

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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NO. 62

NELLIE MOORE ROLLINS

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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

1998

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND  
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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

INTERVIEWEE: NELLIE MOORE ROLLINS

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 1998

EMC: This is the first oral history interview with Nellie Rollins of Forestdale, Rhode Island. Today's date is February 25, 1998. The interview is being conducted at her home in Forestdale. Nellie, I'm so pleased that you were able to carve out some time from your busy schedule for this interview on your career in the WAVES in World War II. We've read a little bit about you from Marcia Davies' account of your time there. But we can fill in some of the gaps with the interview. I'd like to begin the interview by asking you a few questions prior to your entrance in the WAVES. I wonder where you born and when you were born.

NR: I was born on November 26, 1922, in Sharon, Vermont.

EMC: Where's Sharon near?

NR: Sharon is near White River Junction. It's about 15 miles

north of there. Very, very small town -- about 550 people.

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

NR: He was a farmer.

EMC: Did you live on a farm?

NR: We lived on a farm. We had about 250 acres.

EMC: Oh, that's pretty big.

NR: Yes, it is.

EMC: Was your mother a housewife?

NR: Yes, she was. She never worked outside of the house at all.

EMC: Very busy on the farm.

NR: Yes, she was.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

NR: Yes, I had two of each.

NR: I had a brother who was married before I was born. His oldest daughter was born when I was only nine months old. Then I had a sister who was two years younger than my brother. Leonard was the oldest one.

EMC: And then were the other brother and sister younger than you?

NR: No. They were all older. I was the youngest one.

EMC: Oh, okay. You were the baby.

NR: Yes. I had a brother that was five and a half years older and a sister that was two years older.

EMC: Did you spend your growing up years in Vermont?

NR: Yes, I did.

EMC: And where did you graduate from high school?

NR: I didn't. I went two years in high school. I guess I just thought that high school was not for me. I wasn't doing that well. So, I stayed home for that year. Then I went to work.

EMC: Where did you go to work?

NR: I worked in Hanover, New Hampshire. I worked for a professor's family there. I was what they called a maid at that time, you know. You did everything -- cleaning, and some cooking, but not an awful lot. She did most of the cooking.

EMC: Did you take care of children, kind of like an au pair?

NR: What do you mean?

EMC: Did they have any kiddies -- children?

NR: Oh, yes. They had two children. The little girl was very, very smart. She was reading books when she was in second grade that would be like for eighth graders.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes.

NR: But, as I used to say that she was really kind of a brat, too. I didn't care much about taking care of her.

EMC: Oh, I see.

NR: The little boy was real nice. He used to come out and read to me because I ate in the kitchen. They ate in the dining room

always. Yes.

EMC: Oh, yes. Right.

NR: I'm sure that that changed after the war. I don't think they did that much after that.

EMC: Right.

NR: I think the girls had gotten out into the world more and found out that they didn't have to do that.

EMC: That's right. Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941?

NR: I was at the Norwich Inn in Norwich, Vermont. I was working there. I can remember just about where I was standing -- at the big desk there in the lobby. It came over the radio and all of us were in shock. The next morning we all gathered. They had a huge fireplace in the lobby. We all gathered in front of the radio and just listened to the President.

EMC: I know. It was a shocking time.

NR: It was.

EMC: Well, the WAVES obviously weren't organized until July 1942, just about seven months after the war began. And were you still in Norwich at the time when the WAVES were being organized?

NR: I must have been. But I didn't know anything about it.

EMC: How did you hear about the WAVES?

NR: I was working for a lady -- taking care of her for a few days. She had this magazine, and it had a story about the WAVES. This was in 1943 -- February 1943. I was reading it. I thought that sounded very, very interesting. So I went home, and I told my mother about it. She surprised me, because she was just a very quiet lady. And she said, "I think that would be really nice. I think you would really enjoy doing something like that." Then I wrote to Montpelier. Then that's when they sent me my little booklet with the aptitude test and all of that. This was in February that I did that.

EMC: So you heard about it through an article.

NR: Through, I think it was the -Life- magazine.

EMC: -Life- magazine. Isn't that fantastic. How did your father feel about your joining the WAVES? Was he pro or con?



NR: I guess he must have been for it. He just never was much of a talker or like that. But I think he was for it. Yes.

EMC: Yes. He wasn't against it in any way.

NR: No. He wasn't against it at all.

EMC: So you enlisted. Did you enlist shortly after February '43?

NR: Well, I had to wait, you know -- send your things down to Boston and everything. Then they send it to you. So, it was in May, first of May, that I got the letter. Then my sister and I got on the train and went down to Boston. I'd never been on a train before.

EMC: Oh, wow.

NR: My older sister said she would go with me. We went down. We stayed at my aunt's in Manchester, New Hampshire. Because the train left like at two o'clock in the afternoon, we had to be there in the morning. Then we took the train down -- from there down to Boston the next morning.

EMC: Do you remember anything about your enlistment in Boston -  
- what procedures you had to go through?

NR: Well, when we came out of the station, we thought: Oh, this is going to be fun -- 150 Causeway Street. Okay. We came out of the station, and there it is right there.

EMC: Oh. Very close.

NR: We just turned the corner, and went right in. Then I remember Jo, my sister, stayed downstairs. I went upstairs, and had my physical there. We went through all of that which -- I'd never had anything like that before.

EMC: Yes. That's what everybody says.

NR: Oh, it was really awful. Then we went out for lunch together. Then at one o'clock, I remember, we went into another room. We had our aptitude test. You know, true or false -- things like that. I was doing fine until she said, "You've got ten more minutes." I think I froze then and I couldn't answer another question.

EMC: Oh, no.

NR: And I said, "Oh, I don't think I passed." I was so worried that I hadn't passed. I did, though, thank goodness.

EMC: Thank God for that.

NR: But I didn't pass my physical.

EMC: Oh, no.

NR: No.

EMC: Why?

NR: My tonsils were enlarged.

EMC: Oh.

NR: I had to go home and have my tonsils out.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes. Isn't that something.

NR: I made an appointment at the hospital. Well, of course, it was during gas rationing. The hospital was about 25 miles away from home. So they put me on the bus in Sharon. I went up to the hospital, and went in and had my tonsils out. The next morning, they came up, picked me up, and took me home. They could not go both ways.

EMC: No. Isn't that something. We don't realize --

NR: No. That's true.

EMC: How stringent that gas rationing was. You had to recover from that.

NR: Then I had to recover, and then went back to the doctor. He said everything was okay.

EMC: Did you have to go back to Boston?

NR: Then I had to go back to Boston. I went down there on the 15th, -- 15th of June in '43. There were about three or four of us, I guess. We were all sworn in at the same time.

EMC: Oh, that's great.

NR: And then out. Get on the train, and go back home again.

EMC: Yes, wait.

NR: Then two weeks later I was on my way down to Hunter College.

EMC: Oh, you were. You got notified quickly.

NR: Yes. The 29th of June.

EMC: Oh, you went down to --

NR: Yes. Hunter College.

EMC: Hunter College.

NR: I'd never been out of New Hampshire or Vermont. Those were the only two states I'd ever been into until I went on the train.

EMC: Great. Yes. And did you go with a group on the train?

NR: No, I didn't.

EMC: Did you go all by yourself to New York?

NR: I did.

EMC: That must have been an experience.

NR: It was. My mother was really worried about that. When they told me first I was going to land in New York about ten o'clock at night, and she said, "Oh. I don't want you doing that." We found out I could take the train in the morning from White River. I went down and stayed in White River that night with an aunt and uncle. Thank goodness I had aunts and uncles around -- yes. They took me to the station. As I got on the train, my uncle turned

around and he said, "Nellie -- There's a lady over there -- a girl over there, and she's going to Hunter College, too."

EMC: Oh, good.

NR: We started looking at each other. We had lunch together. When we came off the train in New York, there were two other girls there. We were supposed to meet somebody there. We came through the station and everything, and all of a sudden there she was. We must have looked lost.

EMC: Yes, okay. So you had an escort, in other words, to Hunter College.

NR: Yes. They took us by taxi. We were put into Building L -- I remember it was -- up on the fifth floor. I'd never been up on any big buildings like that.

EMC: Those were the old apartments, weren't they -- that were taken over?

NR: Yes. They were all taken over by the Navy. At that time, they were having their last group of women Marines in there, also.

EMC: Oh, yes. That's right.

NR: But they left before we did. I was in the Ninth Regiment, I think was what we were called.

EMC: What was your initial impression the first couple of days at Hunter College? Do you remember your impression of it? Was it terribly busy getting organized?

NR: It was a lot of work. We were on the go all the time, it seemed like. We had classes to do. Our meals were very, very quick. We marched every place we went. We'd march up to this building. Then we'd march into the building, pick up your trays, go through, get your food -- these huge, long tables. You'd sit down to eat, and you'd want coffee with cream in it. But the cream is down at the other end of the table. So you ended up drinking coffee black.

EMC: You had to get used to that.

NR: Yes, because you only had 20 minutes from the time you walked into the building. When you got through eating, you took your trays back and dumped off any food you had there. Then you dumped your trays and your silverware, and then marched out and got into formation again.

EMC: For class.

NR: Yes.

EMC: What did you think of the food? Do you remember what it was like?

NR: I think I thought it was pretty good. They gave us hard rolls all the time. When you only have 20 minutes to eat. We didn't have time to eat the hard rolls.

EMC: Yes.

NR: But I think that the food was good.

EMC: Do you remember anything about the classes and your instruction there?

NR: Yes, I do. I remember, one time especially. They were talking about a girl that was taking a -- what do you call it? She went up in a plane. And she took the -- oh, what is it?

EMC: Parachute?

NR: Parachute. She took a parachute, and she came down. One of the girls -- I remember one of the girls said, "Oh, I'd love to do that." I don't know. I don't think that's one of the things I want to do. We went through a lot of classes. And, of course, we



had to have our physicals again there. We had to have shots. They would put two shots in one arm, and one in the other. And you'd go home and hold your arms up because they were so sore. They told us to keep our arms moving, because that would put the medicine through -- the serum.

EMC: Did you enjoy the marching and the physical exercise?

NR: I didn't mind it at all. I thought it was a lot of fun. We sang as we were marching. Of course, people would be on the sidewalks waving to us as we'd go by. The first two weeks there we didn't have our uniforms. All we had was a cap. The first thing they do is when we'd walk in there was -- you'd go through this place, and you'd get a cap to put on. Now you're officially a WAVE.

EMC: Right. Oh. So you had to wait for your uniforms.

NR: We had to wait for our uniforms. I remember the day that we went for our uniforms. They'd say, "What size do you wear?" Well, I'd always gotten my clothes through Sears Roebuck. And then all of a sudden here we were getting clothes -- we'd try them on. They'd say, "You don't wear a size 12. You wear like an eight, or something like that." Because I weighed about 108 pounds.

EMC: Oh, sure. Yes.

NR: So they would give us all our clothes. We'd come out with our arms full of all of our clothes, you know. We had, oh, -- five uniforms I think it was.

EMC: Oh, you did? That many issued to each gal?

NR: Yes. We had two like this one. That was a nice one. That was wool. And then the jacket with it and all. We had two of those. Then we had three, I think, that were cotton ones which we hated, because we had to wear stockings that were like lisle hose. Well, of course, they'd stick to the stockings. We were so glad when we finally were able to get rid of those.

EMC: Yes. And you were there in the summer, too.

NR: Yes. We were there in July. It was hot. Yes. And then they gave us hats, and shirts, and ties, shoes -- we had to try on shoes. I said that I'd never worn shoes with heels on them. But these were the most comfortable shoes I ever wore. I mean they had to be for marching all the time.

EMC: Yes. Oh, absolutely.

NR: Because they were -- I suppose the heels were bigger, too.

EMC: Yes. Kind of thick, stocky heels.

NR: Then all of a sudden we were into our uniforms. You really felt like you were really in the WAVES now.

EMC: Exactly. Yes. Did you like the uniform?

NR: Yes, I did. Yes, I thought they were very attractive. I think -- Oh, that's right, too. We were given one white uniform too.

EMC: Oh, a summer one.

NR: Summery one. We didn't wear that an awful lot. If you wore it when you were going to go on the train, it would be very dirty.

EMC: Oh, yes. Because the trains were filthy at that time.

NR: Oh, they were. I remember one time we were riding home to Vermont. The only seat we could find was right next to the smoking car. So, it was really, really dirty.

EMC: Yes. Grungy.

NR: Yes, it was. Yes.

EMC: Did you have any physical exercise there, other than marching? Any, you know, gym, for example? Like swimming.

NR: No. I don't think we did, because we really weren't there that long. We were only there for three and a half weeks.

EMC: Oh. Three and a half weeks?

NR: Three and a half weeks.

EMC: Well, most of the time it was six weeks.

NR: It used to be. But then they cut it down when we went through.

EMC: Oh, they did.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, so that was very short.

NR: It was. I was there for two weeks. And then I was put on special duty for one week.

EMC: Well, what did you do for special duty?

NR: I was working in one of the buildings. I answered the phone. Then I remember one day -- that was after the Marines left -- we had to go to one of the buildings that they had been in. And we had to clean it. We had to take all these sheets, and put them in these big hampers, take them to the elevators, and go down to the bottom floor. We didn't have to wash them, thank goodness. But we did all of that.

EMC: Right. Oh.

NR: Then we were going to be having a regimental review.

EMC: Right.

NR: I hadn't been doing any marching for awhile. I thought: Oh, I'll never know what to do. Well, I really, really wanted to be in that regimental review. Well, I couldn't be in it because I was working. Well, they finally gave in. And so I was in it. That was very, very exciting.

EMC: Now, was this on a weekend -- a regimental review?

NR: I think it was either Friday or Saturday.

EMC: And who was it for? Was it in honor of anybody?

NR: No. It was for all of the WAVES that were going through and were leaving there.

EMC: Oh, I see.

NR: We would march abreast going down and across. And then, of course, they had the reviewing stand. So then they would say, "Eyes right." And we'd turn, you know, and face that way as we were going along. It really was very, very exciting.

EMC: Oh, I guess so. I wonder if Mildred McAfee Horton was there to review?

NR: She might have been. I don't know.

EMC: You don't know. But it was just -- I know Captain Amsden was head of the Hunter College U.S. Naval Training School.

NR: Oh, yes.

EMC: He probably was there.

NR: He might have been. I didn't know any of the people that were there.

EMC: Right. You were just there for three and a half weeks.

NR: Yes.

EMC: That's very short. It's amazing.

NR: We had one weekend that we could go into New York. But, of course, you had to be back by ten o'clock at night.

EMC: Did you go into New York?

NR: We went in one day.

EMC: Yes, the city. And what did you do? Do you remember?

NR: Yes. I remember we went to a place where Guy Lombardo played. I don't know if he was there or not. But we went where he had played. We went into a place where they always had dances all day long. Any place you went you could find a U.S.O. and go in and dance. We just walked up and down, and then had to get back.

EMC: It's a big city.

NR: Yes. A little bit of the big city. That's about all I've ever seen of it really.

EMC: Yes. Oh, that's interesting. Do you remember the living conditions there? How did you adjust or acclimate yourself to post living with other gals in those apartments?

NR: Well, I think that we were very, very lucky, because of the apartment we were in. You go through, hoping you can get this corner room where we had windows on two sides instead of just on one. This apartment had what used to be their dining room. In the living room, there were bunk beds in there. There was a place where there was a kitchen or galley. And that was where we did our washing. Then we were in the room on the corner. There were two bunk beds in there. I slept on the lower one. We had a little bathroom all to ourselves. So we felt that we really had the best. But one morning we overslept. We had to be out there to muster by quarter of six in the morning. I'm not saying Navy language. Is that okay?

EMC: Oh, sure. It's fine.

NR: So we were out there. When we came out, they were all in line. And we said "Oh, boy. We're going to get demerits now." But one of the girls had fainted. I don't know why they grabbed me. They said, "Go down and get the M.A. to get something for her." They put me in the elevator. Never had run an elevator. Didn't know anything about it. I said, "What do I push?" They said, "Just push B." I went down there. By the time I got back up on



the fifth floor, she had revived. Everybody was going back to their room. So we were lucky that time.

EMC: Oh, yes. You got off the hook. That's great. Did you adjust easily to the discipline during this three and a half weeks of military life?

NR: I think so. Yes.

EMC: No problems?

NR: No. It just seemed like it was -- We just had a ball. I had a real nice group of girls in there. In fact, two of them -- if not three -- were ones that I had met on the train going down.

EMC: Oh. So you roomed with them.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, isn't that interesting. Well, you spent a short time at Hunter -- shorter than most of the women who were there. When you were there, did you have a chance to express a preference for the kind of work you wanted to do after you finished training?

NR: Yes, we did. That's one of the things. They interviewed you, and asked you what you would like to do. I told them I wanted to

go into hospitals and things like that. That's what I'd like to do. And so they said, "What other preference do you have?" I said, "I really don't have any other one. That's what I really want." So everybody is saying, "Oh, I hope I get what I want." Then they put the list up on the walls. Everybody was running there to see what they got. I was lucky to get into the hospital part of it. Yes. I really liked that.

EMC: Where you were assigned then, after you found out you were detailed to the hospital corps?

NR: Well, then we left on Saturday morning. We all had to go down to the station. The whole train was all full of WAVES. We got on the train and then we went into New York. Then we had to change from there to get onto another train. And that one was full of WAVES. Then that one went from New York to New Haven, Providence, and up to Boston. We were assigned to go to Chelsea, Mass. -- the Naval Hospital there.

EMC: Oh. Was that for advanced training, would you say?

NR: Yes. That was Corp School. We were going through the hospital part of it and learning about that, because we hadn't had any before at all.

EMC: No. Of course not. Now how long were you at Chelsea Naval

Hospital?

NR: I was there for four weeks.

EMC: And did you have to take classes then?

NR: We took classes. The first two weeks we were there, we were taking classes in the morning and all afternoon. It was hot. It was July into August, of course. And you'd find yourself almost falling asleep sometimes when they were standing telling you all these things. Then I think we had class in the morning. And then in the afternoon we went to a certain place. I was on a skin ward.

EMC: Oh, you went to a ward. Yes.

NR: Yes. We went to wards to work.

EMC: To assist, I guess.

NR: Yes. It was just helping out. Yes. These boys had been overseas. They had malaria -- some of them -- and various things like that. I remember one especially. He had started shaking. I didn't know exactly what to do. We were putting blankets on him, because they were just in shock evidently. One day, I remember they had a huge basket with laundry in it. I was supposed to be

taking care of that. I pulled out something with this huge bug. And I screamed. I said here I am from the farm, and I'm screaming over that big bug. It was a cockroach. I had never seen a cockroach before. But it was fun. We worked there after we'd have our dinner. We'd go back to the ward to work until nine o'clock.

EMC: Oh. That was a very full day then.

NR: It was. Yes. Because we were up before 6:00.

EMC: From dawn until dusk.

NR: Yes. We did calisthenics in the morning from quarter of six until six fifteen, something like that in the morning.

EMC: Now that was required?

NR: That was required. You'd run down there in your pajamas outside and do your calisthenics. Then back in, get dressed, and then be at chow and wherever you were supposed to go from there.

EMC: Now where did they house you when you were at Chelsea? Were you in the hospital?

NR: No, we were not in the hospital. There were some big buildings there. I think probably they had been used by the

nurses. I'm not sure.

EMC: Oh, I see.

NR: But I didn't like it there as well. There were two rows of beds and they went the whole length of that building. There must have been 22 on each side, or something like that. It was like a great big open place, you know.

EMC: A dorm -- yes.

NR: Yes.

EMC: No privacy.

NR: No privacy. And the bathrooms were big, huge things. So, I was glad we didn't stay there too long.

EMC: Yes. But you stayed there a month which was long.

NR: Yes. We were there for a month.

EMC: Was anybody that you knew from Hunter with you there? Any of the gals that you had roomed with?

NR: There was maybe only one. I don't think she was where I was.

I don't think she was in that same dorm. I didn't see much of her.

EMC: Did you have to work on Saturdays then when you were in training at Chelsea?

NR: No. I can't remember that. I know that we used to be able to take off like maybe Thursday afternoon, or something like that. We'd work maybe until like three o'clock. And then we could go out.

EMC: Oh. They gave you a little break.

NR: Yes. We went into Boston. We went to Buddy's Club.

EMC: What is Buddy's Club?

NR: Buddy's Club was a U.S.O. right on the common in Boston.

EMC: Oh, I see. Yes.

NR: So we would go there. They always had singing and a piano, you know, up on the stage. They had dancing. I mean people were dancing.

EMC: Did you meet anybody there? Did you date anybody during

this time frame?

NR: Yes, I did. I met this Bill Sargeson. He was from Halifax.

EMC: Oh, he was Canadian?

NR: Yes. He was Canadian.

EMC: Royal Air Force?

NR: Yes, I met him. I don't know how we met. We just started dancing, and liked each other. I came in one other time and he was there. We met there. I remember he took me back to -- not the barracks, but to the gate.

EMC: I wonder what the Canadian Royal Air Force was doing in Boston.

NR: I really don't know. There just seemed to be all different ones there.

EMC: Oh. Isn't that something.

NR: Yes. There were even ones I think from England, etc. there.

EMC: Oh. Yes. Oh, that's interesting. So you met somebody.

NR: Yes. I met him. And I dated him a few times. We came back one time. I don't remember what happened, but I was late getting back. You had to be back inside by ten o'clock. And so we got to the first gate, and they weren't going to let me in because I was enlisted personnel. You were supposed to go to the next gate. And I said, "I won't have time to make it up there." So, they called in to find out for sure if I was stationed there.

EMC: Yes -- who you said you were.

NR: And they said, "Okay, you can go through." But you didn't do that very often.

EMC: No. That was a no-no in the Navy.

NR: Yes. That's right. But, of course, you had to get these buses from Boston. And, you know, sometimes you couldn't get on. It might be full, or something like that. So you had to wait for the next one.

EMC: Did anything amusing or noteworthy happen to you during this training period?

NR: Oh, yes. We had our first anniversary. The WAVES first anniversary in Boston was held while we were there. And we had a



chance to march in that.

EMC: Oh, fantastic.

NR: Which was really, really exciting. I can remember coming into Filene's, I think it was. We were marching three abreast. Came into the elevators, and up to the fifth or sixth floor. The whole place was full of tables. We had our meal there. And then we went to the movies that night -- not the movies -- a show. There was a movie star there that was a singer. I can't remember her name now. But she was there. That was exciting. Her name was Hildegard.

EMC: Oh. So it was festive, and they had a lot of things --

NR: They had a lot of things for us. And, of course, our pictures were in the papers. You know, the whole group of us parading through there. That was in the papers the next day, and all that. I have some of those.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Well, Mildred McAfee Horton must have been there.

NR: She must have been. Yes.

EMC: Yes. She would have, I think.

NR: Let's see, we just didn't know that much about some of those people at that time. I think they became more important maybe afterwards. They were important then, if you happened to be right where they were.

EMC: Right, right. Yes.

NR: But when you were in a different place, --

EMC: So you didn't have any contact.

NR: No. We didn't have any contact. I mean, after all, she was an officer and we were enlisted personnel. And you couldn't go with officers.

EMC: No. That was a definite division.

NR: Oh, yes. Definitely.

EMC: Between the two.

NR: In fact, one of the girls at Davisville I remember was caught with an officer. She wasn't put into the brig or anything like that. But she had to report, I think, practically every day for awhile.

EMC: Now she was an officer who was with an enlisted --

NR: No. She was enlisted, and she was with an officer.

EMC: Oh, I see. Okay -- the opposite.

NR: See, the officer didn't get -- probably he didn't get anything. But enlisted personnel did.

EMC: Right. Well, you finished your training at Chelsea in about a months time.

NR: And now we're supposed to be nurses who have gone through training for two and a half to three years.

EMC: Right.

NR: We were supposed to know as much as they did.

EMC: What was your rate?

NR: I think I was -- No. I was still an HA by that time -- Hospital Apprentice.

EMC: Assistant?

NR: Assistant.

EMC: You weren't a Pharmacist's Mate?

NR: No. I wasn't a Pharmacist's Mate. I didn't get that until later.

EMC: Oh, okay. So you were a Hospital Assistant probably.

NR: I think I was a Second Class. I might have been Second Class then, because we had to take tests.

EMC: Oh, you did.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, okay.

NR: In order to go up in your rating. Your next one will be like HA First Class.

EMC: Oh, okay.

NR: And then you become Pharmacist's Mates after that.

EMC: Oh, alright. It's a progression. Well, so you had to take a test then when you finished the training at Chelsea.

NR: Yes. I was only -- Instead of being an AS, now I'm an HA because this is my rating for Hospital Corpman.

EMC: Sure. Okay.

NR: Then we were off for almost a whole week. So I went home for the first time, and then back down on the train. I got my orders to go to Davisville, R.I.

EMC: Davisville, Rhode Island. Right. That was a Seabee base.

NR: That's right. We didn't know that, though.

EMC: Oh, you didn't. You didn't know you were in a construction battalion.

NR: That's right. We got off the train in Providence. And, of course, I was all by myself again.

EMC: Oh, again.

NR: Then I began to see some of the girls that I had known. Not very many, but some. When we were all together, we were all going

out to the Seabee Base.

EMC: And how did you get out there?

NR: I think we took the bus. I'm not sure, but I think so.

EMC: It's a wonder they didn't have somebody come and pick you up in a bus of something.

NR: I know. We got off at gate five, because that's where you go in. The other one is for the officers. We got off at gate five. Seemed like somebody must have met us there, because we wouldn't have known how to get to our barracks from there.

EMC: Oh, no. Yes.

NR: And we got to our barracks. That was also wide open, but not as many. There were double bunks in there. I think I was on the top bunk there.

EMC: About how many WAVES were there in Davisville when you were there?

NR: At the time we got there, there were only about 100 WAVES. Because when we came in, I think there were ten of us. So it made 110 WAVES that were there on the base.

EMC: And how large was the base would you say?

NR: It was big.

EMC: Big?

NR: We didn't see much of it really, because it was off bounds for us.

EMC: Oh, was it?

NR: Oh, yes. They had a big fence all around our barracks.

EMC: Oh.

NR: And they had guards out there going up and down. If you came home with a date, back to the barracks, and you wanted to say goodnight to him, you had to keep moving. The guard would say, "Keep moving, keep moving." So we had to keep moving. They finally took that fence down after about two years.

EMC: Oh, my heaven sakes. They were really protecting you then.

NR: They really were. Well, there were, I think, something like 20,000 Seabees on the base.

EMC: Oh, there were. It was that big? I had no idea. Because we don't have many materials in the Archives about Davisville.

NR: Oh, you don't?

EMC: No. We didn't get much at all. Well, we were just organized in 1969. So that material has gone elsewhere -- probably to the Navy Department Archives.

NR: Oh, yes. Well, they had quite a few different areas. I know they had -- one of them they called Sun Valley. I never saw that. But that was one of the areas. And there were a lot of different areas. In fact, the WAVES could go to very, very few areas. We'd come in from the gate, and we'd go up two streets. Then we'd turn left, and go past the S-29. Am I talking too much?

EMC: No, no. I'm just watching the tape, because it doesn't click sometimes when it's finished.

NR: Oh, I see. And then we'd go past S-29, or sometimes we'd go by the dispensary. But then we'd go up to another street. It was a ways up to our barracks. It was past a golf course. And, of course, the bachelor officers quarters were across the road from where we were. They had a nice lawn in front of their place and a nice wall. I think we'd only been there that one day. We were



sitting on that wall. And they came over and they said, "You're off bounds over here." Just across the road.

EMC: Right. You're in the military. And everybody's got to be where they should be.

NR: Besides our barracks, they had two other ones. One was for the WAVE officers, and then the other one was for the nurses.

EMC: There were three different female barracks.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting.

NR: They built our chapel while we were there, which went up very, very quickly. We didn't have very far to walk to go to church at all.

EMC: Were you obliged to go to church or was it just up to you?

NR: No. No. We could go or not.

EMC: Yes. Whatever you wanted to do. Now when you were there, you arrived, I assume, in August, maybe '43?

NR: Yes -- August 1943.

EMC: Yes. Where were you first assigned?

NR: Oh. I was assigned to the surgical ward.

EMC: What did you do there?

NR: Well, I had to give out pills. We had to make beds, of course. And finally, we learned how to give shots.

EMC: Wow.

NR: The first shot that I did alone was during a blackout.

EMC: Oh, my heavens.

NR: Which was great. We were holding a flashlight, and giving the fellow a shot. I didn't really think it was going to be so easy.

EMC: Was that the post-surgical ward?

NR: Yes. It was after they had had surgery.

EMC: Okay, post-surgical.

NR: And it was a big, big/ward.

EMC: Now, did you have a hospital there?

NR: No. Just the dispensary.

EMC: Oh.

NR: But it was like a hospital.

EMC: Yes. They just called it a different name I guess.

NR: Yes. In a dispensary, there are things that they can not do.

EMC: Like what? Do you know?

NR: I was trying to think -- Gallbladder --

EMC: Oh, certain operations.

NR: Certain operations that they can't do. They would send them to maybe Newport.

EMC: Yes.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Yes. They had a hospital there.

NR: They had the hospital down there.

EMC: Right.

NR: Once in awhile we had to do some of those operations. Because if it was an emergency, they could not send them.

EMC: Yes.

NR: I stayed working there for two weeks. The Head Nurse -- Chatterton, I remember her name was. Nurse Chatterton would come down and would speak to you and say, "How do you like it?" And I'd say "Oh, I like it very much." And she'd say, "Okay." She asked me that about three days in a row. And she came down one day and she said, "You're going up to the operating room." I thought. Oh.

EMC: What did you think about that?

NR: I'd never seen an operating room or anything like that. Everybody there all the boys were telling me don't touch anything. When you get up there, don't touch anything. So at

noontime I went up. I walked in. And there was Ruthie Mann, who became my very best friend. She was working there. And then I remember Ski. He came from Three Rivers, Massachusetts. His name was John Swatlowski. But we all called him Ski.

EMC: Now what was he?

NR: He was a Pharmacist's Mate.

EMC: Oh, okay.

NR: Yes. Mostly boys. I mean, there were only -- Mostly the boys were in there. There were very few -- And then, of course, Miss McGoogan was there -- our Head Nurse. I walked in. And what do you do? Ski immediately said, "Well, scrub up those instruments there. They're in the sink."

EMC: And you didn't know.

NR: No, I didn't know. I started scrubbing instruments and all. And then we started working in the operating room.

EMC: You really had no training, though, per se. You were just kind of shifted in there.

NR: Yes. We were. Then I was what they called a scrub nurse. It

meant that you got everything ready, and you put the drapes on the patient -- different things like that. You had to make sure that the instruments were out there where they were autoclaved and all. And then when they were --

EMC: Autoclaved means heated, or --

NR: Autoclave is a great big round thing. That was where you put things in to be sterilized. It was put up to 15 pounds pressure, so they were sterile when they came out.

EMC: Sterile -- right.

NR: Yes, they were sterile. We would get a tray together, and had everything on it that you had to use for the operation except for knives. You couldn't put anything in there that was sharp. We put those in formaldehyde, I think it was. Formaldehyde? No. It couldn't have been formaldehyde.

EMC: No. I don't know what you put --

NR: No. No. It couldn't -- Well Anyway, some alcohol, I think.

EMC: Whatever.

NR: I know what formaldehyde was for. That was for when they did

the appendix. And they had to use formaldehyde to cut off the appendix, you know. They had to put clamps on either side. They had to cut in between. They had to use formaldehyde. I remember when you were helping on operations they would use a knife to cut the skin.

EMC: Yes, I know.

NR: We would give them each knife. Then they would give us the knife back. We would have to put it underneath the towel on the tray, so that that knife --

EMC: Oh, so they'd know it was used.

NR: It was not used again.

EMC: Yes.

NR: And then you'd give them another one.

EMC: You had to actually assist.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh. I wouldn't have liked that at all.

NR: Well, we were as scrub nurses assistants later on. But at first you were just working. You were handing instruments, or --

EMC: Oh, I see. Well, you had to be all sterile, didn't you?

NR: Oh, yes. Yes.

EMC: In sterile garb?

NR: Oh, yes. We had to scrub. Then we had to come into the O.R. And they would have our robe -- our gown all ready.

EMC: Yes.

NR: And we'd put our arms through the sleeves and then the scrub nurse would tie it in the back.

EMC: Yes.

NR: Then they'd have the gloves. They'd open up the packs and we'd have to take out the gloves. They had little powder things there for you because the gloves don't go on very good when your hands are damp. Then they would hold them up. You'd put your hands down hard into the gloves. And they held up. They were only used for -- I was going to say, they were only used for that one



time. No. They were used more than that. That's right. Because they were autoclaved -- that's right.

EMC: Oh, I see.

NR: Yes. So they were sterile.

EMC: You had to get prepared.

NR: You had to be prepared. A scrub nurse went around and made sure that none of the sponges that were thrown out. They were thrown down on the floor. You picked those up put them up on hooks. Because when they got all through, they had to count these sponges to make sure that we had the right amount. We knew how many we had in each pack.

EMC: Isn't that something.

NR: Yes. Because that way they couldn't leave one in.

EMC: That's right. Oh Lordy, yes. Things you had to be concerned about.

NR: The first New Year's Eve, we had an emergency appendectomy. Ruthie and I had to get up. Of course, you couldn't put any lights on, because it was night time.

EMC: Oh. Did you have blackouts?

NR: Well, you couldn't have lights on after nine thirty at night.

EMC: At Davisville?

NR: Yes.

EMC: I wonder why.

NR: That's what time our lights were supposed to be off.

EMC: Oh, in your barrack you mean?

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, I see.

NR: We didn't have any flashlights either. So you'd get up and you'd feel around, and try to find your cloths. Of course, at that time, we didn't have any pantyhose.

EMC: No.

NR: Well, what difference did it make whether they matched or not at that time of night.

EMC: Yes, definitely.

NR: The nurse would come - I mean the M.A. - from downstairs would come up and poke us and say, "Moore, Mann -- emergency." And we'd get up and leave. Sometimes we'd be gone for three hours or more.

EMC: For heaven sakes.

NR: And we had worked all the day before, of course.

EMC: Yes. Oh, my heavens. It was kind of a limited staff, and they were very dependent on you to do that.

NR: Oh, yes. See, I was on port watch is what they called it. The other one was starboard. So, we had certain times to report. This day is a Thursday. This is starboard's day off.

EMC: Oh, I see.

NR: But we didn't leave until like three o'clock in the afternoon. It wasn't like we had the whole day off. We only had just part of it off.

EMC: So you were on call. But did you also work a set schedule like --

NR: Yes, we were probably at the chow hall before seven in the morning. Then we'd go from there right upstairs, and right to the operating room. We'd start setting up for operations. They had the schedule out, and we knew what we had to have. We would set things up for that.

EMC: And how many operations did they have a day, would you say? Did it vary? Obviously.

NR: Six, seven probably.

EMC: Oh, that's quite a bit.

NR: Yes, that is. Because we only had two tables.

EMC: And two physicians -- two surgeons?

NR: Oh. We had quite a few.

EMC: Well, I mean you'd have more, but --

NR: We had Dr. Butts[sp?] from Worcester. And we had four, five

-- I'll have to show you the pictures. I've got a picture of the whole group of us there.

EMC: Yes. Four or five surgeons.

NR: Yes.

EMC: But two operating tables. That's all you could do.

NR: Yes, but they very seldom had both tables going at the same time. They did sometimes.

EMC: You were very busy.

NR: Yes, we were.

EMC: It was a full schedule on a daily basis.

NR: Oh, yes. Sometimes you'd get called out more than once during the night.

EMC: Oh, really.

NR: And you'd go back. And then all of a sudden you'd get called out, "Nurse said, I'm going to let you go home early today," because we were tired.

EMC: Oh, absolutely. Yes. Because you'd be alert at twelve midnight.

NR: It was draining too, just doing those operations at night. As I was saying about this New Year's Eve we were going through. All of a sudden, the doctor looked up and he said, "Happy New Year, girls." I said that's the first -- my first New Year's in the WAVES. And here I am in an operating room.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes.

NR: But you see, the rest of the girls at our end of the barracks were all Pharmacist's Mates. And then the other end was what they called StoreKeepers.

EMC: Oh, yes.

NR: Downstairs on the first floor, the Yeomen were on that one side. And the other side was the hall that they used to go into to meet. We didn't seem to have any time to do that. Because, you know, when you worked -- On your day that you worked, you were in there at, as I said before, eight in the morning. And you didn't get home until after nine at night.

EMC: Oh, really. It was that long for you?

NR: On our days that we worked. Yes, once in a great while we would go home if there didn't seem to be anything going on. You know, we'd cleaned up. We'd scrubbed the floors.

EMC: Oh. You had to do that, too?

NR: Oh, yes. Yes. We had to scrub. As we called it -- Swab the decks. And we really, really had to swab them. We had merthiolate on the floor.

EMC: Okay. Let's continue. You said you had to scrub floors as well?

NR: Yes. We had to scrub the floors. Of course, all of the instruments had been scrubbed during the day. So we had to put those into packs. They were on trays. And we'd put those in the autoclaves. You'd have quite a few of those ahead of time, so that you didn't have to do things in too much of a hurry.

EMC: Was that autoclave machine right in the room?

NR: No. We had three rooms. We had what we called our scrub room. And that had three sinks. Of course, when you were scrubbing, you don't reach over and turn off faucets or anything like that. You did it with your knee for the water. And then when

you'd get through, you would have to hold your arms up, so that you weren't contaminating your fingers. And that's what you had to do. When you walked into the operating room, you had to keep your arms up all the time --

EMC: Isn't that something.

NR: Until you got into your gown. Then you could put your hands down. You never put them down beside of you, because you're not sterile down below.

EMC: That's right.

NR: You had to keep them up all the time.

EMC: It was such a procedure.

NR: It was. We had that room. Then we had another room that was called our work room. That's where the two big autoclaves were. We also had another little sterilizer. That was for instruments that were in hot water. They were sterilizing. Then we had a sink that we scrubbed in. We had our big cabinet there that had all of our autoclaved sheets and towels. When we went down to get the sheets and things like that, those all had to be folded just right. I know we had what we called lap sheets. That was with a hole in the center. You know, because when you're doing the



operation you have to have a hole --

EMC: Oh, that's right. Yes.

NR: You have to have a hole.

EMC: Right. Yes.

NR: We had to fold them just right, so when we got ready to open them up, they'd just open right up.

EMC: Oh, isn't that something. You had a lot to learn.

NR: We had a lot to learn.

EMC: And you just were kind of pushed into this without really much training.

NR: I really was, yes.

EMC: Nobody instructing you or anything?

NR: No. Well, you know, the head nurse helped us out, of course. I wasn't in there more than about three days before they had me working on an operation with one of the doctors.

EMC: Oh, well. I'll bet you were nervous.

NR: I really was. This fellow had cut his finger. Everybody said, "Just watch out. Just keep out of the doctor's way." And so he'd say, "Wipe it." And so I'd wipe it. Then I'd get back and he'd say, "Wipe it again." Well, I didn't think I was supposed to be doing that all the time. I knew it afterwards. But I mean the first time I didn't.

EMC: No. They don't tell you anything either.

NR: He kind of yelled, I remember afterwards.

EMC: The doctor.

NR: Yes. The doctor yelled. I remember walking out in the hall. I started crying, because I'd never had anything like that happen.

EMC: Right.

NR: And one of the fellows came out. And he said, "Don't cry over him. He's not worth it."

EMC: Were you in the operating room in the dispensary throughout your stay at Davisville?

NR: Yes, I was. From September of '43 until I left in December of '45.

EMC: Wow. So that was two years and about three or four months.

NR: That's right.

EMC: That's quite a long time.

NR: It was, yes.

EMC: Did you like this kind of work?

NR: I did -- very much.

EMC: You did?

NR: I really did.

EMC: You got used to it?

NR: I got used to it. It was a lot of work, but we had a lot of other things to do, too. We had to make the casts for the boys.

EMC: Oh, you did?

NR: Yes. That we had -- what we called our fracture room.

EMC: Yes. Tell us about that.

NR: On a weekend, you know, it would be slow. We didn't have any operations. So on Sunday, we had this gauze that we had to cut. And then the plaster. You put the plaster on and rolled the plaster up tight, and put it into this pail. We would make two - two or three of those pails. Then when they got ready to put the casts on anyone, all they had to do was take it out and drop it into the water until it stopped bubbling. Then they'd put it on. Of course, the plaster is inside of the cloth.

EMC: Isn't that something.

NR: Yes. It was fascinating.

EMC: It's amazing.

NR: We had another room that was called central supply. That was where they did all of the distilling of water for operations. I've forgotten what else was in there. One of my friends from Oklahoma worked in there all the time.

EMC: Isn't that something.

NR: I heard from her for years. And then all of a sudden I've lost contact with her.

EMC: Well, you were very busy then. Weekends, and all. You seemed to have very little time free.

NR: We didn't have an awful lot of time free. But every other Thursday was the day -- the time that the stores were open in Providence. We would try to get out of there so we would leave by say three o'clock in the afternoon, go into Providence go shopping, eat out, go to a movie, and then come back to the bus terminal. Getting on the bus -- as long as there weren't eight or ten WAVES there, we would all get on first before the boys did.

EMC: Was this a special bus taking you back to the base?

NR: Yes. It took us back to base.

EMC: Did you ever have any encounters with any civilians when you went out on these jaunts to Providence?

NR: No, not really.

EMC: You really didn't.

NR: No. We didn't.

EMC: So you're pretty much on the base then.

NR: Yes. And when we went in, well, I mean it was always two or three girls together maybe.

EMC: Did they harass you at all on the base? Was there any harassment or discrimination, would you say, against the WAVES?

NR: No. The only time that it happened was the first day that we were there. And the head nurse was taking us through, and showing the different rooms. And I can remember when we came in, the boys started yelling. Because they hadn't had my WAVES. All they had had was nurses in there before. Here, all of a sudden, there were going to be some WAVES that were going to be there, too. They were funny. I think they were happy to see some young girls maybe in there, too because the nurses were older than we were. They had to be Registered Nurses to come into the Navy.

EMC: Sure. And have a little bit of experience, perhaps, to come into the Navy.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. But how were you treated by the

doctors that you worked with, and the corpsmen that you worked with?

NR: Oh, the corpsmen were just like we were. We were all corpsmen and we got along great.

EMC: They didn't discriminate against you or treat you poorly.

NR: No, they didn't. I don't think we ever thought of discrimination at that time. Everybody was the same. We were all in uniforms. Nobody knew whether anybody was any better than anybody else. You all wore the same thing.

EMC: And how did the physicians treat you?

NR: Most of the time very nicely. Yes. There was one doctor that I really liked so much. Dr. Conley, I remember his name. In fact, he was supposed to be taking my appendix out. I guess he was gone at the time so some other doctor had to do it.

EMC: Oh. So you had your appendix out there.

NR: I had my appendix out while I was there. I've forgotten when I -- Oh, I think it was field day or something like -- Every Friday we had what we called field day.

EMC: And what is that?

NR: That means that you had to clean. The place is clean anyway. But it had to be spotless. Saturday morning the Captain would come through and go through with his white gloves and feeling around to see if there was any dust or anything like that.

EMC: In your barracks you mean?

NR: No.

EMC: Oh, in the hospital, in the dispensary.

NR: In the hospital, yes, and in the operating room. I was working there one day. I forgot what I was doing. I reached down for something and I guess I must have said "ahhhh", like that. And the girl said, "What's the matter." I said, "Nothing." She said, "Yes, there is. What is it?" And I said, "Well, I just got a little pain in my side." And so she said, "Come on." And the nurse said, "You go up and see the doctor." I went up. He said he thought I had what they called a chronic case instead of, an attack. It wasn't something that was going to burst or anything like that.

EMC: No, no.



NR: Anyway, I had to have my appendix out.

EMC: Right there.

NR: And you have to stay in for almost four weeks.

EMC: Oh, my heavens -- yes.

NR: You can't come out of the dispensary until you're ready to go back to work.

EMC: Oh. You had to be in the dispensary for a month.

NR: And when I got out, I finally got my Pharmacist's Mate Third Class.

EMC: Oh, you did.

NR: And so that was nice to get that on your records. Did you happen to see it on my coat?

EMC: On your uniform. Oh, yes. That's great. Yes. So you had to take a test for that.

NR: We had to take a test for that -- yes. I had gotten First Class evidently some time in the fall. I got this later on. But

then one day, it was a Sunday, we had to walk from our barracks over to the dispensary. Of course, it's a walk and it was cold then. We came in, went to chow and came up to the operating room. One of the fellows said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "Nothing. Why?" He said, "You've got spots on your face." I said, "I have?" You know, we had no mirrors around to look at or anything like that. We went up to the doctor. And sure enough he said, "You've got measles."

EMC: Oh, no.

NR: I'd never had measles.

EMC: Oh.

NR: I'm put into the infirmary, which is across the hall, across the road from the dispensary.

EMC: Oh. The infirmary was something different than the dispensary.

NR: Yes. That was for contagious diseases.

EMC: Oh, okay.

NR: I was put in there. I was really quite sick for awhile. I

had a high temperature. The boys used to -- one of the boys especially come in from Liberty in Providence, and he was coming back. He'd come in through the back door. He said, "Nellie, I've got something for you." And he'd have some fried chicken.

EMC: Better food, I take it.

NR: Yes. That's right.

EMC: Better than what you get in the hospital.

NR: I hadn't been out of the infirmary, back working more than about two weeks. All of a sudden, I've got another rash. I had German measles.

EMC: Oh, no.

NR: So, I began to think I never was going to get over it.

EMC: I wonder if you caught those things because people there had them.

NR: Probably. And you see, I had never been exposed to those before.

EMC: No. You probably didn't have the immunity against these

because you didn't have them as a child.

NR: No. That's right.

EMC: You spent a lot of time in sick bay.

NR: I did, for a short time there -- yes.

EMC: Was there anything that you didn't like about your assignment in the OR?

NR: No.

EMC: Anything negative about it at all?

NR: No. I really can't think of any. There was the food, of course. Friday's food we did not care much for. We had Jello. It always tasted like it had perfume in it, or smelled like it. We had some kind of tomatoes -- not very good, and boiled fish, I think. Everything else was fine except for Friday. By this time they had a commissary.

EMC: Did you have to eat in the -- You didn't eat in the dispensary, did you?

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, you did. You ate your meals in the dispensary.

NR: Yes. We ate our meals down there. Yes.

EMC: Oh, I see. Yes.

NR: But anyway, she was an officer. She could get food at the commissary, which was outside. We went with her one time so she would bring things back, you know, so we could stock them away and have something to eat.

EMC: But your evening meal. Would you eat that in the dispensary?

NR: Yes. We ate all our meals there.

EMC: Oh. I wondered if they had any separate dining hall for the other WAVES.

NR: They did. In fact, I think before we got through that we started eating at that other place. I don't know why. Before that, we didn't have time to go anyplace else because we would be working on operations. They closed the downstairs galley at quarter past twelve. The doctors were very, very good. They would be watching the clock. If they saw we were going to be late

they'd say: "Call the galley and have them hold out four meals", or whatever it's going to be.

EMC: Right.

NR: When we got through, we'd pick up the patient, go to the elevator, take the patient to the ward, come back, leave our cart outside of the chow hall there, and then we'd go in. We'd go right into the galley. We'd have better food then, of course, than we did when we ate regular meals. Everything was hot. It was just coming right out. They'd give us cake sometimes they'd just made and things like that.

EMC: Oh. So that was your situation.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Did you have any time for recreation on the base? Was there anything that they offered like shows and dances?

NR: They had movies for us. All the time you could go to movies. They had bowling alleys. Then we had our own little lounge for the WAVES. I didn't use it very much though, but it was a nice little building. They had quite a lot. S-29 was where they had all of these different things. They had a ships service there. You could go over and buy hamburgers or ice cream. Our head nurse

was a ice cream alcoholic, we used to say. We would say what we wanted but we never knew what kind of ice cream we were going to get because they only dished up what they had open at that time.

EMC: Oh.

NR: We would say what we wanted for our sauce on the top. She would just -- you know, they'd write them all down. Then one of the boys would go over and come back with this tray with all the ice cream for us -- especially on a Friday, after we'd had that awful meal.

EMC: Oh, yes.

NR: We had a doctor, Dr. Cooley, who was a bone doctor. He was like a kid. He was so cute. He used to come in while we would be doing an operation. All of a sudden we'd hear him out there rustling around. We had crackers up in the top of the cupboard and he would come in and get the crackers out and eat them.

EMC: That's interesting. Did you date anybody on the base? Did you have an opportunity to meet any of the Seabees there?

NR: Oh, yes. I didn't date any Seabees at all. The Seabees were in a different area. See, the only ones we'd really meet would be the ones in the operating room or dispensary.

EMC: Yes.

NR: Or ones in the wards, etc.

EMC: Oh, I see.

NR: And I dated two or three different ones.

EMC: Yes. So those were the people that you'd meet actually that were near your work.

NR: Yes, that's right. The dispensary was really pretty good size. It was almost like in a quad.

EMC: Oh, it was huge.

NR: When we would come out of the operating room, we could look down. It would be all grass down there. It was a square.

EMC: And how many floors in this dispensary building?

NR: Two. Two was all. Yes. At one time the nurse thought that I was too thin, and also one of the other fellows that worked in the operating room was too thin. She decided we should go down to the galley once a day, or twice, and get something extra to eat.



EMC: Oh, the galley. Yes -- the dispensary galley.

NR: Yes. Like half milk and half cream.

EMC: Oh, yes.

NR: So we'd go down. Of course, we'd get cake also, because they were just taking it out of the oven. That was great. Except one day, they decided to be extra kind to us. And they gave us more cream than usual. Well, it was a long way from there to the head, which was the bathroom. I ran all the way from there and up the stairs and down to the head. I didn't think I'd ever make it. The next time I said, "Don't ever, ever do that again." That was just too rich.

EMC: Yes, right. Not too good. Did you socialize with any of the other WAVES besides going to Providence on those Thursdays?

NR: I met a girl when I had my appendix out that was in the bed next to me. And she was from Attleboro. She and I became very, very good friends. In fact, we still are.

EMC: Good.

NR: She lives in North Carolina now. I see her quite often when

I go down to see my son.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting.

NR: She used to live right around here. So we saw each other up here, too.

EMC: Oh, that's great.

NR: I went home with her a couple of times. They also had a place on Narragansett Bay. I went down there with her. It was fun to do things like that.

EMC: Oh, yes. Did you ever get home to Vermont during this time frame?

NR: Oh, yes. Yes, I did. But we didn't have very much time.

EMC: No. Sounds like it.

NR: I'd get off in the morning and the next train I could get out of Boston would be twelve thirty. Well, it's an hour from Providence to Boston. I'd get in the taxi and go from there out to North Station.

EMC: North Station. Yes.

NR: North Station. And get on the train and go to South Royalton. I'd get up there at five fifteen at night. I had to be on the two-fifteen train the next day to go back to the base. So you spent an awful lot of time --

EMC: Traveling, yes.

NR: Yes. Unless we had a forty eight hour pass or a - fifty-six, fifty-two hour pass, or something like that. Then we'd have a little bit more time.

EMC: Right.

NR: The trains got so that they weren't stopping at South Royalton, which was near my home. It would stop in White River. If I got off in White River, somebody had to come down and get me. If somebody happened to be down that way, they'd pick me up and take me home.

EMC: Oh, yes. So that's what a lot of the gals said. It was just difficult getting home. They did it, but it was a very short time frame that they were there.

NR: It was, yes.

EMC: You know, I meant to ask you earlier. Did any of your brothers or sisters join the military?

NR: No. My brother was needed on the farm. My sister was married. No. She didn't even think about it. But my niece Helen, who was not quite two years younger than I was, went into the WAVES.

EMC: Oh, she did?

NR: Yes. And then Bud and Paul, two of my nephews, went into the Navy in January, I guess it was, after I went in. I don't know how many there were. I said I started something by going into the Navy because all these others went in.

EMC: You know, is your niece still around -- Helen?

NR: She's in Vermont. And she's the one I'm going with to Hawaii.

EMC: Oh. Do you know what she did in the service?

NR: She worked in New York. I think her life was quite different from mine. She was not on a base.

EMC: Yes.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting.

NR: I really don't know just what she did do though.

EMC: Oh, that's great. Well, we'll have to investigate that.

NR: Okay.

EMC: Well, did you write any letters home?

NR: Many.

EMC: Oh, great. You've got a whole package of letters. Well, we'll look at those too -- describing your duties, and your life?

NR: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic.

NR: These were all letters to --

EMC: All to mother and father?

NR: Yes.

EMC: Great. Because they should -- that is the basis of the books of Judith Barrett Litoff-letters. She has 30,000, I think, in her collection because she advertised. People all over the country have sent her letters.

NR: Oh, my

EMC: Which is fantastic. Well, you must have been at Davisville on V.J. day in August 1945.

NR: I was. Yes.

EMC: Do you remember your reaction to the news of the end of the war?

NR: Yes. I can remember we were in the barracks at that time. I don't know whether I was writing a letter or what I was doing. But I remember being up on my top bunk, and we heard it. It was just like -- we've been released. That's what you felt like, I guess. You could do things that you hadn't done before. We were running out of the barracks. All these people were coming from everywhere. We walked places we'd never been able to go before, you know. We were just all together -- everybody. And then, of

course, when we got over to where the flag was, I don't think you ever felt as patriotic as you did when that flag came down. I think we all felt like we were in tears and everything. We stood there and watched our flag come down and know that the war is over.

EMC: It must have been fabulous.

NR: When we went back to the barracks, there were two fellows there. And they were on motorcycles. They wanted to take us for a ride. I'd never been on a motorcycle before. "Come on, you know. We won't go fast." And so they took us for a motorcycle ride.

EMC: Around the base, huh?

NR: Around the base. Not very far, but around our area.

EMC: Did you party at all? Did you have any parties as a result of the war's end?

NR: I don't remember doing that. I know I have pictures that were in the newspaper of their having awards and different things like that. But I don't remember parties. I don't remember what else we did after that.

EMC: But you did march down to the flag with all the other

people?

NR: Oh, that was the most exciting part. It really was. We marched, as I said, down in areas we'd never been before.

EMC: Off limits?

NR: Everybody just went everywhere.

EMC: Oh, that's great.

NR: I don't think they even tried to contain us.

EMC: Oh, yes, not at that point.

NR: The other thing that we had that was exciting was Christmas day? You may have heard about it from some of them -- that they thought they had sighted a sub off the coast here?

EMC: No.

NR: Well anyway, it was at four o'clock in the morning, and it came over the loudspeakers --

EMC: Was this in '44? December '44?



NR: I'm not sure if it was '44 or '43.

EMC: Yes, whatever. But --

NR: It was one --

EMC: One of those Decembers.

NR: And so we -- had to get dressed. We went to the dispensary. But we couldn't go upstairs. Nothing was unlocked. Anyway, we were all piled into this little hall until seven o'clock in the morning -- because no lights could go on.

EMC: Yes. Darkness.

NR: You couldn't have any lights on at all. We stayed there. Then we went in and we got our breakfast, I guess. Then we went up to the operating room. I guess, it was around, some time in the evening that it was all clear. We didn't really know what had happened.

EMC: They didn't tell you that a sub was sighted. You found that out later.

NR: We found out afterwards. Yes.

EMC: But that must have been kind of a scary, peculiar experience.

NR: It was. It was really scary. I know we had been in the operating room all day. And there was nothing to do -- no operations or anything like that.

EMC: No.

NR: But we had to stay there. We finally said, "We're going to go over to S-29 and go to the movies." So that's what we did. I mean that's dark in there so nothing could happen.

EMC: Was the base darkened at night at a certain time frame? You know, lights out -- You said lights out at nine thirty in your quarters.

NR: That was lights out in our barracks.

EMC: But I just wondered if the base was in darkness at night because it was a training base for Seabees.

NR: That's right. Yes. It seemed like we had lights though because when we came home it was not pitch dark.

EMC: Yes.

NR: And we had no flashlights. It must have been lights out.

EMC: Right. Must have been. Yes.

NR: Where we were, we were coming home later than the rest of the girls. Their lights had to be off at nine o'clock but they kept them on until nine thirty for us. We would have been coming in the dark every night.

EMC: Yes. Late duty. You had a long, long day.

NR: Yes, we did.

EMC: I meant to ask you a little bit earlier prior to V.J. day. April '45 was when Franklin D. Roosevelt died.

NR: That's right.

EMC: Do you remember how that news affected you and what, if anything, formal occurred on the base?

NR: Oh, I know that the flag was at half staff, of course. We had that a few times. I remember when Knox died, too, the flag was at half staff. I don't remember if there were other ones or not. I can remember, you know, feeling sad. At the time, I think

I was again on my bunk because there was no chairs. You'd climb up on your bunk, you know, up on the top bunk.

EMC: That's that.

NR: That was that.

EMC: Yes. Right. That was quite something when Roosevelt died.

NR: And then, of course, we had the end of the European war too during that --

EMC: Yes. The V.E. day --

NR: V.E. day, yes.

EMC: In May of '45.

NR: And, of course, besides that we had June 6th. I said, it hit anniversaries and birthdays in all my family. The war over in Europe was like the 7th of May. That was my brother Elmer's birthday. The 6th of June was my mother and dad's wedding anniversary. Just seemed like they just hit everybody like that.

EMC: Yes. Were there any special celebrations on the base on V.E. day in May of '45? That was the end of the war in Europe, as

we said.

NR: Yes. I don't remember there being anything.

EMC: Yes. V.J. was the final.

NR: Yes.

EMC: I think there was more of that -- very, very definitely. Well, you continued to stay on after the war's end, because you had signed up for the war duration and six months.

NR: We had to have so many points before you could get out, too. Each week or month, whatever it was, they would publish what it was. And, of course, your points were going up, and these other points were coming down. Many of my friends left, let's see, the first of November. Ruthie, my best girlfriend. And, I think, Betty left at that time. It depends on your age and the time you'd been in the service, too. That's how you got your points. It finally got to be 26. And that was what I needed for that time.

EMC: Twenty-six points to get out.

NR: Yes.

EMC: And you got out when?

NR: I got out on December. Well, I left the base like December 2nd probably of 1945. And I was mustered out on the 4th of December in Boston.

EMC: Oh, in Boston. That's where you had to go. Did you receive any preparation for civilian life when you were up in Boston?

NR: Not much. I was looking at something the other day, and found out that they did give us \$100. I'd forgotten that.

EMC: Yes. And a ticket home, I guess. Or did you have to pay?

NR: Yes. I think they did give us our money for that.

EMC: Yes. Did you receive any medals or any commendations for your service?

NR: No.

EMC: Just your rate badges.

NR: Yes. Well, they gave us this --

EMC: Oh, yes -- your ribbon. A ribbon, yes.

NR: Probably -- One of them is a good conduct. I don't know what  
--

EMC: Yes. A good conduct ribbon badge, or whatever. Oh, that's  
great.

NR: And, of course, this is our -- what they called the ruptured  
duck.

EMC: Duck, yes. Oh, yes. Everybody got that.

NR: Can you imagine I could fit into that?

EMC: Yes. That's wonderful. That's in good condition --  
excellent condition. How did you feel about leaving the Navy?

NR: I think I was sad. I think I was ready to go home. I was  
tired. I'm sure I was tired. As you said, we worked long hours  
and all that. And you didn't have an awful lot of time to just do  
nothing. I was sad because I was going to miss seeing all of  
these girls. We had been together for over two years down there.

EMC: Oh, certainly.

NR: We were closer than most sisters probably.

EMC: Yes, working together. Did you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit de corps, loyalty and patriotism?

NR: I think so. I think so, really. Yes.

EMC: Did you feel that the organization, or the part of it that you knew as a Pharmacist's Third Mate, was smoothly run? Did you feel your training went okay?

NR: I think our training went okay. I really think that we should have had more training before being nurses. I always felt that. The nurses had to have so many years to do this. And we had two, three weeks. And we had supposed to know what they did.

EMC: Yes. Just kind of superficial training and thrown in.

NR: Nurses at that time were like the ones that were over us all the time. They didn't do the work. They had more paper work, I suppose, to do.

EMC: Yes, they did.

NR: But they were the ones that were our bosses. Our head nurse was also an anesthesiologist.



EMC: Yes.

NR: If we had to have someone go to sleep, she did the work. Most of the time they were awake, because they had spinals.

EMC: Oh, I see. Yes.

NR: But --

EMC: So she did that.

NR: She did that. She had to check, of course, on the gas and all that stuff, but she had us check it once in awhile. You'd feel like you were floating up above.

EMC: Did you know anyone who was discharged for any disciplinary reasons?

NR: I think there was one girl. But I don't know whether I knew her or not.

EMC: Did you feel that the WAVES experience changed or redirected your life in any way?

NR: Oh, definitely.

EMC: In what way?

NR: Well, I guess I found out that I wasn't as timid after awhile as I was when I went in. When you've been brought up on a farm, and you never have gone anyplace, it's quite a change when all of a sudden you're put in with all of these girls that were near your own age. I suppose it would be like going to college, except that we were always together.

EMC: Yes. Constantly -- and working. Do you think it made you more independent and self-reliant in any way -- more able to act on your own, and be on your own?

NR: Oh, I think so. I think so. I got so that I could go on the train and it didn't bother me at all. When I think back to when I first went down to Boston, I didn't know anything about the trains or anything like that. I thought that I'd be scared to death. But I got so that I'd just get into a taxi, go to North Station, get out, get my ticket and go home.

EMC: Right. It broadened your experiences.

NR: I think it did. I really do.

EMC: Did you like meeting women from all over the country?

NR: That was what was so interesting. I had girlfriends from Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Ohio. There was one from Connecticut, Maryland, California. Oh, yes. I dated a little boy from California. I called him little because, you know, when boys go into the Navy, they can go in before 18. I mean they don't have to be 20 years old. We had to be 20. So when I was dating him, well it just felt like he was like a younger brother to me.

EMC: Did you feel that what women were expected to do and to be changed when the war was over? Do you think women's aspirations kind of changed?

NR: I think they did. Yes, I really do. Because as I said, they'd been out and they'd seen a lot more things. I think it changed everybody, not just the women. I know a lot of the boys were definitely changed.

EMC: Yes, as a result. Did you maintain any service friendships when the war was over? People you had met in the WAVES? You kind of indicated you did.

NR: Yes, I did. Yes.

EMC: Which is good. So there was a lot of bonding there I think.

NR: There was -- yes. In fact, Betty was my maid of honor when I

got married. She was the one from Philadelphia.

EMC: Oh.

NR: I wasn't in her wedding party that was two months later.

EMC: Yes. Oh, that's great. You mentioned you belong to WAVES National?

NR: I've just joined that -- yes.

EMC: Oh, okay. That's great. That will be very interesting. I'll just follow up with a few questions about your life after the war. Where did you settle after the war? Did you return to Vermont?

NR: I went back to Vermont. And I stayed in Sharon on the farm. By that time my mother had died. So my aunt was taking care of that.

EMC: Was your father still alive?

NR: My father was still alive. In fact, he didn't die until he was 100 years old.

EMC: My heavens. He lived a good long life.

NR: Yes. He died in '77. I didn't know just what I did want to do. I thought that I might, you know, go on with my education and everything. But there seemed to be so many things to do on the farm. And it seemed like that they needed me there at that time. I helped out there. And then that fall -- that next September I met Gordon. And we started dating, and fell in love, and got married in April the next year.

EMC: April of '47?

NR: Forty-seven.

EMC: And he was the newspaper editor?

NR: Yes. He was ad manager.

EMC: Ad manager -- yes. So well, that was great. Was he in the war, by the way?

NR: Yes, he was. He was in the Army. And he was at Fort Devens for a long time. He was giving tests and all of that. And I guess he finally asked the Army, because he wanted to move. They finally moved him out to California -- or no, Seattle, Washington -- that's right. Then he went from there up to the Aleutians.

EMC: Oh, he had quite an experience.

NR: He got out in January of '46. Then we met that last fall.

EMC: Right -- in Vermont.

NR: Yes.

EMC: Well, you lived in Vermont for a little while. And then you finally came down here to Forestdale. And how did that happen?

NR: Well, Gordon was with the newspapers up there. And he got offered a job in Woonsocket as an ad manager. We moved down here with our three boys. They were not quite one, four, and seven. Yes.

EMC: Oh. And you've been here ever since.

NR: We've been here ever since. We came down here in January of '58.

EMC: Yes. So it's been a good forty years or so.

NR: Yes. I never thought I would be coming back to Rhode Island again after being in the service here.

EMC: Yes. After being in the WAVES here. You finally ended up in northern Rhode Island.

NR: And, you know, we went down to the base one time. And I said when we went through there, I said, "It wasn't a dream. I know I was here. But I can't see anything that I know."

EMC: They probably --

NR: They'd removed all of the quonset huts. I know our barracks were gone. And I can't remember whether the chapel was still there or not. But it just didn't -- I mean, that was over two years I was there. And it was like it didn't ever happen.

EMC: Didn't ever happen. You have no remnants there of the World War II buildings.

NR: No. That's right. We did see a little bit on gate five. We could see that. Although it was all boarded up, we looked in.

EMC: Did any of your boys join the Navy?

NR: No.

EMC: Did you ever talk to them about your experiences?

NR: I'm sure I have. They've heard a lot more about it in the last few years I think. When I went down last year -- down to the state house -- I was so pleased that Bruce and Priscilla were there -- my son and his wife, and their two boys.

EMC: That's great.

NR: All they could say was, "Grammy, we're just so proud of you."

EMC: And that was wonderful. Because your neighbor, as we were chatting about before, notified Sandra Winslow about your story. And she wrote part of it up. It was great. It was good. Do you have anything else to add about your time in the WAVES? Anything that we missed? Any event in the printed story that we didn't go over?

NR: There's probably something. I can't seem to think of it now, though.

EMC: I want to thank you very much for your memories of that time period.

NR: Oh, you're entirely welcome.

EMC: During your life and your service, in Davisville, Rhode



Island -- which is pretty close to home where we are.

NR: Yes, it is.

EMC: And we will get this transcribed and edited. And then we'll send you a copy for your records.

NR: Well, thank you very much. It's been very interesting.

EMC: Yes. It's been a pleasure. Thank you for cooperating with our program.

NR: Thank you. Okay.

EMC: Nellie -- I just wanted to add a postscript here. Because I didn't realize that you had reunions with the WAVES from Camp Endicott. Can you tell us something about that -- and how they -- where they were and when they were?

NR: Well, the first one I remember going to I think was in like '59 or '60. And it was near Bridgewater, Massachusetts. We went over there. When we got there, I realized I was the only Pharmacist's Mate in the group. I don't know where all our other girls were. But no one seems to be in contact with any of those other girls. I had a lot of fun anyway.

EMC: Now do you know who organized it? And was it for all the WAVES who served at Camp Endicott?

NR: I think it was for all the girls. But somehow or other, as I said, our Pharmacist's Mates got left out -- which happened a lot of times it seemed. I don't know why. I guess it's because our hours were different from the rest of them, and we couldn't join in a lot of things. We've been to quite a few different ones. We had one in Pennsylvania here a few years ago. And we went down to that. That was a lot of fun. We had -- I think that was our 50th anniversary.

EMC: Yes -- could have been.

NR: Yes. I think that's what we had that time. Every time we go, it seems like it's a little bit smaller than it was the time before. And then the very next year we went up to Maine. And that was Biddeford. I think it was in that area.

EMC: Oh, yes. Well, that's great. So somehow the WAVES at Camp Endicott have kept in touch.

NR: Yes, they have.

EMC: They have been able to organize this.

NR: I can't think of the name of the girl that has been doing it either. I can probably look up and find that somewhere.

EMC: Oh, that's good. You also mentioned that you traveled quite a bit when you were at Camp Endicott on weekends. You mentioned going to Philadelphia and other places.

NR: Oh, yes. Well, I had a girlfriend who lived in Philadelphia. So we went down with her. One time we went to Wildwood, New Jersey. We left on the midnight train, I think it was -- and got down to New York, and then down to Philadelphia -- picked up Betty's sister there -- went on to Wildwood, New Jersey. It was a four hour trip to Wildwood. And when we'd stand up, we could hear the cinders falling off our clothes. When we got to Wildwood, of course, we immediately got into our bathing suits and went right down to the beach. Of course, we were lily white. We fell asleep, because we'd been up all night and were we burned.

EMC: Oh, gee.

NR: And then they went on a roller coaster. I've forgotten whether that's the time I went with them or not. I do not like roller coasters. But I think they talked me into it. And they said, "Didn't you love it?" I said, "No, I didn't."

EMC: So you had little jaunts. You were able to get off the

base.

NR: I did, yes. We had a fifty-six hour pass, and we had more time to do that.

EMC: Yes -- two and a half days.

NR: Yes. Otherwise you had to be back in at the base by maybe twelve o'clock, two o'clock -- something like that -- on a Monday morning.

EMC: Oh, yes -- ready for work.

NR: Oh, yes.

EMC: Okay. Well, thank you very much for that addition.

NR: Okay.