

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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Kennon Blair Henderson Patton

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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
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Interviewee: Kennon Blair Henderson Patton

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Date: May 2, 2003

EMC: This is an oral history with Kennon Patton of Lincoln, RI who served in the WAVES during World War II. Today's date is May 2, 2003. The interview is taking place at my office at the Naval War College, Newport, RI. I'm the curator of the Naval Historical Collection. I'm very pleased that you were able to come down from Lincoln today for the interview on your career in the WAVES. I'd like to begin the interview by asking you where you were born and when you were born?

KHP: I was born in Carrollton, Georgia, on October 9, 1918.

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

KHP: My father had come as school superintendent of the Carrollton County schools, but when he became engaged to my mother, my grandfather asked him to handle all of his financial affairs and he did real estate and insurance.

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

KHP: No. She stayed at home. She finished Agnes Scott College, a girls school. It was called that in Decatur, Georgia. She and her two sisters.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

KHP: I had a brother and then there was a sister who died at birth. The brother was nine years older than I was.

EMC: A little gap in age.

KHP: Yes.

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

KHP: I did, but we spent many summers at Montreat, North Carolina, and two winters in Florida at the Gray Moss Inn. I went to Laurel Falls Camp at Clayton, Georgia, for five summers.

EMC: Where did you graduate from high school?

KHP: Carrollton Georgia High School.

EMC: What year was that?

KHP: 1934.

EMC: Did you go to college after that?

KHP: I did. I went to Agnes Scott for two years. My mother thought I was unhappy. I wasn't, but she transferred me to the University of Georgia and I did blossom.

EMC: Oh, that's great. What did you major in at the University of Georgia?

KHP: Journalism.

EMC: So you were a writer.

KHP: Well, a would be writer.

EMC: Did you work after you graduated in 1938?

KHP: Yes. First, I received a summer Rosenwald Fellowship to Ohio State University with the promise of several more.

EMC: What was that in, may I ask?

KHP: I think, primarily, they hoped I would come back and work with teachers to go into the rural schools. At that time the county schools were not the equivalent to the town schools or city schools. West Georgia College (later University) had a wonderful program and I think that's

how I got the fellowship, because they hoped I would stay, but instead I decided to join the WAVES.

EMC: I see. After college, in 1938, you must have worked somewhere.

KHP: I did work at West Georgia College. I was very active in sports at the University of Georgia. I won horseback riding trophies and swimming trophies. I was asked to teach. Then you didn't have to have a degree in physical education, but I taught teachers how to teach, how to conduct their physical education classes. I did that in combination with being secretary to the President. Also, in the summer, I took students swimming and I would come back with wet hair and take dictation in the President's office.

EMC: Oh, so you wore many hats at that time or were doing many things.

KHP: I did.

EMC: And this Rosenwald fellowship must have been in education, I would presume.

KHP: They were interested in helping rural people and the southern states had more rural people than the northern states. The Rosenwald Fund was very philanthropic.

EMC: But you never went to Ohio State then.

KHP: I did go for the summer on a Rosewald scholarship.

EMC: Oh, you did. Just for the summer.

KHP: I went for three months and they wanted me to go on and get my Masters, but that was when I decided to go into the WAVES.

EMC: I would presume they would after that. You had quite an interesting four years or so after you graduated from college. Did your family have any navy connections at all?

KHP: I had an uncle, Appleton Mandeville, who was my mother's brother. He graduated from Annapolis, but I don't know the date.

EMC: Little bit of connection there. Can you tell me where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked and what your reaction was to this?

KHP: I believe I was in Carrollton and it was just one of horror. I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe anybody would dare attack our navy or our bases .

EMC: It was a stunning feat that they accomplished. How did you hear about the WAVES?

KHP: I think it was publicized and all the men were going into the service. Then I heard women were going in. I knew that at sometime women had been in the service, even in World War I.

EMC: Correct.

KHP: So I investigated and heard all about the WAVES. Then I applied and went to Atlanta for an interview and physical, or at least a time was set up later for the exam. I went for the physical and they said, "You have to gain ten pounds." I went home and ate everything I could eat and then I went back. I hadn't gained a pound. That was then.

EMC: For heaven's sake.

KHP: Now I don't have any difficulty putting on a pound.

EMC: So did they allow you in, despite that fact.

KHP: Yes, they let me in, despite the fact I had not gained ten pounds.

EMC: That's good. What was attractive about the navy vis-à-vis the other services that were accepting women?

KHP: This sounds a little exclusive, but I felt the requirements, the caliber of people they took in seemed a little superior to me than some of the other branches.

EMC: That's true.

KHP: I'm not sure that it's true, but it seemed that way. So that's why I chose the Navy.

EMC: What year was this? Was this 1942?

KHP: It was.

EMC: Because the WAVES were established on July 30, 1942. You were accepted; you took the test, I presume, the physical. Where were you sworn in?

KHP: I believe it was in Atlanta. I'm sure that's where it was.

EMC: That's was where you joined. Did any of your friends join the WAVES?

KHP: No, they didn't. I think most of my friends were just thinking about getting married. A few had already married and some had positions as school teachers or something and couldn't get out of contracts.

EMC: So you were pretty daring and adventuresome to do this. How did your parents feel about your decision to join the WAVES?

KHP: My father had died when I was thirteen. My mother did not disapprove. She always wanted me to do what I thought was the best thing to do. Sometimes she objected to a few things, but she liked the idea. She thought it would be good for me.

EMC: That's good, because some parents were adamantly opposed to their daughters joining the WAVES.

KHP: No, she approved.

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

KHP: I think a little bit. I don't have a clipping, but I do know they did publicize when someone joined any branch of the service. So I feel sure it was in there.

EMC: That was big news in those days. You, as a college graduate, were selected for officer candidate training and that's, of course, at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Do you remember when you began your basic training and how you got there?

KHP

~~EMC:~~ I was in the second WAVE officers class and was ordered to report to Mt. Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts, around the middle of December 1942 and I finished this first course and training on 13 January 1943. (I had indoctrination in Atlanta before arriving.) I believe we were considered apprentice seaman. We received orders to go directly to Smith College at Northampton, MA, in January 1943. We were billeted at Hotel Northampton and marched back and forth to Smith College for classes and for drilling. They sent, as I remember, either money or train tickets to go to Northampton.

EMC: So you had to go by train?

KHP: I went by train.

EMC: Did you go all by yourself?

KHP: I did. But I had been to Europe, not by myself but with friends that I met on the trip. I toured there after I graduated from the University of Georgia. I had always gone to camp.

EMC: So you traveled. You weren't unused to something like that. When you arrived at Mt. Holyoke College you were in the second class, which was quite early in the training period. Do you remember how your day was structured there?

KHP: We were busy, I remember that. One funny thing I do remember is that we always heard over the intercom the uniform of the day. One day they gave, I believe, it was galoshes. Quickly they came back over, "Recind that: Boots". The snow had gotten heavier in the interim. We always enjoyed hearing the announcements.

EMC: Where were you domiciled?

KHP: Hotel Northampton. While at the Hotel Northampton there was a severe case of food poisoning and we were dropping out "like flies". Scuttlebutt was that the Germans were trying to poison us. It caused quite a scare.

KHP: It's strange, but we were so busy studying and drilling and everything that somehow while I got along with my roommate, we wrote a few times, but we didn't keep up. I did keep up with Elizabeth Gerrard Blackwelder and we will call and write. She's in California now.

EMC: That was the case with most of the girls, because they were so busy and then they were sent off. Do you remember the kind of classes you had to take?

KHP: Yes. Of course, we were drilled. We had to drill and march. I remember one time they called for me, Midshipman Henderson, to lead the platoon. So I said, "For—waard, ma-arch!" (In my best enunciated and projected Southern accent) And the instructor quickly barked out, "Forward, march!" in military style. But any how, everybody got a kick out of that. It seems to me we had math classes and I know our communications classes at Smith College in Northampton MA taught us encrypting and decrypting. They were not things that we actually used when we went to the coding office Charleston. But it was to introduce us to the process.

EMC: Yes, because in communications you were in cryptology and you would need that. Did you find the classes easy or difficult? Do you remember studying?

KHP: We had to study very hard and I wondered if I would pass. We were introduced to some communications machinery. I felt sometimes the machinery that was used was difficult. I had been used to certain types of office machines, but the Navy had different ones. With a small machine, we encrypted messages. For a while I was confused, but it became very simple later.

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

KHP: Yes, because I had been to camp, a very strict camp, but camp that was fun and ahead of its time. We obeyed the rules so I was used to doing that. In school, of course, we had regulations, so it was not difficult to transition to the Navy.

EMC: That's true for most women of the time, because they were well disciplined at home. Did you like the marching and the drilling?

KHP: Yes, I did. I got a certain amount of satisfaction out of that.

EMC: Did you have white glove inspections on Saturday morning?

KHP: Yes. We did.

EMC: Did you pass those?

KHP: Yes, we always passed. I can't remember having any problem with that.

EMC: That's good. What did you think of the Navy uniform that was issued to you?

KHP: I liked it. In fact, I liked it better than Army olive drab. I liked navy blue.

EMC: It's very attractive.

KHP: I remember Filene's of Boston came out and measured us and the uniforms were bought through them. I'm sure they didn't manufacture them.

EMC: That's still a famous store here. Did you have any limited time off when you were at Northampton?

KHP: Yes, we were encouraged to take "leave". I went two weekends to New York and one to Boston. I can remember we wanted to stay at the Waldorf Astoria, so I wrote and then I signed Kennon Henderson. I got a letter back saying, "I'm so sorry, our policy does not permit a woman to stay in a room with a man." I wrote back indignantly; "I am a woman." We were two women and we were treated very graciously.

EMC: Oh that's nice. So you did have three weekends away.

KHP: Yes, those are the only times I remember going away.

EMC: Did you ever meet Captain Underwood who was head of the school there?

KHP: Yes. I did. I don't remember if I met him personally. He spoke to us and, yes, I remember him.

EMC: Did you ever meet Captain Mildred McAfee who was the director of the WAVES?

KHP: Captain McAfee spoke to us once at Smith College, Northampton. I was very impressed with her sincerity, her kindness, her pleasing manner, her graciousness, and her posture. I admired her very much. She did visit Charleston and Pearl Harbor and those of us off duty were able to see and speak to her.

EMC: Sometimes she came to graduations. You managed to last through the eight weeks at Northampton and passed, I assume, with flying colors. When you were ready to graduate, did you express a preference for the kind of assignment you wanted or were you assigned by the navy?

KHP: I believe I was assigned by the navy. But something interesting happened just as we were about to graduate. I was sent to the infirmary. I didn't know why. They examined me and then she whispered to me. I couldn't imagine why the nurse whispered. She said, "You have measles". How I got them I don't know. They told me I would have to stay on in Northampton, so I was the only person left, except for the nurse who checked on me. I was in the infirmary all by myself. The nurse checked on me regularly.

EMC: So you couldn't participate in your own graduation?

KHP: I don't think so. I missed it. But there was something right after graduation as I remember. The others didn't leave that very day. My California WAVE friend wrote and sent a telegram to my mother stating, "Your darling daughter has the measles. Don't worry. She's well taken care of". This same WAVE is the one I went with fifty years later to the WIMSA Memorial Dedication in Washington, DC.

EMC: That is quite an unusual experience.

KHP: We were promoted to the rank of ensign at the completion of our approximately two-month course at Holyoke and at Smith. We were thrilled when Captain Mildred H. McAfee, Head of the WAVES, inspected our class. Everyone, except for me, left around 24 March 1943 for a short home leave before reporting to our new assignments. I stayed an extra week or ten days in the Smith Infirmary recovering from a case of Measles. The Smith woman doctor and the nurse were wonderful to me. Several WAVE friends ordered flowers for me. Of course, when I left I was traveling alone, not like some of the others in groups. They gave me tickets but no money. Maybe I had a check. I'm not sure. I hadn't cashed it, so I can remember I had to take a taxi from one station to another, the train station. The taxi driver held out his hand and I said, I don't have any money. I can remember I felt like crying, but they hadn't thought to give me cash. I think they gave me adequate funds.

EMC: A check.

KHP: Certainly, to get home.

EMC: Oh, dear. Kind of an oversight. Did you go home after that?

KHP: I did. I had just a short time at home before leaving. I was given permission to report to duty two days late.

EMC: Where were you assigned? What was your station?

KHP: I was assigned to Charleston, S.C.

EMC: So the Charleston Naval Base. That's a big place.

KHP: I was not at the Naval Base. I was at the Fort Sumter Hotel which the Navy had taken over. The lovely hotel right there on the Battery. We lived in WAVE Officers Quarters on 2 South Battery.

EMC: What was the organization that you were with then?

KHP: Communications.

EMC: Ok. Were you living in this hotel?

KHP: No. There were no quarters for living, but we all found places to live. Usually four or five WAVES would go together and rent a house. I think it's interesting that we rented, once, five of us, a little house on 16 Longitude Lane. Cars couldn't even go on the lane, but it was registered in the New York Social register as a "dilatory domicile." We thought that was funny. It was a darling little house. Later we moved to 14 Elliott Street and 51 Church Street. It was at our Church Street residence that we four WAVES who lived there had a tea and invited 150 people. Several Commanders, for whom we had worked, and their spouses were invited as were the famous artist Alfred Hutton and his wife. Only ten people were unable to come. On 9 March 1944 an ALNAV was issued which promoted WAVE ensigns to lieutenant (j.g.). We had been ensigns for one year and twenty-two days and missed the promotion by nine days. Another ALNAV was issued to include our Smith Class.

EMC: Isn't that something.

EMC: You were lucky. So you met up with WAVES there that you had known at Northampton.

KHP: Yes. Some stayed in the BOQ but many of us preferred to rent houses. We thought the rent was exorbitant. I remember one house rented for one hundred and twenty dollars a month and we just thought it was highway robbery.

EMC: Well, I guess in those days it was expensive.

KHP: It did seem high.

EMC: Because you didn't make that much as a WAVE.

KHP: No.

EMC: You probably made.

KHP: I forget. I think we received one hundred and twenty five a month, something like that.

EMC: Something around there. So you needed to have others live with you and chip in. So your office space was in the hotel?

KHP: Yes. The entire time hotel had been taken over as Army-Navy headquarters.

EMC: And your living quarters were elsewhere. What exactly did you do as a communicator?

KHP: I encrypted and decrypted messages. I can remember they told us we could never divulge this. Well, of course, I couldn't divulge the process of encryption if I tried to, because mostly we had machinery on which to encrypt. One of my roommates drove a Navy station wagon and wore a pistol. She met the train each day and carried classified mail to the Communications Office at the Fort Sumter Hotel where we worked. She was to meet the train for mail late one night. We were all to go to a concert earlier to hear Enzo Pinza, the famous tenor. He was splendid. After the concert we went up to thank him. He was very gracious to us and then said, "You WAVES came in a station wagon. I was not met at the train by the committee members who engaged me and had to take a taxi. Do you mind taking me to my hotel?" We said we'd be delighted. Just then a committee member came up to tell him "how glorious his singing was" and that if he'd wait while she gathered some papers and did a few more things, she'd take him to his hotel. Mr. Pinza, bowed and replied, "Thank you Madam, but I am committed to these WAVES!" We even took him by our house first, fed him, and had delightful conversation, before taking him to his hotel. It was an evening to remember!

EMC: How many WAVES worked with you?

KHP: There were three rotating watches. Usually, I think about ten officers and our watch officer. I forget the terminology for him.

EMC: So it was basically women with this one other man.

KHP: Usually there were one or two men in addition to the WAVE officers. We received the messages and encrypted or decrypted them. We received them from intelligence which was through a window.

EMC: That's kind of interesting. It's a little more challenging I would think than the other types of work. Did you find it challenging?

KHP: I did. I think we all did.

EMC: You must have had a secret clearance, I presume.

KHP: Yes, we did. Because somebody went to Carrollton, my home town, and checked on me. The word got around.

EMC: If you were doing that kind of work, I assume that they would check on you. So you worked on rotating watches.

KHP: Yes.

EMC: Did you find that acceptable or was it difficult to get used to?

KHP: No. It was novel, but I wouldn't want to do it all my life. There were times when it was great to have the day off. We could go shopping or sight seeing or go to the beach. Even the evening watch, of course, wasn't bad. We had to sleep the morning after the night watch. We loved it.

EMC: Were all the women that you lived with communicators as well?

KHP: Yes, in our case. Some of them weren't. Sometimes we weren't able to rent a house for longer than three or four months. Owners would go to Caesar's Head to escape the heat and the Navy. Later our family ended up buying a home there. Those who came back wanted their homes. We moved four or five times during two years to different homes.

EMC: Oh, I see. That's kind of disruptive.

KHP: It wasn't too bad.

EMC: You were young. You could cope with that.

KHP: Yes.

EMC: You probably didn't have too many belongings.

KHP: No, we didn't tend to acquire things. We had probably two sets of winter uniforms. We used the cleaners a good bit. (Three sets of summer uniforms.)

EMC: Sure. Absolutely. Could you wear your own clothes out on the street when you were off duty?

KHP: No. We could wear civilian garb at the beach. We changed at the beach. But we could not go about in civilian clothes.

EMC: Right. You're always in uniform to identify you as military personnel.

KHP: Yes.

EMC: Did you have to undergo any additional training to do this communication work?

KHP: There was always ongoing training with new machinery or equipment processing. Nothing formal. We didn't have to go to any other place.

EMC: You mentioned that the WAVES you lived with were good friends, I assume, you went places with them. Did you date any men? Any Navy men at the Charleston Naval Base during that time frame?

KHP: Occasionally. The men that we really knew mostly were those that were in Charleston at the Fort Sumter Hotel where we worked.

EMC: I see.

KHP: My daughter wants me to tell you about one experience. We did get to meet other foreign officers. A few of those who were on our side who would come through occasionally. Some French officers came through, then English officers did. I can remember being introduced to one English officer and I thought he was very nice. He told me that his ship would be in dry dock and asked if I would like to come out and have dinner on the ship. I thought that sounded interesting, so I went. At about, maybe, ten thirty I said, "I must leave now." We went to look and the gang plank was gone. The water had been drained from the dock. I said, "I have to get home." I had to go to work in the morning. The captain of the ship was very gracious. He had sat with us all the time, but he finally said, "You'll have to excuse me; I must go to bed now. I have to be up early." I thought what am I going to do? At two a.m., that's when they were able to put the gang plank up, I can remember my date and I walked across the Charleston Navy Yard. We met two sailors coming toward us. Of course, they could see he was an Englishman. One of them said, "Benedict Arnold". I thought it was so funny, as though you shouldn't be with an English officer.

EMC: That was quite an experience. You could have been trapped on the ship and been late for work.

KHP: I had difficulty getting home. My date waited with me at the lamp post until the bus came. So that was another twenty five minute trip.

EMC: Right. Because the Base is several miles out from Charleston.

KHP: Yes, it was.

EMC: You didn't have an opportunity to go any further afield. Did you find your work at all boring at any point in time?

KHP: Never.

EMC: Good. Were you working on weekends? Saturday and Sundays?

KHP: Regardless. Our rotating shifts and days off varied. It was in Charleston that we had the pleasure of seeing and enjoying again our own Navy Captain Mildred H. McAfee who came 20 Feb. 1945 for inspection and a seated dinner at the Officers Mess. (A seating chart for the occasion is attached.)

EMC: How were you treated by the Naval Officer in charge? Were you well treated?

KHP: Yes, very well treated. We respected him. I don't remember his name and we did have different coding officers from time to time. Sometimes the men were sent to sea, but I think they had respect for the WAVES and treated us with respect and kindness.

EMC: So no discrimination or ill treatment or harassment at all.

KHP: None that I personally experienced.

EMC: What did you like about this assignment?

KHP: I enjoyed being in Charleston. I had been to Charleston briefly before, but I got to know it extremely well, the people also. It was just very pleasant.

EMC: Great. Did anything other than that date with the Englishman happen that was exciting, amusing or different during your stay in Charleston?

KHP: This was kind of funny. There was a Mr. Walker. I mentioned the house on Longitude Lane. I did not tell you that I think he was sixty-five years old. He kept one room down below; it was completely separate. He had his bath and we had ours. It was a two story house. He would sometimes go outside and call up the window to my room to ask something. One time he called up and said, "Ensign Henderson, do you have a bathing suit?" I thought that was so strange! I said, "Well, yes, I do." And he said, "Do you have a two-piece one?" I said, "I do." He said,

"Could I borrow the bottom part? Joe DiMaggio is here and said he does not have a bathing suit. I want to take him to the beach."

EMC: Joe DiMaggio? Was that true?

KHP: Yes. It is true.

EMC: For heaven's sake. It wouldn't fit him.

KHP: I never asked him. Mr. Walker returned it.

EMC: Isn't that strange. That's bizarre. This person must have known him somehow. A baseball player!

KHP: Yes. I don't know where he knew him, but he had known him.

EMC: He must have, obviously.

KHP: Joe DiMaggio was passing through Charleston and somehow. A baseball player!

EMC: Did you find your pay easy to live on?

KHP: We thought it was great. We were quite pleased with our pay. I was pleased and my WAVE friends, too. In civilian life, I was making seventy five dollars a month as secretary to the president of a college.

EMC: That wasn't terribly much.

KHP: No. But I thought that was pretty good and then I thought the WAVE pay was great.

EMC: So you could survive on it with no problem.

KHP: Yes.

EMC: Did you have any contact with civilians when you were in Charleston and how did they react to you in uniform?

KHP: We had contact with the owners of the houses from whom we rented. They were usually very nice. We acquired church friends, too. I think, though, then everybody smoked and I

smoked at that time. I remember one house owner came back and said we had burned holes in several of her tables or something. If we did, we were awfully sorry. So we paid her the amount she asked for. We were sorry about the damage. We were careful after that. I stopped smoking later while I was still in the WAVES.

EMC: That's good. You were ahead of your time. But if you were on the street did anybody ever stop you in uniform and say anything to you?

KHP: Yes. Occasionally somebody would say are you are in the Army? We would say, "No, we were in the Navy." Especially if we did any traveling. They'd speak to on a bus. People always wanted to engage us in conversation.

EMC: Sure. I think that's true. I've heard that before. The reaction from the civilians was positive, very positive. Did you write to your family or friends regarding your WAVE experience?

KHP: Oh, yes. I wrote to my mother. I tried to write her three or four times a week. We didn't use long-distance very much. My mother was funny. She used to tell the operator "Let me know when three minutes is up," and when time was up, she hung up!

EMC: Didn't want to incur any long distance bills. That's interesting. People were a little bit more careful in those days than I think than they are now. You got yourself out to Hawaii, to Pearl Harbor somehow. How did that happen?

KHP: Just out of the blue. I was so delighted. I had requested Hawaii or Alaska. I just got orders that I was to go to Pearl Harbor. On 21 March 1945, I was the only Charleston WAVE to receive orders on this date to Pearl Harbor Communications Office. On May 2, I went by train to California and by Navy station wagon to Balboa Park. There I was assigned to fly to Hawaii on a Navy Clipper. There were, of course, a pilot and a co-pilot. The only other passenger was a

Navy Captain. He remained inside what must have been a very small office/bedroom. I joyfully slept outside his door on the floor. I understood rank (I was just a Lt. (jg). I was proud to do this and grateful for the flight.

EMC: That's great. That must have been in early '45, wasn't it?

EMC: I believe it was because that's when they were letting the WAVES go to Hawaii. How did you react to this transfer? Did you like it?

KHP: Yes, I was pleased about the transfer. It was #1 on my request list! The other two choices were Alaska and Bermuda, respectively. We worked hard on rotating watches, but on liberty I was able to go to the beaches and there were many. Downtown Honolulu was fascinating and I had the opportunity to fly over a volcano which was semi-active (smoking).

EMC: Where you stationed in Hawaii? Were you in Pearl Harbor?

KHP: Yes. I was at Pearl Harbor. A friend of mine, who had gone (two weeks before I went) was stationed at Wahiawha. I asked the officer in charge if I could go there, but then I felt I should go where I was sent. I asked them to rescind my request. So I did not go up to Wahiawha. They had houses, about four WAVES to a house and it was lovely and cool, but I was placed in a WOQ (originally it had been a BOQ). I liked it and I'm glad I stayed where they put me.

EMC: So you were in a traditional WOQ in those days. Where were you working exactly? Were you still in communications?

KHP: I was. When we were in Charleston we sent communications to CINCLANT, but in the Pacific, we sent communications to CINCPAC. We were taught to be so respectful. I can remember one time an admiral came by the office after hours. We were just outside the office. He was sitting there staring into space and didn't say anything. I didn't dare start the

conversation. So we sat there quietly for about a half and hour. I think I was waiting for somebody to pick me up and perhaps he was, too. I didn't know enough to say, "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?" But that might have been presumptuous.

EMC: Do you know if it was Admiral Nimitz or Spruance?

KHP: It was neither. At the time, I did know his name. I was terrified sitting by an admiral.

EMC: That can be intimidating; there's no doubt about it. Interesting. Well, you were doing the same kind of work then. Were you encrypting messages or sending them out?

KHP: Yes. And decrypting.

EMC: Did you have a big office? Was it a large number?

KHP: It was smaller than the Charleston office. It was adequate, but smaller. Our messages just usually went to the Pacific Fleet. In Charleston, they not only went to CINCLANT, but to places all over the country. My duty at Pearl Harbor on the Island of Oahu was wonderful. I worked rotating watches, which allowed for time on the beautiful beaches and for sightseeing. On time off, we were able to catch Navy flights to the other Hawaiian Islands. An army plane came from the island of Kauai once and took thirty of us over for an early dance and returned us that night. In a 28 July 1945, letter to my Mother, I wrote, "Wasn't it awful about the bombers crashing into the Empire State Building! We heard it over the radio at noon. It happened this morning your time." I had no idea then, of course, of the possibility (or probability) of the more devastating-to-human-life and demolishing strike of 2001!

EMC: Did you have a male naval officer who was in charge of the office?

KHP: We did. A code officer.

EMC: Did you remember ever meeting Edwin Layton out there? Do you remember that name at all, because he was in Fleet Radio Unit Pacific?

KHP: I don't believe I did.

EMC: I just wondered if you did. Did you enjoy Hawaii?

KHP: Oh, yes. I loved it.

EMC: What did you do there? Did you have a chance to go to on the other islands?

KHP: Yes. When we had time off we could go different places. Kauai was a place we could go and other places. I did take a plane trip on a navy plane. It was going over to some of the other islands. An army plane came from the island of Kauai and took thirty of us to an early dance there and returned us that night.

EMC: Good. So you had the opportunity to see more. Did you have the opportunity to date many navy men there?

KHP: Oh, yes. There were a lot more men than women. On rotating watches, we weren't off every night. But if you chose, you could have a date every free night.

EMC: For heavens sake. That kept you very busy then, if you did.

KHP: We did. There were lots of fun things to do.

EMC: Oh, good. Like what, for example. What kinds of fun things?

KHP: We always went to the beach which we enjoyed. We did so much. There would be dances we could go to which were nice. We could go to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel for dinner, which we did.

EMC: You had Officer's Club to go to. You were mentioning, Kennon, that you dated many officers as did all the WAVE officers in Hawaii. Did you meet your husband there?

KHP: If I may go back to Charleston, I will tell you. (This is going back even before Charleston. When I was in high school, I had a date with Douglas Patton, he was in college (18); I was in high school (14). He was visiting his brother and his wife in Carrollton. My Mother

was hesitant about letting me go out with a boy was 4 years older, however, she knew his family so she acquiesced.) In Charleston or any Navy Base, you could go to Navy Personnel and find out where your friends were. Doug had found out I was in Charleston so he pretended to have plane trouble one day. He was a pilot and had to land in Charleston. So he landed and called me and we had a date. The next time I saw him I was in Honolulu. He had flown into Hawaii. He called me up and asked if I would go to a dance with him at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. I said I would. He said he'd come get me, but it was much easier for me to come in on a Navy bus than for him to get me, because he did not know how to find me. We agreed to meet downtown in Pearl Harbor. I looked and looked for him, but I didn't see him. Then all of a sudden a strange man appeared who had a red mustache and grinned at me. I didn't recognize him because Doug had dark hair and no facial hair. I didn't know he had red hair but his mustache was red! I said, "I'm not going to the dance with you with that mustache". So he had to go to the barber shop to have it shaved. When we walked into the Royal Hawaiian all of his buddies were there. They just howled because they know what had happened. He was so proud of that mustache and I made him shave it off.

EMC: You had a nerve to do that, to demand that. Kind of interesting, though. Did you continue your relationship?

KHP: After the war we did and then we became engaged.

EMC: So that was back home, I presume.

KHP: Yes, back home.

EMC: Well, you're still in Hawaii and August 15th rolls around, 1945, which was VJ Day. Do you remember your reaction to that and how you celebrated, if you did?

KHP: On 16 August 1945 we heard on the radio: "VJ Day has been officially declared!" The latest scuttlebutt was that 5% of WAVES would be out by 15 September; 10% by 15 October, and all out by February. I'm sure we were joyous and relieved knowing that it would be over soon. Everything had climaxed. Other than that I don't remember any particular celebrations we had. There was a different atmosphere when it happened, one of relief and joy.

EMC: That's good. I know there was a parade, in September, in downtown Honolulu. Were you still there in September?

KHP: Yes. If I was still working, I would have been at work rather than at the parade, unless there was a day off.

EMC: What was the highest rank you achieved in the WAVES?

KHP: I made Lieutenant, Senior Grade shortly before I left. Even though I thought the pay was great, I don't have an accurate memory of the amount. I think it was \$250.00 when housing wasn't furnished. Whatever the starting amount, the pay went up of course with the subsequent two promotions. The hospital ship REFUGE took one group of WAVES back to the mainland in October. I was scheduled to leave 25 November 1945 on the hospital ship SOLACE. Most WAVES were seasick. Providentially, I wasn't. For those who were sick I made repeated trips to the galley for saltines and celery. It was the only thing I could do for them. I left California by train to Atlanta by way of Memphis, TN. The train, carrying only military personnel, stopped in Memphis at the Demobilization Center where we were given important information about separation, finances, and what to expect on returning to a civilian world. We were also encouraged to continue buying War Bonds. From Atlanta, I was homebound to Carrollton, GA.

EMC: That's great. That's a good rank. You were promoted then.

EMC: When and where you discharged from the Navy? What was the process? How did they prepare you for civilian life?

KHP: It seems to me the discharge process began at Pearl Harbor and that the work was completed when our train stopped in Memphis, TN at the Demobilization Center. It was probably concluded by mail after my arrival back in my hometown of Carrollton, GA. They prepared me in advanced that life would be different. The structure and discipline that I had known would be no more. I prepared for civilian life by shopping for civilian clothes, writing, calling, and seeing family and friends. I decided to work in Atlanta in the Advertising Department at Davison Department store. My salary was less then my Navy pay, but I managed by being able to room with a UGA sorority friend.

EMC: Did you receive any medals for your service?

KHP: Just the medals we all received for having served, for service overseas, for VJ Day, for good conduct.

EMC: Were you happy/sad to leave the Navy? Would you have stayed in if you could have?

KHP: I had mixed emotions about leaving the Navy. I was proud to have served my country as a WAVE and always thought I chose the right branch. I was, however, ready to return to civilian life and would not have stayed in the WAVES.

EMC: Did the WAVES have a strong sense of esprit de corps?

KHP: Yes. We all had a strong sense of esprit de corps. I find that, invariably, in long conversations with people I meet and in talking with old friends, I always bring up the fact, or the reminder, that I was in the WAVES!

EMC: Did you have any preconceived expectations when you entered the WAVES?

KHP: I had no preconceived expectations when I entered the WAVES. When I saw the posters of Uncle Sam saying, "I want you!", I took it personally. I wanted to be patriotic and the thought of being able to serve my country was exciting. The possibility of an overseas assignment was attractive also. This I was able to do when ordered to Pearl Harbor.

EMC: Was the WAVES a smoothly run organization?

KHP: The WAVES was an extremely smooth and well-run military branch. The chain of command was extremely important in keeping it that way.

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

KHP: I believe one or two WAVES were discharged from Northampton for disciplinary reasons, but I never knew what the reasons were.

EMC: Did the WAVES experience change or redirect your life in any way? Did the war make you more independent and self-reliant? Did it broaden your horizons? Did you have any career ambitions as a result?

KHP: Yes. The WAVES caused me to be even more patriotic than I had been before, more appreciative of the branches of service, and to have more admiration for those who gave their lives in time of war. The self-discipline in the WAVES helped me to be more independent and self-reliant upon my discharge. Those lessons learned are still a part of my life today. While I traveled a good deal in the States and abroad before and after serving in the WAVES, those service men and women from different sections of the country were an inspiration to me.

EMC: Did you feel that what women were expected to do and be changed when the war was over?

KHP: I do feel that more was demanded and expected of women after the war. And, too the estimation of what we as women could do in time of war and the appreciation for our service were both greatly increased.

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

KHP: Yes. I maintained many friendships with WAVES after the war. I still write to several and I visited WAVES in California, Texas, and in North and South Carolina. I attended the WAVES Memorial event in Washington, D.C., and saw many former WAVES. I roomed with my California WAVE friend.

EMC: Did you attend WAVE reunions after the war?

KHP: I attended the dedication of the WAVE Memorial in Washington along with my California WAVE friend.

EMC: Did you belong to any WAVE organizations? WAVES National?

KHP: I don't belong to any WAVE organization. I am a charter member of the WAVES memorial in Washington, D.C.

EMC: What was the significance of your naval career for you and your life?

KHP: I have better self-discipline after having served in the WAVES. I believe I am more considerate of others and I know I am more fiercely loyal to my country! I am extremely proud of those who have served in times of international stress and war.

EMC: Where did you settle after the war? Did you work after that? What did you do?

KHP: I settled in Atlanta but very soon became engaged to just-discharged Naval Air Corps Lt. Douglas Patton. I had met him when I was a very young senior (15) in high school, saw him again at a train station in Jacksonville, and again when he passed through Pearl Harbor. After we were both discharged, Doug visited Atlanta every weekend from Greenville, S.C. When Doug

said it was getting expensive coming every weekend, I said, "You'd better get a girl in South Carolina!" That did it! He proposed and we were married in November 25, 1946. We lived first in Laurens, S.C. and then in Greenville, S.C. We had a happy life, three lovely married daughters, and ten wonderful grandchildren. For a wonderful year, in 1990-1991, Doug and I served a year for the Presbyterian Church in America as short-term missionaries in Japan. Doug died in June 1993 and I remained in Greenville until December 2002 when I moved to the in-law suite I had added to my daughter and son-in-law's home in Lincoln, RI. The other two daughters live in Woodland Hills CA, and Huntsville, AL. Before moving to RI, I made several trips abroad, including a trip to Antarctica with my University of Georgia roommate when I was 80.

EMC: Did you ever talk about that your WAVE days to your children? Did any of your children join the navy?

KHP: I don't think a day goes by that I don't mention the WAVES to my family. Somehow, too, if I have a lengthy conversation with new friends or strangers, I seem compelled to let them know I was in the WAVES!

EMC: Did you keep in touch with WWII WAVES that you met?

KHP: Yes indeed! I keep in touch with the few living ones left from all those I used to write, call, or see. My California WAVE friend and I went to the dedication of the WAVE Memorial in Washington.

EMC: This concludes the interview. Thank you very much, Kennon, for sharing your memories of your WAVES Service with me. We will have the tape transcribed and then edited. You will receive a final copy for your personal library.

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