Aileen Duffeny Krusell was born on 8 July 1922 in St. Paul. She grew up there and attended school, graduating from high school in 1940. Aileen spent 1941-43 working in St. Paul for the retailer Montgomery Ward, in the mail order department. In August 1943 she enlisted in the US Navy WAVES.

Aileen was sent to Hunter College in New York City, a central WAVE facility, for Basic Training, then to a Navy facility in Stillers, Oklahoma, for additional training in office administration. Upon completion of this schooling she was assigned to the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington, D.C.; her duties included the filing of records and general secretarial work. Aileen remained in Washington through the end of the war in August 1945. In late 1945 she was sent to Great Lakes Naval Facility, by Chicago, and in February 1946, discharged from the Navy.

Again a civilian, Aileen returned to St. Paul, and returned to her position at Montgomery Ward. She married Navy veteran Warner Krusell in 1946, and remained in the Twin Cities area. At the time of this interview (September 2001) the Krusells lived in White Bear Lake, Minnesota.
**Interview key:**
A = Aileen Krusell
D = Dan Borkenhagen
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(***)) = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

**Side A.**

D: Today is 16 September, 2001. My name is Dan Borkenhagen and I’m doing an interview with Aileen Krusell. Thank you very much for doing this with me Aileen. First, I’ve got some general biography questions, so readers can get a picture of you. Could you tell us your place and date of birth?

A: In St. Paul, Minnesota, on July 8, 1922.

D: And who were your parents?

A: Tidella and Albert Stefan.

D: Did you live in St. Paul your entire childhood and through high school?


D: That brings us to the infamous date, December 7, 1941. Where were you, and what do you remember about that day?

A: Yes, it was a snowy day for one thing, in St. Paul. I had just been to the movies with a friend, and on my way home, in fact it was on a bus, because buses were going then in our area, and we hear that there was a war, that President Roosevelt had declared war. December 7, ’41. I thought nothing for myself. It was a bad deal, but I wasn’t thinking about any service at that time.

D: How would you describe your immediate reaction to the news when you heard it?

A: Well, you know, at my age—I was 20 then—I think when you’re young, you’re not so shocked, you know it happened, and things went on as usual. My boy friends went into the service and that part was bad for a lot of the young men going. Outside of that, there was a lot women working in the arms plant, in New Brighton [by St. Paul].

D: So did you see a lot of your friends, or was it parents? Who did you see going into those types of things?
A: I saw my, mostly boy friends going into the service. Let’s see, my brother and I, I don’t know if he went in earlier, probably had. I don’t even know if he enlisted. I enlisted, of course. That’s mostly what it was, friends, men friends. At that time women weren’t going to be that popular in the war, but that was all I knew, my mother and father had no connection with that.

D: How did people around you react, your parents, your friends?

A: Well, I know people weren’t that much interested in it but, you know, they were drafted, a lot of them. And that was sad, because you were left without a lot of, especially men, to work, and service. As a matter of fact, when I enlisted in the Navy, when I served in Washington, D.C., I was replacing a young man to go overseas. That was some of the reasons why they had us doing this. That’s about all I can think about, as far as what was different. They had the war going on, you know. No one thought it would be going on as long as it did.

D: Really, people you think anticipated a shorter war?

A: Shorter? Oh yes.

D: Did you see that in their attitudes in the beginning of the war, like, “We’ll be out of this quick?”

A: Well, I think most people thought we’d be out of this quick. Things went on from one to the other. Germany and Japan, and after one got finished, you had the other yet. All the news was pretty serious, especially with Germany and the leader [Adolf Hitler], you heard so much about the leader.

D: Just in news reports and stuff like that?

A: Yeah, all we had was radio then, of course. But we did get a few details much later. *(pauses three seconds)* I lost my train of thought there for a minute *(laughs)*.

D: That’s all right. Aileen, you enlisted in 1943, right?

A: In August of ’43.

D: So the first two years of the war, a year and a half really, what were you doing?

A: I was working in Montgomery Wards, in the mail order house.

D: So, you just took care of orders and shipments and stuff like that?

A: Right, exactly. And then you know, there were, not much men around because they too were in the service, but there were still a lot that were rejected, too.
D: So did you work mostly with women would you say, or mostly with men?

A: No, it was mostly women, yes, in my area, then of course there were other areas, because I kind of moved around at Montgomery Wards. When the work was slow in my department I moved to another department, and that time there were a lot of older men, married men, and not many younger men.

D: Did you enjoy that job?

A: Well, it was a job, you know. I think I started out at thirty-two cents an hour. (laughs) We'd get a paycheck of fifteen dollars a week, we thought that was pretty good.

D: Did your wages increase or decrease during the war?

A: They went up. By the time I left Montgomery Ward—see, I was in the service from '43-'46, so I was out of Montgomery Ward for those years. Then as we came back the wages were slightly higher. But when I left Montgomery Ward, maybe in '48, so I kind of left Montgomery Ward then, the wage was about $1.70.

D: So over that whole time wages increased significantly.

A: Yes, they kept increasing, exactly.

D: So the war almost kind of bettered your financial situation?

A: Oh, it seemed to, yes.

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D: In those first couple years before you left to join the service, were you single?

A: Yes, single.

D: How would you describe your family life? Did you see it change during those first couple years, how you interacted with your family?

A: You know my mom had divorced when I was eleven years old, so it was just mom. My mother worked in several different places. And then she did some (***) as I was older. Life was just working, to support us. Just my brother and I at home. My brother was two years younger than I. He was in areas that were very troublesome. He was in the Army in Germany at the height of the war. He silenced the machine gun nests for his infantry. So that has been on his mind for always, he always talks about the war. For his service, he received a Silver Star [award for bravery]. For him it was impressive. Mom didn't like to see him go into the service.
D: Did he enlist, or was he drafted?

A: Isn’t it funny; I should know. He must have enlisted, I know mom didn’t want either one of us to go, my brother for sure. I know he was in the service before myself.

D: Okay, he did go in before you then. You said your mom was kind of upset, how did you feel when your brother went in?

A: It didn’t mean anything to me. Some others entered before my brother did, everyone was doing it.

D: So by the time the war started in 1941, you were out of school and just working at Montgomery Wards, right?

A: Right.

D: Do you think the war had much of an impact on that job? I’m assuming the work that you did didn’t change much because of the war.

A: No, that was a mail order house and also a retail store. Things were about the same there, it seems to me that they were busier than ever. I can remember even working on Sundays at Montgomery Wards, simply because people would mail in their orders for merchandise.

D: Did the merchandise change at all during the war, because of rationing and quotas?

A: Not where I worked; there was nothing that they had to ration that I know of. I do know that there was a lot of rationing going on when I was in the service.

D: But you don’t remember much rationing before that?

A: Not really. They might have started later, not later than the war started, it might have started later as the years went on.

D: So rationing really didn’t impact you?

A: No, not me. It was funny. There were some things that were rationed, and I don’t know if it was cigarettes or not, I don’t know why I had a cigarette card from the Navy [allowing for purchase of cigarettes, often in short supply]. I didn’t smoke, but I’d buy them for people that wanted cigarettes. We’d get them from the PX.

D: What was transportation like for you during the war? Did you take the bus to work?
A: I took the bus to work. Always the bus.

D: Was that your practice before the war, too?

A: Yes, I had always taken the bus when I worked, even when I lived out here [in White Bear Lake]. I never drove, I never did any driving until maybe 1950.

D: And you just lived with your mother then during the war?

A: Yes.

D: In St. Paul?

A: In St. Paul, the east side of St. Paul, in a little house.

D: She owned that house?

A: Yes.

D: So you didn’t really have to worry about the housing situation at all then?

A: No.

D: Did you see any changes in your community in those first couple years? Because of the war, did people pull together? Did they do things because of the war at all that you saw, or not?

A: I can’t really emphasize on that. It just seemed like life was going on for everyone. I know that I have known people that worked at the arms plant [in New Brighton]. They had to do all the ammunition, create more ammunition, and that was a big thing for St. Paul, or Minneapolis probably, because there were a lot of people that were working there. It was jobs, that’s it, it was jobs for people. That’s all I can say about that part of it.

D: Were people excited to get these jobs?

A: I think so, and I think a lot more women went to work then, that’s when it all started. Their husbands were gone into the service, and young people were making good wages.

D: Did you have friends who worked in some of these places?

A: There were some friends, but you know, mainly my place was at Montgomery Wards, and that’s where most of my friends were. I didn’t really know many other people from outside there.
D: So you hung out with friends from work?

A: Yeah.

D: What kind of things did you guys do to relax during those first years, before you entered the service?

A: To relax, we went to movies. We did have a lot of fun, we went to the night clubs. That was a big highlight of our life.

D: Did the war impact these things? Did you see the war involved in movies?

A: Yes, there were a lot of movies, and there were movies about the war.

D: Do you remember any of the specific ones?

A: Oh, Anchors Aweigh [1945] was one, about the Navy, and there were many war pictures.

D: Do you remember seeing Bataan [1943], which came out around then? I don't know if you remember that one.

A: Bataan, I had heard that.

I remember there were a lot of sailors and military men in St. Paul and Minneapolis.

D: On leave?

A: Probably on leave. I’m not sure where people were stationed in St. Paul and Minneapolis. They had to have been on leave.

D: Did you ever interact with servicemen? You said you were out at night clubs, I’m assuming you ran into some of these guys.

A: Well, it was a fun time for everybody. We dated, and maybe they were going to leave for this, I didn’t really meet anyone overseas. But when I was in the service, yes, but not so much otherwise. It was kind of interesting to see the military men, because there was so much of it then. They knew what they were doing, they had to serve their country, and there was a lot of drafting then, of course. It seems like the guys in the Navy were better to date, you know. (laughs) More class. Seems like the Army and the infantry, they were a little different level (laughs).

D: So in your community you said you didn’t see a lot of changes, people kind of interacted the same way.

A: Yes, they seemed to. No, not a lot of changes.
D: Did you sometimes see pictures of aluminum drives or steel drives? Did you ever see anything like that in St. Paul?

A: Not really. I’m trying to think... Not really, I don’t recall drives. Other than the bond drives, for savings bonds. The US Savings Bonds were big then, of course.

D: Did you participate in those?

A: I had some. I used to have something taken out of my check for savings bonds. It was a good thing that we did this. And of course, you drew interest on that as the years went on.

Doing without, I’m not so sure doing without anything then, probably when I myself was in, there was more of that where people were doing without, because it was getting longer and longer, this war.

D: You said that earlier, most people seemed to anticipate a quicker war. By the time you joined up [in 1943], had you kind of expected it to be done?

A: I thought I would just be going in for one year, and I was in for two and a half years, from ‘43 to ‘46. I really didn’t think it would be going on that long. I thought it was going to end, and I thought it would be in ‘44.

D: So, let’s take 1942, before you went in the Navy. Can you describe what an average day would look like? What was your day like generally?

A: Well, you got up early enough to get to work for one thing. I think I left at 7:00 in the morning, and sometimes I’d be working until, I’d generally leave work at 5:00. It was an eight hour day, from eight to five or whatever it was. That’s about all, just making our own wage and thinking about an evening out. I didn’t do any help as far as rolling bandages, but there was some of that going on. I myself didn’t do anything for this, and I wasn’t really thinking of going into the service then, at the time. I think what happened is, I wanted to become a stewardess—at that time they were called stewardesses—and anyway you had to have some nurses training to get in. I thought, well, I want to do something that I think is fun. So I enlisted in the WAVES. I heard about the WAVES, and I wanted to do that. Not knowing what I would be doing, it was just an adventure, let’s go with that one. I didn’t know if I was going to be replacing a man in the military, but I was. I was in Washington, D.C.

D: Now that was one purpose of the WAVES, the way I understand it—they freed up the men to go on ships and you women came in and took over some of those stateside jobs, correct?

A: That’s right.

D: So was that your intention, let me do my piece of the service?
A: I was looking at it as an adventure and thinking it would only be a year, but I wasn’t disappointed that it was longer. I had to enlist for the duration of the war and six months after, and it was exactly all of that.

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D: How did the enlistment work? Where did you go?

A: I enlisted in Minneapolis, and there we had the examinations and the tests.

D: Physicals and stuff like that?

A: Oh yes, they were careful with us. You had to be in good health, eyesight and everything had to be in good health to get into that. They weeded us out with where they thought we should go.

D: Did they give you writing examinations, or how did they figure out where your branch was going to be, or what you were going to be doing?

A: They’d look at what your enlistment papers would say, you had to tell where you’d been working and all that. So some of us were placed into the office, general office work. Others were placed into the cooking end of it, the kitchen end of it, but mostly WAVES were generally into the business end of it, and of course there were officers who (**).

D: Most of your officers were women, correct?

A: Yes, all of them. Lieutenants or captains.

D: And you were always enlisted during the war, you never an officer, correct?

A: I never was; I was a yeomen 3rd class, which was, meaning you were a pen pusher [slang for general administrative work], so you were in the office area of it, doing book work.

D: Where were you sent for your training, Aileen, to become a WAVE?

A: We traveled to (pauses three seconds) New York. We had our training in the Bronx, New York, at Hunter College. The military used it for training, but that’s where I had my basic. Shots we got, and training on what we’d be doing, and drilling, and it was really rigid.

D: What kind of activity were you doing exactly? Like marching and drilling?

A: Oh yes. We had to do, as a matter of fact, during the War Bonds parades, us women would march in those parades, to push the bonds. I happen to have a
picture of Frank Knox, his name was, he died while we were in the service, and we had a funeral for him, so we marched in that. We were in a parade that day, and that was in Washington, D.C. I'd already been in Washington, D.C. then. But we were only in Hunter College for a month, and that's when a lot of ladies were transferred here and there. That's when I got my basic for the general office work, at Stiller, Oklahoma; three months we were there. Typing, shorthand, filing, and whatever was required for that, for general office work.

D: So when you were sent out to Basic Training, were you sent out as a unit from Minnesota, or did they just take women as they came and send them? How did that work?

A: They were from Minnesota, all of them on the train, and no air conditioning on the train. It was so hot. It was a rough trip. We got in late into Hunter College, and they served us some sort of a dinner, but it wasn’t...what did they call it? Of course, I don't remember (laughs). They weren't working then, so they just had scrounge up something for us. We were tired and a mess, you know. But it was something anyway. We were in some barracks there, in bunk beds.

D: It was just general Army barracks?

A: Yes. It was quite different, different living; it was roughing it.

D: Did you get to see New York at all while you were out there?

A: Oh yes, we'd get time off. This was us ladies, now they were from all over here, and this is when we were at Hunter College and I was in the group. (Aileen is pointing at a picture of herself and some other women) These are the girls that were in the apartment that I was in. This was just one apartment, we were still in civilian clothes.

D: This is when you got there then?

A: Yes, shortly after we arrived.

D: Which one were you then?

A: See if I can find myself. Here I am, at the very end. (points again to photo)

D: Neat.

A: So there was a lot of that going on.

D: What was it like for you ladies seeing New York City for the first time? You lived in St. Paul, but New York City is a completely different thing.
A: I had been to New York. When I worked at Montgomery Wards, my girlfriend and I would travel to New York a lot. So I’d been there, I knew it. Grand Central Station was super. It was something. So, we kept doing a lot of things.

D: Like what?

A: Night clubbing again. Movies, a lot of theatres, beautiful shows. The Follies.

D: What do you mean by the Follies?

A: They were a dance groups that was very popular then.

D: Just in New York, or was this the type of thing that went all over the US?

A: No, the Follies were in New York. They danced, they were a terrific dance group, very popular. At theatres, the Orpheum was one of them. But like I say, we were only there a month, and we had to do a lot of Basic Training, so we weren’t out into New York very often. This was probably our last night or something.

D: That you got to go out to places.

A: Yes. Most girls had to get these shots, stiff in the arms, and aching. It was kind of painful. Outside of that, we didn’t get to do much.

D: At the college, was it just you ladies, or were others there, too?

A: It was just us ladies. I’ll have to show you. This is what Hunter College looked like. (shows picture of WAVES assembled on Hunter College grounds) We were the largest WAVEs group to come into the service in 1943. Then there were larger groups after I was there. I’ve got an “X” where my regiment was. We’re here. (points to this photo) That’s how big we were. That’s all of us, because that’s where we all ended up, to start with, at that time. All the other WAVES had the same thing.

D: Were there any minority groups there?

A: You know I don’t think…no. Isn’t that something? There were no blacks. But when I got in Washington, D.C. there were a few blacks, but they were in custodial work and in the kitchens.

D: Now were they actually WAVES when they did that, or were they just working for the government in other functions?

A: Yes, right. (switches topic back to photographs) And this was another one of us, we’d probably been out marching, and I’m here (Aileen locates herself in another photo of her group). There’s an “X” underneath me there.
D: This was your group marching in some parade or event?

A: Yes, something that we could probably march for, I’m not real sure which one that
was, but you know, one of those types of functions. I can’t exactly specify where all
these are. (looking together through more photos) And these are the people that,
these gentlemen were in my office in the Navy Department (again referring to
photos). These are the (***). These two men worked with us. But these two men,
they could not go overseas.

D: Why was that?

A: Probably for, I don’t know how they got, but they had to keep some into our units,
you know. But outside of that there were few into it.

D: Right after your training at Hunter College, where did you say you were sent?

A: Stiller, Oklahoma. For three months.

D: And there you said you did office work, is that right?

A: All the time. That was basically what they trained us to do there.

D: Were they actually training you then there, or was that an actual duty station?

A: No, we were trained there. In fact, after the three months we were sent
separately to Washington, D.C. That was where everything happened.

D: So did most WAVES go to Washington, D.C. then? Or where were they sent?

A: No.

D: Did you have any friends that were to other destinations?

A: While I was in the service then, we were asked to sign up to go to Alaska or
Hawaii. I didn’t sign up for that. Now it didn’t happen right away, it might have
been in ’44. I stayed, of course.

D: What was your time in Oklahoma like?

A: It was interesting, it was very quiet; the city was small. And that was Oklahoma A
& M, it was a college. And we were treated pretty nicely.

D: Did you kind of take over the town then?
A: Yes, we did. We were all there. There might have been some men training there, too, I don't know, because there were military there. Every place that we went there were military.

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D: After three months in Oklahoma, you got your formal assignment, which was to where?

A: To Washington, D.C.

D: What was your assignment to be there? You were trained for office work and so forth, but did you actually do that?

A: Yes, they assigned me to the Office of Naval Intelligence, when I came. You couldn't speak of your job. We were in, actually we had many records and files on people that might have been (pauses three seconds) what were they called... (pauses three seconds), people they suspected they might be spies. So we had files on these people. It was funny—we had a file on Eleanor Roosevelt.

D: Really?

A: Yes! And I mean nothing was particularly bad about her, it was just that they had records on everyone.

D: So you remember seeing records of all kinds of people coming through?

A: Yes, and then also on the, I don't know if you knew it, the German Bund.

D: The what?

A: German Bund. Popular in Germany. B-U-N-D. They were a lot of spies or what you call it, espionage, people that got into that.

D: And so people from Europe sent over files to be typed up, and to keep track of?

A: Yes, whoever got this information. I don't know that. But we had lots of files on those kinds, (pauses three seconds) that people were investigating, I would say. I didn't know anyone that would be doing that work.

D: So your actual role was to do what? Did you type files, or organize?

A: I did some typing, but mostly we had to sign off files for the officers that were above us, that were interested in the persons that we were checking up on.

D: What do you mean by sign off?
A: Well, we’d take files out of these drawers, and put them where the officer wanted them, the captain or lieutenant, we would do that for them. And then we’d have to put a little mark to where we’d put our files. Re-file them. Nothing real hard to do, but we worked three shifts: day, afternoon, and all night. We rotated our shifts there.

D: What shift did you work or did you have to work all three?

A: I had all three, I worked on all three of them. That’s when we got out to New York, we got 48 hours off after that midnight shift. We had time to go to the theatre, other places in the city.

D: You stayed in New York then when you got there?

A: Yes, and that’s interesting, because some of these huge homes, mansions, were left open for us to stay overnight.

D: Really, for all military personnel, or for WAVES?

A: For all military. It was really interesting, they were nice homes, but they were just left for us to have.

D: Now was this because people were saying, “Well I’m going to leave my home for a while, and I’ll let other people use it” or for some other reason?

A: I don’t really understand why those mansions were there, and why we were using them, but we stayed in them. For the two days we might have been there, or even overnight.

D: What was your living situation like in Washington? Did you live with some other women then?

A: Yes, I had, there was another girl in my room, in my apartment, I called it.

D: Did they have an apartment for you then, or were you in more of a barracks?

A: We were living in Arlington, Virginia, in a barracks. It was a barracks, and we shared with another lady.

D: Now were all the WAVES there, or did they have them placed in other locations, too?

A: It was all WAVES in that building I was in. In Arlington, Virginia.

D: This was on a military base with all types of personnel, or just the WAVES?
A: I'm trying to remember if there were men there or not. (pauses three seconds) It doesn't seem like there were, because there were other places for the men to be stationed already. Mostly it was for ladies.

D: Aileen, how did you get to work?


D: Would you ride it by yourself, or did you generally go with others?

A: There were many of us riding the transportation. It was very busy then.

D: What was it like being around Washington, D.C. at this time, during the peak of the war?

A: Oh, it was busy. I can say that for it. A lot of military, Army men, Marines. It was interesting, the Marines were guarding buildings, military buildings they watched. Any problems.

D: Was access to these buildings reduced then, or could you still get to places pretty easily?

A: You couldn't get into the Navy Department without a pass, you know. I remember going into a lot of museums, the Smithsonian, of course. We were able to get into anything. Some of the buildings you couldn't just go up into. The White House, there wasn't really any security seriously, now it's so very scary, has been for many years, but we were pretty free to do whatever we wanted to do. We went to the theatre, movies, we went sight-seeing a lot. Go to Mount Vernon and Georgetown.

D: What was your favorite place? Was there anything that sticks out in your mind?

A: I think it was interesting to know we were there, in the capital of the United States, and to see the White House, where the president lived. And historical buildings: the Lincoln Memorial, the cherry blossoms, to me that was beautiful, I loved that one. There's cherry blossoms there. There was a lot there. I can't think of all the buildings I went into myself, and the art museum, I always liked art, so I'd go there and see the art gallery, and that was quite nice. Otherwise, we were just there to do our job. None of us were unhappy. Just seemed to like everything. I don't think young people were unhappy, like today, you've got stressed out people. I don't understand why they've got to be stressed out, young people.

D: So how would you describe the time then?
A: Happy. We were all there, a lot of girlfriends around, and I corresponded with some of them a long time after I got out [of the WAVES]. All nice women, they were. Nobody got into any real trouble that I know of.

D: Did you have to go through background checks to work for the Office of Naval Intelligence?

A: Oh yes. There were three people, three references, that I had to suggest for my security clearance, and they checked my background. They asked these people a whole bunch of things. I gave my pastor’s name, and one of the neighbors that I knew, and they would get in touch with these people. Find out how I was and who I was. And one lady, they had to send her home, because they didn’t care for her after the interview with the people that she had suggested. They had this lady (points at photo) Peg McGee, she was from Colorado. They took her out of Washington, D.C., and sent her home. Just because of her interviews, and her references. That’s what they did for us that were in there.

D: Did the WAVES change much during the war, from your perspective? Did its purpose change at all, or the some of the functions that it served?

A: Well, not really, it just seemed like when they wanted the WAVES to volunteer for Alaska and Hawaii, apparently they needed us over there. (interference from plane flying overhead) Outside of that, we were just doing our job, and when the war was over, they sent us to Great Lakes [Naval Training Center, by Chicago] to be discharged. We had to go there to be released from the military. Outside of that, our officers, you had to salute them, when you saw them on the streets, just like the men had to. And you worked under them.

D: How did the men act towards you? Civilian men or military men, did they treat you differently, at all, because you were a woman in uniform?

A: Well, there weren’t a lot of civilian men to go with. There weren’t many of them around. I went out with all military men, in the Air Force, or the Navy, the Army. These were all people I just met at local restaurants, or night clubs.

D: Did most guys that you came into contact with just accept that you were in the military, or was there any kind of looking down on it?

A: No, there was not, they seemed to accept that.

D: Were they happy that you were there to serve, too?

A: Ah, I don’t know about that. I don’t know if some of the men cared for us in that respect, since they were sent overseas. Because we were replacing them, so they had to be sent overseas. But they all treated us fine, I never had anyone acting not respectful.
D: No one was really unpleasant towards you?

A: No, they didn’t seem to be at all. We did just fine. There wasn’t any trouble that any of us had, we felt safe on the streets.

D: It felt like a safe place?

A: Yes, it was.

D: Did you see any different ethnic groups come into contact while you were in Washington, D.C.?

A: No, I did not. One thing about that, the blacks were happy to be in Washington, D.C., but they didn’t mingle with any of us at work. And like I say, their jobs were maintenance, or cooking.

D: Those groups kind of kept to themselves then mostly?

A: Yeah, we didn’t bother them and they didn’t bother us, and there was a friendly atmosphere between all of us, believe it or not. And there weren’t a lot of them there, then, but now it’s completely changed. Washington, D.C. is different. I don’t know why everything is so bad. I have never felt any difference towards these people, ever. (more interference from airplane) My son Robert had a friend who was black, and they went to college together. But the friend had a chip on his shoulder and he ended up in Stillwater Prison [state prison, by St. Paul]. And when he was there, even Bob played basketball with them. Our friend Murray asked about him. We always liked Larry—we had him over here to eat, but he just went bad, and it’s too bad that he had to be that way. I don’t know where he is now, it was armed robbery –

**End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.**

D: I guess the next kind of thing I’m curious about is if you remember any specific people from your time during the WAVES, people that had a special impact on you at all? Friends, for example, or officers.

A: Not really. I think we always felt lower from our people that were ahead of us, the lieutenants and captains. We always felt a little below them. You could date them, there was nothing wrong with that.

D: But you were kind of kept separate, would you say?

A: Yes, you would say that. We didn’t eat together. I don’t recall them ever going out with us. I have a lot of pictures of places that we were, but it was just mostly ladies that wanted to do things together, but I don’t recall them being along with us. There weren’t that many of them, either.
D: Were there any of the women that you worked with a lot that made an impact on your life, or who were special friends during that time?

A: Not really, not that I can recall. We did things together, went to New York together. We had military dances, where they’d take us to Virginia, to where the men would be stationed. Then they’d have dances and we’d all go on a bus to there and meet these different men.

D: Did you ever have any leave during the war, or was it just the weekends that you had off?

A: No, I had leave, I came home.

D: Did you? You came back to St. Paul?

A: Yes.

D: How did that work?

A: It was fine. I had to wear my uniform then, you know. (pauses three seconds) It was kind of strange, because I was in uniform. I remember that some of the neighbors said how sharp I looked. In my neighborhood, I was probably the only one that was in the service. But, it was different, it was funny, because you only had so much time for leave. After I got into Washington, D.C., I had come a day late, because I had read my orders wrong. I got captain’s mess because I was late a day.

D: What does that mean?

A: I could not go out of the barracks in the evenings. I was able to go to the cafeteria for eating, but I could not go out for a couple weeks, maybe a month, I’m not sure. But I was punished for being late and coming back, that’s called captain’s mess. It was so embarrassing, too. I was going home on the train back to Washington D.C., and on the bus, I was supposed to be at the barracks instead of driving home. It was very embarrassing. It was even more embarrassing when I couldn’t go out at night, strictly restricted to the barracks.

D: Everyone else was going out and you had to sit at home?

A: Every once in a while people did that, you know.

D: So life was pretty strict and orderly there?

A: Oh yes, very orderly.

D: Did you remember any other rules you had to follow, curfews or anything like that?
A: No, like I say. When I had that captain’s mess, I had restrictions. But outside of that, we could stay out all night if we wanted to. We had to be to work the next day. Oh yes, we were basically okay.

D: So you stayed on the base and had a military job, but outside that you were pretty free?

A: Pretty free. Exactly, and any military person probably was. Unless you were in a war zone. (cuckoo clock rings)

D: Did you keep in touch with family back home pretty well?

A: Yes I did. I had my aunties here, and my aunt lived around here and then my grandma. And I would write them and send pictures. Yes, they were always glad to hear from me.

D: What about your brother? Did you keep in contact with him during the war?

A: Not so much, because he was overseas. Not much that we kept together.

D: But did you get letters from him at all?

A: I'd get mail from [my brother] Maury, and then I'd write him periodically, but not much.

D: Because he was involved in infantry, was it harder for him to get mail, do you think?

A: It was hard. He sent me some perfume from the country over there, and I never received it. He sent me a handkerchief that was so meaningful, it had a picture on it, and some kind of a name. I kept it for so long, but I don't know what I did with it now.

D: Did you ever read like *Stars and Stripes* or any of the military papers, or did you just keep track of news based on radio and newspapers?

A: Radio, right. We had, our paper went to the visiting room or restroom that we had. We had basically a den to go to, we had magazines, could do our writing letters. But any time they needed us for a parade, we all had to get ready to go to the parade.

D: How often did you do things like parades?

A: Usually it was person in office that was famous, we'd parade for them. I can only remember the one I told you, Frank Knox. He was the Secretary of State, I think.
D: Did you ever see any famous people that you can recall, like the president or people in the Navy?

A: Not really. No, I did not. Didn’t see the president, either.

D: I’d like to ask you about a couple of famous days that come near the end of the war. Do you remember when President Roosevelt died on 12 April 1945? Do you remember that day at all?

A: I don’t remember that day, no.

D: Do you remember people reacting to it all, or yourself?

A: Not me. These things didn't make an impression on me. At the end of the war, I think when Japan gave up [in August 1945], that was very impressive. That was something.

D: So, with President Roosevelt’s death, V-E Day, in May 1945, or V-J Day, victory over Japan in August 1945, do you remember anything that sticks out?

A: Yes, V-J Day, that sticks out for me, yes.

D: What do you remember about that day?

A: Of course the streets were—and this was in New York then, too. It was in the newspapers and very big about how excited and happy everybody was. The streets were just packed.

D: Were you in New York for V-J Day?

A: I was not in New York.

D: Where were you?

A: I was in Washington, D.C. I can’t recall anything really big there happening, outside of that it was kind of very exciting. We all knew at that time that we wouldn’t be in the service much longer. Because after that, because we were in for “duration and six months,” we had six months afterwards. So we all knew that we would be going home soon.

D: How did you feel about that, were you excited?

A: Oh, I was ready to go home now. I mean, after all those years. Back to normal living, I suppose you’d call it.

(B, 156)
D: Take a step back: do you remember how you reacted when you heard about them dropping the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? What did you think about it?

A: Pretty awful. It was very disastrous. It was a big deal, Hiroshima.

D: So it was something that kind of saddened you?

A: Oh yes, anything like that. (pauses three seconds) It was deserving to do that. We had to do that. We had to wake them up. I don’t feel sorry for that happening to them. It’s too bad but, you know, how do you feel? Just like now [in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001], how do you feel about what’s happened? Now this [11 September 2001] hits me more than back then.

[NOTE: the attacks in New York and Washington occurred just five days before this interview]

D: You got out of the WAVES in 1946, right?

A: February of ’46.

D: What do you remember about right when you were getting out?

A: Following that, there was lots we were going to do. We were going to leave and go back on a train to Great Lakes.

D: Did they let you all out at around the same time, or was it that they let a few go at a time?

A: You couldn’t all go at the same time.

D: How did they decide who went when?

A: Well, see it depended on when you enlisted, too. If you enlisted later, you stayed later.

D: What happened then at Great Lakes?

A: Well, we took the train to Great Lakes, and I think we were only there maybe two days. And believe it or not, they let us out one night in Chicago. Cold! We went to dinner someplace. That was like these discharges, very quick. They just got us out as quick as they could.

D: As in, you think they just kind of wanted to be done with it?

A: Evidently. I do think that’s what it was.
D: What kind of feeling was that for you?

A: It was a time for us to finish and be discharged. We had papers to do.

D: Did you pick up the feeling of “the guys are coming back now, so…”

A: Yes.

D: Did you feel good about that or was it, did you kind of feel pushed out at all or was it just the right thing to do?

A: No, it was just something that was going to happen. Didn’t bother me at all. Most of us were really glad to be out. From Great Lakes, that’s where we were discharged from, most of us.

D: From Great Lakes, then you all went to your homes.

A: Right, to our homes. By trains or buses or whatever. And that was it. I came back home and there were still people in the military then.

D: What was it like for you being out?

A: Different. I had been working at Montgomery Wards and I didn’t feel like I was going to go back, so I applied for a job at a store, a retail store. (***), it used to be. I was in the office there taking care of the attendance charts for some of the employees and managing phones, and I really felt out of place there. I didn’t stay there real long. I don’t know, I might have been there a month or two, and I just didn’t feel right, so I thought I’d go back to Montgomery Wards where I started. And I came back to my old job, and that was it.

D: Do you think your out of place feeling had anything to do with the fact that it wasn’t the military?

A: Well, you know, you have that feeling, it’s different. A feeling that something’s going to be different, and it takes a while to get back. I think that maybe that was for all of us that were in the military. A lot of young men would come home, they probably had a terrible time with that.

D: Did you notice any military guy that you saw having trouble adjusting, more so than you?

A: I did not. I really didn’t know any military after I was right back.

D: When did your brother come home?
A: It’s funny how I can’t tell you about my brother. Well, let’s see, according to these papers I have here, he was in from ’43-’46.

D: So he got back the same year as you did.

A: Yeah, he got back the same year.

D: Did he live with you and your mom again?

A: Yes he did. He’d been working at Minnesota Mining, at 3M, and he also went back to that. The war left an impression on him, my brother. He had a very terrible time with the war. I have a picture of him in Paris. Like I say, he was there in the heat of it. There is my brother there. (points to photo)

D: This is the Arch de Triomphe, in the center of Paris.

A: Yes, isn’t that something. This was a picture of him. Now we’re into my family. (laughs) It was hard for [my brother] Wally, because he didn’t have a father, just mom and me, we were good people together.

D: Did you stay in contact with some of the people that you met in the WAVES?

A: I did. For a couple years later, but then it kind of faded out, because you weren’t going to see them. Just hearing about their life and all of that.

D: So you don’t really hear of any of them anymore?

A: No.

D: Aileen, did you notice a change in your community, do you think, from when you left in 1943, to when you came back in 1946?

A: (pauses five seconds) I don’t think so. I think everybody knew that we were all coming back, and whether they were getting ready for us or not, or if they just figured we were going to be too many people around, I don’t know, because it was quite big then. Lots of people in the military. Nobody treated us different. We all got to go back to our jobs; that was part of it. Part of the agreement with your place of work.

D: So when you left Montgomery Wards, it was understood that when you came back, that job would be yours?

A: That would be my job. That was the way it was for everyone.

D: What was it like for you to see your family again once you came back?
A: Well, you know mom worked double time, and we just went on living again. I didn’t get married until 1948, so I was free to run around until then.

D: Just hanging out with friends then?

A: Yes, that was about it. It was pretty interesting, life goes on.

D: Was there any kind of recognition of either the WAVES or other military service in your community?

A: Yes, there was. Sometimes they had us getting together as a group. One time, the WAVES from Minnesota had a gathering, a reunion. I think I went to one once or something like that. It was nice to know there were that many women doing this. But we were recognized, yes we were.

D: Was there ever a victory parade in St. Paul do you know?

A: No, I don’t know. I remember, I think, I don’t know if it was when I was discharged or not, but there was a picture of me in the paper. The newspaper.

D: Really. Aileen Krusell, or not Aileen Krusell at that time, what was your last name then?

A: Duffeny.

D: Aileen Duffeny was in the paper then.

A: Yes, I kept that picture for a long time, too.

D: Neat. I guess at this point, I’d like to ask some bigger questions. What did the war mean for you? Did it change you, or change the people around you?

A: Actually the war meant that there was going to be a lot of changing, in our state, in the city, because the men had to leave for the war. Actually, there was going to be a big change all over, for jobs. That primarily is what I would think about. It was a good time to make money for a lot of people, that war, believe it or not. Who wants the war? But it did a lot for a lot of people. It was sad that some didn’t come home, those that were lost in the war, of course, but that is war.

D: Has your perspective of the war changed from when you got out until now?

A: I am a really military people. We’ve got to protect our country. I mean that so badly. It takes money to do these things, but we can’t let these people [that are responsible for 11 September 2001] do this to us. Trouble is, it’s not a ground war anymore. It’s scary. Let’s hope the right people take care of these nuclear bombs. I am for it, the Army and Navy and that; I’m for that.
D: So your time made you more patriotic?

A: Yes, it could.

D: It made you more sensitive of our needs to protect our self?

A: Exactly. And my husband [Warner Krusell] was in the service, too, and my brother, and his brother. Of course then, they had to be. Nobody wants war, they’re trying to prevent it, and I guess we have to pay for it. How old are you, Dan?

D: I’m twenty-one.

A: Did you have to enlist in the draft, I mean, you have to be in the draft?

D: Yes, when you turn eighteen, you have to sign up for the draft, guys do.

A: What do you think about it? I’m asking you.

D: That’s all right. There is definitely a feeling of responsibility towards my country and protecting it.

A: I don’t like to see our men go out and get killed, now. But I think it will happen again. We don’t want to do that again, but maybe we have to stop it first. I don’t want war; nobody wants war, but since the beginning of time there’s been wars. War upon war, and this will never end. Unfortunately. Our pastor, his service was good today, given the situation going on now with the Twin Towers. I don’t know what to do. What can we do?

D: It’s a tough question to answer. Aileen, that’s really the end of the questions I have to ask you. I just want to open it up, in case there was anything I didn’t talk to you about that you think was important from your time, any memories, any stories, anything like that, that should be added to this interview.

A: I can’t really say so. I went into this, the WAVES, knowing what it would be. Like I say, I didn’t think it would be as long as it happened, as it ended up to be. I don’t have anything to add, I suppose I’ll think of some after you’re gone! (laughs) Basically, we served our time there, and it was fine. There wasn’t any unhappiness to speak of and, you know, everybody just did what they wanted, what they had to do, and we were content with that.

D: Thank you very much.

A: You’re welcome. Did you want pictures or not?

D: Yeah, I’d be happy to be able to copy several and add them to our collection.
A: If you need anything from this album, you’re welcome to take whatever you want. 
(two photos were added to the collection of the Oral History Project)

D: Once again, Aileen, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW