

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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OF THE  
WAVES

NO. 271

RUTHE WRIGHT BOYEA

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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

2001

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND  
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INTERVIEWEE: RUTHE W. BOYEA

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

DATE: JULY 5, 2001

EMC: This is the first oral history interview with Ruth Boyea who lives at 105 Black Rock Avenue in New Britain, Connecticut. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I am the Curator at the Naval Historical Collection at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and our interview is for the WAVES in World War II History Project. Today's date is July 5, 2001. Ruthe, I am very glad that you were able to give us your time today for an interview on your career as an officer in the WAVES. I would like to begin the interview by asking where and when you were born?

RWB: I was born in September of 1918 in Waltham, Massachusetts.

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

RWB: My father had many, many jobs. But finally he worked for the Boston Gas Company as an engineer.

EMC: And your mother, did she work?

RWB: My mother was a homemaker. No, no. She was a full-time homemaker.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

RWB: I had an older sister and a younger sister, and I have a brother who served in the Navy.

EMC: Oh great, in World War II.

RWB: Right.

EMC: Did you spend your growing-up years in Waltham?

RWB: No, in a suburb of Boston, called Hyde Park. I went to school there and lived there until I went away to college.

EMC: Did you graduate from Hyde Park High School?

RWB: Yes, from Hyde Park High School.

EMC: And where did you decide to go to college?

RWB: Well, my mother was a very religious woman, and she did not have any college education herself and neither did my father. And

so she was very concerned about life away at a college for her daughters. So my sister, who was about nine months older than I, we went off to a small religious college in Demerest, Georgia for two years.

EMC: That must have been quite an adventure.

RWB: It was terrific. And we had a very, very interesting time, coming from Boston where the society was very open, we moved into a very closed society, if you realize back in those years what was going on in the South.

EMC: Well, you spent two years there you said. And did you decide at that point to come back to Boston?

RWB: Well, after two years in a small Southern college--there were a number of professional reasons for moving away from a small college in Georgia to a university. And my sister had made up her mind as to what she wanted to do with her life. There was a good school in Boston for her. And I enrolled in Boston University.

EMC: What did you intend to major in there?

RWB: That's a very interesting question, because I went to Boston University. It had a very strong program in educating

police officers and criminologists. And that's what I wanted to do until I took a professional/emotional test, and the results were that that was not the field for me, so I went into social work.

EMC: Oh, interesting. I assume you graduated from Boston University?

RWB: Boston University, yes.

EMC: Did you go to work after that? And if so, where did you work, and what did you do?

RWB: Well, I had been doing some volunteer work in a YMCA in Hyde Park, Massachusetts. And so I was enamored of the Women and Girls Programs work at the YMCA. So I applied to YMCA, and I got hired in West Springfield, Massachusetts, as a Program Director for Women and Girls Programs there.

EMC: Oh, that must have been very interesting?

RWB: Yes, and it has been interesting all my life. Because every time I have written my vita for any kind of a job or post-graduate education people carefully change the YM to a YW.

EMC: Were you in West Springfield when Pearl Harbor occurred?

RWB: Yes.

EMC: You were. And what was your reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

RWB: Well, it was total shock. And then at that time I was engaged to a young man who was facing the draft or joining the service like all the young men who were healthy in those days did. And so it was a time for us to reevaluate our lives, and this was not just the two of us. But it was people our age who had to totally reevaluate their lives, what they were going to do. They knew that the man that they were engaged to or in love with was going to be in the service one way or another, and so it meant a chunk out of their lives.

EMC: Now, were you engaged to your current husband?

RWB: Yes.

EMC: Oh, okay. And just as insight, where did you meet him?

RWB: We met at the YMCA. I was doing that work, and my husband was a part-time--employed part-time--to do all kinds of work at that YMCA and at the same time he was attending Springfield College.

EMC: Oh, okay.

RWB: And when he graduated from Springfield College, he knew that he had to either be drafted or go into the service.

EMC: Okay, so that was 1941 Pearl Harbor. And you knew your lives were changing. Well, you did join the WAVES in 1943. And can you tell me why you joined the WAVES?

RWB: I actually went-- Remember that the women in Service--it was in late '42 that they were even allowed in. So I was in the Second Class in January of '43 to go in. Why did I go in?

EMC: Yes?

RWB: You have to realize, and you have to put yourself back into the period of time that we're talking about - every single healthy man I graduated from college with, every single healthy man I graduated from high school with, and my fiancé all were going in the service. My brother-in-law, who had a baby and a wife, had no choice; he went into the army. My uncle gave up his job to go in the army. There has been so much change in the philosophy of young people since the days of World War II that it's hard to understand that this was something that we did, and we did willingly and with great spirit.



EMC: Yes.

RWB: And so all these people going in the Service--here I am a college graduate, healthy, absolutely responsible for no one. I am not responsible to anyone financially in any way. And so why in the world shouldn't I also serve the country? And that is the reason, and that's the reason I found many, many of the women I met had once I went in.

EMC: Patriotism, I believe.

RWB: Yes, health, education, and patriotism--why not?

EMC: Yes. What was attractive about the Navy vis-à-vis the other services.

RWB: Well, the Navy was the only one in West Springfield. And Springfield was so close to Mount Holyoke College and Smith College, we saw women in their uniforms. We did not see WACS in their uniforms. And so I think, I really can't answer that question because I don't know why, except that we were more familiar in Springfield with the WAVES than we were with the WACS.

EMC: Yes. Well when did you decide to enlist in the Navy in the

WAVES? When did you join?

RWB: Well, I went in December of '42. Remember it was--I think it was August and September before women were allowed in the Service in '42, and I am not sure of the date.

EMC: Right.

RWB: But it is sometime in that period of time that women were allowed in. Well, now, by December I was, my husband, my present husband, my boyfriend then, had already had to go in, and he was gone. My brother either had to join or be drafted, so he joined the Naval Air Force and he went in. My uncle went in. And so it was a natural thing for me to look into it in December of '42 after the women were allowed in. My initial check-in was in December of '42. I went to Boston to visit my family, and I went down to Boston Naval Headquarters and talked to them about it.

EMC: Oh great, so you went.

RWB: So that's why it was January 7th, I think, that they allowed or at least accepted me, though I wasn't sworn in then.

EMC: Sure. Well, you were an officer you entered the Officer Corps. And where did you go for your initial training and indoctrination?

RWB: The very beginning was Smith College. And that's where we learned Naval life and Naval Procedure, where we marched and we drilled and we learned all the procedures of saluting, of wearing an uniform, and all the things that are necessary to turn a civilian into a military person, Smith College in January of '43. And then I was sent to the officers training in February to Mount Holyoke College, and finished the officers training there, where we did some more marching and some more discipline and some more polishing up of our uniforms and so forth.

EMC: I see. That's an interesting mix. Because I had heard in all of my interviews before of people going first to Smith and then to Holyoke, but I guess they did that at one point in time. I should have doubled back and ask you this question before. But how did your parents feel about your decision to join the Navy? Were they supportive or not?

RWB: Well, the interesting thing is about that, I have a very quick story to tell you. When I went home in December to join and to look into it and so forth, I happened to be at a family party where my aunts, my mother's sisters, were absolutely horrified, and I quote them: "Why in the world, Ethel, would you allow your beautiful daughter to go into the Armed Forces with all those people she's going to have to work with?" And, as I said, that's almost a direct quote, and my mother turned to them and said, "If

I were her age, I would do it too!" And that was the end of that.

EMC: Oh, how wonderful.

RWB: But that was not just my family

EMC: Yes.

RWB: That was a community attitude.

EMC: Yes.

RWB: It was a general attitude. You probably, in your interviews are hearing this over and over again.

EMC: Yes.

RWB: Where not just family, but community, clubs, organizations -- all said, "This was a place for bad women not good women, but bad women." It was so ridiculous and so outrageous, and we found it wasn't true at all.

EMC: Yes

RWB: Its irritating to think that people had that feeling about it.

EMC: Yes, they had that prejudice against the Service.

RWB: For women, for women. Not for men.

EMC: No, not for men, but women, yes, exactly. And that's lingered quite a long time even after World War II. Well, how did you, in your training at Smith and Mount Holyoke, how did you react to the discipline and the marching and the classes and military life in general? Was it easy to adjust for you or not?

RWB: For me it was fine. Looking back, I really cannot tell you of any real great difficulty, except the physical exhaustion of the marching up and down of the hills of Mount Holyoke and Smith College was not exactly fun. And it was winter, January; and we had ice storms and snow storms and so forth. And we were out in it and had to--in both places we had to--march to the mess hall where we got our meals and march back again. We had to march to our classes, so we were out in it. But that's the only difficulty that I can remember. Most of it was the wonderful comradeship of the women who volunteered to go in. And they were going to make the best of whatever was handed to them, and they did.

EMC: Do you remember Captain Underwood at all? He was the head of the training school at Smith. Do you remember meeting him or having any contact with him?

RWB: I had no contact with captains.

EMC: There were no captains.

RWB: At no time. And thank heavens! I had no contact with the captains of the stations.

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

RWB: Well, looking back, obviously they weren't a great trouble to me. And I'm not sure-- I had such a rich background in education, that I found it was a little boring to try to look at these pictures and pick out the Japanese Planes from the American Planes in two seconds as they flashed them on the screen.

EMC: Right.

RWB: But that's the only course I can remember having difficulty with; I wanted to look a much longer time to find out whether it was a Japanese plane or an American plane. But that's the only course I found that was difficult. All the rest of the courses, with the book learning and the discipline learning and the Naval regulations, and so forth, no.

EMC: Did you like the Navy uniform?

RWB: Yes, you know who designed it?

EMC: Yes.

RWB: Okay. Yes, I felt the Navy Uniform was lovely. And in reading later on, I discovered that the first WAC uniform was designed by the men. And then they decided they'd better spruce it up a little, and so they did change it some. But the Navy uniform was designed for women and, therefore, we wore it--body shapes and so forth--we wore it very well.

EMC: Attractive.

RWB: Yes, it was much.

EMC: Did anything amusing or noteworthy happen during this early training period at Smith or Mount Holyoke? Do you remember anything outstanding or amusing?

RWB: The only thing that comes back in the memory of the training was the horrible weather. Most women were protected. You just didn't go out if the weather was icy, you didn't go out in it if it was freezing cold and so forth. So my memory of those two places was it must have been a bad winter, because I can remember marching down the hill to--we ate at a restaurant down

the hill--and it was total ice. And we were expected to march in formation with a street covered with total ice and icicles hanging from the trees. And then I remember the snow, and we were expected to march in formation in snow and slush and whatever the weather. I just remember that it was tough. And terribly, terribly difficult for the girls from the South, for the women from the South and from California. The New England women had lived in some of this, not the marching but the winter. And I can remember how awful we felt for some of these women who just were devastated at being out in these conditions. But we persevered, graduated, and went on regardless of the weather. But other than that I really don't have great memories of it.

EMC: You were commissioned on March 3, 1943, you mentioned in your outline here. And where was your first assignment?

RWB: After being commissioned, I was sent to Hunter College, which was the Naval Training Station for the enlisted women coming in from all over the United States. We took over--the Navy took over--the entire college, all the buildings and all the classrooms and all the administration. They just took over the thing. Then they took over apartment houses circling the campus at Hunter. So that we moved into apartments at Hunter. And the women moved in--six or more into a room or an apartment, whatever they were assigned. And then we used Hunter College for all the classrooms and for the drills and for all the activities



necessary to train the raw recruits from being enlisted raw recruits into Navy personnel in the eight weeks or so that they were there. And that was my first duty: I was in charge of a barracks, which was an apartment house filled with women.

EMC: What did that entail being in charge of the barracks?

RWB: Well, it is an interesting thing. One has to realize that these women came from every kind of a background that you can possibly imagine--from the most wealthy to the most poverty-stricken. They came from every district; they came from every geographical area. Now you're putting them all together in a building and sending them off to classes, marching them to mess halls, changing their lives, getting them into uniform and so forth. That's the kind of thing you were doing. You were handling whatever came up morning, noon, or night. I had some absolutely weirdo experiences, because I came from a protected Boston family who went to church three times a week. And here I am in an environment that includes everything that you can think of. I had never even heard of lesbianism. I had never heard of incest. I had never heard of date rape. Its hard to believe this, but remember I was a young thing, twenty-five years old. I'd never heard of any-- And all of a sudden I had many of these things thrust upon me and didn't know how to deal with them. How to comfort, how to help a woman through whatever mental anguish or emotional state, so that she could go the next day and proceed

through the training and all that.

So that was part of it. Also it was part of the duty to have a weekly inspection with white gloves that my young family almost howls, when I say I went around with white gloves and wiped off the tops of things. They say, "You did not!" "Yes, I did." And I'd look at my white glove, and if it's clean, fine; they passed inspection. My job was made up of so many things. Then I had to take my--it was a company--out to the armory to drill and to practice their marching. So it included an enormous variety, and whatever came up we were expected to deal with--whether we had ever dealt with it before in our lives, we dealt with it. And that was part of it--that's part of your training in the armed forces. They don't ask you in detail whether you can do all these things; they just assign you a job.

EMC: It sounds like you were a master-at-arms. Now that's head of a barracks.

RWB: Yes.

EMC: But anyway, well it sounds like a very interesting time, and I assume you lived in the apartments.

RWB: Oh, yes.

EMC: And did you have your own room?

RWB: I had a small apartment on the first floor of this huge apartment house. I don't know whether it was three or four stories. And each apartment had six women in it. And they used the facilities. But of course they had kitchens and stuff; they didn't use those. But, yes, each apartment had six women in it.

EMC: Well, you had quite a responsibility then in this apartment complex situation for the WAVES. But according to your sheet, you were there for three weeks, is that all?

RWB: I guess. I don't know. I'm looking to see if--

EMC: Assigned there on March 3, 1943 as a Training Officer.

RWB: On March 21st, I went to Charleston.

EMC: Yes, on March 21, 1943.

RWB: Well, they needed somebody that had the training I got at Hunter at Charleston Naval Headquarters.

EMC: Yes, it seems you were assigned to Charleston, South Carolina. And what was your position there?

RWB: Well, it was somewhat of the same thing that I was doing at

Hunter, but it was a small--it was one barracks. It was called the WAVE Barracks on Tradd Street in Charleston. It was within walking distance of the hotel that the Navy had taken over for a headquarters. They could walk from there and back, and most of the women in the barracks were assigned to do all kinds of secretarial work and clerks and work like that; and also some of them were assigned to communications and interpreting messages and that kind of thing. So they were assigned to all that kind of thing at the Naval Headquarters, and they lived at the barracks. And then I found myself doing some of the same things that I did--now I didn't have to drill. But the Navy took over a beautiful home right on Tradd Street, just a lovely, lovely home for a recreational center for the women. And so that's where they could entertain their boyfriends, and that's where they could play cards. There was no place in the barracks to do any of this, so they took that over. And another one of my responsibilities was to supervise it and see that the women were behaving and the men were behaving. And also to lock it up at night when it was over. I don't remember the hours. But it was a place for the girls--the women--to get away from a barracks with bunks to a place where they could meet people (their families were often there) in comfortable chairs and lovely surroundings overlooking the entire Charleston Harbor. So the Navy did do that, and that was another one in addition to the barracks. And I often say the life and death of these young women. You know whatever came up. Also to have the way to contact Red Cross if there was a death and to use

whatever facilities were necessary to use.

EMC: Now, where did you live when you were at Charleston?

RWB: And I had a room, just a room, at the barracks at one end of the barracks, I lived there in the barracks, so I was there twenty-four hours a day kind of thing.

EMC: Did you have an assistant to help you?

RWB: No.

EMC: You were the sole person in charge.

RWB: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember what your rank was then? Were you an ensign?

RWB: I must have been, I am not quite sure when I became a lieutenant. I probably was an ensign at Tradd Street.

EMC: Did you have any free time to yourself? Were you given a weekend off or a day off occasionally?

RWB: I don't remember, I don't remember. I was probably so deep

into my duties that I don't have any memory. I did go shopping and that kind of thing, but I don't remember, no.

EMC: Did you make any friends when you were there?

RWB: In Charleston?

EMC: Right?

RWB: No. Again, I was a lone woman officer, and any of the other officers lived other places, any other officers assigned to the Naval Base. So that I didn't have any circle of friends. And there was a great deal-- I feel strongly, and I've felt this way all my life, that the people in power need to keep a line between, and I did that when I was professionally at the university, Central Connecticut State University, keeping a line between the students and myself because of the responsibility. And so, no, I did not have a-- I'll give you an interesting story, and then you can cut it out if you want to. When I was leaving Hunter College, one of my Navy officer friends gave me a personal letter to relatives of hers in Charleston. And I was to call them and give them this letter of introduction. So I called when I got there, and I never got any response. So I called again, and I never got any response. I did that for three times, and I realized that they were not interested in meeting anybody from the Navy. It was a different society from Hunter College in

New York City where everything was open. And every time we went out to eat, somebody in the restaurant would send us a drink or pay for our meal or something. Then I go into Charleston, where even with a letter of introduction I was not able to get through. So it was tremendous experiences for a young woman to have this opportunity of life in New York City and life in Charleston, South Carolina--totally different lives.

EMC: Right. So the civilians there in Charleston paid little attention to you.

RWB: There were not-- The Navy men, you know-- It was the women again. It was not overt, but it was there. If we rode on the buses, they would move away. Or they would look at you, spend the whole bus ride looking at you and raising their eyebrows and thinking.... And never speaking, you know. And, you know, that isn't normal in the South. Everybody speaks to everybody. We were not ostracized, but we were ignored, inasmuch as we could be. Yes.

EMC: So the civilians in New York were much different.

RWB: Oh, my, everything was open in New York. We even went to private clubs on the Jersey Shore free to swim in the ocean. We had tickets for everything, you know, all kinds of concerts and stuff, free tickets. And as I said, when we went to a restaurant,

very seldom did we ever pay for a drink. Because somebody in the group would say, "Put that on my bill," you know, or whatever. And sometimes even our meals. It was very different--very, very, very different kind of a thing in New York. And then Charleston had that experience where these people even with a letter were not open at all.

EMC: What kinds of problems, if any, did you have with the women in our barracks in Charleston?

RWB: In Charleston, the women were highly supervised because-- by the Navy men--in their offices, wherever they were assigned. And a person like myself expected the women to keep it clean, to be well adjusted, to not come back to the barracks drunk. I think we were living to prove something. And I found throughout my Navy career that the women really felt that they had a need to prove that not only could they do the job, but they could live the life. And that they could be able to go through both the job and the life and come out well adjusted and not have-- So I did not have much discipline.

EMC: That's good.

RWB: I really did not have much discipline, even at Hunter. You wouldn't expect it because they were all brand new and scared to death. But in Charleston they had gone through, and they had



jobs, and they went out every day, and so forth. Now that didn't mean that they didn't have fun and they didn't go on dates and parties and so forth. But, no, I did not have discipline problems with them.

EMC: Good. Well, that made your duties a little bit easier.

RWB: Yes.

EMC: That's for sure. Did you like this assignment? Did you find it challenging or routine?

RWB: I loved Charleston. I did not want to move.

EMC: Why did you like it?

RWB: Well, I liked it because it was so varied. You see I had the barracks and the life of the barracks and the women in the barracks. And then I had this wonderful home on Tradd Street that was taken over for social purposes--to meet their parents, to meet their boyfriends, provide them with cards for playing cards, music. I had almost like two lives: One was this wonderful, wonderful social life, and one with the military and the barracks to control. So I was very happy, and Charleston is a beautiful city. And, you know, it's just a lovely place. The weather is great. It was a great assignment.

EMC: That's a delight.

RWB: It was a great assignment.

EMC: Did you have any time for fun? I assume you weren't dating anybody because your husband was in the service.

RWB: My fiance was away, yes. I had a social life because I wanted one. So I dated, but not seriously. He knew it, and I knew it. It was just a chance to have some fellowship with two people. So I did date, but not in that sexual relationship. These young men were away from home, their girlfriends were someplace else. We were perfectly compatible to have this kind of a relationship. So, yes, I did date. Yes, I did go to dinner. Yes, I did go to parties. Yes, I did.

EMC: With officers?

RWB: Yes. Oh, yes, with officers. Oh, yes. Couldn't date enlisted. We weren't supposed to.

EMC: Right.

RWB: We weren't supposed to. And that was the only-- A couple of times it was a problem for me because I was more attracted to

some young enlisted man--in this relationship I've just told you about--than I was with the officers. So what we could do is meet at this lovely building, this home that we'd taken over, and sit down and talk, listen to music, and talk to the other people, and so forth. And have that relationship. And it was good for them, too, because they were living in barracks, and this was comfortable. The furniture was all left there, so we had comfortable furniture to sit on and that kind of thing.

EMC: Did you find, as a woman with a certain degree of authority over the women and over the men in this Tradd Street home which was used for the recreation area, did you have any problems as an authority figure with the women or the men?

RWB: I never had any problem with the women because it was understood through their training. And remember the women were all volunteers. And this made a totally different ambience. The women were volunteers, and they were going to make it, and they were not going to rock the boat, and they were going to do things. So if I was the authority figure, I was the authority figure, and they didn't challenge it at all. The only thing, and it was a minor thing, a very minor thing, is that now and then the enlisted men would give you a hard time. But it wouldn't go any farther than talking and getting yourself out of it. But the women were not disciplinary problems. They were not.

EMC: That's great.

RWB: Not where I was anyhow.

EMC: That's wonderful. Well, you stayed in Charleston for almost a year and four months. And then you were transferred to Glencoe, Georgia. Can you tell us what that was and what your duties were there as well?

RWB: This was my first assignment that I was not assigned to be an officer for the women. I was an officer for the Glencoe Georgia Naval Air Station, which was men and women. And my responsibility was for both--this is the first time--for both men and women. And as I look back on it, I look back on it with greater joy than I did when I was doing it. Because when I was doing it, it was just something to do, and I didn't really try to evaluate it at all. But the Glencoe Station was a blimp station. We had some airplanes, we had some fighter airplanes, but mostly it was blimps. And those pilots would take the blimp out over the Atlantic Ocean looking for submarines. And they could see the submarines, you know, because they could hover. A blimp can just hover. And they could see the submarine. They could then send radio messages to attack ships to come in and get rid of the submarine.

EMC: Were you near the Atlantic Ocean then? Were you on the

coast?

RWB: Oh, yes. Glencoe juts out into the Atlantic. It's sort of an elbow that juts out. It's off of Brunswick.

EMC: Oh, yes!

RWB: Brunswick is the closest place. Brunswick is a city, and Glencoe is a little place that geographically juts out into the ocean. And so the young men assigned to Glencoe were pilots and the mechanics and so forth that kept the blimps flying and so forth. But in addition to that, Glencoe was an R&R, a Rest & Recreation Center, for horribly wounded Navy men from the Japanese fighting on the islands of the Pacific. And they came back. And we had a magnificent crew of doctors and nurses and a health center. But then because I was called the welfare officer, I had responsibility for all the recreation and welfare and physical educational programs and so forth. I, too, got involved in the emotional bringing back to good health for some of these people. So that it was an interesting, very interesting assignment. And let me quote just from my orders because they're interesting. My orders said: "To formulate, promote, and to conduct a program of welfare, recreation, and physical fitness activities for personnel of this station. And to work closely with community agencies which have been organized to provide wholesome recreation for service personnel on leave and on

liberty."

Now that's a direct quote from my orders. It says nothing about women and nothing about men. This was my assignment, that. And I had to develop a program to meet that. There were twenty-seven orders on my list, twenty-seven different specific orders: general supervision over recreational facilities of this station, both indoor and outdoor, and a plan for the improvement of such as may be needed. And that was what I said earlier, the building was broken. To prepare and advise concerning the expenditures of welfare funds and prepare a monthly audit. Formulate and prepare a program of recreational activities for all personnel in order to develop and maintain the highest state of morale possible. And that was part of twenty-five specific orders that I had to do that.

EMC: Quite an assignment! And you were the only one.

RWB: I relieved a man who was a lieutenant commander to go to sea, and I took over his job.

EMC: Did you have any assistance or any help?

RWB: Well, I had a clerk. And the band had its own bandmaster, and the library had its own librarian. And, of course, the chaplains had their own thing. But they were under that. And so I had people doing things. But I don't look at them. I guess they

were under my command, but I didn't look at them that way. I just didn't look at it that way.

EMC: You had quite a few areas under your command. How large was this base?

RWB: I really don't remember, and I don't have any way to check it. I don't know. We had Navy fighter planes, and we had blimps. And we had all the mechanics to keep these things running. And the hospital and, of course, the barracks and the mess halls and so forth. I don't know.

EMC: Were there many women, many WAVES there?

RWB: Yes, there was one barrack with two floors and maybe ten rooms on each floor, so there probably were forty or more women who were doing everything. I might have told you this story earlier; I'll tell it again: One of the women at the naval barracks was in Communications. And her head was so filled with secret code work, that she was never allowed to leave the base unless she was escorted. She had to tell exactly where she was going, when she would return, and with whom she would be because it was wartime, and she had the information that was crucial. And then, in addition to that, we had the nurses and all the other clerks. And we had women landing the planes.

EMC: Oh, women air service pilots. Oh, isn't that interesting.

RWB: Yes, we had women who took their tour of duty for aircraft controller.

EMC: Isn't that interesting.

RWB: Yes, aircraft controllers. We had women do that. The payroll officer for the Navy was a woman, was one of my WAVE friends. One day I was passing where she was doing the payroll. And she sat down, and she took a Navy revolver--and if you know, they're about forty pounds--and she... The men were all lined up in front of her, and she slammed it on the desk. And behind her to the right was a Marine, full uniform with guns and everything, standing there with her. And she was the payroll officer for the naval air station in Glencoe, Georgia. By the time I went to Glencoe, women were really deep into the service, and they had proven that they could do the jobs. And so we had women at the base who were doing everything.

EMC: Can you tell me about the kinds of programs that you organized for recreation?

RWB: Okay. Every holiday I planned a big party with a dance band in the big recreation hall. So that at Halloween we had all kinds--we had apples strung, and we bobbed for apples in tubs of



water. And we had costumes and all that kind of thing. Everything that goes with Halloween for Halloween. And Valentine's Day we had a sweetheart dance. So the major holidays, I planned a big, big party. The other things that I did were to keep the library going and to have places that they could sit and relax and play cards or table games. I used the Red Cross for whatever purposes the Red Cross was interested in doing. The USO, I introduced all the USO shows when they came on base.

EMC: Oh, how interesting!

RWB: Yes.

EMC: Anybody famous come in the USO shows?

RWB: No, because we were not that large a station. So we didn't have anyone famous. The most famous group that came were the Harmonica Somethings. The name escapes me. But that was a group of men who played the harmonica. But we had wonderful shows. The second-level shows were great shows, but we didn't have anybody of great, great knowledge--great fame, I should say, rather than knowledge. Great fame. And, oh, the other thing that I did: When the YWCA or Red Cross or YMCA or anybody wanted to plan a program for the servicemen on base, then I was the liaison. I worked with them in whatever they were planning to do. And planned for the transportation to that location and so forth. Now, I'm not sure

whether you want the next story or not.

EMC: Well, what is the next story? Can you just--?

RWB: Well, it is a black and white--

EMC: Oh, sure. Well, why not?

RWB: Well, the thing is that one of the heartbreaking things about coming from Yankee Land to the South was the relationship of the so-called Negroes in those days (rather than African-Americans) and the whites. And we had sailors coming back from the hell of the Pacific Islands fighting who were so damaged emotionally and physically and so forth, and they had to ride on the back of the buses. They had to live as--no matter what they had done in the war; they were servicemen and whatever they had done in the war.

EMC: They were segregated then.

RWB: Totally! Totally. And they were segregated by the Navy, you know. The Navy only allowed African-Americans certain jobs. Well, I, coming from Boston, decided that I had to have some parties for the African-American sailors on the base. They weren't accepted or invited or anything to our big parties. So I went out into the community to see if I could find a place that we could

have a party. And I had a real tough time. Finally, I enlisted some black preachers to help me, that this is what I wanted to do. And, you know, we would provide the transportation, we'd do all that. In fact, I would do everything that I could. So I finally ended up by planning a group of parties out in the community, and I enlisted the YWCA, I enlisted the Red Cross, I enlisted the schools, I enlisted the black ministers to provide for it. And then we provided the Navy transportation to these spots because they weren't held on the base. They were held out in school auditoriums or school gyms and places like that. That was just part of the life of that period of time.

EMC: Exactly.

RWB: That one had to live with. I'm very glad that I was able to do that, but I wish it was the other way around. But wishful thinking won't do it.

EMC: Right. Did you have any black WAVES?

RWB: We never had one.

EMC: Okay, I just wondered. Because they were admitted in the service in late '44.

RWB: Yes. I know. I never happened to have any.

EMC: Under your jurisdiction.

RWB: No, never. Never at Hunter. Of course Hunter, remember, that was very early. Hunter was extremely early. And none. It's just as well they didn't put any black WAVES down in Georgia or Charleston. So that's okay.

EMC: Now, you also worked with the chaplains, you said.

RWB: Yes.

EMC: And what did you do for them?

RWB: Well, I helped publicize the worship services. I helped publicize the worship services. I worked with them to be sure that all the enlisted and the officers personnel were aware of the services. And I also, if somebody came to me and it was something that I really did not want to or did not feel capable of handling, I would work with closely with the chaplains, and the chaplains would take over. We usually had two chaplains on the base. And the wonderful thing about the chaplains was that it didn't matter what branch of their religion they were in. They were Navy chaplains, and therefore they handled whatever. And some magnificent religious people I met on that base.

EMC: Now, you also mentioned you went out into the woods and gathered flowers.

RWB: Yes. Well, all of the worship services were held in the assembly hall, which was a hall for dancing and parties and all kinds of things like that. So that I needed to do something about making it look like a chapel, make it look like a chapel. And the woods of Georgia are filled with flowering trees and flowering bushes and things. And so I used to get into the Jeep and go off into the woods of Georgia and bring armloads of flowers back. And then fill and decorate the hall, the secular assembly hall.

EMC: Oh, great! Did you drive the Jeep yourself?

RWB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I drove the Jeep, and we arranged flowers. And of course the chaplains were pleased because it was just a big wooden barracks hall. And it made it a little bit better. So that's another thing I did. That wasn't part of my orders.

EMC: Was there anything else in the recreation area that you were involved in in Glencoe?

RWB: No, I think we've pretty much covered it. But remember I was also the education officer.

EMC: Okay. I wanted to get into that.

RWB: Okay. We'll take that next. The education officers-- During the war, the Navy and the Army, the armed forces, set up educational programs so that anyone who wanted to could study at the same time they were in the service. So some officer on every base was assigned as education officer, who was a clearinghouse for all this kind of thing. And that's about all I was able to do, was to act as sort of a clearinghouse and be sure that the courses were available, the books were available, and that kind of thing. I didn't do any of the education. In fact, most of it was done, you know, on their own rather than have a professor or teacher doing it. So that was another job that I was assigned as part of one of those assignments.

EMC: Were you involved in physical fitness at that time?

RWB: Yes. Part of one of those assignments that I read to you earlier was to be responsible for the physical fitness. Now, I took over, personally, the physical fitness of the WAVES. And we had physical fitness classes where we jumped, and we did all kinds of exercises, bending and stretching and so forth. And then because it was successful and I had a good relationship with the captain, he suggested that I take them out onto the beach so that they could swim and so forth. So we'd go out onto the beach someplace off of Georgia, and we would do our calisthenics. And

then they could go swimming and so forth and come back. And that was part of the physical fitness. For the men it was just to be sure it was organized, be sure that somebody was going to do the physical fitness for the men. But I personally did the physical fitness for the women. And it was mostly calisthenics, you know, that kind of thing.

EMC: Yes, to keep them in shape and moving.

RWB: Yes, yes. Because so many of them sat. So many of them had desk jobs, yes.

EMC: Did you do anything else in this assignment at Glencoe? You had a very full time there.

RWB: I had full days. The other thing that I did-- Part of Navy life is that there are officers of the day. And I took my turn as officer of the day. And at that time, we had to go and secure the barracks for the nighttime. For the women's barracks, I would go in and walk through it and so forth. For the men's barracks, I would just go to whoever was on duty at the desk. But we had officers of the day, and I took my rotation as officer of the day.

EMC: Well, you sound like you had a very, very full schedule and a very full day.

RWB: I did. I did.

EMC: Did you encounter any problems, again, as an authority figure over men and women in Georgia?

RWB: The only thing-- And it didn't develop into a problem. It started out with the possibility of being a messy problem, but it didn't develop that way. The head of the band was a master-- whatever the role was. I was going to say master sergeant, but of course that isn't it. But whatever the corresponding of a master sergeant, and I've forgotten the term. He had hash marks all the way up his arm, and he had medals from all kinds of war service and so forth. And this was a real problem for him, with all these years in service, to have a woman officer. And I walked a very delicate line to keep from it messing up to something awful. And I only had one bad experience with him. And every woman who was to come on the base for one of these parties from the YMCA or the Red Cross or the YWCA, they had to have a list, and they had to be checked at the gate when they came in.

And he brought in a group of women that were unacceptable. And the captain called me to his office the next day, and said that he had a report from the YWCA that they weren't going to come back anymore if women like that were on the base. And I knew something was wrong because during the party I saw how they were dressed. And so I knew something was going on. So I was called to



the captain's office, and my responsibility--what in the world did I think I was doing? How did I do it? And so forth. And I was able to back up all the women that I had allowed in and that were on my list. And this group of people I didn't know. Well, come to find out--he found out. And that poor guy with all his hash marks was sent off base. The very next morning he was gone. But that could have been, you know, a messy thing. But it didn't develop. Evidently the captain believed me. I knew something was wrong. These women didn't just look like YWCA women.

EMC: Right. Well, it's interesting they let other people, other women, from the town into the base for these parties.

RWB: Oh, yes.

EMC: I wasn't aware of that.

RWB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

EMC: It wasn't just these men on base.

RWB: Oh, no, no, no. No, in fact it was mostly for our base. Because, as I said, there were only--what did I say?--about fifty women. So, you know, there were hundreds of men.

EMC: Now, this was a blimp base, you said.

RWB: Blimp.

EMC: And did you ever have a chance to go up in a blimp?

RWB: Yes. If you know anything about blimps, at least during wartime, you had to climb a ladder, a rope ladder up to get into the blimp. And the blimps were--they would bring it over the air base, and then ropes hanging down from the blimp, and Navy enlisted men would grab the ropes. And I don't know how many, two or three men on ropes, and they'd literally pull the blimp down and anchor it. That's how it came in. And so one time they asked if a couple of the WAVE officers wouldn't like to have a ride in the blimp. So we put on our Navy slacks, and we went out to the blimp base. And with the guys holding it down, we climbed up the ladder--and I have a fear of heights, but I did it--into it. And the best way I can describe the cabin on these blimps is about the size of a bus. And of course it had a toilet in it, and it had a small kitchen, and places for people to sit. And so we had a ride over the South Carolina coast in a blimp. It was wonderful because there's hardly any noise. There's just a little noise rather like an airplane. And we were close enough to see the waves and to see the pelicans and everything. And so it was a wonderful, wonderful experience. And when we got back, they pulled the blimp down, and we came down the rope ladder.

EMC: Were you the only woman on board?

RWB: No, there were two or three of us that day.

EMC: Well, that's a unique experience.

RWB: The only woman you'll ever know who rode in a blimp in World War II.

EMC: Right. Yes. In Georgia. That's great. Did you have any social life at this time in the base at Glencoe?

RWB: No. No, I did not. By this time my husband was in Alaska.

EMC: Oh!?

RWB: He wasn't my husband. But he was in Alaska. He had been shipped out on secret orders to Alaska, and I was in Georgia. And we had set our wedding, but he was shipped out on secret orders, and we had to cancel it.

EMC: Oh! So you were going to be married while you were both in the service.

RWB: Yes. And then we decided that, well, we'd try to do it again. If he could get leave and I could get leave at exactly the

same time, we would go home, and we would be married. And he'd go back to Alaska, and I'd go back--it was a real wartime romance. So that's what we did.

EMC: Oh, really!

RWB: Yes.

EMC: When was that?

RWB: And that was in '44.

EMC: Oh, in '44. So you got leave.

RWB: Yes, yes. So I got leave in '44 to do this. And in order to be out of uniform if more than five people were in a group, you had to have permission. So I have a letter in my wedding book giving me permission to wear a wedding dress. And so my family did all the work. They got the caterer, and they got the food, and they got the church, and they got the flowers. And I had bought my wedding dress when I was in New York City. Because, you see, I was going to be married. And he was sent out, and so I couldn't. So I had bought my wedding dress at Saks Fifth Avenue.

EMC: Oh, how nice!

RWB: And the family had taken care of it. So anyhow, we were married.

EMC: In Boston.

RWB: In Boston. Married. And my uncle had to get special permission to get enough gas tickets--remember you had to have gas tickets?--so that he could take us to the train. And he did. He got a special assignment of gas so that he could take us to the train. And we went off on a three- or four-day honeymoon. And he went off--Doug went off--to Alaska, and I went back to Georgia. And the wedding dress was put away. It's up in the attic.

EMC: Let me just turn this over. [Change to Side B of Tape] So you went back to your duties--

RWB: I went back there as a married woman. So I had to change all the paperwork.

EMC: Right.

RWB: To add my name.

EMC: Did you enjoy this assignment?

RWB: In Georgia?

EMC: In Georgia, yes.

RWB: Oh, yes. It was so varied. No day was ever the same. It was just very, very varied. I had a great relationship with the women on the base. And most of the men, either they ignored me or did what I wanted, so it wasn't a problem.

EMC: That was good.

RWB: Yes. Sure. And I think many of the Navy women who were officers felt the same way, that ignored to the point that as long as the assignments were done and so forth, so what? They can think women ought not to be in the service.

EMC: Oh, you got that impression very definitely?

RWB: Oh, definitely, yes. A lot of it. Yes, yes.

EMC: Officers and enlisted?

RWB: Yes. Enough so that you were aware of it constantly. And then, you know, you'd have days when everything went well and so forth, and then you'd bump into somebody who felt women in the Navy and all that, and that's not my idea of whatever..... The

Navy, yes. That kind of thing. But mostly the officers ranked-- the rank itself carried you through nearly anything that--you just didn't allow things to develop to the point that they were a problem. You just didn't. And most of the women officers did the same thing. You know, they nipped it in the bud, or they handled it before it developed into a thing. So I don't really have stories of horror.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

RWB: I really don't.

EMC: That's great. I assume you had your own quarters there.

RWB: Yes, I always had. Yes, I had my own quarters in the officers' wing. In fact, we women--there were about sixteen of us.

EMC: Officers?

RWB: Officers, yes, in that wing. Maybe there weren't sixteen, but there were a lot of them, a few over ten. And we all had our own individual rooms in one wing on the second floor.

EMC: Oh, that's good. How did you cope with the heat? Kind of a silly question.

RWB: No, no. It was a problem. It was a real problem because, you see, for almost all recreation, we were outdoors, and it was hot. I used to play tennis at least three times a week to keep myself fit, and it was hot. One of the interesting things-- coming from New England, I took my luggage and put it at the back of the closet. And hung all the uniforms and clothes in front of it, and left it there without every moving it or airing it out or anything. And when I finally went to get it, it had grown all kinds of gray hair stuff on it. And I was so shocked and so amazed and so devastated by this. And my friends from Georgia said, "Well, what did you put it in the back of the closet for?" But that's my one story about the heat.

The other thing that bothered me terribly--and I had the Navy come and take care of it--was the cockroaches. They're wood cockroaches, and they're big. I couldn't stand it. I could not stand seeing one or having one in my room. So periodically the Navy would come up, and I suppose they used DDT in those days. I don't know what they used, but it got rid of them. I could not deal with that. I personally could not deal with it. I almost traumatized, even telling you about it now without seeing them. But they're so huge. And so the Navy took care of it for me. And I think, unfortunately now in retrospect, I think it was DDT, but it worked. But those are the only things--the effect on my luggage with mold on it and the wood cockroaches. You know, you deal with the heat the best you can.



EMC: Right. Yes. That's for sure. Now, were you a lieutenant by this time?

RWB: Yes. No. A lieutenant (jg).

EMC: Okay.

RWB: I was a lieutenant (jg). Had I stayed in, in a couple of months I would have automatically gone on to full lieutenant. But, yes, I was a lieutenant (jg). I don't when it happened, but I was a lieutenant (jg) in Charleston, South Carolina.

EMC: Oh, okay.

RWB: So someplace in there I changed to a lieutenant (jg).

EMC: Did you save your money that you received, your pay? It was quite adequate, I'm sure. Did you save it all or spend it or--?

RWB: I cannot answer that question. I have absolutely no memory of anything of-- All of our food and clothing and everything was taken care of. So whatever I had, I don't know. I do remember they took out war bonds out of my check.

EMC: Oh, good!

RWB: And the war bonds that my husband had taken out of his check outfitted our first home and furniture.

EMC: Yes. Now, I was going to ask you about war bonds because they did encourage it.

RWB: Yes. I always had war bonds taken out, and I don't know when I cashed them. One day it happened.

EMC: Very good. Well, you were in Georgia when V-J Day occurred in August 1945. Can you tell me your reaction and the celebrations on base, if there were any?

RWB: On V-J Day-- Well, V-D, Debarkation Day, was more dramatic. The invasion of--

EMC: Oh, D-Day. Oh, you mean D-Day in June of '44.

RWB: D-Day in June was much more dramatic.

EMC: Really?

RWB: Yes. I was wakened in the morning by the shore patrol who came knocking on my door. Well, what they did was tell the young woman on duty to wake me and bring me out to tell me about D-

Day. And that was-- For those of us at that time, D-Day meant that something wonderful was going to happen. This is, you know-- We had lived with this so long, that that was very, very, very wonderful. And that was in Charleston, South Carolina. Now, V-J Day was in Georgia. And the enlisted men had a big celebration. They went wild. They had too much flip--too much beer, and they went crazy. I don't remember the women doing very much with V-J Day kind of thing. And we were isolated down in Georgia. We weren't near a big city where they had all the celebrations and stuff. And I don't think there was really too much celebration, you know, I don't. Except I remember that I had to stay away from where they were serving beer because the guys were really out of control: screaming and singing and yowling and everything. In fact, in one of my pictures it shows them; they were acting crazy.

EMC: Right. I remember that.

RWB: Rightly so. I mean many of those young men had come from the Japanese--fighting the Japanese on those islands, which was hell.

EMC: Oh, yes! It was horrible.

RWB: You know, just absolute hell. And they came back with this horrible disease--jungle rot.

EMC: Oh, yes, yes.

RWB: And it was terrible, terrible. And so painful and so ugly. And they were, of course, treated at the base and got over it. But it was miserable when they first came on base, that jungle rot. And then also the emotional trauma of hand-to-hand battle in the heat of the Pacific. It was tough. It was tough.... They had a tough time for the war, and the Navy took the brunt of that. And the Marines, the Navy and the Marines took the brunt of that, where the Army took the brunt of it in Europe.

EMC: Did you receive any medals when you were discharged from the Navy?

RWB: No, but I wrote to my congresswoman and said that I would like to have the medals for my granddaughters, and so how do I do this? And she had one of her people write back to me and tell me how to do it. So I wrote. And I now am the proud owner of two medals given by the Navy, and one medal for being a founding mother of the Women's Memorial in Washington.

EMC: Oh, isn't that great!

RWB: So when I go into full uniform, I can wear three medals.

EMC: You probably got the Victory Medal.

RWB: Yes, the Victory Medal. And one that everybody got in the war. And the other one was something that most people got. I didn't get any medals for heroism or anything like that or battle fatigue or anything. These were just two medals. But at least I got them.

EMC: Yes. American Service, probably, and Victory.

RWB: I'd have to look it up again. But I got them, and I've worn them.

EMC: Great! How did you feel about being discharged from the Navy in October 1945? What was your reaction? Were you happy? Were you sad? Would you have stayed in if you could have?

RWB: I would have stayed in, but there were two things working against my staying in. One was the fact that my husband and I might be released any time, and we needed some time together after all this time. And the second thing is that I had a father who was very ill. I didn't realize how ill. But then I realized he was dying. And so I needed to be home with my family. I had not been with my family to help them through anything through all this time. And so I needed to.... So that when my number was up--which means accumulation of numbers--was up, I accepted it, and

went out. But I was very unhappy because I was leaving so many friends. But there was a pull to go back to Boston that was stronger than that. So in that respect, yes, I was not a happy person to be leaving. But there was pull. And that happened to a lot of people. I mean that's just a typical story for a lot of people in the service, you know. After being away from the family and their families doing what they have to do, and so forth. And you felt an obligation to be there for whatever reason. And I felt an obligation to be back home with my mother. So off I went.

EMC: Off you went. On October 25, 1945 you were discharged.

RWB: Yes, yes.

EMC: Shortly after the war ended. A few questions about the WAVES just in general: Did you ever have a chance to meet Mildred McAfee?

RWB: Yes.

EMC: Oh, you did! And can you tell us where?

RWB: Well, I was at the Blimp Base, and she came down to visit, and we did a parade for her. You know we did the whole thing. And one of those pictures that I showed you, because I was the senior woman officer, I escorted Mildred McAfee all around. And so I had

a marvelous, marvelous time with her. She's a very noble woman. Very well educated, but a very noble woman. And it was lucky the Navy had her, that that caliber and nobility could be in charge of the Navy--so, yes, I did.

EMC: Great!

RWB: I had the joy of meeting her and talking with her, and talking with her and whatever.

EMC: Escorting her.

RWB: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's great!

RWB: I know. I'm lucky.

EMC: You were lucky, yes. Did you find that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit de corps?

RWB: Terrific! Terrific. I think that's one of the reasons I didn't have discipline. I think that the Navy women who volunteered to go in were going to make it by hook or by crook because there was a lot of antipathy toward them--not only in the Navy but also in the community and in their families. And they

were going to prove themselves. Therefore, they weren't about to let one evening's debauchery wreck the whole thing that they had involved themselves in. They were also not going to wreck the whole experience with in-house fighting. I mean women when they get together and living in barracks, you know, lots of stuff goes on. But I don't think they were going to allow that. I don't think-- If somebody--they didn't like somebody and this person was somebody they just couldn't stand, they would leave rather than force an issue because they were very proud. The Navy women that I met in all the bases were very proud women. And many of them had a story more dramatic than I had to tell why they were in. You know, they had brothers, they had fathers, they had all kinds of things going on in their lives. And they went in and, you know, they had great emotional stories rather than just going in for the glory of whatever--there wasn't that much glory at the time. But anyhow.... So I think that's why I didn't have discipline problems. I really do.

EMC: Yes. That's good. Do you think the WAVES was a smoothly-run organization?

RWB: What are you thinking about a smoothly-run organization?

EMC: I mean do you think it was well organized?

RWB: Well, it was the military.



EMC: Right. Were there any problems initially with getting the WAVES organized?

RWB: Well, see, I wouldn't know. See, I wouldn't know that. I mean I never was in Washington. That's where you would get that feeling, as the reports came into Washington. And Hunter College was smooth sailing. I did have temporary run-ins with officers of higher rank, but it was all understood and solved and worked out. So it never developed into anything.

EMC: So the organization got off the ground rather rapidly, and it was a new organization obviously. And they had to set goals and standards and just the proper running of things. So you really didn't notice any glitches.

RWB: I think that the only people who would be able to answer your question are the people who were assigned to Washington, D.C., where the papers and the reports and things are filtered in. We were doing our job in this bucket here, and we were not totally aware. For instance, the loss. I did not know about the loss until well after the war.

EMC: Nobody did.

RWB: I know, but that's dreadful. I mean that's a dreadful story

and a dreadful thing for anybody to say when these gallant women, who were doing magnificent work.... But again, I was in the Navy, and I really don't know. I had some experiences with the Marines, the women Marines. But they didn't want to be called Women Marines, they were Marines. Anyhow, I had some experiences with them, because they were always assigned wherever I was there were some. I had hardly any experience with the Coast Guard, except at Hunter we had a company of Coast Guard women. But I personally did not. They had their own officers in charge of them. I had practically no experience with the Army women, practically none with them.

EMC: Segregated in your own little world.

RWB: Isolated. Isolated in a sense. We were isolated to our position and our jobs and so forth.

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

RWB: Well, this is a sad story. The only one I knew were lesbians, which breaks my heart.

EMC: Where was this?

RWB: But that's not discipline.

EMC: Well, where was this? Was it in Hunter?

RWB: No, I think it was in Charleston, South Carolina.

EMC: Oh, so you had to be involved in that case then, I would imagine.

RWB: Slightly, slightly. But again, I didn't know about lesbians. I didn't know. It's only in my later life, you know....

EMC: That it's come to the fore of public attention.

RWB: Yes, yes. But that's the only thing, and I think there were two officers who were let go. I said Glencoe. It wasn't, it was Charleston, South Carolina. Two women officers. And they were-- they disappeared.

EMC: Right. Did your WAVE experience change or redirect your life in any way?

RWB: Oh, yes! Oh, yes! I became a feminist, an active feminist. Because after all these magnificent experiences and power and position, when I got out of the service, nada.

EMC: Nothing....

RWB: Nothing. It won't happen ever again. But it did. When we got out of the service, we were expected to keep our mouths shut, go back, get married, have the babies, do the things, and so forth. And here I had years of wonderful training, great opportunities, power positions, all that kind of stuff. And then I was supposed to be perfectly satisfied going back and having babies. Well, now, I have to quickly say one of the most valuable things that I've ever done is to be a mother and to have children and have them grow up and be successful. So we'll get that off to that side of me. The other side of me is that I could not get fulfilled with that. Now, some people won't understand what I'm saying. So I went back to--while the two children were very young--I went back to school, and I got my master's degree in education so that I could teach. Because teaching meant that I had the summers with the children, I had the weekends with the children. That seemed to be a good place to be. So I went back, and I became a public school teacher for a few years. And then I went to the university and became a professor, to finish up my career. And then after being at the university, I became the instigator, the dreamer, the person who developed, designed, inspired the development of the Women's Center on the Central Connecticut campus.

EMC: In New Britain, Connecticut?

RWB: Yes. And all of this--going back to school, becoming a teacher, having a family--was the direct result of my Navy experience. I mean women could do anything and do it well and do it extremely well and fulfill.... And so those years the children were very young and I was a public school teacher, I was home with them every weekend. And then I went to the university, and I became a training teacher, training teachers to go out and do teaching. And out of that experience of being a WAVE officer with a lot of-- I saw--remember this was the sixties and the seventies--a desperate need for women to be accepted in leadership roles. And there was great change. And on the campuses were extreme changes, and the students were raising Cain, and the women were coming out of their shells and so forth. So out of all this I dreamed up a Women's Center on the campus. And proved to the authorities that it was important and necessary and needed. And so we opened a Women's Center. And I was released from teaching two courses to be the director of the Women's Center.

EMC: Oh, fabulous!

RWB: Yes.

EMC: Fabulous!

RWB: So then later on, I finished out my career doing that: teaching two courses and directing the Women's Center, setting up

the program. We did all the research to find out what was needed. And that's how we formed the program. We first of all did the research with questionnaires and so forth to find out what was needed on the campus. And then we came back and we established the program based on the results of the questionnaires and so forth. So the Women's Center prospered and was very, very successful. And we had a couple of presidents who were very, very cooperative and very understanding of the needs of the Women's Center. And when I left, they named the Women's Center the Ruthe Boyea Women's Center. And today it's called the Ruthe Boyea Women's Center on the campus.

EMC: Oh, that's excellent!

RWB: And it's because of the Navy experience that women should be able to do whatever God-given talents allow them to do, and you've got to open the doors and allow them to do it.

EMC: That's right.

RWB: So that's how I got involved there. And at the same time that I was doing this, I was active in the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women. I had roles to play in all of these things. And the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, I got involved in that. So along with the Women's Center, I got into all this women's activity, where women

were trying to allow themselves to stretch their wings and fly. But it's all due to the fact that I was successful in the Navy. It never would have happened. Never, never, never would have happened, except that I was successful in the Navy, and I saw what women could do. And then I wasn't interested in being put into a box.

EMC: Fabulous!

RWB: So I ended up my career in administration, director of the Women's Center. Now they have a full-time director with a budget. I started it without a budget, without a staff, without anything.

EMC: Right. Just a fledgling.

RWB: Just a gleam in my eye.

EMC: Well, that's fabulous! A wonderful story, a fine tribute to the Navy.

RWB: Yes.

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

RWB: Yes, at Christmas. I still write to one--at least one--

woman on every base that I was on. A couple of them have passed away. But we have this going. That's the only time. At Christmas time we exchange one of our Christmas letters, and we keep in touch, and I've watched them through all these years of babies and families and education and all kinds of things that have happened to at least one person on every base. And a few years ago--and I don't think they have the newspapers for a year--a group of six of us got together. Fifty years, we got together here in New Britain.

EMC: Fabulous!

RWB: It got a front-page story on the Navy women getting back together again after fifty years.

EMC: That's great!

RWB: Yes. So, yes, I keep that kind of thing. I don't visit. Well, Enfield is the only one I visit.

EMC: Are you a member of any WAVES organizations?

RWB: Yes.

EMC: Like WAVES National?



RWB: Marvelous. Unit 42 of the WAVE National meets in Rocky Hill once a month. And I finally about a year and a half ago, I read an article in the paper. And I was at a Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Hartford, and sat at the table with a group of strangers. And somebody somehow brought up women in the service. We don't know it happened. And so this women said, "I was in the Navy." I was in the Navy. And we had the whole table fascinated by this. And she told me about the WAVES. So I joined the unit.

EMC: You joined the Connecticut unit, 42?

RWB: Yes, Unit 42.

EMC: Are you a member of WAVES National as well?

RWB: Well, that is--our membership the WAVES National and the local and the regional.

EMC: Sure, sure.

RWB: We had a regional conference in Mystic.

EMC: Oh, that's where I sent my notice, you see.

RWB: Yes. Okay.

EMC: And one of my Rhode Island ladies brought it over. Are you registered in WIMSA, Women In Military Service Association.

RWB: Yes. I'm a founding mother of WIMSA.

EMC: Oh! Now, you must tell me about that because that's very important.

RWB: Well, when I found out that they were doing it--I got on their mailing list somehow; I don't have any idea how I got on the mailing list--I immediately sent them a contribution. And that locked me into that. Then I worked with Unit 42 with Jodie Rell, at that time the lieutenant governor, because Connecticut was one of the states that hadn't paid a contribution. So Jodie Rell got it through. And I happened to be down in Washington, so I went over and told them that they were going to get that 5,000, or whatever it was from them, and they were thrilled to death. And then she said, "Well, have you checked on your records." And I said, "No. What do you mean?" She said, "Well, there's a computer over there." I said, "Honey, I don't know how to use a computer." "Come with me." So she posted my name, and up came my picture and my whole Navy career there. So I, periodically, when they send me a notice that they want some more money, I periodically send them money to keep on their list. And, as I said, I have a card. I'm a founding mother--member--of WIMSA.

EMC: That's a great memorial.

RWB: I did it just because I thought it was terribly important that we do it. And I didn't know at the time that they were going to have this computerized thing.

EMC: Yes, they do. They've registered people who were in the service. Well, you sound like you've had a very interesting career after the Navy, which you've mentioned. And you're very, very involved in the community as well. And a lot of this, as you said, stemmed from your Navy experience, which is a fine tribute.

RWB: Absolutely.

EMC: Did any of your children join the Navy?

RWB: No. No, no, no, no, no. No, my two children went to college and grew up in the time when patriotism was a no-no. And they are still colored--their lives are still colored by this, even though they're grown and they have children of their own kind of thing. It was deeply--it was a traumatic time. I mean it was the time of the shooting up at the college and the gassing of students and all that kind of stuff. So both my daughter and my son have never shown one iota of interest in my husband's or my military career. And it's mostly due to the fact of the time that they were

growing up. However, my grandson is a senior at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

EMC: How marvelous!

RWB: So we are very excited about that. And I have to give my son a little bit of a needle about the Air Force Academy kind of thing. But it is that group of people. And I'm also the first woman who has ever served on the Veterans' Commission.

EMC: Oh!

RWB: And as I sit there and listen to the veterans complain about why the politicians are--I say, "Listen, the politicians are all of that age group." And that's the truth. They're all of that same age group that I just told you about. And they're not-- We're Depression children, so we know that. We're war children, and not only World War II, but Vietnam and Korea. And Desert Storm. Now, Desert Storm is part of their lives, but the other things are not as much a part of their lives. And so it's a different outlook.

EMC: Right. It is an entirely different outlook. Well, your Navy career was very significant for you then.

RWB: Yes, yes. It colored my life.

EMC: It colored your life.

RWB: It allowed me to do some things that I never would have done. I never ever would have gone back to college after the service. You know, I'd have been satisfied to be a housewife and take care of the babies and keep my mouth shut. But the Navy didn't allow me to do that. And so therefore I went back to college. I got more education. Then it allowed me to be in the League of Women Voters. It allowed me to put aside time for the American Association of University Women. It allowed me to know that there was something and that I could do it.

EMC: Right.

RWB: My children have turned out marvelously. I have five grandchildren who are doing wonderfully. So Doug and I did something right. But the Navy opened up my eyes to the possibilities of life being more than what my mother did and what my husband's mother did. And also allowed me to take leadership roles. You notice a number of the things there are leadership roles. Never ever would have thought of being on the national board of directors of anything in life. The Navy allowed me to say, yes, yes. If somebody wants me and they think I have the smarts, yes. Sure, I can do that. And that's why I value the Navy. I hope you're hearing this from other people.

EMC: Yes, yes. That's great. That is great. Did you use the G.I. Bill to go back to school?

RWB: No, I didn't. But Doug did. My husband went off, and he used the G.I. Bill for his master's and everything. But, no, I didn't. I don't know why I didn't. I have no idea.

EMC: Maybe it was a little later.

RWB: Well, I don't know. I have no idea.

EMC: Do you have anything else to add, Ruthe, to my questions?

RWB: No. Just except that due to the Navy allowing me to take a leadership role, it allowed me, when I got out of the Navy, to look at life possibilities--that women can take leadership roles, and women can serve on boards. I was the first woman ever to be on the board of directors of a local bank. And as I told you, the first woman to be on the Veterans' Commission. I was the first woman to ever speak as a keynote speaker at the veterans' ceremony on The Green downtown. On the last Memorial Day, I was the keynote speaker after the parade at East Hartford Memorial Cemetery.

EMC: The box?

RWB: I stood up on the podium to accept the parade as it went by, and then I was the speaker in East Hartford. So coming from a little Boston family-- But the Navy, you know, allowed me-- So they asked me to speak.

EMC: You spoke.

RWB: I'm going to do it.

EMC: Yes.

RWB: But that's not part of my inheritance. That's not part of my background in Boston. That is not. My Boston background was a totally enclosed kind of thing, very traditional. Extremely traditional, like as I grew up. But the Navy allowed me to, as I often say, just soar.

EMC: Oh, that's wonderful! Oh, that's great!

RWB: And so I've done a lot of leadership roles.

EMC: That's wonderful.

RWB: And I think it is great.

EMC: Thank you so much for your time. And we will get this tape transcribed, and we can edit it, both of us will. I thank you so much for your memories of this very special time in your life that had such a great impact on your future life.

RWB: Oh, it has. It really has been most satisfying.

[End of Interview]



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