

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

WAVES IN WORLD WAR II

WAVES IN WORLD WAR II

NO. 349

EMMA I. DEAL BIRDY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

2005

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND  
WORLD WAR II VETERANS

INTERVIEWEE: EMMA I. (MICKEY) BIRDY

INTERVIEWER: DR. EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: WORLD WAR II VETERANS

DATE: MAY, 12, 2005

EMC: This is the first oral history with Mickey Birdy at 10  
Casey Street in --

MB: Casey Drive.

EMC: -- Casey Drive, pardon me, in Middletown, Rhode Island.  
She served in the WAVES in World War II as a storekeeper. I'm  
very pleased that you were able to give us your time this  
afternoon, Mrs. Birdy, to conduct this interview and add to our  
corpus of interviews on the WAVES in World War II. And I'd like  
to begin the interview by asking you where you were born?

MB: In Toronto, Canada.

EMC: And when you were born?

MB: September 27th, 1922.

EMC: And did you spend your growing up years in Toronto?

MB: No, I left there when I was three years old.

EMC: And where did you go?

MB: I went back to Philadelphia.

EMC: Now, were your parents from that area, from Philadelphia?

MB: No, my father worked in New Jersey.

EMC: And what did he do?

MB: He's a toolmaker, watchmaker.

EMC: Oh, great. And what did your mother do? Was she a homemaker?

MB: I think she was a homemaker as far as I can remember.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

MB: Let's see, there's Edgar, Nancy, Leonard, Herbie and Joseph.

EMC: Oh, there were six of you then.

MB: Yes.

EMC: It was a big family --

MB: (Inaudible.)

EMC: -- yes, when they were born. Oh, well, that's good.  
Where did you live in Philadelphia, what section, do you  
remember?

MB: What the heck was that called?

EMC: West Philly or --

MB: Northeast Philly.

EMC: Oh, okay. All right. Did you go to high school in  
Philadelphia?

MB: Yes, I think I did. I grew up in New Jersey and then we  
moved to Philadelphia, and I went to high school in  
Philadelphia.

EMC: And did you graduate?

MB: No, I didn't. After a long time I decided to go on back and I took the GED and I graduated that way.

EMC: Oh, when was that? Was that much later on? Was it after the war?

MB: I don't remember.

EMC: But what did you do then when you left high school? Did you have to work?

MB: No, I just took care of the house for my dad.

EMC: Was your mother still alive then?

MB: Yes, she wasn't living with us.

EMC: Oh, I see. Okay. So you had to inherit that responsibility.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Well, did your family have any navy connections at all?

MB: Unh-unh.

EMC: So nobody had any connections? My brother Leonard was in the Navy.

MB: No.

EMC: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7th, 1941?

MB: I was probably still living in Philadelphia at that time, I think.

EMC: Do you remember what your reaction was?

MB: I don't remember.

EMC: Do you remember what the reaction of the community was?

MB: I don't know. We were kind of shocked.

EMC: Yes, it was a shocking event. Well, immediately after that war was declared the very next day, and we started gearing up for combat with the Japanese and in Europe. Did you keep up with news about the war before you enlisted?

MB: No.

EMC: Were any of your friends or relatives in the service? Did

any of your brothers go in?

MB: I can't remember.

EMC: Well, what motivated you to join the WAVES in 1944?

MB: I don't know. I just thought it was something different to do.

EMC: How did you hear about the WAVES? Was it from a newspaper ad or a poster?

MB: No, I think it was -- we used to roller skate a lot when I was growing up, and I think it's because I talked to some of the WAVES that were at the rink.

EMC: Oh, how interesting. Did you just consider the navy or did you think about joining the marines or the WACs?

MB: No, it was the navy.

EMC: Well, Philadelphia was a navy town too.

MB: Yes.

EMC: Where did you enlist and when did you enlist?

MB: Oh, God, let's see, where did I enlist? January 27th, 1944 in Philadelphia.

EMC: And do you remember if you had to take any tests or have a physical?

MB: Oh, yeah, I went through the whole rigamarole to be at boot camp and everything.

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

MB: No, not that I remember.

EMC: How did your father feel about your decision to join the WAVES?

MB: He didn't say one way or the other.

EMC: You were 22 years old at that time.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: So you met the legal age. Did your brothers or sisters have any opinion about it?

MB: No.

EMC: So they supported you.

MB: Oh, yes, they all supported me.

EMC: Where did you go for basic training?

MB: Hunter College in New York.

EMC: Hunter in the Bronx was where you went.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: You must have taken a train, I presume. Did you take a train to Hunter from Philadelphia?

MB: I don't know.

EMC: And I just wondered if you went with any other WAVES or did you go alone?

MB: No.

EMC: -- by yourself?

MB: I went alone. I think my brother --

EMC: Oh, that's good. Now, had you ever been in New York City before?

MB: Oh, yes.

EMC: But you were in a different area, in an area of the Bronx that tourists don't go to. Do you remember how your day was structured and what you did during the day at the US Naval Training School, Women Reserve, in the Bronx?

MB: Oh, let's see. We'd get up. We'd go to breakfast and then we'd go to work. And at that time I was --

EMC: Didn't you take classes there?

MB: No, I was taking care of the barracks.

EMC: Oh.

MB: And then they decided that I was too young to take care of the barracks the way it should be taken care of, so then they put me into the warehouse.

EMC: At Hunter?

MB: Yes.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake, so you really didn't go to class at all?

MB: No, unh-unh.

EMC: Oh, did you live in the converted apartments with roommates?

MB: I know I lived with a bunch of other ladies.

EMC: Oh, yes, you must have.

MB: Yes.

EMC: Did you have to march or drill at all?

MB: Oh, yes, we'd all march and drill all around.

EMC: How did you feel about the discipline of military life?

MB: It was great.

EMC: Oh, you liked it.

MB: Yes.

EMC: Good. Good. So you adjusted easily there?

MB: Oh, yeah.

EMC: What was your reaction -- I should say, to the navy uniform? Did you like wearing a uniform?

MB: Oh, I wore it constantly.

EMC: Did you have any time off when you were at the Women Reserve Training School?

MB: Well, we just had our evenings off.

EMC: Did you do anything during that time frame, go out on the town?

MB: I think that's when I started going roller skating in the evenings. Of course, I did it when I was growing up.

EMC: Oh, that was --

MB: That's about the only thing I did.

EMC: Yes, that you liked to do. Well, when you finished your six weeks at the United States Women Naval Training School, Women Reserve, where were you assigned?

MB: Pasco, Washington.

EMC: Now, what was in Pasco, Washington? What kind of command was there?

MB: I don't know.

EMC: Do you know what you were assigned to do?

MB: Yes, I was in the warehouse.

EMC: Oh, so you were a storekeeper?

MB: I was a storekeeper.

EMC: And what did your work consist of?

MB: I worked in the storeroom just getting materials that men came in to get.

EMC: What kind of materials were in there?

MB: Just about anything you wanted and the navy needed was in there, anything for repairs or anything.

EMC: Oh, for airplanes?

MB: Yes.

EMC: Okay. Was it on the waters.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: -- this base? So it was on the water in Washington State.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: What were your living conditions like out there? Where did you live?

MB: I don't know. I guess I lived in the barracks.

EMC: Did you work with other WAVES on your job? Were there other WAVES in there?

MB: I think there were some WAVES that relieved me, but there were some men in the background that had to get the tools and things out.

EMC: So did you just issue the material, was that it?

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: You just filled out the issue cards as to what they got.

Okay. So you were pretty much the only woman there?

MB: No, there was others working around in different places in the office and stuff.

EMC: Oh, okay. Okay, other WAVES?

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: How did you feel about that job?

MB: I liked it, yes.

EMC: Was there anything about that job that you did not like?

MB: No.

EMC: Did you have to work five days a week or more?

MB: Just five days a week, unless you pulled the duty on the weekend.

EMC: So if not, you had your weekends off. Did you have any opportunity to go off the base then?

MB: Oh, yeah.

EMC: And where did you go and what did you do?

MB: Roller skated.

EMC: Oh.

MB: I did that most of my time I was in there.

EMC: Oh, so that was your major recreation.

MB: Every once in a while I'd go to a movie with a group.

EMC: Did you socialize with other WAVES?

MB: Yes, we were in a group. There was two or three WAVES. And there was a couple enlisted men, and we had one chief. And we kept together, more like a group going out all the time.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's good. Did anything amusing or noteworthy happen during your stay in Pasco, Washington?

MB: Oh, I don't know, but this chief used to go with us. And he'd go with us, and he'd come up with all sorts of funny things, and he'd say, "Now, top that," so I'd top it. And he kept going and going and going. He could never get ahead of me.

EMC: Oh, okay. One-upmanship. Were you well treated by the men though?

MB: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did you experience any harassment?

MB: No, unh-unh.

EMC: Discrimination?

MB: No.

EMC: Oh, so the sailors welcomed the WAVES?

MB: Oh, yes, um-hum.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's good. Well, you stayed in Pasco for a while and then you were transferred, I believe.

MB: To Klamath Falls.

EMC: Klamath Falls is where?

MB: Oregon.

EMC: And what kind of a base was there?

MB: Just a regular base.

EMC: Were there ships there? Was it a harbor?

MB: I don't think it was.

EMC: No, it's in southern Oregon. I know where it is.

MB: I don't think it was. I think it was a land base.

EMC: And what was your job there?

MB: I was still storekeeper.

EMC: Do you know why you were transferred?

MB: Yes, because they closed down the Pasco office.

EMC: Oh, they did. Oh, they closed that base.

MB: Yes.

EMC: So you had to be transferred?

MB: Right, and the same thing when I got to Klamath Falls. I

was there for a while and then they closed that one down, so I went to Seattle.

EMC: That was when the war was ending.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: At Klamath Falls, Oregon you mentioned you were a storekeeper. Now, what kind of work were you doing there?

MB: Oh, I don't remember.

EMC: So you don't know whether you were in a warehouse or whatever?

MB: I think I was in a warehouse no matter where I went. I was in a warehouse all the time.

EMC: Oh, you were issuing.

MB: Yes, um-hum.

EMC: Issuing. Do you know how long you were in Klamath Falls?

MB: No, I don't remember those dates.

EMC: Um-hum. I don't think they're down here.

MB: I don't think so either.

EMC: No, it just says naval air station. Oh, there were air stations where you were. Oh, okay. So they weren't ship commands. They were air stations. Did you enjoy your billet, your job in Klamath Falls?

MB: Oh, yes, I enjoyed the whole session, the whole time I was in.

EMC: Now, that's in kind of a remote part of southern Oregon.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Did you have any opportunity to go out into the city and to travel at all?

MB: The base always had a bus going into town and we'd go all the time --

EMC: Oh, that's good.

MB: That's where most of the skating rinks were. That's where we'd end up -- that or a movie or maybe we'd go out to dinner.

EMC: Did you have any special WAVES friends that you made during this time?

MB: Yes, the ladies that were in the group that we went with all the time, but I can't remember their names. It's been a long time.

EMC: Yes, but they were a special group that you went with.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Did you find your work boring or challenging, would you say?

MB: More challenging.

EMC: And why did you find it so?

MB: Because it's the first time I've ever worked.

EMC: At all?

MB: At all.

EMC: You had never really worked before.

MB: No.

EMC: Oh, okay. So it was a challenge to do the kinds of things that you did. What did you need to do to pull weekend work?

MB: Well, when your time just came up --

EMC: Oh, so you were on a rotating schedule.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Oh, okay. All right. Did you find that you were well treated by both the civilians and the military in Klamath Falls?

MB: Oh, yes, I didn't see any difference in it than any other place.

EMC: Did the civilians react positively to you?

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Okay. Well, now, you mentioned that the Klamath Falls Naval Air Station was closed down.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: And this must have been toward the end of the war and then you were transferred to the Seattle Naval Air Station. Were you

doing the same thing?

MB: Same thing.

EMC: The same thing there?

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: You were a storekeeper. Do you know what rate you were?  
Were you first class or second?

MB: I was second class when I came out.

EMC: Okay. Right, second class when you came out, right. Very  
good. Did you find that you could live comfortably on your pay?

MB: Oh, sure.

EMC: Did you save any money during this time frame?

MB: I think I did. But I never had it in the bank or anything.  
I just kept it in my locker.

EMC: Did you send any money home to your family?

MB: No.

EMC: Were you encouraged to buy war bonds during this time frame?

MB: Well, they mentioned it, but I never bought any.

EMC: Okay. Well, when you were in Seattle at the naval air station, you were a storekeeper again. Do you remember whether you were in a warehouse or not?

MB: Yes, I was still in the warehouse. Every place I went I was in a warehouse.

EMC: Issuing material, I presume.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Where were you housed in Seattle?

MB: In the barracks on the base.

EMC: Do you know where the base was? Was it in the city or was it out of the city? Seattle has grown enormously since then.

MB: I guess it was in the city.

EMC: During this time did you date any navy men?

MB: No, we just went with the crowd.

EMC: But you also mentioned that you were married while you were in the service. And when was that?

MB: Oh --

EMC: You have a picture.

MB: Yes, I know I have a picture.

EMC: And you're both in uniform.

MB: I was a second class.

EMC: Do you know whether it was '44 or '45? Was it when you were in Seattle?

MB: Yes, we were married in Seattle, and it was shortly after I was married that I decided to get out.

EMC: Oh, do you know whether you were married after VJ Day in August of '45, after the war was over?

MB: Let's see, I was married in March.

EMC: Um-hum. And you got out in April of '46.

MB: Yes.

EMC: So maybe that was it, maybe you were married in March '46.  
Now, who did you marry?

MB: My boyfriend from before I went in.

EMC: Oh, so you had a boyfriend then?

MB: Yes, a skating friend.

EMC: A skating friend.

MB: Yes, and then he joined after I did.

EMC: Oh, so he followed you.

MB: So he followed me.

EMC: Oh, that's different.

MB: He came out to visit on his leave because he didn't have any family, so he'd come out to visit me on his leave and that's when he asked me to marry him, so I said, "Yes," and we got married.

EMC: Oh, right then and there?

MB: Yeah.

EMC: Oh, in your uniforms.

MB: In our uniforms.

EMC: Right, did you get married in a church?

MB: No, I think we got married on base.

EMC: Oh, probably in the chapel there.

MB: Probably, yes.

EMC: Oh, how nice. Where was he stationed, do you know? It must have been on a ship.

MB: Which one was he on?

EMC: Well, if you can't remember, that's okay.

MB: He's been on ships his whole navy career. He was on ships.

EMC: But he had joined probably after you. You joined in '44 of January, so he joined after that, so he probably was

influenced by your joining.

MB: Could be.

EMC: So did you write letters to him during this time frame?

MB: Oh, yeah.

EMC: So you kept up correspondence?

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Do you have any of these letters?

MB: No.

EMC: That would have been nice because then we'd have a record of your time in service.

MB: They're all in Texas.

EMC: Yes, because then that would describe what your day was like and what you were doing and what you thought of the service. So you had a boyfriend, and you weren't involved in meeting anybody else?

MB: No.

EMC: Did you like the climate of Seattle?

MB: Rain, rain, rain, rain, go away.

EMC: Yes, very dismal.

MB: We never went out without our -- we never went off the base without our rain cap.

EMC: That havelock that you wore.

MB: Yes.

EMC: Right, kind of interesting. Did you have a group that you went out with in Seattle, too, special friends?

MB: Oh, yes, because we were all on the same base, and we all got closed out at the same time, so we all went to the same place.

EMC: Oh, I see, so they transferred everybody to the same place.

MB: They transferred everybody to the next base.

EMC: Did you write any letters home to your parents or to your

siblings about your experiences?

MB: Oh, I wrote letters home to my father, yes.

EMC: That's good. Well, on August 15th, the war ended, VJ Day.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: And do you remember at all your response to that and what it was? How did you feel about the end of the war?

MB: Thank God it's over.

EMC: Did you celebrate at all with your friends?

MB: No.

EMC: Not that you remember. Well, you stayed in quite a bit after. You stayed in a good seven or eight months after the war ended because you were discharged in April. I think it was '46.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Did you ever have a chance to meet the director of the WAVES, Mildred McAfee?

MB: I don't remember.

EMC: She never came?

MB: She might have been, but I don't remember.

EMC: Well, did you decide to leave the navy because you were married? Was that your main reason?

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Did your husband stay in the navy?

MB: We spent thirty-three years in there.

EMC: Really.

MB: We traveled all around.

EMC: So you became a navy wife?

MB: Right.

EMC: Was he in the enlisted ranks?

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: And what was his rate?

MB: He was yeoman, second class.

EMC: So he was in for 33 years.

MB: 33 years.

EMC: So that takes you to 1977.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Was your last billet in Newport, Rhode Island?

MB: I think so. We were up and down the east coast. We'd go into one port, of course, he was aboard ship and so we moved into navy housing, and the ship would go for six months and we kind of got used to that, and finally, this one time he went over for six months and then he came back and six weeks later they transferred him to another ship and that went back for another six months, so I guess, you know, I knew how to take care of the house.

EMC: Yes, you were on your own.

MB: Yes.

EMC: And with children, too?

MB: Um-hum. Yes.

EMC: Wow, that's very difficult.

MB: It wasn't bad.

EMC: You managed to do it though.

MB: Oh, yeah.

EMC: So you went quite a long time with him in the navy. And you're very closely affiliated with it?

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: I bet you never expected that to happen.

MB: No.

EMC: Not in a million years. And your decision to join the WAVES really was kind of a turning point.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Well, did you receive any ribbons for your service? Did

you ever send for any?

MB: I never sent for any, but I was authorized to wear the American Campaign ribbon and the ribbon for World War II victory.

EMC: Right, exactly and I think you do have to send for them. Were you discharged from the navy in Seattle?

MB: Yes.

EMC: Did you have to go through the same kind of process as when you enlisted?

MB: Oh, yes.

EMC: You had to take physical exams?

MB: Yes, we had to take all that stuff.

EMC: And did they indoctrinate you into civilian life?

MB: Yes.

EMC: Told you what to expect?

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Well, how did you feel about leaving your active duty service in the navy?

MB: It was kind of sad at one point there, but I got used to it, but I was with a lot of navy wives all the time.

EMC: Oh, yes.

MB: We used to put our children to bed at night, and we'd all get on our front lawns, and we had our iron and ironing board and do our ironing outside.

EMC: Oh, boy.

MB: We did that all the time. It was a once a week affair.

EMC: Oh, really.

MB: Yeah.

EMC: Did you feel that the WAVES organization that you were in for almost two -- well, for two years had a strong feel of "esprit de corps" and loyalty?

MB: Oh, yes.

EMC: Do you think that most of the WAVES were very patriotic?

MB: I think so, yes.

EMC: Can you comment at all on patriotism during that time frame, just in general in the country?

MB: I don't know.

EMC: Did you feel most people supported the war?

MB: Oh, yes.

EMC: Yes, that's good. Did you feel that the WAVES, from your experience with them, was a smoothly run organization?

MB: Oh, yeah.

EMC: Did you know of any woman who was discharged for any reason? Was there anybody in your group who was discharged?

MB: Unh-unh.

EMC: Oh, okay, because occasionally there were instances when people were discharged. Did the WAVES experience change and redirect your life in any way?

MB: Oh, yeah.

EMC: And how was that?

MB: I was a very shy little girl.

EMC: Um-hum.

MB: And that brought me out of my shell.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Do you think your experience in the WAVES and the travel that you underwent made you more independent and self-reliant?

MB: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did you like the idea of meeting people from all over the country?

MB: Oh, that was great, yes.

EMC: Did you feel when the war ended that women -- what women were expected to do had changed? Do you think that women were more interested in careers or in going back to domestic life?

MB: I think a good bit of them went into careers.

EMC: Now, did you work at all after you got out of the navy?

MB: No.

EMC: You didn't have paid work?

MB: No.

EMC: Okay. But you said you had four children.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: That was work enough.

MB: We had fun though.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's good. Did you maintain any service friendships when the war was over with WAVES that you had known?

MB: I started to but then all of a sudden I lost track of them.

EMC: That happens to a lot of people.

MB: Yes.

EMC: People move around so much. Did you attend any WAVE

reunions after the war?

MB: No.

EMC: Do you now belong to the Ocean State WAVES, which is a group that is a chapter of WAVES National. Have you heard of WAVES National?

MB: No.

EMC: Have you heard of Women in Military Service for America in Washington D.C., Arlington, I should say?

MB: No.

EMC: That's another organization. It's an archive and a museum for women in the military. Well, where did you settle after the war?

MB: Right here.

EMC: Well, not immediately after World War II.

MB: Newport.

EMC: But Newport was where you finally settled, I guess, where your last billet was. And why did you select Newport?

MB: Because he liked it.

EMC: Oh.

MB: And wherever he wanted to go, I went.

EMC: Oh, okay, so you didn't put up a fuss. Did you ever talk about your WAVE days to your children?

MB: Oh, sometimes, yes.

EMC: Did any of them join the navy?

MB: No.

EMC: Not a one?

MB: Not a one.

EMC: Do you think they resented the fact that they had to move around so much?

MB: No, they just weren't interested.

EMC: Okay. Just weren't interested, but basically, you said during your 33 years you were up and down the east coast.

MB: Um-hum.

EMC: Never in the south?

MB: Yes, we were in Jacksonville, not Jacksonville, Mayport. And we were in Philadelphia, then we were in Newport, then we went back to Philadelphia and then down to Norfolk, back to Newport, and I guess that's as far we went.

EMC: So you had a little bit of time in the south as well.

MB: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Well, do you have any other comments to make on your service in the WAVES, anything that stands out for you, any experiences that you'd want to talk about?

MB: No.

EMC: So if you had to sum up your service in the WAVES, your two years, how would you sum it up? What kind of an experience do you think it was for you?

MB: For me, it was a great experience. I just did what I wanted to do, and I was happy.

EMC: That's great. Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Birdy, for your reminiscences of your time in the WAVES.

## Index

American Campaign Medal, 33  
GED (General Education Development), 4  
Hunter College, Bronx, New York, 9  
MacAfee, Mildred, 29  
Middletown, Rhode Island, 1  
NAS Klamath Falls, Oregon, 16, 19  
NAS Seattle Washington, 18, 21  
Newport, Rhode Island, 31, 40  
Pasco, Washington, 12  
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 5  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2, 40  
Seattle, Washington, 23, 24, 28, 33  
Toronto, Canada, 1  
U.S. Naval Training School, Woman Reserve, at Hunter College, 9, 11  
Victory Medal, 33  
Woman Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), 1, 6  
World War II, 2