

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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NO. 67

YVETTE RICHARD VARY

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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
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INTERVIEWEE: YVETTE R. VARY

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

DATE: JUNE 30, 1998

EMC: This is the first oral history interview with Yvette Vary. Today's date is June 30th, 1998. The interview is taking place at her home at 15 Aigan Place in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Yvette, I'd like to begin the interview by asking you where you were born and when you were born.

YRV: I was born in Central Falls on March 22, 1921.

EMC: And what did your father do for a living there?

YRV: My father was a painter.

EMC: And your mother?

YRV: My mother was a homemaker.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

YRV: One of each.

EMC: Was your sister older or younger?

YRV: Younger. I'm the oldest one.

EMC: Oh, I see. Where did you graduate from high school?

YRV: Central Falls High School.

EMC: And do you remember the year?

YRV: 1941.

EMC: So the war hadn't quite begun yet.

YRV: No. In June --

EMC: June '41. What did you do after you graduated from high school?

YRV: Oh, I worked at little at odd jobs here and there. Then I had one job for a year or so -- Providence Braid -- just working inside there. You had government contracts. We worked at that.

EMC: Now was that a mill?

YRV: Yes, it was.

EMC: Was it in Central Falls?

YRV: No. Pawtucket.

EMC: Oh. Pawtucket.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Okay. Well, about six months after you graduated from high school, Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese on December 7th.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember what your reaction to that event was?

YRV: Very scared.

EMC: Oh, really? Where were you when this happened? Do you remember the exact place and time?

YRV: Yes. We were visiting my grandmother. And it came over the radio. And everybody got very upset -- very.

EMC: Did you have any idea that the war was going to change your life in any way?

YRV: None at all.

EMC: Not at that time anyway. Did you keep up with wartime news before you enlisted in the Navy?

YRV: Definitely. Every day.

EMC: Read the papers and --

YRV: Oh, yes. Radio --

EMC: Did your brother join the service?

YRV: Yes. He volunteered soon after. In fact, he left, I believe it was in January right after Pearl Harbor was attacked.

EMC: Oh, really?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Joined immediately.

YRV: He was 17.

EMC: Wow! And did he join the Navy?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Oh, very good. So you're all Navy in your family for some reason.

YRV: Yes. Except my father was Army. World War I.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: But we all went to the Navy.

EMC: Isn't that amazing. Do you think it's because you lived in Rhode Island and the Navy connection here?

YRV: No. We just had a great feeling for the Navy.

EMC: Oh, that's good and very interesting. Where did he serve?

YRV: My brother?

EMC: Yes. Where did he serve? I'm just kind of interested.

YRV: Oh, he was on the Destroyer. And he served all over the Pacific.

EMC: Oh, in that theater -- a lot of action then.

YRV: Yes -- a lot of action.

EMC: How did you hear about the WAVES?

YRV: Well, it was highly advertised. They had posters all over. And after our brother had been in awhile, we decided -- they kept saying release a man for action. That was a reason.

EMC: That was your goal?

YRV: That was it. Go do that.

EMC: Release a man for action. That's great. What was attractive about the Navy, let's say vis-á-vis the WACS or the SPARS, or the women Marines?

YRV: I think their uniform for one thing.

EMC: A lot of people say that.

YRV: But it seemed like a very nice organization. Very nice. And it was.

EMC: Good. When did you decide to enlist in the Navy?

YRV: Let's see. May -- Might have been March or April of 1944. And they accepted us.

EMC: When you say we, who do you mean?

YRV: My sister and I.

EMC: Oh, you both enlisted at the same --

YRV: At the same time.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes.

YRV: Yes. We were sworn in in Providence. And then we left May 18th to go to Hunter College in New York.

EMC: Now was there any publicity about you two girls? And your sister is Noella?

YRV: Yes. Pictures in the paper. They have stuff in the State

House. When we went to the celebration last year -- Let's see, that was --

EMC: In May.

YRV: May. The Governor showed us a few of our pictures. They had them up there on a big screen.

EMC: Oh, that's great. So you must have been in the Providence Journal, or whatever.

YRV: Probably so. Yes.

EMC: Because this was unique.

YRV: And in the Pawtucket Times -- yes.

EMC: That's right -- having two women join. Now how did they honor your mother? You showed me a picture before of your mother receiving a bouquet of roses.

YRV: Well, you see, apparently these people made studies like you're doing. And they discover who the people are, you know, and I guess three Richards at the same address. And they contacted my mother. And they invited her to come to the radio station. And then they had her for a breakfast someplace, also.

EMC: So they honored the mothers of those who were in the service.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Patriotic mothers.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: How did your mother feel about you and your sister enlisting?

YRV: Oh, awful.

EMC: Really? Was she against it?

YRV: Well, she didn't forcefully say don't go. But she was so afraid for us, you know.

EMC: It was an unknown organization I guess.

YRV: Yes. She had never known girls who went in, and then her two girls went.

EMC: That was very unusual in those days, I think, to take off

and to go. Most people stayed in their home towns. When you enlisted, did you have to go up to Boston for tests?

YRV: Yes, we did. We went to Boston. We had our physicals there. And we took all those entrance exams. And I think we had to go to Boston twice. But we left out of Providence.

EMC: Right. And you were sworn in, you said, in Providence.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Both you and your sister. Was your sister younger than you?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: How old was she when she joined? You must have been about 23.

YRV: No. Let's see --

EMC: If you -- It was 1944. You were about 23.

YRV: Twenty-three? Well, she had to be 21.

EMC: So she was a couple of years younger. Did you go by train to basic training in Hunter College?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: And did your sister go with you?

YRV: Oh, yes. We were together all of the time.

EMC: Oh, really?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic. Well, when you got to New York and you got to Hunter College, what was your reaction to being domiciled there and living there?

YRV: Let me tell you. The very first night I said, "What the heck am I doing here?"

EMC: Why did you say that? Your reaction to Hunter.

YRV: I thought that was awful the first night.

EMC: What didn't you like about it?

YRV: I was hungry. I was tired. And I didn't like standing and waiting. That was my very first impression.

EMC: You had to do a lot of that in the Navy. Did you room with your sister? Did they put you into the same room?

YRV: Yes, they did.

EMC: Oh, they did. Oh, isn't that amazing. And other girls too?

YRV: Well, you see, they more or less did it alphabetically, you know.

EMC: Oh.

YRV: So we were together pretty much.

EMC: You had the same last name obviously.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember how your day was structured at Hunter for those six weeks?

YRV: Yes. I do remember it. You get up at five in the morning, and wash the windows, and wash the floor and clean the heads.

EMC: Oh.

YRV: And then take a shower and get dressed. And they'd call you out. They'd stand in the stairway and they'd call -- have a roll call. Then you'd go out. And you'd march -- I forgot how far, to the mess hall. And then march, and march, and march. And then you'd have classes in the afternoon. They didn't give you much time off. On Wednesday you have rope yarn Sunday, every Wednesday afternoon where you could do what you wanted. You could write a letter. You could go to the PX and shop.

EMC: Oh, I see. So you had a little free time, but not much.

YRV: A little time on Wednesday afternoon, if you didn't have extra duties to perform then.

EMC: Yes. What did you think of the marching and the drilling? Did you like it?

YRV: Yes. After we got into that, I liked it very much.

EMC: Good. Because you had to do a lot of it.

YRV: Oh, my God -- every day.

EMC: Did you adjust easily to the discipline of military life do you think?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: It was no problem there.

YRV: No.

EMC: Did you find the classes challenging or easy or difficult?

YRV: Well, a little bit of both. Because some of the things you never knew about, you know. Like you had to learn to recognize planes. And I never tried that before in my life. Things like that.

EMC: Yes. A lot of memory work, which was difficult.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Did you get your uniform right away when you came there?

YRV: Well, it took about a week or so I think. And they measured us. And they fitted us to uniforms. And then we got them.

EMC: And you were there in May --

YRV: May -- right.

EMC: For about six weeks. So it was a transitional time.

YRV: Exactly six weeks.

EMC: Did you ever get a chance to go into New York City?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: To see the city.

YRV: Our mother came to visit us on a weekend -- the first weekend we were allowed to get off.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: And she came and met us there. And we went out with her and some of our friends.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: That's great. Did you think that having your sister there was a help to you in making the adjustment?

YRV: Probably. Yes, I think so.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Did anything amusing or noteworthy happen during this six weeks training period that you can remember?

YRV: All I remember was very hot marching. And the girls were falling off like dead soldiers in the field.

EMC: Oh.

YRV: And we did another thing, too. While we were there, they made a movie.

EMC: Oh, really?

YRV: "Here Come The Waves."

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes. That's interesting.

YRV: Who was that songwriter? Hoagy Carmichael?

EMC: Yes.

YRV: And what was that other man's name? I don't know. They were there. And they drilled us for two weeks. And we had to sing that song over and over and over again.

EMC: Oh, really?

YRV: Yes. And the girls kept dropping off.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: Exhaustion.

EMC: Oh, isn't that something. Now did you appear in that movie in your group -- your regiment?

YRV: Our marching did, I guess.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: You couldn't pick anybody out, you know.

EMC: No.

YRV: They had everything out in the distance.

EMC: Sure. Oh, isn't that interesting. "Here Come The Waves." We'll have to look that one up. But I guess making patriotic movies was one thing that was going on in WWII.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: When you graduated, so to speak, from Hunter College -- did you express a preference for the kind of billet you wanted or where you wanted to be assigned?

YRV: Well --

EMC: Did they ever ask you, you know, what you were interested in -- whether it was the hospital corps, or yeoman, or whatever?

YRV: No, they didn't. No. They just went according to what you had done at school, I believe. I had taken a business course, I believe.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: And they put me in an office -- put my sister in an office. She ended up in IBM. And I was doing personnel work.

EMC: Oh, really?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: So you had a yeoman rate, I guess.

YRV: Yes. I was not a yeoman. I was a yeoman striker. A seaman first class.

EMC: Oh, okay. Seaman first class, yeoman striker. Well, where did they decide to assign you?

YRV: I think when we got to Boston. We left New York and went to Boston. Then they told us we were going to Davisville. And some girls went to Washington. And it wasn't until much, much later the girls went to Hawaii.

EMC: Right. It was early '45.

YRV: You had to have a parent's signature to do that.

EMC: Yes. Were you interested in going to Hawaii?

YRV: I don't know. I might have. My mother didn't think it was so hot. And she would say, "Why don't you stay where you are." So we did.

EMC: Were both you and your sister assigned to Davisville?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Well, isn't that unique. Now you were assigned, as you

said, to work in personnel. And she was assigned to what?

YRV: She was in personnel. And then -- That was part of personnel, doing IBM. That's more or less all this --

EMC: Was it computer -- early stages of computer?

YRV: It's the early stages, you know.

EMC: Oh, the data.

YRV: Everything was on IBM cards and all coded.

EMC: Cards -- right. Yes.

YRV: And she worked on that.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes. That's interesting -- the early computer business.

YRV: That was the beginning I think.

EMC: Yes, it was. And they had -- the machinery, I think, took up the whole room.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: It was enormous. How did you feel about being assigned to Davisville? Were you happy about staying in Rhode Island and not seeing the world?

YRV: Actually, we met some wonderful friends. It didn't feel like we were in Rhode Island. We were out in the boondocks.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: Made wonderful friends. And they gave us a lot of things to occupy our time with.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Now, let's talk a little bit about your work at Davisville. You said you were in personnel. And what exactly did you have to do?

YRV: Well, I worked for a Warrant Officer. And I worked for a couple of Lieutenants. And whatever they had to have done I did.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: I did their typing, their filing. You had to file the Navy way.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: Everything was the Navy way, and pretty much ordinary office work.

EMC: Now Davisville was the Seabee Base, wasn't it? So you must have been processing personnel for the Seabees.

YRV: Yes. And a lot of groups came in and left from there, you know. They would arrive from overseas. And every time a ship came in, we would all march up -- or to the train we'd all march up and welcome them to Davisville.

EMC: Oh, how nice.

YRV: Some of the girls dressed real stupid-like, you know, with crazy hats and stuff. We went out to meet the boys.

EMC: Oh, in your civilian gear then.

YRV: No, no. Just something over our uniforms or something, you know.

EMC: Oh, I see.

YRV: I didn't do that, but some girls did.

EMC: Yes. Oh, that's interesting.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: So you welcomed them back from overseas.

YRV: Yes. And then we'd see them off. The ones that were going -
- see them off.

EMC: And they'd take off from ships right in the bay.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Did you work rotating shifts and Saturdays there, or was it
eight to five?

YRV: Let's see. They were rotating shifts -- definitely. I
didn't ever get one.

EMC: Did you have to work weekends?

YRV: Oh, yes. Every other weekend we were on. But not
necessarily work in the office. We had to be there on call.

EMC: Oh, I see. So you may have other duties.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Oh.

YRV: For the most part, they didn't make you work on a weekend.

EMC: Did you live in barracks there?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: And how were they organized and designed? Did you have your own cubicle? Or --

YRV: At first there were no cubicles. They were wide open. But then they separated. There were four girls to a cubicle -- two bunks, you know. And then later on they got fancy and made us a closet. It was a locker, but it was tall. And we had it stuffed. We were very happy with that.

EMC: Oh, that's good. A little better accommodations. Were they wooden barracks?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: I'll bet they're torn down by now.

YRV: Oh, everything's gone.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: And there was a beautiful chapel on that base too that is gone -- gorgeous. And bowling alleys. Gigantic swimming pool.

EMC: And you used all these facilities then.

YRV: Yes. We had use of everything.

EMC: Now what kind of social life did you have in Davisville? You showed me a picture of a band.

YRV: A lot of dances -- a lot of dances. And in the summertime they used to have clambakes on the beach. They had teams -- basketball and stuff like that. The usual things.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Did you date any of the Seabees?

YRV: Many, many.

EMC: Oh, I see. So you fraternized with them.

YRV: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did you meet your husband there?

YRV: No.

EMC: I just wondered. Because a lot of women met their husbands in the service.

YRV: My sister did.

EMC: Oh, she did?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: She met a Seabee?

YRV: Met a Seabee, married him, and they had six children.

EMC: Oh, that's great.

YRV: Wonderful.

EMC: Was he from Rhode Island?

YRV: He was from Brooklyn.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes. But they stayed in Rhode Island.

That's good. So was your husband in the war?

YRV: My husband was also in the Navy.

EMC: Oh, was he?

YRV: He was on an aircraft carrier. Not this husband.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: That's my first husband was on an aircraft carrier. And I met him because he was at boot camp with my brother.

EMC: Oh, I see. So that was the connection.

YRV: In Newport.

EMC: Oh, in Newport? Oh, for heaven sakes.

YRV: That's where my brother went to boot camp.

EMC: Oh, yes, of course. Right on our base -- the training station.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Yes. We have letters from individuals who were in boot camp that we collected. That's very, very interesting. Oh, so at this point in time you had a boyfriend. Didn't you?

YRV: Oh, not a steady boyfriend.

EMC: Oh, not steady.

YRV: We corresponded.

EMC: Oh, you corresponded, yes, obviously he was out. So you corresponded. But you still dated a lot of the Seabees.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember any of the big bands that came -- the names of them? Who came to Davisville, for example?

YRV: Oh, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw. Xavier Cugat. Oh, I thought all of them came. Because it was really nice when they did come.

EMC: Must have been a big draw.

YRV: Yes. And they decorated beautifully. They gave them a nice welcome.

EMC: That's great. What did you like about your assignment in Davisville in personnel?

YRV: It was just a day to day job really.

EMC: Did you find it boring or routine?

YRV: Sometimes. Sometimes it was boring. Same thing every day.

EMC: Did you feel you were making a contribution to the war effort?

YRV: Yes. They surely made us feel like we were.

EMC: Yes. That's good. Did anything interesting or amusing happen during this time frame when you were in Davisville?

YRV: Not that I can recall right now.

EMC: How were you treated by the men?

YRV: Very well. Very, very well. Always helpful and polite. They were a nice group of people. That's why I find it hard to believe a lot of this stuff where, you know --

EMC: Well, I think it was a different world then, too.

YRV: It was. I think a lot of the men are macho. A lot of it, I think, is a little resentful. Because women have got some very fine positions now, you know -- the commanders and stuff. And I think that does not sit well with the men.

EMC: I think you're right about that. So you had no discrimination then, or --

YRV: None. They never treated us badly.

EMC: Well treated. Did you ever have a chance to take leave and go home during this time frame for weekends or vacations?

YRV: Oh, yes, sure. We had every other weekend off.

EMC: Did you go back to Central Falls then?

YRV: Yes. We would come visit our parents. And we'd take vacations elsewhere. My sister and I took a trip to Canada one time. We saw our parents quite often.

EMC: Yes. When you did come home, you must have met other civilians or encountered them somehow -- relatives or friends or whatever. And how did they react to the WAVES? How did they treat them?

YRV: Well, some of my friends -- We came home on a Saturday. I'd probably go out on a Saturday night with my old girlfriends. Go down to Providence and dance and have fun.

EMC: So would you say any civilians you encountered treated you well?

YRV: For the most part, yes -- for the most part.

EMC: Right. Because most of them were very proud of the Waves and happy that they were serving. Do you remember anything about your rate of pay -- what it was?

YRV: Sixty-six dollars a month.

EMC: Did you save it or did you spend it?

YRV: I spent every penny of it.

EMC: Oh, really?

YRV: How could you save?

EMC: Yes -- at \$66.00 a month. That wasn't much. During your service in the WAVES, did you keep up with news about the war?

YRV: Oh, yes -- every day. I mean the radio was on all the time. And then if something big happened it was amplified all over the base.

EMC: Oh, yes -- I'm sure. I'm sure it was.

YRV: When President Roosevelt died, we were all playing softball. And they came over the loudspeakers.

EMC: What was the reaction on the base to his death?

YRV: Shock. Everybody stopped playing, and they just went back to the barracks.

EMC: Yes. I think it was unexpected.

YRV: Yes. And he was well liked.

EMC: Yes, he certainly was. Did you ever have a chance to meet the Director of the WAVES -- Mildred McAfee, or see her in any capacity?

YRV: Well, now let me see. I don't think so.

EMC: Because sometimes she showed up at graduations or whatever.

YRV: She could have been there. But, you know, we wouldn't meet her.

EMC: No. Well, you wouldn't meet her. You probably would have seen her from afar.

YRV: No.

EMC: Well, do you remember anything -- any of the other WAVES on the base being disciplined in any way or being released from duty? Did anybody have that happen? Was any WAVE disciplined for any reason or released?

YRV: I know of one girl. I don't think it was disciplined. She was married and was pregnant and she went home. That was all.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: That was the only one -- the only incident in that way. Nobody was discharged. I think one girl was sent home because she was a kleptomaniac.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: She couldn't help it I guess. We would lose our shirts, you know.

EMC: Oh.

YRV: We did hand washing. We'd hang them out in the head. First you'd go back and your shirt was missing. And up in her closet they would make an inspection.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: And they would retrieve our clothes.

EMC: Oh, isn't that something.

YRV: I know.

EMC: Well, there's always -- In a big group, there's going to be somebody -- yes.

YRV: It's a sickness. So they sent her home.

EMC: Yes. That's too bad. Did you ever make any permanent

friends there that you kept up with over the years?

YRV: I certainly have. I meet them every year.

EMC: Oh, really?

YRV: They come here. I go to their homes. We meet, maybe ten -- sixteen of us. We were up in Kennebunkport two years ago. One of the girls lives over there. And we had a nice reunion. And my sister and I went up to visit her last October. We go to New Jersey. Scranton, Pennsylvania. I have several in Florida. I just got a phone call the other day from a girl in Florida. I'm in touch with a lot of the girls.

EMC: Oh, that's great. And these are the gals from Davisville.

YRV: Yes. They're very good friends.

EMC: Oh, that's wonderful. Now was Davisville your only assignment as a WAVE?

YRV: Yes it was. It was.

EMC: And you stayed in you told me through 1946.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Well, what was the highest rate that you achieved?

YRV: I told you -- Seaman First Class.

EMC: Okay. Seaman First Class is what you were. How did you celebrate on V.J. Day, which is August 15, 1945? Do you remember the end of the war and your feelings?

YRV: I was out with a Chief, I believe. And we had gone out towards Fall River way. Well, we weren't in with the crowds. We had dinner. And I heard all that. And we went back to the base. It was a lot of crazy stuff. It was scary, you know. We went back to the base probably at 11 o'clock -- something like that.

EMC: Did you celebrate at all in any way?

YRV: Oh, yes. We had quite a few drinks.

EMC: How did you feel about the end of the war?

YRV: Very happy. Everybody was so happy. And then everybody's starting to count their points to get out.

EMC: Right. Well, the war ended in August '45. And when did you finally get discharged from the Navy?

YRV: February 1946.

EMC: So it was the war, and the duration and six months I guess that you were pretty much in for.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Did you want to get out of the Navy? How did you feel about it?

YRV: Sort of mixed emotions, you know. I was wondering where would we go. We were so settled in there. Where would we go after this, you know. And we figured civilian life in the service probably wouldn't be that much fun. So -- Civilian life -- I know -- But it is not quite civilian I mean. But being in the service during peacetime didn't appeal to us too much. But, you know, afterwards I thought that was probably a big mistake. We should have stayed for awhile anyhow.

EMC: Well, some women did stay a little longer.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: But in 1948 legislation was passed that women could serve in the Reserves and in the regular Navy.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: So you would have had to wait a little longer for that.

YRV: A couple of our friends did that.

EMC: Sure. They kind of stayed in for awhile because their services were needed, and then they could transition in.

YRV: Yes. They stayed in. And every two weeks they would -- every two weeks they'd have like a drill meeting, you know. And once a year for two weeks they would go up just like the other Reserves.

EMC: Yes. They were in the Reserves -- some were in the inactive and the active Reserves.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Well, you got out in February 1946. And did you come back to Central Falls?

YRV: Yes. We came home.

EMC: Did you resume your old job at that point in time?

YRV: Yes, for awhile. And then I got married. And then -- Oh, I took flying lessons.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting.

YRV: On the G.I. Bill.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic. Why did you decide to do that?

YRV: Oh, my husband was doing it. So you go with the flow.

EMC: Did you get a pilot's license?

YRV: Well, no. I received a private license.

EMC: Private pilot's license.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic. That's most unusual.

YRV: Then I went to college.

EMC: Oh. Where did you go?

YRV: Bryant College. I did four years in two.

EMC: On the G.I. Bill?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic. That was a great benefit.

YRV: That was great. That was one of the nice benefits.

EMC: Absolutely.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: And what did you major in there?

YRV: I was an executive secretary.

EMC: Oh, that's great. So you did the four years in two at Bryant up here in Smithfield.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Did you work --

YRV: Bryant was in Providence at the time.

EMC: Oh, it was in Providence.

YRV: They found me a job.

EMC: Oh. Where did you work then?

YRV: Actually, I worked in Pawtucket. And when that place closed down, they got me a job at Firestone. I stayed with them till another company bought out the office where I was, and I worked for them till I got married and left.

EMC: Till you retired.

YRV: Always had a job.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's great. That's fantastic. So actually, being in the WAVES was an asset and a bonus.

YRV: Well, it was. It was a great help.

EMC: It was a great help to you. Did you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit de corps when you were in?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: A lot of patriotism?

YRV: A lot.

EMC: Which is unusual today but wasn't then.

YRV: No. You can see that in the girls in our unit and stuff, you know. They're still hooked right into it. They put their heart into it.

EMC: Oh, absolutely. Did you feel that the WAVES was a smoothly run organization?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: For being a new organization --

YRV: Very good.

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

YRV: Well, they give you a different way of thinking.

EMC: Well, that's a good comment. Do you think that the WAVES service made you more independent?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: And self-reliant?

YRV: Yes, definitely.

EMC: I think being away from home and being on your own. Did you have any career ambitions as a result of being in the WAVES?

YRV: No. I don't think so.

EMC: Did you feel that what women were expected to do and to be changed when the war was over? Did you feel that women, many of them retreated to the home, or do you think more of them wanted to have jobs and careers?

YRV: I think a lot of them retreated to the home. Some had very good jobs.

EMC: But for you, you didn't really retreat back to the home.

YRV: Not -- No. Not 100 percent. I moved back home with my parents. But then I did things.

EMC: Yes. But you worked. You took flying lessons. You went to

college. So your horizons were really broadened as a result of that experience.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Did you attend WAVE reunions after the war?

YRV: Oh, yes. Every one that came up.

EMC: Oh. Could you tell us about these, and how they were organized, and who organized them?

YRV: I organized one.

EMC: Oh, you did?

YRV: My sister organized one. And I had mine in Sturbridge, Mass.

EMC: And when was this? What year? Do you remember?

YRV: Sturbridge -- in 1980 -- in the early '80's.

EMC: Now was this the Davisville group?

YRV: Yes. Davisville group.

EMC: Were they all New England people basically?

YRV: No. They came from all over.

EMC: And how many gals were there? Do you remember at Davisville how many WAVES?

YRV: We had 200.

EMC: In Davisville.

YRV: Yes, two hundred girls.

EMC: You must have kept in contact with some of them so you'd know addresses and the like.

YRV: Oh, yes. One girl was very good. She made a list and passed it on to all of us at the first reunion. We keep upgrading this list. We've lost a few girls. But we keep it up to date.

EMC: So you planned one in Sturbridge in the '80's. What was the first one you attended?

YRV: The first one we attended I think was right here in Boston.

EMC: And in what year was that?

YRV: 'Forty-seven.

EMC: So it was just a year after you left, more or less, that you got together.

YRV: Yes, '47.

EMC: Oh, that's great. So you've been very, very active in the Davisville group.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Now, do you belong to WAVES National and Ocean State WAVES?

YRV: I do.

EMC: Are you active in that group?

YRV: Not very active. I am a charter member of the Ocean State. And I'm not very active. See, my mother passed away at almost 105. I had her here. I went to a few meetings and stuff. I paraded. We don't have too many walkers.

EMC: Not anymore -- yes.

YRV: So I would walk and carry the flag. I did that in Newport as well.

EMC: Oh.

YRV: Did it in Providence. And this year they cancelled out. They didn't have enough girls to go for Memorial Day.

EMC: Yes.

YRV: So that is why I haven't been active. And my husband's had a lot of medical problems.

EMC: Oh, I see. Yes.

YRV: So it's difficult. I have to excuse myself from a lot of the activities.

EMC: Have you contributed at all or registered with WIMSA -- Women in Military Service for America in Washington D.C.?

YRV: Yes.

EMC: The memorial --

YRV: Yes.

EMC: And you did go to the State House last May for the commemoration of women in the military.

YRV: I must say, I was there.

EMC: That's great. Because we contributed a lot of photographs and memorabilia to that. Sandra Winslow organized it.

YRV: Were you there?

EMC: No. I had something else to do that day.

YRV: I was going to say -- my sister and I were there. Oh, and it got so cold.

EMC: It was cold that day. I remember that. Yes. But the Naval Historical Collection did contribute a lot.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: And that material came from the WAVES when I interviewed.

YRV: I see.

EMC: Which was very good. What would you say the significance of your naval career was for you and for your life? How has it impacted and what does it mean to you having served in the WAVES?

YRV: It's made me more alert and curious as to what goes on in the world -- in our country and how it's run. But before that I was kind of, you know, go with the flow and have fun. It's made me more observant.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's great, politically and otherwise. Did you ever have any children?

YRV: No.

EMC: I was going to ask you if you talked to them about your WAVE days. Some of the ladies did. And some of their children joined the Navy.

YRV: My girlfriend in Florida did. Her daughter became a Commander. She's retired now, but she's a Commander.

EMC: Yes. Some of them do. Did any of your sister's children join the WAVES?

YRV: No.

EMC: Or the military? No?

YRV: No.

EMC: She didn't influence.

YRV: She had two boys go in the service -- one to the Vietnam War. And then he went back for the Desert War.

EMC: Persian Gulf.

YRV: Yes. He went back there as a Reserve.

EMC: Right.

YRV: He was a Marine. Then he joined the Army Reserves and he went back as that. And the other one was in the Coast Guard. But the girls didn't go. They were not interested.

EMC: Yes. Do you have any other comments to make on your WAVES service? Anything that I've missed, or that we've forgotten that was outstanding?

YRV: No. What I would say is if I had a daughter, I would have talked with her and said: Why don't you go in and try it?

EMC: Well, that's good. So military service was a good thing -- positive thing for you.

YRV: Yes.

EMC: Well, thank you very much for your reminiscences of your service in Davisville, Rhode Island.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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