

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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G. MARIE EDMONDS BLASIK

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THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

INTERVIEWEE: G. MARIE EDMONDS BLASIK

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: WAVES IN WORLD WAR II

DATE: SEPTEMBER 15, 1999

EMC: This is the first oral history interview with Marie Blasik of Carolina, Rhode Island. Today's date is September 15, 1999, and the interview is taking place in my office at the Naval War College. I'd like to thank you, Marie, for coming all the way over on this gloomy day--the day before the hurricane--to talk about your career and your service in the WAVES in World War II. I want to begin by asking you a few questions, prior to your entry into the WAVES, about your background and where you were from, etcetera. Can you tell me where you were born and when you were born?

MEB: I was born right in Providence Hospital, but we went home to Kenyon, Rhode Island. And that was 1923.

EMC: And do you know your exact birth date?

MEB: April 23, 1923.

EMC: Kenyon is out in the country, isn't it.

MEB: Oh, yes--way out.

EMC: Way out in the country. What did your father do for a living there?

MEB: Well, he started out in the mill making canvas awnings and things. And then they changed. And they were going to move down south, and he didn't like it down south. So he got to be an insurance agent, and he made out well--very well.

EMC: I didn't know there was a mill in Kenyon.

MEB: Oh, yes. It's a textile mill now.

EMC: Oh, a textile mill. Is there one still there?

MEB: Oh, yes.

EMC: It's good to know that Rhode Island still has a few mills. What did your mother do?

MEB: Just a housewife--farmer's wife.

EMC: Oh, did you have a farm, too?

MEB: Oh, a big farm--yes.

EMC: Oh, you did. So your father both farmed and worked.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: In the mill or as insurance agent. What did you raise out there?

MEB: Cows, pigs, chickens.

EMC: Did you have any crops--grow any crops?

MEB: Oh, yes. Just our own garden.

EMC: Oh, your own truck garden.

MEB: But we had hay. We hayed the field for the cows and horse.

EMC: Oh, interesting. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

MEB: I had four sisters--no brothers.

EMC: Oh. Did they work on the farm?

MEB: No. I was the farmer.

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

MEB: Yes, I did.

EMC: Where did you graduate from high school and when did you graduate?

MEB; I graduated from Westerley High in 1941.

EMC: Before the war began.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Just about six months.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: What did you do before you entered the WAVES and after you graduated from high school?

MEB: I worked in the mill for a little while. It was boring.

EMC: What did you do in the mill?

MEB: I inspected cloth--inspected for paint spots and things.

EMC: Oh. What kind of cloth was this?

MEB: Linings for _____. Linings mostly.

EMC: Oh, interesting. For clothing?

MEB: Yes. For a suit.

EMC: Oh, I see.

MEB: When the war broke out they made parachutes.

EMC: Oh, how interesting. Were you involved in that?

MEB: No. Because I left.

EMC: You had left prior to December 7th, '41?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: And where did you go from there?

MEB: Hunter College. From the mill I went right into the base.

EMC: Oh. I thought that you had entered the Navy in 1944.

MEB: Well, alright. I worked two years then.

EMC: Yes. Okay.

MEB: Two years.

EMC: Right. Then you worked in the mill for a couple of years, not just six months.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: That's correct. Did your family have any Navy connections at all?

MEB: No, not at all.

EMC: Did your sisters join the services?

MEB: My youngest sister went in for the nursing corps. She nursed--learned at Newport Naval Hospital. And then by the time she finished the war was over.

EMC: Do you remember where you were and what your reaction was to the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941?

MEB: We were listening to the radio. Because a boy up the road was in Pearl Harbor and was killed on one of the ships.

EMC: Oh. Isn't that awful. So it must have been devastating.

MEB: It was.

EMC: Devastating, yes, to hear that. But you were still at the mill at that time.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: And you were working at the mill through 1943.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Did you keep up with news about the war during these two years before you joined?

MEB: Oh, yes. Because all the boys were leaving.

EMC: No. There was nobody around. What inspired you to join the Navy?

MEB: Well, I had no brothers. And I just wanted to help.

EMC: Well, that's great. Was patriotism a motive then?

MEB: Yes. I think so.

EMC: It would have been at that time. What was attractive about the Navy versus the other services?

MEB: I look better in blue.

EMC: Some people said the uniform was certainly an attraction over the dull khaki of the WACS.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: How did your parents feel about your enlisting in the service?

MEB: They were proud.

EMC: So they didn't object.

MEB: No. They didn't object.

EMC: They were very positive. When did you decide to enlist, and where did you go to enlist?

MEB: We had to go to Boston, because Westerley wasn't set up for it then.

EMC: Or Providence either.

MEB: No.

EMC: That wasn't set up. They didn't have the recruiting office for them. Do you remember what you had to do up in Boston when you went?

MEB: We had a physical. And we had to answer some questions. Stand in line and wait.

EMC: Hurry up and wait. Did you go up there by yourself?

MEB: Yes. I did.

EMC: And how did you get up there?

MEB: On the train.

EMC: You took the train from Kingston?

MEB: Kingston. Yes.

EMC: Great. Well, that was kind of brave. Did you feel that you were doing something that was extraordinary or very brave?

MEB: No. I was very nervous.

EMC: But you wanted to do it.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: You wanted to do your share. Well, you went up there. What year and what month did you go to enlist?

MEB: It wasn't too long.

EMC: I think it's on the newspaper clipping there, Marie, that we have describing-- You went up there in, was it June '44?

MEB: I think it was.

EMC: Yes. I think it was June '44 that you went up there.

MEB: Okay.

EMC: And you went to enlist. And where were you sent for basic training?

MEB: Hunter College, New York.

EMC: New York City. And did you go there alone?

MEB: Well, I did. But I met Thelma on the train and we were buddies.

EMC: You met your friend Thelma that you told me about--Thelma Tattersal.

MEB: Right.

EMC: Now where did you board the train?

MEB: I did it in Kingston, and she had done it in Westerly.

EMC: And how did you happen to meet this woman?

MEB: She was sitting alone and I sat with her.

EMC: And you didn't know that she was a perspective WAVE too, a recruit.

MEB: No. I didn't even know her.

EMC: And you just met at that--isn't that interesting--at that time. Now when you got off in New York City, were you met by anyone?

MEB: Yes. A lot of other girls in the--signing up for it. There was a girl on the platform recruiting.

EMC: Oh. So she was kind of directing you.

MEB: Yes. Like a mother hen.

EMC: Mother hen directing you to Hunter College. But had you ever been to New York City before?

MEB: Not by myself--no.

EMC: They got you over to Hunter College in the Bronx. And do you remember what your reaction was to your accommodations--your living accommodations and to the college at large?

MEB: Well, we had four girls in a room. And every week we had inspection. And everything had to be white gloved, you know. An officer would come by. The bathroom mirror on top--they checked, and mattresses and _____. It was rough.

EMC: Now did you have to do the cleaning?

MEB: We all helped.

EMC: Trying to get things shipshape. Did you pass your inspections?

MEB: Yes, we did. But once the wind had blown the quilt off-- cover on the bed. And I moved my eyes down, and we got marked on it.

EMC: Because of the quilt?

MEB: Yes. I was looking at it. And I was supposed to keep my eyes straight.

EMC: Oh. It was because of your demeanor. You were supposed to look straight ahead and stand at attention.

MEB: Attention--yes.

EMC: Now what happened as a result of that?

MEB: We got marked off.

EMC: Were you penalized?

MEB: No. We just got marked off. We didn't pass. But the next week we did. And three weeks after we did.

EMC: So every week you had to go through this inspection.

MEB: Yes--inspection.

EMC: Were you given your uniform right away--your WAVES uniform?

MEB: No. We had our seersuckers right away.

EMC: Because you were there in the summer of '44. Correct?

MEB: Yes. And then when we passed four weeks of that, then we got our uniforms.

EMC: You were at Hunter for about four weeks then.

MEB: Oh, yes.

EMC: Okay--doing your training. One of the ways of indoctrinating you was through marching and drilling, wasn't it?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: And how did you react to that?

MEB: I liked that. It was alright.

EMC: You didn't mind the marching and drilling. And you also had to take courses when you were there.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: And how did you find these? Did you find them easy? Did you find them difficult? Did you find them interesting?

MEB: Yes. They were interesting. We had to learn the outlines of ships and outline of airplanes. And then when they got to the sports I was already there. Because I passed my swimming test like nothing. And some of the girls got eliminated because they couldn't jump in the water.

EMC: Oh, I see. But you were kind of athletic, weren't you?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: You had learned to swim as a child?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Good. Did you adjust easily to the discipline of military life?

MEB: Yes. Because I had had a strict father.

EMC: You were disciplined at home.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: That's what many of the women say--because they were brought up in a strict fashion. And so transitioning to the military was no problem. What did you think of the Navy cuisine? I often ask people that, because that was kind of different for them.

MEB: Well, you mean the dinners?

EMC: The mess. Yes, the dinners--the food.

MEB: Well, I was surprised at the way some of the girls acted. They had no manners, and they didn't know how to hold their knives or forks, or napkins in their laps, or anything. They just sat there and ate.

EMC: I guess you were eating on tin trays, weren't you?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: That must have been a change.

MEB: Yes. Well, that didn't bother me, because I had been to camp--Girl Scout camp--Campfire Girl camps.

EMC: Oh.

MEB: But I felt sorry for the girls from the south. They didn't act as I did.

EMC: Oh.

MEB: You know, they had rules there when you're eating.

EMC: Oh. So you thought they weren't quite as polite as the others?

MEB: Yes. That's-- Yes.

EMC: Isn't that interesting. Did you have any very limited time off on the weekends?

MEB: Oh, yes. When we graduated we could go into town. My mother

and father came, and a girlfriend from the village came to visit.

EMC: Great. So you celebrated?

MEB: Yes. Showed them New York City.

EMC: Show them the sights. That's good. Did anything amusing or noteworthy happen during this month of training in the summer at Hunter?

MEB: No. It was just training.

EMC: Just going through the paces.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Did you express any preference to the officers there for the kind of billet you wanted after you finished training? Did you let them know what you wanted to do?

MEB: Well, they gave us a test. And then I couldn't spell. And I had no typing experience. They put me on the line, and they gave us tests.

EMC: What was your rate?

MEB: Seaman First Class.

EMC: Seaman First Class was your rate. Now where did they assign you to work?

MEB: Right down in Kingsville, Texas.

EMC: Kingsville, Texas, was where you were sent.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Did you go there directly after Hunter, or did you go home first?

MEB: No. We went right to Kingsville.

EMC: Did you go on a train?

MEB: Yes. Three days it took us.

EMC: With other women assigned there?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: And, of course, you had a supervisor on the train.

MEB: Yes. Maybe a sergeant or something like that.

EMC: Do you remember what this train ride was like? Can you describe it?

MEB: Prisoners of war, really. You know, we were all in one boxcar--not a boxcar, a pullman car. We weren't allowed to go to either end to get out of the car. We had to stay in our own. Because there were prisoners of war on one of the trains.

EMC: One of the cars?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Oh.

MEB: Army or Navy or something, you know. We had to stay in our own car.

EMC: Oh. The military was on the train, plus prisoners of war.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Oh. So you were kept to your own car.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: It wasn't a pullman, was it?

MEB: No.

EMC: No. It's just a regular train. So you had to sleep in the seats?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: How did you cope with the heat?

MEB: I didn't notice the heat.

EMC: You were going south in the summer.

MEB: Oh, yes. It didn't seem to bother me.

EMC: Yes. It didn't bother you. But three days on the train is a long time.

MEB: I know it.

EMC: Did you sing at all?

MEB: Yes. We sang songs. We visited. And we were passing notes

to the other cars.

EMC: Oh. That's how you entertained yourself. Well, you got to Texas in the late summer. And you said you were assigned to Kingsville, Texas. And what was at Kingsville, Texas? Was at that base? What kind of a base was it?

MEB: It was a Navy base, a flying air base.

EMC: An air base. Was it a large base?

MEB: No. Kingsville was a part of Corpus Christi, which was our main base.

EMC: Satellite base.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: And how far were you from Corpus?

MEB: About four hours.

EMC: Oh, I see. That's quite a distance.

MEB: Well, Texas is nothing.

EMC: It's a big state. Well, when you got there, what were your accommodations like, your barracks?

MEB: Boxcars. They were simple on the outside, but inside was alright. We had six girls in the bin. No roof on our room--just the door. But we each had our own locker and our own bed. And there must have been about 50 girls on the top floor and 50 on the bottom.

EMC: So they were compartments then of six?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Where were these women from that you had to bunk with? Did you know any of them?

MEB: No. I didn't. One was from New Orleans. One was from Texas, Chicago--all over the country anyway.

EMC: Did you enjoy these roommates? Did you like them?

MEB: Oh, yes. They're friends forever.

EMC: Oh, okay. You got along with them well then. Well, this is an air station. And what kind of work did they assign you to do on the air station?

MEB: Well, I was a painter for the insignias on the airplanes out on the line.

EMC: Oh, isn't that interesting. Now who was working on painting airplanes?

MEB: I had a Chief over me. And he would make the gold plate on the name tags on your desk. And he showed us how to mix the paint and use a spray gun, and what to put on what plane. Because each plane had a different number, like they had the training jets. So you had to know the number of the plane.

EMC: And you had to paint that on.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Now were there any other women on this duty other than you?

MEB: No. I was the only one.

EMC: I wonder why they assigned you to an all male paint brigade, so to speak.

MEB: I don't know.

EMC: Now you mentioned something--we were talking about the name tags. Can you tell us that story?

MEB: Well, in the Navy you just print the first initial and your last name. And I showed up at work. And I saluted the Chief like you're supposed to. And they thought I had been in the Navy quite awhile because I had done that. And they said, "What's the G stand for on your name?" I said, "Well, I don't know--either George or gorgeous." So they said, "It must be George."

EMC: So you were--

MEB: George. All the guys would call me George.

EMC: How large was this paint brigade? How many people on it?

MEB: Well, there was about five of us in the shack.

EMC: Oh. You were in a shack?

MEB: One of those paint shack _____. Every morning we had to get our cans and mix it up and whatever we were supposed to do.

EMC: Did you actually have to go out to the aircraft?

MEB: Yes. Climb up on the aircraft and paint.

EMC: You had to climb up. How did you climb up? Did you have ladders?

MEB: No. Well, they have a step stool.

EMC: Oh, a step stool.

MEB: These are fighters, small fighters.

EMC: Yes.

MEB: So we had to put the U.S. Navy and the insignia like the stars, these numbers on the tail.

EMC: Oh. So that's what you had to do--all that painting--the tail, the insignia, the U.S. Navy on it.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Now were these new planes?

MEB: Some of them had been fixed, you know, because they'd gotten clipped or something. And then when they were no good for flying, we painted them all yellow. And they used to drag them behind a boat and they would practice shooting at them.

EMC: Oh. They'd be targets.

MEB: Targets. Yes. All yellow.

EMC: Isn't that interesting. Did you have enough work to keep you busy doing this on a daily basis?

MEB: Oh, yes.

EMC: How many planes were there there? Do you have any idea?

MEB: Have no idea how many. But they took off and flew after, you know, we had _____.

EMC: Yes. Sure. It was an air field. They had to. Well, that's kind of different and kind of interesting. I've never interviewed anybody who did this kind of work. Now when you did this kind of work, what kind of garb did you wear?

MEB: Dungarees and a dungaree shirt.

EMC: Yes. Very modern. Everybody's wearing them today. And did you have any cap? Did you wear a little cap?

MEB: Baseball cap. Yes.

EMC: Oh, that sounds very now. How interesting. How were you treated by the men on the line?

MEB: Well, the boys I worked with protected me. Because if some guy came up and said something, they'd rip him off.

EMC: What did they say to you, for example? Were they harassing?

MEB: Yes. Not bad harassment but, you know--

EMC: But just--

MEB: You know, teasing.

EMC: Teasing harassment. Oh, that's kind of interesting. Was this your job for the remainder of your service at Kingsville?

MEB: No. Maybe five months, I guess. I worked in the tower. And we had the planes coming in. They flew off, then we counted them when they came back in.

EMC: That's interesting too. We'll get to that. But I want to ask you more about this online job painting. Had you ever had an experience before painting?

MEB: No. I had art class in school.

EMC: But not painting airplanes, or painting a house, or something like that. I assume you really didn't need much training to do this.

MEB: No, I didn't. No.

EMC: You just went right into it.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: They gave you your paint bucket, and away you went?

MEB: No. I had a spray gun.

EMC: A spray gun?

MEB: Had to mix it right. The Chief would show us how to mix it.

EMC: But when you painted an insignia you couldn't spray it, could you?

MEB: Yes. You had a tin plate, you know, with a hole in it.

EMC: Oh, I see.

MEB: Like a stencil.

EMC: Yes.

MEB: And then you sprayed.

EMC: Oh. You sprayed onto everything.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: There was no painting by hand. Well, that's easier, isn't it?

MEB: Oh, yes. Messy but easier.

EMC: Yes. Messy but easier. So there you were doing that. What did you like about this job?

MEB: It was outdoors.

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

MEB: Boring sometimes, you know, not enough to do.

EMC: Did you work eight hours a day?

MEB: Yes. We got a bus from our barracks. They had buses, open buses. You'd catch a bus.

EMC: And it would take you out to the field.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: And did you work Saturday at all?

MEB: No Saturday or Sunday.

EMC: But it was a five day week.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Well, that's interesting. That's very, very different, as I said, a very unique experience. Was there any pressure in this billet at all to work harder or faster?

MEB: No.

EMC: It was all take your time.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Well, you said you painted online for awhile. And you said your next job was in the tower.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Counting airplanes leaving and coming in. Now why were you reassigned to this job? Did you request it, or was it just assigned?

MEB: Well, they asked if I wanted to work up there. I said, "Yes. I'll do that."

EMC: Why did they have you count planes coming and going?

MEB: Because this was a training field. And if they send out 15 planes, they want 15 planes coming back. If not, they have to send out and look for them or something happened.

EMC: Did you ever lose any planes?

MEB: No. We had a lot of hurricane warnings, and everything had to be tied down--secured. That took time.

EMC: Now were you involved in this tying down and securing?

MEB: No. Just had to wait for them, you know, be sure that this

one was done and that was done.

EMC: Oh, I see. How many people were up in the tower?

MEB: Maybe five at a time.

EMC: Were you the only person doing the counting?

MEB: Oh, yes--the counting. But there was a girl watching. And then there was a sailor over us. And then another one would put out the flags--different flags--what runway they were going to land on. And every flag had a color, and they all knew what the colors were.

EMC: So you landed where your flag was.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: That's interesting. They had it all systematized. Did you work five days a week in the tower?

MEB: Yes. No Saturday or Sunday.

EMC: What did you like about that job?

MEB: A little more prestige.

EMC: Oh, really? Yes. Being up there in the tower. Did you find it boring though?

MEB: No. Because there's always something to do, you know, checking the flags and see they're folded up right or rolled up and in the right bins.

EMC: So you were responsible for the flags as well as for counting.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Were you responsible for anything else? Just the flags and counting the planes leaving and taking off.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Was the tower staffed by women, or was it a mix of women and men?

MEB: Mixed.

EMC: How did you get along with your co-workers?

MEB: Fine.

EMC: How did they treat you?

MEB: Fine.

EMC: So there was no problem with the women working in that capacity.

MEB: No.

EMC: What you did basically were nontraditional jobs.

MEB: I know it.

EMC: Women didn't do that on the outside. How did you feel about doing these nontraditional jobs?

MEB: Well, I was a tomboy all the time, so it didn't bother me a bit.

EMC: You fit right in.

MEB: Yes, I did.

EMC: But after the war you wouldn't have been assigned to these kinds of jobs.

MEB: No.

EMC: Do you have anything else that you want to add--anything unusual, anything interesting that happened both during your job painting online and working in the tower?

MEB: No. But I've heard of all this harassment and things. And the only time I was harassed was when I got on a bus. And getting on the bus, the sailors would say, "Colored people and WAVES in the back."

EMC: Oh.

MEB: They didn't like us too well.

EMC: Oh. This was just people you didn't work with.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Just the Navy population there in general.

MEB: All the Navy. Yes.

EMC: So you think they resented the WAVES being there.

MEB: I think so. Because we took their jobs, and they would have to go overseas.

EMC: And they didn't like that.

MEB: No.

EMC: Yes. Well, were there any black individuals on the base, any black WAVES?

MEB: I can't remember any.

EMC: In December '44 they were allowed into the service.

MEB: I don't remember any. But there were a lot of men--colored men there.

EMC: Yes. But not WAVES at that point.

MEB: No WAVES.

EMC: Okay. They probably didn't send them to Kingsville.

MEB: Not down in Texas.

EMC: Yes. That may have been kind of a problem at that time. Did

you date Navy men while you were at Kingsville?

MEB: Yes, I did.

EMC: Did you date enlisted or officer?

MEB: Mostly enlisted.

EMC: But I think you said you dated one officer.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Was that at Kingsville?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: But was that kind of--

MEB: Hushed.

EMC: Hushed. Yes. That's kind of interesting. Now was he a pilot?

MEB: He ended up as a pilot.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. What did you folks do for

recreation there?

MEB: Well, we had a Sea Club--I mean, you know, a Sea Club. And they had dancing, ping pong. Must have drank a thousand bottles of Coke.

EMC: What about movies?

MEB: Yes. I guess they did have movies. I didn't bother with the movies.

EMC: Did you go off base when you socialized a lot?

MEB: No. We could walk right to the Sea Club.

EMC: Was the Sea Club a Navy club?

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Did you go into the town? Was there any town nearby?

MEB: There was a small town. I'd go in for grinders and things.

EMC: Did you ever have any contact with civilians?

MEB: Yes. They were very nice. There was a woman in town that

was sort of a mother hen. And she'd let us stay there, you know, and have supper or soda or something.

EMC: Oh, that's nice. A friendly civilian.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: So you were mainly confined to the base at that time. You mentioned that you were very interested in sports. Can you tell me what sports you were involved in and what that entailed?

MEB: I was on the basketball team. We had lessons and training. And we got to play other bases.

EMC: Did you travel to other bases?

MEB: Oh, yes.

EMC: And it was WAVE team against WAVE team?

MEB: No. We played the Army one time in Texas. We got there kind of late. And when I woke up in the morning I thought I was in the boys barracks because all the girls were big, rugged, with short cut hair. And the girls that were sleeping on the side of me, I said, "I think we got in the wrong barracks." We didn't win that day.

EMC: So did you mainly go to Texas?

MEB: No. We went to Florida. We had a baseball game in Florida. We flew in a PBY to the base in Pensacola. And when I was in Texas, we took the bus--two buses. We sang all the way--had fun.

EMC: That was organized recreation--the basketball and the baseball.

MEB: Oh, yes.

EMC: Now did you do that on weekends or during the week?

MEB: Both, I guess.

EMC: Now you also mentioned swimming.

MEB: Well, that was just on the base. But we did have a swim-off with another Navy base. And we won all of it.

EMC: Oh, that's great. So you were involved in all these sport activities.

MEB: Yes. That was my specialty.

EMC: Now did that take up a lot of your time?

MEB: Yes. Because I had to practice swimming and diving and relay races. And we had to practice baseball, basketball. And we had practice at night after supper.

EMC: Oh, I see. So you were very busy.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Had you been involved in these sports before?

MEB: In high school I was.

EMC: Oh, you were. Okay. So this was a carryover from that. During your year or so in Kingsville, did you keep up with news about the war?

MEB: Oh, yes. We all did. I lost a good friend over there.

EMC: Oh. That's too bad. Did you write to your parents or your friends during this year regarding your WAVE experience?

MEB: Oh, yes. We wrote quite often. It was great to get mail. And another sister would send boxes of cookies. And I always shared them with the boys.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Do you have any of these letters?

MEB: No.

EMC: That's too bad. Because they would have been good to save. Well, you seemed to be very busy with your job and your sports. But did you have time to travel?

MEB: Just to Mexico.

EMC: Well, that's something. And when did you go and why did you go?

MEB: That was the weekend. Weekends we went to Mexico.

EMC: And where did you go in Mexico?

MEB: Brownsville, you know. It was right over the border.

EMC: Yes. Brownsville, Texas, and then the next town right over the border.

MEB: Yes. And they're dirty towns in Mexico.

EMC: What did you do there?

MEB: Just walked around. And buy souvenirs for everybody. I bought a leather jacket and a hat and huaraches and perfume.

EMC: Oh. So it was just kind of a--

MEB: Flea market. Great big flea market.

EMC: Like a weekend jaunt.

MEB: Yes. Right on the borderline.

EMC: Did you walk over?

MEB: Oh, yes.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. Well, did you have a chance to travel to any other place?

MEB: No. When I got out I went to New Orleans. That's it.

EMC: Oh, well that's good. What was the highest rate you achieved in the Navy?

MEB: First Class--Seaman First Class.

EMC: Seaman First Class. Did you feel that your pay was fair and that you could survive on it?

MEB: Yes. Because I didn't get anything before I went in the service. I worked at the mill, but I gave my money to my father.

EMC: Oh. So this was your money.

MEB: It was my money.

EMC: And what did you do with it?

MEB: Spent it.

EMC: Oh. You spent it all--you didn't save it. Well, in August 1945 the war ended on V.J. day. Do you remember that day and how you celebrated?

MEB: Yes. All the girls in our barracks--we went into town. We rented a house. I've got pictures here. This one right here. And that's all the four of us. And cried a little.

EMC: And did you celebrate in any way?

MEB: Oh, yes.

EMC: How did you celebrate?

MEB: We wore our civilian clothes.

EMC: Oh, yes.

MEB: And I guess we had a house party. I don't remember.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. You rented a house then. Was it for the weekend?

MEB: Yes. For the weekend. It was over a garage. But it was our own, you know.

EMC: Yes. Oh, isn't that nice. How did you feel about the end of the war yourself?

MEB: Sad, a little sad. Because I knew I'd lose my friends. But glad it was over.

EMC: Yes. Oh, yes. It was a terrible experience. Where and when did you decide to leave the Navy?

MEB: Well, we were out on points. We had enough points. And a girl from New Orleans was going out too. And when they'd give us our physical to leave, they wanted me to stay because I had a bad

infection in my ear. And I said, "I can't, because she's going home." So I went home with an infection, and I still have trouble with it.

EMC: Oh. Maybe you should have had it taken care of.

MEB: I know I should have.

EMC: Yes. By the doctors there. Oh, dear. I wonder how you ever caught that.

MEB: Swimming.

EMC: Oh.

MEB: In pools and everything.

EMC: Yes. That can happen. When were you discharged from the Navy?

MEB: It's on that paper.

EMC: It's on that little clipping. I think it was August '45.

MEB: Yes. It probably was.

EMC: August '45, which is just about the time the war ended. And did you receive any medals for your service in the Navy?

MEB: No.

EMC: No. You never claimed any? Some people did receive them. Some women were asked to stay in the Navy because their services were needed to muster out the men at the end of the war. If your services were needed, would you have stayed?

MEB: Oh, I think so. Yes. But they didn't need me.

EMC: They didn't need you in the tower.

MEB: The clerical staff, people with typewriting, they were asked to stay.

EMC: Yes. Some of the people with clerical skills or storekeepers, paymasters. Were you happy or sad to leave the Navy?

MEB: Yes. Because I was going back to my humdrum life. There was always something going on.

EMC: Did you find the Navy an exciting life for you?

MEB: Yes, it was.

EMC: Did you enjoy meeting people from all over the country?

MEB: Yes, I did.

EMC: Because you were exposed to a wide variety of people. Did you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit de corps? Do you think they were a loyal bunch of girls?

MEB: They all helped each other. We all did.

EMC: And a patriotic group. Did you feel that the WAVES was a smoothly run organization?

MEB: They were. Just like in real life. You run up against people you don't think much of, but they're bosses. That's their job.

EMC: Did you know anyone who was discharged for disciplinary reasons in the WAVES?

MEB: No. I knew a couple that had sickness. They were relieved for that.

EMC: Yes. But everybody was fairly well disciplined then. Do you

think that the war made you a more independent and self-reliant person?

MEB: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did you think that it broadened your horizons?

MEB: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did your experience in the WAVES change your life in any way and, if so, how?

MEB: Yes. And I had two daughters. And I said--If they want to go in the service, I'll let them. But I'm not going to talk them into it. Because could they take the challenge like I did?

EMC: Did they join the service?

MEB: No.

EMC: No.

MEB: They went to school.

EMC: Did you maintain any service friendships when the war was over? Did you keep in contact with anyone?

MEB: Yes. The girl in New Orleans. My husband and I have been down to her house twice.

EMC: And you went home with her you said.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: And what did you do when you were there?

MEB: Oh, we had a ball when we went. But we went to the Court of the two sisters. And we went into a gay bar to see. Her brother took us. You heard about that. So we had a good time.

EMC: You saw New Orleans.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting.

MEB: But I never went to Mardi Gras.

EMC: And you said you kept in contact with your other friend Thelma.

MEB: Yes. And we're still friends.

EMC: That's great. Did you feel that what women were expected to do and be changed when the war was over?

MEB: It was a letdown like when the war was over.

EMC: Why did you feel it was a letdown?

MEB: We had to go back home, you know. In that peace and quiet. And we were used to that routine, you know, something to do all the time. The boys felt the same way.

EMC: Oh, they did. Did you attend any WAVE reunions after the war was over?

MEB: No. I got married and had three children. So I was busy.

EMC: Was your husband in the war?

MEB: Yes. He was a paratrooper. And he had a Gold Star because he made three jumps--one in France, Holland and Belgium. He was in the Battle of the Bulge.

EMC: Oh, really. That was a serious battle.

MEB: It was.

EMC: Many were killed there. Was he somebody you met at home?

MEB: Yes. After I got home.

EMC: Oh, isn't that amazing. So you came back to Rhode Island and found your husband there instead of in Kingsville.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: And you got married. When did you get married, may I ask? After the war obviously.

MEB: Yes. It was after the war. I was home about a year and a half.

EMC: Oh, good. And you had three children. Girls?

MEB: Two girls and a boy that joined the Navy.

EMC: Oh. The boy joined the Navy.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Is he still in, or was it a short enlistment?

MEB: No. He's out. He went to college over in Hawaii. So I got to see Hawaii, too.

EMC: Wow! Oh, that's great. Did you work at all after you came back from the war?

MEB: No. No.

EMC: You didn't work at all?

MEB: No. Well, just helping people. Sat with old people, with their husbands.

EMC: Oh. So when you were discharged from the WAVES you came back to Rhode Island and you didn't find a job.

MEB: No.

EMC: Okay. And you settled down in the same area where you were from.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Did you ever work after your kids grew up?

MEB: Just part time work.

EMC: Good. Did you ever talk about your WAVE days to your children?

MEB: Not really. No.

EMC: Did you ever encourage them to join the Navy?

MEB: No. I never did.

EMC: When did you join the Ocean State WAVES, the Rhode Island group?

MEB: Just about a year ago.

EMC: Oh, very recently.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: That's interesting. How did you find out about this group?

MEB: Well, they wrote letters to me before, you know. Because, you know, I had my picture taken for the memorial. And I would have liked to join but I couldn't leave.

EMC: So you're registered with WIMSA in Washington, which is great.

MEB: Yes. Oh, it's a beautiful place.

EMC: Yes. I would love to go down and see it. And I know some of the women went to that dedication, which was not last October but the October before. So you're active now. You have come full circle. You're active in the WAVE organization that you had left 54 years ago. Do you have anything else that you want to add about your experiences--anything unique, anything extraordinary, anything that we missed or overlooked in the interview?

MEB: No. I think we've touched everything.

EMC: Good. Well, it was a pleasure interviewing you. And I look forward to having this transcribed and becoming part of our collection.

MEB: Yes. And the women in Providence are a great group of women.

EMC: Oh, they are.

MEB: Yes.

EMC: Yes. Very good. Thank you, Marie.

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