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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES

Interviewee: Helen Goss Vibberts

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

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EMC: This is an oral history interview with Helen Goss Vibberts who served in the WAVES during World War II. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I am the curator of the Naval Historical Collection at the Naval War College in Newport. Today's date is June 10, 2002, and the interview is taking place at her home on Andrews Street in Southington, Connecticut. I'm very pleased, Helen, that you were able to give me some time to interview you on your career in the WAVES. I'd like to begin the interview by asking you a few questions about your background. Where were you born and when were you born? Can you tell me?

HV: I was born in New Britain, Connecticut, on Grove Hill, July 20, 1916.

EMC: What did your father do for a living?

HV: He started the Goss and de Leeuw machine company in 1922. It was a machine tool business.

EMC: Did you mother work at all or did she stay at home?

HV: She stayed at home. She was very active in the VNA and the YWCA and very much of a community activist.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

HV: I have an older brother and an older sister. We are three years apart. I was the youngest and my sister was smack right dab between, so mother was busy.

EMC: Right, with three children in those days. Did you spend your growing up years in New Britain?

HV: Yes, and I went to Camp School on Walnut Street. Then I went to Oxford, which was a girls school in Hartford, Connecticut, and then I went to Vassar College. I graduated from college in 1937.

EMC: What did you major in there?

HV: Political Science.

EMC: Oh, that was quite unique in those days. Did you work after you graduated from college?

HV: I worked at the Forman School in Litchfield, Connecticut, which was a school that recognized that there was such a thing as Dyslexia. I commuted, learning and unpaid, for two years and I lived there paid for one. Then the war was declared and I quit to go into war work.

EMC: Did you teach at the Forman School?

HV: Yes. I worked with dyslexics.

EMC: Oh, I see. Did you need any special training for that? I'm just curious.

HV: I got my training through the two years that I commuted up there, through Warren Koehler, who was head of the department. The school was started by John Forman and by Dr. Samuel Orton. Orton of New York was the first person to really recognize and discover that dyslexics could be helped.

EMC: In 1941 you said you left there and went into war work.

HV: I wanted to get into war work. I passed a civil service test, and I was put off and put off and put off. During the war, I worked at Goss and de Leeuw, handling the payroll there for a while.

EMC: Did you work at the YWCA at all?

HV: I worked one summer at the Y.

EMC: Can you tell me what your reactions were to the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941?

HV: I was horrified like everybody else. I remember exactly what I was doing. I had bought a boxer puppy in New Milford, CT and we had gone up to get it. My father turned on the radio and we heard the news driving down the hill from the kennel.

EMC: Yes, that was quite a shock. Did you keep up with the news about the war before you joined the Navy?

HV: I probably did.

EMC: I guess everybody did in those days.

HV: Yes.

EMC: You said you were interested in war work and one way you could contribute was by joining one of the services that were open to women. How did you hear about the WAVES?

HV: I have absolutely no idea. I know that I had been brought up on Nantucket in the summer. I was boat oriented and probably that had something to do with my choice.

EMC: Right, the water. You're surrounded by that. What was attractive about the Navy vice the other services?

HV: I think just what I said.

EMC: So that's why you were selected the Navy.

HV: Right. I don't think I ever contemplated any corps but the WAVES. It may have been the uniform.

EMC: People do say that it was more attractive than the Army khaki. When did you decide to enlist?

HV: I enlisted in 1943. Now wait a minute. Date of service, February 13, 1943.

EMC: Right, so that was shortly after the WAVES were established in July, 1942. Do you know where you went to enlist? Did you go to Boston?

HV: I went to New York.

EMC: Oh.

HV: And I had quite an interesting tale to tell there, if you want to hear it.

EMC: Sure.

HV: I was scared to death. I enlisted and then when I was sworn in I had to go back to New York and I was scared to death, wondering what in heaven's name I've done this foolish thing for, and my hand was shaking when I had to swear allegiance to the government and all the rest of it. And afterwards, the young man who swore me in, a good looking young man, a lieutenant came up to me and obviously saw that I was a little nervous and his first question was, "Have you ever heard of an ox trek?", and I looked at him and I said, "yes". He said, "How far did your family get?" And I said, "Well, my father came from Chicago," and he said to me, "Well, you come from hardier stock than I do. My family stopped in Pennsylvania." He was a Lieutenant Goss and I always wanted to know what happened to him.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake. Isn't that interesting, the same last name. So at that point you were a little concerned about your decision, I guess.

HV: I was.

EMC: Well, it was a new organization.

HV: Yes. There won't be anybody nice. What had I done?

EMC: Yes, because the attitude then about women in the military service, they really hadn't been in since WWI, was kind of dubious. Let's put it that way. How did your parents feel about you joining the WAVES?

HV: I think they were very proud of me. I don't think they ever influenced me not to join or to join.

EMC: So you were apprehensive about your decision?

HV: Yes. I thought nobody will be nice. I won't make any friends. I cried all the way to Northampton on the train.

EMC: That's a concern. Did you go by yourself from New Britain?

HV: Yes.

EMC: You didn't go with a group then to Northampton.

HV: No.

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

HV: I don't think so. But when I got out to Hawaii, it was in the New Britain paper. You couldn't tell where you were going or anything else. The day I got out there it was in the local paper, where I was exactly, so somebody told them.

EMC: Somebody told them, right. When you arrived at Northampton, I assumed you were there for at least six to eight weeks. Where were you domiciled?

HV: In a hotel.

EMC: In the Northampton hotel?

HV: Yes. Four of us in a single room.

EMC: And did you find these women compatible, your roommates at that time?

HV: They were very nice and I've always regretted that I haven't kept up with one of them. Her last name was Heagy and she came from Omaha, I think. And another one amused the daylight out of me because she was a blonde but really a brunette and every single night she had to take out dye and do her hair.

EMC: Dyeing her hair with peroxide probably.

HV: Yes. She was a nice girl, but different. And she hid that dye. I don't know where she hid it for inspection.

EMC: Interesting. Do you remember how your day was structured there and what kind of classes you took at Northampton?

HV: I had to learn how a radio was built. I had absolutely no idea. We had typing and we had communications. I was in communications. I can remember sitting on the steps with a whole bunch of us the day before we had to take the exam on how a radio was made. I guess we all passed, but none of us understood it. We got it down on paper for the test and that was the end of that, and I still don't know how a radio works. I don't understand why we had to know.

EMC: Unless you were going into radio communications somehow. But a lot of communications was coding and decoding. It wasn't the innards of a radio. How did you feel about the marching that you had to do?

HV: Oh, it was fun.

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

HV: I remember once when I was asked away for the weekend. And I forget to ask permission by a prescribed date and I was not allowed. I had not and was denied my weekend. They were very strict on that. I think the discipline was very good. I also had when I was there my second case of German Measles and had to go to the Smith infirmary.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake. That must have been going through the officer ranks.

HV: I was put in charge of one of the squads and I was very hesitant, unsure of myself, and I was quickly removed from that.

EMC: Did Mildred McAfee ever visit the Midshipmen's School?

HV: I met her somewhere and I think it was out in Hawaii.

EMC: Probably. Because she did make a trip to Hawaii.

HV: Yes, I think that's where I met her. I can't verify that.

EMC: At that point in time. What was your reaction to the uniform, the Navy uniform?

HV: Oh, I loved it. I thought the havelock was just marvelous. I just loved it. Wrapped around your neck.

EMC: Right. Raingear.

HV: I understood that it was taken away at discharge.

EMC: Oh.

HV: Because it was so distinctive. I have one up in my attic, so it was not confiscated!

EMC: You saved your uniforms then.

HV: And I can still get into it.

EMC: That's marvelous.

HV: It's a little tight.

EMC: Right, that's good.

HV: I saved it, thinking that maybe one day there would be a parade and I'd be asked as an old lady WAVE to sit in the back seat of an open car.

EMC: They should.

HV: They never have and they never will.

HV: Also, I thought the Repertory Theatre here might want it for a costume. I did wear it to the Club one night when there was three of us, in uniform, two men and Helen.

EMC: Oh, really. Was that a special occasion? Military dress up night or something?

HV: I can't remember. Armistice Day, maybe.

EMC: One of those.

HV: One of those.

EMC: Because I know Rhode Island WAVES, the Ocean State WAVES, wear their uniforms if they can fit into them and ride in the Bristol, Rhode Island parade, which is a big Fourth of July parade there.

EMC: So you had very limited time off, I assume, at Northampton. Did anything amusing or note worthy happen during your training period, your eight weeks there?

HV: I don't remember.

EMC: It was just classes and your exams. When you graduated you were an ensign.

HV: I believe.

EMC: Did you need any additional training at all for communications?

HV: No. I was sent directly to the Port Director's office in New York.

EMC: Was there a large contingent of WAVES working there?



HV: Yes.

EMC: For the Port Director's Office.

HV: Yes.

EMC: And what exactly were you doing?

HV: We were breaking and sending coded messages. And I was head of the coding room, and I enjoyed it. I especially enjoyed the garbles. I love anagrams and that kind of thing and I could work out the garbles.

EMC: Decipher that. When you said you were taking and receiving code, I assume it was Morse Code.

HV: Oh, no.

EMC: No, it wasn't

HV: It was type written. It came in by radio.

EMC: Oh, it came in by radio.

HV: There were two in particular. To break codes, we had special typing machines and something else. I can't remember the name of the other machine. And then we broke other codes. We had machines. We had British books. We had a lot of different books, but the first five letters of the message would indicate which code was involved.

EMC: That must have been challenging.

HV: It was. It was fun. We were on the seventeenth floor. When I first went down, five of us lived in one room in some hotel down in the village. Then we got an apartment on Sixty Seventh Street, four of us, for a \$100 dollars a month.

EMC: Wow.

HV: And then Mrs. Armstrong. I always wondered what happened to her. And she had sterling silver, she had linen sheets, oriental rugs. Her rental to us was her contribution to the war effort.

EMC: She let the WAVES have it.

HV: She let the WAVES have it and then there was a little room down the hall that we rented for \$25 a month, where we could have a guest if we wanted.

EMC: That was nice.

HV: So the four of us split \$125 per month.

EMC: And you had luxurious accommodations.

HV: Absolutely.

EMC: Far better than most.

HV: Right across from the fire station. Oh, my word. At first, whistles would keep us awake all the time. About after a week we never heard it.

EMC: It blocked out.

HV: Yes.

EMC: At least you didn't have inspections, captain's inspections, in those quarters.

HV: No, we didn't have those.

EMC: Did you ever have any problems with captain's inspections at the Northampton Hotel?

HV: No.

EMC: So you passed there.

HV: Yes.

EMC: How many days a week did you work at the Port Directors?

HV: We went around the clock on three watches and then had time off.

EMC: Oh.

HV: Three days on one watch and I can't remember, 7-?

EMC: Probably 7-3, or something.

HV: 7-3, 3-? And then we would have a day off.

EMC: So it would be a 24 hour rotation.

HV: Yes.

EMC: That kind of disrupted your sleeping, I guess.

HV: It disrupted my mother, I can tell you. One time she was down visiting us and we came in from the night watch and I guess about 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock in the morning she got up and found two of us drinking sherry at 7 o'clock in the morning. And I said, "Well, mother, it's before dinner." Right.

EMC: That's right and then you slept the rest of the day. So you found your work challenging and, I assume, not routine or boring at all.

HV: I practically saw every show on Broadway.

EMC: Oh, you did. I was going to ask you about recreation. Were these gratis?

HV: Oh, no.

EMC: Okay.

HV: We had to pay.

EM: Because some of the WAVES got tickets gratis. What else did you do socially?

HV: One thing that was very, very interesting was that I and a roommate, whom I still keep up with, decided we'd never been to St. Patrick's Cathedral. So one Sunday we went and there were two lovely looking British WRENS. We looked at each other and thought

well, why don't we ask them home for lunch. So we did and they accepted. One was Rosemary Clark, her maiden name was Clark. I kept up with her. She was the communications officer on the QUEEN ELIZABETH all during the war.

EMC: Oh, wasn't that something

HV: Tremendous job and I can't remember what her rank was; they had different ranks from us, but she was the communications officer on the QUEEN ELIZABETH. I visited her one time in England when she was married to Norman Clive. I always wondered how I could get a hold of her. I think, finally, she and her husband went to South Africa. I don't know how you would go about finding her.

EMC: Internet. You don't have a computer. If somebody has a computer, you can find her on the internet. It's kind of unsettling.

HV: After church we gave them spam for lunch and they were thrilled.

EMC: Because they didn't get any of that. Food shortages.

HV: And the other girl's husband had just been in the HOOD that had just gone down.

EMC: The HOOD.

HV: I can't remember her name.

EMC: That was interesting. So you saw plays in New York City, shows, and did you do anything else? Were there any men in your office other than the supervisors?

HV: No.

EMC: Were the men the supervisors? Navy men?

HV: No. They had our watch when I first got there. The head of the coding room was a man. Actually he came from, his relatives came from New Britain on Lincoln Street, and I can't remember his name. And then we had a young darling male yeoman there from

Texas. Basically, what the port director did was to get the convoys in and out of New York Harbor and one of the WAVES who sat outside the coding room was the one who handled that .

EMC: Oh, I see. So you were receiving and decoding messages there. Were you well treated in this assignment?

HV: Oh, very. We lived on 67<sup>th</sup> St., and we were met at the Battery by the shore patrol when we worked on the night shift. They escorted us to and from the Battery to the subway, so we were very well taken care of. It was a tough neighborhood. There were drunks in the doorways.

EMC: Kind of unpleasant.

HV: Yes.

EMC: That's good that the Navy took care of you. Were the WAVES who worked there congenial, easy to get along with?

HV: Yes.

EMC: No problems with that.

HV: One girl that I particularly admired, a Jewish girl, worked every Christmas and every Christian holiday. She was just a wonderful gal.

EMC: That was good. Did you survive on your pay? How did you feel about your pay?

HV: I had no problem whatsoever. We had ration books and I don't remember any problem.

EMC: No stinting there.

HV: No.

EMC: Did you have any contact with civilians on this assignment?

HV: Not through the WAVES. I had some through my family, yes.

EMC: And how did they react to your service in the WAVES?

HV: I think they all thought that it was great.

EMC: Very positive, then.

HV: Yes.

EMC: Did you write to your parents or your friends regarding your WAVE experiences?

HV: I was so near home. I think I told my parents. I don't remember, no, I don't remember any letters.

EMC: You probably called. You were in New York from 1943, almost through the end of 1945, wasn't it? April of 1945.

HV: Yes.

EMC: So that was almost two years in New York City. How did you manage to get assigned to Hawaii? Because that was your next billet.

HV: I had a friend in the Navy on the same watch, whose aunt was in the House of Representatives and she met us in Washington one time. We had lunch with Aunt Mary and I guess it came up in conversation, I happened to say I'd loved to go to Hawaii. I was there in two weeks.

EMC: She must have pulled some strings.

HV: She must have pulled some strings. Yes.

EMC: Why did you want to go to Hawaii?

HV: Oh, just adventure. It's the only place at that time outside the continental United States where the WAVES were allowed to go.

EMC: Right, it was.

HV: Then Panama, I think, opened up.

EMC: And Alaska. But Hawaii was a neater assignment. I should have asked you about your two years in New York. Did you ever have time off, weekends, and vacation time, and did you go anywhere?

HV: We went to Atlantic City once and had a hysterical time. We stayed in one of the big hotels and I think we were the only three people there. I don't remember much.

EMC: Did you go home on weekends? Could you get back to New Britain at all?

HV: I think so. These are all very hazy.

EMC: Right, it was a long time ago. You were assigned to Hawaii and you said within two weeks you were out there. How did you get out there?

HV: I went by train to San Francisco. Actually the day of Roosevelt's funeral, my mother and father drove me down with another WAVE who eventually became my sister-in-law. She was one of my roommates.

EMC: For heaven's sake. That's interesting.

HV: They were driving us down to New York to put me on the train to San Francisco and we got the word, we were on Riverside Drive, through the radio to get out of the car and salute toward Washington during Roosevelt's funeral.

EMC: Oh, that was interesting.

HV: So that dates the time I started from New York and I can't tell you what that was. When I got out to San Francisco, I flew out to Hawaii on Pan Am, I think, in a flying boat. It took fifteen to seventeen hours.

EMC: Oh, that was a long time on a plane. And there were admirals on this plane as well.

HV: I was a JG at the time and all the rest were admirals, and when I got to Hawaii I was not the first WAVE to be in Hawaii, but I was the first WAVE to be flown in. That's what I was told.

EMC: Isn't that interesting. A distinction.

HV: It was because Aunt Mary pulled some strings on that one, I think.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting. Did you have any opportunities to talk to these admirals who were on the plane?

HV: Yes. They signed a short snorter, a dollar bill which I still have.

EMC: The dollar. Right.

HV: They were very pleasant.

EMC: That's good. So when you landed there where were you assigned?

HV: I was assigned to the Pacific Fleet Radio Station, which was in Wahiawa. It was in the middle of Oahu and right opposite Scofield Barracks, the army base up there. We were right in the middle of the pineapple fields.

EMC: Oh.

HV: And four of us had a house and I can remember the Poinsettia plants that were up to the second floor, tremendous. We were at the Pacific Fleet Radio Station that funneled all naval traffic to and from the Pacific. All messages had to go through us. We broke all the messages to be sure that they would be received properly and then sent them out.

EMC: So you were decoding again.

HV: I was decoding and coding.

EMC: How large was that office? How many WAVES were there? Was it big?

HV: Big.



EMC: Big operation. Did you go out with anybody from New York? From the Port Authority?

HV: No. I went by myself.

EMC: So you had to meet new people.

HV: Yes.

EMC: And get together with them.

HV: This is kind of a silly thing. The first night I got there, they were having a dance and one of the men saw me and asked me if I'd like to go to the dance and I said, "Sure". So I got into my white uniform and went to a cocktail party before the dance. They gave me a tall glass filled with ice and one ounce of Southern Comfort and then they filled it up with champagne.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake

HV: And I floated the whole night on one drink.

EMC: Oh, I can imagine, kind of strong.

HV: No, I don't think it was.

EMC: Oh, really.

HV: But I don't dare have it again because my memory of a happy evening might change.

EMC: You don't know what the reaction would be.

HV: Yes.

EMC: But anyway, so that was just after you arrived.

HV: The day I arrived.

EMC: After a long flight.

HV: There was a big contingent of men out there and they were a very nice group and very smart and they were working on really top, top secret stuff. I mean way up. We coded top secret messages, but their work exceeded that classification.

EMC: Oh, higher

HV: They may have been working on the bomb or something. I don't know.

EMC: Isn't that interesting. You were in Hawaii when VE Day occurred. Was there any response to that that you remember, if you can? In May of 45.

HV: VE Day?

EMC: Yes. Victory over Europe, as you know.

HV: I don't remember.

EMC: Okay. Were you on a rotating schedule again in Hawaii?

HV: Yes, and we also had to censor outgoing mail.

EMC: Oh, so you had to look at outgoing mail as well?

HV: Not officers' mail but enlisted. We had to read all their letters and cross out stuff we thought might be of interest to the enemy. I hated it. I hated that part of it, reading other peoples letters, but that is one thing we had to do.

EMC: So you had a busy job, lots of coding and decoding and reading and censoring mail. Kind of interesting. Was the office congenial again?

HV: Oh, very.

EMC: And your roommates congenial?

HV: Yes, but one of the girls I lived with was raped when I was there.

EMC: Oh, my heavens.

HV: Which was very sad.

EMC: Did she stay in the service?

HV: Yes.

EMC: She did. Oh, that's horrible. Do you know of anybody who was discharged from the WAVES for any infraction of any sort or for disciplinary reasons?

HV: No.

EMC: What did you do socially?

HV: We had a wonderful time. We had a jeep on our days off and we would go to the cook and get steaks, which were absolutely wonderful. When we ate them in the dining room, they were cooked to death and when we cooked them ourselves they were delicious. I went to Honolulu only three times when I was there. It was just so overrun with people. And we just had a wonderful time swimming and body surfing on the north part of the island. We couldn't use our surf boards then because they were afraid that maybe Japanese would come in on a surf board. We did body surfing and we had picnics in a mixed group, and it was fun.

EMC: Oh, that's great.

HV: Most of the men were married. I will say that.

EMC: Oh, I see.

HV: It was just friendly.

EMC: Did you ever get a chance to go to any of the other islands?

HV: I went to Kauai and I went to Hawaii.

EMC: Now is that on vacation time or weekends?

HV: On liberty days.

EMC: And, I assume, you had to fly out then.

HV: Had to fly out. One the girls in my class at college came from Kauai, so I saw her.

EMC: I was going to ask you a few other questions about Hawaii. How far were you from Honolulu? You said you only went there three times.

HV: I was right in the middle of the island and I can't tell you how far.

EMC: I see.

HV: So many people made Honolulu unattractive to us. It turned out that a cousin of my husband's lived there and I tried, I don't know how many times, to get in touch with them without success. And then people would come in from New Britain on shore leave.

They'd look me up and we'd have dinner in different parts of the island.

EMC: Now were you married at that time?

HV: No.

EMC: Do you remember VJ Day in August 1945, because you were still there on the islands?

HV: I sure do and here's another story.

EMC: That's fine.

HV: When VJ Day happened I guess everything broke loose and we ended up after much drinking with, I think it was eight people, including the commander, playing tennis with two tennis racquets on each side of the net. The place went absolutely berserk. And we had to go on watch the next morning and I'll never forget, ever, ever in my life the doctor on the post who came in with big tall glasses of chocolate milk shakes for all of us and ice cream cones. We needed something like that to keep going. That was fun and thoughtful.

EMC: In the morning, right. I heard they had a big parade in early September of 1945. Now that was in Honolulu. How did you feel about the end of the war? What were your feelings about it?

HV: I was that glad it was over.

EMC: Absolutely. What was the highest rank that you achieved in the Navy?

HV: Lieutenant.

EMC: Now when did that happen?

HV: That happened after I got home from Hawaii.

EMC: After you were discharged.

HV: After I was discharged, but I was home when the promotion came through.

EMC: Oh, isn't that interesting. After the fact.

HV: I don't think I even had time to put on my two stripes. I can't remember them on my uniform.

EMC: Now did you stay in Hawaii until you were discharged in 1946, after VJ Day?

HV: I came home on the SOLACE, and I was discharged in New York City.

EMC: And when was that?

HV: I remember being met at the Berlin station. I think it was on Thanksgiving Day.

EMC: Oh, so you had stayed there through November.

HV: And I was met by my family at the Berlin station. One of them had a violin and one of them had a bugle and the other had a violin. I don't know. So I was welcomed home. And I think it was Thanksgiving because they were a family that usually got together on Thanksgiving.

EMC: Right, so you stayed in Hawaii after VJ Day.

HV: Yes, and I was made head of the watch, too.

EMC: And what did that entail?

HV: I was in charge of the whole decoding room and machines that sent the messages in and out. And I did not know one bit about any of these enormous machines. I will never, never, never talk down chief petty officers who managed the machines. They were the back bone of the Navy. And they liked me, and they could have made mincemeat out of me because of my ignorance.

EMC: Right. They could have discriminated against you.

HV: They were just wonderful.

EMC: Oh, that's good. They had long service and knowledge.

HV: They were my father's age. They were just wonderful.

EMC: I know some of them resented the WAVES and the women in the Navy.

HV: I think if you treated them well, they treated you well.

EMC: Did anybody else ever complain about discrimination or harassment?

HV: No.

EMC: Any other WAVES?

HV: No.

EMC: You said you came back on the SOLACE, which is a hospital ship, and you mentioned when we were chatting that it was a horrible trip back.

HV: It was horrible. We went through the end of a typhoon. But that's not what made so many people sick. They made themselves sick even before we untied from the dock in Honolulu. There were 200 girls seasick. Conditions of the bathrooms and all were actually horrible. Four of us of the main ward, I'm not saying all of the ship, but the main

ward we were in went up on the deck and we played bridge and we got through the mess that way.

EMC: Got through the trip. And you said you were discharged in New York City. Was that a lengthy process? Do you remember what you had to go through to get discharged?

HV: I can't remember anything about it. I think it was probably very simple.

EMC: Did you receive any medals for your service in the WAVES?

HV: No. I had ribbons.

EMC: How did you feel about leaving the Navy?

HV: Oh, I was ready to go on.

EMC: Would you have stayed in?

HV: No.

EMC: Oh, Okay. So you had your wartime service and you were ready to get on with your life, so to speak. Do you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit de corps?

HV: Oh, very definitely.

EMC: Did the WAVES experience change or redirect your life in anyway, career wise or whatever?

HV: I got a job at Time Magazine in communications there through my communications experience.

EMC: Time Magazine in New York City. So you were back there again. That's kind of interesting. Well, so there was an impact there. You kind of followed the same area.

What did you do in communications for Time Magazine?

HV: It concerned gathering news from England which, if sent by wire, was costly, paying by the word. The man I worked for thought that a man in England spoke very fast on the telephone, and we could make transmission much cheaper if we could record his words on a Dictaphone and then type them out. So that had nothing to do with decoding. It was a communications thing.

EMC: Exactly. How long did you work there? This must have been in 1946.

HV: I think about three or four years.

EMC: Back to New York City. You must have liked that. Did you feel that the WAVES service or military service made you more independent or self reliant or were you independent to begin with?

HV: I got to the top of things, but I never really had that much self confidence and I don't think the Navy helped me there either. I think you are born with self confidence.

EMC: I've noticed that women of that era, your era, World War II era, have said that, too. I think it was the attitude toward women then. They couldn't do this, that, or the other thing, so thought you couldn't.

HV: I think that in every college, before you graduate, you should have to have a course in public speaking. That's what I think. But even now, though I know my subject, I can do well sitting down, but once I'm on my feet I am speechless.

EMC: That's people's greatest fear. Public speaking. That's what they say. You have to try to get over it. I know it's difficult. Not anymore. You can forget it.

HV: I'm forgetting that one.

EMC: Yes. Forget that one. Did you maintain any service friendships once the war was over?



HV: Oh, yes. My friend in West Hartford and, of course, my sister-in-law. The gal whose aunt sent me to Hawaii and another cousin of my husband's. Another one who lives in Maine that I hear from regularly. She was on my watch in New York.

EMC: Oh, that's great. That's very good. Did you attend any WAVES reunions after the war?

HV: No.

EMC: Do you belong to any organizations? Any WAVE organizations?

HV: I just joined, though I don't know what its called.

EMC: Women in Military Service for America.

HV: Yes.

EMC: So your registered there. That was great.

HV: I just thought if somebody wanted to get a hold of me.

EMC: That's the way to do it, because you will be in their computer. Right. This is maybe kind of a hard one, but what was the significance of your naval service for you in your life? Did it have any great significance or impact?

HV: I was proud of the fact that I have been able to serve my country. I got my job at Time. As I say, it didn't give me any more self confidence.

EMC: That's good. That's a good answer. Where did you finally settle after the war? You went to work in New York.

HV: And then I came back and I was married. We both came from New Britain. We came out here, built and designed our own house. I painted the whole inside of my home. We lived in Farmington while we were building in 1953.

EMC: Was your husband from New Britain?

HV: Yes.

EMC: Oh, I see, Ok so you married someone from your hometown. Was he in the service at all?

HV: No.

EMC: Very good. Do you have anything else to add? Did you work after you came back in 1953?

HV: I didn't work, but I've done a lot of community service. I was very involved with the Red Cross. I was the Chapter Board secretary for years.

EMC: In the community here after you moved back in 1953.

HV: I worked at the Red Cross. I worked in the blood bank for about thirty-five years. I gave a lot of blood myself. I was secretary. I was on the Board. I have no connection with it now. When our church was rebuilt, it used to be on Church Street, First Church. I was head of one of the three main building committees, decorating and getting all the supplies, kitchen equipment, desks and the whole works. That was a three year job. This was all volunteer work, and I've been very active at the New Britain Museum of American Art.

EMC: Oh, great.

HV: I was one of the first on the Museum's women's committee and I was secretary treasurer for twenty-two years and I'm still very active.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

HV: But I never worked.

EMC: Did you have any children?

HV: No.

EMC: Any other comments on your service? Anything we've forgotten.

HV: I don't know. I think I've told you a lot of things.

EMC: Thank you very much for your comments on your WAVES service.