

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE WAVES

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No. 306  
Helen Jackson Donnelly Petterson

Oral History Program  
Naval War College  
2003

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Newport, Rhode Island

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The History of the WAVES

Interviewee: Helen Jackson Donnelly Petterson

Interviewer: Evelyn M. Cherpak

Subject: The History of the WAVES

Date: September 4, 2003

EMC: This is the first oral history with Helen Petterson, a WAVE who enlisted in the Navy in World War II. Today's date is September 4, 2003. The interview is taking place at her home in Warwick. My name is Evelyn Cherpak. I'm the curator of the Naval Historical Collection at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. Helen, I am so pleased that you were able to be interviewed this morning for our program on the WAVES in World War II. I'd like to begin by asking you where you were born and when you were born.

HJDP: November 15, 1924, in Providence, Rhode Island.

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

HJDP: My father owned liquor stores.

EMC: Was your mother a homemaker?

HJDP: No. My mother was a secretary.

EMC: Did she work while you were young?

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: She did.

HJDP: That was Depression time, so everybody worked that could work.

EMC: That's great. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

HJDP: One twin sister.

EMC: What was her name?

HJDP: Dorothy.

EMC: I know you mentioned she served in the WAVES with you.

HJDP: Yes, we went in together.

EMC: That's fantastic. Did you spend your growing up years in Providence?

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: When did you graduate from high school? And what high school did you graduate from?

HJDP: We both graduated from Central High School in January 1943.

EMC: A mid-term graduate?

HJDP: Yes. They had mid-terms in those days. They don't have them anymore.

EMC: No, they don't. What did you decide to do after you graduated from high school?

HJDP: I worked at The Providence Journal and my sister worked for the railroad company. Then when the war broke out, of course, we were anxious to do our part and didn't have any brothers, so my mother said she would allow us to go because we wouldn't have gone without her permission, even though we were old enough. So we went in on our birthday.

EMC: What date was that?

HJDP: November 15, 1944. We were sworn in on our birthdays.

EMC: You were twenty by that time.

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: What did you do at The Providence Journal?

HJDP: I was an ad taker. I took ads for the display ads.

EMC: Did you find that interesting?

HJDP: Yes. It was interesting, but at eighteen you have more interests, boys and other things.

EMC: Right, than putting ads in The Providence Journal. Your mother and father, I take it, were supportive of both you and your sister entering the WAVES.

HJDP: Yes, they were.

EMC: Did you have any friends or relatives in the service at that time?

HJDP: Yes. I had one uncle in the service. One uncle who was killed in Pearl Harbor. He was on one of the ships. He was permanent Navy.

EMC: That's awful. When the war began and Pearl Harbor was attacked and your uncle was, unfortunately, killed in that, where were you when you heard the news and what was your reaction?

HJDP: I was at the movies and when I came out people were talking all over the street about it and that's how I found out about it

EMC: Did you feel any great sense of indignation?

HJDP: Oh, yes, indeed. Absolutely.

EMC: Can you comment on the patriotism in this country after that attack and your own feelings of patriotism?

HJDP: I think anybody and everybody wanted to do them in. Nobody had ever attacked the United States, so this was terrible.

EMC: So you felt there was a ground swell of patriotism.

HJDP: Absolutely, yes.

EMC: Was that your reason for joining the WAVES?

HJDP: Yes, it was.

EMC: Because a lot of people said that was their reason. How did you hear about the WAVES organization, do you remember?

HJDP: I don't know. I guess because the paper and radio were filled with the war and women went to war. The WACS, WAVES and the Marines, so that is all there was in those days was the war. There was very little else to talk about but the war.

EMC: That was all consuming. What attracted you to the Navy, vice the Marines or the WACS?

HJDP: I guess because I lived near the water. We all sailed as kids. Two uncles, one uncle died and the other uncle, who were very young, by the way. I guess I never thought of another branch except the navy.

EMC: Living in Rhode Island, being close to the water, is a good reason. You enlisted on your birthday, November 1944. Did you enlist in Providence?

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: I assume you had to take tests and physicals.

HJDP: We had to go to Boston to take the tests.

EMC: Were you sworn in Boston?

HJDP: No, in Providence.

EMC: Was there any publicity in the local papers about you and your sister joining the WAVES, which is kind of unique?

HJDP: Yes, there was. They put our picture in the paper when we joined the Navy.

EMC: That would have been in big deal in those days. You both set off for basic training. When did that occur?

HJDP: We went to Hunter College for six weeks and it was bitter cold, because we went before Christmas, within two weeks after we were sworn in. It was bitter, bitter cold.

EMC: In New York City. Did you go with a group?

HJDP: Yes, we went with some other girls here who had joined the Navy. One of the girl's name was Duffy. But I don't know her last name any more. Lenore Duffy.

EMC: So you went on a regular train with a contingent of WAVES and spent six weeks at Hunter. Had you ever been to New York City before?

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: So that wasn't strange for you.

HJDP: Well, actually Hunter College was in the Bronx.

EMC: Yes, it was in the Bronx.

HJDP: In the Bronx, right.

EMC: Not in Manhattan. So you probably hadn't been there.

HJDP: No.

EMC: When you got there you had to live in apartments that were converted.

HJDP: Yes, correct.

EMC: How many roommates did you have? How did you find that situation?

HJDP: There was my sister, myself, and the other girl, Duffy, from Rhode Island and three other roommates from Michigan.

EMC: So they mixed you up.

HJDP: It was strange because we kept talking and the three girls from Michigan never talked. We couldn't figure out why they didn't talk to us. Finally, I asked one of the girls, Madeline, I said: "Why aren't you talking to us"? She said, "because we love to listen to your accent". They thought we had an accent, which we didn't think we did.

EMC: How interesting. Did you get along with these people finally?

HJDP: Yes. Two of them I stayed with almost all through the WAVES.

EMC: That's interesting. Your sister lived with you, so that was kind of nice.

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: Do you remember how your day was structured? Did you have reveille in the morning?

HJDP: Yes, we were up I think about 5:30. We had to march to breakfast, which was across the campus in bitter, bitter cold. It was a big hall and at 5:30-6:00 your stomach is not hungry, especially in snow. But that's what we did. Then we went to classes the rest of the time.

EMC: Did you find the classes interesting, challenging?

HJDP: Yes. They were very interesting to me.

EMC: Do you remember if your instructors were WAVES?

HJDP: Some were WAVES, but I think most of them were men, navy men, service men.

EMC: Did you like the marching and the drilling?

HJDP: Not particularly, no. But I didn't mind it all that much either.

EMC: You probably had regimental reviews, I would think, on a Saturday.

HJDP: Trying to keep your left foot, your right foot where it belongs wasn't always easy. I always seemed to be on the wrong foot.



EMC: Did you like the WAVES uniform?

HJDP: Yes, very much. I loved the uniform.

EMC: Were you outfitted immediately?

HJDP: No, they don't give you a uniform until I think almost two or three weeks before we graduated, as I remember. Because I remember my father brought my sister and I each a new suit to go away. You think we were going on a trip. Of course, after going to the mess hall three times a day, we had all these stains on these lovely new suits. But we didn't get our uniforms. I can't quite remember, but it wasn't right away that we got our uniforms.

EMC: They were probably slow in sewing them. Probably was a shortage or something of materials in those days.

HJDP: Yes, we got them right away quick.

EMC: Did you feel that you adjusted easily to the discipline of military life?

HJDP: Yes, I did. I knew what I was there for. I knew that this is what we had to do, so I don't remember having any qualms about it or being negative about it at all.

EMC: Right. You were regimented obviously. Things were done at the same time.

HJDP: Everybody else was doing the same thing.

EMC: Did you find that most of the WAVES reacted positively to the Hunter experience?

HJDP: Yes. There was a lot of camaraderie, and I don't ever remember any one grouching too much, except for getting up early in the morning.

EMC: Right. Do you remember the white glove inspections you had?

HJDP: Oh, yes, indeed.

EMC: Did you pass those?

HJDP: Most of the time, yes. Every once in a while there would be a little infraction.

But for most of the time, yes.

EMC: Did you get a demerit or get punished in anyway?

HJDP: We had to swab a deck or do something like that. I remember I made my bed perfect one day and I thought this is it; I'm never going to sleep in this bed. So I slept on top of it until the end of the week when we had to change the linens and then I would get it perfect again and then I would not sleep inside of it. I slept on top all the time. So I could pass inspection and it would be just right.

EMC: Isn't that something.

HJDP: So I didn't have covers for a long time.

EMC: I hope it was warm enough in the room.

HJDP: It was.

EMC: Did you have any limited time off on a weekend at all there?

HJDP: Not until we were ready to graduate. The last week I think we got a furlough and we went into New York City.

EMC: Did anything amusing or noteworthy happen during the six week period of training?

HJDP: Not that I can remember. Nothing outstanding. I know in the apartments that we had they had a stove that was disconnected and we use to hide cookies. But we got caught hiding the cookies and they confiscated the cookies.

EMC: Oh, so you couldn't eat in your room.

HJDP: No, you couldn't have anything out. You couldn't keep any food in your room of course.

EMC: Oh, I see.

HJDP: Then we had a blanket that we referred to as the "admiral" that had to be folded at the end of the bunk. So if it was chilly we would always say "Oh, I had to sleep with the admiral last night." So this was kind of a joke about the admiral.

EMC: Oh, yes. That's cute. After the six weeks was up, you completed your training officially. Did you express any interest in the kind of billet or job you wanted?

HJDP: No. They pretty much decided that by the tests that they gave you. But we could make a preference as to where we wanted to be stationed, not that it meant anything, because if you wanted to be stationed in east cupcake you went to west cupcake. I didn't want to be stationed in Rhode Island. I wanted to see something else. I think I put the first one as the west coast, or something like that. But at any rate, I didn't go there.

EMC: You were selected to be trained as a yeoman.

HJDP: Yes, correct.

EMC: Where did they send you for that?

HJDP: My sister and I both went to Stillwater, Oklahoma. To Stillwater, Oklahoma A&M College.

EMC: Right. That must have been quite a change for you.

HJDP: It was very nice. I really can't say I liked Oklahoma, because it was all red clay. I think when you grow up near the water it seemed awfully dry to me.

EMC: You were there probably in February or so. In the winter time.

HJDP: Yes. I think we were there for three months.

EMC: Three months training. That was an experience.

HJDP: It was very nice. The school was very nice. The Navy had taken over part of Oklahoma A&M College and we had lovely rooms. We had a beautiful dining room with candles every night. The college was still running, but then the Navy had taken that part over so that was interesting. I liked it there.

EMC: Good. What kind of subjects did you take and what were you trained in?

HJDP: For one thing we took how to spot different planes and things about the Navy. I can't remember all the other classes we had. They had a full day for us and a lot of it was paperwork and that kind of thing.

EMC: Typing, stenography?

HJDP: Yes, typing. My sister did shorthand. I didn't take short hand. That kind of thing. filing and how the navy filed, which was different than regular business did.

EMC: Yes, they still do.

HJDP: Everything was back into and fourteen copies, right?

EMC: Yes. Did you have any time off during that time period? Were you able to get weekends off?

HJDP: Yes, and if we did we went into Oklahoma City or into Tulsa. There would always be four or five of us to go. We had some nice times and got to see some more of Oklahoma.

EMC: Oh, good. Did you have any team sports at that time? Were there baseball teams?

HJDP: No. Not that I remember.

EMC: Did the navy provide any recreation for you? Any singers or band that came?

HJDP: Yes, they did. I remember a couple of bands coming, but I don't remember an awful lot of recreation. Our days were so busy. By the time the day was over we were ready to get into our bunks and call it a day.

EMC: Sure.

HJDP: I don't remember any entertainment or anything.

EMC: Did you have the opportunity to date anybody?

HJDP: No. We didn't have the time.

EMC: No parties.

HJDP: No parties, because we were just the women on our end. I do remember one funny thing. We had to march to classes, of course. Some of the students who were still there civilian students. The boys use to make fun of us. We had one girl that called the cadence. She was a real southern girl and the boys were making in fun of her. She was a big, big strapping girl and she just leaned over and she was going one, two. She said, "Now boys you don't worry you just keep on buying war bonds and we'll win the war for you. "That shut them up for a while.

EMC: Did you have to buy war bonds, or were you encourage to buy war bonds?

HJDP: We didn't have to, but we did. Yes. We had some taken out of our pay.

EMC: That's good, to support the war. After you finished this long three months in Oklahoma, it was spring by this time. Where were you assigned as a yeoman?

HJDP: New York City.

EMC: Back to New York City.

HJDP: Yes. We lived in a hotel. They had taken over this hotel. I'm trying to remember the name of the hotel.

EMC: In Manhattan?

HJDP: In Manhattan. The fleet post office was way down near the water front.

EMC: Oh, so that's where you worked. The fleet post office?

HJDP: Yes, I went to work for them. That's the first time we ever been parted in our whole lives. They sent my sister to Washington, DC. And I went to New York.

EMC: Did you have your own room there?

HJDP: I had three roommates. Four of us in an apartment. We had to take the subway way down past the waterfront. That's where the post office was. We had to work three different shifts, like eight to four and four to eight, midnight to something. Every week it changed. So it was really kind of tough when I look back, because you never got accustomed to the time that by the time I was use to sleeping in the day time.

EMC: They probably thought it was unfair to have one person taking the night shift.

HJDP: That's right. It was opened twenty four hours. It was strange, Evelyn, because sometimes I would take that subway alone at midnight. I was never afraid. It's not like the world today.

EMC: No, it was vastly different.

HJDP: We all did it and it never dawned on me to be afraid.

EMC: Right. People weren't that and unfriendly then.

HJDP: Everybody was in the service and everybody that wasn't, the civilians respected the service people. I never had any trouble.

EMC: That's great. What exactly did you do at this fleet post office?

HJDP: They had what you called the tub. You sat at a desk and on the left and on the right were tubs, which were just really files. I had "L" and all the sailors' names that

began with "L". I didn't have all of "L's, but I had part of "L's". The mail would come and if it had been transferred to another place then I would have to readdress all the mail and try to find where that boy was, because they moved around so much. That was part of what we did.

EMC: Oh, that was kind of taxing. How did you find out where they went?

HJDP: They would give us a list in the morning.

EMC: Oh, I see. Transfers.

HJDP: We would put John Doe isn't at this base and where is he transferred? The next day it would come down and we would look to see if John Doe wasn't there, then you'd wait another few days and eventually they got the mail to where it was going. Sometimes it was months and months before you found out where he went.

EMC: Oh, sure. You know the individuals would have to find out from Washington.

HJDP: Some of them didn't want us to know where they were. So that's why I stayed in the service after the war because they still had all this mail. When the European war was over, they transferred us all to California and then I worked in San Francisco at the San Francisco post office there.

EMC: Oh, that's kind of interesting. Did you find it interesting?

HJDP: I thought it was wonderful. Yes, I loved it.

EMC: There is some challenge there.

HJDP: Yes, I enjoyed it very much. I liked the people we worked with.

EMC: All WAVES?

HJDP: No, we had quite a few boys there, too.

EMC: Oh, really. So it was a mixed group of WAVES?

HJDP: Mostly WAVES, but there were some boys.

EMC: Navy enlisted men.

HJDP: All Navy. Most of the navy enlisted men there were older.

EMC: Probably couldn't serve.

HJDP: They were older and all very nice. Of course, being stationed in New York was very exciting, because by that time we could go out when we had our time off. It was very exciting.

EMC: What did you do on your time off?

HJDP: We had dates and we would go to the movies. We saw all the shows in New York.

EMC: Did you ever go to the U.S. O'Canteen?

HJDP: Oh, yes, indeed. We went to the Canteens and danced our toes off.

EMC: Did you ever get free tickets to some of these shows?

HJDP: I don't remember getting free tickets. I think in those days, if I'm not mistaken, they had prices for service people and it was always very reasonable.

EMC: So you saw some of the good shows. Oklahoma. Annie get your Gun.

HJDP: Yes. What ever was on, that's what we went to see.

EMC: Sounds like a great time.

HJDP: It was. We enjoyed it.

EMC: You had an opportunity to see New York City, more or less.

HJDP: Right.

EMC: Did anything unusual happen during this time? Anything exciting, different or memorable during your time at the Post Office?



HJDP: The most memorable thing was when the German war was over. We were in New York City when they said the war over. They closed the post office.

EMC: VE day. In May.

HJDP: VE day. They closed the post office down and we all went into New York and we were there where you see the picture of the sailor kissing the girl. We were right there in Time Square to see everything that was going on.

EMC: Oh, that must have been exciting.

HJDP: It was exciting.

EMC: Do you mean VE day or VJ day?

HJDP: VE. It was European war.

EMC: VJ was August.

HJDP: Which was Japan. I was in San Francisco when that war was over.

EMC: Oh, that's interesting.

HJDP: That was very exciting.

EMC: I'm sure it was.

HJDP: Everybody went crazy.

EMC: You had some interesting times then at the FPO in New York City. How long were you there? If you joined in 44' and got out of training at about April.

HJDP: The European war ended when?

EMC: May 45'.

HJDP: Okay. May of 45. I was there and then I got transferred to San Francisco.

EMC: You were in New York for maybe fourteen months or so.

HJDP: Something like that.

EMC: Did you request transfer?

HJDP: No. They just said when that when the German war was over. Everyone in the fleet post office was transferred to San Francisco.

EMC: Oh, really. So they closed it down.

HJDP: They closed it down all together.

EMC: That was an adventure for you.

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: To go to San Francisco.

HJDP: Yes. When we went they routed the train through Canada. Now don't ask me why. It was a troop train and it took us for ever and a day to get to California. Can you imagine going through Canada? And this old train was so hot and crowded. We had the best time on that train.

EMC: Oh, really.

HJDP: We went through Canada. So when the war was over they said if you had served outside the continental United States you got an extra two hundred dollars at mustering out time or something. You had to be outside of the country for twenty four hours and the train broke down and we were in Canada for forty-eight hours, so we got two hundred dollars for being stuck in Canada.

EMC: Isn't that something. It was probably a diversionary tactic, I would think.

HJDP: I imagine so, because we didn't know that it was so hot and crowded. That dusty train must have come out of World War I.

EMC: That must have been an experience. Did any of the gals that you lived with go with you to San Francisco?

HJDP: Two of the girls went with me to San Francisco.

EMC: So all of you were at the fleet post office. Must have been about May or June of 45' that you were there. Where did you live in San Francisco?

HJDP: First we lived in a barracks, a WAVES barracks. Then there were so many girls there that they said if we could find an apartment they would pay so much per diem. So three other girls and myself found a beautiful apartment on Nob Hill. We lived on Nob Hill in San Francisco. Four of us shared the apartment.

EMC: That must have been great.

HJDP: We would take the cable car to work everyday.

EMC: Oh, how nice. Where was this fleet post office?

HJDP: In San Francisco, but I don't remember whether it was on the southern end or northern end. We had to take the cable car and then we had to take another trolley or a bus to the post office. But we didn't have to work the three different shifts there.

EMC: That's great.

HJDP: They had straightened that out, so we worked like maybe a month on one shift and then maybe another on a different shift.

EMC: That's better. Did you do the same thing there?

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: You were re-routing mail for people.

HJDP: Yes. Of course by that time it had piled up fierce, because of all the New York Post office was shut down so everything was going from San Francisco.

EMC: FPO, Fleet Post Office. That was quite a lot of responsibility. Were most of the people in this office in San Francisco WAVES or was it mixed group?

HJDP: It was a mix.

EMC: Navy men and the WAVES as well. Did you enjoy this assignment?

HJDP: I loved San Francisco, and it was wonderful because my sister was still stationed in Washington. Any boys she met who were being shipped out had to go through San Francisco. When they came in they were going to Washington, so we use to send each other boyfriends.

EMC: Really.

HJDP: Yes. She would write or call and tell me that this nice boy she went out with is being shipped out and he will be in San Francisco such and such of time. I'd gave him the phone number. So we had a swell time shipping boyfriends all around.

EMC: Right. That's something. You had a more regular schedule in San Francisco and time for recreation too on weekends. What exactly did you do? Where did you go?

HJDP: We went into town. San Francisco always had something going on. It was like New York with all these plays and shows and USOs and movies and, of course, there was such camaraderie. We went everywhere together.

EMC: That's good.

HJDP: There was always four or five of us. It was nice.

EMC: That sounds wonderful. Did you feel that you were well treated in the offices that you worked in?

HJDP: Yes, very much so.

EMC: You did not experience any discrimination?

HJDP: None at all. I don't ever remember any of the boys or the men being any bit fresh. You got to remember they were just boys that came from Providence and farms. They were just boys from home. There was nobody that ever gave us any hard time at all.

EMC: That's good. No harassment or anything that you hear about today.

HJDP: Either that or I wasn't attractive enough. I don't know which.

EMC: I think it was a different world.

HJDP: Yes, it was a different world. Boys were very respectful.

EMC: And well mannered.

HJDP: They were all the same ages that we were.

EMC: You were twenty. That was very nice. Was there anything that you didn't like about your assignment?

HJDP: No. I liked it. I can't think of anything negative.

EMC: Did you ever meet any movie stars or important people in your assignment, because some gals did?

HJDP: At the USO we met a few of them. Peggy Garner was a movie star at that time. I don't remember meeting any big movie stars.

EMC: None of them who were in the service dropped in or anything at the FPO.

HJDP: No.

EMC: Did anything exciting or amusing or outstanding happen during this time in San Francisco?

HJDP: Of course when the war was over San Francisco had to be shut down. They had to call in the National Guard because they went absolutely crazy.

EMC: What did they do on VJ Day?

HJDP: VJ day came and again they closed the post office, and I said I wanted to go into town and this big sailor that worked next to me, his name was Bill Porch. I'll never forget it. He was married and I was a little tiny thing at that time. I don't think I weighed a hundred pounds. He said, No, "You don't want to go into town". I said, "I'm going and he said," Then I'm going with you." I'm so glad he did because they were smashing the liquor store windows and taking liquor out. People were dancing and jumping in the pool with no clothes on. I remember one of the captains in the navy took his hat off and gave it to me. He took my hat and gave me his hat. Bill Porch was a great big guy, so I was very glad I had him with me because they just went crazy. It was mob hysteria.

EMC: I didn't realize there was that much vandalism.

HJDP: They had to close San Francisco down to two or three days after that. It was so bad.

EMC: The destruction. Was it military or civilian people or everybody?

HJDP: I think it was mostly military, because there was more military than there were civilians, so it was kind a combination. Everybody went crazy.

EMC: Not the local populace. That was the end of the war but not the end of your service.

HJDP: No.

EMC: How long did you stay in San Francisco?

HJDP: I stayed until I was discharged.

EMC. August 15, 1945 was VJ Day.

HJDP: We did not get out until 46', because you had to have so many points to get discharged. When I had enough points, they would freeze the rate. They needed people

in the post office now. It was getting worse than ever because everybody was going home and all this mail was going all over the place. Every time I get enough points they would freeze the rate and I'd have to stay on longer and, of course, by that time I was dying to get home.

EMC: Really.

HJDP: I was engaged to a boy back home and I wanted to come back home. There was no way I could get out.

EMC: Oh, I see. What was your rate? Do you remember?

HJDP: I was just a yeoman third class.

EMC: Ok. Yeoman third class. That's what you were and that is what you stayed at. I guess in order to keep you there in your job.

HJDP: If you reenlisted, they would give you another rate. I was engaged. I wanted to go home and get married.

EMC: Right. So you did not want to reenlist at all.

HJDP: No.

EMC: Did you meet your fiancé locally?

HJDP: No, he was the boy from home. He was my childhood sweetheart.

EMC: Was he in the service?

HJDP: Yes. He was in the Air Force, a fighter pilot.

EMC: Army Air Force. That's quite dangerous. Where was he stationed?

HJDP: First he went to Alabama, Delaware, and then overseas.

EMC: He did go in the war zone. Was he in the South Pacific or Europe?

HJDP: Europe. But he didn't get hurt, thank God.

EMC: He dropped bombs and all that?

HJDP: No, he was a fighter pilot. He didn't do bombs. Then he came home and we got married. He went to work as an airline pilot for TWA. First, he went with Pan American and then he went with TWA and he was with TWA for twenty years. He died at forty-five, though.

EMC: Very young.

HJDP: But not from an airplane accident. Actually it was when he first started flying with TWA. This was not too long after the war. He graduated college first and then he went with TWA. They were prop planes and then the jets came in, and they didn't realize that the pilots couldn't go as fast as the planes did because he flew international. So he would fly to Johannesburg or Paris or whatever. They would only have a one night stay and then they would have to turn around and fly back. Just as they made captain, they started dying at forty-five and forty-six and they were trying to figure out why they were losing all of these pilots so young. That's when they started to find out about jet lag. That's where it came from, jet lag, because the planes could go that fast but the human body can't. Then afterwards he would fly to wherever, Germany, and he would have two or three days off.

EMC: They have to catch up with their sleep and everything. You were anxious to go home, to leave the service, but you were in for a little bit longer through part of 1946.

During your service years, did you write letters home to your parents and to your fiancé?

HDP: Oh, sure. I got my engagement ring through the mail.

EMC: You did. That's interesting.



HJDP: I was in San Francisco and my roommates and I went out for dinner and we brought champagne and we all tried the ring on and dipped it in champagne. That was the big celebration.

EMC: I hope it was insured.

HJDP: I don't know.

EMC: Did it just come in an envelope?

HJDP: No. It came in a little package.

EMC: That was kind of unique way of getting engaged. He wasn't there but.

HJDP: I got the ring anyway.

EMC: Right. Oh, that's good. I assume you kept up with the news about the war during your time frame?

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: How did you personally feel about the end of the war and VJ Day? What was your reaction?

HJDP: I think everybody was so wonderfully glad that it was all over. Elation. I think everybody was just so excited that the German war was over and now the Japanese war was over and that meant going back to what we thought would be normal, which was a different world from where we came from. Of course, everybody was just thrilled.

EMC: Did you every have a chance to meet Mildred McAfee who was director of the WAVES?

HJDP: No.

EMC: You never saw her?

HJDP: No.

EMC: Can you identify the month in 1946 that you were discharged. Do you have any idea if it was winter or spring?

HJDP: That was at home here in Rhode Island. That's a nice shot.

EMC: Helen, I wonder when you were discharged from the WAVES?

HJDP: May 16, 1946.

EMC: So you stayed on a good bit longer, almost a year after the war ended. Were you discharged or separated from the service in San Francisco?

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: Do you know if you got any medals or pins of any sort to signify your discharge?

HJDP: I got the honorable service lapel pin, the honorable discharge emblem and an honorable discharge pin.

EMC: Very good. How did you feel about leaving the navy in May of '46?

HJDP: Well, of course, by this time my soon to be husband was home. He had gone back to college, and I was anxious to get home and get started on my civilian life. The war was over and my patriotism had gone down hill. I wanted to go home now.

EMC: Did you go back to Providence via train?

HJDP: Yes. By train.

EMC: When you returned to Providence what did you do for a living? Did you have to get a job immediately?

HJDP: In those days wherever you had a job before they had to take you back if you went in the service. But I went to work at Quonset Point for about three or four months. I did not like the traveling, so I went back to work at the Journal.

EMC: Did you work there until you got married?

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: When did you get married?

HJDP: September 6, 1947.

EMC: So you waited a little bit longer.

HJDP: Yes. My husband was still in college. We had a baby the first year and she was walking when he graduated from college.

EMC: That must have been around 1948 then.

HJDP: We got married in '47, and Maureen was born in '48, and he graduated in 49 from Providence College.

EMC: Do you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit de corps?

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: Did you feel it was a smoothly run organization?

HJDP: From my point of view it was. Of course, I was young and didn't know any other part of it but the fleet post office. It was run very efficiently, I think.

EMC: Did you know of anybody who was discharged for any reason?

HJDP: One of the girls when we were in New York got caught stealing. It was a terrible experience, because we all had to march out on the field and they stripped the buttons, the emblems off her jacket. We had to stand there and watch that. It was very sad.

EMC: What was she stealing? Do you know?

HJDP: I don't remember what she stole, but she got caught stealing whatever it was and that's what you call being drummed out of the corps.

EMC: Exactly.

HJDP: We all had to stand at attention. They took each button and sliced each one off and any emblems that she had in the service.

EMC: That was quite something to watch. Do you feel that the war made you more independent and self reliant?

HJDP: Oh, yes. Of course it did. One time I was coming home on leave and if you could get an airplane. I had a seat on the airplane, but they told me I could not have it because some important person needed it. I went to the navy and they were having a plane that was going to New York and they said I could hitch a ride. I had to have a parachute. So at the time you could go to YMCA and they would loan you a parachute. I got the parachute and at the time I weighed about one hundred pounds and I got this big parachute and I got to the field. This is going to be a transport plane that they were taking to England and it had no seats. It was from Oklahoma College A&M. I remember, because two or three of the other girls were on it and we had packed us a lunch. We got on the plane with no seats.

EMC: You sat on the floor.

HJDP: We sat on the floor. All of a sudden we hit bad weather and it was absolutely awful it was the worse thing I think I ever remembered. I have been in some bad storms. The whole airplane was shaking and everybody on the airplane laying down was sick except me. There was a doctor on the plane. One of the girls said, "Doctor, can you help me". He said, "I can't help myself". One of the pilots came back and he said, "You're not sick." I said, "No, but I'm going to be." He said, "Come up front." So I sat up front with the pilots and we landed. When we landed we didn't have enough fuel to get to the

airport terminal. We had to have someone come out of the truck and get us. That was kind of exciting. Don't want to repeat that one.

EMC: Not a plane trip like that. Those navy planes are something.

HJDP: It seemed like a good idea at the time. When you got to your destination you take this parachute to a mailbox or a post office and you gave it back to them and they took it back to the Y.

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

HJDP: I did for many years, Evelyn, but then it's been sixty years and people moved around and we all got married and had children and we just kind of lost touch.

EMC: Did you attend any WAVE reunions after the war?

HJDP: I think I did a couple.

EMC: There was one in Boston, New York.

HJDP: I think I did the one in Boston with this girl Duffy and then again time marched on. When we had a family, babies just keep you from doing things that you want to do.

EMC: That's right. The WAVES National organization didn't get organized until about twenty years ago and the Ocean States WAVES in 1989. So that's been fairly recent that they have organized. You mentioned that your sister joined the WAVES and we have her picture right here, which is very nice, but you were separated. Did you write to her and keep in contact with her when she was serving?

HJDP: Oh, yes. We kept in contact every week. We called and wrote letters, absolutely.

EMC: How did she feel about her service, do you know?

HJDP: She liked it very much and loved Washington, DC. She worked in intelligence, I think. I'm not sure. I really never knew quite what she did.

EMC: But she was a yeoman, too.

HJDP: Yes, she was a yeoman, second class.

EMC: Did she spend her entire WAVE career in Washington?

HJDP: Yes. She never got transferred at all. She spent her whole time in Washington.

EMC: And you said she met a fellow in the service and got married.

HJDP: Yes. A marine that was in Washington, DC. They got married right after the war.

EMC: Oh, really. As so many of them did.

HJDP: Yes.

EMC: Then you said she settled in St. Louis. So you were separated then permanently.

HJDP: Yes, we were. I went to her wedding and she went to mine. And then, of course, we visited each other. She would come home. I didn't get to Alaska, because I had to many things to do at home, too many responsibilities. But before she went to Alaska she lived in Denver. I did go to Denver. Then she would come home, maybe every year. So we did get to see each other, but not often enough, of course, because she had a family too.

EMC: Where did she live in Alaska?

HJDP: Anchorage.

EMC: Oh, way up north.

HJDP: Her husband was an engineer for General Electric. That's why they stayed there and when he retired they moved to Albuquerque. She wanted to come back to Rhode Island, but he didn't want to so they moved to Albuquerque. He was only there one month when he had a heart attack and died.

EMC: Oh, dear. That's a nice place. Did she spend the rest of her time there?

HJDP: She did. She stayed in Albuquerque for quite a long time, because one of her sons lived there and then one of the boys moved to Oregon. That's where she died, in Oregon.

EMC: Did she find her WAVES service satisfactory?

HJDP: Yes. She liked it very much.

EMC: No regrets about joining.

HJDP: She didn't want to go in the first place.

EMC: Oh she didn't, that's interesting. Elaborate.

HJDP: No. She kept saying she didn't want to go. I said, "you don't have to go, but I am going to go." When I went to get sworn in, at the time I was working at The Journal, and we got sworn in at the government building or post office, which was not too far from where The Providence Journal is. When I got there my sister was there and she was crying her eyes out. I said, "Dottie don't go, if you don't want to go." "We have to go together," and the whole time we were sworn in she cried. Tears ran down her cheeks.

EMC: So she was kind of unsure about going.

HJDP: She was very unsure, but she liked it after that.

EMC: That's good. That's interesting.

HJDP: She was always glad she did it, she said.

EMC: You settled in this area in Providence and Warwick after the war. After you were married, did you work?

HJDP: No. We had to move to New York, because my husband flew international.

EMC: You said you were living in New York after you were married.

HJDP: Yes. And then he got transferred to Boston, which was better, so I lived in Rhode Island because of flying international he didn't have to go every day. So he would just drive up to Boston for his flights, so we came back and lived in Rhode Island, which was better for me because I had family and support here.

EMC: Oh, sure. Did you ever talk about your WAVE days to your children?

HJDP: You know, it's very interesting. I really didn't talk about that much about it until George had that exhibit downtown. I said to all of my children, "Do you know what I did in the service?" They knew I was in the WAVES and they said, "No." I never thought to tell them. You know life went on and that was then and they never showed any interest. But why would they, I never brought it up? So all of a sudden after "Treasures" and when you wanted to interview me, my kids said, "Tell us what you did do". That was so alien to them, of course. The Civil War to them.

EMC: Sure.

HJDP: That's what really brought it all out. So you're the reason.

EMC: Rhode Island Treasure Exhibits and my WAVES interviews. Did any of your children join the Navy?

HJDP: No.

EMC: To sum things up, if you don't have anything else or any other comments to make, we can close.

HJDP: No, I think that's all.

EMC: Okay. I just wondered what the significance of your WAVES service was for you in your life.



HJDP: Like I said, it taught me to be independent and to take things as they came along and not to worry about the next thing that was going to come along. It still leaves me very patriotic. I still cry when I hear the national anthem. Tears still run down my cheeks and I still have this great patriotism and I think it's people my age who do. I get very annoyed when people are not standing at attention or with their hand over their heart, standing up straight, especially school children. We were taught and now they all talking to each other and not looking at the flag. It annoys me.

EMC: Yes. They have to be more disciplined. So patriotism and service were important for you.

HJDP: Indeed it was.

EMC: In this very important and earth shaking war.

HJDP: Yes. I see it coming out now since this Gulf War. I see it in Iraq. More patriotism now than I have seen in years and years.

EMC: Oh, yes.

HJDP: It's a tough way to get it, but maybe it will make people stop and realize how damn lucky we are to live here.

EMC: That's true. The flag and supporting the troops. No doubt about it. Helen, we will get this transcribed.

HJDP: Very good.

EMC: Then I will edit it and have you edit it. We will have a final transcript made and you will get one and one will be in our library.

HJDP: That's very nice.

EMC: Thank you very much for your memories of this very special time in your life.

HJDP: I thank you.

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