

HISTORY
OF THE
WAVES

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BARBARA BRANDT WOOD

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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Interviewee: Barbara Brandt Wood

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

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C: This is an oral history with Barbara Brandt Wood for the WAVES in World War II Oral history project. The interview is being conducted in Mahan Hall, in N22 at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. Today's date is August 13 1997. Mrs. Wood, I'm very pleased that you were able to come over today for the interview. I'd like to begin by asking you where and when you were born?

W: I was born in New York City in the last ten minutes of the year 1921 on New Year's Eve.

C: What did your father do for a living ?

W: My father was in the United States Navy as a career officer. He was the class of 1909 at the Naval Academy.

C: And your mother, I assume, was a Navy wife. Did you have any brothers or sisters ?

W: Yes, I have a brother who is two years younger and went to St. George's and Harvard and ended up in the Ski Troops.

C: Oh, in World War II. How interesting. Where did you spend your growing up years ?

W: Well, if you were in the Navy, you spent them in a lot of places. I have been to twenty-three schools. I've lived on both the East coast and West coast.

C: When did your father retire from the Navy ?

W: My father did not retire from the Navy. He died at a fairly early age in San Diego.

C: Oh, that's unfortunate. Where did you graduate from high school?

W: I went to the Bishop's School in LaJolla, California. I graduated in 1939.

C: Where did you attend college ?

W: At Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts and graduated in 1943. And our whole senior year we watched the Midshipmen's School WAVES marching around us.

C: Right, they were right on campus. What did you decide to do after graduating from Smith ?

W: Well, there was no doubt that I would go immediately into the WAVES, because it was right at Smith College. The Midshipmen's School was there.

C: And that influenced you obviously, plus your Navy background. Did you keep up with news about the war before you enlisted, from forty one to forty three ?

W: Oh, yes. Because we all new in the Navy that we were at war. The Navy was at war for a year before we got in. And we were all very familiar with what the Navy was doing and were very much aware we would be in it. It was just a question of how soon Roosevelt was

going to be able to influence the country to get into it. Pearl Harbor, of course, accomplished that.

C: Right. When did you enlist in the WAVES, and where did you go to enlist ?

W: I went to Boston and I think it was as soon as I graduated, June of 1943.

C: What procedures did you have to follow to enlist as far as tests, physicals, whatever?

W: I don't really remember. You had to have a physical, I suppose. They asked for your transcript. I don't really remember. I just sent in everything that was required and I was accepted to start on the first of October, 1943.

C: How did your mother feel about your decision to join the WAVES?

W: Oh, she was delighted seeing me going off to do it. After all, she'd grown up in the Navy, too.

C: Was there any publicity about your joining the WAVES in your local hometown newspaper at that point ?

W: I doubt it. I really don't know.

C: In October you reported back to Smith College for your training at the Midshipmen's School. Where did you live at that point ?

W: The Navy had taken over several dorms at the college, and so I just moved into Gillette Hall which they had taken over and everything was exactly the same, except that we had bunks and the bathrooms now were one great big community shower with several shower heads around the room, and that was about all that was different. The only thing that was interesting was the first morning my roommate who was in the bunk above me, when they called reveille, she leaped out of bed and broke her leg.

C: Forgetting that she was in the upper bunk!

W: Yes, so poor Mary had a tough time and had to be driven around everywhere and never had to do any marching.

C: That was one thing she escaped. You know, speaking of that, it's kind of amusing, because just yesterday I received an article from a woman I interviewed from the Barnard College Alumni Magazine, and it was about training at Smith College, and the alum who wrote it said that her roommate fell out of bed from the upper bunk, didn't break anything but fell out. Do you remember how your day was structured there ?

W: Well, you got up, you had to clean your room, and we marched down to the Hotel Northampton for all our meals and marched back and went to classes. They'd taken over various houses at the college for classes. We marched back for lunch, we marched back, and always in our platoons, and then in the afternoon we probably had drill down at the armory, and we marched down there. We went back to the Hotel for dinner and back. We had five courses: they were delightful, typical ones, naval history, naval personnel,

ships, aircraft, ordnance, and I've really forgotten the other ones.

C: Did you have homework with these courses ?

W: Oh, yes. We had homework.

C: Did you ultimately have tests ?

W: Oh, yes. Because when I became an instructor, I gave them.

C: Right. Did you like the marching and the drilling which was constant ?

W: Oh, yes. It was fun going around to all the places. I'd already been there for four years and this was my fifth year, and it was fun being there in the Navy, rather than as a Smith College student. And, of course, I was very familiar with all the places marching around, and I had a lot of friends still at the college, and when I went back and was instructing, I went back and took some courses at the college that I wanted to take but missed. And my former professors, we used to play tennis, they were begging me to

come to wine mess and dinner because the food at Wiggins' Tavern, which was our best restaurant in Northampton, was now our officers mess. So all my former professors were just asking to be invited.

C: Well, the food was wonderful.

W: I was very popular. Well, the wine mess was wonderful, the drinks were really good, and the food was marvelous. It never changed, whereas the college food by that time was pretty bad.

C: I see. So you got a treat by living in the Northampton Hotel.

W: Yes, we certainly did.

C: Did you adjust easily to the discipline of military life ?

W: Oh, yes. That was no problem. It was all a lot of fun, just like camp. The same thing.

C: Did you have any time off, limited as it may have been ?

W: I really don't remember. I'm sure we did because I did get off to play tennis. I know our first weekend was after we had been there for six weeks, and I remember going to Boston and meeting

some fellow and having a very nice weekend. That was our only real time off.

C: You were pretty much kept in line there for the whole twelve weeks. Do you remember Captain Underwood at all ?

W: Oh, very well. He knew my father very well.

C: And you had more contact with him when you were a teacher, I'm sure.

W: Oh, yes.

C: Did anything amusing or noteworthy happen during this training period?

W: Well, I really don't remember. I remember so much more from the year following when I was there.

C: Well, then let's get into that. You finished your twelve weeks and you were an ensign. How and why were you selected to be an instructor in ships, aircraft and ordnance? Did you request it or were you just assigned ?

W: Well, I don't know why. Betsy Chase was the head of the department, and I loved ships, aircraft and ordnance, and I did well at it, I guess. And they needed instructors and I wanted to go to BUAIR, or something to do with photography, and I had a lot of drafting and I don't know why, but anyway about ten of us stayed. Two of my classmates were in the uniform department.

C: What was that ?

W: Fitting uniforms and getting everybody into their uniforms, and all that. Two or three of us were instructors. We had a very nice department. It was a lot of fun.

C: Were you trained first before you went into the classroom or were you just put in ?

W: Well, I knew the lectures, and I knew the curriculum very well, and I knew what we were supposed to teach. We had wonderful training films. And I learned how to work the projector because we had to do these training films. In fact, we were so good at it that

everybody heard about ships, aircraft and ordnance. Everybody was interested in ships, aircraft and ordnance lectures, and these marvelous training films that were done by the best people in Hollywood, and what happened was we got invitations from the Masons, the Elks, all the mens' fraternities in Northampton to give a training talk. They couldn't give us any money for it, and they couldn't give us any flowers or perfume, and what we got was nylon stockings because McCallums' hosiery mill was in Northampton and that's what they gave us, and we were very appreciative.

C: Oh yes, because you were wearing those lisle stockings.

W: Oh, those terrible things. And we really were asked to give quite a few of these talks because the men were interested. We really did give good talks on ships, aircraft and ordnance.

C: Oh, that is an interesting sidelight to your regular duties there. As you said, you knew the curriculum inside and out, and you

had the training films, and you were an instructor in this area. I was going to ask you, what were the teaching methods you used ?

W: I had never taught anything before, but I found that if you were interested in something and you wanted other people to be interested in it it's very easy to put it across, and I was fascinated by it, and I wanted them to be fascinated by it, and then people I knew, friends of mine, kept coming in as midshipmen, I mean Debbie Kirk, whose father, Alan Kirk was an admiral. She is an old friend of mine. Several of my classmates from college, I talked them into joining the Navy, so they were there. And it was fun having people come in. I never knew who was going to show up in one of my classes.

C: They say Admiral King's daughter was there.

W: Oh, everybody was there, yes.

C: That must have been just interesting for you. How large were your classes?

W: They were usually two platoons, about sixteen or twenty people, not too big.

C: Can you comment on the caliber of the students ?

W: They were all college graduates, and they were all interested, and you just taught so that they would learn. I don't remember people being washed out or sent home or anything like that.

C: They were all a select group, obviously. Did you have classes Monday through Friday ?

W: Oh, yes.

C: Any weekend work ?

W: No, on weekends I would get on the Peter Pan bus line and come to Providence and take the Short Line bus to Newport.

C: Oh, really ? why did you come to Newport ?

W: Because my mother lived here.

C: Oh, she did live here. This is where she settled.

W: Yes, so I came back here and had a wonderful time. Spent the whole weekend at Bailey's Beach or at dances and balls and it was fun.

C: You had the best of both worlds.

W: Yes, it really was.

C: That's great. I didn't realize that your mother had finally settled here. I was going to ask you if you found this work challenging or routine, but I think I know the answer to that.

W: I liked to teach and I've taught ever since, because I really liked to teach. If it is something I like and am interested in. Now I teach archaeology and fine arts, and so forth. So I have things that I care about and I want other people to be interested.

C: So this kind of set you on the track of a future career.

W: It really did.

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

W: Well, one thing. I really wanted to be out of Northampton, Massachusetts. I had been there for five years, and I wanted to be out more in the war effort, and, of course, we couldn't go overseas. I asked really for the Eleventh Naval District. I would have liked to go back to California, or Washington, someplace that was a real naval base. Eventually they shut down the Midshipmen's School and I was allowed to leave.

C: Did anything exciting, amusing, or interesting happen during this time frame ?

W: Yes. One thing that really was interesting was I went into New York to meet my present husband on Labor Day weekend. And we went to Forest Hills to the tennis matches because we were tennis players. And then Monday night, because, of course, it was a Labor Day weekend, he had gotten me a berth on a train going back to Springfield through the Navy League. So he had done it in his name, I guess, and so when I got there, he was a lieutenant, Lt. Wood,

and so I got down to Grand Central Station at midnight, on Monday night, and there was no one on the train or in the station, or anywhere near it. And it was a berth, which was hard to get. So I got into my upper berth, got undressed and pulled the curtains, and about a half an hour later I heard all these marching feet and commands and a whole group of men came onto the train, the sleeper. And I looked out of my curtain window and each man was handcuffed to another man. They were German prisoners and they all got on the train. I heard the commands, get in your bunks, go to sleep, no talking, and so forth. We all went to sleep, and I woke up the next morning in Springfield. I thought I was going to be in Northampton, but it was Springfield. I got out, dressed in an upper berth in my uniform, which is hard to do, and came down, and the stares, and the remarks and whistles as I came out in my uniform with my little red suitcase was unbelievable. And there was the MPs marching around the car. We were on one car about a mile away,

isolated in the Springfield station. And they looked at me and said, "how did you get on this train ?" And I said, "where are we ?" I had no idea. We were so far out in the boondocks. He said, "well, you are in Springfield" and I had to walk back a mile to the station and call my boss, and I had a nine o'clock class and there was no way I was going to make it. I explained all this. I don't think she believed me. It was true and, finally, I was able to get back to Northampton and my job, but having missed a couple of classes. But it is sort of an amazing story.

C: It is amazing. I wonder where they were taking these people ?

W: Alot of them went to Dutch Island. That's where all the German prisoners were, right off of Jamestown.

C: Right, I knew they were in that vicinity. But anyway, there you were with all these prisoners. While you were teaching at the Midshipmen's School, did you live in the Northampton Hotel ?

W: Yes, by that time we moved to the Northampton Hotel. All the staff lived in the Northampton Hotel. We didn't live in the dorms.

C: Did you feel that you were able to survive on your pay ?

W: Oh, we had so much pay and nothing to spend it on. So what I did was, a classmate of mine had married one of the pilots that taught at the Lafluer airport in Northampton. She was taking flying lessons, so I said, " why not?" That's a good thing to do with all this money, so I got my pilot's license for something to do. We would bicycle down to the airport, and we didn't have cars, of course, and that's what we spent our money on. There was nothing else to spend it on. We couldn't buy clothes or anything. So we spent it on flying lessons.

C: Well, you are amazing. You are quite accomplished then.

W: So that first solo flight was Valentine's Day and we landed on skis in the snow.

C: In the middle of winter! Do you still fly ?

W: No, I don't not at all. We were just flying little Taylor craft. And all the P-47 pilots from Westover Field would come flying around and bother us. They were so good. They didn't realize how poor we were. But we practiced the figure eights over the Connecticut River, and over the Amherst Smokestacks. You do a cross country. It was fun.

C: That's fantastic. You were very adventuresome.

W: Like I said, there was nothing else to spend it on.

C: You might as well learn something new. Did you have any more contact with Captain Underwood during your teaching days there ?

W: Yes.

C: Can you comment on him and his leadership ?

W: Captain Underwood and Mrs. Underwood were darling people, and they happened to live in Calvin Coolidge's house in Northampton, and they would have teas and things like that and we would go once



sent out at once. It was three shifts a day working at the Hydrographic Office to get the most modern, up to date charts out to the fleet, so it was very interesting to hear all these notices, and to know what was going on. Once a month we were on duty. We wore 45 pistols. We were there all night. We had to know how to use the Enigma machine and change the codes and all that business, because we were the duty officers once a month. And then if we had charts to go to the map room at the White House they would give us a car with a driver and we would go over with our .45s strapped to us and the charts and go into the White House, and go to the map room. We were never allowed into the map room. They would open the door and take the charts. This hand would reach out and that was as close as I ever got to the map room itself. But that's what we did.

C: Oh, that sounds very interesting. And your drafting ability must have helped you with that.

W: Oh, that is why I was there, obviously one reason, and also we were very privy to all the invasion charts, what was coming up, what the new invasions were going to be, and doing the charts ahead like that.

C: Oh, so you did the charts for the invasions ?

W: We did all the charts because we didn't have charts. We had no charts. The only charts we had were Captain Cook's charts. The only charts we had to work with were BA (British Admiralty) charts, then we got some Japanese charts from captured Japanese submarines. But we, literally, had no up to date charts of the Pacific. And our hydrographic ships were out there. We had two hydrographic ships that were making soundings, making temporary charts. And they would send back these temporary charts, and we would get them into shape. And we could get them out in forty eight hours, and we were getting these back to the fleet because they needed them. The charts we had were so wrong. They had islands and reefs in all the wrong places.

They just weren't accurate, so it was very necessary to get these out to the fleet. For instance, the English Channel, we had so many notices to mariners because there were such constant wrecks and mayhem going on in the English Channel constantly that we had to keep those up to date.

C: So you did it for the Pacific...

W: Everywhere.

C: Atlantic. The whole world. That sounds very very interesting.

How many WAVES were in that office ?

W: It really was a civilian office when we went in. It was really civil service people when we went in and they all had grades. And I think at first they resented us coming in and immediately being number four or whatever it is. But we caught onto it very soon. Admiral Bryan was in charge of it actually. It was a naval facility. It just happened that most of the people were civilians and then a whole lot of us came in.

C: Did you work the rotating shifts or were you assigned a specific shift ?

W: No, I was assigned a specific shift and I never did do the night shifts. I don't think our particular department did them. It was mostly the ones who were really processing and making the charts that were on the three shifts.

C: You were just altering them, I assume.

W: Yes, chart revision, revising.

C: Were there enlisted WAVES that worked in the office ?

W: Yes, there were also enlisted WAVES.

C: Was it a pressure job ?

W: No, and I'd say there was probably five or six of us in the office. I think there were probably maybe twenty people actually. No, it wasn't a pressure job. When the war ended we were given other things to do. For instance, I was given all of Admiral Byrd's notes and charts, too, because we couldn't do all that during the

war. They just dumped a carton on my desk and said, "look through this" which was very interesting, too. It was all in his writing and everything. They would bring up things after the war had ended for us to do that they hadn't had time to do.

C: Yes, to work on. That sounds interesting; it was a classified assignment, I assume.

W: Oh, yes, it was. And the thing that was interesting was when we got these Japanese charts from the submarines they were sort of waterlogged and damp. We had a terrible time trying to decipher the Japanese and suddenly they were gone. I said, "where are my charts I was working on?" I was living with my cousin in Washington, who was also a navy junior, and she was working at the Army Map service. And I happened to say, which I shouldn't have, "I was furious today because these charts that I was working on, these Japanese charts, were missing" and my good cousin Beverly said, "well, I have them".

C: They were transferred.

W: She had them at the Army Map service. That was sort of amazing. So they did do things back and forth, captured stuff, which was new.

C: This is so unique. I've never interviewed anyone who worked in this sort of situation. Some of the gals have worked in intelligence on Nebraska Avenue. Now were you considered in communications at this point ?

W: No, this was really hydrographics, because my three roommates were in communications at the Navy Department and they were on shifts, so they were always coming in at odd hours. I had three WAVE roommates and they were in communications, definitely.

C: What did you like about this assignment ?

W: I loved being in the middle of the war effort, and I loved being in Washington as that was pretty exciting, and we had a wonderful house right near the Capitol, near Union Station, and everyone

would come and stay with us because we had a big sleeping porch.

And so all of our beaux and brothers and uncles and fathers who came into Washington would just walk down to our house and spend the night.

C: Was this the house you were sharing with your cousin ?

W: No, later when my three roommates arrived we got our own place.

That was just in the beginning, temporary. I play a lot of tennis, and somehow I got into the Army Navy Country Club. One interesting thing, I got into a lovely doubles game every Wednesday afternoon with two captains and one general, which was very nice because we all played a lot of tennis, and it was summer. In July one time this general didn't show up and we were furious because it meant three of us were sitting there. And then it happened again in August and we were really upset about that. As it turned out it was General Leslie Groves. He, of course, was setting off the atomic

bomb, and, of course, he couldn't say anything, and that's why he didn't show up for our tennis game.

C: That's interesting. What kind of social life did you have in Washington ?

W: We all knew a lot of people and we had a very good time. And at the end of it I was engaged, but my fiancé had been in the Pacific for two and a half years, and he came home and then went back out again.

C: Tell us what he was doing.

W: He was in motor torpedo boats right here in Melville, Rhode Island. That is where he started. Then he went out to the Solomons and then came back for six months and taught at the Training Station in Melville and then went back to the Philippines. But we all had a very good social life because we all knew so many people.

C: Now where did you meet your husband ?

W: I met him here in Newport at the PT school. Every month a new group would come in and I was here in the summer. I was in college and we met them all. And also all of us were hostesses at the officers club which was at the casino. And we met everybody. And then when the Deb parties, the big balls came, and they didn't know enough men, they'd say to us bring over fifty or a hundred we need for this ball, and we knew all of them, so we'd just bring over everybody we knew which is why we had such a good time.

C: Oh, I guess so. You met him while you were in college. I assume you corresponded during this time frame.

W: Oh, yes. We knew each other for four years before we got married.

C: Do you have any letters from this time that you either wrote to your mother or to your husband describing your experiences ?

W: I don't know. I don't know whether I do or not.

C: Because there is a great interest in collecting letters and documents.

W: I did have a whole shoebox full of letters and it was classified according to military service and rank, whether they were Air Force or Coast Guard, all the men were here. It was wonderful.

C: They were either in Newport or at war. Can you describe what wartime Washington was like ?

W: The summers were so hot and we had to wear those terrible stockings. And we never learned to cook, any of us, because there was nothing to cook, and we never got home in time to make anything, and we lived on tuna fish and spam I think. We just didn't learn very much in the way of cooking. There was a lovely Chinese restaurant near us and we used that quite a lot and we seemed to get along. I don't remember very much about it, but I know I never really learned to cook anything until after I was out of the navy.

C: Yes, that's what the gals say. There was rationing and it was difficult.

W: Yes, there was, there was definitely rationing and shoes, and sugar were the two things I remember and gasoline. I had extra gasoline because I had to drive out to Suitland, Maryland.

C: Oh, you had a car then?

W: I had a little car, and it was actually my husband's brother's car who was in the submarine service, and he was out in the Pacific and his wife didn't drive, so I had his car. So that's the way I got it.

C: Right, I was going to ask you how you got out to Suitland, because you needed transport. Do you remember events surrounding the death of FDR in April of 1945, your reaction to it, and the reaction of the people in Washington ?

W: Oh, yes, and, as a matter of fact, I do remember because we had two days off when that happened. It was a big deal, because, after all, we had him for a president for a long time and it was a real shock to everybody. But then Truman seemed to step in and do very well, and I remember VJ Day very well. In fact, I went to The White House and have pictures of it and have pictures of Truman coming out on the front porch on VJ Day in that park right in front, and

all the celebration and everything. Because I knew it was going to be a memorable day and a memorable event. And I was the only one home. All my roommates were working. It was about four or five in the afternoon and they were all working and I said, "I've got to get in the car and get to The White House". I don't know what made me do it, but I did, and that was sort of fun.

C: Oh, that's fantastic. Do you remember how you celebrated personally on VJ Day ?

W: Like I said, I got in the car and went to The White House. And then when they came home, I remember everybody was throwing beer bottles around, and the Mount Pleasant Street Car went right in front of our house, and they were all out there yelling and shouting, and things like that. It was exciting.

C: Oh, it certainly was. How did you feel about the end of the war? What was your own personal reaction ?

W: Well, it was wonderful, because I really wanted to be married by this time and I knew that my husband, he had the silver star, and he had plenty of points, so I knew he would get home. So I planned the wedding and really didn't know if he would make it or not. He only made it home about a week before the wedding.

C: And what date did you set ?

W: I set November third and he got home a week before and went up to Melville to pick up some ushers. He didn't really go; we all drove up. He said, " don't worry about ushers." Of course, how do you do ushers when you have been overseas ? So he went and said, "I'll just go up to Melville, and I'll pick eight ushers." He got to Melville and they had just closed the base. There wasn't anyone there. So he just picked up six officers off the street practically who were the ushers at our wedding which was at St. George's Chapel.

C: Oh, that is beautiful. What a setting.

W: I wanted to get out by Christmas then, and I couldn't get out until I was married. I didn't have any points, of course. He had plenty of points, so he got out. Then he came around and lived with us in Washington along with my three roommates. And he took my papers around to every office in BUPERS and I did get out two days before Christmas.

C: Oh, that's good.

W: Otherwise I'd have probably been in another three months.

C: Right. The war and six months was the norm. Did you ever meet Mildred McAfee ?

W: Oh, yes. Captain Mac. Oh, heavens, yes.

C: Where did you meet her ?

W: At the Naval Midshipmen's School. She was up there.

C: What was your impression of her ?

W: Well, she was marvelous. I'd known her and she was president of Wellesley and also my boss at Midshipmen's School. Betsy Chase worked for her at Wellesley and so I always- we knew Captain Mac.

C: She was an impressive figure. She just died several years ago at age 94 in a nursing home.

W: She was a great person.

C: Did you meet any other naval or political figures during your WAVE service ?

W: Of course, all the ones that were running the war at that point were all classmates of my father and friends of my mother and father, and I sort of knew them anyway. But I don't remember meeting any in particular. I didn't meet President Truman, or Roosevelt, or Harry Hopkins or anyone like that.

C: What was the highest rank you achieved in your service ?

W: Well, I was a Ltjg. That was my highest rank. And then when we were out. We were never really out. Then when I was in Boston and

had one child and was eight and a half months pregnant with my second child, I got a notice to report back for the Korean War. So I went down to the hospital and they took one look at me and said, "you're out". And my second son was born the day the Korean War started, June 25th, 1950. So I was up for Lieutenant, but they threw me out.

C: Right, at that point. When you were discharged, do you remember if they prepared you in any way for a return to civilian life ?

W: Oh, no, nothing like that. No, like I said, at that time of the month I didn't see anyone. My husband had taken all the papers around and gotten them signed.

C: Right. How did you feel about leaving the Navy ?

W: I was ready. I'd done it. The war was over. I'd had a wonderful time. I was now married. Also I was going to Harvard on the G.I. Bill.

C: You took advantage of that.

W: Oh, very much so. Who wouldn't ?

C: Right, it was a wonderful opportunity. Was your husband there as well?

W: Yes, he had a job at IBM through the whole war. He had been with them for a month or two before the war. On December 7th, he was in. He was already in. But they paid him a war bond a month the whole four and a half years he was in, and he had a job the minute he got out in Boston. As soon as we were married, we went up to Boston. And we lived in Cambridge, and I think he was the only person in Cambridge that had a job. Everybody else was on the G.I. Bill in law school, or med school, or business school, or graduate school.

C: Now, what did you decide to major in ?

W: I was an art major, a history of art major, so I just went on with that at the Fogg Museum at Harvard.

C: Did you get a masters degree ?

W: Yes, I got a masters which has been very useful since.

C: Oh, yes. So you were in Cambridge for that time frame. Lets double back for just a little bit. I want to ask a few questions about the WAVES again. Did you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit de corps

W: Oh, absolutely, and what was wonderful about the WAVES is we were subjected to a group of people halfway between my age, and my mother's age, and the Navy was so smart, unlike the Army, that they picked very superior people to run and start the WAVES. They were wonderful women. We looked up to them. They were our role models, because I didn't know people that age. They were in their 30's.

I was twenty two. My mother was much older, but these were these wonderful women and they were really, I think, gave everybody, (of course I already was a navy junior anyway) so there was no question about having any esprit de corps. But I think they did.

d. And the uniforms were so wonderful and, I don't know, the whole thing was so delightful. But the women were so superior, they

really were, at the Midshipmen's School. Now I don't know about Hunter College, because I don't know anything about that, but certainly at the Midshipmen's School.

C: Oh yes, they chose the top people. They were very careful about that. Did you find that the WAVES were a smoothly run organization?

W: As far as I was concerned it was. Nothing was sloppy or anything. You got orders. You did it.

C: Did you know anyone who was ever discharged for disciplinary reasons

W: No, never did. I didn't know anyone who was ever discharged for anything, not even at the Midshipmen's School, not even for academic reasons.

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

W: Well, only in that I was exposed to teaching which I had not ever planned on doing particularly, and it turned out to be very

useful, because I ended up being a docent and doing adult classes and teaching and I still am. I really liked it, and I do a lot of it.

C: Did the war make you more independent and self reliant in your service in the WAVES ?

W: Oh, I'm sure it did, because we were all in Washington, running our own house, and having to plan things, and we were on our own. Of course, if we had just graduated and gotten a job and gone to New York, it would have been the same thing.

C: Did you feel that what women were expected to do and to be changed when the war was over ?

W: Well, I think everybody realized that they could do things that they didn't know they could do before. In other words, there was more to life than just being a housewife. You could be a housewife, and do other things, too. Of course, a lot of it was Gloria Steinem, but I always felt that way, because when we were in

Cambridge after the war, and I had a child, it never occurred to me to stay at home. I mean I got sitters; I took classes; did a lot of Junior League volunteer work. I did a lot of things. And I think being in the Navy probably helped that along.

C: Did you maintain any service friendships when the war was over ?

W: Oh, heavens, yes. A lot of them were classmates. As I said we meet every year. And with the PT group, I know them all very well.

C: And some of these gals were in the WAVES with you. Where did you settle after your time in Cambridge ?

W: Well, then we moved to Wellesley, and my husband was still working for IBM in Boston. And we went to New Haven, and we went to LaGrangeville, New York, Poughkeepsie, and then we went to Sewickley, and then we came to New Canaan, and we have been there for the last forty years.

C: Oh, so all this moving was in the early part. Did you work at all after you had your children or during that time frame ?

W: Well, by work, I didn't have a paid job, but I did a lot of volunteer work, and I did a lot of courses, and I did a lot of school work. But I didn't have a paid job.

C: Did any of your children join the Navy ?

W: No, none.

C: Did you ever talk about your WAVES days to your children ?

W: Oh, heavens, yes. They know all about it. Because for instance, our club had it's centennial and anybody who had been in the armed services, said come and we will have a little march, and a band and so my husband put on his uniform and I put on mine which is still in perfect condition.

C: And still fits ?

W: Well, almost. But the material is absolutely incredible. We also went back to the Solomon Islands two years ago. We have a talk that we give together on the Solomon Islands, then and now. My husband went down and got a lot of material from the Naval Archives in

Washington, and I took a lot of pictures, and we went back to all the PT bases, and took pictures from then and the way they are now. And we have given this talk. We gave it first to our senior men's club, and there was always somebody there that talked to somebody else and we have now given it about ten times to all the various organizations around Fairfield County, because the veterans are very interested in the whole Solomon Islands campaign and Guadalcanal and the Slot, and everything else and the way it is now. The Solomon Islands are beautiful right now. Nobody knows about them. Nobody has ever been there.

C: No.

W: And that has been very interesting. To do that together and wear our uniforms.

C: That strengthens your ties to your time in the Navy and World War II.

W: Oh, yes, and my husband is a navy history buff.

C: And he's a Pt'er and very active in that organization.

W: Yes, very active, and he's into all the naval battles and so forth.

C: I'm sure he has some stories to tell, and that would be very interesting. Do you have any more comments on your WAVE days, anything that I have missed or anything that you have neglected to tell us?

W: I just thought it was the time when you had to be in the service, some service. It was a good war. We were happy with it. it wasn't like Vietnam. It was a wonderful thing to be in and the people were fabulous, and I can't think of a better time to be at that time. Now I'm not sure I would have wanted to stay in the next ten years particularly. I don't know what kind of a job I would have had. But I really wanted to be married and have children. That was what I planned to do, but at the time I think it was wonderful.

I'm so glad I did it and it led to the G.I. Bill. I mean all the things it led to. That was very important.

C: Right, that was very important for your future and your education, and it was a time of great patriotism.

W: Oh, absolutely. It was just the thing to do. Everybody was involved. I was wondering why everybody didn't join the WAVES. The only thing that is a little sad about it is that when I have talked about it to schools and I mention that I was in the WAVES in World War II, they say, "oh, we thought everybody was dead that was in World War II". They think of World War II the way we think of the Civil War. They really do. They have no sense of real history, and it was so far, I mean fifty two years ago. It is a long time, and they can't believe that anyone is still alive that was in it. That's a little disappointing. But that's the way they are. And they don't teach history in the schools anymore. They teach Social

Slop, which is the worst thing in the world. I am very disappointed in our education system.

C: I want to thank you very much for your remarks on your career in the WAVES combining teaching and your work in the Hydrographic Office. I want to thank you very much again, Mrs. Wood, for coming in.

W: Well, thank you. I have enjoyed it.

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, Newport, R.I.

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES