attractive about the Navy for you, let's say, ^{via} joining the WACS or the SPARS or the Women Marines?

W: Well, as I said before, we had a little Navy connection in the household. Besides that, the uniforms were beautiful, I thought. It was an excellent, excellent, feminine-looking uniform, dark blue with the white shirts and very trim-looking. No, outside of that, I just knew that the Navy was where it was at.

C: Did you think patriotism was the motivation?

W: Absolutely, absolutely.

C: Can you comment at all on the patriotic atmosphere that was in existence at that time in your area? Was there a lot of support for the war? Were people very patriotic?

W: Even before the war started, patriotism was very strong. I can remember in my class in high school, it was just part of our growing up, part of what the teachers and school taught us, part of our home. You know, homes had flags or pictures of flags in them. And, of course, we saluted the flag every morning in school. And when we knew that terrible things were going on in Europe, we were so happy that we were in a country that was free of this. And so when our own country was attacked, the patriotism was just-- you didn't even have to talk about it. It was just there. It was just part of our lives. Church services always mentioned our country and our president and our elected officials, and how proud we were of the people that were serving. And during the war years we attended novenas for our boys in the service and for our country. And it was always our country, our country. And it was just a feeling that permeated through to everybody.

C: Was an improved social life any motivation for joining the service? Because, of course, all the men were in the service. Nobody was at home. Was that part of your motivation as well?

W: Yes, in a way. Yes. I will say. At home I belonged to a circle of girlfriends, of course. But I had this feeling that of my generation, this war belonged to us, and I wanted to be part of it. I wanted to be part of this enormous effort. Not only because of the patriotism, but I felt like I wanted to do something myself.

C: Personally, yes.

W: Yes. To be part of this effort. Because this whole thing was, "what can you do to serve?" And I knew I could contribute something somewhere along the line. So this was one reason I wanted to join. The social thing--naturally you're going to be in with a lot of other people anyway. So that's how you ended up, with a lot of other people.

C: When did you enlist?

W: I enlisted a day or two after I turned 20, in April of 1944.

C: And where did you have to go to enlist? Did you go to Providence or Boston?

W: No, I enlisted in Providence. And I was sworn in in Providence. I believe it was in the recruiting station, but I'm not positive

of that right this minute. The physical entrance examination was in Boston. I had to go to Boston for that.

C: Did you have to take any tests at that point, aptitude, scholastic tests?

W: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You took a long written test in Boston and the physical test in Boston.

C: Right. But then you think you were sworn in in Providence.

W: Yes.

C: Was there any publicity about your joining the WAVES in local papers, The Providence Journal, whatever?

W: I don't remember anything in the local papers. But I know I was interviewed on the radio.

C: Oh, you were? How interesting.

W: Station WJAR. I had a five-minute interview on the radio, and they asked me what I was going to do, where I was going to be stationed, why I joined the service? And it was kind of a nice little interview for local people. I guess they did that at

noontime every day; they interviewed somebody who was in the service or joining. And I had a little interview.

C: Oh, that's great. That's quite unique. But there was publicity in the Shepard's paper?

W: Yes.

C: The Shepard's Department Store paper?

W: Yes. In fact in those days, wherever you worked, they would have the names of the people who had--who were employed there who were serving their country. And the Shepard Company put out--at two or three different times--put out newspapers and told what their people were doing in the service. And they published our pictures and what was going on. They also held our jobs for us until we came back from the war.

C: Well, that's great. Yes, you did show me those. So we know that they existed. How did your parents feel about your decision to join the WAVES?

W: Well, I often had the feeling that if my mother had been my age, she would have gone.

C: She was an adventuresome lady.

W: She was very progressive, I thought. As I think now. Of course when you're young, you know, you think that the world is your oyster, and you can do anything you like. But now that I'm older and have children of my own, I realize what a parent must have gone through to allow a child to go off like this.

C: Because people didn't leave home in those days.

W: No, they didn't. And especially girls. And your reputation actually came into question. I mean it's a fact. My brother who was in the Navy expressed it in one of his letters to me that he wished I wouldn't go. But if I did, you know, to serve my country and be proud of it. But it was my mother who was--who backed me fully. And I believe she probably talked my father into accepting this.

C: Now how did he feel? Was he against it in any way?

W: No. He was not against it. But he worried about my safety maybe? About my safety, my conduct, and how it would reflect on the family. People were very worried in those days about what other people would say.

C: Absolutely! That has completely changed.

W: And I think my parents must have been on the defensive a great deal among their peers. But, as I say, my mother was a very staunch supporter. And I also had uncles and aunts who supported me very nicely at that time.

C: Oh, that's great, great. That's fantastic. Well, you were off. Do you remember what time of year you left and how you left?

W: Oh, my, yes.

C: And where you left from?

W: May 18, 1944, the train station in Providence. And this was the biggie, and I remember thinking, I'm leaving on this train, and I'm going to end up somewhere, and it's going to affect the rest of my life. .

C: And it did.

W: And it did.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting.

W: We went off to New York, to Hunter College, where the boot camp was.

C: What was your initial impression of Hunter in the Bronx when you got there?

W: The vastness. I had been to New York City with my mother. We had been there. I don't remember-- Yes, I had been to the Bronx, and I knew Jerome Avenue. Some of the names of the streets were familiar to me. But the armory there, where we had to assemble, and where we had our parades on rainy days, battalion assemblies, whatever you would call it; it was vast. It was so enormous. The city itself, it could be cold and damp, especially at six o'clock in the morning when you're gathering down in the streets. You know, we lived in these big apartment buildings, and you came all the way down six flights of stairs to muster out in the middle of the street on a damp morning, a rainy morning. It was a lot of fun. Then you marched off to chow hall, and that was half a mile away, of course. But it was interesting.

C: You got your exercise.

W: It was an adventure. And you met so many different people from all over.

C: Did you like that aspect?

W: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Absolutely. Absolutely.

C: Did you live in these apartments with gals from New England, or were they from all over, your roommates?

W: I can remember there were two ladies from Boston; there was one from Atlanta, Georgia--gee, we made fun of the way she talked. And a couple of girls from Philadelphia. And I don't remember where the others were from.

C: But they were from all over.

W: They were from all over. I met girls from California who had travelled for days by train to get to boot camp.

C: So you got exposed to people from other areas.

W: Oh, yes. And this was the thing about the service. You learned to stand on your own two feet, and you learned to get along with other people.

C: Yes, you had to be cooperative.

W: Absolutely.

C: Living in those close quarters.

W: But we were all of the same mind. We were all a little bit adventurous; you had to be in order to leave home and take on this endeavor. You had to be a kind of person who liked other people. And you had to have a pretty good head on your shoulders. And you were bound to find somebody who you got along with well, somebody who had an outgoing attitude. Most of the girls had outgoing attitudes.

C: Well, that's good.

W: And they were easy to get along with.

C: Oh, that's great. Do you remember how your day was structured there? What time you got up, and what you had to do during the day for those six weeks?

W: Sure. It was tough getting up because you were so still tired from the day before, especially if you had to go up four or five flights to your apartment. But crack of dawn you were up, and you got dressed, and you got out there. And you mustered, and you walked to chow, and you ate, and had your schedule out. You just fell in, and you just went along, and you kept in step all the way. And you just did what you were told, period.

C: Did you have physical exercise--

W: Yes, yes.

C: --during the day?

W: Oh, yes.

C: Gym, so to speak.

W: Yes. We had physical training. I thought the first thing they were going to teach me was how to swim. But, unfortunately, I suppose with a gang that size and one pool, we didn't have access to the pool. But that was one of my fantasies, I guess. I figured that going into the Navy, they were going to teach me how to swim.

C: And they didn't?

W: And I didn't learn until I was at my station in Lake City, months later.

C: Oh, I see.

W: And we had access to a pool.

C: But you probably had calisthenics or exercises.

W: Oh, we had calisthenics. And, of course, the marching alone was enough to keep you in good shape. But the meals were good, too. I thought the meals were great.

C: Oh, that's good.

W: Oh, yes, the meals were excellent. And there was so much of it, you could have anything that you wanted along the line. Here was a whole cafeteria with complete meals. And you just went through the line and picked what you wanted. And the meals were great.

C: What was your opinion of the classes that you took during this training and indoctrination for six weeks? Did you find them challenging?

W: Well, very informative. They told us, more or less, a lot of what was going on in the war. We had hygiene classes, and they told us what was expected of us. That each of us was to shower every single day, regardless of whether or not we had our periods. And, of course, this was revolutionary in those days. Because you didn't--in the house I came from--you didn't go near water when you had your period. But their reasoning was that one quarter of us would probably have our periods all the time, and you couldn't have one quarter of the battalion unwashed. So therefore you would take a shower every day. So that's what you did. And you didn't die. It was wonderful. You washed your hair every day, and you didn't die.

And they taught us naval history. They gave us tests, aptitude tests, intelligence tests, general-- It seems like they tested every facet of what we knew. Physically, we had gym classes, and they kept us in shape all the time. Boy, it was kind of hard. I was just 20 years old. But I can remember there was a girl in my apartment who was in her middle thirties, and she had it rough, especially on the days we got shots. The days that we got a shot--I can't tell you what they were for at this point--but sometimes your arm was sore. And they were a little depressing. You didn't feel up to par, you just didn't want to partake in all this stuff, and you just had to keep going. There were days it was rough. But there was always a comedian in the crowd that could keep your spirits up.

C: Oh, that's good.

W: God bless them. They were wonderful. There was one girl from Boston that used to cheer us up all the time. She was super.

C: Oh, that's great.

W: She was just super.

C: Did you like the drilling and the reviews that you had to have on Saturday?

W: Yes. I had no trouble marching. And to this day I love to put marches on and just listen to them. Because I love march music. John Philip Sousa is my favorite. We kept in step the whole time. We learned to pay attention. We learned to dress right, make straight lines, keep straight lines, and I loved the marching part. especially on the days when we had battalion review, when everybody would be out either in the field or in the armory. It was particularly stirring to have the flags go by and be marching as part of this enormous group of women all in step, and all doing the same thing at the same time.

C: Such synchronization must have been marvelous.

W: Oh, it was just wonderful. I still love it.

C: You did have room inspections, I believe, on a weekly basis.

W: Oh, we had those.

C: And how did you have to prepare for them?

W: Oh, how we dreaded those, because we didn't know what to expect. We would get down and get soap and water and scrub those beautiful parquet floors with soap and water. And we would make sure that our bed was absolutely tight. We would make sure that all the window sills were clean. We were told that the inspectors would

come around with white gloves, and there'd better not be any dirt anywhere. So we just stayed up, oh, until late, cleaning and cleaning. I can remember all this soap water on the floor, and I said, "Where are we going to put all this soap water?" We didn't have--you know at home you have rags or something--we didn't have that kind of stuff. We had to use mops and wring them out.

C: Oh, gee.

W: And some of us were not housekeepers.

C: No.

W: I mean at 20 years old, we weren't housekeepers, and we didn't know how to do this. We had to learn how to do this. We had to sop that water up, and get out a bucket, and throw it in the toilet, and get that water off the floor. And I often wonder if those floors swelled up.

C: Yes. Right.

W: After we left, somebody else came along, probably did the same thing. Those poor floors were scrubbed to death.

C: Right. Had wooden ones, too. Did you have the opportunity to participate in any extracurricular activities there? I know there were singing battalions and newspapers and things like that.

W: No, not at first there, I didn't. What I was surprised at was that on Sunday there was no structure to the day at all. If you wanted to go to services, you went on your own, and, of course, I went to Mass. And it was the first time in my life that I attended a Mass that was held in a hall without any statues around. That was a revelation. We sat on chairs that moved, and we didn't have pews. And then we went back to our barracks, and we could sit and read the paper or do anything we wanted. And go to chow when we wanted. So that was a completely unstructured day, and that went on for the six weeks we were there. Except the last weekend when we were allowed liberty to go into New York City.

C: And did you go in the city?

W: Oh, yes, yes. We had a relative that lived in Brooklyn, and I got on the subway, and I made it all the way to Brooklyn and back on my day off.

C: Wow! On your own.

W: That was great.

C: Yes. Did anything amusing or outstanding happen during this time frame, during your six weeks, that you can remember?

W: Well, I can remember dreading, when we went off on this one-day excursion, that we were allowed the last weekend we were there, dreading to meet an officer, because we would have to salute him. And how were we going to do that? And you had to remember to salute him before he saluted you, and hold that salute until after he returned it. So how was this going to work? So the first time you met an officer, and the poor guy who was the first one up the street when all of us were on our way to the subway, got saluted about 50,000 times. And had to return all those salutes.

C: Oh, no!

W: But that's the only thing I can remember. I didn't have much opportunity to go to ship's stores, and I had not brought stationery with me. I remember that once or twice I had to borrow stationery to write, and then I had repaid it after I got to ship's stores. Because you had to find your way around to these places when you had time. And it was just easier, much easier, to just stay on the schedule, and stay in your apartment, and be ready to go the next time. I was not adventurous in that way, to go off on my own and do. I would rather be ready for the next time when I had to be somewhere or when it was time for muster.

C: Sure. Did you write a lot of letters during that time?

W: I sure did. I knew that Mom back home was waiting for the mailman everyday, so I tried to write as often as I could get a letter off. It was easy to write because you had franking privilege, and it didn't cost you anything. You didn't have to go out for stamps. All you needed was that envelope and paper and a pen. So I tried to keep the folks at home apprised of what was going on in my life, and I knew they would want to know.

C: Well, that's great. You've got a nice collection there. Well, you graduated after six weeks. And before this, did you express a preference for the kind of rating or job you wanted after you finished boot camp?

W: Yes. I was interested in going to weather school, tower operating, or Link trainer operating. They give you kind of a smattering at boot camp of what these things are, and I expressed my preferences. And I was very fortunate to get a Link Trainer billet. Happily, I was sent to Atlanta, Georgia, to a small base there, an air base, where they taught us navigation, they taught us about the Link Trainer. I found out at that point that I was from an area that didn't have an accent. Because people that went into Link Trainer or tower operating had to be people who spoke clearly without a pronounced accent. And most of these people came from New England, Chicago area, or California.

C: Yes, places that, you know--

W: Didn't have a pronounced accent.

C: Right. That's so true. Did you need any other special skills for being a Link Trainer instructor, other than just having clear diction?

W: Well, you had to be fairly intelligent, I found. And you had to have had a minimum of a high school education. Most of the people that I went through school with there had at least two years of college. I was one of the few that had only high school. I found that out later. But they were a smart bunch of girls. The school itself--

C: You went to the Naval Air Station at Atlanta.

W: Yes, yes.

C: Yes, for the training. Can we back up just a little bit? Can you tell me how you got there? Did you go by train? Did you go with a group from New York to Atlanta?

W: Yes, we went by train. There was a group of us that went together. I'm not very clear on that.

C: Well, that's okay.

W: I don't remember-- I know we went by train, and that it was a long trip--a long trip. Yes. In fact, yes, we had sleeper cars. I guess that was the first time I'd ever slept on a train. We had sleeper cars.

C: Right. It would have been a long jaunt in those days. Well, you landed at Naval Air Station, Atlanta, and got yourselves situated. How long were you there for the training?

W: Training there was for ten weeks.

C: And can you describe the kinds of classes you took? Was it all class work, or was it hands-on as well?

W: There was a lot of book work, there was a lot of class work. But also, besides the navigation and besides the--oh, what were the other courses that we took? We took some celestial, you know, the stars and all that.

C: Navigation, yes.

W: But besides that, we had to learn how the Link was set up and how to operate it. And they told us that some girls were stationed

at bases where the Link had to be shipped in, and they had to assemble it. And that scared me to death. But you had to learn how to put that Link together. I don't believe at any point I actually put a whole Link together. But they educated us enough so that if you had a manual, and if you had a Link shipped in in a crate, you could do it. But what I remember the most about the classes was that because we were on an air base and there were planes flying over all the time, taking off and landing, the instructors all taught us with a microphone in their hands, which made it easy for them and easy for us. Because they could be drawing on the board or writing on the board, and they'd have that microphone, and you could hear every word so perfectly. And then they were such good teachers.

C: Were they women or men?

W: Women.

C: WAVES.

W: I only remember women. Civilians.

C: Oh, civilians!

W: Civilian women.

C: Oh, that's interesting.

W: That I remember. Their diction was so excellent, and they were such good teachers, that I had this sensation that I wasn't even hearing it--that they were talking inside my brain. You just absorbed what they told you. Well, I don't know if college teaches the same way, but this was wonderful to me. Your mind didn't wander at all. You just absorbed what they taught you. And, of course, we always worried about tests every week--every week they would test us--because girls flunked out like crazy.

C: Oh, they did? Oh, that's interesting.

W: Oh, yes. Oh. And so you hung in there, you know, and you worried about passing these tests at the end of every week.

C: Did you have homework at night?

W: We had homework all the time, yes. We had homework at night. So, you know, we didn't have much time to go anywhere or do anything. You weren't allowed off the base, except afternoons on Saturday. You even had classes on Saturday morning.

C: Oh, you did?

W: Afternoon on Saturday until Sunday evening you could go off the base, if your marks were up. If your marks weren't up, you couldn't leave the base. I was fortunate.

C: Oh, it was very strict.

W: Yes, yes. It was really. But I passed okay. I did okay. Because I can remember going into Atlanta, the City of Atlanta, on Saturday afternoons.

C: And what did you do there, when you went to Atlanta for recreation?

W: Oh, just walked around, and did a little shopping in the stores. We didn't have much money, but we did a little shopping in the stores, or had a little ice cream or whatever.

C: Right.

W: Five or six or eight of us sometimes would pile into one hotel room. We would share a hotel room.

C: Oh, stay overnight.

W: Stay overnight, and come back on Sunday night--Sunday afternoon usually, Sunday afternoon before chow. Because if you did have any

money, it was all gone by Sunday night. And so you came back to the base to eat.

C: What were your barracks like at the base in Atlanta?

W: They were one story.

C: Were they wooden?

W: Yes. One-story wooden building. Across double bunks all the way down. Double bunks, three bunks on each side of the aisle. The lockers in front of your bunk backed up to the locker. Your locker was in front of your bunk, right at the foot, with a little aisle in between. And then the next bunk was up against you at the back of your locker. So you were in three double bunks. Three double bunks, and that's all the way down. And you wake up early in the morning because she'd come and flick the lights on and yell down the line, "time to rise and shine," and get us up. And we had calisthenics early in the morning, and then we could go to chow. And then it was off to class.

C: Wow, it was a busy day.

W: It was a busy day.

C: And a long day, I imagine. When did you finally--?

W: Yes, because we studied--

C: Did you have classes in the afternoon as well?

W: Oh, yes. We had classes all day right up 'til five o'clock.

C: Oh, I see. And then you had to study after that.

W: Oh, yes. After chow, at night.

C: Did they have lights out?

W: Ten o'clock. Ten o'clock. If you wanted to study anymore after that, you had to go down to the head, but we didn't.

C: Did you mind the lack of privacy in that situation?

W: No. I don't know why, but that didn't bother me at all. I think after you've been through that physical up there in Boston, you felt like, hey, the whole world saw everything you had anyway, so it never bothered me.

C: Did you have any time for dating any of the airmen?

W: I don't remember dating at all at school. I don't remember even keeping any company. I don't remember being in the company of any guys at all. Because we were all WAVES in the barracks. And we had so many classes and everything. When we went into the city on the weekend, of course, there were plenty of men from an Army base that was nearby. And, you know, a lot of us went to the USO's.

C: Oh, did you? That's interesting.

W: Oh, yes.

C: What did they provide for you there?

W: And they had a very active USO, and they always had music and refreshments. And we'd actually meet men there. Sometimes we'd sit there and chat a long time with people that you met there. I don't remember any lasting friendships that I made down there, though. Because usually the girls stuck together pretty much. And the guys-- You know--nobody had any money. Nobody had any money to do anything.

C: And everybody was shipping out.

W: I can remember going to a park and swinging on the swings with this guy that I met, and just talking on a Sunday afternoon. And then we'd go back to our respective buses, back to our respective

bases. And it was just a matter of chit-chatting with somebody from another area and from another point of view. They were interested in meeting and talking to a girl, and I was having a good time talking to a guy. But it was just a fun thing to do.

C: Oh, that's great! That's a good description of the social situation there. After the ten weeks were over, you graduated obviously. What was your rate at that time, after you finished the training?

W: We did get a rate. We were one of the last classes that graduated from that school that got a Specialist/T third class upon graduation. I was assigned to N.A.S. Lake City, Florida.

C: Did you select that, by the way, or were you just assigned?

W: All I asked for was somewhere on the East Coast. And I was very fortunate to get somewhere on the East Coast because a lot of the girls in this line of work went to Texas, Oklahoma, other training bases, or air bases, where they train pilots. It had to be, of course, an airfield where these Link Trainers were.

C: Sure. Where is Lake City located?

W: Lake City is 60 miles west of Jacksonville. It's a satellite base of Jacksonville. And it was a rather small base compared to

Jax. Jax was a very large base. But we had on that station light-to-medium bombers called PV2's. The pilots who came there had already learned to fly at one of the other bases in Texas or in Pensacola, many of them in Pensacola. But they had at our base, they learned.

C: You were saying at Lake City, Florida, the pilots--

W: Yes. The pilots had already been trained as pilots in Pensacola or in Texas, and they knew how to fly planes. But at our base they learned how to fly these medium bombers, these PV2's. And then they assembled into crews: pilot, copilot, navigator, and bomber crew. So there were pilots there, and there were the seamen there who were going to be the enlisted men who were going to be in the bomber crew. So there was a continual flux of personnel in and out of the base as they went through the courses there.

C: Now, you weren't teaching them to fly then per se.

W: No.

C: You were teaching them to fly this special plane.

W: We were part of their ground school training. In those days we did not have the sophisticated radar and things, navigational techniques and equipment, that they have today. Pilots flew by

looking at the horizon, and watching whether it was level. And he knew where he was by his radio signals and by looking. I mean a pilot could actually fly the whole East Coast by following the train tracks by sight, sight flying. If the weather closed in on the pilot, then he was in trouble. If he was fogged in. This is what we taught them, to listen to what we called radio-range signals. Every airfield had a nearby radio-range station that sent out signals. And a pilot could listen to that signal and orient himself by circling in one direction, turning around, coming back to see if the signal got louder or fainter. And finding the leg of the radio-range signal coming in over the station, and then finding the field. Because all pilots had these maps of the fields, the airfields, and the radio-range stations. The radio-range stations gave out a certain signal, and we taught them how to find themselves and come in to within 500 feet of a field where supposedly they could see the ground from that point to land.

C: It sounds tricky, doesn't it?

W: I suppose, yes.

C: If you were the pilot.

W: But they did well, and it worked. It worked. It sure worked.

C: It worked. It seems kind of crude in comparison to today. But those were the conditions.

W: Those were the days of barn-storming, and we had some adventurous people up there flying those planes.

C: Oh, I'm sure they did, yes. That's amazing. Did you teach? You said it was the ground school, so did you have a class of about how many people? Or was it one to one?

W: It was a one to one. Our Link building had six or eight Links. And we had enough people to staff those. And we scheduled hops all day long on a one-to-one basis. Each hop lasted about an hour. And you would speak to your pilot, and show him--he would have a copy of the map of the radio-range signal for Jacksonville or Gainesville or Banana River, Lake City, or any one of the fields in the Florida area. And then we at the desk would, after the pilot got into the Link, closed the hood, he had just his instruments and his radio. And he could move, or fly a course, and he could watch his instruments. We had a duplicate set of instruments on our desk. We gave him the signal, the radio-range signal, that he would hear if he were up in a plane, flying the course that he was flying on our desk. They did take us, each one of us, up in a real airplane flight, oh, once every six months, to make sure that we would be accurately giving them the proper radio-range signal that they would actually hear. And so it worked. It worked.

C: Did you do your flights, when you went up, in Florida?

W: When we went up in the plane, we would have the radio earphones on. And they would allow us to listen to the radio-range--the actual radio-range signals. It was the same thing. The equipment that they gave us was good. It was always in perfect condition. The equipment was maintained beautifully. It was nothing that-- You couldn't say, oh, I can't give you a hop today because this is not working. Everything worked all the time.

C: Well, that's great.

W: Better--sorry to say--better than the planes. The planes the pilots flew, the PV2's, had already been through hours and hours and hours of wartime use. They were secondhand. They were old. And when we had crashes, we were devastated.

C: Oh, so you would hear about these crashes.

W: Oh, yes.

C: Somewhere in the Pacific or something?

W: No, no, no.

C: Oh, right there.

W: During training.

C: Oh, in training! Okay.

W: Local. If a plane went down, and they did, I won't say with what frequency, but we may have known the pilot or the gunners or the staff or whatever, and it was devastating to the whole base. But they were flying old machines. Because anything that was any good was in service in the war.

C: Yes, absolutely. And this was training.

W: And this, what we had for the pilots back here to train in, was stuff that was patched and re-patched and re-patched. And it was tough.

C: Oh, yes.

W: It was tough.

C: Terrible. How did the pilots respond to a woman instructor? Did you note that?

W: We were their teachers, and they were our students. We were not allowed to fraternize, and there was really none of that. We were friendly, but we always had to maintain a professional relationship with the pilots.

C: So you didn't date the pilots.

W: No. No, we didn't date them.

C: I wondered if you did. Did you get any flack from any of them?

W: No, not really.

C: So they were cooperative.

W: Oh, yes. It was part of their training. And, of course, they were anxious to have good marks and to do their best. I mean we were all--it sounds corny--but we were all working for the war effort, and this was part of their training. So they just took it in stride, and most of them with a smile on their face. And if they goofed, they straightened out. And they were pretty smart guys anyhow.

C: Oh, I'm sure they were. Now, you mentioned you met some of your brother's classmates from Annapolis.

W: Yes, yes. My brother had graduated from Annapolis in the Class of January of '41. And it was an accelerated graduation. He would've ordinarily graduated in June. But things were getting a little hairy, I guess. And the military academies were speeding up their graduations. And several times I had for students classmates of my brother's. And I would write and tell him that So-and-so said to say, hello. And that was kind of a nice thing to happen.

C: Yes, that was. What did you like about this assignment as a Link Trainer instructor?

W: Well, I wanted to be a teacher since I was a kid. But I didn't go to college, and I went in the service instead. And I ended up as a teacher, so this is what I liked about it. Besides, it was something different. It was in the Naval Air Force. We didn't have an Air Force then. There was the Army and the Navy, and they had their planes. It was the Naval Air Force, and it was something different. And it was fascinating. And yet you met people from all over, and they were all intelligent people, smart people. And I enjoyed it.

C: Great. Was there anything about it that you did not like?

W: No. The schedule was such that you might have two one-hour hops in the morning and one in the afternoon. If you had the duty at night, and you had to have duty one night out of four, the whole

base was on this four-day duty thing. So that one quarter of the staff of the base was on duty at all times. So there would be one evening that you would be on duty and might have a hop. But that was the only restriction we had. You might have a grumpy guy once in a while. Somebody that wasn't in the mood to do his hop probably. But outside of that, no. Everything worked out well.

C: So it was a positive experience.

W: Very positive experience.

C: I should have asked you, when did you arrive at Lake City in '44? What time of year? Do you remember?

W: I believe it was around August, August or early September. Because when I got through training at Atlanta, I was granted a leave. And I didn't have to be down to Lake City until some ten days or so later.

C: Did you use your leave to go home?

W: Yes. So I came home on leave. And when I went back, I went back by train all the way down to Jacksonville. And then the bus over to Lake City.

C: What were your living quarters like at Lake City, your barracks?

W: The barracks were a low, one-story wooden building, with a lounge at the entrance at one end. And the opposite end had the showers and heads and the laundry room and the ironing room. In between were cubicles with two double bunks and two lockers making a cubicle, with a wall between this cubicle and the next one. But it didn't go all the way up to the ceiling. So that you could hear, more or less, everything that was going on in the barracks. We had inspection once a week. It was not as--

C: Rigorous maybe?

W: Rigorous is the word I'm thinking of. As the ones that we went through in training. But we did have inspection, and we were not, things were more relaxed. We didn't have to get up and do calisthenics in the morning. And we didn't have to go to breakfast if we didn't want to. And you didn't have to go to form up and march places. As long as you were at your duty station at your hop time--and you always were at your duty station at hop time.

C: Sure. Did you make any lasting friendships there?

W: Oh, yes. We certainly did. We made friends with girls that I am still in touch with today.

C: Were they all Link Trainer operators in this barracks?

W: No.

C: It was a mix of other WAVES.

W: Oh, yes, yes. We had girls who were mechanics. We had girls who were control tower operators.

C: Oh, yes.

W: We had girls that were secretaries and worked in the office in the administration building.

C: So it was all WAVES.

W: So it was all the WAVES in one barracks. There were about 60 of us on this base. And I think there were 2,000 men.

C: Wow! Quite a ratio!

W: Yes. Quite a ratio.

C: Tell me what did you do for entertainment on your time off in Lake City? Do you remember what you did?

W: Lake City, the town, was about five miles away. We were outside the town. It was a very small town, nothing but a crossroads actually. It was in cattle country. Every time you went from one road to another, there would be these metal pipes where they didn't want the cattle. It was open cattle country and piney woods country. And brush. Brush, you know, like-- Not palm trees, but these sagewoods. You didn't walk in the woods. Chiggers were in there and snakes.

C: And God knows what.

W: You just kind of stuck to the base. Once in a while they would organize a picnic, and we'd go off to where there was a river and swim. But on the base they had a swimming pool, they had movies for us. I can't remember what other particular activities. But it was kind of a homey kind of place. Well, of course, everybody on the base knew us WAVES, either from working with us or just from us being there. They all knew all of us. So if anybody spoke to us, we spoke to them. It was very homey. Chow hall, if we sat down with guys at the table, we'd carry on conversations with them. We were all pseudo-family.

C: Yes, yes. Right.

W: You'd be waiting in chow line, and whoever was in front of you or in back of you, you struck up a conversation with them and kidded with them.

C: Sure, sure. Did you date there?

W: Sure.

C: Now, who did you date? You couldn't date the pilots, you said.

W: No. But there were sailors, and they were great guys. And you could go to the movies in town. You could go to the movies on the base. They had a ship's store on the base and a little restaurant where they'd fix you a sandwich. Most of the time, if you had a date, you went to the movies in town. Or there was a restaurant in town that served fried chicken and pickles, I can remember. Oh, that was a big thing, to be taken to that restaurant, or to the USO. The USO was on the banks of one of the lakes, and they had music and dancing, and, oh, it was just great. It was really pretty. You know it was a pretty little old house with a big porch. It wasn't a house because it had a big floor for dancing.

C: It was probably a hall.

W: It was more like a hall. And it was great. We had many a date there because you could dance and have refreshments. And it was

cheap. It didn't cost anything. But the thing was you had to get that last bus back. I don't remember if it was eleven o'clock, but if you missed that last bus--

C: You walked.

W: You walked. And it was a long walk. Only once it happened to me and my date, that we missed the last bus back.

C: Oh, no!

W: Oh, Lord! I said, "We're walking." And he said, "What?" I said, "We're walking. I am not staying in town." I wasn't going to stay in town. Where was I going to stay in town? No way. I'm going back to my base. So we walked. And a truck driver picked us up.

C: Thank God!

W: And took us back. So that was great. That was great. To walk five miles.

C: Oh, good exercise, but late at night.... Did you meet your husband there?

W: Yes, I did.

C: Was he a sailor?

W: He was a sailor. He was a mechanic.

C: Was he stationed there permanently?

W: He was stationed there permanently. He was from South Carolina.

C: A Southerner with a Yankee. That's most unusual in those days.

W: Oh, yes. But we were all one big group, so what can we say? We were from all over, and you met some great guys and some great gals. Made some great friendships. Yes, I met my husband there, and we went steady.

C: Oh, you did.

W: We started going steady. And he proposed, and he bought me a ring. And we set a date, and I let the people know at home I was going to get married. And, of course, they--

C: How did your people feel at home, your mother and father?

W: Oh, they accepted it. They accepted it. I was 21 by that time. So they accepted it. But they did ask us to come home to be married in church. And I said, fine. That's where I wanted to get married.

And I asked my boyfriend, if he would convert to Catholicism, and he said, yes. So he took lessons from the local priest down there in Lake City. He took lessons, and he was baptized Catholic. And we got married in church back in Providence.

C: Oh, you did? And was this before you left the Navy?

W: Yes. Oh, yes. This was in November of 1945. V-J Day had just been in August. In fact, I was home on leave on V-J Day.

C: We'll get back to that.

W: And we got married in November. And then when I got back to the base, I put in for my discharge, because after V-J Day anyone who was married to a serviceman could be discharged because the men over in Europe were coming back, and the men in the Pacific were coming back. And so if you were married to a serviceman, you could be discharged.

C: So that's how that--

W: So I was discharged from New York City. I went back to New York to be discharged from there. And then I spent a few days home with my parents before I went back to Lake City to spend Christmas with my husband.

C: Oh, right, right. Yes. Because it was at that time. Well, let's double back a little bit to Lake City and your service there. Did you write to your parents or your friends regarding your WAVES experiences when you were a Link Trainer instructor in Lake City?

W: Yes. I kept a correspondence with my mother constantly. I wrote letters to my sister who was in California and my brother who was in the service out in the Pacific, and wrote to them all the time. And I also kept in touch with some of my school friends who were in the service. I had a friend who was in Europe, and I had a friend who was in the Snow Troops out in--he was training in Denver, Colorado, in the Snow Troops. I think he went to Alaska after that. But I kept up quite a correspondence. And then people who went through the system that I had been part of their training--we had befriended some of the boys that had come through our training--I had corresponded with some of them, the enlisted men.

C: Oh, that's great.

W: We kept busy.

C: Well, we have a partial record of that, at least your mother's correspondence, that we're going to copy. You mentioned V-J Day, and you were home at that point in time on leave in August 1945. Do you remember what your feelings were when you heard that the war was over? How did you celebrate?

W: I had planned to be home in August because our family had a big--we have a big church celebration on the 15th of August.

C: I see.

W: And it's a big thing in our family.

C: Right, the Assumption.

W: The Assumption. And so I had planned to be home for my, I think it was ten days' leave for that week in August. And so I had come home. And there were rumors at that time that something was going on. I don't know if you remember, but there were false rumors that there was going to be a settlement or--

C: Peace treaty.

W: --treaty signed. But then that turned out to be false. And then on the day that the news came through, it just--the whole country just went wild. I mean I was home, and I was in my uniform. And everywhere I went, everybody shook my hand or hugged me. I remember going downtown with my cousins.

C: You were a bit of a celebrity.

W: The bus driver didn't charge me anything. They were just so happy that this terrible thing was over, and that the boys were coming home, and they didn't have to worry about them being killed anymore. Because that was the big thing, of course. If you had anybody in the service, you worried about where they were and if they were in danger.

C: Absolutely.

W: So we had a tremendous celebration on the 14th of August. And of course the 15th was the holiday that I came home for, and that was almost an anticlimax.

C: Yes, to that. Can you tell me, what was the highest rate you achieved in the WAVES as a Link Trainer instructor?

W: I became a Specialist/T second class. That was the highest. I had taken the examination at some point and made it to second class. It was kind of rough to advance because there had to be an opening on the base for that rate. If there were ten people who were Specialist/T third class, and five who were Specialist/T second class, it wasn't until somebody second class got transferred or whatever off the base that you could have an opening to apply for second class. You didn't automatically just go up.

C: Yes. Oh, okay. So that restricted people.

W: Yes.

C: Do you remember what your pay was as a Link Trainer instructor?

W: No, I don't. Somehow the figure \$21 a month sticks in my mind. I don't remember at what point that was. But I think that was typical.

C: Did you find it hard to survive on that?

W: Yes. You couldn't do much on it. But then again, you didn't do much that cost money anyhow. Because everything was free unless you wanted to buy more stockings or a set of pumps rather than wear the tie shoes because you didn't want to wear the tie shoes if you were going anywhere special, so you had to buy yourself a pair of pumps.

C: No, they looked kind of tacky.

W: But then again, shoes were, what? four dollars, five dollars. Stocking were more expensive, you know, 79, 89 cents for a pair of stockings. So you had to be very careful with them. But we were fortunate. We wore slacks to work.

C: Oh, you did!

W: We wore slacks to work. We had a work uniform: navy blue slacks, navy blue shirt, and a light blue tie. Down in Florida we wore also seersucker dresses which were cooler. But we didn't mind the slacks and the dark blue because that was a nice uniform to work in. And, of course, you didn't have to wear stockings to work, so that was good.

C: Yes, because of the heat down there.

W: Yes.

C: Did the heat bother you?

W: Yes.

C: And the humidity.

W: The heat was oppressive. I can remember walking between the barracks and the Link building and saying, Oh, I wish the sun just wouldn't shine today, because it was so--

C: And no air-conditioning.

W: --early in the morning. Yes, in the Link building we had air-conditioning because the Link Trainers had to be taken care of.

C: Oh, that's good.

W: Because their mechanism was so delicate. So we did have air-conditioning in the Link building.

C: Oh, that's good.

W: We didn't have it in the barracks, and we didn't have it in chow hall. But we did have it in the Link building, so that was something.

C: That was an incentive to go to work then.

W: That's right.

C: So you'd be cooled off.

W: That's right. It was nice and cool. As I say, we didn't mind wearing slacks.

C: How did you feel about leaving the Navy when you were discharged in December? What was your feeling?

W: Well, it was kind of sad. Of course the war, to all intents and purposes, was over. You see when we signed up, when you joined the

Navy, you joined for the duration and six months. And in 1944, in the spring of '44, you had no idea how long that was going to be. But after I married, I was anxious to start my new life as a married person. So that was--I just looked forward to that, and that took the edge off the sadness. But it was kind of sad to leave all my friends.

C: Well, you returned to Lake City.

W: But I did return to the base, and my husband was stationed there.

C: And how long did you live there?

W: My husband was stationed there, and he was a mechanic. And they had recently installed over on one side of the base about 50 trailers; and we were eligible, as a married couple, to live in one of those trailers. And we moved into one of those. It wasn't until May or June of the following year that my husband was discharged. And he had to go to Jacksonville to be discharged. So we broke up housekeeping, I would say, in May.

C: Of '46?

W: Of '46. And I went home to my parents. I was pregnant, expecting in December, and I went home to my parents. And then he

went to Jacksonville, and he got out of the service, and came home to Providence.

C: Is that where you settled?

W: We settled in Providence, yes.

C: Okay. I'll ask you a few questions about the WAVES per se. Did you ever have a chance to meet or to see Mildred McAfee, who was the director of the WAVES?

W: No. I don't remember ever meeting her. I read about her. And, of course, she was our guiding light.

C: Right.

W: But I never met her personally.

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

W: Yes. Yes, we certainly did. Oh, we griped like anybody does. But we were right there. We were very, very close. Just as an aside. You know whenever an entertainer came, a big name entertainer, came to put on a show--

C: Like who, for example? Do you remember anybody in particular?

W: Martha Raye comes to mind. The thing is every one of those seats had to be filled up, whether you were in the mood to go to a show or not. So every area, every barracks, had to send X number of people. And if you had a date or duty--of course if you had duty, you couldn't go--but if you were free, you had to show. And, you know, this is where your esprit came in. I mean, come on, let's go. Of course if it was somebody like Martha Raye, of course you'd want to go and see it. But, I mean, if it was somebody that was just there, a local personality or something, you'd say, aw, gee.... But it was the thing to do was to go and be Navy and go and be there. But there was a certain pride in being part of the Navy. It's inexpressible. And even to this organization that I belong to today, a band of us women getting together. We didn't know each other in the service. But just the bond that we were part of this is enough to make us friends.

C: That's great. That's a wonderful comment. That's great. Did you find that the WAVES was a smoothly-run organization?

W: Absolutely. A lot of brains behind it to organize it and make it work as well as it did.

C: And at short notice.

W: Absolutely. Well, the whole war effort. It was amazing how people rose to the occasion, and figured out all this stuff to do. And look at even the atom bomb came out of it. I mean all those brains to do all this stuff in a short amount of time. But I thought that everything was planned to a T. Everything, from what you ate--everything, what we studied to what we wore. I mean what a tremendous effort was put out by these people who took from their private lives and donated it to the country to do this. It was a tremendous effort, a tremendous effort. That's what won the war.

C: Absolutely. Absolutely. It was a concerted effort on the part of the civilians and the military. Did you know anybody who was discharged from the WAVES for disciplinary reasons or any other problem?

W: There was a girl in our barracks whom we all knew. She was part of our barracks, who suddenly decided she wanted out.

C: Was this at Lake City?

W: Lake City. So she told them that she was 16 years old, and she was only 16 years old!

C: Oh, no!

W: How she ever got in, I don't know. But she did get out because, actually, she was too young.

C: Isn't that amazing?

W: Yes.

C: Not ready for that.

W: Outside of that, I don't know anybody that was disciplined.

C: No, you were a select group, so probably not. Did the WAVES experience change or redirect your life in any way?

W: Oh, I think so. I think it broadened me immeasurably. It redirected my life in a way that I found out I loved to travel. I married a man from South Carolina, so right there, you know, you immediately became allied with the South. And I found out that there's a whole section of the country that thinks differently, talks differently, and eats differently than anybody else.

C: Right, right.

W: I mean hot bread versus cold bread. It goes on today. But, yes, it certainly did. And I knew this would happen. I remember thinking that, remember when I got on that train in 1944, I said this is

going to change my life, and it did. But it was certainly an experience that I don't regret for a minute, that I enjoyed tremendously. Tremendously! And today when people say, Wow, you were in the service! And, oh, thank you for serving our country. I thought, gee, I almost did it for personal reasons, you know. Because I enjoyed doing it, as well as for the patriotic thing. I enjoyed doing it.

C: That's great. Did the war make you more--and your WAVES service--make you more independent and self-reliant?

W: Yes. Absolutely. You learn to stand on your own two feet on your own merits. And you have no family in back of you. You only have your education and your own thoughts and your own ideals and your own character.

C: Right.

W: And you shape up. If you don't have it, you shape up.

C: Did you have any career ambitions as a result of your service and being in a specific area?

W: No, I didn't. And that's one of my regrets today, that I didn't. I should have taken advantage of the GI Bill and gone on with my education. But by the time my husband got out of the

service, and we started to make a home, I was already pregnant with one. And then I had another one right away. In fact, I had three babies within three years.

C: Wow! That's a lot to take care of. You couldn't even think of that.

W: So it was like trying to keep your head above water. And I had to subject my own desires as far as education and all go, so I let it go by the board.

C: So you didn't work at that point in time at all.

W: No. I didn't work until several years later when the children were starting to grow up. And then I worked.

C: What did you do, may I ask?

W: Well, I went to work in a watch factory because we have-- Providence is jewelry. And I worked for U.S. Rubber Company in their golf ball division. See, what we did, my husband and I, is we worked separate shifts so that there would be someone home with the children. All we needed was a sitter for the little time that one left home and the other one came, so an hour or two a day. So he was working in the rubber company, and I was working in the rubber company, and we worked opposite shifts. And then when the

three children were all in school, I went to work days in the Bulova Watch Company. They were making parts for the government, and I had to use a calibrator. I was an inspector. That was interesting, too. And then my marriage broke up, but I had a fourth child. I was pregnant--I got pregnant--when I worked at Bulova, and I had a fourth child. When he was two years old, and I had been married 15 years, my marriage broke up. So then I had to work days and put the youngster in day care, and the other three older ones were in school all day. So I got a job at the Rhode Island Hospital in the business office, and I worked there for 27 years.

C: Oh, wow! That's a long time.

W: Yes. That was a fascinating job in the business office.

C: I would guess so.

W: You worked with patients and their families. You found out what their coverage was and how their bills were going to be paid. You worked with attorneys, workers' comp. lawyers, state agencies, etc. But the object was to see that the bill was covered in one way or another.

C: When did you retire from there?

W: I retired from there in 1987.

C: Oh, that's not too long ago.

W: I was 63.

C: That's relatively recently. After the war, did you attend any WAVES reunions? I know there were several in Boston, and I just wondered if you had the opportunity.

W: I went to one in Washington once. I have the plaque at home. I don't remember which one it was. The 20th?

C: Could have been.

W: Sounds like the 20th.

C: WAVES reunion? Now, you're a member of the Ocean State WAVES, as well as WAVES National.

W: Yes.

C: And you're an officer in that organization, aren't you?

W: Yes, I am now.

C: What is your office?

W: I'm vice president this year. Going on to be president eventually.

C: And you mentioned that organization and the camaraderie that the women feel among each other, even though they didn't know each other in the service.

W: Yes, yes.

C: Which is very nice. Have you attended any WAVES National reunions or regional reunions since this organization was founded, Ocean State WAVES, about five years ago, I believe?

W: Only one, but it was for all servicewomen. But I'll be going to more of them. We're having a conference in Newport next year.

C: Yes, in April.

W: In April, yes. And I'm involved with that. And I'll be going to more now.

C: Now, that you're retired you're able to go to these things a little more than you could in the years that you worked. Were you contacted to join the Ocean State WAVES by someone?

W: No. I saw it in the paper that they were having a meeting, and I didn't even know they existed. So I went to one of their meetings because I saw the notice in the paper. That's the first I had heard of it. And they were already in existence two years, I think, when I saw that.

C: Oh, I see.

W: In the veterans' column in the Providence Journal.

C: Oh, that's good. Well, I'm glad you saw that. It's good to have that kind of affiliation.

W: I am, too.

C: And activity. Do you have anything else that you want to add, any other anecdotes, or any interesting things that happened that we may have overlooked during the interview?

W: I can't think of anything at the moment. It's just that I regard that little episode in my life-- You know it's a little like your life is separated into little chapters, and it's a little chapter of my life that I enjoyed very much. I know it was a bad time because it was wartime. But a lot of good things come out of wartime.

W: During the war, when we had these scrap metal drives. We had scrap metal drives, and people would go into their homes, their cellars, and bring out all this scrap metal because the country needed it. And everybody in the neighborhood did it. Everybody. And these big trucks would come along and pick up all this scrap metal, old bedsprings and kettles and pots and pans and pails. I mean everything was metal in those days. We didn't have plastic. And pick up all that. I can remember that. And what a camaraderie there was in the neighborhood. Even riding the buses to go into the city. I worked in downtown before I joined the service. And everybody talked to one another. And, did you hear on the news last night? Did you hear this? Because it was wartime, and everybody was close.

C: Pulling together.

W: There was, you know, black, white, Italian, Jewish, whatever. We were all Americans. It didn't make any difference. We were all in this thing together, and we were going to win, and we were going to help each other. And everybody was part of it. And it was such a different feeling, such a different feeling.

C: It was a different world.

W: And we were all--whether we were Democrats or Republicans--we were all solidly behind Roosevelt. He was our leader, and he was doing the right thing for us, and we were all behind him. And so

that's why, when he died there during wartime, it was so devastating, so devastating.

C: It was April '45 when he died, and you were at Lake City then.

W: I was at Lake City.

C: Can you remember the reaction?

W: And I can remember how terribly it affected us that day, that we were all going around in the doldrums that day. Everybody was writing home to find out what the reaction was at home. And, you know, we didn't make phone calls like we do now. We didn't have that immediate correspondence back and forth. But I remember writing home and wondering how everybody was doing at home, and how sad everything was. There were church services everywhere. And I remember one of the girls that was in the tower talking to the pilots, and they announced it over the radio to the different pilots around in flight, that the president had died, and how shocked they were. She got a reaction that the pilots even were shocked to hear about it. It was rather a shock, I guess, to everybody because he had not been ill--in bed, sick, ill. We knew he had been declining, but we didn't know it was that bad. But it did affect the whole country.

C: No, we didn't get the immediate news then, as we do today, blow by blow, you know.

W: No.

C: They weren't covering things in such detail. But that was a shock to the country, his death in Georgia. Did anything amusing or interesting or exciting or different happen when you were at Lake City, that you may have forgotten?

W: I went back to visit the base one day when I was down in Florida. And I persuaded my present husband to take a ride up by Lake City, and let's go to the base. So I stopped at the local chamber of commerce in the city, and I asked if the base were still there. "Oh," she said, "it's our community college now."

C: Oh, really!

W: So I drove out there, and the guardhouse was still there. I said, "Wow! After all these years, the guardhouse is still there." It's not there now because I've been back again. But the guardhouse was still there. And where our barracks were and everything--of course they're gone--but the buildings there are their community college. But the airfield has been taken over, and there were planes out there, so some kind of a company has planes on the base

out there. So that was very interesting to me after all these years.

C: Right. That is. It's still partially in use.

W: So they made good use of the base, which is good. I don't know whatever happened to Jacksonville. I went to Atlanta to try to find the base where I was trained, and I couldn't find it. They kept referring me to this very large--

C: Oglethorpe maybe.

W: --air base. But that wasn't it. But I found out by looking at the map of Atlanta that there were several small airfields. And I have a hunch that it's one of those small airfields. But I think after 50 years you wouldn't recognize it. The City of Atlanta has grown so that--

C: Probably enveloped the whole area where you were.

W: I did find the Catholic cathedral where I had gone to church on those Sunday mornings. I had found that that's the only thing I found that I recognized out of the whole city, Atlanta has grown so big.

C: That's amazing.

W: As far as Lake City, Florida, we not only had WAVES teaching Link Trainer, but we had two civilian men who were teaching Link Trainer, who kind of acted like godfathers to us. They gave us little hints of things because they had been doing it a long time. They had been teaching Link Trainers a long time, and they knew a lot of little tricks of the trade, so to speak. They were almost the only contact we had with the civilians. You were so complete within this base that you were stationed on that you really didn't have any contact with civilians. There was no need to go into a drugstore or grocery store. You could go into a grocery store. After I was married, I went to grocery stores. But I didn't when I was just a WAVE on the base because there was no need of it. And we had very, very little contact with the civvies.

C: Well, that's true. Yes, you were sheltered.

W: Outside of the priest that was at the church, we didn't have that much contact with the civilians of the town, so I didn't get to know anybody in that area at all, to keep up a correspondence with them at all.

C: Right, right.

W: And the problem is that everybody is so excited about going home, that you don't think to get addresses, names and addresses

and home phone numbers and relatives, and you lose track of all these people.

C: But you have kept in contact with some of them.

W: Oh, yes, I have a friend in Hartford, Connecticut that was at Lake City with me. There was another girl, the one that was my closest friend was down in Virginia, and I contacted her several times. But now, all of a sudden, I've lost her. You see people my age are retired, and they sell their homes, and they move, and we lose them. So, unfortunately, I've lost her.

C: Yes.

W: I made some wonderful friends though. People are the same everywhere.

C: That's what they say. Well, that's great. I want to thank you very much, Luisa, for coming down and sharing your memories of your service as a Link Trainer instructor during World War II. It's been very enjoyable. We'll get this transcribed as soon as possible. Thank you.

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