

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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OF THE
WAVES

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ELIZABETH MALM CARLSON

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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

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NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
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INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH MALM CARLSON

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 2001

EMC: This is the first oral history interview with Elizabeth Malm Carlson, who was a WAVE in World War II. Today's date is February 19, 2002. The interview is taking place at her apartment at Avery Heights in Hartford, Connecticut. Mrs. Carlson, I'm very pleased that you were able to give us your time today to discuss your career in the WAVES in World War II. I would like to begin the interview by asking you where you were born and when you were born.

EC: I was born in the Dorchester section of Boston on June 25, 1912.

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

EC: At that time my father was a clerk in a law office in Boston.

EMC: I assume he was not a lawyer then but a clerk.

EC: Yes, that's right.

EMC: Sort of a male secretary in those days.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Was your mother a homemaker?

EC: My mother was a homemaker, although she had been a secretary before they married.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

EC: Not at that time. Later I had one of each.

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

EC: No. About the time my sister was born in 1915, my folks moved out to Melrose where they spent the rest of their lives. That's in Massachusetts.

EMC: A suburb of Boston.

EC: Northeast of Boston, yes.

EMC: Did you graduate from high school there?

EC: I did. I graduated from Melrose High School.

EMC: Do you remember what year that was?

EC: Yes. I remember very clearly. It was 1929.

EMC: The beginning of the Depression.

EC: Right.

EMC: Did you plan to attend college after high school?

EC: Yes, my parents had planned that I should.

EMC: Where did you enroll?

EC: After looking at several places and also realizing that it would be expedient for me to live at home, I went to Simmons in Boston, and got my degree there in 1933.

EMC: What was your major at Simmons?

EC: At that time it was called secretarial studies.

EMC: Or secretarial science at that time. Now, did you go to work immediately after that?

EC: I certainly did. I was lucky in the midst of the Depression to get a job with an investment advisory service in Boston.

EMC: Oh, that's great! You were one of the lucky ones.

EC: I was.

EMC: Did you work there until you joined the WAVES?

EC: No, I had a wanderlust, trying to find other jobs. So I had several jobs leading up to the one that I left to join the Navy.

EMC: What was the one you left? I'm just curious. What were you doing then?

EC: That was the Malden Savings Bank where I was secretary to the president.

EMC: Great. Well, on December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked. Do you remember where you were and what your reaction was to that?

EC: I remember I was in the movie theater. I don't remember what

movie we were seeing, but I remember the announcement being made. My cousin was about to be sent as an engineer in the Army down to South America, presumably to make airfields. They were at a hotel in Boston, and we joined them there. Of course, there was a lot of excitement.

EMC: I can imagine. Do you remember being horrified or shocked or surprised?

EC: Just keyed up and excited. Of course, my cousin, who was about to be shipped off, must have had some feelings like that, too.

EMC: Right. The beginning of the war. Well, the WAVES were organized on July 30, 1942; they came into being. When did you join the WAVES? What year?

EC: It was in December of '42. Then I was actually called to duty on December 24th. The day before Christmas we had orders to report to Smith College for the program of indoctrination.

EMC: Right. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your decision. Why did you decide to join the WAVES?

EC: Not so much of patriotic enthusiasm, but the fact that it was something new and different. I had tried two or three jobs

after graduating from Simmons, and I really hadn't clicked into anything that was super. So this was something. Also, by that time a younger brother was already in the service in the Army. I thought it would be something exciting and different.

EMC: So not so much for patriotic reasons, but for a change and something exciting and different and new. What was attractive about the Navy versus the Marines or the Coast Guard or the WACS?

EC: Gee, I really don't know except that by the time there was the publicity about it, I was ready to make a decision. I'd had no previous experience with either of the other services.

EMC: Did you enlist in Boston?

EC: Yes, I had to enlist at 150 Causeway Street, Boston.

EMC: Yes, everybody remembers that. When you were enlisting, you had to, of course, I think, take tests of some sort?

EC: Really not so much a test as just to review my experience, my education and experience.

EMC: You joined the Officer Corps.

EC: Well, they were the ones that placed us. At that time they

were looking for people who had had accounting experience. So I was put into that group. I didn't know that then, but that's what it turned out to be.

EMC: Very good. How did your parents feel about your joining the WAVES?

EC: Well, I had no reason to doubt their approval. I don't think they were wildly enthusiastic. My father was a little proud, I think, that I had done it. As I said, my brother was already in, and maybe they felt that that was enough. They never had disapproved of any action I had taken up to that point.

EMC: That's good. They had two gold stars in their window then.

EC: Well, yes. And later three because my sister-- At the time I was sworn in, the Navy physician who gave me my physical had been my sister's boss at one time. So he said to me, "Tell Susan we need her." So my sister joined.

EMC: The WAVES?

EC: She joined the WAVES, and she was in the Hospital Corps. She was a pharmacist's mate and was at Bethesda.

EMC: Now, did she go to college?

EC: No, she didn't. She'd had two years, but she had bad eye problems, and wouldn't have passed the exam anyway.

EMC: All three of you were in the service. That's amazing. Was there any publicity about your joining the WAVES in the local newspapers?

EC: No. There was just one little notice in the paper.

EMC: That's great. Well, you were off to your basic training, then, just before Christmas.

EC: That's right, the day before Christmas.

EMC: Isn't that an odd time. At the U.S. Naval Midshipmen's School in Northampton.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Did you travel there by yourself?

EC: Yes, my father put me on the train at North Station with a book, and I remember the book. It was Paul Revere and the World He Lived In.

EMC: That was your reading material on the train to Northampton.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Well, lucky you had trains in those days. When you arrived at Smith College, of course, it's the middle of winter, the beginning of winter, and you were there for about--?

EC: I think it was 28 days. We used to say 28 long hard days.

EMC: So a good four weeks then.

EC: Yes.

EMC: In the depths of winter. Did you live in the Northampton Hotel there?

EC: Yes, we lived there and ate at that famous restaurant there, too.

EMC: The Wiggins Tavern.

EC: The Wiggins Tavern, right.

EMC: Well, your cuisine must have been pretty good then.

EC: It sure was!

EMC: Did you have roommates during that time?

EC: Yes, there were bunk beds in the room and at least two to a room and sometimes more.

EMC: What kind of classes did you take during that time? Do you remember the kinds of things you studied?

EC: I don't remember a thing, to tell you the truth, except that we were rushed all the time. In fact, we used to say it was hard to find time to go to the bathroom.

EMC: Oh, really. They kept you on the go.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Classes all day, I assume.

EC: There were physicals and shots, and it just was rush, rush, rush.

EMC: Hectic, yes. But you did have to march and drill quite a bit.

EC: No, we didn't. You see this was only the second class there, and they had to set up things. We did have exercise at our next stop, which was at Radcliffe. By that time they had figured some of the setting up exercises for us. And it was between those two that we got more. We didn't know what they were going to do with us exactly. At first we didn't know what we were going to be, whether we were going to be midshipmen or what. So finally, as we left Northampton, they made us ensigns.

EMC: Oh, yes.

EC: So by the time we got to Radcliffe, which was in a way connected with the Navy accounting school which was at Harvard Business School. Harvard Business School took over the education of the Navy accounting officers.

EMC: Well, that was kind of interesting. Now, did they select you for attendance at Radcliffe?

EC: By the time we got together at Northampton, we knew that we were a select group. They had billets for--I've forgotten how many there were--but let's say 29 or something. Now, the training at Radcliffe was purely Navy accounting, and we were there for a couple of months.

EMC: Where were you domiciled then?

EC: At Briggs Hall, one of the dormitories at Radcliffe.

EMC: How many women were being trained at once?

EC: I think there were 29 or 30 of us.

EMC: In your class?

EC: Yes, in the class.

EMC: And what kinds of things did you learn?

EC: Well, not only how to pay officers, but how to pay enlisted people. Also how to pay the Navy's bills. There were these schools for male officers at various colleges, and we had to pay the cost of those, as well as the fellows that were in the fleet. I ended up with--my first billet.....

EMC: Can I just ask you a few questions about the Radcliffe training?

EC: Yes.

EMC: You were there, as you said, for a couple of months with a class of 29. Did you find the training rigorous, difficult?

EC: Not at first. But toward the end I did. There was a great age range in us. You see I joined a good eight years out of college. I had gotten over the habit of studying. Whereas the girls that were accepted right from college found it easier to apply than I. Because when I got out of college, I remember saying, "This is it for studying." I wasn't interested in going any further. So that was a little bit harder. Also the Navy way of accounting was different.

EMC: Oh, sure. You had to learn that, master that.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Did they give you tests, though?

EC: Oh, yes. We had tests, and we had instructions on the use of a gun.

EMC: Oh, really!

EC: But actually the only instruction we had was in the basement of the Cambridge Police Department. They had a shooting range there. I remember going there one night and trying to hit the bull's-eye. Because later I did have to wear sidearms.

EMC: I was going to say I think you would if you were handling money. Acting as a paymaster you would have to wear sidearms.

EC: Right.

EMC: So that's why they trained you in that. Isn't that interesting. So that was very different for women in that time frame. Did you have any time off during this training? Did you have weekends off?

EC: Oh, you know, the girls that caught on quickly to the course had evenings free. Then where I lived out in Melrose, I could go home when I felt that I didn't need that time to study. It wasn't restrictive in that sense.

EMC: Did you have to march to class? Did they impose that, marching in formation?

EC: There were a couple of occasions when we did that. I'm trying to figure out why. There wasn't that much. Going back to the exercise bit, I can remember just when they woke us with reveille in the morning, we struggled into bathrobes and went out in the hallway and did some calisthenics. But nothing really rigorous.

EMC: Just keeping in shape. That's what the Navy liked to do.

Did you have any time for social life during this interlude at Radcliffe--Harvard?

EC: Well, I can remember going to movies, but not much really. Not much at this time.

EMC: It was a wartime situation by that time.

EC: Yes. Right.

EMC: I guess things were restricted. Did they have any officers' club for the military in Boston?

EC: Oh, well, later, when I was assigned to a billet in Boston, there was an officers' club, and they had entertainments.

EMC: And the like. Were your instructors in the Navy accounting system at Radcliffe men or women?

EC: They were men.

EMC: Women weren't ready for that quite yet.

EC: Yes, they hadn't trained anybody, any women.

EMC: Well, you finished that course successfully. I assume you

passed.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Were you promoted at all from ensign at that time?

EC: No, no. We'd been made ensigns when we got there. During a war situation like this, there aren't any individual--there wouldn't be individual promotions. Usually you were promoted when you'd been at a certain level for a certain length of time.

EMC: Right, right. So you'd have to be in for a little bit longer. You said you were assigned to Boston after you finished the course. Where were you assigned?

EC: I was assigned to the First Naval District headquarters, which was the Boston Navy Yard.

EMC: Right, the old Boston Navy Yard. Who did you work for and what were you doing?

EC: My first boss there was the disbursing officer for the First Naval District.

EMC: How large was your office?

EC: Although the headquarters for a lot of the activity were down at the yard and others were at 150 Causeway, the accounting department was out at the Paine Furniture Building.

EMC: And that's where you were?

EC: That's where we were. That's where my office was.

EMC: Was it a large office? Many WAVES working there?

EC: Yes, it was. You can imagine the floor of a furniture company. The accounting office was there, and that was enormous. I had nothing to do, actually, with the accounting as it related to enlisted personnel. My particular office paid officer accounts. But also it paid some of the bills of the whole Naval District. My particular job was assistant to the disbursing officer, although all I had to do with at that time was officer accounts. One of the things that the boss had me do was to pay those officers who wanted to get paid by cash; which meant that I had to go from our building, which was in the Park Square area, down to the Navy yard. I went at lunchtime. And those officers that wanted to be paid by cash came to the yard, and I paid them. I got there by calling the Marines, and a Marine guard came with a chauffeur. I had to wear sidearms as well as have him as an escort with his gun. Then we went to the Navy yard, and I paid them.

EMC: You were carrying the money with you then.

EC: Yes. I had a little tin box with slots in it for the different denominations. I sat there with my gun on the table, and I counted out the money.

EMC: Oh, isn't that something! That was quite an event.

EC: Well, it was something new for a woman to do that.

EMC: Yes, something new for a woman. Did you do that once a week?

EC: No, twice a month as I recall.

EMC: Every two weeks.

EC: Yes.

EMC: That's good. That's quite an adventure. That's something you wouldn't forget. Did you like this work?

EC: I enjoyed it. But it wasn't carefree. I felt a little--not uptight, but I guess I felt it was important.

EMC: And responsible.

EC: Yes.

EMC: A very responsible job to be doing that.

EC: Right.

EMC: Where did you live when you were in Boston?

EC: Oh, because it was in Boston, I could live at home. So I went in and out on the Boston & Maine Railroad, just like I did for my civilian jobs.

EMC: Isn't that something! That's most unusual.

EC: Well, actually it wasn't because there weren't dormitories available for all the Navy personnel.

EMC: They'd have to get apartments.

EC: In fact, all the men that I worked with, too, a lot of them were just living at home because there were no other facilities ready for them.

EMC: Right. I wonder if the Navy assigned you to Boston because

they knew that you could live at home.

EC: No. They had these 29 billets, and they let us express a choice.

EMC: Oh, they did.

EC: Yes.

EMC: After you finished Radcliffe?

EC: Yes. At that time I was ready to stay at home. I think I found out I--maybe it was because, you know, my brother was away from home. It wasn't that I was disillusioned by anything. It was just that I'd just as soon stay with the familiar.

EMC: Yes, your wanderlust was a little curbed.

EC: Yes.

EMC: And your sister was away.

EC: Yes, by that time she was in Washington.

EMC: So you were the only one around at home. Well, that's kind of interesting. Did you ever have to work on Saturdays?

EC: Oh, we all worked on Saturdays.

EMC: Oh, you did.

EC: Yes.

EMC: So you worked a six-day week instead of a five-day week.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Well, the Navy got its money's worth.

EC: You haven't asked about the pay scale.

EMC: Oh, I will. I wondered if you remembered what your pay was.

EC: Well, I remember particularly that it was exactly the same as for the men. There was no difference there.

EMC: No, no discrimination, which was great.

EC: As ensigns it was \$150 a month, as JG's, it was \$166.66, as full lieutenants, it was \$200 a month.

EMC: That's not too bad in those days.

EC: No. It was very good for those days.

EMC: Yes, given the prices then; they were much lower. Did you save money then?

EC: No, I lived on my money, but also during this time I met a Lieutenant Alford Anderson and married him.

EMC: Oh, where did you meet him? Could I ask you about this?

EC: I met him at the counter where I took his papers when he came in. Then it turned out that he was living with the aunt of a friend of mine.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

EC: Yes.

EMC: And he was stationed in Boston?

EC: Just temporarily. He was actually on his way to learning how to be a diver. They have a fire-fighting school in Boston. So he was there to learn that, what they had to offer. So I met him there.

EMC: Was this in '43?

EC: Yes. We were married in '43.

EMC: Oh, you were! This was a whirlwind courtship.

EC: We were married before he went overseas.

EMC: Oh, this was whirlwind because you-- Wow!

EC: Yes. Then it was, you know, you got engaged, and you didn't get married for another year maybe. But wartime was different.

EMC: What month were you married in, may I ask?

EC: October of '43.

EMC: Yes, this was quick. A six-month courtship then. Was he from New Britain?

EC: Yes.

EMC: Oh, so that's how you landed.

EC: He worked at Fafnirs.

EMC: Oh, he worked at Fafnirs!

EC: In aeronautical engineering, and the Navy put him in diving.

EMC: Well, that's what they do. Diving. So where did he go off to, may I ask?

EC: He went off to Scotland and England and stayed there getting ready for the invasion.

EMC: Oh, D-Day. Was he involved in D-Day?

EC: Oh, yes, he was there the night before. He was on a small ship that was used for rescue. He was out there in the English Channel before dawn of June 6th.

EMC: Yes, D-Day. He would've had some good stories to tell, I'm sure. So now did you keep up your relationship through letters? Did you write?

EC: Yes, those little V-gram things. I kept them for a long time. Finally they got destroyed. It's too bad. But with all the moving around and so forth, they were lost.

EMC: That would be wonderful, though, because you get the flavor of wartime and your concerns. Now, did you continue to live at

home after you got married?

EC: Yes, because he was off, you see.

EMC: That makes sense. So your social life was a little bit limited then.

EC: After that, yes.

EMC: Did you find that in this billet that you were well treated?

EC: Very. Yes, yes. When I first went there, I heard that the commanding officer thought that I would be more decorative than useful. But I think he changed his mind.

EMC: Oh, that's good. No harassment or discrimination then.

EC: Very little, yes.

EMC: Was there anything about this billet that you didn't like?

EC: No, I don't think so. I just thought every duty I had was because of the job. Halfway through that--not halfway through--but after a year on that job, they moved me across the street to another billet, and this was the interesting one and the one that

I really liked. Because I paid for ship construction in the First Naval District. I paid companies like Bath Iron Works and Bethlehem-Hingham. And then the small boat builders. So that to me was a little more interesting--a great deal more interesting--than paying personnel.

EMC: Right, so you were paying actual companies.

EC: I had to check on the feasibility on some of this stuff.

EMC: Did you check their accounts and whether they'd paid?

EC: Well, the men in the department did that and presumably on their signature, to me, that was enough. The biggest check I wrote was for 50 million to Bath Iron Works.

EMC: Wow! That's a lot.

EC: And people used to get a kick out of when I would call Washington and say, "Please give me \$50 million in my account."

EMC: Wow! Fifty million in my account.

EC: Even in these times.

EMC: Even in these times that would be a lot of responsibility. So that was quite exciting. Did you continue in that interesting

billet until the end of the war?

EC: Well, no. Actually then I did something that makes you smile because it really is true: Just be sure what you ask for because you might just get it.

EMC: That's right.

EC: By that time my husband was coming back from Europe.

EMC: What year?

EC: D-Day was over, and he was coming back but with the prospect of going to Japan. So he was stationed very temporarily in Philadelphia. So I was brazen enough to ask for a transfer to Philadelphia. I got it, and I hated it because they put me in a department which I had had very little experience in except for the big stuff. I was unhappy for three months there.

EMC: Were you in the Philadelphia Navy Yard?

EC: Yes. That's a great big yard. It isn't like the cozy little Boston Yard. I slept in a bed that was actually slept in when I wasn't there.

EMC: Oh, so you were domiciled in a dormitory?

EC: No, This was in a private home. But it was so hard to get accommodations. Some girl who worked during the evening and night slept in my bed and had my room in the daytime.

EMC: Right. Hot-bunking kind of. That's what they called it.

EC: Anyway, it was.... But fortunately by that--

EMC: Where was your husband?

EC: By that time he was--he had been sent back to New York, and then Japan capitulated. Then there was the job of cutting off all these contracts that the Navy had, and I didn't care about that. But then also there was a system whereby you got certain credits for whether you were married or, you know--

EMC: Points.

EC: And I collected enough so that by December of '45 I was out.

EMC: Yes, you had enough points.

EC: Yes, I had enough points.

EMC: So you were in Philadelphia when you were discharged.

EC: Yes, from Philadelphia.

EMC: Were you about a year in Philadelphia?

EC: Oh, it was less than that. It was just four or five months.

EMC: Oh, that's good, because you didn't care for that assignment too much at all. And your husband came back. Did you ever have any contact with any civilians during your WAVES service? And, if you did, how did they react to or treat the WAVES? People you maybe saw on the street.

EC: Oh, I was with civilians all the time. The personnel in the offices I worked in were almost all civilians. There'd just be two or three top Navy people. The Boston Yard had, you know, mostly civilians.

EMC: Oh, I see. A couple of WAVES.

EC: And then commuting on the trains and everything, people were more than gracious, I would say. I never felt one bit of--

EMC: Like a curiosity or anything.

EC: Just people accepted it.

EMC: Did you like the uniform?

EC: Oh, yes.

EMC: That attracted some people to the WAVES. Did you keep up with news about the war during wartime? Were you involved in newspaper reading?

EC: Yes. It's very interesting. When one group that I was with had a girl in the Coast Guard, and she knew about the invasion from England, you know, and she knew it had happened, and she didn't tell us. We had to learn it from the papers, you know. We were so mad at her.

EMC: Now, did you know your husband was involved in that invasion? You probably didn't.

EC: I knew that he would be because I finally guessed by hints he put in his mail that he was in England. Actually I didn't know that he was going to be out there in the English Channel before it even began. I didn't know anything like that. Then once he was in France, I got a lot of mail from him, and he could tell me where. Most of the publicity we had, they talked about Omaha Beach, and I knew he went in at Utah. I found that out some way; I've forgotten just how.

EMC: That's amazing. Well, you were in the service when V-J Day occurred. Do you remember your reaction to V-J Day, August 15, 1945, or any celebration that you were involved in?

EC: Isn't that funny. No great celebration. I can remember being at home. Also, in the meantime, my brother had been lost.

EMC: Oh, really.

EC: Early on. So there was a great deal of pressure on my family because also his wife was pregnant, and she was living with us.

EMC: Oh, dear.

EC: So there was a great deal of emotion in that, naturally. I don't remember any wild celebration.

EMC: Because in some of the major cities there was, of course. Washington, New York. Was your brother found?

EC: Never.

EMC: Never. Oh, he was lost permanently. In the Army.

EC: No, the Army Air Corps. Even before the Air Corps was

separate, it was before that. The interesting thing is that just recently I have given, a drop of blood, from which they will get my DNA. So that if they ever find any of his remains, they would be able to identify him.

EMC: Was he in the South Pacific?

EC: No, he was in Europe. Going out from Tunis. It probably was from friendly fire, too.

EMC: Yes, there was so much of that these days, in all the wars, and they hushed it up before. Oh, that was a shame. That was too bad. How did you feel about the end of the war?

EC: Relief. I felt that I didn't want to stay in. I had the opportunity. But by that time I'd had plenty of it.

EMC: You didn't want to stay in the WAVES any longer.

EC: I didn't want to stay in uniform any longer, that was for sure.

EMC: Did you ever see Mildred McAfee, the director of the WAVES?

EC: Yes, yes.

EMC: Oh, where did you meet her?

EC: Well, I didn't actually meet her. It's very funny. I saw her at a concert of the Boston Pops in Symphony Hall. We missed each other.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sakes! She was the director.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Were you discharged from the Navy in Philadelphia or in Boston?

EC: In Philadelphia. Well, actually, I think it was New York.

EMC: Oh.

EC: I think it was New York.

EMC: Because there were five separation centers.

EC: Yes, where I actually got my papers.

EMC: Did you receive any medals of any sort?

EC: Just the ribbons that they give to everybody for the American Theater, you know.

EMC: Right. The Victory Medal.

EC: By the time that--toward the end of the war, the WAVES had the opportunity to express an interest in going to Hawaii. But by that time my husband was in Europe, of course, and I couldn't see any sense in requesting a transfer.

EMC: Yes, a transfer to Hawaii because then you'd never catch up with each other.

EC: I could have stayed in because they were very anxious to have accounting girls stay in. A male friend who was in Washington had suggested that I do that. But naturally I was ready to start married life with Al Anderson in New Britain.

EMC: Rather than acting as a paymaster for the Navy. But there were plenty of fellows getting out, and they needed accounting people to pay them, I'm sure. Well, so you were happy to leave the Navy in December '45. I'm going to ask you a few general questions about the WAVES. Did you think that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit de corps?

EC: Oh, yes. I do.

EMC: Did you have any preconceived expectations before you entered the WAVES of what it would be like?

EC: Not really. I had no idea what to expect. It was just that it was something new to try.

EMC: Did that fulfill your expectations? Did the WAVES fulfill your expectations of something new and challenging?

EC: Yes.

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

EC: No.

EMC: Most of the officers weren't.

EC: Actually I knew one girl--several girls--that didn't make it through indoctrination, one because they found out that she'd had TB at one time. There were several of those. But then there was one girl who-- We were assigned to the hotel there, and her room was way off. One night she got terrified about something, and they didn't think that she reacted the right way, so they-- But the funny thing was that she joined up with the Red Cross and was

sent to the South Pacific, while the rest of us just stayed stuck in the United States.

EMC: Right, that was even scarier. I'm going to turn the tape over now. [Change to Side B of Tape] Did the WAVES experience change or redirect your life in any way?

EC: No, it was more the marriage that did that, you know.

EMC: Brought you to a new place anyway, a new city.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Did the war make you more independent and self-reliant?

EC: Oh, no. I went to Simmons College, and that was way ahead of--I was independent before that.

EMC: An independent woman.

EC: Yes.

EMC: So the WAVES really didn't provide you with career experience?

EC: No, no.

EMC: Or ambition. Do you think that what women were expected to do and be changed when the war was over? Do you think they were more interested in the workaday world than in home and hearth?

EC: Well, I think the women were. But I don't think-- It was really too soon. Like you've heard stories about the girls that went to work in airplane factories. They were sent back home to be housewives again so that their husbands could have the jobs.

EMC: Right.

EC: It probably helped a little bit. But the real swing towards equality for women came a little later, I think.

EMC: Oh, it certainly did, yes, in the seventies. Did you maintain any service friendships when the war was over?

EC: I did by letter with one girl in particular. Because by the time we were ready to retire-- In the meantime, my husband, Al Anderson, had died, and I had married Herb seven or eight years later. By the time we were looking for a place to spend some retirement, this Navy friend of mine and her husband had done all the research in Florida, and we visited them, and liked the area. So we just bought a condo in Jensen Beach because this Navy friend had done all the research.

EMC: Oh, isn't that something!

EC: And she just died within the last year. Now I have no contact with any of those people.

EMC: Was she somebody you met in Boston?

EC: Yes. I met her actually at Northampton at the very beginning. She was in our group.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting that you maintained contact with somebody from that far back. Oh, very good. Do you belong to any WAVE organizations?

EC: No. I did, but I somehow or another along the way didn't pay my dues. So I don't. I contributed to--

EMC: WIMSA.

EC: --that organization that built a memorial or something.

EMC: Right. Women In Military Service for America.

EC: Yes.

EMC: That's great. That's fantastic.

EC: But the other group, WAVES National, I was active in it in Florida. But in the moving and everything, why, I must have not paid pay my dues. So right now I'm not affiliated.

EMC: Well, Ruth Boyea gave me your name.

EC: Yes. Well, you see--

EMC: How did you connect with her?

EC: She belongs to South Church.

EMC: Oh, she does. Okay.

EC: And she somehow or another Herbie Jr. told her that I-- because Ruth didn't know that I was in the Navy. And I'm surprised that she didn't give you Helen Vibbert's name.

EMC: No, she didn't.

EC: And right here there's a girl that worked in Washington all the time and had to do with codes.

EMC: Codes, code-breaking, yes, and code interpretation. Great.

Well, that'll be someone to look up. I'd like to ask you what the significance of your naval career was for you. What impact did it have on you, if any, and what significance?

EC: Well, it's just like a big thing. Like being born or having scarlet fever or something. It just was a big part of my life. And if anybody asks me, you know, what are the important things in your life, I would say, you know, marriage, Navy. It didn't steer me in any direction. But it was just something I'm glad I went through.

EMC: Good. That's great. Very nice. That's a good answer. I assume you settled in New Britain after the war.

EC: Yes.

EMC: Because your husband went back to Fafnirs.

EC: Right.

EMC: Did you work at all at any point in time?

EC: Oh, yes. Right off. I thought, well, I've got to get a job here. One day I was downtown, and I looked up at First Church when it was down there in the middle of town, and I said, gee, I've never worked in a church. I wonder what that would be like.

And so I got in touch with one woman who happened to be a South Church member, and she had a good First Church friend, and before I knew it I was being interviewed by Dr. Green. And after we'd talked, he said to me-- Did you ever know him, Dr. Green?

EMC: No.

EC: He was a rather stern, short little gentleman. He looked at me, and he said, "You know, you're the best thing I've seen come over the pike in a long time."

EMC: Were you hired there?

EC: So he hired me.

EMC: As a secretary?

EC: Yes, a secretary.

EMC: Interesting.

EC: So I worked there for eight years. Then again I felt the wanderlust. Then I did a lot of volunteer work, like I worked some for the Red Cross, and I worked for the YW, and just going in. And I worked for Rowland Products down in Kensington. Then one day I had a call from Dr. White, John White. He knew that I

had gotten a little bored with my job at Rowland Products. So he said, "I've got something for you to think about." Bliss Clark was looking for a secretary at the hospital.

EMC: Oh, yes!

EC: The twelve years I spent at the hospital, outside of the Navy, was really--it was like this is where I was meant to be.

EMC: Oh, that's great.

EC: So I was there. Then Herb Sr. was chairman of the board. So everybody thought it was nice: Herb Carlson and Libby Anderson got married.

EMC: Oh, so you met him right there.

EC: Well, I had seen him. In the meantime, we had lived out on Lincoln Street, and Herb and I caught the bus together for downtown. So I knew who he was. But then when he came to work, why, there were a couple of hospital activities he asked me to, and so that--

EMC: Well, so that's how that materialized.

EC: So that's how that happened. So I had 25 years with Al

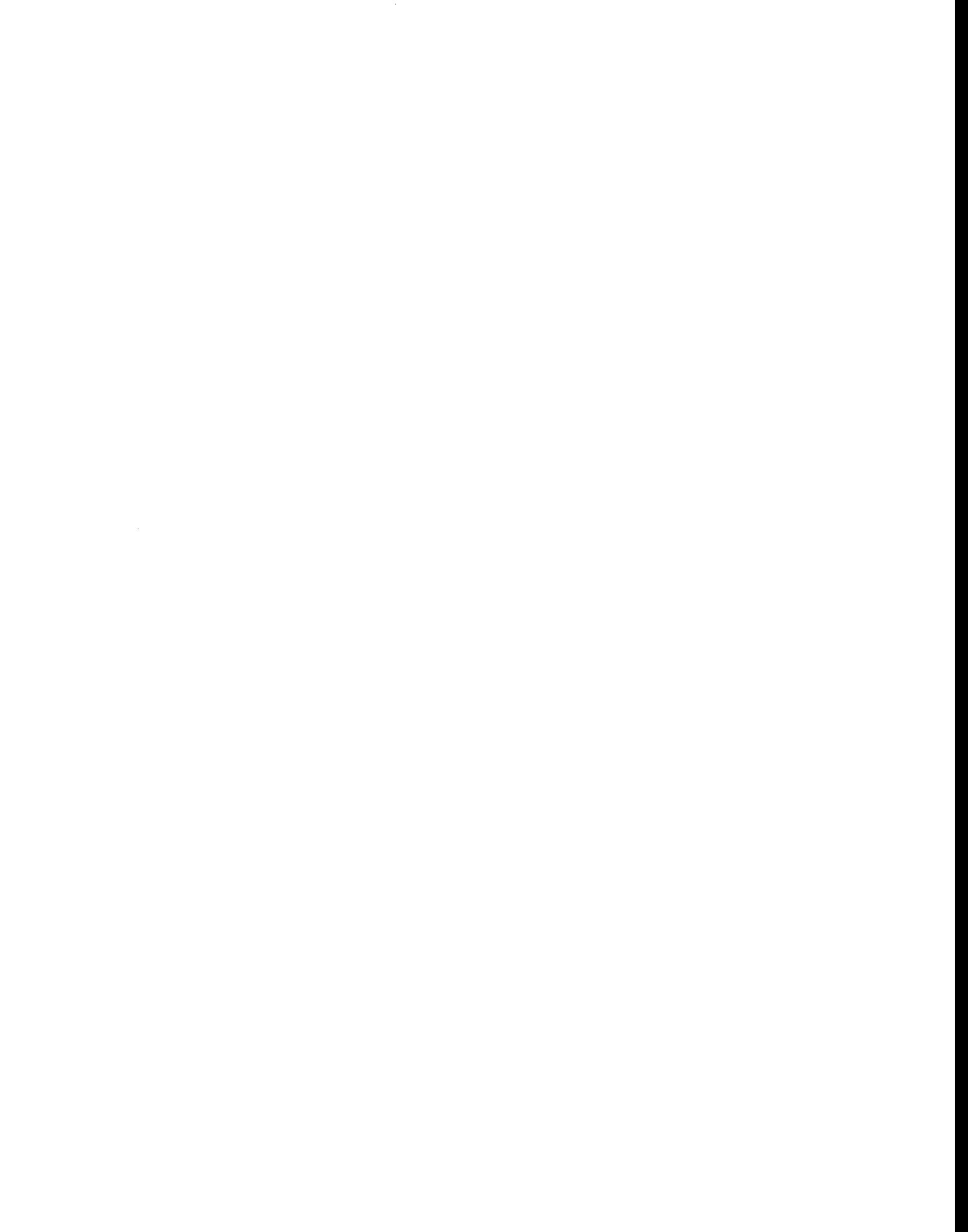
Anderson, and I had 19 with Herb.

EMC: Wonderful! That's quite something. That's amazing. Well, your WAVES experience, you know, took you to this part of the world and what happened after that. That's very nice. Do you have anything else to add to the interview, anything that I've missed, anything amusing, or exciting, or interesting that happened, outstanding?

EC: Let me look through that. I've got it all written down....

EMC: Mrs. Carlson, I want to thank you very much for giving us your memories of your time in the WAVES in World War II. You had the distinction of being in the first graduating class in the Naval Supply School at Radcliffe-Harvard, and that is most unique. I want to thank you for your participation in this project.

[End of Interview]



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