

A Veterans Oral History
Heritage Education Commission
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Moorhead, MN

Marrion Walsh
Narrator

Terry Shoptaugh
Interviewer

April 14, 1992

Marrion Walsh Biography

Marrion Walsh grew up in Lock Lake, North Dakota and enlisted into the Navy in 1944. She attended grades K-12 in the Lock Lake public schools until she attended secondary education at the Junior College in Aberdeen and then North Dakota State University. Through the Navy she was trained in Georgia and New York for book keeping tasks related to the Navy. After training she was moved to Mississippi to work in the Dispersion Center until the end of her term of service.

TS: My name is Terry Shoptaugh. Today is the 14th of April 1992, and I'm interviewing Mrs. Marrion Walsh of Moorhead regarding her experiences in the United States Navy Waves. And so we will start with a quick question here. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

MW: I was born in Devils Lake, North Dakota, August 1, 1924.

TS: Did you grow up in Devils Lake?

MW: No, my home was in Rock Lake and that's where the hospital was, where I was born. But I lived in Rock Lake, North Dakota, and went to school, grades 1-12 there.

TS: And this was the city school then, in town?

MW: Uh huh.

TS: What did your dad do for a living?

MW: He was a merchant. He came to our town about the year after it was started so he was really an old pioneer in the town. My mother was a domestic science teacher. And she came to teach in Rock Lake and met my father there.

TS: She was teaching at the public school? .

MW: Yes.

TS: You said your dad was a merchant. Did he operate a general store?

MW: A general store, yes.

TS: How long was that store open? You said it started about a year after the town was founded?

MW: Yes, 1906 until about '50 – no – about '55 or '57, something like that.

TS: Almost exactly 50 years.

MW: Yes.

TS: Dry goods.

MW: Yes.

TS: Just about anything, you name it, he had it?

MW: I learned to make change before I went to school. I did the candy counter.

TS: Now you say you went to school in Rock Lake through all 12 years.

MW: Yes.

TS: And that means you would have graduated about 1941-42.

MW: Forty-two.

TS: You said your mother was a teacher?

MW: Yes.

TS: Do you remember when approximately that was that she came to Rock Lake?

MW: 1918, '17, somewhere in there.

TS: I should ask your maiden name?

MW: Jahnke, J-A-H-N-K-E.

TS: Okay.

MW: Mispronounced.

TS: That's a German name, isn't it?

MW: Yes, it's "Yahnka."

TS: And your father's first name?

MW: Charles.

TS: Or was it actually Carl?

MW: It was actually Carl. His confirmation bible says "Carl."

TS: Did he come from Germany?

MW: No. Both of my paternal grandparents came from Germany after my grandfather's flour mill burned down. And he decided if he was going to start over – he told me this – "I want to start in a better country."

TS: So it would have been like 1870s or '80s, something like that he came to the United States.

MW: Yes.

TS: On your mother's side of the family, were they also German?

MW: No, my maternal grandmother was Scottish. And she was 18 years old when she came to the United States. And my grandfather was Pennsylvania Dutch.

TS: And your mother, her name?

MW: Wilkins.

TS: And her first name?

MW: Mary.

TS: Mary Wilkins, that's a very English-sounding name.

MW: Yes, my grandmother was Kennedy.

TS: Let me ask you a question. Since your father was born Carl Jahnke, took the anglicized version, Charles Jahnke, when he was a merchant in Rock Lake, did he ever talk much about World War I?

MW: No, not very much. He said by that time he had children and, therefore, he wasn't up for the draft or anything. He didn't talk about it very much.

TS: I just wondered if he had. In some of the towns in North Dakota and here in Minnesota, people of German descent were not very well treated during the First World War. Of course, with having anglicized his name, it may not have been readily evident for him.

MW: Well there were a lot of Germans in our community. I just never heard anything about it.

TS: Now, you say that he already had children by the time of World War I, so I take it you weren't the first child.

MW: No, I'm the fourth.

TS: The fourth child and you say your mom was a teacher. Were you interested in going into teaching or something when you were getting out of school?

MW: No, I was not.

TS: Were you thinking at all about what you wanted to do when you got out of high school?

MW: Yes, I was going to be an occupational therapist.

TS: That was your interest?

MW: Yes.

TS: Did you have in mind a particular school you were going to go to?

MW: No, it was what I could afford because there were a lot of us, and our parents sent all of us to college but it wasn't easy to do that.

TS: No, I can imagine.

MW: And I went my freshman year to Grays Harbor Junior College in Aberdeen, Washington, where an older sister was working. And I went to junior college there and I worked part-time.

TS: Since she was related, you were able to get some kind of a break on the tuition, or?

MW: No

TS: It just gave you a place to live while you went to school.

MW: Yes, right.

TS: During the depression, did your dad have any trouble keeping the store open or keeping it going?

MW: He surely did. But he managed very well. I don't know how he ever, ever managed it, because he did so much credit business.

TS: I can imagine, particularly with the farmers around that town, he pretty much had to keep accounts for just about everybody.

MW: And he was really quite tenderhearted. He couldn't stand to see children with nothing to eat, so he gave them food.

TS: Did you work there most summers while you were growing up?

MW: I worked there lots.

TS: And you said you ran the candy counter.

MW: I learned that early.

TS: What else did you do there?

MW: Oh, everything. I kept books. As I grew up my older sisters would go off and then you'd get promoted to the next job ... counted eggs. I did everything.

TS: Why did you decide on occupational therapy?

MW: I don't know. You know, when I graduated from high school, the opportunities simply were not there for women.

TS: Teaching was one possibility.

MW: And I didn't want to be a teacher. And I didn't want to be a nurse because I – that wasn't my thing at all.

TS: Which leaves a secretary.

MW: Secretary and that wasn't my thing. So I thought, well, I thought occupational therapy was a helping occupation, therefore, I thought maybe that would be good.

TS: Another possibility would have been libraries. That was always pretty, quite common in those days.

MW: Yes.

TS: Did they talk about that much in high school, the kinds of occupations for women.

MW: We did not for women. But I did. We had a compulsory course in vocations – when I was in high school. And I went through the list and I thought, well, I'll try it. However, I hadn't reckoned on the fact that I really hate chemistry; and I really hate a lot of science; and when it came right down to it, the things I was taking weren't my thing at all.

TS: What were your favorite subjects in school?

MW: Political science, history, English.

TS: And, if you didn't want to teach, that leaves only a few doors.

MW: Yes, right.

TS: Since you were interested in history and political science, did you follow what was going on Europe during the late '30s?

MW: Oh, indeed. My grandmother was living with us, part of the time.

TS: Which grandmother is this now?

MW: My Grandma Wilkins.

TS: Okay.

MW: The Scottish immigrant and a very bright lady. And she taught me politics, really.

TS: She had particular, fairly strong political opinions?

MW: Boy, she did. She couldn't stand Franklin Roosevelt.

TS: She was a Republican, by [unclear].

MW: Yes.

TS: Well, there were a lot of Roosevelt – and anti-Roosevelt people out there, which made for a lot of discussion in the '30s.

MW: Yes.

TS: But politics in Europe now, she followed that as well?

MW: Yes, she had a sister who lived in Scotland and I can remember when we would get letters about the war, for example. And Aunt Marrison . . .

TS: Are you named for her?

MW: Yes. Lieshman (sp?) was her name – Kennedy-Lieshman – used to write long letters and my grandmother and Aunt Minnie used to write back and forth. She would write about, tell about sitting in a closet that was fitted out with dark curtains and waiting for the bombs to go over, because she lived near Glasgow.

TS: Sure Naval bases nearby, one of the primary targets during the Battle of Britain.

MW: Yes.

TS: Did your grandmother, for example, have very strong opinions about the representatives from North Dakota? There were some very, very influential senators at that time in North Dakota. Gerald Nye was one.

MW: Gerald Nye, yes.

TS: And he was extremely determined to keep the United States out of “that war in Europe,” as he called it. The other one, if I recall, was the governor and I can’t think of his name right now. Darn, I just can’t think . . .

MW: Which one?

TS: He was elected but they wouldn’t let him take his seat right away.

MW: Oh, you mean Bill Langer?

TS: Bill Langer, right.

MW: Oh. Yes.

TS: Langer was the other one and, of course, he was fairly isolationist but he had to keep quiet during the first year or so, because he had trouble just taking his seat in the senate. But most of the representatives who were in Congress for that state were very much against American involvement in the war. They voted against Lend-Lease. They voted for Neutrality Acts. Where did your grandmother stand on that? Did she want the United States to get involved in the war?

MW: No, I don’t think she especially did, but she also was very opposed to what was happening in Europe and what she knew was happening, but . . .

TS: Most of the people in this state weren’t that aware of what was going on in Europe at that time.

MW: Probably not. I can remember – oh, he was actually one of my mentors in our local politics. His name was E. J. Langley and he was our representative. He came one day with Gerald P. Nye in tow to introduce him to me. And I was at the beauty shop underneath one of these hairdryers.

TS: How old were you then?

MW: Oh, still in high school, 16 or 17, or something like that. But he knew I was interested in politics, so . . .

TS: Okay, now Langley was in the Congress in the House of Representatives.

MW: House of Representatives, yes, and anyway, I remember that – I still remember this because they came and they stood so close to me. You know you have to get out from under these ... Well, I couldn’t get out because

their feet were there. So they were talking to me and I couldn't hear a word they said.

TS: So you met Gerald Nye and you don't know what he said?

MW: That's right. But that was during about '42, '41-'42, somewhere in there; '40, was it? Maybe somewhere in there.

TS: Nye, unfortunately, had the misfortune of making a speech against American aid to Britain at the time of Pearl Harbor. I mean, he was literally speaking about this in New York when the announcement came about Pearl Harbor, which really harmed his chances for re-election in 1944, I think it was, if I recall. When he ran for re-election, he was defeated.

MW: Oh, I'm sure.

TS: Do you remember much about the build-up towards, in the fall of 1941, when the National Guard of North Dakota was called to service, for example. Did you know anybody who was in the Guard?

MW: No, I did not. I didn't know anybody. But I had a remarkable history teacher ... a really, truly remarkable man.

TS: What was his name?

MW: Harold Sheets, he taught later up at Grand Forks but he was our school superintendent. He was my history teacher. And he made us review articles in all the news magazines. I spent a lot of time in the library because I was reading all these articles. I can still remember one about the Senate turning down the fortification of Guam. That sticks in my mind, because we talked about it in class and should it be done and, of course, it should have been done. But I know I read Mein Kampf in those years when it was an awfully big book.

TS: And an awfully dull book, too.

MW: Very dull, hard reading.

TS: But Harold Sheets asked you to read that?

MW: No, he did not. But I was interested enough, so I just read it on my own. And I remember discussing it with my parents.

TS: That brings up an interesting question. Once the United States entered the war, it wasn't really possible to get a copy of Mein Kampf in an American bookstore.

MW: Is that right?

TS: That's right. That was just an interesting thing, but it was readily available in both English and German during the late '30s and, in fact, there were a number of people in North Dakota who subscribed to a German language newspaper that was very pro-Hitler until the war broke out, of course. So it was an interesting period and there was a lot of interesting divisions of thought at that time. And it's interesting that you got to read about a lot of this and reflect on it when you were so young.

MW: I remember in *Life* magazine that there was women against the war . . . and I can remember a picture of them in an old *Life* magazine kneeling, and I don't remember what they [unclear].

TS: I wonder if that was Mothers Against the War.

MW: I think it is ... Mothers Against the War, that's right.

TS: They talked a lot about "don't draft my son." And they did lobby a great deal, particularly in the fall of '41, when they were renewing the draft. They had the draft in the fall of '40 for one year and that's how the National and Minnesota Guards were called to active duty. Then in the fall of '41 they had to vote again to renew the draft, and it passed by one vote. So they were very involved in that. While a lot of students your age weren't paying much attention to it and I've talked to several and they said, "Oh, we didn't pay any attention to it."

MW: Oh yes, I did.

TS: You were following it.

MW: I did, yes.

TS: Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

MW: I surely do. Let's see. Our Sunday dinner was finished. We put the good dishes away and all my sisters had drifted on to their own activities. My dad had the day off and he was napping on the couch. And my mother was at a Sunday school teacher's meeting. And I was curled up in a rocking chair reading the new issue of *Life*. And I just finished reading an article by Clare Boothe Luce on General Douglas MacArthur and our stronghold in

Corregidor. Just finished reading it and they used to have a picture of the week, a full-paged picture; and the picture that Sunday, was of two Japanese envoys that had come to America to negotiate. They sat there with their striped pants on, as I recall it; and I remember thinking, “me thinks you smile too much” or something, the inscrutable Japanese. And I was looking through the magazine, and our front door just flew open, and my mother just flew in shouting, “Get up! Get the radio on! We’re at war! We’re at war!”

TS: I’ll be darn.

MW: And my mother never shouted and she didn’t fly in and so that, it was so untypical.

TS: [unclear] you said she was at a Sunday school teacher’s meeting

MW: Yes.

TS: May I ask what kind of church you attended?

MW: Methodist Church across the street -- high school was kitty-corner across the street.

TS: So she was the first one in the family who had heard this?

MW: Yes and our superintendent of Sunday school was obviously there, and her son came running over and said, “You better come home, we’re at war.”

TS: Oh dear. Did you have any brothers?

MW: No, all sisters.

TS: Did you turn on the radio then and follow the events on the radio?

MW: Yes, my dad jumped up and we just sat glued to the radio, until midnight, listening to everything that was there. And, you know, it was hard to comprehend just what was really happening at the time.

TS: Do you remember your father or your mother making any particular comments, once they realized the war was going on for the United States?

MW: No, it was there. It had happened. We had to do what we could.

TS: Since your mother was so involved in the Methodist Church, I'm curious, did the church get involved in any wartime activities that you remember before you, yourself joined the service?

MW: I remember that my mother sent materials, I suppose religious materials to all the soldiers we had over there. I think they were involved in, certainly in writing to all of our members who were overseas and there were a lot for a little town. And also I can remember, I was learning to knit and my grandma taught me to knit. There was all this khaki yarn that my mom and my gram knitted all kinds of caps and scarves and things like that.

TS: That was very common.

MW: Yes.

TS: Did they get involved in the Red Cross activities, making bandages, that kind of thing?

MW: I don't think so.

TS: It was pretty much knitting and you said religious materials that they sent.

MW: And corresponding, keeping in touch with . . .

TS: Members of the town. Did you remember the Guard going off to active duty before the war began? Did you have any friends that were involved in that or [unclear].

MW: Well I knew they went, 164th. But I didn't have any friends, no.

TS: Were there people in the Rock Lake who went with the Guard?

MW: No. But I do remember, let me see, was the Death March itself. My dad used to pick up kids around town. He had all these girls at home, so he would take some waif under his wing and then he'd bring him home so they'd get a square meal. We had a lot of kids in and out, you know.

TS: This was during the '30s?

MW: Yes, and this one kid we called, Mahat. He had had rickets and he came from a poor family and I'm sorry to say that we called him Mahat because he looked a lot like Mahatma Gandhi.

TS: So that was the nickname you gave him?

MW: Yes and he was dirty and poor and always hungry and I can remember him eating many, many meals at our house. He was a young lad that went in the Army and was on the Bataan Death March and died.

TS: So he went into the Army before the war began.

MW: Yes, he did. But I don't remember the circumstances at all.

TS: But you can remember later discovering that he had been . . .

MW: On the Death March.

TS: On the Death March. And is this your most vivid memory of the first or those early months, hearing about what was going on?

MW: I think so.

TS: Because you mentioned MacArthur and Corregidor. The Pacific War, of course, was the early focus. We weren't fighting, per se, in the Pacific . . .

MW: There were two other . . .

TS: or in the Atlantic, rather.

MW: Two other young men who died from my hometown and that's all I really remember. They would come home with their uniforms on and things like that but nothing remarkable.

TS: When did you decide to join the Waves?

MW: Well I had finished two years of college.

TS: Okay and this was at the junior college?

MW: Yes, one year of junior college and then I came back home and went to NDSU. NDAC (North Dakota Agriculture College), it was in those days.

TS: And that would have been in 1942?

MW: Yes, 3.

TS: '42 to '43?

MW: '42-'43, '43-'44. And my best friend from my hometown and I decided that we – I mean, things were happening out there, and we didn't want to sit on the sidelines. We wanted to be a part of it. So we decided we would join the Navy. And that's just what we did.

TS: I should ask you now. You spent a year at NDAC. Did you live in Fargo during that time?

MW: Yes, I did.

TS: And what was the campus like during that year? I mean, it must have been fairly empty.

MW: Yes, although the Army was stationed there.

TS: They had an officer's program of some kind. I know that.

MW: I've forgotten what it was now, but . . .

TS: It was some kind of a specialized program. I remember reading about it. But other than that, there were very few men students.

MW: Yes, there were very few men students.

TS: And what about the town, was it very active at that time?

MW: Well, of course, I came from world's smallest town. I thought it was very exciting, very big town.

TS: Do you remember if they have blackouts on the campus?

MW: If we did, it didn't impress me.

TS: I should ask your friend's name.

MW: Jean Spencer. (sp?)

TS: You and Jean Spencer decided to join the Navy and "see the world," as they say.

MW: See the world, right.

TS: How old were you at that time?

MW: I was – well, I was 18 when we started and when I went into the Navy, my birthday was in August, so I was 19 then. So my parents had to sign for me.

TS: So that would have been August of '43.

MW: Forty-four.

TS: Forty-four ... so you would have been 20 then?

MW: Well, yes, I would be by the time I went in November, but when I signed up in summer I was 19.

TS: You were 19?

MW: Yes.

TS: And if I recall then a person under 20 could not, or maybe it was even 21. . .

MW: I think it was 21.

TS: for the women. A woman could not join without their parents' permission.

MW: And my mother said she would sign for me. Then when my mother signed for me, my dad said he wanted to sign then, too. He was a little reluctant about it, at first; but once Mom did then that was fine.

TS: But were they worried you'd like overseas?

MW: No, my dad said, "I know you'll smoke."

TS: That was his first concern.

MW: His first concern.

TS: At that time, there wasn't the expectation that women would get involved in a situation that would be combat or in any great physical danger.

MW: No.

TS: Of course, nurses did go overseas and there were women who were killed at Pearl Harbor who were nurses and in other professions. There were women who were

on the Bataan Death March, for that matter, who were nurses overseas. So you never knew that for sure. But you decided you wanted to join and they did give you permission?

MW: Yes.

TS: Now you say it wasn't until about November of '44, is that right?

MW: I was in New York City. We reported for duty the 2nd of November of '44.

TS: And that's where you were officially inducted?

MW: No, I was sworn in at Grand Forks in the middle of the summer sometime. I've forgotten just when.

TS: Why did you pick the Navy?

MW: Well, I liked it. I thought it was a little bit more exclusive than the Army. And we just thought we'd like to join the Navy.

TS: What kind of training did you get, when you started your basic training?

MW: Well, we got a lot of drilling and a lot of exercise, believe me. And we learned all kinds of things, you know. We had identification of aircraft. We had all kinds of classes that we went to at boot camp.

TS: And where was that?

MW: Hunter College of New York City. Among the things that I learned was Navy language, like port and starboard and the head and the galley and so forth. And that our 2130 bedtime meant 9:30 and not one minute thereafter. Fortunately we were so exhausted that it worked. And I learned that "bare hand on the ladder, seamen," meant "hurry." It didn't mean take off your gloves or anything. I learned to lace a bunk so tightly that you could bounce a coin. I learned how to salute correctly. And I learned about white glove inspection the hard way.

TS: What do you mean the hard way?

MW: Well Jean and I were supposed to clean the bathroom. And we did it with great energy, scouring powder and steel wool and everything. And we were billeted in apartments.

TS: Near Hunter College?

MW: Near Hunter College, yes ... at 12 girls to an apartment and one bathroom.

TS: How many rooms to an apartment?

MW: I think there were three bedrooms of four, two bunks in each one.

TS: Okay, twelve people and one bathroom.

MW: Yes.

TS: Sounds like my family in the morning.

MW: Okay, well anyway when we finished cleaning the bathroom, we were standing at attention and the inspection party came in; and they said the head is filthy. I was never so crushed but, anyway, there was another time when I got into trouble. I was supposed to wash the woodwork. I said, "Well, I'm the only one in here tall enough to reach the wooden molding in the hall and nobody's going to do that, anyway." And that was the day Eleanor Roosevelt came, and they did a full-scale, white-glove inspection, and we were all 12 confined to quarters for dust on the overhead. My popularity was really in trouble.

TS: Most of your officers and instructors at Hunter College were they women or were some of them men?

MW: There were some men, mostly women.

TS: What about in the actual physical training, the calisthenics, all this exercise training. Most of that was run by women, too?

MW: Most of it was, yes.

TS: Were they recently in the Navy or had they been in a little longer?

MW: No, well, not very long.

TS: I don't think they had any women in the Navy before the war.

MW: No, they didn't before the war. They didn't.

TS: There was a little bit in the Army, just before the war, they'd gotten it started, but not for very long.

MW: No, not long at all.

TS: So these officers, did you get the feeling they knew much more than you did?

MW: I tell you, they were good. I liked them. I thought they were great. We had a – our, gosh, what would she be –our drill master, anyway. We called Fanny, and she was six feet tall, and her voice boomed out. And she really marched us along. We had the wind coming off the reservoir there, and I can remember drilling with my eyes closed, hoping that everybody else would keep step, because it was very chilly.

TS: That helped you concentrate as well, just kind of focus on yourself?

MW: No.

TS: Just trying to stay out of the cold.

MW: Yes.

TS: How long were you at Hunter College?

MW: About six weeks.

TS: And this was in the late part of 1944?

MW: Yes.

TS: The last few months.

MW: November, December, it was pretty cold.

TS: That was a pretty cold winter. It was very cold overseas, I know that, because I talked to my father who was in France and Germany during that time. Where did you go after you received your training at Hunter?

MW: We went to Milledgesville, Georgia. Jean and I were both assigned to Georgia State College for Women in Milledgesville to go to storekeeper's school. But first, I should tell you that before that I was called in. And before we got our assignments and let's see. Oh no, that was afterwards.

TS: That's okay, if you want to talk.

MW: Let me see if I can get my sequence correct here. No, we were just assigned there at the time.

TS: Now what do you mean by storekeeper school?

MW: Well we learned to do all the bookkeeping, that there was for the Navy. And I became a dispersing storekeeper after I was through.

TS: Did they give you any idea once you were done with all this training, what it was going to be for?

MW: Well, we knew, yes.

TS: Well now, did they base this on your own background? I mean, I'm just trying to figure out how it . . .

MW: We took a battery of tests.

TS: They gave you a series of tests?

MW: Yes and it was considered a good job.

TS: One thing I should ask you, before we finish your training, did they give you rifle training?

MW: No.

TS: They did not give you any kind of weapons training?

MW: No.

TS: Or any familiarity with it at all? And then you went to Milledgesville?

MW: Yes.

TS: And how long were you there?

MW: I was there for three months.

TS: Early part of 1945?

MW: Yes.

TS: Like January through March, something like that?

MW: Yes.

TS: At that time did you know the war was coming close to coming to an end in Europe?

MW: Well actually, I was less informed than I had been because we didn't have time to keep up with the newspapers and have access to them but, yes, I think we did.

TS: The Navy didn't go out of its way to keep you informed on what was going on overseas at that time.

MW: Not really, we were busy. We had our classes and so forth and . . .

TS: What kind of accommodations did you have in Milledgesville? Were you on the campus?

MW: Yes, we had lovely accommodations.

TS: Dormitory accommodations type?

MW: Yes, the campus buildings were red brick with white pillars. And Sanford Hall, our new billet, had lounges and pianos and bathrooms galore. So that was a whole new Navy for us. And everybody was wonderful to us.

You know, they didn't have time for you except just do what you had to do at boot camp. But when we got to Milledgesville, we were held up by two train wrecks and we came in very late. All the old girls were there waiting for us and they carried our suitcases and everything like that. We couldn't believe it. We had this big meal waiting for us . . .

TS: Now, what do you mean by "old girls?"

MW: The ones who hadn't graduated, who were still in school.

TS: I see.

MW: They were partly through their training.

TS: The older class or what you want to call it, that they had at that point?

MW: The older class, yes.

TS: Was this a specialized program or was this just what they had set up for that training to take place?

MW: It was what had been set up.

TS: I see...

MW: And they trained a lot of subdivisions, I suppose, in the storekeeper system.

TS: Did you go to classes on the campus?

MW: Yes.

TS: Did they use the civilian professors there?

MW: No.

TS: Or was it all military instructors?

MW: No, we had military instructors.

TS: Were there many students? I mean, based on what you could see? Obviously, you couldn't interact with them a whole lot since you were going to your own classes. Were there many students on the campus, regular college students?

MW: Yes, there were a lot.

TS: Had you ever traveled outside of North Dakota before you joined the Navy?

MW: Well, I went to school in Washington State.

TS: Right and that was about it?

MW: That's about it. Oh, you know, Minnesota and Canada but not a lot.

TS: But you had never been to the East Coast?

MW: No.

TS: So New York was a new experience?

MW: Yes

TS: The South must have been a very different experience?

MW: Yes.

TS: What did you think of the South?

MW: I liked it. I enjoyed it, our time there. Let's see. I had a little trouble with the language, as you can imagine.

TS: Yes, I imagine they felt the same way about you folks?

MW: Yes, indeed. Because I went in one day to a place and – my great love is caramels and chocolate. You know, those two things are best things in the world, as far as I'm concerned. And so after all these hardships with the classes, we had gone downtown. Jean and I had gone downtown, and I went into a shop and I said, "Do you have any caramels." And everybody was mystified and so they were asking, "What does she mean?" And they were all looking around. I said, "You know?" They said, "What is it?" And I said, "Well, you know, caramels or candy. They're good to eat." Nobody could get that at all. And finally a young man said, "She means caramels." So I had a little language problem.

TS: Same problem in New York ... did you find the accent there [unclear]?

MW: No, not that bad. Besides they didn't let us out much. We were in a War Bond Parade down Fifth Avenue.

TS: Oh in Milledgesville?

MW: No, no, this was in New York and we had one weekend liberty.

TS: So you really didn't see much of New York.

MW: No, but boy, we saw a lot for that two days.

TS: I understand.

MW: Yes, but I didn't really have that much contact with New Yorkers.

TS: But you did have contact with people from all over the country, once you actually started going to these programs, and because the people you were with. Now your friend, Jean, you were fortunate that you weren't separated at all.

MW: **Yes.**

TS: You were going through the program together, but these people came from all over.

MW: **I know.**

TS: Was there any particular parts or types of people that you found irritated you?

MW: **Probably Brooklyn.**

TS: Brooklyn, why?

MW: **Well, they seemed to be more arrogant, certainly very self-confident and with all the answers. But I got along with everybody. I didn't find objectionable people, really.**

TS: Were any women in your unit Jewish?

MW: **Yes.**

TS: Had you met any Jewish people before that?

MW: **No, I had not.**

TS: How did you react to that?

MW: **When I think back I was looking through my scrapbook the other day; and I said to myself, "I don't remember anything about them being Jewish." And if we had Negroes, I don't remember. It just didn't impress me.**

TS: The Waves, in my memory, if there were Blacks in the Navy, you didn't see them very often.

MW: **I didn't see any or else I don't remember. They just didn't impress [unclear].**

TS: How about Blacks in the South, when you were in Georgia?

MW: A lot of Blacks in the South, yes.

TS: Was this your first encounter with Blacks [unclear]?

MW: Yes it was. This shocked me a little bit. Well it shocked me a lot, that there were separate places for them and that they . . .

TS: By separate places you mean if you went down into the town of Milledgesville, where you mentioned earlier, going and asking for caramel, you discovered there were separate restrooms?

MW: Yes.

TS: If indeed there were any available for Coloreds.

MW: Separate restrooms, separate waiting rooms at the train depots ... they sat in the back. I had an interesting experience, I thought, when I was in New Orleans, when I was – I'm getting ahead of myself.

TS: That's fine, go ahead.

MW: It's on this topic. I went and got on the streetcar, and it was the canal streetcar and thought nothing of it, sat down. And a woman came up to me and she said, "Are you a Negro?" And I said, "No, I'm not. Why?" I mean, I don't really look like a Negro.

TS: Were you in uniform?

MW: Yes and she said, "Well then, you shouldn't be sitting in their seat." "Oh," I said, "Are they reserved? I didn't know. I just sat down." She said, "You must not sit in that seat then." And they had a sign with hooks on it, and you could put that behind you. But if that was in front of you, you were not to sit there. So if there were more Blacks on the streetcar, they had more seats; and if there were more Whites, then they had more seats.

TS: I see.

MW: And I was quite shocked that anybody would accost me with something like that. I didn't think it would matter anyway, but I learned.

TS: Did you get a chance to talk to any Blacks while you were in the South, in Louisiana or in Georgia, or wherever?

MW: Yes.

TS: Were they subservient? That's how they were presented by Southerners.

MW: Well, you know, one was our laundry lady and she was great. We'd go and joke with her and she did our laundry for about nothing. And we'd go and deliver it and pick it up, and I can still remember this big bright pink bed in this immaculate little cabin that we had near the gate. And . . .

TS: This was her cabin?

MW: Yes.

TS: I see. So this was kind of in a rural setting [unclear]?

MW: Yes it was. That was in Mississippi.

TS: What was her name?

MW: I don't know. I can't remember.

TS: Okay.

MS: I've forgotten.

TS: Did you detect any resentment on the part of Blacks?

MW: Well – no, I can't say I really did, but I found something that was interesting to me and that was that my dear friend, Kathy, who was from Anguilla, Mississippi, dealt better with Blacks than I did. I mean, we had a cleaning lady when I was stationed in New Orleans; and I mean, I was absolutely as friendly ... you know, I had no feelings. I hadn't been brought up with any ethnic differences, really; and so I had no feelings about her at all except I thought I was friendly but she didn't like me. She liked Kathy. Kathy knew how to deal with her.

TS: I see.

MW: And that always puzzled me a little bit because Kathy was from a plantation in Mississippi.

TS: Now when you say she knew how to deal with her, what ways was she dealing with her differently than you were?

MW: I don't know, but it was discernable.

TS: Do you think you were patronizing, or do you think she was patronizing?

MW: I don't think I was. I don't think I was patronizing but she knew, seemed to know what to expect from Kathy more. She did the paying and she did the telling her what to do and everything and they just seemed to have a better working arrangement than I did.

TS: Were there any overt racists that you encountered in the Navy?

MW: No, not really.

TS: Now you say you got your specialized training in Milledgesville and you were there for about three months.

MW: Yes.

TS: And when you were done with that you were called in, something like that?

MW: Yes, I was.

TS: What do you mean by called in now?

MW: Well, I suppose like a counselor. And they offered me a job in Washington, DC as a Specialist X. I guess this was supposed to be quite a good assignment. And I said, "Well what does a Specialist X do? X as in what? X as in miscellaneous. And they said that I would be doing straight mathematical computations and I despise math.

TS: I see.

MW: Well, I said, "I don't want to do that at all."

TS: This was an officer?

MW: Yes.

TS: That you were dealing with at this time, and they were coming up with where you would be assigned?

MW: Yes, where I was going to go next.

TS: I see.

MW: And I said, "I don't want to do that at all." My mother said she had to take algebra five times.

TS: How did this [unclear]? was it a man or a woman?

MW: A man.

TS: And do you remember if he was an ensign or . . . ?

MW: Oh, I think probably JG or something like that.

TS: And how did he react to that?

MW: Well, a little shocked.

TS: I imagine if you're used to dealing with the standard Navy type, they don't ask. They just tell you where you're going.

MW: Yes.

TS: But the Waves were a little bit different.

MW: Yes and well then, the next time I was called in, I was given this duty assignment in Gulfport, Mississippi, at the Naval Training Center there. And I said, "Sure that's fine." You know, that was okay. And Jean got to go there, too.

TS: When did you leave for Gulfport?

MW: We came home on leave for, I suppose, about a week or something like that – 10 days. And then I know I left all my grays – uniforms, because we wouldn't have to haul them around, then I just wore my blues. And we no more than got down there, it must have been the first of March, in March anyway.

TS: Blues were considered the lightweight uniform?

MW: No, blues were the heavyweight.

TS: The heavyweight uniforms.

MW: And that's what we wore.

TS: I see.

MW: All the time until then. So I just dropped off my grays at home. And immediately I had to write for them because we were going into our grays in March in Mississippi.

TS: Because it was so much warmer?

MW: Yes.

TS: I see.

MW: That's why I remember the time.

TS: You didn't take into account what the climate was going to be like right down there on the Gulf Coast.

MW: I didn't.

TS: So it was about early March, or something like that, you arrived in Gulfport?

MW: Yes.

TS: What were your duties now at this center?

MW: I was assigned to the dispersing office and I was waiting outside on a bench and in personnel along with some other people who had just arrived aboard. And this man went past and then he said, "I'll take the tall blonde." And that was me. I went to work in the dispersing office and had an excellent job.

TS: How did you feel about being referred to as the tall blonde?

MW: Well, whatever.

TS: Now give me some background on this center that you were referring to, what was the formal name of the center?

MW: Gulfport Naval Training Center.

TS: And it was designed for what purpose?

MW: Training schools for – well, there was all kinds of different schools that were at the training center. And then they were shipped from there out as engineers, as firemen, as carpenter's mate, all kinds of things.

TS: And the actual training took place in schools around the country?

MW: No, right there.

TS: Right there at that point.

MW: In Gulf Port, yes.

TS: So you were working in the dispersing center. So what, actually, did you do then?

MW: Figured pay and then I went on the pay line and I paid the men. And that was an excellent job. Because everybody wanted their money, you know. And the cooks would bring us pie. I remember, every time we went on the pay line they brought us coffee and pie.

TS: How long were you there?

MW: Oh, I should have refreshed my memory on times.

TS: That's fine, approximately?

MW: Let's see ... a couple years.

TS: Couple of years.

MW: Yes.

TS: Now was there also a connection between that and the college training program and the college personnel training program?

MW: No, not at all.

TS: Not at all. Okay. I had that mixed up in our pre-interview. That's what I thought had something to do the V-5 programs.

MW: No.

TS: Had nothing to do with the V-5.

MW: No.

TS: So you were in Gulfport, which is real near New Orleans.

MW: Yes.

TS: For about two years, which would be . . . ?

MW: A year and half or so, something like . . .

TS: Until early 1947, thereabouts or late '46?

MW: Forty-six, I think it was. I brought this along in case I had to check something. I can find out, but . . .

TS: That's fine, so you worked in payroll during that entire time?

MW: My boss discovered I had a talent for forgery. And every sailor had a separate yellow payroll record; and you entered how much he had. It was a continuing record for all the time he was in the service. And every single one of these kids that was transferred had to have his payroll signed by the dispersing officer. When Lieutenant Layden discovered I could do that, I got all these stacks on my desk, so I signed all the records when they were transferred; and they were all transferred, obviously, because it was a training center.

TS: You were signing his name?

MW: Yes.

TS: And his name was Layden?

MW: Yes, L-A-Y-D-E-N 55642, I know it by heart. That's his number. He had to have that on there, too. And then we got another officer in and it was Lieutenant Bosman (sp?) and I had this reputation, so then I learned how to do his.