

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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NO. 58

JESSIE EAGLESON KUSTER

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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

1997

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

INTERVIEWEE: JESSIE EAGLESON KUSTER

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

DATE: AUGUST 27, 1997

EMC: This is the first oral history with Jessie Gibson Eagleson Kuster of North Kingstown, Rhode Island, for the WAVES of World War II Oral History Project. Jessie served in the WAVES from 1943 through 1955. Today's date is August 27, 1997, and the interview is being conducted here at the Naval War College in N-22 in Mahan Hall. Jessie, I'm so pleased that you were able to take time out of your very busy schedule to come over here and talk to us and reminisce about your Navy days and your career of 12 years. I would like to begin the interview by asking you where you were born and when you were born.

JK: I was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on May 31, 1921.

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

JK: He worked for the tire company -- U. S. Rubber Company.

EMC: And your mother?

JK: She was a housewife.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

JK: Yes, I have a twin sister, a younger brother born in Connecticut, and a younger sister born in Scotland.

EMC: Where did you spend your growing up years?

JK: In Scotland near Renfrew and Paisley, a suburb of Glasgow Renfrewshire, in Scotland.

EMC: Tell us how you got there from Hartford, Connecticut.

JK: We went over in a ship.

EMC: And what was the occasion? Why did you go there?

JK: My Father was going to a position with an American company to build tires, the first tire company in Scotland.

EMC: How interesting. How long did you stay there? How many years?

JK: Nine years -- from 1928 through 1937.

EMC: So you had much of your early education there.

JK: Yes.

EMC: Did you graduate from high school there?

JK: No, we didn't graduate because we left before graduation. I have a high school graduation certificate from the State of Rhode Island.

EMC: So you were about sixteen when you returned to the U.S.A.?

JK: Yes.

EMC: Again, where did you settle in the U.S. when you landed?

JK: In Providence, Rhode Island.

EMC: Did your Father have a job there?

JK: No, he didn't. He finally obtained a position at Brown & Sharp. Then later he went to another company.

EMC: So you settled in Providence. Did you work at this point in time? Did you have a job?

JK: I did baby sitting jobs for about a year and a half. And then I got a job in a factory. Then I got a job as file clerk in the office, and then secretary. When I resigned I was in cost accounting.

EMC: Now what company was that?

JK: Anaconda Wire & Cable in Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

EMC: So you spent your time working there before you joined the Navy. Did your family have any Navy connections at all?

JK: No, none at all.

EMC: Were any of your friends or relatives in the Service once Pearl Harbor occurred? Did anybody you know join?

JK: Yes, my brother joined. He joined the Marines.

EMC: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, and what your reaction was to this event?

JK: I was in Providence. It was a Sunday evening. We were listening to the radio. We just could not believe that Pearl Harbor was attacked. Yes, I remember quite vividly because I had a friend who worked there. He was an electrician and he was in Pearl Harbor. I received a card from him, telling me he had just arrived. I was quite concerned about him.

EMC: Wasn't that amazing.

JK: He was working for the Navy. When the attack came he was called onto one of the ships to help.

EMC: Yes, it was very vivid for you as you said. How did you hear about the WAVES organization?

JK: It was well advertised in papers, in advertisements and on the radio. One of the girls in the office joined. That strongly influenced me.

EMC: Oh, that did. I was going to ask you if you knew anybody who joined and if that did influence you. Why did you pick the Navy instead of the WACS or the SPARS? What was attractive about it?

JK: I always liked the water. I liked the Navy. My brother a Marine, told me not to join the Marines -- it was too strenuous -

- but to join the WAVES.

EMC: Did you want to join the Marines?

JK: I was thinking about it because I liked their uniforms, and because my brother was in the Marines.

EMC: That's good. Did you like the WAVES uniform?

JK: Oh yes, I liked the WAVES uniform.

EMC: Would you say that patriotism was a motivating factor as well?

JK: Oh, yes, yes. That was one of the prime factors. Because my brother was in the Service we were all very war conscious. I thought I would be helping the country.

EMC: Good. And when did you enlist? What year?

JK: September 28, 1943. I left for active duty October 21, 1943 and went to Hunter College, Bronx, New York, for basic training.

EMC: Did you enlist in Providence or Boston?

JK: Boston -- there was no recruiting activity in Providence.

EMC: And then just a couple of weeks later you went down to Hunter College. How did your parents feel about your decision to join the WAVES? Were they supportive or not?

JK: No, my father was not supportive. He didn't think joining the Service was the thing for me. My mother told me, "Well, if you want to go, why don't you go." They were not too happy at first. Being stationed in Washington, I could come home on weekends. I brought home many girls who couldn't get home. After a few visits home with friends, my father became quite proud of me being in the service.

EMC: I think there was a feeling then that women didn't join the Armed Services. There was a definite feeling that it wasn't the place for you to be. I guess nobody respectable did that.

JK: That's right.

EMC: You were kind of shady.

JK: That's exactly right.

EMC: How did you travel to basic training to Hunter College? Did you go by train?

JK: Went by train in a group from Providence.

EMC: Right. And you were at Hunter for six weeks. Had you ever been in New York City in the Bronx before?

JK: Oh, yes, I had been to New York before.

EMC: What did you think of your living conditions at Hunter?

JK: It was strenuous. They had college dorms, and had about three or four double bunks in one apartment. It was quite difficult to get eight girls mustered out in the hall by 7:30 in the morning. Do you know what that causes in the bathroom? One bathroom -- eight girls.

EMC: Impossible.

JK: It was almost impossible.

EMC: Well, you did it.

JK: Yes. We didn't have time for makeup, etc. You put on your uniform, got your bunk made, and got out. It was an experience.

EMC: Yes.

JK: Being young -- 21, 22 -- we all moved quickly.

EMC: Oh, yes.

JK: I think it was very interesting and fun. I couldn't do it now but we did it then.

EMC: No, right. Do you remember how your day went when you were at Hunter?

JK: Yes. We marched over to the mess hall for breakfast. I had never been exposed to a mess hall before. It was an experience.

EMC: Did you like the food?

JK: The food was alright. Daily we had drilling, marching, and, of course, we got shots. We had swimming and attended lectures. We had interviews, aptitude tests, etc. Of course, I wanted to be in the control tower at an air field. I thought that would be very glamorous. They told me that with my Scottish accent, or New England accent I would not be acceptable. They were only taking girls from the West and Midwest, not from the South or the North. If someone had a regional accent, pilots could have difficulty understanding them.

EMC: Yes, I've heard that. You had to have very clear diction

and no regional accent.

JK: Then they asked me what else I'd be interested in, a storekeeper or a yeoman. I chose yeoman.

EMC: So you had some input into that final decision which was good.

JK: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember the kinds of classes you took when you were at Hunter College?

JK: They were mostly lectures. We did not have too many of them because we had so much drilling and marching. We had lectures on security, the war and patriotism. Then I went to Iowa.

EMC: Yes, I want to wait on that and just finish New York. But anyway, did you have tests?

JK: Oh, yes, we had tests.

EMC: Did you find the academic part of the training challenging, easy or difficult?

JK: It was fine. American history was a little bit difficult for

me because I was not familiar with it. I knew more about British history.

EMC: Did you like the marching and the drilling?

JK: It was good. It was invigorating. We learned about esprit de corps.

EMC: Do you feel that you adjusted easily to this first dose of discipline of military life?

JK: Yes, I think I did. I liked it.

EMC: You liked the regimentation?

JK: Yes, I think it is good for everybody to have a certain amount.

EMC: That's true. That's right. Did you have any limited time off? I know they gave you some time off.

JK: We had Saturdays and Sundays off. We had time to go into town on Saturday. Of course, we had changed from our civilian clothes and sent them home when we got our uniforms.

EMC: That's what you wore?

JK: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember what you did for recreation in New York City?

JK: We didn't have much time. My two sisters came to New York, and we went for lunch and just visited around town.

EMC: Did anything amusing or noteworthy happen during your training period, during the six weeks at Hunter?

JK: There wasn't anything spectacular. But I remember one day we had our tetanus shots, and they told us not to eat anything sweet before the shots. They gave us our tetanus shots and told us we could have the afternoon off. After returning to our rooms I was standing up and some of the girls had lain down. One of the girls said something and I remarked, "Well, let's go over to the gedunk," a little px store to get candy. As I looked around two girls had fainted. I think I was the only one left standing. I went over to the px, and when I returned most of them were resting or sleeping. Shots don't seem to bother me. We signed papers, learned rules and regulations. Actually, time flew so quickly, and we were kept busy most of the time.

EMC: As a yeoman you needed additional training in that field.

Where did they send you for this additional training?

JK: I went to Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls, to a training school for yeomen for two months.

EMC: And how did you get out there?

JK: We were told where we were going and to tell no one, not even our family. We left New York in the morning, boarding a train which traveled through Canada. Window shades were pulled down. This was a precaution to prevent sabotage, which could curtail 200 to 400 WAVES from releasing men for sea service.

EMC: Right. It was all kind of classified -- your movements. Well, you got to Iowa State. It must have been at the end of November -- right?

JK: Yes.

EMC: It was about that time. And how long were you there?

JK: I was there two months.

EMC: In the dead of winter.

JK: Yes. The girls who were not sufficiently qualified in

typing and shorthand had a three month course.

EMC: And what did you take? What kinds of classes did you take if you knew shorthand and typing?

JK: We had to learn the format of Naval letters, and correspondence.

EMC: Oh, right, yes -- the format that the Navy used.

JK: We transcribed shorthand and typed letters. Of course we learned more about the Navy and the jobs we'd be going into, mostly secretarial work.

EMC: Right -- it's what you were trained in. Did you enjoy this time -- this two months in Cedar Falls?

JK: Oh, yes, I loved it. It was very different from the East coast. We had liberty on weekends and went to Waterloo. Of course there wasn't much doing, and we were there during Christmas. Many of the girls were homesick. We had four in a room. I had great roommates. The dormitories were very nice and the food was excellent. We had corn almost every meal. I enjoyed it very much. We had tests and drilling.

EMC: Do you ever keep in contact with these people at Iowa

State?

JK: Oh, yes.

EMC: Oh, isn't that amazing.

JK: I still keep in contact with a girl from Worcester, Massachusetts. I met her on the train going to New York in 1943.

EMC: Oh, that's great. Did anything interesting happen during your time at Iowa State?

JK: Not anything in particular, except one of the girls who was in my room had security duty and she broke a sink by dropping a jar into it. We had security duty making rounds to ensure doors and rooms were secure

EMC: Oh, you were on duty?

JK: We had duties and we were kept busy. Recently, I had a call from one of my roommates and we reminisced about our days in Iowa. At one point, she had lost her wallet. Of course, the other three of us wondered who had taken it. As it happened, she had put it under the mattress and it got stuck in the springs. We were all so relieved. (This was the same girl who let a jar of face cream fall into the broken sink.)

EMC: Did you have any athletic training there at Iowa State?
Were you involved in athletics in any way?

JK: Some. We marched to classes and the gymnasium where we went swimming. We had gymnastics also. Soldiers were in training on the opposite side of the campus. As we marched past them we would be singing Navy songs very loudly, while they would be singing Army songs. The Army had liberty week days from 2-3 p.m. The WAVES had liberty from 3-4 p.m. We all had liberty on weekends. At Christmas they asked for volunteers to sort mail. Many of the girls were homesick. Since we had experienced homesickness when we returned from Scotland, I volunteered. The girls in my room asked why I did that. I said, "We have a whole week off, what can we do with no classes."

EMC: Oh, you had a week off. But you wouldn't go home.

JK: No, we were not granted leave. It was fun sorting out letters, cards and parcels. There was lots of mail that came in. About the third day, my roommates asked me if I would like to be replaced. As they got tired playing cards and games all day.

EMC: Oh, that's kind of interesting. You mentioned when we were talking informally before that when you went swimming at Iowa State you had a very limited time to get ready for the next

class.

JK: Usually, they gave us about five minutes to get out of the pool, wiped down and dressed.

EMC: And your hair froze, you said.

JK: Oh, yes. We didn't have time to dry our hair. As we marched across the campus our hair freeze. The rooms were all warm and our hair quickly dried when we returned to them.

EMC: You could hack it.

JK: We could hack it.

EMC: Did you date any Army officers when you were there or Army recruits?

JK: No, I didn't date anyone there.

EMC: You didn't have time for that?

JK: No, I didn't.

EMC: Well when your two months were finished, where were you stationed? Where were you sent to?

JK: I was sent to Washington, D.C.

EMC: And what office there?

JK: To the Chief of Naval Operations. I was assigned to Naval Intelligence. A Marine Colonel, who was head of the Intelligence division -- he gave us a lecture about keeping our lips closed. During the lecture, a sailor brought in coffee and a donut for him. He said, "See, we're nice. We have coffee breaks." That relaxed us a little bit, but he was very serious. I was assigned to the sabotage section.

EMC: Oh, and what did you do there?

JK: I checked files, incoming mail.

EMC: You checked it for what reason?

JK: To check on...

EMC: That were on a list for sabotage or something?

JK: We had to check files to see if we had any previous information on the person.

EMC: Oh, I see -- for any reason.

JK: To make sure there was no reason to keep them from serving in the Navy.

EMC: That's kind of interesting, isn't it?

JK: Yes. My parents never knew where I worked.

EMC: Oh, they didn't? You couldn't tell?

JK: No. When asked where I worked and what I did, I stated I worked in the Chief of Naval Operation Department, and enjoyed what I was doing.

EMC: Where did you live during this time?

JK: We lived in quarters at Arlington Farms, located over the Memorial Bridge, across from Arlington National Cemetery. We had nightly muster at 11:00 p.m. If we came in late, we had to sign in at the duty desk.

EMC: Did you feel that your job at the Chief of Naval Operations was a pressure job?

JK: No, no pressure, but important.

EMC: Did you work five days a week or six?

JK: We worked six days a week. We had extra duty staying in the office when it was being cleaned. A yeoman was assigned to stay there until the cleaners were finished. Then the offices were secured.

EMC: Yes.

JK: Also we had teletype duty. There would be a different code each day to communicate with other intelligence activities.

EMC: Sounds interesting.

JK: It was very interesting. I felt privileged to be assigned in a vital and important section.

EMC: Who did you work with -- other WAVES?

JK: Yes, with WAVES and officers.

EMC: Any civilians?

JK: Yes, most of the secretaries were civilians. We all graduated from Yeoman school as third class petty officers. Since

I was junior petty officer in my section, I had to go for the coffee each morning.

EMC: Did you become second class while you were there?

JK: Yes, I became Chief while in Naval Intelligence.

EMC: Was there anything you didn't like about it?

JK: No, I really liked it.

EMC: Did you ever meet the CNO? Did you ever see Ernest King?

JK: Oh, yes. He walked down the hallways, occasionally. Admiral King was well liked. In fact, one day while I was going up the stairs in the hallway, some admirals were going up also. I stood at attention to let them pass. One of the admirals asked me if I was going up. He took my arm and said, "Let's go little girl." I thought that was nice of him.

EMC: An Admiral?

JK: Yes. One day a WAVE friend asked if I would like to see Admiral Halsey's office. I told her I would. She led me to his office and told me to open the door. Admiral Halsey was sitting in his office, looked up and asked me if I needed something. I

answered, "No." I told him, "I'm sorry I have the wrong door." Of course, I should have gone through his assistant's door. I felt embarrassed.

EMC: Now how long were you in Naval Intelligence in D.C.? You were there from '44 through...

JK: Through the fall of 1946.

EMC: So you were there after the war ended even.

JK: Yes, then I transferred to Communications. They were downsizing Naval Intelligence.

EMC: Let's continue with this seven years in Washington which sounds very interesting. Did you meet anybody else who was prominent or see anybody else that was prominent during this time frame in Naval Intelligence?

JK: I saw Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.

EMC: And what was he doing?

JK: He was an agent. He was a Naval Lieutenant and came in to see the Captain.

EMC: Oh, sure. Did you ever get a chance to go to the White House or tour the White House?

JK: Oh, yes. But not until after the war. Of course, I saw Truman.

EMC: On what occasion did you see Truman?

JK: We used to see him out walking on Pennsylvania Avenue. Once he intended to lay a wreath at Lincoln Memorial in February. We were let out of the office to go there and see him. General Eisenhower came instead. I was standing close by when he arrived and got a wonderful picture of him.

EMC: Great! You saw some interesting people. Oh, that's great. Can you tell me what you did for recreation and social life in Washington during the war?

JK: We went to the movies or sometimes friends would come to Washington, and we'd go sightseeing with them and go to church. I went to New York Avenue Presbyterian to hear Dr. Peter Marshall. He became the Senate Chaplain. He was Scottish, and very good. When he preached, you felt he was speaking directly to you. One of the officers took me to lunch at the Officer's Club in Washington. While there, General Eisenhower came in and sat down at the table behind me. As we were leaving, I saw him. She also

took me to meetings at the American Association of University Women (AAUW).

EMC: Do you remember VJ Day in Washington, D.C. and how you celebrated?

JK: Oh, yes. To celebrate, some of us went downtown in the evening. Everyone was down walking around by the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. That was very exciting. It came over the radio that everyone was excused from duty the next day except those on special assignments. I did not report to work because I thought we had the day off. About 10:30 a.m. I received a call from the office asking me why I did not report in. I was told to report in at 12 noon. Then they let off those who came in at the regular time.

EMC: You were on special assignment or something. How did you feel about the war's end? How did you react to that?

JK: Oh, that was wonderful.

EMC: At that point in time did you entertain any thoughts about leaving the Navy when the war was over? Because you originally signed on for the war and six months after.

JK: Well, I had made Chief.

EMC: When did you make Chief?

JK: In 1946 after the war was over, the WAVES' complement was greatly depleted. WAVES were allowed to sign an extension for one year, and were upgraded in rate. Since jobs were not so plentiful in Rhode Island I signed up, and became Chief quite quickly.

EMC: You certainly did.

JK: As Chief, I would have a pretty good salary.

EMC: When did you transfer from Naval Intelligence to Naval Communications?

JK: In 1946.

EMC: And where did you work in Naval Communications?

JK: A civilian engineer who was in charge of the lines. I was in the section that had charge of radio equipment at naval stations.

EMC: What is a tie line?

JK: It was a connection from the White House to the temporary White House in Key West, Florida. When President Truman went to

Key West the Navy would connect the lines from Key West to the White House - so he could be contacted at all times.

EMC: Sure.

JK: One time, when I came home my parents were quite concerned about me in Washington because the Navy had been inquiring about me. I told them the Navy did a background check on everyone.

EMC: Right, right. Good background checks.

JK: Yes, background checks. I never told my parents where I worked until after the war.

EMC: And what exactly did you do as a Chief or a Yeoman?

JK: That I was a secretary for an engineer.

EMC: So you basically did some clerical work.

JK: Yes. I did some clerical work, typed reports and letters.

EMC: Yes. Did you voluntarily go over to Communications?

JK: No.

EMC: Oh you were transferred.

JK: Yes, I was transferred to Communications Division.

EMC: Because of the downsizing, right?

JK: Yes. I was offered a civilian job as naval clerk in Naval Intelligence. I told them, "No, I like the Navy. I'm going to stay with the Navy."

EMC: That's great. Where did you live during this time frame when you were in Communications?

JK: I went to quarters off Massachusetts Avenue -- then Chiefs could live off base. Then I lived in McLean Gardens. Have you heard of those?

EMC: Oh, yes, I've heard of those. Over in Arlington?

JK: No, it was out past the Washington Cathedral.

EMC: Now did you live with a couple of other WAVES?

JK: Another girl I knew from Naval Intelligence.

EMC: Oh, so she stayed in, too. Did you like living on the

economy now and not in a dorms-like situation?

JK: It was good.

EMC: What did you do for recreation in the post-war era?

JK: I went on tours around the countryside, to movies, the theater, and to dances. My roommate got married and resigned from the Service. I moved back to quarters at Potomac.

EMC: Oh, so you left McLean Gardens?

JK: Yes.

EMC: Potomac Park?

JK: Potomac Park, yes. I was in Washington from 1944 to 1950.

EMC: Oh, yes. So you were there a good long time.

JK: Yes, I was there a long time.

JK: Yes.

EMC: Jessie, can you tell me what you liked about your job in Communications and what you didn't like and compare it to

Intelligence, if you can?

JK: Well, Communications was not as restrictive as Naval Intelligence. We corresponded with radio and communication stations involving radio equipment. Naval Intelligence more or less investigated Navy personnel and Naval activities.

EMC: Did you work with WAVES there in Communications too?

JK: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did you manage to get home at all during your time in Washington?

JK: Oh, yes. I was able to go home on weekends.

EMC: Oh, yes. That was a nice break.

JK: After the war, we could wear civilian clothes, but during the war we wore our uniforms.

EMC: You mean to work you would wear civilian clothes?

JK: No, we wore our uniform to work.

EMC: Yes. Now when you were on liberty you could wear civilian

clothes.

JK: Yes.

EMC: Yes. Well, did you ever have a chance to meet Mildred McAfee during the war?

JK: Yes. I met her at one of the conventions. I shook hands with her -- a very gracious lady.

EMC: She was the director of the WAVES during World War II.

JK: Also Captain Joy Bright Hancock became Director of WAVES in 1946. She was at some of our conventions.

EMC: She was another director of the WAVES as well. Jessie, well, it's 1950, you've been in Washington for a good long time - - seven years -- and what was your next billet in the Navy? Where did you go after Communications?

JK: I was assigned to CINCNELM (Commander in Chief, North Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean) Headquarters in London in Strategic Naval Planning. Top secret clearance was required for this section.

EMC: Was it?

JK: After three months, the Captain gave me my Geneva Conference pass. I asked, "What is this for?" He said, "In case you're captured. They've got to treat you in accordance with the Geneva Conference. Then I asked, "When is the next plane going back to America?"

EMC: Oh, were you in that billet for...

JK: I was the Captain's secretary.

EMC: Now what building was that in London?

JK: In Navy Headquarters on North Audley Street.

EMC: Anyway that's where you were. How did you feel about this assignment to London when you learned you were getting it?

JK: Well, I was quite happy. I had requested New York so that I could go home for the weekends. I was also asked if I had a choice of overseas assignments and I chose, "London, of course."

EMC: That's fabulous.

JK: It was a long journey to get there.

EMC: How did you go? By plane?

JK: Yes. I went to St. Albans, New York. Then I flew up to Westover, Massachusetts. We left at midnight and flew to Frankfurt, Germany as England was fog bound. It meant we'd have to stay over the weekend. A few of us decided to try to get a train to Holland, then a ship from Holland to England, which we did. We landed in London on New Year's Eve. In the process of going to the train in Frankfurt, one of the ladies was robbed. We had been warned about robberies there. As we were approaching our coach, a young fellow ran past us. She was ahead of me. As she was about to board the train, the conductor noticed her purse was open. I lent her some money, and when she got to England she was prepaid her salary so she would have some money.

EMC: Isn't that something. You had quite a trip over there then. Now when you were there did you live on the economy? Did you have an apartment?

JK: Yes, I had an apartment.

EMC: Who did you live with?

JK: Myself.

EMC: Oh, yourself.

JK: A group went over earlier and most paired up in apartments.

EMC: Where were you situated in London? Was it in the city?

JK: Yes. Right in the city, in Queensway near Hyde Park. We all had apartments in the city.

EMC: What did you like about this assignment?

JK: I loved it. We had opportunities to travel around Britain and Europe. The work was not stressful, and we had plenty of leisure time. We attended theaters weekly in London, had ice skating parties, etc. We had a great opportunity to meet and mix with the British people.

EMC: How did they feel about your being there? Did you feel any discrimination or harassment?

JK: Oh, no. There was no harassment. Most of us in Strategic Planning were from New England. The Captain was from New Hampshire and the Commander went to Boston Latin School, Massachusetts.

EMC: How did they treat you? How did the officers treat you?

JK: Very well.

EMC: And did you do basically secretarial work at this job?

JK: Yes, secretarial work.

EMC: Did you meet anybody important, outstanding, during this time frame?

JK: Well, Admiral Robert Carney, then Admiral Perry, and Admiral Jerrald Wright had assignments there. I was only there about three or four months when Captain came in and asked me, "If I would like to go to Paris?" And I said, "Paris?". I sat there and I guess I looked blank. Then he said, "Well, if you don't want to go, I'll take one of the boys." I said, "Oh no, sir." He told me to go pack my bag. We're going to Paris in about two hours.

EMC: And what did you go there for?

JK: We had a radio station and an airport in Morocco. The French leased it on a yearly basis.

EMC: Was this Kenitra? That was an air base.

JK: Maybe it was -- I don't remember. It was in Morocco. We wanted to build some permanent buildings. We were negotiating

with the French for a long term lease. They met in the Naval Attache's office in Paris.

EMC: Oh, I see, to do that. How long were you in this billet in London?

JK: From January 1951 to September 1953.

EMC: Oh, you were for about a good three years.

JK: Yes, about three years.

EMC: What did you like about it and what didn't you like about it?

JK: I loved it. It was after war. We had lot of free time.

EMC: What was living in London like?

JK: It was great.

EMC: Were there food shortages?

JK: No, not too much. We had our U.S. commissary in the building and also our own postoffice.

EMC: Did you have an opportunity to tour around England?

JK: Oh, yes. I toured England, and many countries. Also I met my husband in London.

EMC: What was he doing there?

JK: He was a Chief. He was in navigation, and charted movement of naval ships in the Mediterranean and surrounding areas.

EMC: So was he in the same building you were?

JK: Yes.

EMC: Oh, so you met him right there at work.

JK: Yes.

EMC: Where was he from?

JK: He was from Fulton, New York. It's north of Syracuse. I took him to visit cousins in Manchester. I also took him to my grandmother's home, where my aunt was living, in Scotland. Sometimes I took WAVE friends to Scotland to visit my aunt.

EMC: Oh, that's fabulous.

JK: We had a lots of good times.

EMC: Sounds like a wonderful tour.

JK: Yes, it was.

EMC: When were you married and where?

JK: In 1952 in London in the Presbyterian Church by the Navy Chaplain.

EMC: In London?

JK: Yes. We spent our honeymoon in Edinburgh and Aberdeen, Scotland. One day after returning from the Admiral's daily meetings, the Captain said Admiral Carney was going to Paris on business and he said to fill up the plane with anyone who wanted to go. He asked me if I wanted to go. I told him, "Yes." Another chief and I went. As we were nearing Paris, Admiral Carney asked us if we had been to Paris before. I told him I had, but the other chief had not. He then told the pilot to circle Paris and the Champs-Elysees. It was a beautiful day and the view was wonderful.

EMC: You had some nice opportunities then.

JK: He told us, "Now girls on Tuesday this plane's going back. You girls had better be here or else you're on your own." We got back in time!

EMC: Oh, you had quite a nice time.

JK: Yes, we had a good time and took a tour to Versailles Palace. We also visited with a WAVE friend who was working at SHAPE Headquarters with General Eisenhower.

EMC: It was a wonderful experience.

JK: Yes, it was a privilege working beside great people.

EMC: Oh, yes.

JK: We had close contact with them.

EMC: Right. Oh, you certainly were. Now when you were married in '52 did you move to another apartment?

JK: We moved to my husband's apartment because it was a little larger.

EMC: Now when did you finally leave London?

JK: We left London in 1953 when our tour was up. We were there for the Coronation as no transfers were made until after the Coronation.

EMC: Did you witness it?

JK: Yes.

EMC: Were you in the crowds?

JK: Yes, we spent \$50 to \$75 to view it from a roof. It was pouring down rain. I finally viewed the carriage and entourage from the street. We were given the day off from duty. Afterwards celebration parties were held everywhere.

EMC: Where did you transfer to?

JK: I was assigned to the Planning Section, Naval Operating Base.

EMC: Oh, at the Norfolk Navy Base.

JK: Yes.

EMC: And you were a Yeoman in the Planning Department?

JK: Yes. I was secretary to the Commander.

EMC: Did you like this position?

JK: It wasn't as exciting as the London Billet.

EMC: No. And was your husband still in the Navy?

JK: Yes, he was in Charleston, South Carolina. He went to a mine sweeping base.

EMC: So you were separated.

JK: Yes. I stayed in Norfolk. I was asked if I wanted to go to Charleston, and I said, "I want to go to Norfolk because I've never been on a naval base." When I was in Washington I felt like a civilian except I wore a uniform. Again in London it was working in an office.

EMC: But you wanted to work on an actual base.

JK: Yes. I thought it would be good. I worked in Planning Section of Commander Naval Base.

EMC: Right. Did you dislike anything about that assignment as

secretary to the Commander in Planning Section.

JK: No. It was not as exciting in Norfolk as in London. However, I did enjoy my tour of duty on a naval base, and living conditions were very good. I met some good friends there.

EMC: Well, things kind of simmered down then. In Norfolk, it wasn't quite as exciting as you said. But it was still a Navy job and you were working on a base. Did you see your husband often?

JK: Twice a month we met. He would travel to Norfolk one weekend, then we missed a weekend and the next one I would travel to Charleston. It was every alternate weekend we spent together.

EMC: Yes, that's not too bad.

JK: Oh, no, it wasn't bad at all.

EMC: But that's unusual because in this day and age it's more commonplace. In that day and age it wasn't. Now, you stayed in the Navy at Norfolk through 1955. Why did you decide to leave at this point?

JK: Because I became pregnant.

EMC: Oh.

JK: I was going to have a baby.

EMC: So you had to get out. They wouldn't accommodate you in those days. How did you feel about leaving the Navy?

JK: I was happy to have a family, but a little sad to leave the Navy which I enjoyed. I had great assignments and met some wonderful people.

EMC: Right. Did your husband stay in the Navy?

JK: Yes, he stayed in for 21 years.

EMC: Oh, he did? So you were a Navy wife after 1955.

JK: Yes.

EMC: Where did you live after that?

JK: When I was discharged from the Navy, I went home and stayed with my mother in Providence. Richard, my son, was born in Providence, Rhode Island.

EMC: I see.

JK: As a WAVE I could have gone to Newport Naval Hospital, but decided to go to one closer to my home in Providence.

EMC: So, did you travel and live with your husband on other assignments after your child was born?

JK: Yes, we were in Charleston, South Carolina, for about one year. We then went to Yorktown, Virginia, when my husband was assigned to the minesweeping base for a short period. We were close to Williamsburg and enjoyed the area. Then he was assigned to Bath, Maine, to a pre-commissioning crew of the Destroyer Bigelow. After his tour was completed he was discharged.

EMC: What year did he get out?

JK: 1961.

EMC: Oh, so you've had almost a 20 year affiliation with the Navy in some capacity or another.

JK: Yes. My mother had had a stroke, and I took care of her in our home. After my mother passed away, and my son went to school, I took a Civil Service position at Quonset Point.

EMC: Oh, you did.

JK: Yes. I never quite completed the whole thing. Then I did another 12 years working for Civil Service.

EMC: Oh, you did, at Quonset Point until they decommissioned -- till they were disestablished in 1973, wasn't it?

JK: 1974.

EMC: So what was your Civil Service position?

JK: I was a secretary.

EMC: Sure, you were well versed in that. Well you've had quite a career then and quite an affiliation -- a very long term affiliation.

JK: When the Navy moved out, Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics moved to Quonset. I was hired by Electric Boat in the personnel office.

EMC: So when did you retire from there?

JK: I retired in 1982.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic. So that was just 15 years ago. So you've had a very long and interesting career. I wanted to double

back and ask you a few questions about the Navy and your active service. When you were in the WAVES during the war and after did you write letters home to your parents about your experiences?

JK: Oh, yes.

EMC: Do you have any of these?

JK: No, I don't.

EMC: That would be very good for us to collect. Because they're wonderful documentation of how you felt. Were you satisfied with the pay in the Navy that you received?

JK: Yes -- very much so.

EMC: It was enough to live on. Do you remember if you received any medals?

JK: Yes, I received the Good Conduct, the American Theater, the Overseas, and the Victory Ribbon.

EMC: Oh, sure, for your overseas service. Do you feel that the women in the Navy from 1943 until you left in '55 had a strong sense of esprit de corps?

JK: Oh, yes, I think so.

EMC: Do you think they felt in any way isolated or not part of the main Navy because of the fact that they were women and there were small numbers of them in the Navy?

JK: I don't think so. I never felt that. I think everyone felt we were part of the Navy and proud of it.

EMC: And you were well treated.

JK: Oh, yes, well treated.

EMC: Never discriminated against?

JK: I don't remember being discriminated against.

EMC: Do you think that the service in the Navy changed or redirected your life in any way?

JK: It broadened my aspect of the whole world and many things to which I had never been exposed -- more travel, meeting people from all walks of life and from all over the U.S.A.

EMC: Great, that's a good comment.

JK: It was wonderful. I just wish more girls would join the Service. It is a great experience. Also it makes one more aware of the vastness of our country.

EMC: You certainly did. And you had some great experiences. Have you maintained any friendships with any of the women you met in the Navy?

JK: Oh, yes -- many of them.

EMC: Did you attend WAVE reunions after the war and which ones did you attend?

JK: Yes, the 20th Anniversary in 1962 in the Statler Hotel in Washington, then in San Diego, Albuquerque. The 50th Anniversary was held in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1992.

EMC: Yes, that was the 50th reunion.

JK: Norfolk went all out to celebrate for us. I've kept in contact with the WRENS' Director in Wales. Quite a few of the WRENS (Women's Royal Naval Service) came to Norfolk.

EMC: Great. Did you meet many of the WRENS when you were over there?

JK: Yes, we met many of them. We were invited to their homes.

EMC: How interesting.

JK: I have just written another WREN officer, Ann Trigg in Wales, Great Britain.

EMC: Oh, isn't that great.

JK: When in Wales we were invited to visit the mayor's court in one of the towns, and they were dressed in their regalia with red coats and white wigs.

EMC: Was this a WAVES tour that you were taking?

JK: Yes. A tour in 1990 in Wales when we were invited to Ann Trigg's home (She is Scottish. We believe we may be related), also with Captain John and Anne Collins, Captain Irene Wolenski, Commander Ruth Erno, and Chief Lois Brown. Have you heard of them?

EMC: No.

JK: Also in 1988 a group of ex-WAVES from Washington, D.C. led by Anne Collins and husband Captain John Collins went to Australia and New Zealand. While traveling in Australia, we were

entertained by the WRANS (Women's Royal Australian Service) in their clubs. We were invited to a morning coffee at the American Embassy in the capitol of Canberra.

EMC: Great. So you have met WRENS and you have some affiliation and some connection with them -- still some contact. Do you belong to WAVES National?

JK: Yes. I'm a charter member, and member at large.

EMC: And what does that mean?

JK: That means I don't belong to the local unit.

EMC: Okay, you don't belong to the Ocean State WAVES but you do belong to the WAVES International.

JK: Yes. I have been to some of their conventions.

EMC: That's great. Did you ever talk about your WAVE days to your son?

JK: Once in awhile, but he did not seem too interested.

EMC: Was he interested at all in joining the Navy?

JK: No. We wished he had been.

EMC: Oh, yes.

JK: Yes. We thought it would be good training for him.

EMC: Thought it might rub off on him.

JK: It didn't.

EMC: What would you say was the significance of your naval career for you in your life -- your 12 years in the Navy? Why was it important to you?

JK: I think the highlight of my Naval career was during the war in Naval Intelligence. I felt privileged helping the war effort, and supporting the men who were protecting our country, and giving their lives for us.

EMC: That was the high point?

JK: Yes, I think it was very crucial for us to do the very best we could.

EMC: That's great, that's fantastic. Have I missed anything? Anything else you want to comment on or make mention regarding

your career?

JK: No, nothing. I have said plenty.

EMC: No, that's what we want.

JK: Sometimes trying to remember exactly what transpired is difficult.

EMC: That's okay. It will come to you later. But I want to thank you very, very much for taking time out of your busy schedule and coming to talk to us about your career both in the WAVES and in the regular Navy, which is so unusual. Not that many women transitioned into the regular Navy in 1948. And you did have a nice 12 year career which was very gratifying to you. So what we'll do is get this transcribed eventually. It may take some time. And then I'll go over it and edit it and you can edit it. So thank you very much, Jessie.

JK: Now, do I get a copy?

EMC: Yes, you will get a copy.

JK: This is wonderful. Do I pay you for this or contribute something?

EMC: No, no. This is totally gratis.

JK: Are you sure? This is great.

EMC: This is on the Navy.

JK: The Navy treated me well and I received many benefits.

EMC: Oh, good.

JK: I feel I was very fortunate. I had good assignments and worked with wonderful people.

EMC: Well, that's a great comment.

JK: I truly enjoyed it. Sometimes I hear people talk about the Navy in a derogatory manner, that bothers me.

EMC: You had such a positive experience.

JK: Oh, yes, I did. Everything wasn't always wonderful. Things never are, but it was good most of the time.

EMC: I think it gives you discipline and order.

JK: Yes, you learn discipline and order.

EMC: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]