

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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RITA CALLANAN TRENN

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

INTERVIEWEE: RITA CALLANAN TRENN

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

DATE: MAY 16, 1997

C: This is the first oral history interview with Rita Trenn for the WAVES in World War II Oral History Project, which we're conducting at the Naval War College. Today's date is May 16, 1997, and I'm conducting the interview at Rita's home at 14A Caddy Rock Road in North Kingston, Rhode Island. Rita, I'm very glad we made contact and you consented to be interviewed for the program. I'd like to begin by asking you where you were born and when you were born.

T: I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, July 4, 1923.

C: Oh, Independence Day!

T: Independence Day.

C: What did your father do for a living in Providence?

T: My father was a steamfitter, a union steamfitter.

C: And your mother?

T: My mother, before she was married, was a cook for the people on the East side. She was from Ireland. And when she was married, she stayed home and took care of seven children.

C: Wow! Quite a family.

T: Yes.

C: Brothers and sisters?

T: Four brothers and two sisters.

C: Did you spend your growing-up years in Providence?

T: No. We moved to Conimicut; it was a summer place in Warwick. And I lived there until I was 13 years old. And then I moved back to Providence.

C: Oh, I see. Did you graduate from high school in Providence?

T: Yes, I did. I graduated from St. Xavier's High School in Providence.

C: And when was that?

T: That was June 6, 1941.

C: So it was before the war began.

T: Yes, it was. We were the last graduating class before the war.

C: Did you work after graduation?

T: I did. I worked in the Providence Public Market as a comptometer operator.

C: What was that?

T: Now, comptometer operator was the forerunner of the computers. It was a beginning where you added on a machine. You used your hands on one corner of the machine, and you added.

C: Oh, how interesting! I hadn't heard of that before. How long were you there?

T: I was at the Public Market for a year and a half. Then I left there to go to Brown & Sharp's for defense work because by now the war had started. And we didn't get much money at Providence Public Market, so I went to Brown & Sharp's. And I stayed there until I went into the Navy, which was about another year and a half.

C: What did you do at Brown & Sharp?

T: I was payroll clerk.

C: So that kind of helped you in the Navy.

T: Yes, it did.

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

T: No. I only had one uncle who was in the military, and he was a graduate of West Point.

C: Oh, interesting. Did your brothers join the Army or the Navy?

T: Four brothers: one brother was in the Navy. Three were in the Army.

C: Did your sisters join?

T: No, my sisters both went in the convent.

C: Oh, how interesting!

T: I went in the Navy so I wouldn't have to go in the convent.

C: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked? And what was your response to the attack?

T: I was on a date with my now husband. We were going to visit his family, and we were downtown in Providence going through the city to get a bus to the other side of the city, when the newsboys were out there with the extra, you know: "Pearl Harbor is attacked!" I can remember it like it was yesterday.

C: How did you react? How did you feel about this?

T: You know we were dumbfounded and shocked. But at the time we had no idea of the repercussions it was going to cause. After all, I was only 18 years old. And that was the last thing in the world I was thinking about.

C: Absolutely, a prolonged war.

T: Right.

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

T: Yes, I did.

C: How did you hear about the WAVES?

T: I think I heard about it probably through the radio and publications, and one of the main reasons--I was talking about this--I joined the Navy was that I wanted to leave Brown & Sharp's. And during that time, if you worked in a defense plant, you couldn't leave a defense plant to go to work in another defense plant. And you couldn't live in my mother's house and not work. So I left Brown & Sharp's and went in the Navy.

C: Did you feel any sense of patriotism as well?

T: Oh, yes, yes. I thought I was lucky. And, of course, one of the things that happened when I was going for my physical is there was a small clip in the paper at one time that said: The WAVES will now accept women with eye problems if their vision is corrected to 20/20 with glasses. So I knew my vision was not anywhere near 20/20 without the glasses. So when I went to Boston for my physical--because you had to go to Boston--it was my first time on a train. I had never been on a train before when I went

to Boston. And the enlisted man said to me, whoever he was--the pharmacist, I guess--he said, "Take your glasses off and walk until you can see the board." So I took my glasses off, and I just walked to the board. And he said, "You shouldn't be in the Navy. You shouldn't even be in the Home Guide if you can't see that without...." I said, "I can't." But then I put my glasses on, and I had perfect 20/20 vision. So he had to accept me.

C: Oh, good!

T: Yes, he had to take me, whether he wanted....

C: Whether he thought it was a good idea or not. What was attractive about the Navy versus going into the SPARS or the WACS?

T: Well, I knew nothing about the SPARS. And the WACS, you had to be 21, and I didn't want to wait another year. I wanted to go then.

C: Do you remember when you enlisted, what time frame, what date--about?

T: I went up for my physical on July 5th. And we left for Hunter the end of July, probably about the 23rd or the 24th of July. And that was within three weeks.

C: In '43.

T: 'Forty-three.

C: Okay. I wanted to make sure of that. How did you parents feel about your joining the Navy?

T: My father was happy that I was going. My mother never denied us anything that we wanted to do. But I think she prayed all day that I wouldn't pass the physical.

C: Didn't want you to leave.

T: Didn't want me to go, no.

C: Was there any publicity about your joining the Navy?

T: My picture was in the paper. My father cut it out and carried it around with him for years. And then my mother put the star in the window because now she had two children in the service.

C: Yes. That was very popular to do in those days. Well, you were off to Hunter College for basic training.

T: Right.

C: Did you go with a group from Providence?

T: Yes, there were a group of us that went from Providence.

C: On the train.

T: On the train to New York, and there we were like all the rest of them, stretching the neck, marching through Grand Central Station. That was our first time we marched. Because they put us in twos, and we had to follow the leader.

C: Right, right. So you made your way finally to Hunter College. What was your impression of Hunter when you first got there?

T: When we first got there, we went in that armory to have our pictures taken and be given our number, our military number. And I can remember the person saying to us, "You can forget your name, you can forget your date of birth, you can forget everything. But don't ever forget this number." Seven-four-eight-one seven-six-zero [7481760].

C: Oh, wonderful!

T: And I can still remember. I never forgot it.

C: That was really imprinted on your memory.

T: Yes. And when I put my cap on--I had first had my hair cut short, and that was the first time it was short. And when the cap went on, you couldn't even see the hair, that's how short it was. But Hunter was--I didn't mind it. And I said this to my children: I was brought up in an Irish Catholic Democratic home. If you weren't those three, you weren't. And I found out in Hunter, in two days, that there were other people that were just as good as I was. And I learned to get along with other people at that time.

C: Oh, that's great!

T: Yes.

C: Do you remember who your roommates were? Not necessarily by name, but where they were from and....

T: No, but they were-- There were some from California; there were some from New York. There were six of us because we had one of those apartments in there. We had the double-decker bunks. And there could have been more; I don't remember. And I can remember the fire drills in the middle of the night, when we had to get up and go out and put our raincoats and shoes on. They didn't care what else you had on, but you had to have your raincoat and those black shoes.

C: Do you remember any of the classes you took at Hunter and your reaction to them? Did you find them easy, difficult, challenging?

T: I just remember studying the Blue Jackets Manual. We had to study that. And I remember doing math. We had to do a lot of math and a lot of history. And I remember the drills in the gym, where we had to participate, which was something I had very, very little exposure to, any kind of exercise at all at that time.

C: Oh, really.

T: Yes. It wasn't something that we did.

C: No, women didn't do that.

T: Women didn't do that, no. They didn't do that at all. That wasn't one of the things. The marching. The left foot and the right.

C: Did you learn that?

T: No. Got lost a few times when she said to the rear march, and we didn't hear. Because I was always at the end of it because I was so short, that I was always at the end of it.

C: That's funny. Did you adjust easily to the discipline of military life?

T: Yes, I did. Because I had been well disciplined at home.

C: I think so many women of that time frame were.

T: It was just different. And getting paid for it now. But it was just different.

C: You were at Hunter for four weeks according to your--

T: Yes, we were there for a month.

C: It was a shorter time than usual.

T: I think that they had just shortened it up at that time, because a lot of them had been there six weeks, I think they were, before us.

C: Six weeks. Yes. Exactly. So I guess they had shortened the training period. Do you remember if you participated in any extracurricular activities there? Because some gals said there was a singing platoon and the newspaper.

T: I didn't do that at all.

C: Did you like the Navy uniform?

T: Yes, I did. I loved it.

C: Do you remember eating on tin trays and tin plates?

T: Oh, yes. And that was the first time I saw the packaged cereal, where you could pour the milk right into the package. You opened it up and poured the milk right into it.

C: Oh, isn't that interesting!

T: Either that or in Bloomington. But I know it was early on in my Navy days. I didn't think too much of the food, but....

C: Did anything amusing or outstanding happen during those four weeks?

T: Not at Hunter, no. No, it was-- Only the stupid fire drills in the middle of the night when the people in New York would stand outside and watch these women who lined up both sides in the middle of the night, twelve o'clock or one o'clock, in their raincoats and pajamas and those shoes.

C: When you were at Hunter, did you express a preference for the kind of job or rating that you wanted?

T: No, I didn't. I knew that I would probably get into office work, and that was what I wanted. I wanted to go into the field, but I didn't care.

C: Okay. So you didn't request anything.

T: No.

C: But you were assigned and given the rate of a storekeeper.

T: Not then. I was a Seaman 3rd class.

C: When you were--I guess when you graduated, when you finished.

T: When I finished Indiana. Not when I finished Hunter.

C: No, but you were assigned to storekeeper school. That's what I mean.

T: Storekeeper school. Knowing that if I graduated, I would have a rate.

C: Right. You got your rate after you did that.

T: I think we went from apprentice seaman to seaman whatever the next rate was up--second class or third class, apprentice seaman while we were in Hunter. Seaman 3rd class at Bloomington.

C: After you finished Hunter and graduated, did you go directly to Bloomington?

T: Directly to Bloomington.

C: No leave.

T: No time to go home, no.

C: Did you go by train?

T: Yes.

C: And did you go with a contingent of WAVES?

T: Oh, yes, we did. We went with a big contingent of WAVES who were going there.

C: You were carefully chaperoned.

T: Oh, my goodness, yes! We were very well chaperoned.

C: Do you remember anything about the train ride?

T: It was a long train ride. It was the middle of the night. And we went up through Canada, and that amazed me, that we would go up to Buffalo and across Canada and down into Bloomington. But I guess that was the way the trains were sent at that time.

C: Maybe so, yes. Because other people have mentioned that. Well, you were at Bloomington, Indiana, for three months, 12 whole weeks taking typing.

T: That was a long time ago. Not just typing, other subjects.

C: It was a long time.

T: Yes.

C: What was your impression of Bloomington at that time?

T: The campus was beautiful. The people in Bloomington didn't like us.

C: Why not?

T: Because we were--how can I say this? I guess we brought a lifestyle into their community that they didn't want their children to have. I can remember going downtown into Bloomington on a Saturday night. That was the only night we had off. We had to be back by nine. And they would hardly even talk to us. They just ignored us, yes. And that was the first place I ever ran into J.C. Penney store. They had a small store there.

C: Well, the WAVES were well disciplined and well behaved.

T: Yes, we were.

C: So I can't see why these people--

T: Well, you had to know the people in Bloomington.

C: You were serving your country.

T: I mean you think about Larry Bird, the slick clique there that he comes from. That's the way they were.

C: Oh, I see.

T: They were like that.

C: Do you remember what classes you took at storekeeper's school?

T: We took English. We took history. We took almost college courses. We had college teachers who were teaching us.

C: Oh, really!

T: Yes, we did. And that was the first place that I came in contact with the multiple-choice questions and answers. I had never seen them before. And I guess that was when they first started, at that time, because it was easier to mark the papers.

C: Did you learn anything about payroll and dispersing and accounting?

T: I learned-- Yes, we studied it. I don't remember too much about it, but I do remember studying it all.

C: Yes, you would have had to study that as well. Did you have classes all day?

T: All day. We marched to classes, and we marched back from classes.

C: Did you have tests at the end?

T: Oh, yes, we had tests. We had tests every week. I can remember that.

C: So you had homework to do at night.

T: Oh, yes. We had to study.

C: I imagine. Did you live in the dorms there?

T: We lived in the men's dorms. That was a men's school, and we took over their dormitories, all of us. Now, we had a two-room suite, and there were eight of us, four in one room and four in the other. One of the girls came from Walla Walla, Washington. I remember that. Another one came from Yakima, Washington. Another one came from Arkansas. Another one came from Wisconsin. And then I don't remember where the others came from.

C: Oh, so you had a real mix.

T: Yes, yes. Because Hunter at that time was the only boot camp.

C: Right, it was.

T: It was the only boot camp, so they came [from] everywhere there.

C: Exactly. Did you have any time off when you were at the University in Bloomington?

T: Only Saturdays. Saturdays and Sundays we had off. But other than that-- And we were allowed into town.

C: Was there a possibility of dating anyone at that time frame?

T: Not there. Because they were all girls. It was all women. Unless anybody wanted to meet the sailors that were there or the instructors or whatever. But no, we didn't have any opportunity.

C: Were the other students on campus at this time, the men?

T: No. They had taken over the university.

C: Oh, totally taken over; it was closed down. Oh, I see.

T: As far as I know. I never saw any students. There could have been there on some other part, and we might have just had one part. But it was a big university.

C: Yes, I wondered how they worked that. Did anything interesting or outstanding happen during this 12-week period that you can remember?

T: The only funny thing that ever happened-- I can remember we were in gym. And we had this little officer. She was a full lieutenant. And she was as short as me, if not shorter, and she came from Detroit. And we had to bend from the waist without bending our knees. And I told her I couldn't do it. And she'd say, "Seaman Callanan, bend!" Couldn't do it. And finally she came over, and she put one hand on my back and one hand on my stomach, and she said, "Now you will bend." And she held my stomach, and I bent without bending my knees.

C: She gave you help.

T: She gave us some help, right.

C: Oh, boy! Did you have white-glove inspections there?

T: Oh, yes. We also had inspection there--I can remember some of the girls had shoes that the heels, the dress shoes, their heels were a little higher than normal. And they had left them on top of the closet. And they got marked for that because the shoes were out of uniform. They weren't regulation shoes.

C: So you had to have everything in the room had to be regulation.

T: Everything had to be, right. And it had to be perfect the way it was supposed to be.

C: Right, right. Did you pass all the time?

T: Well, yes, I did. I did well on the beds. We had to make those hospital corners--I taught my kids how to make those hospital corners. And when the boys went to summer camp, they used to get a quarter from the other kids for making their beds, because they knew how to make the corners right.

C: Right. Yes, there's a trick to that. Well, when you finished at Bloomington--which was in what month?

T: I finished in November.

C: November of '43 at Bloomington. Where were you assigned?

T: To Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

C: Did you request that?

T: No, you couldn't request anything. You were just sent wherever they wanted you to go.

C: Okay. Did you have some time off?

T: Yes. I had about two weeks because I remember I left home about two days before Thanksgiving to go to Cornell, and I had to report.

C: That's too bad. You're in the Navy now.

T: That was it. You're in the Navy now, right.

C: You can't pick and choose. Did you go to Cornell by yourself?

T: Yes, I did.

C: On a train?

T: On a train. And a bus because the trains went as far as to Binghamton. And then we had to take the bus from Binghamton to Ithaca.

C: Were you happy about this assignment?

T: I had no idea what it was. I'd never heard of--I didn't know anything about the Finger Lakes. Nothing about Ithaca, Cornell. No matter what it was, I didn't know a thing about it. It was all brand new to me. Because in those days you didn't know where other places were.

C: People didn't travel as much.

T: People didn't travel. I knew I had relatives in Syracuse. I had relatives in Oneida and in Syracuse.

C: Oh, that's great!

T: So when I got time off, I went to visit them.

C: That's good. Well, you arrived at Cornell just as winter was beginning. You probably will never forget that.

T: I have never ever forgotten those winters at Cornell. I said to people it started snowing on Columbus Day, and it didn't stop until Easter Sunday. And it was just snow all the time. The snow was taller than me--which wasn't difficult. But it was taller. And the hills.

C: Oh, I see.

T: You had up-and-down hills, and they had a railing on the side of the hill to help you going down the hill. Because it would be very slippery, and lots of times I had to hang onto it.

C: Where did you live at Cornell?

T: We lived in apartments.

C: On the campus?

T: No. There were no barracks for the WAVES. We had our own apartment. There were four of us that lived together. One of the girls was my maid of honor and godmother to my second son. And I'm still friendly with her. She's up in Presque Isle, Maine. And another girl also came from Long Island. And another one came from New Jersey. And then me.

C: Did you meet these people after you came?

T: We went to work. At one time I was living in an apartment across from the fraternity house with two roommates, one from Detroit and one from Independence, Iowa. And we just didn't hit it off. So then I was working with Maureen in the office, and we were looking for a place where the four of us could go. And we got an apartment in Ithaca.

C: Oh, good! Oh, good.

T: Yes. So we shared everything: the cooking, the cleaning, the rent, the whole--and the companionship.

C: Great!

T: It was great.

C: Now, that's good. Now, what were you assigned to do at Cornell?

T: I was assigned in the disbursing office to figure the payroll for the various officers and enlisted men who were there. It was a big unit. There were eight WAVES in the office. And we had V-12 students.

C: What is V-12?

T: V-12 was the enlisted men studying to be officers. When they got through V-12, they went to Officer Candidate School. And the Officer Candidate School, they were the men who were already officers. They had just been taken into the Navy, and they were ensigns, and they had to learn how to be an officer. And then they had the graduate officers, who were already officers, who came up to study engineering at Cornell because it was famous for engineering.

C: Oh, so you had three different groups.

T: Three different groups of men, yes.

C: That you prepared payroll for.

T: And we also were fortunate--or unfortunate--because our principal duty was to relieve the men for active duty. And unfortunately, we got to meet and work with the men we were relieving for active duty. So they worked with us for about--I went there in November, and I think that the men started leaving in March. So we got to meet them and their families. And it was sad when they left, because we knew that we were the reason why they were leaving their families.

C: And how did they feel?

T: I think they felt the same way. When we first got there, they felt we were intruders.

C: Oh, really! That's what I wanted to find out.

T: Yes, yes. Yes, they did. Because they knew why we were there, and they knew that their time had--

C: Was almost up.

T: --on land was almost over.

C: And were they enlisted as well?

T: Yes. They were doing the same work as enlisted men that we were going to do as enlisted women.

C: Right, right. How large was your office? How many WAVES in it?

T: There were eight of us. And an officer, a WAVE officer.

C: Was she your supervisor?

T: Yes, she was our supervisor. And then we had a Lieutenant Waring who was the commanding officer.

C: At the contingent there. Did you work eight hours a day, five days a week?

T: Yes, we did. I think we worked six days a week. We usually did work six days a week, and Sundays were off.

C: So you had one day off. What did you like about this assignment?

T: I liked the people, I liked the office, I liked the place. It was very interesting. It was nice. And I got to meet a lot of nice people.

C: Were you in a building on the campus?

T: Yes, we were. We were in a building--in Sage Hall, was the name of the building, and it was where their offices were, so we were there.

C: Was there anything about the assignment that you didn't like?

T: Except that it was a long way from home--and it was a long way. Because it was such an out-of-the-way place that you couldn't get home very often.

C: Right. It certainly was. Transportation wasn't as easy.

T: Yes. It was in the boondocks.

C: Right. Exactly. Did anything interesting or amusing happen during this time frame?

T: Oh, I'm sure there were a lot of amusing things. I can remember one day one of our girls got all the way to work, and she took her jacket off, and she had forgotten to put her skirt

on. She had her coat and her jacket and her shirt and her tie and her slip. So she had to go back home to get her skirt.

C: Oh, that's interesting. What did you do for recreation on your time off?

T: On the weekends we went into town, we went into Ithaca. And there were places there for us to go. There were a couple of hotels, and there was the USO. And of course there were the Navy men, and we were young--those of us were very young. And we had dances, and we had a good time.

C: Oh, that's good. So you had some recreation.

T: Yes.

C: And did you socialize with other WAVES as well?

T: Only our roommates, yes.

C: Were the ones that you knew.

T: That I knew.

C: Were there many other WAVES there?

T: No, just us.

C: Okay. It was just the eight WAVES.

T: Just the eight WAVES at Cornell.

C: Oh, wow! So you were limited in the people that you knew or met. Did you have any contact with civilians or any reaction from the people of Ithaca?

T: No, no. I think that they were used to the Navy by the time we got there because the V-12 unit had been there for a couple of years.

C: Oh, okay. How long did you stay at Cornell?

T: I was there from November '43 until April of '45.

C: Oh, so you were there for a good year and a half. Did you get any leave during this time frame?

T: Yes, we did. I had weekends when I went to visit my aunts in Syracuse and Oneida. And then I had time off when I came home. I came home a couple of times. As a matter of fact, I was home, just going back to Cornell, when D-Day happened.

C: Oh, June....

T: I was getting off the train in Binghamton. And we went into the station, and they told us that the Army had just invaded Paris--or France. D-Day had happened.

C: Right, in '44.

T: June 6, 1944.

C: Absolutely. That was a big event. Well, you stayed there for a year and a half. And then you told me you were assigned to Hawaii.

T: Yes. You had to volunteer to go to Hawaii.

C: Oh, okay. Why did you volunteer?

T: I just wanted to go someplace else.

C: And it was warm.

T: And it was warm, and it was a long way, and I knew I would get to see the rest of the country, and I'd be on a ship, and I thought, good.

C: That sounds exciting.

T: It was exciting.

C: An adventure.

T: And you had to be recommended.

C: Oh, you did.

T: You couldn't just say I would like to be assigned. I had to go through my commanding officer and request it in writing, why did you want to go? And then he had to recommend me that I could go. They were very careful.

C: Yes. Well, what did you put down as to why you wanted to go?

T: Just that I wanted--I think I probably put that I wanted a change and that I wanted to see some more of the world. And since it was a new field in Hawaii, I just wanted to go. Because we had--Admiral Nimitz didn't want the WAVES over there at all.

C: I didn't know that.

T: No, he wanted no part of them. He wanted them to stay in California. Because Hawaii was out of the States. It was overseas

duty, and he didn't want any WAVES overseas. The WACS had already been overseas. They went over right from the beginning. But the WAVES were not allowed overseas. So he finally allowed them to go. I think it was in the summer of '44 that they were allowed to go.

C: Yes, it was late '44.

T: Late '44. Maybe even nearer to September, I think.

C: That he allowed them, right.

T: So I put my first request in. I put my request in in January of '45. And I was home in Rhode Island when President Roosevelt died.

C: Oh, you were.

T: And that was the time frame that I was in.

C: How did you react to that? I'm just curious.

T: I was with my mother up to the convent to see my sister before I left. And my mother was a--Roosevelt was a saint as far as she was concerned. And we came out of visiting my sister, and one of the nuns was at the door. And she said to my mother, "The

most terrible, terrible thing has happened to this country." And my mother said, "What is that?" And she said, "The president has died." Oh, my mother burst into tears. She really--she was so upset about it. She just couldn't believe that it could happen. Everybody wasn't happy that--wasn't sad--that he died. I had an acquaintance--she was a relative afterwards--but I had a sister-in-law who was delighted that he was dead.

C: Oh, yes, there were some people who were anti-Roosevelt.

T: There were some people. There sure were. There were a lot of those. And so then I left to go to California.

C: How did you get out to California?

T: Train. By train. Troop train.

C: Troop train!

T: Troop train. Oh, yes! That was fun and games.

C: An adventure.

T: That was an adventure, yes.

C: Did you go with other WAVES?

T: I went with other WAVES, yes. But I was all by myself. I didn't know any of them. I was all alone.

C: Were you the only one from Cornell that put in for it?

T: Yes, I was. I had another one put in, but they wouldn't let her go.

C: Oh, they didn't select her.

T: She wasn't-- The doctor--the commanding officer--said that she wouldn't be a good candidate because she wasn't happy at Cornell. She was not happy there. Everything was against her.

C: So you kind of winged out on your own and left your roommates.

T: I did.

C: Well, you were very adventuresome.

T: Hey, what the heck!

C: Right. That's good. So you got out to California. Where did you land?

T: I landed in San Francisco, and I stayed with some girls that I had been in Bloomington with. I had contact with. They had been assigned to San Francisco, to the navy yard there. And I stayed with them because it was about a week in between from the time I landed in California until we left.

C: And you went by ship to Hawaii.

T: Oh, we did indeed. We went by ship.

C: And do you remember what the ship was, and was it a troopship or what?

T: It was a troopship. It was one of the troopships that was built here in Rhode Island by Kaiser Shipyard. He built it, and we went on his troopship. It wasn't the best thing. It wasn't the best trip I ever went on.

C: How were the accommodations?

T: Bad. We had three-tier bunks, and the top bunk was very close to the ceiling, and was not easy to get in and out of. We were going out under the Golden Gate on the afternoon that we left, and they had given us chili con carne for supper.

C: Not a good choice.

T: I'd never liked it anyway. And we went topside to watch California go and the United States. And as we were going under the Golden Gate Bridge, there was another ship coming in. And we looked at it, and the water was rough. And the ship was going like this.

C: Oh, no!

T: And there went my stomach. And for three days I was in bed. Three days over and three days back I was so seasick. I was not a good sailor when it came to the ship.

C: Were there troops on the ship--men that were going out there?

T: I don't think so. I think it was all women.

C: Was it all women?

T: I think it was all women, yes.

C: Do you remember who the commanding officer of the WAVES on that ship was?

T: No, I don't know.

C: No, no. I meant in command of the WAVES. The gal who was in command of the WAVES?

T: No, no. I think it was just whoever, you know.... There were so many of us I don't remember her name.

C: Because I did interview one lady who was an officer who was one of the first to go over with the WAVES to Hawaii.

T: Oh, really?

C: Yes, yes. So I just wondered.

T: She must have been--she was really a pioneer.

C: Captain Love. She went over. Well, you survived that horrendous trip.

T: Oh, I did. I did indeed.

C: And you landed in Hawaii, in Oahu, I assume.

T: Oahu, that's where we were, yes.

C: And where were you assigned?

T: I was assigned to the navy yard, and we had barracks--Navy 128 barracks, and it was Route 128. And we were there. We were right next to the Navy hospital.

C: And that was in Oahu. Was it near Pearl Harbor?

T: It wasn't too far. Because we went by bus to work. We went on a Navy bus every day to work, and they brought us back at night.

C: And you were assigned to the--

T: And we weren't allowed off the base at night. We had to stay there. We were allowed in town on the weekends or whenever you had time off. They worked seven days week, and you had alternate time off. And you could go into town, but you had to be back by six o'clock.

C: Oh, real early!

T: Six o'clock.

C: Well, they were very protective of the WAVES.

T: Oh, yes. I guess that's what Nimitz made, that they had to be.

C: Made that rule to have you back so you wouldn't, you know, encounter any problems.

T: No, no.

C: Were you a disbursing clerk as well at the base?

T: Yes, I was. I was a disbursing clerk.

C: Was your office a large one?

T: It was. It was a very large one. Because we paid all of the Navy people who were at Pearl Harbor, and we paid the ships when they came in. We had to get their pay. I remember Dennis Day came.

C: Oh, really!

T: Yes, he came in to be paid. He was coming back from overseas.

C: Oh, isn't that something! Yes, because some of the stars I'm sure would pass through there because they were in the service. Do you remember how many WAVES worked there?

T: Oh, there was a tremendous amount of WAVES there. And they were all over the island. It wasn't just at Pearl. They were at the Air Station, Barbers Point. And they were at the hospitals, and they were at the commissaries. And we were all over. It was a very large-- WAVES, Spars, and Marines.

C: Yes, I guess so. A big group. Did you make any friends there in Hawaii?

T: Oh, yes. A lot of nice friends.

C: Did you date--have an opportunity to date--any of the sailors there.

T: The only sailor I ever dated was I dated a young man when I was at Cornell. But I never bothered after that.

C: Oh, I see.

T: You had the opportunity, but I never found anybody. Most of the time I worked with women anyway.

C: Yes, you'd have to make a special effort.

T: And we had such a good time in the barracks ourselves, that--
-And then we had a rec center where we had music. And the five
o'clock happy hour was there every day, and we could--

C: Oh, so you were a pretty self-contained unit with your
recreation.

T: Yes, we were. We were a self-contained unit with our
recreation, our movies, and plays, and whatever we wanted was all
there. Bob Crosby used to play for us. At least three times a
month he played. Because he was stationed on the island, and he
would come over and play at Navy 128. And then they would bring
the sailors in from the other places to dance. And we'd go on
picnics with the sailors. We'd go out to the beaches with them.

C: Well, that sounds like fun.

T: We had fun. I was young. I was 22, 23.

C: Oh, sure. At the time.

T: I didn't appreciate it. I said that I didn't appreciate
Hawaii when I was there. All I was thinking was I was so far away
from home after I got there.

C: But you must have liked the climate.

T: Oh, I loved the climate, yes.

C: Because it's easy to take.

T: The only one thing that really happened, my brother had sent me from Paris, he had sent me some Tabu perfume. And I put it in my duffel bag when I was going over there, and it spilt. I could not get that smell out of my uniforms. And I hate it. To this day I can't stand the smell of Tabu. It took me months to get it out of my uniforms. I think I finally got it. Because we had the seersucker uniforms.

C: Oh, yes.

T: That was what we wore in Hawaii, issue seersuckers. And I think I finally bought new uniforms because I couldn't stand the smell. It just wouldn't go away.

C: No matter how much--

T: No matter how many times I washed it and hung it out on the line because they didn't have dryers in those days.

C: Oh no, we didn't.

T: No, no. We had to hang them up.

C: Well, that sounds like an exciting time for you.

T: It was. It was an exciting time.

C: Did you have to do any marching there and drilling?

T: No, no. That was all gone.

C: That was over.

T: That was done.

C: Do you remember anything about your pay?

T: Yes, I got \$50 a month when I went to Hunter; \$62 a month when I was at Indiana; \$78 when I went to Cornell; and \$96 when I went to Hawaii. And then Cornell we got subs and quarters. We got \$3.25 a day, I think, because we had to rent, we had to pay rent and buy our food because there were no barracks. And in Hawaii we got overseas pay. I think it was 10 percent you got for overseas pay.

C: Did you manage to save any of it?

T: Oh, I saved more money when I was over there than--

C: Than you ever have.

T: --I ever have before or since, I think. Yes.

C: Oh, that's great. So you were able to--

T: I didn't have to spend it because everything was so contained.

C: Yes. So that's good. Was there anything that you didn't like about this assignment?

T: I don't think so. I don't think.... I don't think I disliked any bit of my assignment in the Navy. I think I enjoyed every bit of it.

C: Oh, that's good. So that's very positive.

T: Yes, it was a positive experience.

C: Well, you were in Hawaii through--was it February '46?

T: Right.

C: Well, you were there, obviously, on V-J Day in August.

T: We were there for the-- The first one, that wasn't a true V-J Day, a week ahead of time-- V-E Day was in May.

C: Right. V-E Day, yes.

T: V-J Day, they had two. They had the real one, and the week before they had a scuttlebutt that the war had ended. And we got up like two o'clock in the morning, and we paraded all around the barracks with the garbage can covers and the spoons and everything. And then were sent back to bed because it didn't happen.

C: Oh, I see. I never heard that.

T: Yes. That was a week ahead of time. And then the following week the real one came, and then we really celebrated.

C: How did you celebrate? That's what I wanted to know.

T: Oh, we just paraded. And we were allowed off the base. We could go downtown. We had no restrictions. We had to be back by--I think they allowed us to stay 'til ten or eleven that night. But we had to be back in. And then they locked the gates. But we went downtown to celebrate.

C: Well, it must have been uproarious.

T: Oh, it was. It was wonderful. It was really-- Oh, it was just the greatest thing you ever saw, because everybody was so happy. And then next day we started talking about points, when we were going home. And then a couple of weeks later, there were three of us girls who were very friendly. And you could now go off base for time off. So we got a week, and we went on a vacation. We went to Waikiki, which is now the Waikiki--Hawaiian Waikiki. But then it was the Hawaiian Village. And they had a big dining area where everybody ate their meals together. Then we lived in little cabins, the three of us together. They used to rent those out. And they had a coconut tree in the front, and we all climbed up and had our pictures taken. My kids used to think that was great. And then we would go swimming at midnight. We'd come back, and we'd go swimming at midnight, skinny-dipping. And we rode the bicycles, and we went all over Hawaii. We went all over Oahu at that time, the three of us, with no restrictions. And we could wear civilian clothes. We didn't have to wear our uniforms.

C: Oh, that was a nice break.

T: It was. It was a good break.

C: Great. So that was your week off after.

T: Yes. But then after that the girls started leaving. The ones who had been in the service longer and had been over there longer, they got enough points to go home. Disbursing clerks were frozen. We weren't allowed to go home. Because we had to pay--we had to make sure that the men got home.

C: And all the ships were coming in there.

T: All the ships were coming in from the Pacific, yes. And they were getting paid. We were busy.

C: I'm sure you were.

T: And then finally it started to die down in January and February, and they told us that we would be--in January they told us we'd be going home soon.

C: Oh, that's great. Did you ever have a chance to see Admiral Nimitz when you were over there?

T: No.

C: He was far removed from your end of it.

T: Yes.

C: The man that objected to having the WAVES. During your service in the Navy, did you ever write your parents or friends regarding your WAVES experiences?

T: No. I'm sure I wrote to my mother. But I think she was about the only one. And then I had one friend who came up to Albany to visit me when I was there, when I got a weekend off, and I went up to Albany. And she came from Pawtucket, and we visited. But if I wrote to them, I'm sure the letters have long been destroyed.

C: Yes. I wondered because if you have any letters to your mother, that would have been very interesting.

T: Yes. She probably kept them. But I don't know what she did with them. She didn't give them to me anyway after I got married.

C: Well, you must have been thrilled when it was time to go home.

T: I was. I was.

C: What was the highest rate that you achieved?

T: Second class storekeeper. And I was going to be promoted to first class the first of May. The first of May I was going to-- my rate was going to be advanced to first class storekeeper.

C: Oh, but you got out?

T: I got out instead.

C: In February. Uh huh. Well, were you sad to leave Hawaii?

T: In a way. I've been back three times.

C: Oh, you have.

T: Yes, I've been back three times. Yes. And I'd go back again tomorrow.

C: It's a lovely place.

T: It's a lovely place.

C: But it's changed so much.

T: Oh, yes. The first time I went back was 1973. And when we were there, there were only three hotels: the Moana, the Royal Hawaiian, and another one. And I dropped my bags. There was a

group from the hospital, and we had a tour. And I dropped my bags, and they said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going out on the beach." "What are you going out on the beach for?" I said, "I've got to see how much this place has changed." And when I walked out on that beach and looked, I could not believe it. I couldn't believe that they could do such a thing to such a beautiful place.

C: Right.

T: And every time I've gone back, it's been worse, you know.

C: It's very crowded with hotels.

T: They had a church--we used to go to the church, a Franciscan missionary church, that was a beautiful little place. And when you were in church, when you looked out the door, you could look right out on the water. So I said to the girls, I said, "Well, I know where we're going to church on Sunday. There's a chapel down here." And we started walking because I knew it looked out on the water. And I couldn't find it. Then finally I saw a sign that said, "Franciscan Chapel." So we went into church. And in front of it was a souvenir stand. So Sunday morning, when I was talking to the priest on Sunday morning, I said, "Father, why is that stand in front of the church?" He said, "Because we did not know that we didn't own the land to the street. We thought we had the

full ownership." And he said, "They found out that we didn't, and they put a souvenir stand in front of the church." That's the way it is in Hawaii today.

C: Yes, it's very touristy. It's very touristy. Well, did you take a ship back?

T: Oh, yes. I came back on a hospital ship.

C: Oh, which one?

T: I think it was the Hope, U.S.S. Hope.

C: Because the Solace was out there, too.

T: And my brother-- At the time my second oldest brother was assigned to Hawaii. He was on a ship. And they had docked in Pearl Harbor for a while. So he got permission to come to see me. And he came the day I was leaving. He was there in time to wave me out on the ship. So I saw him for a few minutes, and I had to go.

C: You were just about leaving Pearl Harbor. How was the trip going back to San Francisco?

T: I was seasick again for three days.

C: So it wasn't the best trip.

T: No.

C: When you got to San Francisco, where were you sent?

T: We were sent to I think Coronado. And then we were sent by train to Brooklyn Navy Yard for discharge. And I spent about a week in New York before I was discharged.

C: Do you remember anything about the discharge process, or what happened?

T: The only one thing I do remember is that you had to make sure the spelling of your name was correct, and the WAVE officer asked me if I was sure I was spelling my name correctly because my maiden name is a different Callanan spelling. They usually have an H in it. And I told her I'd been spelling it that way for 23 years, so I guessed I knew what I was doing.

C: Well, you could answer, I guess, in that fashion.

T: I was because I was leaving.

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

T: In a way I was happy because I had the rest of my life to look forward to. But I was sad. I made a lot of nice friends in the Navy.

C: Would you say it was a good and positive experience?

T: Absolutely. It was a positive experience.

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

T: Yes, I did. We had it.

C: Did you feel that it was a smoothly-run organization?

T: Yes, I did. Captain McAfee did a wonderful job running that organization.

C: And Joy Hancock--?

T: And Joy Hancock was our commanding officer in Hawaii. I met her in Hawaii. And I met Captain McAfee at several WAVE reunions that I went to.

C: They were extraordinary women.

T: Yes. For their time. Like I said, I went in a year after they started, and I was in Hunter at the first birthday, and I saw Eleanor Roosevelt. We weren't allowed to march because we had just gotten there. We weren't even in uniform yet. But I can remember the WAVES marching in that field in Hunter, and it was an awesome sight. And she was an awesome woman in her day.

C: Yes, she certainly was an awesome lady at that time. Did the WAVES--in your experience in the WAVES--did you ever encounter any sexual harassment?

T: No, none at all. We just talked about that recently where I'm working now. And I said that we weren't-- I never, never-- I didn't know what sexual harassment meant. And I said I think it was because the men respected us, and we respected them. And we didn't expect to be treated equally. There was a man's position in life, and a woman's position in life, and they weren't the same.

C: It was a different world then.

T: Not necessarily was it correct, but it was a different world.

C: It was. It was a different time and a different place. Did you ever know of anyone who was discharged from the WAVES for disciplinary reasons or for any infraction of any sort?

T: Yes. When I was at Cornell, one of the girls got pregnant, and she was discharged immediately. She was sent home.

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

T: Oh, I think it changed and redirected my whole life. It just made me more organized, more disciplined, and able to handle a lot of things. Because I had to learn to handle myself.

C: Well, that's good. Did you have any career ambitions as a result of your storekeeper experience?

T: No. When I got out of the Navy, I was married. My husband had just been discharged from the service in December. He met me at the station when I came home. We became engaged a week later. We were married in September of that year. And we just celebrated our 50th anniversary last week--I mean last September.

C: Oh, that's great! Did you work at all after you came home from the service?

T: Oh, yes. I worked-- I went right to work right away. And then when I had my first son, I stayed home for eight years. And then when our youngest child was born, I went to work at Rhode Island Hospital, part time for about six years until he went to kindergarten, and then I went on full time. Stayed there 38 years and wound up as a supervisor for 22 people. Still working there two days a week, 14 hours a week.

C: Oh, that's great! How many children did you have?

T: We had five. Five children, seven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

C: Wow! Did you ever talk to your children about your WAVE experiences?

T: They didn't want to hear it.

C: Did you ever encourage them to join the Navy?

T: I wanted my daughters to join. I thought it would've been good for them to get out of Rhode Island like I did. But they weren't interested. One son joined the Navy; our youngest son went in the Navy. He served on the Intrepid.

C: But not career?

T: Oh, Lord, no!

C: So you settled in Providence after the war and have remained in this area ever since.

T: Right.

C: Did you join any WAVE organizations?

T: I joined the Ocean State about a year or two after it started.

C: And are you active in that group?

T: Not really. I'm very active in another organization, and I just can't do the two of them.

C: What is the name of that other organization?

T: It's the Emblem Club. It's connected with the Elks.

C: And you've said you've been very active in that.

T: Very active in that.

C: Which was great. Did you feel that what women were expected to do and to be changed when the war was over? Or was it back to the old home and hearth?

T: I thought that it would. I knew a lot of them would go home to the home and hearth. But the group of girls that graduated with me from St. Xavier's, most of us waited for the war to be over before we were married. And we went to a reunion, our 50th reunion, and I think that our group of girls had more children than any other group of girls ever did because--I guess we made up for lost time. And most of the marriages stuck. There was one or two that were not happy marriages, but most of them all stayed. And the group of women that were married the same time that I was married, in '46, not one of them were divorced. They're still all married to the same person.

C: Well, again, I think that was the trend of the times.

T: It was, yes.

C: And divorce was frowned upon. So do you have any other comments to make on your WAVES experience?

T: No. As I said, it was a wonderful experience. It broadened my life. I changed my life from a very sheltered child to a woman

who knew she could handle anything. And I have handled it. Sometimes not the greatest, but I've tried, you know.

C: Well, that's great. Well, thank you so much for your reminiscences.

T: Oh, you're welcome.

C: We will have these transcribed.

T: Okay.

C: Then we'll edit them and send you a copy for editing. And then give you a final transcript. Thank you so much, Rita.

T: You're entirely welcome.

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