

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

HISTORY
OF THE WAVES

No. 50
CATHERINE E. FITZGERALD BROWN

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
1997

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

INTERVIEWEE: BETTY BROWN

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

DATE: MARCH 18, 1997

C: This is the first oral history interview with Betty Brown. Betty is from Providence, Rhode Island. She came down to the Naval War College today for the interview which is being conducted in Mahan Hall. Today's date is March 18, 1997. Betty, I'm very glad that you were able to come down. We finally got together to pursue your memories of the WAVES in World War II. I'd like to begin by asking you where you were born and when you were born.

B: I was born in Johnsonburg, Pennsylvania, September 27, 1923.

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

B: He was a carpenter. We ultimately moved to New Jersey where I spent most of my life.

C: Your growing up years.

B: My growing up years.

C: Was your mother a homemaker or did she work?

B: Yes. She was employed.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

B: I have a brother and I have a sister. My brother was older. My sister was younger.

C: Where did you spend your growing up years in New Jersey?

B: Elizabeth, New Jersey.

C: Did you graduate from high school there?

B: Yes, I did. Benedictine Academy.

C: What year was that?

B: 1940.

C: That was before the war began. What did you plan to do after graduation?

B: I was going to be a nurse and took the entrance exam at Jersey City Medical and Presbyterian Hospital, New York City, but I was too young. So, I didn't go into nursing.

C: What did you do after graduation? Did you work?

B: I went to work for Prudential Life Insurance Company in Newark, New Jersey.

C: How long did you stay there?

B: I stayed there... I don't remember. It couldn't have been more than a year. I had several jobs after that.

C: Before joining the WAVES.

B: That's what I mean. Before joining the WAVES.

C: Did your family have any Navy connections?

B: None. You mean my mother and father?

C: Right.

B: No. My brother went into the Navy but that wasn't the same thing. That's not what you mean.

C: Right. Nothing prior to the outbreak of WW II.

B: No.

C: Do you remember where you were on December 7, 1941, and what your reaction was to the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

B: I haven't got a clue where I was. I know what my reaction was, and that was horror, the same as everyone else experienced. But I don't remember where I was.

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

B: Not really. No. I didn't. The war was all around you. You heard it on the radio. It's not as though you had the instant media. So, no.

C: When did you decide to join the WAVES? What year?

B: It was 1943, I think. But it was a decision that I went... I worked in the RCA building in New York City. We used to eat lunch in the International building. We had to go underground. There was a concourse where they had a recruiting booth with a WAVE, a SPAR, and a Marine. We got to know them and they talked me into going to Pine Street. I went down and it was on a dare more than anything. And then I forgot about it.

C: So, you registered at Pine Street. Is that what you did?

B: Yes, I did. And then I forgot all about it.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting. Then what happened?

B: Then six months later they called me and said that I had to report to Hunter College. I said at that time, "Well, I'm sorry. I changed my mind. I'm not going in." They said, "Yes, you are."

C: You can't change your mind.

B: No. It was a shock beyond shocks. I was just stunned because I was a women. That didn't happen to women - that a shore patrol would come and take you to boot camp. But that's how I got in anyway.

C: Oh, that's very interesting. You got in on a dare. What was attractive about the Navy? Why did you go to Pine Street instead of joining the Marines, let's say, or the SPARS?

B: Probably because of no other reason than, you know, I don't want to enhance the Navy's image, but I have no idea. It was just that Pine Street was closer. I don't know whether the Marines registered at Pine Street or not.

C: Oh, I see. So, it was just the proximity.

B: This was not a well thought out thing like I want to go into the WAVES like a lot of them did. No. It was just the convenience of Pine Street. I went and then forgot about it.

C: Oh, dear. Well, you got this letter telling that you had to report for duty at Hunter College. How did your parents feel about this?

B: They thought it was just another thing that I was doing and my mother didn't really believe it. When she found out I had to go, my mother was upset about it.

C: How did your father feel about it?

B: My father was noncommittal. It didn't matter. He knew that I would do whatever I was going to do and he accepted it.

C: Well, that's good. Was there any publicity about your joining the WAVES in the local papers?

B: Was there anything in the paper?

C: Yes. Anything about your joining.

B: I don't think so. Elizabeth was a big, big city and the local paper was the Journal. No. There were so many at the time that I went in. No. They wouldn't have put that in. That wouldn't have been an item.

C: Did any of your friends join from work?

B: No.

C: You were the only one?

B: I was it. Actually, I didn't really think I did.

C: Isn't that interesting. Well, you got to Hunter College in 1943. Do you remember what time of the year it was?

B: December. Cold, cold, cold.

C: What was your initial impression of the U.S. Naval Training School at Hunter?

B: Well, my first impression was this isn't real. They told us that we were in bunks; we had to get up at five o'clock in the morning; they called the floor the deck and the walls the bulkheads. I can't even tell you how it felt but I know I didn't like it.

C: Oh, that's interesting.

B: Yes. I did not care for it at all. I didn't like standing in line in front of the chow hall. I was tall so I was always in the front. And it was cold. No, I didn't like boot camp. I didn't care for it. Being regimented was the problem from the beginning. I just could not be regimented. I went along with it, don't misunderstand me. When I was there, I was there. And then you're committed. But, no, I didn't like boot camp.

C: Right. That's the training and indoctrination end of things.

B: Well, they really didn't train. They did a lot of marching. They had so many women. They did different testing to see where you were going to go.

C: What did you think of the marching?

B: I loved that. That was my favorite thing. Loved the marching.

C: Why did you like it?

B: I don't know. I liked the precision marching better when I was in the training school at Milledgeville. I have no idea. But it was good and I liked that.

C: What did you think of the uniform?

B: The uniform was nice. When I went in they were so particular about the uniform. They made sure it fit and made sure that everything was perfect on your uniform. And I liked that. I liked that part of it. I liked the Navy uniform. It looked very, very

nice.

C: It was attractive.

B: Mainbocher designed them and it was nice.

C: Right. Vis-a-vis the Army khaki. Do you remember any of your roommates in boot camp and did you get along with them?

B: I got along with everyone. I remember, what was her name, Bonnell Bentley. And why I remember her is she went AWOL which is another thing that was new. What does that mean if you're a woman? But she went AWOL. I'll always remember that.

C: What happened to her?

B: I have no idea. They don't tell you. You would never know. You couldn't follow it up. But I remember Bonnell Bentley. I even remember her name. It's probably the only name I remember in the whole Navy. But that was such a surprise to me. You don't do that to women. I mean women are not...

C: Well, she was apparently removed then, discharged from the Navy.

B: Oh, yes. Ultimately, I'm sure she was. But the fact that you would be hunted down if you went AWOL. I just couldn't believe it.

C: Right. You're in the military now.

B: Right.

C: Do you remember what the cuisine was like?

B: The food was good. I never had a problem with the food. I thought the Navy food was very good.

C: Did you have to eat on the tin plates?

B: I don't remember that. Probably, but that wouldn't have bothered me. That was in boot camp. Boot camp went very fast. It was such a quick few weeks. So, I'm not too clear on everything in boot camp.

C: Do you remember any of the classes and how you responded to the classes?

B: In boot camp?

C: Yes.

B: Well, I don't remember classes. I remember being in an auditorium when they were doing the tests for radiomen and all those things. I remember that. But I don't remember classes.

C: Well, you did have classes.

B: Did they?

C: Yes. There were classes in Navy protocol and history.

B: Well, I'm sure they did.

C: Some of the gals have mentioned that there were extracurricular activities that they participated in, like a

newspaper or singing platoon, at boot camp. Did you ever have the opportunity to do that?

B: No.

C: You had a little bit of time off on weekends?

B: One weekend we were allowed off. I went home to New Jersey. I happened to be going with a guy and he brought me back. I wouldn't get out of the car, I didn't want to come back. See, they let you go home, but I didn't live that far. And when they let me go, I didn't want to come back.

C: But you had to go back.

B: Definitely. At least they got that across to me that I had to go back. That this was my life for the next whatever. So, that was brought home to me.

C: Right. For the duration of the war.

B: Right.

C: Were you homesick at all during this time frame?

B: No. I wasn't homesick because I was in contact with my family all the time. In boot camp, no, because I lived right across the river.

C: Exactly. You were so close by.

B: Right. But you were allowed only that one weekend off.

C: Do you remember whether you had to attend church or not? Was this part of the regime?

B: I don't remember whether I had to. I always went to Mass when it was available. It was made available and I was always there.

C: At Hunter, occasionally, they provided entertainment for the WAVES; singers came in, concerts. I wonder if you were ever exposed to those?

B: I don't remember them.

C: Well, when your eight weeks was over, you were going to be assigned to a rating or to a job. What rating and what job did you get assigned to when you completed boot camp?

B: I don't think you got a rating. You were a seaman or whatever. You didn't get your rating until you went to training school. I went to Storekeeper school.

C: Well, you were selected to be a Storekeeper.

B: Yes, I was.

C: Did you express any preference for this kind of position or were you just selected willy-nilly for it?

B: No, it was willy-nilly. Storekeeper embraced everything that I knew how to do, which isn't much. It wasn't secretarial because I didn't type. Yeoman school was not one school that I would have

gone to. So, other than that, it was Storekeeper school.

C: And a few other opportunities that were open to women then. You had to go for advanced training, to Storekeeper school, and where did you go?

B: Milledgeville, Georgia.

C: How did you get down there?

B: That was a riot. I don't remember where we went. We went all over the world to get down to Milledgeville, Georgia. We went north and then we went south. The train was... It mystified me. Because I didn't understand that they rerouted these trains so that they didn't go directly. They didn't go from the Bronx right to Milledgeville, Georgia. I had a friend that was a yeoman and they went into Canada and came down. And, when she mustered out, she got extra pay for that overnight thing going through Canada.

C: You went down as a group didn't you? A group of WAVES?

B: Oh, yes. A train-load of us went down as a group to Milledgeville.

C: Do you remember anything about the train ride?

B: The train ride was unreal because the Navy had you stand duty. You had to have duty. They had WAVES at one end of the car and at the other end of the car. You had to get up, dress, full dress, and sit there and log-in/log-out. I remember that so well because I'm

thinking, really? It was one of the things that I never understood.

C: Anyway, it was quite a journey down there to Georgia.

B: Yes, it was a journey.

C: Well, you arrived and you were billeted in the college, I assume, which was Georgia State College?

B: Yes. We were in the mansion. It was called 'the mansion'. Unfortunately, I had contracted Vincent's mouth in boot camp and I reported to the dentist right away. He got down on his knees, he was so thankful. So, I spent my first five days, or more, in the sick bay because it was highly contagious. That was my first introduction to Milledgeville.

C: Not too pleasant.

B: No. But I was thankful that he was able to take care of me.

C: Oh, certainly. When you got there and you lived in the mansion, which I assume was a dormitory, can you describe your room and tell us about your roommates?

B: Oh, it was just so nice. The roommates were lovely women. All nice women. I enjoyed Milledgeville. The thing that we liked most about it was that the beds were nice.

C: Did you have bunks?

B: They were bunks, but they had spring mattresses in them. They

were thicker than the regular bunk bed and they weren't as high. And it was nice.

C: How many in a room there?

B: Gee, I don't remember. I know there were more than four, it was more of a dorm, but it was nice.

C: Did you have to undergo white glove inspections there?

B: Yes. There is something that I remember - an admiral's blanket. Do you think I can get anyone to remember what an admiral's blanket is? It's how you fold the blanket - that white blanket that you got. Nobody seems to remember that. Where did I get it from? I don't know.

C: Well, I'm sure that it was the way to do it.

B: But why do they call it an admiral's blanket? I'm dying to find out.

C: I don't know.

B: If you hear in another interview, let me know.

C: You had to make the corners of the sheet correctly.

B: Well, that part was easy. I didn't mind any of that.

C: Did you march and drill at Milledgeville?

B: Yes. I loved that. They had platoons. As a matter of fact, the

platoon I was in won the prize for precision marching. That was really interesting. I liked that.

C: That's good. Do you remember what kind of classes you took there? Because you were going there for training on how to be a Storekeeper.

B: You had workbooks on how to pay, disbursing, and typing. To get your rate, you had to type so many words a minute.

C: Did you learn how to do that?

B: Yes. It killed me but I learned. Then you graduated Third Class Storekeeper.

C: How long was the school?

B: Twelve weeks.

C: Do you remember if you had any time off during this?

B: We had time. I think we went to Atlanta. There was a dance. There was a prison right near Milledgeville and they took us over, in buses, to the prison to a dance.

C: With the prisoners?

B: Yes. I have no idea why.

C: That doesn't sound like something the Navy would want to expose you to.

B: You're kidding. Of course, what difference? I don't remember the details. All I know is that was one of the little adventures. But I remember we did a lot in Milledgeville.

C: What did you do?

B: Well, I had pictures that I showed you. We went on hay rides. We went downtown a lot. I don't know, we did a lot. There wasn't too much to do in Milledgeville, Georgia.

C: I would say. It is probably a small, sleepy town.

B: It is. But we seemed to entertain ourselves well.

C: Did you participate in any sports?

B: We had to. It was mandatory to do sports.

C: What kind of sports?

B: We had swimming, archery, and exercise. I remember I hated the exercise. I would try to get way in the back. And this woman, she was good, would see me 'cause I wasn't doing them and bring me up to the front. So, I remember that well. Exercise was mandatory. You had to take exercise.

C: They tried to keep you physically fit.

B: Oh, yes. Then they had the marching. Everywhere you went you marched. Everywhere.

C: How did you like the Navy chow in Milledgeville?

B: It was excellent, except grits. I didn't care for that.

C: You were exposed to southern cooking.

B: Oh, southern cooking. We fought the Civil War everyday; breakfast, lunch and dinner. We were northerners at the table with southerners. But the food was good.

C: Did you have the opportunity to date anybody while you were in Milledgeville?

B: Not really. There wouldn't have been too many to date.

C: No.

B: I think they would have discouraged it anyway. I mean, how could you date?

C: Very little free time. Now when you went to Atlanta with some of the WAVES, do you remember what you did there? Was it sightseeing?

B: That's all and shopping. I don't remember.

C: What did you think about the pay?

B: I didn't even think about the pay. The pay was nothing. You couldn't think about the pay because there wasn't any pay to speak of.

C: And what little there was was just enough for your personal

needs, I imagine.

B: Right. Your time was such that you didn't need the money. I mean, what did you need the money for?

C: You had little opportunity to spend it.

B: Yes. Right.

C: How did you react to the schooling at Milledgeville? Did you like it better than Hunter?

B: Well, yes. You had to like it better than Hunter. Hunter was more like a cultural shock. They really were. They had the 'Daisy Chain'. That was terrible.

C: What was the Daisy Chain?

B: The Daisy Chain. They had all the women in line. You stripped to the waist. You never heard of that? The Daisy Chain?

C: No.

B: Daisy Chain was terrible.

C: Then what did they do?

B: They examined you. I mean, this was a physical that they were putting all the WAVES through. And, of course, they can't wait for one to undress. So, that's what they called the Daisy Chain.

C: Oh, I see. I hadn't heard of that. Nobody mentioned that

before.

B: Maybe they blocked it out from their memory 'cause it wasn't very pleasant. Women, at that time, did not like to be exposed.

C: No, that's right. Oh, that's interesting.

B: But they had the Daisy Chain.

C: Okay, I'm glad you explained that. Well, when you completed Milledgeville and Storekeeper's school, you got a rating of Third Class Storekeeper. Where were you assigned?

B: Right. Well, they gave you a choice. They said, "Where would you like to go?" So, you put down where you wanted to go.

C: What did you put down?

B: I put down San Diego and Brooklyn Navy Yard and I was sent to Norfolk, Virginia. But, it was too late to learn. It was already over. So, that's where I went. The Naval Air Station in Norfolk.

C: That's where you went. This would have been in 1944.

B: Approximately, yes.

C: Right, about mid-1944 that you went there. Did you get any leave before you were assigned to Norfolk Naval Air Station?

B: I don't remember.

C: Do you remember how you traveled there? Did you get there by

train?

B: Train. There was no other way to get anywhere.

C: When you arrived at Norfolk, where were you billeted?

B: Naval Air Station in barracks H? or no, I don't remember.

C: You had a WAVES barracks?

B: Oh, yes.

C: How were the barracks set up physically?

B: Physically they were in the shape of an 'L' or an 'H'. Yes, an 'H'. The whole center part of the barracks connecting the two ends held the laundry room, the showers, the johns and everything.

C: Did you have a private cubicle or were the bunks all in a row?

B: There were cubicles, all on the floor, with four in a cubicle. Four WAVES in a cubicle. Two bunks, I think.

C: So it was kind of open then or was it an actual room?

B: No, it wasn't open. No, it was a room with no door.

C: Okay, no door.

B: No door, but it was private. And one thing I would say, yes, it was private.

C: Were the girls you bunked with Storekeepers as well?

B: No, they weren't. One was a dental hygienist, the other was a yeoman, and one was... I forget what she was.

C: Have you kept in contact with any of these people that you bunked with there?

B: No.

C: What were your duties as a Storekeeper and where exactly did you work on base?

B: The first assignment I had on the Naval Air Station was transportation. And what I did there, I was in charge of record-keeping with title B equipment. And that was transportation. Then I was transferred. They needed a Storekeeper Third down at the Boat House and they sent me down. It was interesting because the Officer-in-Charge wanted a Storekeeper but didn't want a WAVE.

C: Why?

B: He didn't want a woman. He was just regular Navy. He just didn't want a woman. They said, "Well, tough luck, sailor." And, there I was.

C: How did he treat you?

B: Well, in the beginning, he was kind of aloof but then we got to be great friends. I was the only WAVE there.

C: Oh, you were. What were the responsibilities of the Boat

House? What exactly was there?

B: There wasn't too much record-keeping. I did the muster report in the morning, etc. I went to ship's service if they needed anything. I had my own jeep.

C: How many men were in the Boat House?

B: Oh, quite a few. I don't remember the exact number. A hundred or so.

C: What was in the Boat House?

B: The Boat House is where they kept the captain's gig for the area. The yard salvage derrick was there. We worked at the Boat House in conjunction with the Coast Guard on the Chesapeake for any air-sea rescues. And that's what the Boat House was for. They had boats that went out to chase the fishermen away, etc.

C: To keep them off...

B: To keep them out of sea lane because the sea planes used to come in. They had quite a few boats. I did any paperwork that had to be done in connection with the Boat House.

C: Did you have to wear a WAVES uniform?

B: No and it was very relaxed in the Boat House. I wore slacks or dungarees with a top and moccasins.

C: Not the traditional uniform.

B: No. In the summer, I wore the summer uniform, the gray seer-sucker. But, no, I didn't have to.

C: How did the other men treat you in the Boat House?

B: Good. They were so nice. As a matter of fact, I was saying to my son-in-law, I never heard swearing. They treated me so well. They really did. No, it was good.

C: Polite and respectful. No discrimination or harassment?

B: No, none at all. No! We were pretty protected in World War II. It's not like today. I can see, obviously, where we were really protected, which is good but it's too bad it didn't carry over.

C: That's right. It's a different world.

B: It's entirely different and I have to admit it.

C: Well, that's great. Did you have any interesting experiences at the Boat House? Did anything happen that was rather momentous?

B: The only momentous thing that happened at the Boat House was when the yard salvage derrick went out to pick up a seaman, a pilot that went down. They were hit mid-ship by a Russian freighter going out and that sunk it. The thing that upset me most was that I had to take muster that day and report them all missing. And, of course, they weren't brought up to the surface for a month or so after that.

C: Did you know these fellows that went out?

B: Very well. I saw them everyday.

C: That must have been very distressing.

B: It was traumatic. It was a very traumatic experience. I used to go on the yard salvage derrick and bake cakes and things like that.

C: Oh, really. So, you knew these people well and this was the first casualty that you really experienced in WW II.

B: Yes, I would say so.

C: Well, that's unfortunate. What did you like about your assignment at the Boat House?

B: I really don't remember liking or disliking it. I knew I had to stay in the Navy until the war was over, so you make the best of it. There wasn't too much to like or dislike about the Boat House. I didn't really work very hard. It wasn't a case of being over worked or anything like that. As a matter of fact, I think I was very spoiled, so there wasn't very much to like or dislike about it.

C: Was that your only assignment at Norfolk Naval Air Station or were you assigned again?

B: No. I was transferred from transportation. Then went over to the Boat House. And that was it.

C: And that's where you stayed.

B: That's where I stayed until the war was over.

C: Did you have to work on Saturdays?

B: Sometimes, not really. No.

C: It was a five day work week?

B: It was a five day work week. So, my time was pretty free.

C: What did you do with your free time?

B: I did a lot. I went to Virginia Beach a lot or went home. I went home a lot. I could get a ride, an air ride, into New York. And then the train. So, I went home a lot.

C: Did you socialize with the WAVES when you were there?

B: Oh, yes. I had a couple of good friends.

C: Did you also date any of the sailors there?

B: Yes. I dated. You know, when there was four thousand to one. So, you dated. You practically dated everybody at one time. There was a camaraderie in the service that it wasn't like dating.

C: Group activities?

B: Oh, yes.

C: So, what kinds of things did you do as a group? Like go to the

movies or whatever?

B: Movies. The one thing about going to the movies that I remember, and I really was so appalled at it, because we were in Virginia, the Blacks had to sit in the back of the theater. I just could never get use to that. I just didn't understand that being from the North and that was way back when. I just didn't understand why it would happen in the Navy.

C: Oh, I see. Segregation existed in the Navy. Plus on the outside, of course.

B: Yes, terrible. This was on the base.

C: Right. Did the base offer many recreational activities for you?

B: Yes. We had swimming. We did a lot of swimming. They had ship's service and they had the movies. And you could go to the big base, Naval Operating Base, and there was ship's service over there. So there was a lot to do. You didn't go into Norfolk. The couple of times that I went into Norfolk, the sailors... That's the only time that I remember being harassed.

C: Oh, really.

B: The sailors really didn't like the Navy WAVES because they looked at them as women that were replacements for active duty. And you found a lot of them that would harass you because of that. But

on the base itself, no. But if you went off the base, you got that.

C: That's interesting. Did you ever encounter any civilians when you went off the base? And do you know what their reaction was to the WAVES?

B: Their reaction to the WAVES was no different than their reaction to the sailors. This was in Virginia, now. Remember the signs that said, "Sailors and dogs keep off the lawn"? The same applied to the WAVES.

C: So, they really didn't look up to them?

B: They didn't look down on them either. No. The WAVES weren't looked up to.

C: Oh, I see. Not that you noticed. Did you write letters home during this time frame?

B: Not as often as I did when I was in training in Milledgeville because I went home often. I was home on weekends.

C: So you had the opportunity to leave, which was good. Did you keep up with news about the war during this time frame?

B: Not really. We were kept up on the news by certain things that happened, like when Roosevelt died or when anything happened, they would close the gates. Then you knew that something had happened. But outside of that, no.

C: Do you remember when Roosevelt died and what the reaction was

on the base? That was April 1945.

B: That was very sad. I remember you were restricted to the base. You weren't allowed off the base. The reaction was the same on the base as it was all over the country. And, of course, these people, the Navy personnel, were young and they were emotional.

C: Yes, I imagine they would be about that. Did you ever have the chance to meet or see Mildred McAfee, who was the director of the WAVES, or anybody in the hierarchy of the WAVES?

B: No.

C: Do you remember what your reaction was to VE Day, which was May 8, 1945, victory over Europe?

B: That was the same reaction. It was a little more joyous. You were restricted to the base again. You weren't allowed off the base.

C: VJ Day was August 15, 1945 and that's really when people celebrated because that was the end of the war. Do you remember what your reaction was to VJ Day and what celebrations took place?

B: Well, because you were restricted to the base. You couldn't really celebrate. You know, it wasn't like Times Square where everybody let loose. You couldn't do that on the base. When you're restricted to the base, it's kind of like they hold onto you. So there wasn't any great celebration.

C: No hoopla about that. How did you feel personally about the end of the war?

B: So glad. I was packing my bags. I was going home. I wanted to go home.

C: You wanted out.

B: And I couldn't get out.

C: What was the highest rate you achieved?

B: I was working on my second class. Then the war broke out which was great. And then I wanted to leave and I couldn't because our rate was frozen. So even though I had enough points to get out, I couldn't get out. Because the rate, Storekeeper rate and Yeoman rate, were all frozen you were not among the group that was let go.

C: So how long did you stay in after August 1945?

B: I don't remember.

C: Initially, it was duration of the war and six months. That's how long they could hold you. So you don't remember exactly when you were discharged and returned home?

B: I was discharged in New York on 20 March 1946.

C: Do you remember anything about the discharge process?

B: At U.S. Navy Barracks, New York City, New York. I had my navy blue jacket. I had gained weight. All I can remember is, when I was going up to get my discharge paper, inhaling and buttoning my

jacket and didn't exhale until I walked across the stage and went down the other side. That's all I can remember about that.

C: Well, I assume you were happy to leave the Navy.

B: Loved it. Loved going home.

C: Would you have stayed in if you were able?

B: Absolutely not!

C: It wasn't until 1948 that women were given the legal right to stay in the Navy. Did you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit-de-corps and camaraderie?

B: Yes. Definitely.

C: Did any of the gals ever tell you why they joined the WAVES and what their motivation was?

B: Not that I remember. Everybody had a reason either because it's something they wanted to do, they wanted to get away from home, or they lived in a small town and they wanted to experience life, I guess. I don't know. No, I don't remember.

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

B: Yes, I did. As a matter of fact, they took such good care, I can remember that they even created a special class or special rate for hairdressers. They realized, once the WAVES got in, that there were a lot of women that didn't know how to take care of

themselves, like to do their hair and so forth. So they had to open beauty parlors.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting. I've not heard that before. Did you have them on....

B: On Naval Air.

C: On Naval Air.

B: Yes. Because some women couldn't take care of their hair.

C: So, you would say the focus was on neatness?

B: Yes, definitely. For an image. It was always the image. And that was so obvious the whole time I was in.

C: They were focusing on the image the WAVES presented to the world. That's very good to know.

B: Yes, on the image. That's right.

C: Did you ever know of anyone who was discharged for disciplinary reasons or any other reasons?

B: No. I knew a lot that were trying to get out but the only way you could get out of the Navy was be pregnant or have something wrong with you. There was this one gal, she'd go to sick bay with a back ache and you can't prove a back ache. But I don't remember anyone. No. I know that when they left there was a reason but I don't remember the details.

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

B: No.

C: Do you think that the war and joining the WAVES made you more independent and self-reliant?

B: No. I was that way before I joined.

C: Do you think it broadened your horizons, meeting people from all over the country?

B: I don't know what you mean by "broadened my horizons".

C: Exposure to new and different people.

B: It was great. That was a plus.

C: Did you have any career ambitions as a result of your rate in the WAVES?

B: No. Storekeeper rate wasn't a great motivator to go on to. But what I wanted to go when I got out was to be a service rep. in the telephone company and that's what I did.

C: Oh, so you knew. You had an idea of what you wanted to be after that.

B: Yes.

C: Did you feel that what women were expected to do and to be

changed when the war was over?

B: How do you mean?

C: Did you feel that their goals and their professional experiences were something that was motivated by their war experience and their work experience in the WAVES?

B: I don't think so. No. Because it was like a sterile world where you were. You weren't exposed to anything that would motivate you to go on to be a CEO or anything in the company.

C: Okay. Did you maintain any service friendships when the war ended?

B: Oh, yes. Muriel Liekweg. She was a yeoman on the base. As a matter of fact, we got out of the Navy and I worked for a while. Then we decided we would go to California, so we moved to California.

C: Where were you working immediately after the war when you got out?

B: In the telephone company.

C: Where?

B: In Newark, New Jersey.

C: Oh, you went back home.

B: Yes, I went back home.

C: Then from there you decided to go to California.

B: Yes, Muriel and I decided to go to California. We just had enough money to get there and couldn't come back.

C: In what year was this?

B: 1947 through 1949.

C: Where did you settle there and what did you do?

B: If you remember, or maybe you don't remember, the migration to California was out of sight. You couldn't find a native Californian if you tried. We couldn't get a job. So, the first job that we had was at the Naval Testing Station at Inyokern, California, in the desert. So that's what I did there. I didn't stay there long. Then I joined Consolidated Millinery and I was trained to be a hat buyer, a millinery buyer. I lived in Los Angeles.

C: Where was this?

B: This was in Pasadena, California. And then I left California and came back to Jersey.

C: How long did you stay out in California?

B: I was out there about a year and a half or two years.

C: Did you like it?

B: Oh, yes. I liked it. I came back and was telling everybody how

wonderful California was which you should never do. As soon as you say that they look at you and say, "Well, if you liked it so much why did you come home?"

C: Why did you come home?

B: I came home to get married.

C: Where did you meet your husband?

B: Oh, I knew him from Junior High School.

C: So, he was somebody local?

B: Yes, he was local.

C: Did he join the service during the war?

B: He was in the Army. Everybody was in the service during the war.

C: Did you write letters to him during the war?

B: No. I wasn't going with him during the war.

C: So, you resumed a friendship with him after the war?

B: Right.

C: Did you attend any WAVES reunions after the war?

B: None.

C: There were several, in Boston and New York. When did you join

WAVES National?

B: About three years ago.

C: Okay. Are you active in that organization?

B: Well, I represent them on the volunteer advisory board at the VA hospital and I represent them as a volunteer. I'm as active as you can get in a unit.

C: That's great. I'm so glad they've organized.

B: They are very committed and they are a very nice group of women.

C: They certainly are. I've interviewed so many of them for this program. What would you say the significance of your naval career was for your life? Did it have any great significance or impact on you and your life as a whole?

B: Not really. Now, in retrospect, yes, it was something that you did and you realize that was a very important part of your life. But, at the time, no, it didn't have an impact on what I was doing.

C: Where did you settle after the war and after you were married?

B: New Jersey.

C: How did you get to Rhode Island?

B: In 1966, Charlie, my husband, said we were going to move to

Rhode Island. And I said, "Rhode Island? Never heard of it." The people in New Jersey did not go north. So, that's how I got to Rhode Island.

C: He had a job here, I assume.

B: He had a job here. Then we left and moved to Ohio from Rhode Island. Then Charlie left me with four girls. I stayed out there until my number three daughter graduated. Then I decided to come back to Rhode Island. I couldn't go to New Jersey because I had one more daughter to put through school. I couldn't move to an area in New Jersey where I liked the schools, so I came back to Rhode Island.

C: Yes, back to Providence. Did you work during this interim period?

B: Work?

C: Yes, outside the home.

B: Oh, yes.

C: What did you do?

B: I was a homemaker for a long time, until I had to go back to work. Then I did selling and things like that. Then I worked at Bostich for seventeen years in accounting.

C: Here in Rhode Island?

B: Yes, here in Rhode Island. Not a very illustrious career.

C: But you did have to, obviously, work to support yourself after that.

B: Yes. Well, I had four daughters to support.

C: Right. That's what I was thinking. Did any of these gals join the Navy?

B: No. My number two daughter, Diane, is a Major in the National Guard. But I never encouraged her. The reason she joined was so she could get a van. And she went on from there.

C: Did you ever talk about your Navy experiences to your children?

B: Not really. Quite frankly, they're not interested. I don't think that age group is interested. I was at the doctor and this physician's assistant, David, and I'd tell him I was coming over to Newport. I said, "Hurry up because I am going to need my wrist." I was kidding him. He said he didn't know the WAVES. He never heard of the WAVES. He said, "What does the WAVES stand for?" I said, "I haven't got the foggiest idea." What is it?

C: Women Accepted For Volunteer Emergency Service. That's the acronym.

B: Okay. So, I said, "Sorry, David. I'll find out though."

C: Well, isn't that interesting. Your children probably will be

interested in that as time goes on.

B: That's why I'm keeping some of these things and mementos. I'm sure they will. And if they are not, maybe the grandchildren will. I have no idea. But seriously they're not. That age group is not interested in World War II. Vietnam, now if you're talking about Vietnam it's...

C: Well, that's something that they've been exposed to.

B: That's right.

C: Do you have any other comments or contributions to make on your career in the WAVES as a Storekeeper? Any outstanding event that we've missed or any other thing that you would like to comment on?

B: I don't think so. I hate to be so blase about it. I'm sure that I gained a lot from being in the service. I mean, you have to. You can't spend a couple years of your life with people, especially in the Navy or in a service, because it rubs off on you in some way.

C: Thank you very much, Betty for the interview. I enjoyed it very much.

B: I enjoyed it too. It was neat.

C: We will get this transcribed and back to you for editing.

INDEX

Atlanta, Georgia, 15, 16, 17
Bostich Company, 38
Canada, 12
Elizabeth, New Jersey, 2, 5
Georgia State College, Milledgeville, Georgia, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18
Hunter College, 4, 5, 6, 11, 18
Inyokern, California, 34
Johnsonburg, Pennsylvania, 1
Los Angeles, California, 34
Marines, 4, 5
McAfee, Mildred, 28
Milledgeville, Georgia, 7, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 27
Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia, 20, 21, 24
New York City, New York, 4
Newark, New Jersey, 2, 34
Norfolk, Virginia, 19, 20, 26
Ohio, 37, 38
Pasadena, California, 34
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 3
Providence, Rhode Island, 1
Prudential Life Insurance Company, 2
Rhode Island, 37
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 27, 28
SPARS, 4, 5

United States Naval Training School, Bronx, New York, 6

United States Navy, 3, 24, 30, 32, 38, 39

VE Day, 28

Virginia Beach, Virginia, 25

VJ Day, 28

WAVES National, 36

WAVES, 1, 3, 4, 5, 11, 12, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25, 26, 27, 27, 30, 31,
32, 33, 36, 38, 39

World War II, 1, 3, 23, 24, 39