

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, R.I.**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**HISTORY OF THE WAVES**

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OF THE  
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**No. 54**

**E. JANE POTTER**

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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE**

**1997**

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND  
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Interviewee: E. Jane Potter

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: June 18, 1997

C: This is the first oral history interview with Commander E. Jane Potter who served in the WAVES in World War II and then continued as a member of the Navy for a total of twenty-one years. Today's date is June 18, 1997. The interview is being conducted in my office in Mahan Hall at the Naval War College. Commander Potter, I am so pleased that you were able to come in today to share your memories of your very wonderful naval career with us.

P: Why, thank you; it's a privilege to be here.

C: I'm going to begin by asking you where and when you were born.

P: I was born in Beaver, Pennsylvania, on October the 23rd, 1913.

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

P: My father was in the glass business. The Phoenix Glass Company made electric light shades and things like that.

C: Did your mother work or did she stay at home ?

P: No, she stayed at home.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters ?

P: I had one brother.

C: Did you spend your growing up years in Beaver, Pennsylvania ?

P: Yes, I did.

C: Did you graduate from high school there ?

P: Yes, from Beaver High School.

C: Then did you go on to college ?

P: Yes, I went to Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, which was very near there. I wanted to go to Ohio State, but I was only fifteen and my mother didn't want me to go away, so I went to a local college.

C: You were very young when you graduated. You must have skipped grades.

P: I did.

C: They did that in those days. So you were fifteen when you entered college. What did you major in ?

P: I majored in English and in Social Studies, and then for my graduate work, at Boston University later on, I majored in

International Relations.

C: Did you go to Boston University right after college ?

P: No, I went later on, while I was in Newport as a matter of fact.

C: Oh, I see, when you were in the Navy. What did you do when you graduated, I assume, at the tender age of nineteen ?

P: Well, I worked for the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company in their personnel department.

C: In Pittsburgh ?

P: It was in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, which is near Pittsburgh. Almost all of that area is almost a suburb of Pittsburgh. It's all one town after another.

C: Did you like that kind of work ?

P: Yes, I enjoyed it. I interviewed applicants and assigned them to jobs. I thoroughly enjoyed my work.

C: So you must have worked there from about 1932.

P: 1934.

C: 1934, until when ? Did you stay there for a long time ?

P: I stayed there until I went into the Navy in 1943.

C: So you were there a good nine years.

P: Yes.

C: That was your only job. Did your family have any Navy collections at all ?

P: I understand that way back Secretary Knox was related, but I don't know the connection. It was too far out for me to be particularly interested in.

C: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked, and do you remember what your reaction was to it ?

P: Not particularly. I don't remember where I was. We were all stunned, of course. It was one of the very interesting experiences I had, this is digressing a little bit, but when I retired, I went around the world, but when I got to Hawaii, I took a little tour around the ARIZONA and that tour that they had, and this young sailor was telling me what had happened and what not, and it was all I could do to restrain myself from saying well, I was almost there, but it brought it all back to me.

C: Yes, it certainly would. After Pearl Harbor was attacked did any of your friends or relatives join the service, the armed forces ?

P: My brother worked for the Army, but I don't think he was ever in uniform, but he left his civilian job and went with the Army,

and I had an uncle who was in the service, and I had another uncle, my mother was the oldest of nine children, there were seven boys and two girls, and my youngest uncle was in the Navy. He was a dental surgeon in the Dental Corps.

C: So you had some relatives in the service after that. How did you hear about the WAVES ?

P: Oh, I don't remember particularly.

C: What was attractive about the Navy versus the other services ?

P: Well, I think for one thing, it was smaller, and a little more selective.

C: When and why did you decide to join the navy ? When did you make that decision and how did you come to it ?

P: Well, I decided early in 1943, and I came in in April and was commissioned in May 43. I don't remember why I decided to do that; it just seemed a nice patriotic thing to do.

C: Well, patriotism was a main reason for many people to join.

P: Oh, at that time I think patriotism was an quite an important thing in our lives.

C: It certainly was, and everyone was pulling together. Did you enlist in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania ?

P: Yes.

C: Did you have to take any tests or examinations before you got in ?

P: I don't remember. I know we had to take a physical test before we got in.

C: Any intelligence tests or aptitude tests of that sort? How did your parents feel about your decision to join the Navy ?

P: They were very much in favor. They thought it was great.

C: After you joined and were sworn in, you had to go to basic training at the U.S. Naval Midshipmen's school in Northampton, Massachusetts. Did you travel by train on your own to get there ?

P: Yes.

C: When you got to Smith College, do you remember what time of year it was ?

P: It was in April.

C: April of '43. Do you remember anything about the training you underwent there ? The kinds of classes you took and your reaction to them.

P: Not particularly. I remember we all marched around in formation when we went from one place to the other. I believe it was Captain Underwood who was in charge of the school and there was one amusing incident if I can just recall it. Well, of course



we were exhausted at the end of the day , and when we had time to go to bed, most people got ready and put on their night clothes and that sort of thing. And Captain Underwood put out a call for us to muster. There was going to be a lecture or something we were supposed to go to, so everyone arrived- hair up in pin curls, and pajamas rolled up underneath their skirts and so forth, because they didn't know why they were mustering. They thought it was just some temporary thing and they didn't know they were going to a lecture.

C: Kind of late in the day.

P: Well, it was, a surprise to everybody, so we were quite a strange looking group that night, but it was a very good time. We made friends and we enjoyed it. As I said, we were tired, but we felt that we were accomplishing something too.

C: They did keep you busy every moment of the day.

P: They certainly did.

C: Did you like the marching and the drilling ?

P: Yes, I didn't object to it.

C: Did you adjust easily to the discipline of military life at Midshipmen's School ?

P: Yes, I didn't have any problems with that.

C: Do you remember where you were domiciled? Where you lived during that time frame ? Were you in the Northampton Hotel ?

P: No, I was in a dorm and I don't remember the name of it.

C: Oh, so you were in a dorm. I know some of the women lived in the Northampton Hotel.

P: Yes, I know, they lived in the hotels.

C: Did you ever have a chance to see or to meet Mildred McAfee ?

P: Oh yes, I met her here in Newport, when I was assigned here. That was my first duty station. I was at the station here. I was in charge of the Navy Relief program, because I had been doing welfare work in my civilian life for awhile, so Mildred McAfee came, and I was the senior woman, so I had the job of meeting her and escorting her around. I got to know her a little bit; she was a charming person-- very, very charming.

C: A fine representative to lead the WAVES.

P: Yes, she certainly was.

C: That was quite an important assignment for you, to meet the Director and to escort her around.

P: Yes, it certainly was.

C: Did you have any input into where you wanted to be assigned after you finished your eight weeks training at Northampton ?

P: No, not really. Of course at that time I didn't really know the different stations or what was available, anything like that, In those days, you didn't question it. If you were assigned somewhere, you went.

C: Right. But obviously they took into account your background, the work you had done, your volunteer work, and put you, as you said, as head of the Navy Relief Program. So you were sent to Newport, Rhode Island in 1943, and can you tell us a little bit about what you did for Navy Relief. What exactly was your assignment ?

P: I administered the whole program. I was in charge of it. We made loans to sailors who needed it for one thing or another; they had hospital bills or something of that sort and did a little investigating to see what was correct and what wasn't, and to follow the rules of the organization. To help people who needed help financially. That was basically it.

C: Where were you working ? Do you remember where it was on the base ? Was it near here ?

P: Yes, it was near here. As a matter of fact, it was just about where Sims Hall is now, but it was, at that time, a barracks, and a training station.

C: Ok, so you were in the barracks.

P: That's right. I had an office near the chaplain's office.

C: How many people did you have working for you ? Was it large ?

P: I think there were three or four of us.

C: Were they WAVES ?

P: No, they were enlisted and civilians.

C: Did you have a lot of cases to deal with ?

P: Oh, I don't know what you mean by cases.

C: I mean a lot of people applying for loans or financial assistance.

P: Oh, yes. We were busy, because there were a lot of enlisted people here particularly; the officers didn't need so much help because they had more income and all that, but we had a good size base, so there were a lot of emergencies coming up of some kind or another.

C: Oh, that's interesting. Where did you physically live in Newport ?

P: I lived on Rhode Island Avenue. The CO of the base was very concerned about young women coming under his command and wanted to make sure we had good places to live, and he had a friend who lived on Rhode Island Avenue and he had a house over there. She wanted to rent out some rooms, so he introduced me to her and I rented a room from her.

C: Oh, that's good, because I know you had to live on the economy. They had barracks here for the enlisted WAVES, but the officers had to live on the economy. What was your rank at that point ?

P: I started out as an ensign.

C: So you were an ensign at that point in time. What did you like about this assignment in Newport ?

P: Well, I fell in love with Newport for one thing.

C: Why ?

P: For some reason, I have a great love for the water and the ships and boats and I don't know why I acquired it, because I always faced the water. Where I lived we could always see the Ohio River, but that's quite different. It was interesting, and I thought I was doing something worthwhile. I think that was important.

C: Oh, absolutely. Was there anything you disliked about the assignment ?

P: I can't think of anything in particular.

C: While you were here, did you socialize with other WAVES ?

P: Oh, yes. There weren't very many here. There were, I think, only about six WAVE officers. There were some at the base in communications, and, of course, they worked shifts, so I didn't

get to see them as much as I would have people who worked day times as I did.

C: Did you work five days a week ?

P: We worked six days a week in those days.

C: Ok, so you worked on Saturdays as well, so you had one day off. Do you remember what Newport offered the service men and women during W.W. II? What kind of recreation was on the base, or off ?

P: I don't remember particularly anything. Everyone was really nice to you. Of course, I didn't require very much. It wasn't like the enlisted. They had a YMCA, I think, for the enlisted people. They were really good to the Navy people.

C: How did the townspeople react to the Navy ? Did you ever see any semblance of hostility from them ?

P: No, never. They were always very very nice. I had a little advantage I have to admit, because Potter was an old Newport name. There had been a Bishop Potter at one time, and when my family came to this country in 1637, they had landed in New England. There were a couple of brothers, and one of them came this way and another worked his way gradually down to New Jersey and western Pennsylvania, and so forth throughout the generations. So it was a good old Newport name. That didn't hurt any.

C: Right. Did you ever have any contact with people at the Naval War College at this time frame, Admiral Kalbfus, or anyone ?

P: Well, I knew them. There were so few WAVE officers here that we all had lots of contacts. I remember one of my big embarrassments was that I'd meet these captains at the War College particularly, because that was where most of the senior officers were, and they'd remember me by name, and I couldn't remember their names, and I was embarrassed about that. Of course, I realized I was the only WAVE officer they knew, and I knew lots of them.

C: Did you ever feel isolated because of the few WAVE officers on base?

P: No.

C: Did you spend the war years in Newport ?

P: Yes, I did.

C: Do you remember VJ Day and how you celebrated that in August 1945 ?

P: Vaguely, but not to the point where I could describe it. We were all just thrilled, of course. I remember going somewhere with a friend, and I can't remember his name or what we did, but we were all just really thrilled to think that it might be over.

C: Right. I guess the town really celebrated, all of Newport.

P: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed.

C: After VJ Day did you continue in the service in Newport for awhile ?

P: For awhile, then I was transferred to Washington.

C: Did you express any desire to return to civilian life after the war's end ?

P: No, I loved the navy. I enjoyed it, so I had no desire to leave it.

C: Do you remember what time frame you were transferred to Washington ?

P: I don't remember.

C: Around 1946 maybe ?

P: Well, probably, 1946 or 1947.

C: So you spent a good deal of time in Newport ?

P: Yes, I did.

C: A good part of your early career. When you were sent to Washington, what was your assignment there ? Did you continue with what you had done ?

P: I was in the Bureau of Naval Personnel, in the Plans and Policy Department, and found that very interesting and enjoyed



it tremendously.

C: What type of work did you do there ? Was it assigning people ?

P: No. It was general policy, working with various things that would come up. It could be a question on uniforms, or a question on assignments, but it was more a general policy than any specific assignments.

C: So back into personnel work. That was something you had done in your civilian life as well. So you managed to stay in the service despite the provision that the WAVES were to be in the service for the duration of the war and six months. You were fortunate to get extended.

P: Yes, a lot of people wanted to and weren't allowed to.

C: Right, most of them had to leave. But I guess if your services were needed desperately at that time, then you stayed, which was good. Getting back to the war years just a little bit, did you write any letters home about your war time assignments and your reaction to the WAVES and your life, in general, in Newport ?

P: Of course I wrote letters home, but I don't remember much about them.

C: Were any of those saved ? Do you have any of those ?

P: No.

C: Did you feel that during the war the WAVES had a strong sense

of esprit de corps ?

P: Yes, I think they did, at least the ones here that I knew did.

C: Did you think that the operation was smoothly run ?

P: Oh, yes, I thought it was very well run.

C: For being organized so quickly and under duress. Do you remember if anybody you knew, enlisted or officer, was discharged for disciplinary reasons, or any other reason ?

P: I didn't know any that were.

C: Nobody that you happened to know. Did you maintain any service friendships when the war was over ?

P: Oh, yes. My very close friends were Winifred Love and Dorothy Council. Dorothy Council died this winter. You may have interviewed her.

C: I did.

P: They were my closest friends. The three of us were friends for over fifty years at least.

C: Now, did you meet them here ? On this assignment in Newport ?

P: Well, not at first, but I did later on.

C: Later on in your career ?

P: Later on in my tour in Newport. And I was the first of the three of us to be assigned to Newport.

C: Did you receive any medals for your service during war time ?

P: I had four medals, but I don't remember what they were for.

C: Were you promoted at all during the war ?

P: Oh, yes, we had promotions based on the length of service really, and I suppose you had to be satisfactory. I don't recall. But it was more or less just for awhile there; it happened just as a matter of time, then later on promotions were a different story. They were very slow, as it is now. I think I told you earlier we had age units, according to rank in those days, and promotions were so slow that before I came into the zone for promotion, I had reached the age limit, so then I had to retire. I retired involuntarily. I didn't want to retire, but I had to.

C: Yes, because of that restriction.

P: Which has since been lifted as I understand.

C: Yes, they don't do that anymore. Did you feel that the experience of the WAVES in the war changed or redirected your life ?

P: Oh, yes, indeed.

C: How did it do that ?

P: Well, I grew up in a small town with very little opportunity for women as far as a career is concerned, so coming in the Navy and being given assignments that were challenging was a whole new experience. One of the great lessons that I learned was that I could do anything that I wanted to do.

C: And you had the capacity to learn obviously.

P: Oh, I hope so. I hope I am still learning.

C: Right, facing new challenges and new opportunities, which is great. You stayed in the navy a good twenty years from 1943 to 1963, when you said you had to retire. We mentioned your job in Washington, your first assignment after Newport in personnel, and I'd like to continue on talking about your other assignments and how you felt about them, and what you did. Do you remember how long you stayed in Washington ?

P: I don't know, but I imagine it was about three years. And then I was assigned to Europe.

C: Where did you go ?

P: I went to London and also to Germany. I was in intelligence in London, on the staff there, and it was very interesting. I enjoyed that very much.

C: Do you remember what kind of work you were doing ? Were you

reviewing messages, or reading documents ?

P: Well, a little bit of everything. Anything that came up, the intelligence staff got involved with.

C: This was kind of unique for a woman to be assigned to Europe at that point in time.

P: Yes, it was.

C: Do you remember who it was you worked for ? Was Admiral Conolly there then ?

P: No, he wasn't there then.

C: You were on a U.S. Admiral's staff obviously.

P: Yes, I'm terrible with names at this point.

C: In the post war period, I believe Hewitt, no Conolly was there in the late 40s. Anyway, that doesn't really matter. What did you like about this assignment ?

P: Well, I liked being on the staff. It was a small staff in comparison to a large base staff. I enjoyed meeting the people there, and made some friends among the English and, of course, I have always enjoyed travel and seeing another country, and seeing it from the eyes of a resident. You know you go into a grocery store and things were a little different than they were at home. So you learned a lot more about a country than if you were just traveling through for a day or two.

C: Right. Did you live in London ?

P: I lived in London, St. John's Wood. And I had a flat there, which I enjoyed very much.

C: Were there any other WAVES that you worked with ? Were there any other women there ?

P: Well, there were a couple of us there, not very many. I think about three, a very small group.

C: Yes, a very small group, so you got to know them. Did you have opportunities to travel on this job ?

P: Oh, yes. At every opportunity, I travelled. Everytime I had a little leave, I went somewhere, and I saw a lot of Europe, the British Isles, of course. I really took every opportunity to go somewhere.

C: That's great. It sounds like a plum assignment.

P: Oh, it was.

C: Very interesting. Then you mentioned you went to Germany.

P: That's right.

C: Was that right after London ?

P: They set up the joint staff and all of us were asked if we wanted to transfer to the joint staff, so I signed up for it

because I thought, well, I'll see a different country and have a different position and learn a little bit more.

C: Oh, that's fantastic. Where was the joint staff located in Germany ?

P: It wasn't Frankfurt, but it was near there.

C: Oh, ok.

P: It was between Frankfurt and...

C: That's ok. Did you stay there for a couple of years as well ?

P: Yes.

C: So you were on the joint staff at that point. What type of work were you doing there ?

P: For awhile I was in Logistics and worked in that department. As I said I was in intelligence in England, so I started out in intelligence in Germany as well.

C: Were there many other women there ?

P: No, we were very few.

C: Yes, but there were a couple of other Navy women there ?

P: Yes.

C: That's good, because it could be isolating.

P: That's right.

C: If you were the only women there. How were you treated by the male officers ?

P: Very, Very nicely. With great respect. We had a few problems, but we took care of it. They weren't serious. But most of them were very respectful and very cooperative. They helped in any way they could.

C: So you felt that you were treated fairly ?

P: Oh, yes. I never had any problems.

C: Yes, and as a professional. Well, times were different then, weren't they ?

P: Yes, they were. For the better.

C: Did you have any opportunity to travel on the continent ?

P: Some, yes. I took every opportunity I could, and I was very fortunate that I had my car over there, so it was much easier to get around than if I hadn't.

C: Yes, because language could be a problem over there, if you didn't know German.

P: Well, it's amazing. I've never studied any German. I studied French and Spanish in college, but German is so much like English, I was really surprised. There are so many words that we



have that are derived from the German.

C: So did you pick any of that up while you were there ?

P: Oh, yes, a lot of it.

C: Did you have to live on your own there as well ?

P: Yes.

C: In the town ? In an apartment ?

P: Yes.

C: So you had to deal with the local people.

P: Yes.

C: Did you enjoy this assignment ?

P: Oh, very much, yes.

C: It was positive. After your European tours, where were you assigned next ?

P: I don't remember whether I had a tour in Washington again before I came to Newport to the War College.

C: You came to Newport in 1958-1959 as a student at the Naval War College. If you were assigned to Washington before that, do you remember where you were working and what you were doing ?

P: Well, I had a tour in the office of the Chief of Naval

Operations, and I was one of the three senior women working for the Chief of Naval Operations.

C: In any special area ?

P: Nothing particular, just in the planning area. It was very interesting, because we knew what was going on, and what we were trying to hit and so forth, and that was interesting.

C: That sounds fascinating. Another plum assignment.

P: Oh, it was. I have been very fortunate with all my assignments. I really had some fine ones.

C: You were in a well placed situation.

P: Yes.

C: Do you remember who the CNO was that you worked for ?

P: No, I don't.

C: That sounds challenging. Was it six days a week again ?

P: I don't remember when we got back to a five day week. It was certainly long after the war.

C: Was this a high pressure assignment with the CNO ? Did you feel as if you were pressured and stressed ?

P: Oh, yes, to an extent. Not so much that it bothered me, but to a certain extent, yes, we worked long hours. I was

always at work a little after seven in the morning and we were supposed to be there by eight, but I found you can get so much done before everyone gets in and the phone starts ringing, and then I didn't leave at 4:30, the way you were supposedly doing.

C: Yes, so it was a long day.

P: Yes, it was, but it was an interesting day, and it was better to be busy than not to be busy.

C: Oh, absolutely. Did you meet any highly placed individuals during this time frame that stood out, anyone that you remember Navy-wise or politically ?

P: I met many admirals, but I don't remember any that stood out. None more than others, and I knew the Secretary of the Navy. I didn't know him well, of course, but I met him. I had a lot of opportunity to meet a lot of people.

C: Any politicians ?

P: Some, but I don't particularly remember any. I met Senator Vinson. He was from Georgia, Senator Vinson. He was quite a character. I met quite a few. I was invited to the White House.

C: On what occasion ?

P: Just a reception, but I was invited a couple of times.

C: That must have been under Eisenhower.

P: Yes, which was very interesting. I met a lot of nice contacts.

C: So you must have met the Eisenhowers in passing.

P: I did.

C: Well, that's great. You did have a lot of opportunities because of that position.

P: And I met the Trumans. The one person, I shouldn't say this, but the one person that did not impress me was Bess Truman. I like a good handshake, and she just kinda of, like that, you know. I don't think she enjoyed being first lady, the social side of it. There is so much of it. It would be hard for anybody.

C: That's true.

P: But President Truman was a different type of person, very outgoing. Most of those people were.

C: Yes, if you're a politician, you'd have to be, I guess.

P: You'd have to be.

C: It sounds like a very interesting time frame for you.

P: Oh, it was.

C: A fascinating job, excellent assignment. Did you go to the War College directly after this Washington assignment ?

P: I think so. As I recall, I did.

C: Now you entered the college in September 1958 and graduated in 1959. What was the distinction about your being there ?

P: Well, it took the Secretary of the Navy saying, "yes, she is going to go."

C: Why is that?

P: Well, a lot of people were against it. A lot of the senior admirals thought a woman didn't need to go to the War College. And it got to Mr. Gates who was the Secretary of the Navy then, and he said "I think it's a fine idea. Of course, she is going to go." And I got here and I spent a year. Before the year was up, Admiral Ingersoll said to me, he was sitting behind me in the auditorium, he said, "Jane, I didn't want you to come. I didn't think it was right for a woman to come to the War College, but I have changed my mind and I am going to ask for some more women." So I thought that was a terrific compliment.

C: Oh, it was. You were a path breaker in that sense. You were the only woman.

P: Yes, I was the only one, the first women to attend.

C: Were you in the junior class ?

P: No, I was in the senior class, because the junior class was more ship tactics and that sort of thing, and they felt more of the strategy and planning would be of more use to me for the rest of my career. So I was in the senior class even though I wasn't

senior.

C: Oh, that's interesting. I wonder whose idea it was to send you to the War College ?

P: It was mine.

C: Oh, was it ?

P: Yes.

C: So you put in a...

P: I put in a request, and the detail officer said, "that's a good idea," and it gradually worked it's way up, and people were against it, saying, "no, that's not appropriate", but it got to the Secretary of the Navy and he said yes.

C: That's interesting. Why did you want to go to the War College?

P: Well, I thought the courses would be very interesting, and I thought that I could learn a lot, so I wanted to go, and I was always interested in planning and strategy, that type of thing, so I thought I'd like to do that.

C: Had you known people who had gone to the War College and talked to them about it prior to this ?

P: Oh, yes.

C: Well, that was quite unique almost forty years ago.

P: It's getting around there.

C: So that was quite a distinction. Did you find the course work challenging ?

P: Oh, very; it was a very busy course. There was a lot of reading, and a lot of work to do. It was very interesting work, and everyone was so nice and so helpful.

C: How were you treated by the fellow students ? Were you accepted ?

P: Oh, yes. Nobody seemed to have any problem whatsoever. The faculty was very nice to me, and I remember one of the funny incidents. I had a desk in a room with Captain Jack Eddy, a nice Captain, nice person, and his wife invited me to a cocktail party one time, and she introduced me as Jack's roommate. Well, I hadn't heard the expression used in that connection at the War College, so I was a little startled, but I soon found out that that was what they called each other.

C: Oh, I see.

P: Because I just shared the office with him. They were so nice, a great couple, and he was most helpful.

C: Oh, that's great. So it was a good year.

P: Oh, it was a splendid year, marvelous year. And the librarian was very helpful. I can't think of her name.

C: Mrs. Heffernan, I think it might have been.

P: No, she lived down in Middletown, and she was librarian for many, many years.

C: Ms. Carey ?

P: Well, I knew her, but she wasn't the senior.

C: No, she wasn't. But anyway the War College was much smaller at that time frame.

P: Oh, yes. I've been very interested in the changes and the growth of the War College since I was here, and I think it's marvelous.

C: Yes, we have expanded the number of buildings and the number of students.

P: Oh, yes, indeed.

C: But at that time frame, they had just started the Naval Command College Foreign class, so you had that component as well.

P: I used to eat my lunch down here at the Bachelor Officers quarters, and that's where the foreign officers stayed, so I met many of them at lunch. They were all very nice, and I tried to be friendly since they were all guests in my country. So I got to know them, and they all said if you are ever in my country, please get in touch. When I took my trip around the world, I



looked some of them up, and I had some very interesting experiences, particularly in Japan. I was nice to the Captain. You could tell he felt a little out of place in view of World War II. So I got in touch with him, and at that point he was what would be the equivalent of the Chief of Naval Operations of the Japanese Navy, and he introduced me to his family, and we had several get togethers and he arranged a trip to the Emperor's Gardens for me, which is quite a privilege, as the gardens are usually open one day a year. I said to Mrs. Itaya this is quite an honor for me. It's a great honor for me, too, she replied, "I've never been able to come either until now." So I had a great time, and everywhere I went they were so nice.

C: You were very lucky to have the opportunity to meet all these people and maintain these friendships.

P: And I benefitted from it tremendously.

C: Oh, yes. You would with those contacts in the different countries. After you graduated from the War College in June of 1959, where were you sent ?

P: I stayed on the staff for a year and was administrator for the Global Strategy program.

C: Oh, yes. How interesting.

P: They called it Global Strategy then. I think they have a different name.

C: It's Current Strategy now. But they had somebody who was involved in planning that then for the whole year.

P: Yes.

C: That's quite something then. Did you like that assignment?

P: Yes, I liked it very much.

C: So you stayed two years in Newport. Was it then that you decided you may want to return here part time anyway ?

P: Oh, I don't know when I decided that, but I went to Little Creek from here, down to the amphibious forces, and I was planning all the fleet exercises, which I thoroughly enjoyed, and lots of scenarios for some of the exercises. I worked for Admiral McCain, who was a great person, and I liked to work for him. He would give you an assignment and say here do this, and then you'd go off and do it, and you'd come back and report. He never interfered. He might ask a few questions when you'd report, but he just gave it to you and assumed that you'd just go and do it, and that's the way I liked to work.

C: Oh, yes, independent. You were trusted to do your job and go do it, so that sounds like a very interesting assignment.

P: It was a very interesting assignment. I worked with the Second Fleet admirals and the Marine Corps generals who were connected to the amphibious forces and it was very, very interesting. My

actual title was head of the Intelligence Department at the school there, but I was on these fleet assignments most of the time.

C: That sounds great. You were back in the intelligence field.

P: Yes.

C: Was that a pressure cooker job ?

P: Well, I wouldn't say so. It was busy enough, but I wouldn't say it was too bad.

C: Were there any other women officers ?

P: No.

C: So you were kind of in a unique situation again. What was your rank at that point in time ?

P: Lieutenant Commander

C: When were you promoted to Commander ?

P: I wasn't. I had to retire before I came into the zone because of my age.

C: Oh, I see. Was that your last assignment in the Navy ?

P: Yes, I retired from there.

C: Retired from Little Creek, Virginia, in 1963 ?

P: Well, it was actually 1964. My retirement date was December, but I actually stayed on active duty until February.

C: Oh, I see. It was actually 1964. You spent a good twenty years in the Navy, with very, very interesting assignments.

P: Oh, very interesting. I had a fine career in the Navy.

C: Yes, you certainly did. Very unique.

P: And I think I had the privilege of being the forerunner of women going into new areas, and new positions, and getting into different assignments, and they've expanded tremendously since then, which is marvelous.

C: That was my next question. Did you consider yourself a pioneering woman in the Navy ?

P: Yes, yes, I did.

C: You certainly did.

P: I think those that were in during World War II were. Some had more opportunities than others, depending on background and capabilities and interests.

C: That's true. When you retired in 1964, where did you choose to live ? And did you choose to work ?

P: While I was in Little Creek, I went to Washington.

C: Did you decide to live in D.C. for a while ?

P: I lived there for a while, yes. Then I decided to come up to Newport. I worked in Arlington, Virginia. I volunteered at the library. I worked there for a while. I didn't want to work full time; I just wanted to work part time, so I just volunteered. I was there for several years. After I retired I served with the civil service in training for a couple of years and was also Executive Director of the Business and Professional Womens Clubs of America, headquartered in Washington, D.C., then I decided I wanted to work only part time and left to do volunteer work at the Arlington County library.

C: So why did you decide to come to Newport ?

P: I always liked Newport. I enjoyed it here. Of course, it has changed considerably since 1942. I remember one of the funniest things that happened to me after the war was over. I wanted a new automobile, and I wanted a convertible.

C: Wow.

P: So I ordered one and said any color but red. Finally, the dealer got some convertibles in. He got two in, and they were both red, so I said, "well, I'll take one." I don't know who took the other one, but he frequented places I'd never be seen at. There used to be a place down along the water called the Blue Moon Cafe. Did you ever hear of it ?

C: I think I did, but it was probably gone by the time I came.

P: It had a rather unsavory reputation. I was never in it, but whoever bought the other red convertible liked to go there. And I'd come into the base, and somebody would say, we know where you were last evening. and I'd been at home all evening, but I'd be accused of having been at The Blue Moon Cafe because of the red convertible. We had a lot of fun over that.

C: When you came back to Newport, did you live here permanently for a while ?

P: Yes, I did. I've always loved Newport. I decided that was someplace I'd like to live.

C: Did you work during this time frame when you were in Newport ?

P: No.

C: You just retired ?

P: Yes.

C: And your friends also came here as well.

P: I think that was another reason why I wanted to come here. I had friends here, and, of course, I have many many other friends that are all navy people here, navy retired people, so we had a common background, and that makes a big difference.

C: Oh, yes, it does. I know Captain Council came here and retired

here and your friend Captain Love as well. You met them on a various assignments throughout your career ?

P: Yes, I did.

C: Did you feel that there was a strong bond among the small number of women in the Navy in the 1950's and 1960's ?

P: Yes, I think so, and the way I met Captain Council and Captain Love was when I was in Washington. At that time and shortly after the war, it was almost impossible to find someplace to live, and my good friend Winnie Collins found an apartment and the three of us then took this apartment, and that's how we became friends. That was really another lucky time.

C: That's great. When did you decide to move to Florida and live part time here ?

P: I'd say probably twenty years ago. I'm guessing, but I had an aunt and uncle who had a house down there and they offered to rent it to me for a couple of months, and so Capt. Love and I went down, and we found the nice warm climate in the winter time was so pleasant that we rented an apartment and then bought an apartment down there, so that was great.

C: Yes, you've got the best of both worlds. I am going to ask you a closing question. How would you sum up your naval career, it's significance for you and your life?

P: It has been one driving force in my life really. It has been one motivating force. I felt I was doing something worthwhile, well, I hope I was, and so I feel that this has been a wonderful, wonderful career and made life worthwhile.

C: That's a great comment on a long and fine career in the Navy. I'm sure back in 1943 you had no inkling it was going to turn out this way when you first joined the WAVES.

P: No, I certainly didn't.

C: You certainly had a very interesting and unique career.

P: Oh, I had a very interesting one, a very fine one, and, I think, a very responsible one, which, I said, was a good motivation, and made life worth the effort. I really feel that I have been very fortunate.

C: That's great, I want to thank you for coming in today and sharing your memories of your career.

P: Thank you. I appreciate your taking the time to do this, giving me the opportunity to talk about it. It's been a long time, but it's been a wonderful time.

C: Thank you very much.

P: Thank you.



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