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HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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Ruth Lovejoy Small

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Interviewee: Ruth Lovejoy Small

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: March 26, 2003

EMC: This is an Oral history with Ruth Small, who served in the WAVES in World War II as a parachute rigger. The interview is taking place at her home in Barrington, Rhode Island. Today's date is March 26, 2003. I'm Evelyn Cherpak, the curator of the Naval Historical Collection in Newport, Rhode Island. Ruth, I'm so pleased that you are able to give us some time this morning to tell us about your services in the WAVES in World War II. I liked to begin the interview by asking you where you were born and when you were born.

RS: 8-12, 1919.

EMC: Where?

RS: In Boston, Massachusetts.

EMC: So you were born in Boston and what did your father do for a living there?

RS: He was with the telephone company as a complaint supervisor.

EMC: Did your mother work at all?

RS: No, but she taught music. Piano. She had students.

EMC: Interesting. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

RS: I had a brother that was in the army and he was a lieutenant colonel overseas. I had a sister that was a WAC; she was a chaplain's assistant.

EMC: So you were really a military family in World War II.

RS: Right. My father was all uniform. He was in the Spanish American War, the Cuban Rebellion, the First World War.

EMC: That's amazing. Was he in the army?

RS: Yes.

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

RS: It was called Forest Hill. It's really Jamaica Plain.

EMC: Did you graduate from high school there?

RS: I went to high school. It was called the high school of practical arts. The only reason I went there was because they didn't have courses at Jamaica Plain High School that I wanted to take. So my mother said I want to send you to practical arts. The town paid, Roxbury. I think it was on Rock St., where it was. So I could go there.

EMC: What kind of things did you learn at Practical Arts High School?

RS: I was studying designing. That was what I was doing as I got out.

EMC: Clothing design?

RS: Yes.

EMC: Interesting. When did you graduate from the Practical Arts High School?

RS: 1937.

EMC: What did you do after high school? Did you work?

RS: I worked for a while, but then I went to designing school.

EMC: Where was that?

RS: That was right in Copley Square, Boston. It was the modern school of applied art.

EMC: Oh, how interesting. Did you finish there?

RS: Yes. I got a scholarship. It was just a two year course and I took it in one. When I got out, that's when the war had started. Someone that was going to school with me there was a Japanese girl. She had her husband in Harvard University studying Government and in a hurry they left. It was just before the war was declared. She was already at home.

EMC: Right. The war broke out on December 7, 1941. Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked and what your reaction was?

RS: I was sitting in the living room with my father and we heard it on the radio.

EMC: What was your reaction?

RS: I was shocked, because I had gone to school with a Japanese girl and she was beautiful. She had presents on her robes and things. She was of royalty.

EMC: Isn't that something. Did you work after you graduated from the one year course you were taking?

RS: When we got out. When we graduated. That's when they were just taking in ranks. At the time there was not much employment. There were about four of us that went in and signed up for the Navy. The next week I had a call from Nason College. They wanted me to be with the Art Department, but I couldn't go, accept the fellowship.

EMC: You acted quickly.

RS: I would have had a different type of life.

EMC: Right, if you had gone to Maine and Nason College.

RS: I had signed with the Navy and I couldn't get out.

EMC: How did you hear about the WAVES? Do you remember how you heard about them?

RS: We had discussed it, the girls at school.

EMC: What was attractive about the Navy vice the WACS or the SPARS, or the women marines?

RS: Conversations with everybody and hearing people talk. They gave me the idea that they were more of a female or feminine than it was going into the Army. I felt that I had maybe the abilities to do something in the WAVES rather than in the Army.

EMC: Oh, I see. Did you feel a sense of patriotism at that time?

RS: Oh, yes. I've always been patriotic.

EMC: Did you feel that patriotism was a motivating factor in your joining the WAVES? Wanting to serve your country?

RS: Yes, because my family was very patriotic. My father was patriotic.

EMC: That's great. Did you enlist in Boston?

RS: Yes, I did.

EMC: Do you remember any procedures you had to follow when you went to the Causeway in Boston.

RS: Yes.

EMC: Did you have to take tests?

RS: No. We did a lot of paperwork for them. Then we had to go through all our shots and everything, the medical end of it.

EMC: How did you parents feel about your joining the WAVES?

RS: My father was shocked, but being so military himself he was all for it.

EMC: Was he all for your sister joining the WACS?

RS: Yes.

EMC: So there must have been three stars in their window?

RS: They did.

EMC: With all three of you in the service.

RS: There's an article in the paper that you may want to read. That the whole family was for the cause.

EMC: Right, because I was going to ask you if there was publicity about your joining the WAVES. Was that in the Boston papers?

RS: It was in several papers. The Boston Globe and I think it was the West Roxbury Transcript, the Jamaica Plain News. There were several of them.

EMC: So you got publicity as a result of the family serving. Do you remember the date, roughly the month, when you enlisted in the WAVES?

RS: I was inducted on May 18, 1943.

EMC: Did you leave immediately for basic training after your induction?

RS: Yes, I did.

EMC: Were you trained at Hunter College?

RS: Yes.

EMC: In New York City?

RS: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember how your day was structured at Hunter College?

RS: Very disciplined.

EMC: How did you react to the discipline?

RS: It didn't bother me. My father was a very strict man, so I was used to it.

EMC: No shock there. Can you describe your living conditions at Hunter and your roommates, if you remember them?

RS: We were in bunks and we were in rooms. There were about six to a room. It was in apartments.

EMC: Yes. The apartments had been converted.

RS: Yes.

EMC: Did you enjoy meeting woman from all over the country, because, I assume, you were with them.

RS: Yes, and I learned a lot about people.

EMC: For example, what did you learn?

RS: I had been what you call more or less cloistered, kept at home. My father was strict and I have never done a lot outside of church work or at home. I had to be very trustworthy. I found some that I couldn't trust and some that I could. I learned a lot in ideals and things like that.

EMC: Right, exposed to all these new people. Did you like the marching and the drilling?

RS: I didn't mind it. But we did have a marine sergeant and he was awfully strict.

EMC: Kept you in line.

RS: It was hot weather.

EMC: Yes. You were there in New York in the summer for about eight weeks. Do you remember anything about the classes that you had to take?

RS: That was basic. Just more or less to learn about the Navy. From there we had to go to other places.

EMC: Sure.

RS: They more or less decided what we were able to do.

EMC: Can you comment at all on the navy uniform that was issued to you? How did you feel about that?

RS: The first one was cotton and it was crummy.

EMC: Oh, really.

RS: I don't have it now. But it was alright. I mean the style wasn't bad. It had like a little fitted jacket and the gored skirt.

EMC: You got the summer uniform, I guess.

RS: It was cotton.

EMC: A lot of people commented on the navy uniform as being nicer and prettier than the WACS or the Marines.

RS: Oh, it was.

EMC: Yes, smarter. Did you have any limited time off?

RS: No.

EMC: So you never got a chance to go into New York City?

RS: Oh, yes. After we had graduated we were able to go in, because some of us stayed there after the graduation. We weren't billeted in any other area.

EMC: Did you have the opportunity to participate in any extracurricular activities, such as the singing platoon or the newspaper?

RS: No. I was designated to run the officer's club coffee house for quite some time. I got very perturbed and I went to my higher officer and I said, "I didn't come into the navy to

make coffee for the officers. "I said, "I came in to do a job." I said, "Can you billet me somewhere?" and that's what happened.

EMC: Was this at Hunter?

RS: Yes.

EMC: Isn't that interesting.

RS: I didn't go off with the rest of my class. I was a hostess.

EMC: So this was an addition to your education.

RS: This was after I had gotten through.

EMC: Oh, after you had gotten through and finished the training period.

RS: That's when I was able to go into New York.

EMC: So you were designated as a hostess.

RS: Yes.

EMC: Was this for the male or female officers?

RS: Both.

EMC: Over at Hunter.

RS: Yes.

EMC: Oh, so you stayed on?

RS: Yes.

EMC: That's interesting. Do you know how long that lasted?

RS: No, I don't remember, because they finally came through with two choices. I'd either go to Lakehurst to Parachute Rigging School or go to Washington. At the time I was going with an Annapolis man.

EMC: Oh, you were.

RS: Yes. He was at Annapolis at the time and I felt, well, if I really loved him distance would tell. He wanted to get married in the chapel in Annapolis.

EMC: How nice.

RS: Yes. I decided if I really loved him, the further away I went I'd forget him. So I chose Corpus Christi, Lakehurst, New Jersey first.

EMC: You chose the Parachute Rigger School?

RS: Yes.

EMC: Well, let's just double back up a little bit. Did anything amusing or interesting happen during your WAVES training at Hunter?

RS: Yes.

EMC: What was that?

RS: One of my friends, a male friend from home was almost like a brother to me, he was on a ship that had come in and he was an officer and I couldn't even speak to him. Because we'd march by and he'd be standing in the corner and he'd shake his head. I couldn't say hi or anything, because that was while I was still in training.

EMC: Yes, no officer, enlisted fraternization at all. That's kind of interesting. Did you have to undergo white glove inspections? Did you have any problems with those?

RS: No, I didn't.

EMC: Or regimental reviews?

RS: No.

EMC: Did the girls in your room get along with each other?

RS: Yes, because they were all scared to death.

EMC: Oh, really.

RS: They seemed to be. But I think they were just taking everything in.

EMC: So there were no problems?

RS: Accepting.

EMC: You decided to choose to go to Parachute Rigger School in Lakehurst, New Jersey.

What did the schooling entail? What did you do there?

RS: We went to classes every day.

EMC: What were the classes in?

RS: It was all about parachutes. What they were made of, what you had to do to pack them. It was at the Blimp station in Lakehurst. We learned about blimps, we learned about mending them, we learned about jumping. We had to run machines and I had worked for Singer for a very short period of time as an instructor, so I knew machines.

EMC: Sewing machines?

RS: Yes. All kinds. Being a parachute rigger you have to mend harnesses with a harness machine. You have to run the big machines.

EMC: Oh, I see.

RS: So that was a help. Tensile strengths of the shroud lines, everything. Anything to do with parachutes and the materials. All about silk, all about the different tensile strengths and everything.

EMC: Well, that seemed to be up your alley because of your design background.

RS: That's it. I had the background.

EMC: That was a wise choice for them. How long was the school? The advance training there.

RS: I think I can tell you. I think I have the dates, because I have a card of graduation.

EMC: Okay. Do you think it was six weeks?

RS: It was a number of weeks.

EMC: Where were you domiciled at Lakehurst? Did you have your own barracks?

RS: Yes. We had barracks just like the men.

EMC: Yes, the standard barracks.

RS: Nothing fancy.

EMC: Nothing fancy. It was the military. Did you feel that you fit into this niche of becoming a parachute rigger? Did you feel this was your niche?

RS: I enjoyed it because it furthered my other education.

EMC: When you got out, did you feel you were competently trained and able to perform your job?

RS: Yes. All the time we were in the Navy we studied.

EMC: How many people went to the Parachute Rigger School, in your class?

RS: I don't remember. We even had men.

EMC: Oh, you had men, too?

RS: Yes. It was for both.

EMC: That's interesting. So the men were parachute riggers as well.

EMC: As the WAVES.

RS: Oh, yes.

EMC: I wonder if all the women who were sent had some kind of mechanical talent or sewing talent.

RS: They had a lot of backgrounds. Some of them had been teachers of Domestic Science in the schools. That was their background.

EMC: That was a wise choice for the navy to pick people who were in that field. Did you keep in contact with any of these women that you met at Parachute Rigger School?

RS: I still do.

EMC: You do.

RS: One girl right now is in Florida. She has a home in Falmouth and she lives there six months and she'd go six months down to Florida. But she wasn't a parachute rigger. She was a friend from home.

EMC: Oh, so she wasn't in that school. I wonder if you kept in contact with anybody from the Parachute Rigger School.

RS: Yes. A lot of them ended up in California.

EMC: Did you have any opportunity for recreation when you were at Lakehurst?

RS: Not much. We marched to and from school.

EMC: No dating or anything.

RS: We didn't have time. We had to study.

EMC: Just got tests then.

RS: Yes.

EMC: You were tested.

RS: I kept all my scores. I never made a four O.

EMC: But that's tough. Do you remember if you were tested weekly or not?

RS: I don't remember.

EMC: But you did have to pass to graduate.

RS: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did they have a graduation ceremony?

RS: Yes, they did.

EMC: After you finished Parachute Rigger School, this was in '43 still, I assume, where were you assigned? Did you have a choice in your assignment?

RS: No. We were assigned to go to Corpus Christi, Texas.

EMC: That's the naval air station.

RS: Yes. It's a big one.

EMC: Now before you went did you have a opportunity to go home? Did you get any leave?

RS: I don't think I went home. I didn't.

EMC: Went straight to Corpus?

RS: We had so much time to get to Corpus. In the group that I took, I was in charge of a group.

EMC: Oh, you were.

RS: Yes. There was four of us that left for Corpus Christi, Texas.

EMC: How did you get there?

RS: By train, by plane.

EMC: Really.

RS: Yes.

EMC: It must have been a long trek.

RS: It was and we learned a lot on that trek.

EMC: What did you learn?

RS: When we got to one place that was in Texas, we had to take like a water train, a train to get right into the station in the area. Being brought up in my area in Boston, I didn't

have a lot of problems with Black people. And that's where we met, it was right there. We got on the train and we sat down and the Black people asked us to move. We were in the Black section.

EMC: Oh, I see. Segregation at that point in time.

RS: Yes.

EMC: That was a shock.

RS: And then when we got to the parachute loft because they had a Black women that came in to do the cleaning. When she came she put a sign on one of the bathroom doors that we couldn't use it. So I learned a lot.

EMC: Different areas of the country and their reactions to things. Texas must have been a very different place.

RS: A shock.

EMC: I was going to say a very a shock to you, because it's a very different state.

RS: There's a book called Texas Pride and that's really true.

EMC: It is very, very hot at Corpus, so that was a climate change.

RS: It was very. I minded that.

EMC: And no air conditioning.

RS: Yes, we worked in air conditioning.

EMC: Oh, you did.

RS: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's good. But your barracks weren't.

RS: Yes, they weren't bad.

EMC: That's good. How did you react to Texas per se? Can you tell me?

RS: I happened to be in the barracks with a lot of Texas girls.

EMC: Oh, really.

RS: So I learned to love the place, really. A lot of the girls have come from Kingsville.

One had a horse ranch and she was a real help to us.

EMC: Were any of the New Englanders there with you?

RS: Yes. I think there was three in my group. I met girls from all over the country.

EMC: Oh, sure. Now when you were at Corpus, what kind of work were you performing as a parachute rigger?

RS: We started right into packing parachutes.

EMC: Packing them in what?

RS: There's a procedure and you have a long, long table. You have to breakdown these chutes out of the dry locker. Then you hook them up at one end and put the packing pack down at the other end and there's shroud lines. Each one has to be folded in, so that you get no wrinkles or anything. Its just packed. And then you have a certain way of folding it down. When I was in the rigging school, we made our own instruments that we had to use, like our hooks and things like that. So we did our own things that we used to pack with. But there was a procedure. And you fold the silks and you have to fold the shroud lines and each one has to go down into a pack at the end of the table. You have to make sure that there is nothing wrong when you're packing and if you can follow through yourself you were all right, but if you had a team which was originally the way of doing it. I had an Angelus who was working with me so that our name going on the chute pack wasn't right, because we didn't go through all the procedures.

EMC: Yes, you passed it down.

RS: Yes. It was like mass production. But then we complained to Washington. We got a group of girls and we wrote to Washington and we complained that if our name was going to be signed on that chute that we would want to follow through on it.

EMC: All of the procedures.

RS: Right.

EMC: Did they change that?

RS: Before they changed it, we were put on report. We had to march and pick up cigarette butts in our work clothes.

EMC: Why?

RS: Because we were defying.

EMC: All because of your complaint you were punished.

RS: Yes, by our officer.

EMC: So what else did she make you do, besides picking up cigarettes.

RS: That was policing in the grass. It bothered me, but we were trying to get something done that was right and we knew it was right. Because one of the girls had had a chute jumped and the person died. And, of course, her card was in there. Whether she had gone through all the procedures. She was a little girl called Martha Partridge. She had been a teacher in the South. Sweet little girl. She never got over it.

EMC: That's terrible. Did she continue on as a rigger?

RS: Oh, yes. She had to. But we got what we wanted.

EMC: Oh, you did. How long did that take to make the change?

RS: Didn't take long at all.

EMC: You know your punishment today, I think, would have been called into question. It would have probably been illegal, you know, to make you do those menial chores because you complained.

RS: We also had another thing come through from Washington. When the girls began to jump, do the parachute jumping.

EMC: Oh, the girls did?

RS: Yes.

EMC: Why?

RS: Because where they packed them and worked with them and did everything for the parachutes, they wanted them to know all the things that went with it.

EMC: Oh, okay. Including the jump.

RS: Yes.

EMC: So did you jump?

RS: No. I pushed them out. Because they'd get to the opening a lot of times and they almost paralyze.

EMC: Freeze. Yes, you'd be paralyzed. How high up were you?

RS: I don't remember the height. I got a picture. One of the girls, the first girl to do it was from Norwood, Massachusetts.

EMC: Oh, my heavens. Oh, I would never do that. Very scary. You're up in an airplane, they open the hatch.

RS: No, the hatch is open. You don't have to open it.

EMC: And out they go. Wow. And they were picked up, obviously.

RS: They had to do something with the chutes because the chute would bang against their chest.

EMC: Oh, yes.

RS: So they had to manipulate and design something else. But finally we came through and we had a backpack.

EMC: How many times did you do that?

RS: I don't know how many times. I did it quite often.

EMC: So they took the WAVES up in the plane and put the parachute on them.

RS: They had a school right there.

EMC: Parachute Jumping School?

RS: Yes.

EMC: It was part of the Naval Air Station. But it's interesting that they made the WAVES do it.

RS: They didn't make them. They gave them the opportunity.

EMC: Oh, they didn't make them. They gave you the opportunity.

RS: No. It was my preference.

EMC: By choice. And you choice not to?

RS: I didn't want to.

EMC: I don't blame you. I wouldn't want to either. Did many people volunteer for this?

RS: There were quite a few.

EMC: Isn't that something. Amazing. That's very scary. They are brave ladies to do that.

RS: The first one to jump from Norwood, she finally married Kelp , who was in charge of the school there for parachute jumping.

EMC: Oh, for heavens sake. Birds of a feather, I guess. That sounds like very interesting work. Did you find it challenging, or did you find it repetitive and boring?

RS: It was very interesting. Because we learned so many different phases that we had to go through. We never knew where a lot of the chutes came from. They'd be wet and be in bad condition. Maybe they had been out for six months and then come in and packed. We had to do cursory inspections. We had to mend them. We had to dry them out and sometimes run the harness machine and fix the harnesses before they went back out again.

EMC: So they were recycling them.

RS: Yes. They were coming in from all over. It wasn't just for the ones that were training there.

EMC: Right they were coming in from use during the war.

RS: Right.

EMC: That's interesting. Did you make new ones as well?

RS: No. It was all the ones that had come in, either from boats or ships, airplanes.

EMC: For repair, I guess.

RS: Yes.

EMC: I wonder where they were manufactured, the chutes themselves.

RS: That I couldn't tell you. It's probably in the book that I have, because all the information is in there.

EMC: So the new ones were issued?

RS: And they were silk. They started using nylon later on for cargo chutes. We even had cargo chutes.

EMC: What are cargo chutes?

RS: That's when you drop instruments, boats. Anything you drop that isn't a body.

EMC: Yes. It's a cargo chute. So you worked on those as well. That's every interesting. You had to be very adept, I would think, and very precise and careful.

RS: You had to be precise. That was the one thing, because it was very serious. Someone's life was in danger.

EMC: Right, exactly. How many women or men were working with you in this room, I presume? Did you have a long table or something?

RS: We had many tables. It was a big room.

EMC: Did you have your own table? Or did you have to share?

RS: We had one table and then on that table we had a girl at either side, at the prop doing the silks. And then there were three down at the bottom. There was one man and two women. It didn't make any difference, they were all intermingled. Then off to the end of the room was the dry locker where all of the chutes hung that were brought in. So many had parts of the body.

EMC: So somebody must have been killed in the process.

RS: Used it.

EMC: Oh, that's horrible. Now that's quite an experience. How many hours of the day did you work in this area? Was it a standard eight hour a day?

RS: Yes, it was.

EMC: Did you work five or six days a week?

RS: Everyday.

EMC: Did you work on Saturdays?

RS: We had so many days on and then so much time off.

EMC: Oh, I see.

RS: We use to have weekends where we would have maybe two or three days. And then we'd take off, and they'd be a group of us go and see someplace, like we'd go to San Antonio to the opera or we went to Mexico, if we had enough time. And we hired someone to drive.

EMC: That's interesting.

RS: So that we saw some of the area. Went to the Alamo, things like this.

EMC: That's great. Fantastic. I forgot to ask you. When did you arrive at Corpus Christi? Do you remember what month it was in '43, I presume.

RS: Oh, I'd have to look it up.

EMC: But anyway, you were there in probably late '43.

RS: I don't know what month it was. It was divided up. We had to stand duty.

EMC: Watches, maybe.

RS: Yes, at the loft itself and we had to sleep there.

EMC: Why did you have to do that?

RS: We had German prisoners there.

EMC: You did. That's interesting.

RS: We had to be protective of all of our gear in there. Each person was given so many hours on and so many hours off. The one night that we were on, there were two girls, myself and someone else. It was about nine thirty and we heard knocking at the door and it

was the officer on duty. He said, now make sure everything is locked up. One of the German prisoners got out.

EMC: Oh, boy.

RS: So they had to make sure. That was one night that we were standing duty.

EMC: Isn't that interesting. Did you ever see the German prisoners?

RS: Yes, we did. Our mess hall was divided. They were on one side and we were on the other. They looked like scared boys.

EMC: Were there a lot of them there?

RS: Yes, there was quite a few.

EMC: You know that's unknown. I know there were German prisoners in Jamestown, Rhode Island. But there were some at Corpus Christi, which was a very big base, I presume.

RS: It was huge. Yes, it was. Admiral Mason who was on the USS HORNET was the one in charge of our base.

EMC: It was an area, I guess, where flyers were trained as well.

RS: We had officers, we had pilots that were being trained. We had Brazilian pilots being trained and a lot of people in flux there. There was another base out near King's Ranch. That's where Tyrone Power was. He was a marine. But they came to our base to be trained.

EMC: Was that Kingsville?

RS: Yes.

EMC: An air base there. Did you ever see Tyrone Power?

RS: Yes. I shook hands with him and I talked to him.

EMC: He was quite a handsome guy.

RS: He threw a lot of parties.

EMC: Oh, he did.

RS: Yes.

EMC: Did you go to any?

RS: Yes. He invited a lot of the girls.

EMC: Oh, that's nice. What was your opinion of him?

RS: He had a terrific ego.

EMC: Yes, I guess being that good looking.

RS: Especially in uniform.

EMC: That must have been quite a glamorous thing in those days.

RS: He was in charge of the Navy Day. I got a picture of him.

EMC: That's fantastic. That's great. You had quite a career there and a very, very interesting job.

RS: Very interesting career. I didn't mind being there for the two and a half years.

EMC: And for those two and a half years, were you doing the same job as a parachute rigger?

RS: Yes. But I kept taking my tests to get a higher rate.

EMC: What was your rate?

RS: When I came out?

EMC: Yes.

RS: Parachute rigger, 1st class.

EMC: Oh, that's great. So you did progress. So you had to take tests.

RS: We had to study. We had to take tests.

EMC: In order to achieve the next rate.

RS: Right.

EMC: How did the other women feel about their work, the ones in the parachute rigger loft with you? Were they as positive and interested as you?

RS: I think so. They all were in because they felt they were doing good. They were being a help.

EMC: So there was esprit de corps?

RS: Yes, it was. Until later on when they had stopped taking girls. There was a lot more coming in that didn't have the same opinion, ideals or feelings for what they were in for.

EMC: That was interesting. You were in the first group of women.

RS: In for a man or something like that.

EMC: Because, of course, the men were gone. They were in the war. They wanted to go where the men were. You mentioned you traveled during this time period to Mexico and around Texas. Obviously you went with some other WAVES. What other kinds of recreation did they have for you on base that you participated in?

RS: We had to take swimming.

EMC: Oh, you did.

RS: Oh, yes. Because they were getting to the point where Washington was going to send WAVES on ships and up until that time they hadn't. But we had to be able to swim and there were so many hours we had to put in for a day for that.

EMC: Did they have any teams there, like baseball teams or basketball teams of women who competed with others?

RS: I'm not athletic myself. More than I did, hand work and things like that while I was in.

EMC: What kind of hand work?

RS: Knitting.

EMC: Recreational.

RS: Yes. We had a barracks where we had a big room where we could all gather and socialize.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Kind of like a WAVE haven.

RS: Yes.

EMC: Did you have the opportunity to date during that time frame?

RS: Yes.

EMC: Who did you date?

RS: An officer.

EMC: Oh, you did. See that's a no, no. How did you manage to do that without anybody knowing?

RS: They more or less did it and it wasn't made a big issue.

EMC: Oh, Okay. Because there's no fraternization. Now what happened to your Annapolis friend?

RS: We grew apart.

EMC: Because you were far away.

RS: He ended up being an instructor in Annapolis until just recently.

EMC: Isn't that something. So he had a career in the navy.

RS: Right.

EMC: That's interesting. How were you treated during your assignment at Corpus Christi? Did you experience any discrimination or harassment on the job there?

RS: No. I thought that we were treated very decently, even by the men.

EMC: Oh, that's good because you were working with men. Who was your immediate supervisor? Was it a man or a woman?

RS: We had a woman officer over us. And then we had a man and he was very nice. Fred. Fred something.

EMC: Oh, that's good. What did you like about your assignment and what didn't you like about your assignment?

RS: I really didn't have any likes or dislikes. I accepted everything.

EMC: Was there any pressure in this billet?

RS: We had to keep our lockers perfect and we had to bottle our underwear, because the bugs would eat them.

EMC: Oh, so you had problems with vermin in the barracks. Were you in a regular barracks?

RS: Yes.

EMC: With long rows of bunks.

RS: There were four in a cubicle. Two facing this way and two facing towards. Yes, there were four in a cubicle.

EMC: Did you get along?

RS: Yes, we did.

EMC: Have you kept in contact with any of these women?

RS: One of the girls married an officer from Texas and she lived next door to L.B. Johnson's ranch, when she was first married. Then there was another girl that married, after she got out of the service to one from the photo lab and they ended up in Texas. I visited them out there. Then in California, Redwood City, I visited another one, because my husband had to go out there on a scientific glass blowers convention.

EMC: Wow. That's interesting. So you have kept in contact with those ladies. That's great.

RS: They were very nice people.

EMC: I'm sure they were. They were kind of hand picked for that. Do you remember what your pay was?

RS: I use to send it home.

EMC: Oh, you did.

RS: Part of it, yes.

EMC: To support your parents?

RS: No. My father kept it for me.

EMC: In a bank account or something. Do you have any contact with civilians during this time frame in Texas? And, if you did, how did they treat the WAVES or react to them?

RS: There was a woman that opened her house to the WAVES and she was lovely! Call it southern hospitality, I guess it was. But she would let us go and they made the inside of the house over so we could go in and stay over night and use it as a hotel practically. We could even cook there.

EMC: How nice.

RS: We had an Italian girl that use to make a big pan of spaghetti. We would all go and have supper there.

EMC: Oh, that's great.

RS: So we did a lot of that.

EMC: So the civilians were very nice to the WAVES.

RS: I met some through dating officers. They'd have another officer with them with a girl from the town or something. Now the girls looked down on us.

EMC: From the town, Corpus? They probably felt you were competition.

RS: Maybe. I don't know.

EMC: Did they just snub you or what?

RS: Somewhat.

EMC: Because you had an opportunity to go into Corpus itself. Did you keep up with news about the war during this time frame?

RS: I did quite frequently, because my brother would send me a letter. And very often he would send me something in the mail because it was either a German helmet or something like that.

EMC: So he was in Europe?

RS: Yes, he was in Belgium at one time.

EMC: Did you write to your parents or friends regarding your daily events during your time in the WAVES?

RS: I have some letters.

EMC: Wonderful.

RS: I have some letters that were sent to the church. We had a youth group that used to be in the Methodist church. One of the girls took it on her shoulders to write to all of us. We kept writing back to her so that she would know what we were doing.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic. So your letter got to her.

RS: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's fantastic. That's great.

RS: I got one that tells everything we did practically.

EMC: Oh, that's wonderful. I'd love to copy that and send it back to you. You were at Corpus on August 15, 1945, VJ Day. Do you remember that day and your reaction and how you celebrated?

RS: We had a big party at one of the places in town. My brother came because he happened to be in the hospital in Dallas. He was there and we had the photo lab. We had a big dinner out.

EMC: That's great. So it was quite a celebration. I assume you were very happy about the end of the war.

RS: Yes, we were.

EMC: Were you interested in mustering out of the WAVES immediately?

RS: We decided, the group that was going to Massachusetts, because my brother was going home with me, we stopped in New Orleans, because I had never seen New Orleans.

EMC: Were you mustered out of Corpus?

RS: Yes. Then we went to New Orleans on the way home. I bought a dress because I had to think what I had at home.

EMC: Right, after two and a half years. When were you out? When did you get out of the WAVES?

RS: I was discharged November 4th, 1945.

EMC: So it wasn't too long after. A couple of months you stayed on, in the interim after the war ended on August 15th through November 5. You had a good two and a half months. What did you do during that time? You were still doing the parachute rigging.

RS: Yes.

EMC: You did the same job. Did you ever have chance to meet Mildred McAfee, the Director of the WAVES?

RS: I never met her, but I knew of her.

EMC: Everybody did. I assume you were very happy, as I said, when the war ended and you made your way home with your brother and the group from Massachusetts. Did you receive any medals for your service?

RS: Not medals, but I have things from different organizations. I got the papers.

EMC: Oh, yes, your discharge papers. How did you feel about leaving the navy? Were you happy or sad to leave?

RS: It was sad leaving the girls. It was a family.

EMC: Right. Working together for that long. Would you have stayed in if you could have?

RS: I could have. Some of them did.

EMC: Yes, I know they did. If they were needed.

RS: But I wanted to have a home and a family. I didn't want to stay in the navy. I didn't want to be in that kind of profession.

EMC: Did you think that the WAVES during your time in the service was a smoothly run organization?

RS: Yes, I do.

EMC: Do you know of anybody who was discharged for disciplinary reasons.

RS: Yes.

EMC: What did they do?

RS: One girl got married and during the war you couldn't marry.

EMC: So she had to leave.

RS: Yes.

EMC: They did change that policy though as time went on. Did the WAVES experience change or redirect your life in anyway?

RS: Oh, I imagine so.

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

RS: Yes.

EMC: You had to travel.

RS: On my own.

EMC: Did it broaden your horizons?

RS: Yes, think it did. About humanity.

EMC: Did you attend any WAVE reunions after the war? There were a couple in Boston.

RS: And there was one in California. I really didn't get to any of them.

EMC: Did you feel that women after the war wanted to return to domesticity and home life or do you think that their expectations were raised for a career?

RS: I think more of them went back to the home life, because I had a taste of something else.

EMC: That's interesting. You do belong to a WAVE organization now, don't you?

RS: Yes.

EMC: Can you tell me which one it is and how you came upon it?

RS: Unit 118. It's the Ocean State WAVES. The reason I found out about it first was my friend that lives in Falmouth belongs to one. She said, "Ruth have you joined?". "I said, "No." She said, "Why don't you find out if they have one in your area." And then I met Betty Brown.

EMC: She is a member of the Ocean State WAVES, so that's great. What was the significance or your naval career for you and your life? Can you tell us? What did it mean to you?

RS: I learned a lot about people, because I was brought up by a strict father and didn't have the opportunity to socialize much. It made me realize what life was all about.

EMC: Thank you very much, Ruth, for your participation in our oral history program on the WAVES in World War II. We will have this transcribed and send it to you for editing.

Index
Oral History 300, Small Ruth Lovejoy

Barrington, Rhode Island, 1
Boston, Massachusetts, 1
Brown, Elizabeth, 32
Corpus Christi, Texas, Naval Air Station, 13-29; Segregation, Racial, 14, Parachute Packing, Filed Complaint, 16, Punishment, 16, Parachute Jumping, 17-18
Design School, Copley Square, Boston, 3
German Prisoners, 21-22
High School of Practical Arts, Roxbury, Massachusetts, 2
Hunter College, New York, NY, 5-7
Jamaica Plain, childhood home, 2
Kingsville, Texas, 22
Lakehurst, NJ, Parachute Rigging School, 8-12
Mason, Charles P. Admiral, 22
McAfee, Mildred, 30
Nasson College, Art Department, 3
New Orleans, Louisiana, 29
Ocean States Waves, Unit 118, 32
Officers Club Coffee House, 7
Pearl Harbor, Attack on, 3
Power, Tyrone, 22-23
San Antonio, Texas, 21
The Alamo, 21
V-J Day, 29
WAVES, Treatment by civilians, 27-28, Impact on life, 31
Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), 3, Enlistment, 1943, 4, 5; Announcement in Boston Papers, 5