

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II

Personal Experience

O.H. 1244

ROSE S. ROVNAK

Interviewed

by

Frank Kovach

on

July 8, 1989

ROSE SUZANNE ROVNAK

Rose was born in Burgettstown, Pennsylvania on May 17, 1922. She is one of eleven offspring born to George and Helen Skvarka Rovnak. Her family moved to Neffs, Ohio (Belmont County) when Rose was only three months old. They continued to live in Belmont County until she was five years old.

At the age of five, Rose's family moved to Youngstown, Ohio. The family purchased a home at 832 Miami Avenue, on the city's east side.

During the depression, Miss Rovnak's father and older brothers were fortunate enough to continue to work at the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, and the family was able to make ends meet.

Rose entered John White Elementary School to begin her formal education. She transferred to parochial school in the third grade. She continued her education at Sts. Cyril & Methodius School through eighth grade. Her high school years were spent at Scienceville High School. She graduated from Scienceville High in 1940.

When the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor took place, Miss Rovnak was working in the payment office at Strouss-Hirshberg's in downtown Youngstown.

She enlisted in the W.A.V.E.S. in May of 1943. She did not report for active duty until November of that year, because her friend, Mary Kathryn Daugherty, was under age. Miss Rovnak and Miss Daugherty received their basic training at Hunter College in the Bronx.

She received advanced training at Oklahoma A&M University,

in Stillwater, Oklahoma. The Navy had a three month course, which prepared her for her assignment as a Yeoman. [Naval office secretary].

In the Spring of 1944, Rose was assigned to the Office of Naval Intelligence [ONI], Central European Section, in Washington, D.C. Her section's work was classified as Top Secret and entailed translating captured German documents. Their office was under the direction of Admiral King. Miss Rovnak's specific assignment also included keeping a detailed account of the destruction of munitions plants in various German cities including Munich, Stuttgart, and Badenhausen.

The Central European Section of ONI was responsible for Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Miss Rovnak feels that her ethnic background and living in a German neighborhood helped her to be assigned to this unit.

One of the other accomplishments of The Central European Section of ONI was the development of the first map of occupied central European countries at the end of the war.

Rose was discharged from the United States Navy in March of 1946. She reached the rank of Yeoman 3rd Class. She received the Good Conduct Medal and an Honorable Discharge from the service.

Upon her return to civilian life, Rose entered the work force as a secretary in the insurance field. She began working for The Travelers Insurance Company and worked for them for twenty-six years. She has worked for various other insurance agencies and retired from the Steinhauser Agency in early July of

1989.

Rose formerly taught Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) classes at Sts. Cyril & Methodius for sixteen years and received The Pope Pius X Award for her services.

Rose has remained single and currently resides at 164 Stadium Dr. in Boardman, Ohio. She was one of the top women's bowlers in our area during the 1950's, 1960's, and early 1970's. Her hobbies include tennis, swimming, bowling, reading, and attending plays and symphonies.

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INTERVIEWEE: ROSE S. ROVNAK  
INTERVIEWER: Frank Kovach  
SUBJECT: the Depression, December 7, 1941, W.A.V.E.S.,  
ONI [Office of Naval Intelligence], Washing-  
ton, D.C. during the war  
DATE: July 8, 1989

K: This is an interview with Rose Rovnak for the Youngs-  
town State University Oral History Program, on the  
World War II Veterans Project, by Frank Kovach, at 164  
Stadium Drive, Apt. #2, on July 8, 1989, at 1:00 p.m.

Rose, why don't we begin by having you tell us a little  
bit about your background, your personal background of  
your growing up before World War II.

R: I grew up on the northeast side of Youngstown, which  
was a mixed neighborhood, mostly German--I would say.  
It was a very mixed neighborhood. I went to a parochi-  
al Catholic school up to the eighth grade, and then, I  
went to Scienceville High School. I graduated from  
there in 1940. I grew up in a large family. I had  
five brothers and five sisters, and most of them were  
older than I. My parents were born in Austria-Hungry.  
[They] came to the United States, I guess, when all of  
the immigrants were leaving Central Europe. So, I had  
a very happy childhood, I'd say. Most of the people in  
the neighborhood were of the same kind. And, it was a  
depression. We grew up in the depression, but we  
didn't know it as kids. We didn't know we were poor.  
Everybody else was poor, so it didn't matter to us, as  
long as we had food and the necessities. We had a good  
time. We played, and grew up. We had a good life!

- K: You went to Sts. Cyril & Methodius?
- R: Right. [I] graduated from there. Then, [I] went to a public high school.
- K: What do you remember of the depression, besides the fact that everyone was the same and poor? Is there anything else that you remember?
- R: Well, I think we were fortunate in our family. My father always worked. He was never without employment. I remember a lot of the neighbors were W.P.A., which was W.P.A. at the time. And then, I had older brothers at home that worked, also, especially my oldest brother. He was a foreman in the mill at a very early age. He married late in life, so he helped with the family. We didn't have too many luxuries, but we had necessities. We never were deprived of the necessities of life. And somehow or other, I don't think that my parents allowed us to realize how poor we were, if we were poor. But, we got along. We weren't deprived of necessities of life. Somehow or other we managed to come up with whatever we needed.
- K: Do you remember December 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?
- R: At that time, I was out of school and was working. . . . That was a Sunday that it happened. Of course Monday, we went to work. I was working in Strouss' payment office at the time. Of course, that was all everybody talked about, "Pearl Harbor." We didn't have television at that time. There was no television, so you had to read it in the newspapers. And of course, you went to movies, and that's all you saw in the movies, the attack on Pearl Harbor. I remember the day, and I remember discussing it at work; but that's about it. Like I said, it's what you read in the newspapers and people talking about it. But, I do remember it.
- K: After Pearl Harbor in 1941, did it have any effect on your family's life or your neighborhood's life, directly?
- R: No, because none of them were in the service at that time. None in that family were in the service. However, I know in the neighborhood--not immediately--there were friends, people in the neighborhood that we knew that were in the service. [They were] right at Pearl Harbor. I don't remember any of them being injured, but after--of course, as the war progressed--there were

people in the neighborhood that were prisoners of war, Japanese. In fact, one of the boys I went to school with was in Baton. [He] would march . . . he was in that. . . .

K: The Death March?

R: Yes, the Death March. He was in it. Although, he did survive it and came back home. They thought he was lost, but he wasn't. But, he was in it. So, different neighborhood people were in it. Yes, it affected the neighborhood, it really did.

K: What caused you to enlist in the W.A.V.E.S.?

R: I really didn't plan on enlisting, but one of the girls. . . . I mean, it was the spur of the moment thing that we did. One of the girls that I worked with, Mary Kathryn Daugherty--her dad was a printer at the Vindicator. At the time we enlisted, the Vindicator was having a big drive for personnel. I don't know whether it was just for W.A.V.E.S. in particular, or for women for the service. Mary came to work and said to me, "Let's join the W.A.V.E.S." I said, "Okay!" We went down and enlisted. That was that! I don't know whether she gave it any thought, but we did it together. I mean, [we did it] as a result of the drive the Vindicator was having at the time, and being that her father worked at the Vindicator. I guess we just did it on our lunch hour. (laughter)

K: On your lunch hour.

R: On our lunch hour. (laughter)

K: And, this was in 1942, 1943?

R: It was in 1943. The time that we did it, it must have been around May, because Mary wasn't old enough yet; so we had to wait for her to become of age to join the W.A.V.E.S. I think it was around in May that we signed up. May or June, we signed up, but we had to wait until November to go.

K: You were working where at this time?

R: At Strouss' payment office. Mr. Sonny was the boss there at the time. [He was the] head of the personnel in the offices at Strouss'.

K: You signed up in May, and in November you left for the W.A.V.E.S. Can you give me your first impressions as you arrived at the camp where you were going to take basic training?

R: That's a good one. Our basic training was in New York, [at] Hunter College. Of course, it was cold, very cold, and very damp in New York. They had taken over apartments there, in the Bronx. They had taken over apartments, and that's where we were assigned to a . . . our barracks was an apartment building that they had taken over. All I can think of was all these different women from different parts of the country, [with] different accents! You'd think we were in a different country! You didn't know what. . . . First you're talking with a Southern accent, then a Western accent. It was funny, because really, you were picking up these different accents so fast, that it wasn't even funny, until you got used to them. Then, you ignored them and went back to talking your own way. (laughter) But, I don't know. Like I said, all I could think of was these rows and rows of houses that we were assigned to. They were clean. We were four to a room. [There was] nothing big about it. And of course, Mary Kathryn and I were in the same room. We were assigned to the same room. There were two other girls from Youngstown that were assigned to the same room, so the four of us were in the same room. We were a little bit at home. We weren't feeling so lonely. He had company. And, it was lonely. I mean, it was the first time that I was away from home for any extended period of time. Mary had been in college. She had been to Kent for one year, so she was used to being alone, away from home. But, I had never been away from home, just the camp for the girl reserves that we used to go to in high school. But other than that, I basically was a home body. (laughter) They kept you too busy to really be homesick while you were in camp, basic camp.

K: You said they kept you too busy. Why don't you walk us through an average day in basic training for W.A.V.E.S.

R: Well, you get up pretty early in the morning. I don't know. It must have been between six and seven o'clock. You marched. Every place, you marched and sang as you. . . . First you marched to breakfast. Then, you marched back. You had to clean your room before anything. You had to put your room in ship-shape. You had to make your bed, square your corners, and the bed had to be tight enough that a dime could bounce off of it. You even cleaned the waste basket. [You] made sure the waste basket was clean. [There was a] white glove inspection. Everything had to be spotless before you left the room, and like I said, you had orientation classes, different classes. You marched to your meals. I was one of those. . . . They had those swimming classes. If you didn't need the posture . . . they went around and checked which ones needed the posture exercises. This is the end of



November. I said, "No way do I want swimming," but I had to take swimming every day. In New York, I had to go back out into the cold after swimming, but I enjoyed it. I had swimming every day there, too, at Hunter College. My teacher happened to be an old Olympic star. She had won. . . . I think her name is Helen Jacobs, or Helen Wills Moodey. I don't know which one [it was]; it was either one. She had won the Olympics for swimming, and she was our teacher at Hunter college for the W.A.V.E.S. Like I said, these were things we did during the day.

Back in the evening, of course, after the evening meal, we usually went into the lounge and everybody was jabbing, jibber-jabbering, [talking]. We got acquainted with different girls from different parts of the country. Then, we'd take our showers and get to bed early, and get up early the next morning. Like I said, it just went so fast that you didn't realize what was happening. The time was going so fast.

K: You said you had orientation classes. What kind of orientation?

R: [Orientation] of what our life would be like in the a W.A.V.E.S. and what would be expected of us. Also, they tested us for aptitude tests and things like this. Our grades . . . we had English tests, math tests, mechanical abilities tests, different tests where we would be well suited to serve in the service.

K: How about physical training?

R: We did a lot of marching. Like I said, as far as our exercises, calisthenics, I didn't have to do it on a daily basis, because I had swimming in place of calisthenics. That was basically geared to people who needed it for--I don't know why--mostly posture and spine, straightening up the spine. I've been athletic all of my life, so I probably didn't need that kind of training. I got out of it, because I had swimming every day. I didn't think it was heavy grooming or anything, kind of [hard] training, because like I said, I was active, always active. So, maybe to someone that wasn't active, it would have been hard, but I didn't find it difficult, physically.

K: In my research on the W.A.V.E.S., I came up with two terms referring to the W.A.V.E.S. I'm going to read both of them to you, and then, could you tell me which one was a common referral to the W.A.V.E.S. at that time? One was the Woman's Auxiliary Volunteer Service. The other was a Woman Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service. Which one were you familiar with?

R: The first one.

K: The Woman's Auxiliary Volunteer Service?

R: Yes, and I think that was what it was referred to in the W.A.V.E.S. when they referred to it. Of course, it was always "W.A.V.E.S.," but they accepted the first one.

K: How long was basic training? How long did they put you through basic training?

R: Training, let me see . . . [it was] six weeks at Hunter [College].

K: Six weeks at Hunter College?

R: Yes. From there, I went to Stillwater, Oklahoma, to Oklahoma A&M College. There, we lived right in the campus. I lived in what was Murray Hall. It was a beautiful hall. It was a girls dorm, and we marched there to classes. We had different. . . . We had the regular college professors teaching us on different things. We had history. Of course, they decided I was going as a Yeoman, which is a secretary. We [did] shorthand, typing, which I was familiar with and had in high school. I had no problems, since I had all of that. We had history, which is basically current events. [We had] English and grammar with the English professor. And, what else? I'm trying to figure out what Mr. Newton taught us. Mr. Chauncy was my English professor. Like I said, it was mostly the typing, shorthand, English, and history, which was equivalent--three months there--to a regular college six months business course at that time. I think Youngstown College, at that time, had a six month business course that you could take, and that was equivalent to it--the three month course.

K: [It was] rather intensive, then?

R: Yes. It was very intensive. You spent from about eight o'clock [in the morning] until about four o'clock in the afternoon in school, and you had two classes for each day. Then, at the end of each week, you were given a test. On Saturday mornings we had tests, every Saturday morning, which I imagine they graded and took the grades on. They weren't difficult. To me, none of it was difficult. As a matter of fact, I did see my grades, and I passed the college course with a 3.96 average. (laughter)

K: That's good.

R: So, it was nothing exceptionally difficult. I liked it at Stillwater. It was pretty country.

K: Now, we're into 1984, about the spring of the year.

R: Yes. 1984?

K: 1944, I'm sorry.

R: 1944, yes. I left Stillwater for Washington, DC in--I think it was--April. It was the week of Holy Week that we arrived in Washington. We finished our courses there, and we came to Washington, DC.

K: That was your assignment, it was in Washington, D.C.?

R: Right, the Office of Naval Intelligence, ONI.

K: Naval Intelligence?

R: Yes. I was assigned to the Central European Section. I'll tell you! I was thrown in an office where half of the people were millionaires! I said, "Why me?" (laughter) As a matter of fact, one of the people in my office--she was a Lieutenant J.G.--Edith Gould, who was Jay Gould's granddaughter.

K: Yes.

R: My commander was Brockhurst Livingston, New York Livingston's. They had a ship named after them. He was a heck of a nice guy. He was really a nice guy! I don't know if they were wealthy, too. Most of them came from money in the office I was in. And then, our Senior W.A.V.E. Officer was Miss DeLaguna, she was an anthropologist. She was interesting. She was very good. She graduated from Byan Mar College. Miss Gould, Miss DeLaguna, and I were in one office after things got settled where you were going to be and everything. Basically, it was interpreting captured OSS and other intelligence documents that they had. We were keeping track of all the bombed out factories and different things. We couldn't talk about what we were doing, but this is what we were doing. At the time, we were keeping track. Stuttgart was one of the big targets. Badenhausen and Munich, where there munitions works were, is what I, personally, was keeping track of as they bombed them. We got different bombings. Both Gould and DeLaguna knew German very well, so they were doing the translating of these documents. And, I was keeping track of the good stuff. So, I worked closely with these two women. Ours was a Top Secret Office. I suppose they did a good check on you and checked your background very good. Most everything we had in the office was "top secret." From our office, also, we did

the watches in Admiral King's office. He was the head of the Navy at the time. We did the watches in his office, too. Communications used to come in at night and different things like that. So, a W.A.V.E. and a Naval Officer would be on duty all the time at night. We had to take different turns. [It was] a little different from Youngstown. (laughter)

K: Where were you stationed in Washington, DC?

R: Do you mean where I lived?

K: Where you lived and where you worked there.

R: First, I lived at the Dodge Hotel, which was [owned by] the Dodge family, Grace Dodge, the ones that own the Dodge manufacturing. Grace was--I don't think she was married. She was the daughter of the originator, and she owned this hotel. She lived right there at the hotel. I lived there for quite some time as long as it was open, ever since I went into it. My roommate was a girl from Erie. She was about six years older, so she knew her way around. [There was] another girl from Warsaw, Wisconsin. That's how I heard [of] that place first. We were there [for] a couple of years. We lived at the hotel, which was interesting. Then afterwards, when they decided--I don't know why they started taking all [of] the personnel out of the hotels and putting them in different barracks.

Then, I was stationed at W.A.V.E. Quarters D, they called it. It was way out, almost in Silversprings, Maryland. It was a nice drive, because you went up through Massachusetts, where all the Embassy's are, to go home. From what I understand, they did have barracks there, but basically, it was an Episcopal Private School at one time. That's where we used to have our Sunday Services, in the chapel there. We could walk into Silver Springs. We used to walk down to Silver Springs, Maryland. It was a large place. They have everything in it: bowling, swimming, anything you wanted was right on the base. Then from there, they started closing that out.

Then, they shipped us to. . . . No, I went to Arlington Farms first. I'm sorry. I went to Arlington. I was there just for a short while. Then, I went to Wave Quarters D, because I was a discharge out of White Quarters D.

K: Where did you work in Washington, D.C.?

R: [I worked] in the Navy Department. It was on Constitution Avenue, which--the last time I was in Washington--it doesn't exist. As a matter of fact, I

think the Vietnam War Memorial was not far from it. They tore it down. It was, supposedly, a temporary building. It was called the Navy Department right there on Constitution Avenue.

K: You say you did intelligence work on Central Europe.

R: Yes.

K: Could you share anything more about that now that the war has been over for forty-five years? [Is there] anything interesting that you were involved in, besides what you have already told us?

R: Like I say, that's basically what we did. My one roommate, though, she worked in an office, where the naval fliers used to come in. I think, all the movie stars who were in the service were in the Navy Fliers. She would always call us and try to get a hold of us, if we could come down when Robert Taylor or so-in-so was coming in, so we could see him and get a good look at him. Douglas Fairbanks had an office [that was] not too far from mine. Like I say, it was interesting. I probably didn't realize. I was too young, too green to realize [who] all these people were. To me they were just people. I did see. . . . The Dodge Hotel is not far from Union Station--well, it doesn't exist now--but, it wasn't far from Union Station. When President Roosevelt came back from Yalta, I happened to be walking around there. I don't know what we were doing, but I was around there; I saw him go by in his limousine. Believe me, he looked like death at the time.

K: Oh, yeah?

R: Oh, yeah. His eyes were all . . . he had these circles, and he was so thin and everything. It wasn't too long after that, that he died, too. But, I did see him. That was the last time I saw him. I saw him when he came back from Yalta, when he left the train station and was on his way back to the White House.

K: Do you think your ethnic background had something to do with you being stationed at the Central European Intelligence?

R: Yes, definitely. Since it was Central Europe, it was called the Central European Section. I understood Slovak. Most of the people were either German, Slovak, or of that background, that we were in our office. You had to understand some foreign language, central European language.

K: Did you ever have to use your language background in any of the work that you did?

R: No. We didn't get any documents that said on them "Czechoslovakia." I mean, I could understand the German, being that I lived in a German neighborhood. I knew and understood a lot of the phrases and the words and everything. So, it wasn't difficult for me to pronounce the words. We were also the office that had the first map made up of central Europe, of the occupied Europe after the war. Some of the personnel in the office had drawn up this map of occupied Europe. I remember that my supervisor said, "Hey Rovnak, take this down to some Marine General." I looked at him. I said, "Why me?" He said, "You're the only one I know that could tell a Marine General to go to hell and get away with it." (laughter) He said, "I want you to tell him we want this back."

K: Did you have much leisure time or recreation time while you were in Washington, D.C.?

R: Oh, yes. Well, to tell you the truth, once we were established on our jobs, it was just like working. Evenings were our own. We could do what we wanted after work. Of course, we had to stay in uniform all the time, and there were supposed to be curfews at certain times at night. They were never enforced, except when I lived at Grace Dodge's Hotel. She was in the lobby until we got home, to make sure we got home. (laughter)

But, I used to go . . . as a matter of fact, they had indoor ice skating rinks, two of them, in Washington, D.C. at the time. I used to go ice skating a couple times a week, once or twice a week, all of the time. They had U.S.O.'s in Washington where you would go. There was always dancing there. We would go to movies--go to anything, art galleries, The Smithsonian. We used to go to the art galleries that had the different showings and things. We'd go to different places: concerts and plays. I enjoyed Washington. I really like the city, myself. Like I said, it was more like . . . You did have a W.A.V.E. Officer always over you. Even at the Dodge Hotel, we had Grace Dodge. And besides that, we had a W.A.V.E. Officer that was in charge of you and made sure that you got in no trouble. As long as you got in no trouble, it was a good life. I got home, usually, about once every couple of months.

K: You did?

R: Yes. Then, I could go to New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. In Annapolis, we used to go to football games there. I went up to New York quite a few times.

It [Washington] was a good central point to operate from, to go to these places, because it didn't take long to get there. It took me nine hours by train to get home at that time. [To get to] New York, [it took] about four hours, and Philadelphia, [it took] a couple of hours. It was a good place to work from, and I worked with nice people. I think they were inclined--because I was young and most of them were older in the office that I worked in--to be protective of me, in that sense. They were more sophisticated than I, believe me. They had been around much more, with more schooling. Most of them had more schooling than I did, college and different degrees and things like that. But, I enjoyed it. I didn't feel ill at ease with any of them, but I really enjoyed it.

K: How would you say the male service personnel looked upon you as women in uniform, in general?

R: The male personnel. . . . Well, I'll tell you what. As far as an enlisted personnel, they treated you just like another girl. You were treated just the same as any other guy would treat you. And, the Officer Personnel, of course, they weren't supposed to date enlisted personnel. But, as far as being nice to you, they were very nice. They treated you like a lady all of the time. I had no problems. I never had any static from any of them. If anything, I think Commander Livingston was sort of like a father away from home. As a matter of fact, if I was going to New York, he gave me his New York address. He said, "If you run into any problems, you call there."

K: Oh, yeah? This is from the Livingston's of New York?

R: Right. He gave me his address. He said, "You call there if you run into any problems." I never ran into any problem. The guys we would meet up there--or, if we were going to meet anybody up there--were someone that we knew for a long time. So, no problems.

K: How about Civil Defense Training, or Rationing? Did that affect you?

R: No, I wouldn't say it affected me at all. My meals were provided for. How much can you eat? (laughter) I mean, I'm not that big of an eater and don't eat that much. No, I wouldn't say it affected me. It may have affected civilians. But, as far as me, no. I walked all over Washington. I was great at walking. And then, there were street buses, street cars or things like that. And, I didn't drive at the time, so it didn't bother me.

- K: How about the civil defense trials? Did they have a lot of civil defense crimes?
- R: No. [In] Washington, no. Not in our barracks or anything like that. [There were] none. To tell you the truth, I can't remember any of them.
- K: I'm going to turn the tape over since we're coming to the end of this first side. And, there's a couple of things I want to ask you. Could you share with us one or two of your most memorable characters in the service, one that sticks out for some reason or another?
- R: Well, let's start with Lieutenant Gill. He was a character. Everything had to be according to FOIL [method]. Of course, he was what you used to call a ninety day wonder, too. I mean, he took himself seriously. Of course, we were in the Central European section. I used to pick up the phone and answer, "Central Europe." I guess that really. . . . He got a memo, "Please do not answer with 'Central Europe.' Some poor person is going to really be confused. (laughter) They think they've reached Central Europe. Please say, 'Central European Section.'" I've always thought that was funny! He thought we were really going to confuse people. It just shows you different personalities.

Lieutenant Commander Brockrost Livingston--I think I liked him the best of all my officers, all of the personnel over me. He's just such a regular guy. I knew he came from money, but you could never tell. He just treated everybody super. He was acting like he cared about everybody. As a matter of fact, he used to always tease me. He said, "Hey Rovnak, do you comb your hair with an eggbeater every morning?" He used to always tease me, because my hair was a mess. In Washington's dampness, it didn't hold too well. Whenever he was leaving--he was going to be transferred to become the Navel Attache in Spain. Bev Warren drew this picture of me with my hair this way, that way, and an eggbeater in my hand. We gave it to him at his going away party! (laughter) I don't know what happened to the picture. I think [that] I liked him the best of all my officers.

The two of them that I worked with were Miss Gould and Mill DeLaguna. I liked both of them. As a matter of fact, when Edith Gould got married, she sent me an invitation to her wedding. I didn't go, because I didn't think I would fit in with them. It's different [when you are] one-on-one talking to them, but I don't think I'd fit in a room with millionaires or all of the



socialites on Park Avenue. But, she told me she was going to send me an invitation to her wedding, and she did send me an invitation to her wedding.

Of course, I liked my roommate, Alice. We remained friends. When she got married, I was her maid of honor and godmother of her son. Her husband died of multiple sclerosis. I always liked Alice. And, [I liked] Dorothy AshBrenner. She was my other roommate, but we weren't that close because she was transferred. She wasn't in the same group with us, then. There were a lot of people that I really liked. There were a lot of people from a lot of different parts of the country that I really enjoyed. Dixie Wigs, she was from South Carolina. She was funny. She was a real Southerner! As her name would say, Dixie Wigs. We were young and impressionable, all of us.

K: You said you were able to get home every couple months or so?

R: Right.

K: What were those trips like, coming and going?

R: Usually, they were crowded. I came back on a train, on the B & O Railroad. Going to Washington, I usually got a seat. It was crowded, but I managed to sit. Of course, I would go from the train station straight to work, usually. Coming home, sometimes, I sat on my overnight suitcase, almost all of the way home. One thing that I always was amazed at--and, I knew that I was almost home, especially if I came home early in the morning--you could see the skyline and the mills. That was from Pittsburgh to Youngstown. That always impressed me, the mills. They were all lit up. Being wartime, they were working, too, full time. That really impressed me.

K: How did you see your job in Naval Intelligence as helping the war effort and winning the war?

R: I didn't realize it at the time, how . . . I knew what I was doing--that we were keeping track--but, I suppose this would have been put to use as to what we were bombing, not churches, because they were interested in the munitions and bombing out the munitions factory. That's what we were keeping track of. I'm sure somebody put that to good use. Whether how big an effort or how big of a help it was towards winning the war, I don't know, but I'm sure it helped. To those who were doing it, I imagine that information was quite important!

K: Do you have any very memorable events during the war-time that stick out in your mind?

R: Such as?

K: Anything.

R: I think the thing that sticks out most in my mind is the comradeship and the companionship of all these people, especially these women from so many different parts of the country coming together and becoming friends. It was so easy to make friends with them, no matter what their background was. You just accepted them as friends. I think that's the thing that probably impressed everybody. You lived together as a group, and there was no friction. As far as I could see, there was no friction or animosity between the girls. You were there, and you were part of an organization, a fraternity. We got along and helped each other.

K: Did you have any contact with any of the allies in the section you were working, being in Washington, D.C.?

R: You mean. . . ?

K: [Contact with] any of our officers from British troops, etc.

R: No, not in my unit. We weren't dealing with outside personnel. This was strictly a closed unit. Just the ones that would come into our office were assigned to it. You wouldn't get any outside personnel there.

K: You said that you dealt with OSS captured documents. Were these delivered to you, or were they brought in personally?

R: They were delivered to the office, yes. I don't know what office they were delivered to, and then, [they] brought [them] to our office. We wouldn't have contact with anybody like that.

K: When did you leave the W.A.V.E.S.?

R: [I left] in March of 1946. I was probably one of the last ones in my unit to leave, because they were discharging the W.A.V.E.S. according to service and according to age. Like I said, a lot of them were quite a bit older than I. Both of my roommates were older, six years older, so they got out about six months ahead of me. I was one of the last ones from my unit to get out. Even our office unit was down to the bare minimum by the time I got out.

K: After V.E. day, did you continue your intelligence work with Central Europe?

R: Yes we did, because we had a lot of captured documents that had to be translated. Then, we ended up doing the map of occupied Europe. I'm sure all this information on these documents, whether it was important [or not], they wanted the information. It helped them make decisions on different things.

K: So, your effort didn't end with the final victory in Europe?

R: No, no. We were still the Central European Section, but you have to remember that the war really didn't end with V.E. day. It went on, and trials were going to come up and everything else. All of those things were still important. They needed as much information as they could get.

K: Did you deal with any captured documents that dealt with concentration camps in Central Europe?

R: No. We knew they were there, but as far as I know, I didn't see anything on it. I'm sure somebody in [Naval] Intelligence did get them. I don't know, my guess would be . . . especially Poland was where [the camps were], and we had nothing to do with Poland, the Polish war efforts. We were strictly German, mostly German and Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, basically those countries there. Poland would be more eastern.

K: When you came home from the service, having been in the W.A.V.E.S., how were you welcome home as a veteran?

R: I just took up where I left off and became part of the family. (laughter) There were no special efforts. With my friends, I had no problem, because I used to see them often enough. I decided that I wasn't going to go back to Strouss' to work. I wanted something different, but I did wait for about a month or so. Then, I decided I wanted to get into an office. The first interview I had, I got hired. That was for the Traveler's Insurance Company. I worked there for twenty-six years.

As far as adjusting, there was no real problem adjusting. They treated you like, "Hey, you're just one of us now."

K: How about the reserves, was that open to the W.A.V.E.S.? Was there a need for . . . ?

R: There was no need for the reserves at that time. I don't know whether it was open to the W.A.V.E.S. or

not. I wasn't particularly interested in staying in the reserves. As far as I know, it wasn't open.

K: What about veteran's benefits?

R: You could have kept your life insurance. As far as veteran's benefits, I'm entitled to everything that anybody else that served in the service is--the veteran's hospital, to be buried at Arlington [Cemetery], to help with the burial at any other ceremony. I'm entitled to all of that. I am a veteran.

K: The G.I. bill was open to women, too?

R: Right. I didn't take advantage of it, but Mary Kathryn Dougherty, the girl I went in with, she did. She took a four year course at Youngstown [College]. Quite a few of the people did take advantage of it. It was open [to us].

K: How about the veteran's organizations? Were they open to women?

R: The W.A.V.E.S. had their own organization. I don't think the men's auxiliaries were open to women. But, the W.A.V.E.S. was a national organization. I think they still have group get-togethers at different times of the year, at different places, Washington, D.C. or different places. It's national.

K: Is there anything else that you want to tell us about World War II and your experiences before we end the interview?

R: I'm sure my experiences were nothing compared to what the men went through. I had a very easy life. I remember the kid that used to live next door to me. He was on a ship in the South Pacific, which was shot up from under them. I forget the name of it. It was a big one. I guess he found out that I was in Washington, and he looked me up. He was a nervous wreck, especially the first time [I saw him]. His hands shook and everything. I knew he just wanted someone to talk to, so we walked around Washington. We talked and everything. For a long time, he would come in almost every weekend. I would see him improving. Then, I guess he got shipped out. But, when he first got off that ship, he was one nervous wreck! I guess most of his buddies were shot up and killed in that incident. There, I could see how much better off I was. I was just in an office in Washington, D.C., whereas they were the ones that won the war. Maybe we contributed. We don't know how much we contributed, but they did the work. Of course, there were the nurses. They were out there in the battles. I think the W.A.C.K.S., the

Army, did get out in the field, too. The W.A.V.E.S. were not allowed out of the United States. Towards the end, they did allow them to go to Hawaii, but that's as far [as they let them]. They were not stationed on ships or anything like that.

K: Anything else?

R: No. I can't think of anything. It was an experience, and I'm not sorry that I joined. As a matter of fact, I don't think it's a bad idea for any young girl or boy to spend one year in the service, to give one year. Even in peacetime, it wouldn't hurt, before they start their college.

K: What do you feel has been most beneficial to you?

R: I think I grew up. I was very, very protected. A very protected and sheltered life, I led. I think I did a lot of growing up. I saw different parts of the country, a different life that I wouldn't have otherwise seen. I think it helped me to grow up and to respect other people's opinions and styles of life. I think it helped a lot.

K: Do you think, as a woman growing up in the 1940's--you said you had a sheltered life previous to this--do you think that the opportunity to join the service opened avenues to you that would not have been open normally, as a woman?

R: I think so. It's too bad it happened as a war.

K: Yes.

R: Basically, most of the women that were in the W.A.V.E.S. probably wouldn't have left their hometowns or home states. [They would have] met all of the people that they met from different parts [of the country], and learned how to understand them and how they live in different parts of the country. I don't think most of the women that were in the service would ever have done this. They would have stayed there, gotten married, raised a family, and that's as far as it would have gone--their knowledge of the United States--unless, they took trips here and there. Vacations are fine, but you don't learn that much about people in a two week vacation.

K: What about your parents? What were their feelings of having a daughter go off to war?

R: My mother was very upset! When he said that they have to have their signature, I said, "You'll never get my mother's signature!" (laughter) "Okay," they said,

"Don't worry about it." I said, "You're never going to get her signature or okay on this." If you're under twenty-one [years old], you had to have to have your parents' signature. But my father, I think he was quite proud of me.

K: Yeah?

R: Yeah.

K: He had five sons. None of them were in the service. The older ones were older, and too old for the service and raising families. Steve was too young. My brother, Paul, had a punctured eardrum, so he couldn't pass his tests. I think my father was proud of the fact that he had someone in the service. Most of his friends and the people that he worked with, everybody had somebody in the service. I was the only one out of a large family that was in the service. So, I think he was kind of proud of me. I don't think my mother was, believe me!

K: She did sign, though?

R: I don't know. I think they only needed one signature. As long as my father signed . . . she claimed that she never did [sign], and I wouldn't be surprised if she never did. This was not the life for a woman.

K: With my remembrances of grandma, I can understand that.

R: A lady just doesn't do these things, join the W.A.V.E.S. Like I say, I think my dad was very proud.

K: How about your sisters?

R: I think they kind of liked the idea that someone was in the service in the family.

K: Your brothers?

R: I think they were proud of me, too. They probably thought, "She's the only one gutsy enough to do something like this." Maybe I'm the only one naive enough. My mother said, "You're going to be so homesick," and she was right. I never admitted it to her, though. (laughter) There were times that Mary Kathryn used to not even look at me on a holiday, because she said, "I know that if I look at her, she's going to cry." (laughter) She was right. I did get homesick, very homesick. But then, we were all homesick together.

K: How about the people in the neighborhood when you came home? Was there a lot of questioning about the war?

R: No. When I was going to Naval Intelligence, they were doing an investigation of me. They went to all of the neighbors. The neighbors kept telling them, "Her parents live over there. Go ask them!" (laughter) [They said,] "We don't want to talk to her parents, we want to talk to the neighbors." They did do a thorough investigation, by what I understand.

Apparently, no one said anything bad about me, because they did let me do top secret work. (laughter) They investigated me with my teachers. My best friend lived across the street, and she joined the Coast Guard. There were quite a few [women] in the service. I had some friends that were home--lady friends, too, that I knew and worked with. We were good friends and corresponded. When I came home, I usually met them, and they'd keep me up with what's going on around Youngstown. I think that's the reason I had no problem getting right back into the swing of things in Youngstown, when I got home. It is a small town compared to Washington, D.C. I loved that town. It's a very sophisticated cosmopolitan town. You feel like you're in the middle of everything there. I like it better than New York. New York, I'd never want to live there, but I like Washington.

K: Were there a lot of people in uniforms around Youngstown when you came home, or were you one of the few?

R: There were lots [of people]. As a matter of fact, there was a relative of the McKelvey family--she was older and she was in the same unit as I was when we went to camp--and, there was another Buchanan that was in the service. She went from Youngstown. There were quite a few. You didn't feel out of place or anything like that. Then, there were men military personnel. No, I never felt out of place, and I don't think my friends made me feel out of place, the ones that were home. I was just the same old person to them.

K: So, it's an experience you would repeat?

R: I would. I don't regret having done it at all.

K: [Is there] anything else that you would like to share?

R: Not to my knowledge. Like I say, I enjoyed the experience, and I don't think it would hurt any young person to give a year or two for their country. At that time, people were more patriotic towards their country than they are nowadays. Maybe we didn't know as much about what went on in Government, because we didn't have television and things like that. We trusted our elected officials more than we do now. It amazes me sometimes, the lack of patriotism in the

country. I just can't believe it! Maybe it's because we were brought up with "God, family, and your country," and you respected them in that order. Maybe too, so many of our parents were European born. They appreciated the United States so much, the freedoms and opportunities at Youngstown. They instill that into their children, that this is the best country there is.

K: You are a first generation American?

R: Right. Even the second generation, they just seem to instill this in their children. You can't compare [that in] the United States with no other place on earth. Everybody was proud to be an American. Nowadays, everybody takes things too much for granted.

K: That's interesting. You talk about patriotism and feelings for the country. Was the American flag very evident during World War II?

R: Oh, yes. And, [it was] respected.

K: When I say evident, [I mean] besides Government buildings. . . .

R: Right. People in their homes [had flags]. They were proud that they had a flag in their window to show that somebody in that home was serving in the service. The stars and things like that, they were proud of this! Somebody was serving their country.

K: Were there a lot of stars in homes throughout the country and in your neighborhood when you came home?

R: Oh, yes. Almost every home had something, had someone serving. More had someone serving than not [serving].

K: The term "girls" was a term used in reference to women, especially those who were taken into the service. It was more or less in a country of--a feeling that a woman's place was in the home. Some Senators made some speeches on that. They were developing the W.A.C.K.S. and the W.A.V.E.S. Did you ever hear that terminology or get that feeling?

R: Things like that don't bother me. The woman's movement never bothered me. I never felt persecuted. I never felt that I was less than anybody else. I figure, "[If] some one else can do it, I can do it. If somebody else can learn it, I can learn it." I never felt like an underdog. I never did. I suppose those terms and [the fact that] they had jokes and different things--those things don't bother me. Things like that don't bother me. I don't need the woman's movement to



tell me how to live my life, and by the same token, at that time, I didn't pay too much attention to what other people were saying where a woman's place is. My place is where I want to be! That's the way I feel.

K: The term "Rosie the Riveter" referred to women in work places where they weren't previously. Any of your friends, when you came home, were you surprised at some of the jobs that they had?

R: No. None of my friends had those kinds of jobs. They were all basically in offices and things like that. I don't know anyone, a close friend, that worked in a mill. But, the song was funny, I thought. It didn't bother me one bit.

K: Is there anything else about the 1940's or the war effort, any of your impressions before I shut off the tape?

R: No. I think we've covered a lot of it.

K: Okay. Thank you.

R: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW