

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

HISTORY
OF THE
WAVES

NO. 275
VIRGINIA DOWNS COLBY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

2001

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: VIRGINIA DOWNS COLBY

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

DATE: SEPTEMBER 19, 2001

EMC: This is the first oral history with Virginia Colby, who served in the WAVES as a pharmacist's mate in World War II. The interview is taking place at the home of Mary McGuire in Little Compton, Rhode Island, and today's date is September 19th 2001. Virginia now lives in East Greenbush, New York, and is here on vacation. Virginia, I am pleased that you were able to give up some of your vacation time to have this interview on your career in the WAVES in World War II.

VDC: I am delighted to do it, and I am really very excited about it.

EMC: Oh, good.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: I am very happy that you are here and will be able to contribute to our program. I'd like to begin the interview by asking you a few personal background questions. And the first is

where were you born and when were you born?

VDC: I was born in Pasadena, California, on March the 2nd, 1923.

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

VDC: My father did colonial reproductions. And did beautiful, beautiful work. The movie stars used to order from the Wallace Nutting Books. He would make the furniture up to order. Later in his life he could no longer work in wood because of his asthma, so he did technical work on a project called "the Camel." It was a secret project for the Navy which I believe was part of the "A Bomb" development.

EMC: Fantastic. Did your mother stay at home?

VDC: Yes. She had been an RN, and she trained in New London, Connecticut.

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

VDC: Yes, I have one brother and one sister, both younger.

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

VDC: No, on the outskirts of Pasadena, in Glendale, and on the

outskirts of Hollywood. And then in the later years up in the valley at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains in a place called La Crescenta.

EMC: Sounds beautiful.

VDC: It was.

EMC: And the climate, wonderful. Where did you graduate from high school?

VDC: I graduated from New Britain High. And the reason that took place was because my mother was an RN, and my grandmother was very, very ill, terminally ill. And so mother went East to nurse her. So I went East and had my last year in high school, at New Britain.

EMC: And what year did you graduate? Do you remember? It was probably '41.

VDC: I think it was '40 or '41, yes. As a matter of fact I'm going to my 60th reunion in October.

EMC: Oh, then it was '41. Well, your saying that kind of made me light up because I am from New Britain, Connecticut, and I graduated from New Britain High in 1959.

VDC: Oh, for goodness sakes.

EMC: Yes. That's why I was kind of amazed.

VDC: Oh.

EMC: But anyway, what did you decide to do after high school?

VDC: Well, after high school I went back to live in La Crescenta and attended Glendale College and became interested in art, so I had an art major at Glendale College. At that time it was a two-year college, but it is a four-year college now.

EMC: And what kind of art did you major in?

VDC: It was....

EMC: Painting?

VDC: Well, I covered all the different aspects of it, yes.

EMC: So you must have finished Glendale College around 1943?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: If it was a two-year institution?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Well, the war was in full swing by that time. Were any of your friends or your relatives in the service?

VDC: Yes, my father was in World War I. And if you'd like for me to tell you why I went in the service, I will.

EMC: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

VDC: Because I'm rather proud of it. After I graduated from college, I applied to Walt Disney for a job in art. I sent Disney some of my paintings. And I didn't hear and I didn't hear. And at that time my father felt very badly because he wanted to reenlist, and he wanted to teach flying. And the Commander wanted him, but the doctor said no because he had asthma. And it bothered him that he couldn't help serve his country. So I decided I would go in the service and take his place because my brother wasn't old enough. So that's why I went in.

EMC: Very good. How did you hear specifically about the WAVES?

VDC: Because my father was a Navy pilot, and if you're in a Navy family, then you're Navy.

EMC: You're Navy, right after that. Was the Navy any more attractive to you than the other services? The uniform or--?

VDC: No, no it was strictly tradition. Because my father was one of the first fifty pilots in this country to get his gold wings. And I have his certificate and some pictures, too. But some of them were sent down to Pensacola, but I do have a record of that.

EMC: That's amazing really. His story would have been very interesting, too, about World War I.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Well, when did you enlist and where did you go to enlist?

VDC: All right. I went in on June the 23, 1943. And I enlisted in Los Angeles, and then I got sent to Hunter College for boot camp.

EMC: Oh, okay. And do you remember when you entered Hunter College or the U.S. Naval Training School when you served there?

VDC: Well, no, I will have to look at my records, but I have my card here.

EMC: Oh, yes.

VDC: That states it was '43. And after I did sign up, I heard from Walt Disney. They wanted me, but it was too late.

EMC: Too late. They were too slow.

VDC: That's it, yes.

EMC: Was there any publicity about your joining the WAVES in the local newspapers?

VDC: Yes, there was. There was a picture in the Los Angeles Times of the group of us that boarded the train in Los Angeles.

EMC: How did your parents feel about your decision?

VDC: I think they were pleased. See, it was very real to us out in that valley, because we could look down and see, you know, the activity in the sky.

EMC: I see. Now you said you boarded the train in Los Angeles with another group of WAVES, I guess, who had enlisted. And do you remember anything about that long train trip to New York City?

VDC: Nothing I can really pick out because, I guess, there's been so many trips in my background back across the continent. Because on both sides of the family, both grandparents were in Connecticut and Massachusetts. So just about every summer we would go cross-country.

EMC: Right, and that was the only way to go.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Or one of the best ways to go then.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Well, you arrived in New York City I assume that summer of '43. Had you ever been to New York before?

VDC: Oh, yes.

EMC: So that wasn't overwhelming or shocking to you?

VDC: No.

EMC: And you were assigned to Hunter College.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: The U.S. Naval Training School, Women Reserve. Do you remember how long your training was at that point?

VDC: As near as I can recollect it wasn't too long. I don't know whether it was maybe three months something like that.

EMC: Oh, it probably wasn't much less than that, because they normally train them for six weeks. Well, do you remember how your day was structured at Hunter?

VDC: You know, it's been over fifty years and so much has happened since then.

EMC: Right.

VDC: And I know we marched a lot and we had to swim. Of course, I was a good swimmer anyway, but they taught us how to swim, oh yes. And I guess they, you know, sort of gave us aptitude to see where we would fit.

EMC: Yes, they did do that.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: And you did have classes too during the day?

VDC: Oh yes.

EMC: And do you remember what you learned or the nature of these classes. Were they easy? Were they difficult? Were you tested?

VDC: No I don't think they were difficult. But that was a while back.

EMC: Oh, it was, yes, fifty-five years ago.

VDC: No, I took things in my stride and had no problem.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

VDC: No problem.

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

VDC: I think so, yes. I was in there for a reason, to serve my country, so you did it.

EMC: Did you like the marching and the drilling?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember the white glove inspections that you had on Saturdays?

VDC: Sure.

EMC: And how did your group do?

VDC: Good.

EMC: You passed?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: No problem then.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: How did you respond to the Navy uniform? What did you think of it?

VDC: It was fine, yes. I grew up in rather a strict family so it was a matter of course, it was no problem.

EMC: Right, you adjusted easily then, to military life and that's what most of the women said: They were raised carefully and they did. Do you remember if the Navy provided any extra

curricular activities for you or any entertainment at Hunter?

VDC: I must say I can't remember. That doesn't mean it wasn't there, but I really don't remember. It was a serious business; we were there to train.

EMC: Did anything amusing or note worthy happen during this training period? Is there anything outstanding that you want to comment on?

VDC: No.

EMC: Well, you said that you had to take aptitude tests at Hunter, which most of the women did.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: To place you in the correct assignment and where did they decide to place you once you finished your training?

VDC: Well, I'm going to start by saying that my first choice was to be a chauffeur. Well, yes, can you imagine that? But anyway they looked at my records, and they saw my mother was an RN; so in the Hospital Corps I went.

EMC: Oh.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Whether you wanted to or not or had any interest?

VDC: Oh, it was a good thing.

EMC: Why did you want to be a chauffeur?

VDC: Probably because of the glamour of it, I don't know. I just, you know, being young and all, thought that being a chauffeur was glamorous.

EMC: Chauffeuring the Military Brass around.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Well, so you were placed in the Hospital Corps as a hospital corpsman. Now did you need additional training for that?

VDC: Oh, yes. After Hunter College I was sent to Chelsea Naval Hospital near Boston, for training to become a pharmacist's mate. And I was sent there to the First Naval District, because I requested to be in the East because of my grandfather being in Gloucester and being ill, I wanted to see him.

EMC: So did you have this extra training or the training at Chelsea?

VDC: Oh, yes. It was thorough.

EMC: And what exactly did you train to do as a pharmacist's mate?

VDC: To do nursing. To change beds properly with patients in them.

EMC: Oh.

VDC: And to give bed baths. To do medical things to take care of the sick.

EMC: So you more or less assisted the nurses, I would assume.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Did you have any paperwork to do? Were you instructed in that?

VDC: Well, yes, taking temperatures and blood pressures and things like that.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. How long was this training period?
Do you remember how long you were in Chelsea?

VDC: I would say it was, I can't tell you exactly, but we got a thorough, thorough indoctrination in this you know.

EMC: And what was your rank at this point?

VDC: It was still hospital corpsman.

EMC: Hospital Corpsman, okay. Well, how long did you stay in Chelsea?

VDC: When the indoctrination was through, I don't know how it came about, but I was chosen to be sent up to Bar Harbor, Maine, to be a doctor's assistant. And I was at the Section base, which was the yacht club, and I was a doctor's assistant up there.

EMC: Interesting. Well, just to double back to Chelsea where were you bivouacked? Where did you live during your training period in Chelsea?

VDC: They had quarters for us there.

EMC: Oh, they did.

VDC: We stayed right on the base.

EMC: Do you make any permanent or life long friendships from either your Hunter College experience or your training at Chelsea?

VDC: It wasn't till I got down to the Naval Air Station in Brunswick that I became well acquainted with a dental technician, and we corresponded for years until her demise.

EMC: Very good. Well, after you said you finished your indoctrination and your training at Chelsea, you went to Bar Harbor, Maine, which is kind of interesting. Was there a naval station there of any sort?

VDC: No, just the section base was there, the yacht club. And then there was an airfield in Trenton or Ellsworth. And they were, you know, checking on movement in the area there.

EMC: I hadn't heard of any installation at Bar Harbor, but there was the hospital, so to speak, at the yacht club.

VDC: Well, there was the town hospital, but I didn't work there except for a short time when I did take care of a flyer there; he was a British flyer. And they were practicing Dummy Deck Landings up at Ellsworth. And he cracked up, and he was severely burned

over 80 percent of his body. So he went to the hospital right there in Bar Harbor, and I took care of him, but he didn't make it.

EMC: Oh, so you had some serious cases then.

VDC: Yes, a few.

EMC: But they went to the Bar Harbor Hospital.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Which is where you and the Navy doctors were.

VDC: No. We had an office in the section base there with a small, one-room dispensary. And it was mostly to take care of the personnel, and the doctor also took care of the Navy families.

EMC: Oh, yes.

VDC: Of the service people.

EMC: Right that was usually the case.

VDC: That was primarily, yes.

EMC: Where did you live in Bar Harbor?

VDC: I lived in a home just outside of town. It was a residence, and it was a local family that ran the Lymeberner's Electrical Store. And I had my room there and meals on occasion, but mostly I would eat at the section base.

EMC: Oh, I see.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Okay, so did the Navy help you find quarters or were you on your own?

VDC: I really don't know how that came about. But I was very, very pleased. It was an excellent set-up.

EMC: Yes, it's a beautiful little town, too.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Were there many other WAVES there at the section base?

VDC: There were two communication officers, and I was the only WAVE for a while.

EMC: That was kind of isolating then?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Yes. Was there any opportunity for any recreational activities there?

VDC: Well, the people I stayed with took me around and showed me the sights on the island and all what to see. We did hiking, boating, and fishing.

EMC: Pretty quiet existence then?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Yes.

VDC: And I used to like to walk the shore.

EMC: Yes, that's beautiful up there. So were you there during the winter?

VDC: Yes. And it was hard to adjust because I'm from California, where the sun's out bright and it's warm outside. Whenever I was out east before, it was always during the summertime.

EMC: Yes.

VDC: And I would leave to go for a walk or go to work, and I would walk along the cliff there. And I thought I was dressed warm enough, but so many times it was bitter cold.

EMC: Yes, it is up there with the wind blowing, too.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Well, during this time frame, did you keep up with news about the war?

VDC: Yes, I would say we did. And there were times when the doctor would have to go visit a family, and would have to get to some of the remote areas by airplane, so I would go in the small airplane. I think that only happened maybe once or twice.

EMC: Oh, I see, to some other part of Maine?

VDC: Yes. One of the upland areas.

EMC: Oh, that was a little different. How long were you at Bar Harbor?

VDC: I was there until it was de-commissioned.

EMC: Oh.

VDC: And then I was transferred down to Brunswick Naval Air Station.

EMC: When was it de-commissioned?

VDC: I'm not sure. I think, see, they were checking the coastline, and I guess the threat had subsided enough that they just felt that it wasn't necessary any more.

EMC: So you were sent to the Brunswick Naval Air Station, which is just over the border from New Hampshire. And what were your duties there?

VDC: Well, for a while I was a doctor's assistant, and then I also worked on the Officers Ward taking care of the sick.

EMC: Now did they have a hospital there or a dispensary?

VDC: It was a larger dispensary. That was it.

EMC: So it wasn't a full-fledged operating hospital.

VDC: No.

EMC: Were there any other WAVES there?

VDC: Oh, yes. We stayed in a barracks there, and the girls that were in the Hospital Corps had their own little cubicle that was sort of shut off from the others. Because there were some WAVES who were mechanics there you know, and other branches of services. So we had our own little group, and we got along very nicely, and it was good.

EMC: Oh, that's good, so you had regular bunks?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Barracks life.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Did you find your work at Brunswick challenging, routine or routine-ish?

VDC: Not too much, no, because back then you worked and you worked hard. And there were no breaks and sloughing off. I would have a whole ward to take care of.

EMC: Oh, really.

VDC: And sometimes there would be just one of us and sometimes there would be two. And each patient would get a regular bed bath every day and a good back rub, and they had good care. Not like today.

EMC: Today, right. So you had to do that yourself.

VDC: Oh, yes.

EMC: And you were responsible for a whole ward. Now how many would be in a whole ward? Do you have any idea on the average?

VDC: I can't say.

EMC: But you were running?

VDC: Oh, yes, you were busy. You didn't have any time to sit down. No, no time to sit down.

EMC: Did you work eight hours a day?

VDC: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did you work weekends?

VDC: There was a schedule. Sometimes you worked weekends and sometimes you had it off. It depends on what the schedule was. And one thing I will always sort of remember there was this one lieutenant that I had as a patient. He was very demanding. Really, he wanted to be waited on. And then when it was getting close to the end of his dispensary stay, he said, "You're always here." You know, so I think at that point he realized.... And when he left he gave me this nice little manicure set. Because you know, my hands got sort of rough. I'm in the water and working hard all the time, so he gave me this nice little manicure set.

EMC: Oh, well, that's nice.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: So you were basically taking care of at Brunswick members who were Navy people on the base and their families I presume?

VDC: Yes, correct.

EMC: Exactly. How did the physicians treat you?

VDC: Good.

EMC: You had no problem with them at all.

VDC: No, no. Well, there was one that I was doctor's assistant for, and we were taking care of families and wives and all. And he would go out on call and he would be gone long, longer than most. And then there would be all these mothers with children in the waiting room and the Commander came through once. And I guess it was sort of my fault because there was so many there, but I had no control over it. And that's the only time, otherwise it was good, good.

EMC: Oh, that's great. Well, it wasn't your fault that he was late.

VDC: No. But naturally it fell on my shoulders.

EMC: Right

VDC: Because I was the girl Friday.

EMC: You were there.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: You were in charge at that point. What did you like about this assignment at Brunswick? Did you enjoy it and the previous ones as well?

VDC: Well, I did like being in Maine because I'm a walker, and I could take walks along the coast and things like that. But no complaints, no complaints.

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

VDC: No, no. But how I happened to leave Brunswick is I wanted to put in for overseas.

EMC: Oh.

VDC: And I put in and I didn't hear and I didn't hear and I didn't hear. And I thought they just want to keep me here. So what I did. I was due a leave so I put in a leave to go out to California. And I think they were trying to discourage that leave for California.

EMC: It's a long trek.

VDC: I went anyway. And I got back from my leave and shortly thereafter there were my orders to go to Hawaii. So I went to Hawaii. I took my second trip to California from Brunswick Naval Air Station so I could be shipped to my next station on Oahu. I was sent west on a troop train. As I remember, there were mostly

all soldiers and just a few WAVES. I felt uncomfortable because the soldiers around us were all loud and rowdy. I decided to leave the train along with another WAVE. We asked about the nearest airfield and how to get there. So I hitched my second plane on a large empty cargo plane. We sat on benches along the side of the plane, and I believe we were the only passengers. I worried about getting to San Francisco in time for the transport ship. We made it all right. But looking back now, I think we really took a risk in getting to our destination as ordered!

EMC: Oh, fantastic. Now this must have been in 1945?

VDC: Well, I was discharged November the 23rd in '45. And that was when the Armistice was declared. And then we were sent, we were all sent home at that point, all of us.

EMC: Yes, because the legislation allowing WAVES to go to Hawaii was passed in '44, and in late '44 they first went. So you must have been there at that early time frame.

VDC: Early, yes.

EMC: Why did you want to go to Hawaii?

VDC: I just wanted to do something different. I guess I wanted to be near the front.

EMC: Yes, the front, certainly. So how did you get to Hawaii?
What kind of transportation did you take?

VDC: It was on a troop ship. And there was about, I don't know
how many bunks.

EMC: Where did you leave from?

VDC: We left from San Francisco. And I don't know how many bunks
there were. But it seemed like there were probably about five
high or so. And it was a troop ship, yes.

EMC: Were other men on it? Men on it as well?

VDC: I don't remember that. Maybe that's true, but I would say
it was mostly all WAVES.

EMC: All WAVES then?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: How long did it take you to get there by ship a couple of days maybe?

VDC: Easily, easily. I would say, see my memory is, because I haven't thought about these things, I didn't do my homework so to speak.

EMC: Well, where did you land in Hawaii? Were you in Oahu?

VDC: Yes, we were in Oahu, and probably at the base there.

EMC: And where were you assigned?

VDC: I was assigned to the airfield.

EMC: Oh, Hickam.

VDC: Yes, I was assigned to Hickam Airfield. Once again a dispensary type place. And it was good because when we had time off we could, you know, sight see, but couldn't do too much of it, because we didn't have too much time off.

EMC: Were you working the same kind of shifts?

VDC: Yes. I had a whole ward of people to take care of.

EMC: And the full eight-hour day and sometimes weekends?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Now were you domiciled at Hickam?

VDC: Yes. We had quarters there.

EMC: WAVES quarters?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember if you ever met Captain Winifred Love?

VDC: No.

EMC: Because she was one of the prominent WAVES there?

VDC: I can't, maybe I did see her, but it didn't register.

EMC: Because there were some prominent people there?

VDC: Would you allow me to back track?

EMC: Sure.

VDC: To say how I got out on leave after Brunswick?

EMC: Yes.

VDC: I was very brave, and I went down to New York to thumb a ride, you know, when they are flying planes out.

EMC: Yes.

VDC: And I registered and said I wanted to go to the West Coast. And they said, "Well, sit over there and wait." So I wasn't there too long. And they called me up to the desk, and they said, "Here comes your pilot now." He was a young J.G., a Marine Corps Lieutenant.

EMC: Now what airfield was this out of, New York? La Guardia, Idlewild?

VDC: Was it John Rogers?

EMC: Never heard of that one.

VDC: No. It was one of the Navy airfields.

EMC: Oh, I see.

VDC: Yes, it was a Navy Airfield. And so okay, so we go out. And it was a biplane, seaplane that they were ferrying out to San Francisco, so I had to get in a jump suit. I had to wear a parachute. I had to climb in the back cockpit. And then I had to pull the "greenhouse" up over me. And then the pilot sat in the front. And we flew days only and they were flying a number of planes out all different ones. And they'd stop at night, you know, at these different places along the way. And when we took off in the morning, we'd say, "Well, see you at such and such." And so the next night when we landed there would be this group, and that's how I got out there the first time.

EMC: Wow.

VDC: It was exciting, it was great. And I can remember so well we flew low over the Mississippi River. And he said he could go down into the water but it was too risky because of logs or something like that. But I really got to see things close at hand.

EMC: Oh, I guess, and they didn't fly that high?

VDC: No. And then we landed in Burbank. And he came and stayed overnight with my parents. And then was taking off the next day to go up to San Francisco. And I couldn't see the plane going without me. So I went up to San Francisco. And then took a

commercial plane back.

EMC: Oh, for heaven sakes. That was quite an adventure.

VDC: It was, yes.

EMC: Wow. That is something. So that was your leave to California?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: The leave that they didn't want you to take, but you did. But then you had to get back out there again.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: You know, when you went to Hawaii?

VDC: And I ended up going on a troop train. And sometimes on troop trains that can be a little rough.

EMC: Yes, they're not the most comfortable.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Well, you're out in Hawaii now and it's 1945 and you're in

the Hospital Corps in the dispensary, housed on base and still enjoying your work, I assume.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Did you meet many WAVES there that you could do things with on the outside?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Were there any men available, as well, for dating or going out with?

VDC: Not really, not really. I will probably get a black mark on my name but I did go out with an officer once.

EMC: Oh, right. That was a no-no.

VDC: Yes that was a no-no, yes.

EMC: So you, basically, socialized with other WAVES.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Did you ever have any contact during your career with civilians? And if you did how did they react to or treat women in

uniform? Do you remember their attitudes toward women in uniform?

VDC: As far as I can remember, it was always favorable.

EMC: Because, prior to this time, except for a short period in World War I, women weren't in uniform. They weren't in the services. Did you write to your parents or your siblings about your experiences in the WAVES?

VDC: Yes, I would write my folks.

EMC: Those letters would have been great to have as a record of your experiences.

VDC: I don't think they were kept. I don't think so. I haven't seen them in my travels and all and moving about I don't remember coming across them.

EMC: Okay. Did you keep up with news about the war during your service?

VDC: Oh, yes.

EMC: Now when you were in Hawaii what kind of recreation did you engage in with other WAVES?

VDC: Mostly sightseeing. And I did horseback riding on Barber's Point and swimming.

EMC: Yes, the beaches were great.

VDC: And touring the pineapple fields and, you know, the general.

EMC: Well, you got a "picture" of old Hawaii.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: It's changed.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Very much so. Well, VJ Day occurred on August 15, 1945, the end of the war. And do you remember the celebration in Hawaii and how you celebrated with the other WAVES? What was your feeling about the end of the war?

VDC: It was a relief, and we were just overjoyed that the fighting had come to an end. And I was on base, and we just had just a joyous time. Nothing, you know, rowdy just all happiness.

EMC: I know there was a big parade, a victory parade, in Hawaii?

VDC: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did you participate?

VDC: Oh, yes I marched in the parade.

EMC: That was great.

VDC: That parade I marched in and then, in later years, I marched in the big Dublin parade on St. Patrick's Day in Ireland.

EMC: Oh, really?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: That's great.

VDC: So a couple of big parades.

EMC: During your WAVES service did you ever meet Mildred McAfee or hear her speak?

VDC: I did see her once but it was, you know, in a large, large gathering. And I don't know about the speaking part of it. I just don't remember. But she was an outstanding person.

EMC: Yes, and she was in Hawaii, too, visiting there. What was the highest rank you achieved in the Navy in the WAVES?

VDC: I got to the three stripes, the Third Class. And I was working on Chief.

EMC: No. The war ended by that time.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Well, you said you were discharged in November 1945.

VDC: Correct.

EMC: And where were you discharged? Do you remember what your discharge point was in this U.S.?

VDC: Yes, the base name was Shoemaker.

EMC: Well, I mean what city. I'm sorry, I should have been more specific.

VDC: Oh, what city?

EMC: What city were you sent to?

VDC: I sort of think that it might have been San Francisco?

EMC: That makes sense.

VDC: Yes, I think it was San Francisco, not Los Angeles.

EMC: Right, that would be one of the discharge points.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: And you were taken, of course, by ship to there.

VDC: Yes, I came back on a hospital ship and it was the USS RESCUE.

EMC: To San Francisco. Did you receive any medals for your service?

VDC: No.

EMC: I guess you're entitled to several, the Victory Medal, American Service, but you might have to put in for it.

VDC: Oh, those ribbons, yes, but not any real medals, you know.....

EMC: And they gave you the ruptured duck I guess when you--

VDC: Yes. I have that.

EMC: Now, how did you feel about leaving the Navy? Were you happy? Were you sad? Were you ready?

VDC: I was ready. The purpose of serving it was accomplished. And so, you know, you get on with your life.

EMC: Would you have stayed in if you had the opportunity to and there were opportunities for women?

VDC: I don't think so.

EMC: When you were in the WAVES, do you think that the women had a strong sense of esprit de corps? Do you think there was a lot of patriotism and strong feeling about serving?

VDC: I think so, of course, there's always a little, a few that-

EMC: Grumble?

VDC: Yes, grumble. But I think on the whole, in the group of the people that were in the Hospital Corps, they were dedicated.

EMC: Oh, that's good to know.

VDC: Yes.

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

VDC: No, I can't recall anyone.

EMC: I guess the women were pretty well behaved. Did the WAVES experience impact or redirect your life in anyway? Did it steer you off in a new direction or?

VDC: No, because when I came back, I went to art school in Boston. So I stayed with the field of art.

EMC: Right, which you were originally involved in. Do you think that your service in the WAVES made you more independent and self-reliant?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Did it broaden your horizons, meeting all these new people?

VDC: Yes, it had to.

EMC: Did you feel that what women were expected to do and be, changed when the war was over? Do you think there was more freedom for women to enter the marketplace and the workplace?

VDC: I think so. Yes, I do. They realized that the women were capable of doing things.

EMC: Yes, things that they hadn't handled before. Do you belong to any WAVES organizations?

VDC: Not really. I do go to the Stratton Medical Center for check-ups and for my prescriptions. And they have a Women's Health Day there once a year and I attend that. And that's about it.

EMC: What was the significance of your naval career for you and your life? How did it impact or did it at all on your life and on your life after '45?

VDC: I don't know. I was proud to have served. And I'd have to think on that one a little bit. I was glad. I was pleased that I went in. Of course, I should say, where we lived up at the foothills it was sort of a sheltered life. And it opened up my sight into a lot of things that were going on that I didn't realize, or, let's say, I hadn't been exposed to before.

EMC: Right.

VDC: Put it like that, yes.

EMC: Where did you settle after the war? You mentioned you went to art school in Boston. What art school was that?

VDC: That was Dexter George School of Art. After that I married someone from Vermont, he was going to school there, and so I've stayed here since then.

EMC: Oh, okay. Did you work after you were married?

VDC: Yes, I worked on the pediatric ward at Mary Hitchcock Hospital for a while.

EMC: Oh, so you continued your hospital work up there?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: And did you live in Vermont or New Hampshire?

VDC: I lived in Vermont.

EMC: Beautiful state. Do you have any children at all?

VDC: I have two adopted children.

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

VDC: Oh, probably to my son because when he was old enough, he went into the Hospital Corps.

EMC: Oh, isn't that something.

VDC: Yes, he went into the Hospital Corps. And now he has been in the Emergency Unit, the ICU Unit, for years and years.

EMC: Isn't that amazing.

VDC: Yes. And I said, "Well, why don't you go on and get a degree?" And he said, "I don't need to, I know all that." But you probably could get more money. Well, anyway he's happy doing it.

EMC: Well, that's interesting.

VDC: It's stressful, but he said he's saving lives.

EMC: That's great. That is great. Now did he join the Navy?

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Right, it was the Navy that he joined, okay.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Very good. Do you keep in touch with any World War II WAVES that you've met over the years?

VDC: The ones that I have kept in touch with are gone.

EMC: Did you meet anybody important, anybody outstanding during your WAVES service in World War II? Anybody famous?

VDC: Well, the most famous was with Admiral Nimitz there; he came to Bar Harbor. But he was just in the office just briefly. And I just saw him, and I didn't shake his hand or anything. I just saw him and saw the gold ribbon and that; I would say probably that was it.

EMC: That was the most important person that you saw even briefly.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: In passing.

VDC: That I knew about.

EMC: That you knew about, right yes. Very good. Do you have any other comments on your WAVES service in World War II?

VDC: I think I've probably have just about covered everything unless you want to ask me anything in particular? It was a good experience and I'm glad I served. And I think my father was very pleased that I did it.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

VDC: Yes.

EMC: Well, that was great. Thank you very much, Virginia.

[End of Interview]