

Interviewee: Betty Myers Sarner

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 21 October 2002

Location: living room of the Sarner home, Oakdale, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, November 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, June 2003

Betty Myers Sarner was born on 3 December 1923 in St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota. The youngest of three children, Betty was raised by her mother after her parents divorced in the early 1930s. She graduated from St. Paul's Monroe High School in 1941, then held a number of jobs over the next two years; these included office work at a shipyard in Richmond, California, and for the Northern Pacific Railroad in St. Paul. In May 1944, desiring a change, Betty joined the US Navy WAVES.

Following Basic Training at Hunter College in New York City, Betty was stationed in Washington, D.C., in the communications division; her duties were primarily administrative and clerical. With the end of the war in August 1945, personnel requirements changed, and in November Betty was discharged with the rank of specialist third class.

A civilian again, Betty returned to St. Paul and her job at the Northern Pacific Railroad. She got married in 1947 to Thorvald Sarner, a Marine Corps veteran of the Pacific battles of New Guinea (1943), Peleliu (1944), and Okinawa (1945). Betty and Thorvald raised a family; after years as a homemaker, Betty went to work at North High School in North St. Paul, Minnesota, retiring in 1984. At the time of this interview (October 2002) Betty lived in the St. Paul suburb of Oakdale.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

B = Betty Myers Sarner

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is the twenty-first of October 2002 and this is the interview with Betty Sarner. First, Betty, on the record, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me this winter-like morning.

B: Yes.

T: We've been talking a little bit and have learned that you were born on the third of December 1923 in St. Paul. Went to school there and graduated in from what was then Monroe High School in 1941. You joined the service, the WAVES, in May of 1944. Until then you had a number of jobs. Among them you worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad and you also worked at a shipyard in Richmond, California, for several months in 1943. You were in the WAVES until November of 1945 and you spent your service time in Washington, D.C. After you got out of the service you were married in 1947. Your husband's name is Torvald, and together you had three children. You worked many years at North High in North St. Paul, Minnesota. Retired in 1984 and you've been a resident of Oakdale since 1995. I wanted to start by just asking you. You were in high school until 1941 which means when the US got involved in World War II you were a high school graduate. December 7, 1941. I'm wondering, with respect to the attack on Pearl Harbor, if you remember what you were doing when you first heard that news?

B: I was with my mother, believe it or not, at a bowling alley. And it really hit her and I because my brother was a serviceman.

T: Was he already in service by that time?

B: Yes. I remember she was bowling, and I had just gone down there with her. That's the day we heard about it.

T: What was your first reaction, as a young person, to that kind of news?

B: I guess I could just visualize that most all the young men that I had gone to school with would be the first ones that they would draft. It would hit my age group quite a bit. Which it did.

T: Did you have a lot of friends your own age?

B: Oh, yes. Very much so. Yes, an awful lot.

T: How soon was it before you began to see people going off to service?

B: I would say some of them were going in '42-'43. They stuck around more or less until they were about twenty or so. But then a lot of them went in the service.

T: How about your mom? What kind of reactions, did she say how she felt at that time?

B: She was very, she was shook up because of my brother. Like anybody else, you're devastated to think that we were at war. She had quite a few brothers, you know. Nine brothers. They had their own baseball team. And she was the mascot. So she had a few brothers that had been in World War I. So she definitely knew more about war than I did. Naturally.

T: Your own brother was in the Air Corps, is that right?

B: Right.

T: Was he stationed stateside at this time?

(1, A, 66)

B: Yes. He was stationed all over in the States. He stayed a lot of time in the States. He never did have combat duty at all. He was overseas, but actually he was in more or less the office part. But then he got into kind of like management. That's what he ended up in. He was top sergeant when he retired, and then he got out and he was managing hotels.

T: When did he go into the service?

B: I can't recall.

T: Before the war began, clearly, because you said that he was already in service when it began.

B: He had to be in the Reserve at least, because when we moved in my senior year on the East Side he wasn't with us. So I know by then that he had been in the service. That was probably in 1940.

T: So he was one of those who was already in service when the war began.

B: Yes. He had worked at the railroad at one time. He quit and went in the service. Then he came out for a while, and after he came out he decided that was not where he wanted to be, and so he went back and enlisted and stayed in. He was a career

man. He was about fifty-three when he got out because, like I said, he died in '54. And he had more than twenty years in.

T: You lived at home with just your mom. Your folks were divorced, and your dad also lived in St. Paul.

B: Right. He was a fireman. I saw my dad every week.

T: Could you gauge his response to this attack on Pearl Harbor?

B: No. I think not as much, because of the fact that I was only thirteen when my dad and mother divorced. When we were together, it was just to be together and stuff like that. There was a few things happened when I got a little older, and so I wasn't that close to my father for a while.

T: After Pearl Harbor then, really until you went to California in early '43, you lived at home with your mom?

B: I always lived with my mom until I went in the service. Except when I was in California. Just three of us girls went out to California.

T: So it was just the two of you living at home then?

B: No, my sister also lived at home.

T: So two girls and your mom.

B: Yes.

T: And were you living in St. Paul then too?

B: Yes. Always lived in St. Paul.

T: How did the war seem to change St. Paul? You were living, working in St. Paul. What kind of changes did you notice as the war came, say in '42 or '43?

B: Things got a little tougher to get, but maybe it's the fact that I was... I wasn't out of high school that long. Things don't bother you that much when you're that young. You always felt somebody else could worry about it. When you get a little older you've got a few more smarts up above. I did notice the shortage of men. All we women notice the shortage of men (*laughs*).

T: So the eligible bachelor population...

B: Was starting to go, yes.

T: So how did that impact your social life for example? There were fewer eligible men around now.

B: You didn't go out as much, that's for sure. You went out with girls more or less all the time, which was fine. In fact, I was used to going with crowds more anyhow. We always had a gang that we went around with. A mixture of boys and girls which was, you know, how that is. You'd pair off eventually.

T: Yes. How about inside your home? How were you and your mom and your sister impacted by rationing, for example?

B: We never had a car, so that's something we didn't have to worry about.

T: So gas and automobile tires, for example, no problem there.

B: Yes. And I guess, maybe the fact that there were three women, it wasn't probably as much of an impact as if we had a man there that was depending on a lot more things than women. Women could get by with a lot less as far as food is concerned. Although I never felt that we were ever deprived. Never.

T: You felt like you were doing okay.

B: Yes. I was a very fortunate young lady because my father always had a good job. So even in the Depression years I never knew it.

T: He was a fireman, which is one of those Depression-proof jobs.

B: Right. So actually, I hate to say this, but I never realized how bad those days were until I married my husband. He came from a family of nine kids. He could tell me a lot.

T: So a completely different story.

B: Oh, absolutely. Him and I, our lives were so entirely different. In fact, to this day I still meet with three of the gals that I lived on the same street with when I was five years old. They now tell me that I was the little rich kid on the block.

T: That was their perception, eh?

B: I said, "Did I act like it?" And they said, "No, but you just had everything. You weren't wearing the same clothes every day." Isn't that funny? I never realized that. I didn't even realize it when I was older going to school that things were different. So I thank God that I was never given that idea that we were better than anybody else.

T: When you were living with your mom and your sister, and after your folks were divorced, was your mom getting money from your dad?

B: Yes. My dad was very faithful. Every month it was right there on the dot. Never had to worry at all. In fact, my father, even after I was not eligible for any more, my father still gave my mother something every month until the day he died, and that was even after he married again. He was a very, very dependable man as far as finances were concerned.

T: Did your mother work outside the home at all when you were in school?

B: After high school, later on she worked. She worked at a dry cleaner and believe it or not, she worked at a nightclub marking fourteen. You probably don't know what that is, but that was a dice game. Then she managed a bowling alley downtown where my uncle worked. She used to manage a bowling alley there.

T: Was your sister still at home then when you were away in service?

B: Yes.

T: Then it was just the two of them.

B: Yes.

T: Was your mom working then, or not yet?

B: No. That's when she was working for a dry cleaning company at the time.

T: Did she like working, or was that something she felt...

B: She almost felt, I think, she had to. She got something from my father, but then remember, when I got to be eighteen I was cut off. My sister was older. She was cut off a long time ago. So my mom was really not getting that much money.

T: She needed to supplement then.

B: Right. If you want something besides food. She did go to work. But it was very tough on her because when she was in eighth grade she had snuck down and got a job downtown at one of the dime stores for the holidays. She was going to Catholic school at the time. They found that out that she had done that and so she got kind of kicked out of school. She never did finish her education at all.

T: Is that right? For that, they kicked her out of school?

B: Yes. She wasn't going to school. She was just going down there and work. Things were different at that time.

T: When you were home then, who was doing most of the shopping for food?

B: I'd say my sister. My sister was.

T: Did you notice shortages or rationing problems with any kind of foods?

B: No, I didn't.

T: Did you do any of the cooking at home?

B: No. I was the spoiled one. They said I was, and I agree when I look back on it now. I guess I was. My sister and brother... well, my sister did everything. She was real good.

T: She was seven or eight years older than you?

B: Yes.

(1, A, 198)

T: So you really were almost the baby, weren't you?

B: I was the baby. I really was. She always used to say to my mother, "Boy, she can do anything she wants. She wanted to go in the Navy. You let her go in the Navy." And my mother said, "Would you have gone in the service?" And she said no. She said, "Then don't squawk. You wouldn't have gone in the service."

T: You were out of school by that time. You had a number of jobs after you got out of high school. What did you notice about applying for jobs? How difficult was it to find one?

B: It wasn't that difficult. It wasn't really that difficult, because I did try a lot of jobs. And to tell you the truth, I was seventeen when I graduated, I just hadn't found what I wanted to do and I wanted to explore different jobs, and so I went from job to job. That's how it happened.

T: It sounds like if someone didn't like a job, they could move on very easily.

B: At that time you could. Employment was much easier. And for a girl, too.

T: You went to work in a shipyard in California in early 1943.

B: Right.

T: How did you come to that decision to go pretty far away?

B: My girlfriend saw this in the papers and thought it would be a real good idea.

T: So it was an advert in a St. Paul paper?

B: Evidently must have been. Shipyard jobs. She said, "Wouldn't that be fun?" And of course, I had never given it a second thought. Then stupidly we went to a fortune teller and she said you are going to be going out of town shortly. I said, "No way, I'm not leaving St. Paul." Within two weeks I was out in Richmond, California.

T: Now that's a long way from St. Paul.

B: It is.

T: How did your mom react to the fact that you were going to California?

(1, A, 224)

B: My mom was quite shook. But she said, "You'll be back shortly."

T: She was right, too, wasn't she?

B: Yes, she was. I think I lasted longer than she thought I would. But when I think of the things now... We got our bags packed. I had a suitcase that we had to have a rope around it to hold it together on the train. Nowadays, you would have been embarrassed to tears to even walk down the street with that kind of a suitcase (*laughs*). I mean it was terrible, when I stop to think of it now. But you know, when you're nineteen years old, not too much phases you (*laughs*).

T: Maybe that's a good thing sometimes. So here the three of you were just...

B: Actually, just out of the blue. We went to Richmond, and we got this place to stay which was just really a Godsend because it was right on the main line directly going to the shipyards. It was in Richmond. We just lucked out. We really lucked out as far as the location. We lived upstairs; we got an upstairs duplex. We were just fortunate.

T: How long of a trip on the train was that out to California?

B: It had to be a couple days.

T: Do you remember that journey at all?

B: No. Hardly at all.

T: So when you got there though, was there a job waiting for you?

B: We thought there was a job waiting, but when we got there, no. But when we did go down and apply we didn't have any trouble at all getting the job.

T: So once again the jobs were there if you wanted them.

B: Yes.

T: Now you mentioned that finding a place to live was not a problem?

B: No. Just to be honest with you, I have no idea how we found the job unless someone actually did when we got there. And I don't remember anything about how we found the place to live. I really don't.

T: Were you working full time out there?

B: Yes. Forty hours a week.

T: What kind of work were you doing?

B: Office work.

T: Clerical?

B: Right. You had kind of like blueprints of different ships and stuff, and you had to file all those things. That was about it. It was anything to do with the ships. It was strictly office. Strictly office work.

T: Was this a big operation, this shipyard?

B: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Great big.

T: So they had lots of employees?

B: Yes. And it was guarded. Very guarded.

T: So did you have a little badge that you showed to get in every day?

B: Oh, yes. You had to show that.

T: So you were really a part of the war economy now?

B: Right.

T: You were showing up with an official ID badge. How did that strike you that you were really part of the war effort?

B: I guess the main thing, when I saw the christening of one of the ships; made me feel so good that I had had some little bit to do with that ship being christened, and that it was going to help our boys. I guess that's the reaction that I had at the time. The feeling.

T: Was this the first time you'd been that far away from home?

B: Yes.

T: How did you adjust to being far away from home?

B: Being far away from home was hard. It was quite hard, yes. But luckily I was with two girls that I was close to. I don't know whether I did call home or not because we probably didn't have the money to call home. But I wrote home quite a bit.

T: Did you get letters in return too?

B: Oh, yes. My mom was good at that.

T: Would you say you were homesick or that you adjusted pretty quickly?

B: I would think it wasn't too bad. Then I had a girlfriend that came out to visit us. She was going in the service. She's the one that kind of got Shirley and I interested in going into the service too. Then I waited until Shirley got old enough, and then we both went in.

T: How old was Shirley?

B: Shirley was a year younger than I was. She was twenty. I think we had to be twenty. She was twenty in May and I had already been twenty in December. So I waited until May until she got to be twenty. Then we went in together.

T: What about your social life out in California? Was it much different than here in St. Paul?

B: You met quite a few service fellows out there, because they were out there waiting to be shipped out. But nothing real exciting or anything. There was a lot of fun. It was down there if you wanted to. But it was usually... you met young men that you know were going to be shipped out shortly.

(1, A, 284)

T: Where is Richmond?

B: Not too far from Oakland. Between Oakland and San Francisco. In that area right down there.

T: Right in the Bay area.

B: Right.

T: The three of you living out there. Were you doing your own cooking and shopping and stuff like that?

B: Yes. One of the girls was an exceptionally good cook. So she did most of the cooking, but we did the shopping.

T: Anything in short supply?

B: Not that I remember. Not that I ever remember, no.

T: It sounds like what you recall from St. Paul too. You don't remember shortages really impacting or hurting you on a daily basis.

B: No, I don't recall that at all. I guess maybe it's because of my age. I guess I was letting all that up to my mom. She could worry about all that stuff. And my sister. Maybe I didn't have the responsibility that I should have had at that time, but I didn't need to have it.

T: And the same in California, it sounds like. Someone else was doing the cooking.

B: Right. We did the shopping together. But the one girl was exceptionally good at cooking.

T: Without remembering exactly how much you were paid in California, can you recall, did you perceive yourself to be well paid, just okay, or not very good?

B: I think at the time I thought the pay was okay. It was okay for what we were doing.

T: Were you saving any money?

B: No. I never knew what it was to save money (*laughs*). I didn't learn that until after I got married. Smartened up a little bit.

T: So you had plenty of money to live comfortably.

B: Oh, yes.

T: As a single woman out there.

B: Yes. I mean, let's face it. We couldn't dress like Christian Dior or anything like that, but we lived from payday to payday. Like most kids at that time. Enjoyed life. At that time that was all you lived for was to have fun.

T: Things change when we get older.

B: Oh, absolutely.

(1, A, 309)

T: Now none of you had a car out there.

B: No.

T: So no problems with gas rationing.

B: No.

T: Did you get into San Francisco or Oakland at all when you were out there?

B: Yes. We went to San Francisco, and I recall riding the trolley and going down to Fisherman's Wharf. We didn't have the money to do some of that stuff, but we did get a chance to go into Oakland and San Francisco at the time. A little bit. We stayed most of the time in Richmond.

T: Talking about Richmond. What evidence did you see that we were at war? What kind of things?

B: Mainly because everybody that was in that area working for the shipyard.

T: That's the main industry there.

B: The main drag that was going past our house was cars every morning, and they were all hard hats. It was strictly work people. Strictly laborers.

T: And they were producing ships for the war effort.

B: Absolutely. Yes.

T: Were there things like blackouts out there?

B: Just a couple. But that's all I recall.

T: Was that something new for you compared to what you saw in St. Paul?

B: Yes.

T: Did the war in a sense then seem more real out there?

B: Probably, because you had something to do with the ships. More so. And you saw a lot of servicemen. There were a lot more servicemen.

T: More than here in St. Paul.

B: Right. I think they took all the men from St. Paul out of here. That's why.

T: They were all out there in California.

B: Right. A lot of them did go out... started out in the Navy and a lot of them ended up out in California actually.

T: Yes. This sounds like a pretty okay place to be. It's some decent money and yet you didn't stay there even through 1943. What convinced you to come back to St. Paul?

B: My girlfriend that came to visit us, and that was going to join the Navy. She did join the Navy. And before she left she came out to visit us, and it sounded great. So Shirley and I decided to go back home and work. And of course, at that time when you got three gals about that time, you know, three's too much. So then it got a little bit more or less rocky.

T: Was the apartment small that you kind of didn't have enough space?

B: It was small, yes. And then you get, well let's face it, three women together. You can just go so long. Each one has their own ideas and stuff.

T: So moving back and joining the service sounded like an appealing option to you.

B: Right. Absolutely. In fact, when we came back that was the object.

T: Was to go in the Navy.

B: Yes. But then I knew I had to work before I went in the Navy and luckily... Of course, at that time they had to give you a leave in order to go into the service too. But when I went to the railroad they didn't know I was only going to stay so long.

T: And this was the Northern Pacific Railroad at that time.

B: Right.

T: With regards to the Navy. How would you explain your decision to join the service? What was it that appealed?

B: Mainly I think the life back here was so boring. I guess just a change of venue was what I was looking for. Something different.

T: Not being in St. Paul anymore.

B: No. Just to see what other parts of the world were. That's how the Navy gets you in there. You're going to see the world. They didn't tell me it was only two cities I was going to be in. That was beside the point. That was my choice too.

T: So in a sense, you liked being somewhere outside of Minnesota and were anxious to do that little more.

B: But then, you know and it's amazing, you feel that way. But then it's like, I don't know how you feel, but like the same as I like vacation once in a while. And when I come home there's nothing like Minnesota. Even days like today with the snow. It doesn't really bother me. As long as I can get in the car and drive that's all that matters to me. Take my wheels away. That'll be a different ballgame.

T: On the snowy days it's a little more...

B: Oh, very bleak.

T: How long did you work for the railroad?

B: I started in '43 and I went in the Navy in '44. Then I went back in '45 and I quit January of '47 to have my daughter. That was in '48.

T: So you worked for them for...

B: I got married... I've got to figure this out.

T: '47 you were married.

B: Okay. Then I quit in January of '48.

T: So you worked for them for a number of months before you went off to the Navy.

B: Yes. It was nine months I think.

T: Is that the job you held the longest before you went in the service?

B: Right.

T: What exactly did you do for the railroad?

B: I sorted tickets. That's about what it was mostly. Handling tickets at that time.

T: At one certain location?

B: The one office. It was passenger and station accounts. So that was mostly with passengers that had been on the railroad and you had their tickets and you had to compare them and you had to see that they came in at the time and different things like that. It was strictly office. Boring office work.

T: Eight to five stuff again?

B: Right. But at that time we also worked half days on Saturday.

T: So five and a half day weeks.

B: Yes.

T: Now was that more hours than people had worked before the war?

B: No. I think the railroad was on those hours, because my brother worked there before he went in the service and he worked Saturdays too. Half days.

T: So five and half day work week in your particular office, and you stayed in the same office the whole time you were there?

B: Right.

T: Did you notice, were there mostly men working in your office or mostly women?

B: They were starting to hire more women. It used to be just a lot of men at that time. But then they started hiring more younger women. But then the men were, a lot of them were beyond the service too. They were getting older. We were kind of a young group and they were, I would say, they were probably at that time in their forties which seemed like old to us. At the time.

T: Sure. So there was a switch in this office to more women?

B: Right.

T: And younger women too?

B: Right.

T: How did you get along in an office that was kind of changing in the gender makeup? Were there tensions around there? Was it difficult?

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 378.

B: I really never had too much trouble getting along with older ones or younger ones. I've always seemed to get along okay with them. I was rather friendly and so I guess maybe that's why....

T: It was okay for you.

B: Right. And my cousin worked at the railroad in the same office I did too. He was older. In fact, he was my godfather. I had some friends that worked there. Naturally you gravitate to some people. I don't seem to have too much problems meeting people, being friendly with them.

T: From what you observed, how were women treated by men in the office? By their coworkers?

B: I never thought I was treated unfairly, no.

T: So you felt that you were respected by the male employees.

B: Yes. I can't recall that I ever felt that I was treated badly. And the railroad was paying good at that time too.

T: Were they?

B: Yes. They were. It was a real good paying job at the time.

T: Was it a job that you found difficult to leave when you went in the Navy or were you happy to move on?

B: No. I was ready to leave. I was ready to go. I think I was more bored. I'm so used to changing jobs, I suppose that nine months is a long time for me to hold down a job.

T: Was it hard to get in railroad?

B: No. But I do think the fact that my brother had worked there at one time kind of helped. I think at the time you had to know someone or have someone vouch for you. At least that's what I always thought that you had to know someone to get in there. Maybe I was wrong. But my brother did, I'm sure. His working there did help. And my uncle. My cousin.

T: So you had a couple people you knew there.

B: Right.

T: Was the war in evidence around the railroad? Were there things like bond drives or other things that reminded people that there's a war going on here?

B: I think they did have bond drives. I'm sure they did. As a matter of fact, I'm almost positive they did because they had... you could take so much out of your paycheck for bonds at the time.

T: Is that something you thought you wanted to be part of?

B: I never felt I made that kind of money to do it. I was still at the reckless... I made good money and I spent it. That's what it was for.

T: And you were living at home again, right?

B: Right. It makes a difference you know.

(1, B, 434)

T: A huge difference. No rent. No food. Things like that. So would you consider yourself, when you think about how much you were earning, well paid, okay, or not so good?

B: I was well paid. And I can tell you why I really think so is because when I started at the school system--I quit the railroad in 1947 and I started the school system in 1964, which is seventeen years later. And I started at the same price at the school system as I had ended up at the railroad.

T: No kidding. Seventeen years later the wages at the school system were the same.

B: Absolutely.

T: The railroad was a decent place to work?

B: Absolutely. You bet. You bet.

T: So for a number of years then after you quit the railroad until you worked for North St. Paul schools, were you a homemaker working in the home?

B: Yes. I stayed home.

T: You raised three kids too, right?

B: Right.

T: You did decide to join the service. Do you remember breaking the news to your mom that you were going to join the Navy?

B: I had talked to her, because my girlfriend Margaret had already joined. I said, "Gee, Mom, that sounds like a good idea." "Well," she says, "you think it over." And at the time my mom needed a little help along the way. Financially. But then I found out that I could use her—she would be my dependent, and I would get money in the service for her. So consequently that made me feel a little bit better that, if I did leave her, I didn't leave her in the lurch financially. So she did get a check every month. I don't have any idea what it was, it was probably a pittance, but it was worth something.

That's probably why I was one of the earliest separated, because I had a dependent. They wanted us out of there so we could...

T: Because it was costing the military more to keep you.

B: Absolutely.

T: I think those were allotment checks that your mom got, so you paid part of that allotment and the service...

B: It came out of my checks. So needless to say, I wasn't too wealthy in the service. That's why you went to USOs. I never went to any fancy nightclubs.

T: USOs were free, right?

B: Right. Pepsi Cola Center. Yes. The USOs were a good place to meet people and have fun.

T: I bet it was, actually. People your own age too.

B: Oh, right. Right. And I remember when I was in Washington, D.C., I wish I would have kept records. I had seen more boys from St. Paul that came through Washington, D.C., that were stationed in the suburbs around there.

T: Is that right?

B: I couldn't believe it. How many that I had known. Casually. From school. That did come. I saw them. In fact, I had seen quite a few of them. They were very lenient where I worked. If I did see some of the young men from home to let me come in to work a little later at night. Because I worked from eleven to seven in the morning.

T: Did you really? The whole time?

B: I worked three shifts. I had some wonderful officers. They were very understanding.

T: Well, before you went to Washington you spent some time at Hunter College in the Bronx.

B: That was strictly military.

T: What can you say about Basic Training?

B: I liked it. That's the part that I liked. I enjoyed that immensely.

T: What did you do there? What kind of stuff?

B: You did a lot of marching and then you learned a lot about health. I guess the same things [as] any Basic Training. Of course, we never learned how use guns or anything like that.

T: No weapons training.

B: No. Nothing like that.

T: But physical fitness.

(1, B, 498)

B: Right. Physical fitness. Then they taught you a few things about the ships. It was more or less just regular service life. Some people didn't like it. That part I liked. I thought it was great.

T: So living in barracks, getting up early, physical fitness.

B: Right. And you had to get up at a certain time, and get out of bed, and you had to do this, and you had to make the bed. The bed had to be made perfect. Things like that.

T: And you say, you feel that you did adjust to that pretty quickly?

B: Right. Yes.

T: Was there also classroom time at Hunter College too?

B: I recall we had some classroom time but, I hate to say it, but it gets further back in my mind now than it did. But I know we had classes on different things, I know that. And like you said. I think hygiene was definitely one of them. And different things about, nowadays they probably call it, how to get along with people and diversity

type training. At the time we never did have too many blacks in the service at the time anyhow. They were very scarce.

T: That's a good thing you bring up. When you were in Hunter College in the WAVES were there people of color?

B: I don't recall one.

T: All white?

B: Yes.

T: How about your office that you worked in, in Washington?

B: No.

T: Sounds like you went to a pretty white environment.

B: All white.

T: Did that puzzle you? Why with people of color in our society why you didn't see them in the Navy at all or where you worked?

B: In fact, you don't need to put this on the record, but anyhow, every day after we got the shift eleven to seven, this girlfriend and I would go down on the Potomac and rent a boat. They had right in the middle of the Potomac, they had this really nice, beautiful kind of rock and scenery and that. We would row out there every day and go on the top, walk up the top and lay there and sun bathe. That's what we did when the weather got nice.

T: That was in '44 or '45.

B: Right. Of course, we would come back to the barracks and then we'd sleep because we had to get up at night to go to work at eleven. And I remember the one yelled real loud, "We got the first colored gal in our barracks," and that was because I had such a beautiful tan at that time. That was the only reason (*laughs*). And I'll never forget that remark. I said, "What are you talking about!?" Well, it wasn't long after that we did get some. But not in boot camp. That was in barracks. Then we started getting some. But not very many.

T: In your barracks.

B: See, I don't think that would have bothered me because we had a colored girl in our school at Monroe. She was the only one in our school. Everybody loved her. In fact, we still to this day, have tried to locate her and can't locate her.

T: In your barracks, there must have been people from all over the country.

B: All over. Oh, absolutely.

T: Did you notice a difference between people from the North, people from the South?

B: Oh, yes.

T: How would you describe that difference?

B: The people from the South were very lazy. Eastern people are a little different than we are too. I don't know. Maybe it's just their talk and stuff like that.

T: People from the South, you mentioned them, did they have different attitudes or different approaches to things?

B: I guess they didn't like to work very much. They didn't think they should be doing so much work and stuff. Which we never did have that much to do. It was just like you had a uniform, and that was about it. Other than that, your civilian life was pretty much the same. Whenever we went out on anything, we didn't have to wear our uniforms if we went roller skating or anything like that. Off the base you could do whatever you wanted to. But at first you couldn't; no matter where you were you had to have your uniform.

T: So that changed after a while.

B: Yes. But even my son, my grandson, he comes home. He never has the uniform on.

(1, A, 562)

T: When you got blacks in your barracks, was there an adjustment for some people to that? Was that hard or was it no problem at all really?

B: Didn't seem to be any problem? Didn't seem to be. But like I said, if I recall, we didn't have that many. We didn't have that many at the time.

T: Were you aware of the kind of jobs that the blacks were doing?

B: They were doing the same thing as all of us. They were doing whatever they did, whatever they qualified for they did. Whatever they wanted to do. Or could qualify for. That's what it was.

T: You mentioned working night shift. Did you work all three shifts?

B: Yes.

T: On a rotating basis?

B: Right.

T: Did your job change at all with the shift changes?

B: No. Same things just different times.

T: How did you adjust to doing shift work?

B: It wasn't easy. It was hard to sleep at a certain time. You got up at a certain time. I don't think shifts is for anybody. I don't think they should have that anyplace. Or if they have it they should keep it in one. Like the mining. To me I think they ruined more people with three shifts. I had a brother-in-law that had ulcers; he had to have surgery on them. It was because by the time he was used to one shift, he was put on another one. Your body doesn't get used to it changing that much every week.

T: How often did your shift change?

B: Every week.

T: So you would get one week of eleven to seven, one week of three to eleven.

B: Yes.

T: The job that you were doing. Can you say a few sentences about exactly the kind of stuff you were working with and what you were doing?

B: I was never one that broke the code. It was just that you were always trying to work with something to see if it had any pattern whatsoever. You were working with this, you'd look and see whether there was a certain pattern. I never broke a code, so I don't know how but other than the fact they gave you these things and asked you to compare and see if you could see some sort of a pattern that was a little more regular.

T: So you had people, a lot of people working in this office, with code breaking.

B: Right. And we had gals that were quite up in the ranks. Then we also had the commander of the whole barracks, not the whole barracks. The commander of the whole quarters. His wife was working there too. But she was a civilian. Most of my officers were graduates from Wellesley and Vassar. But very nice. Very nice. I couldn't have asked for nicer officers. They were very, very nice. Neither one of them were snooty. And of course we got to know them pretty well so that we could have told them off anyhow and they would have accepted it. It was a high a mighty

school you went to or something, and they would just laugh. They were very, very wonderful officers. I have nothing but the best to say about them.

T: It sounds like the atmosphere around your office...

B: It was very good. Very good.

T: At the time did you consider staying in the Navy longer term?

B: No. I think mainly because my mom was kind of looking for me to come home, and I was still doing office work. I wasn't doing anything really challenging to me at the time. I probably, if it was something else... I guess at the time I never even dreamed of staying in real long.

T: So you saw the Navy as just something to do for a little while.

B: Stepping stone. Something that I was inquiring about. I just wanted to find out. I guess just being a part of the war effort. We girls, you know, were not looked on as very... A lot of guys and other girls didn't look on us as very good citizens. They just thought we were in there for one thing—to get a man and stuff like that.

T: Did you hear people saying that?

B: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I could tell you, when I came home on leave the one time and we were out in the park. I guess the part that I recall more than anything is that we were in a nightclub. And you know, when you're in the service you've got your uniform on and all the guys have got their uniform on. You have something in common, and it's much easier for a guy to come over and talk to you because you have a uniform on. That's the way it happened. Well naturally the civilian girls didn't like that one bit, because it was just like they were shunned. So they just made kind of little snide remarks, something like, "What we really need is a uniform." Stuff like that. I could brush it off. It didn't bother me any.

T: Were these people that you had known before you were in the service?

B: Yes. Well, not my friends. But anybody that you just saw out. But it didn't bother me, because the guys were coming over and talking to me so I couldn't care less (*laughs*). It worked. Real good.

(1, B, 628)

T: Did you feel proud wearing your uniform?

B: Absolutely. Absolutely. You bet. Very much so.

T: You worked at the same office in Washington the whole time.

B: Right, the whole thing.

T: Did the personnel change? Did people come and go in this office?

B: No. We kept pretty much the same ones all the time that I was there.

T: Were there men in uniform and women in uniform in this office?

B: No. I think we had one fellow and I don't think he was actually in our office. He was, I think, kind of the commandant of our quarters. We had mostly all women in there.

T: So women doing office work and also women in charge.

B: Yes. Actually the men that we had around there was that we had the Marine Corps guards when we went in to work. That was all guarded by the Marine Corps.

T: The building itself.

B: Yes.

T: And did you have some kind of ID pass you had to show?

B: Definitely. But you were wearing your uniform too at the time. And the Marines were... the thing is, I always thought they were so cocky, but they had a right to be. They had all these women coming and looking at them every day. Four thousand women. Where else could a guy be so lucky. But a lot of those Marine Corps deserved it, because some of the men had already gone overseas and had a few bad experiences by the time they were already back.

T: This was very light duty for them.

B: Right. It was actually R and R for some of them too. Just to be there. But they liked it. Come back and look at goofy WAVES all the time. They even looked good after a while.

T: Betty, did you stay in touch with your mom and your sister back home?

B: Absolutely, yes. Definitely. I wrote a lot.

T: Did you get mail too?

B: Yes.

T: Now you're a person who had lived away from home already—you'd been in California. Would you say you were homesick at all in Washington?

B: I was glad to get home, but it's the funniest thing--I guess when I found out I was going home on leave, the last month was probably the toughest month in the whole... I could hardly wait through that month. Up until then it didn't bother me. But the fact that I knew I was going home then, that last month it never went fast enough until I could go home.

T: When you knew it was going to be happening.

B: Right.

T: You were part of the war effort directly. You were in the service. How closely did you follow the war's progress?

B: I wasn't as good. History was not my cup of tea in school. It was probably the worst subject. I didn't like it at all, and so consequently, when you don't like something you're not going to give your whole effort into it. It was just like you'd listen to it. You'd hear different things that were going on. I can't really say that I was the best person to follow the war. I just was reading. You'd listen at work when they would talk about we did this and that, and then you'd get very enthused when you think pretty soon it's going to come to an end. If they talked about things in different areas and you knew you had one of your friends there, that really alerted you to paying a little more attention to what was going on.

T: There was a personal link that attracted your attention.

B: Right. Right.

T: You mentioned USO clubs a little bit earlier. Was that something that you did frequently, go to the USOs?

B: Quite a bit. I think it was because it was free. Didn't cost us anything and it was, I think it was Pepsi Cola Center. Pepsi was free. Let's face it, when you don't have any money, that's where you go. Once in a great while we [would] probably save enough money to go to a nice place and have a meal or something. But that wasn't too often.

T: Do you remember what your pay was in the Navy?

B: No. No idea.

T: But you don't remember yourself having much pocket money.

B: No. You can tell how much. Let's see here. I was just looking at this yesterday. (*picks up discharge papers*) The initial mustering out pay was one hundred dollars,

to get out of the Navy. But the total payment upon my discharge was thirty-nine dollars. That's all I got...

T: You weren't going far on that.

B: No. And like I said, I wasn't going out mainly to get my discharge money.

T: You were certainly going to earn more back at the railroad.

B: Oh, absolutely.

T: The thing with the Navy was, of course, that room and board was covered.

B: Right. Absolutely. But when you first went in they issued you uniforms and stuff, but after that you're on your own.

T: You had to buy your own?

B: You bet, yes. But they did issue enough. Now I had beautiful Navy blue all-weather coat. Topcoat, with a zip-out lining. I never had the lining in the whole time I was in Washington, D.C.

T: Really. So it didn't get as cold as here in Minnesota.

B: No. But you had your uniform underneath, so it was a nice jacket and stuff. But I never put the lining in.

(1, B, 694)

T: You were there over one winter.

B: Right.

T: So in 1945 you made the decision to get out. Was the military, was the Navy, encouraging you to go as well?

B: They were probably more anxious to get rid of me because I did have a dependent. So that's why I was discharged. At the time I don't think they even gave you a choice, as I recall. I probably wouldn't have taken it anyhow at the time; I was anxious to get home at that time. The war was over so let's go home. And that was it.

T: You were in the Navy and in Washington when President Roosevelt died in April of 1945.

B: Right.

T: How did you react to that news?

B: That was a real blow to everybody, I think. Then we went into town when they had the big parade for his funeral.

T: Do you remember that funeral procession?

B: I remember the procession but that's quite a few years ago now. But I remember you couldn't believe it, because you had never gone through anything like this before, especially when he died.

T: He had been the president since you were young.

B: Right. He was very well liked. Everybody liked him very, very well.

T: Was there a reaction in the office you worked in?

B: No. It probably wasn't any different than when I worked down at the St. Johns when I heard about President Kennedy. Of course, that was such a shocker too. What can you do about it? There's nothing you can do about it. It's all over. We've got to move on, especially at the time. You were more concerned about who was going to take over and how was this going to be. We have a new leader coming in. Right in the war. That was kind of a quizzical thing for people. Wondering what was going to happen.

T: It was only a month later, in May '45, that the war against Germany ended. What do you recall about that?

B: I don't recall an awful lot about that, to tell you the truth, other than the fact that they said they were shipping all the guys back home. Thank God. We all felt, thank God, they're all safe now. Let's get the rest of the war over.

T: The one against Japan.

B: Yes.

T: And that was in August of 1945. What kind of impact did that have around your office?

B: Oh, everybody was celebrating. Everybody was celebrating. They could hardly wait to get into town and really have a good time.

T: Yourself too?

B: Right.

T: What kind of good time did you have that night?

B: It was just, everybody was running around the streets and hollering and stuff like that. That was about it. A lot of people I'm sure got drunk. That wasn't my cup of tea at the time.

T: Did your job change once the war ended?

B: No, I did the same thing most all the time. All the time until I got out.

T: With the war over, were there still codes to break?

B: I don't really recall whether we still worked at that or we did something else or not. August it was done and I was out already in November so there wasn't really a lot of lapse of time in between. August to November. I was on my way home already.

T: Had people started to leave or move out of your office by the time you were discharged?

B: No. I think they were pretty much there. I was one of the first ones out I think. Dorothy might have been because she was in quite a while--the one I was telling you that was such a good one. But I wouldn't be surprised if she had made a career of it. I often wondered what happened to her, but I never kept in touch with most of those girls. Most of the ones that I kept in touch with were two of the girls from back here. One from Wisconsin that went in the service when I did. I didn't know her when we went on the same train together, but then we got to be the best of friends and she was one of my maid of honors for when I got married.

T: So you stayed in touch with a couple of people, but they were from this area.

B: Right.

T: Do you see these people? Have you seen them or talked to them over the years?

B: The one I just talked to last week. She's in Woodbury Nursing Home. Kind of living in an apartment by herself. She needs a little care, but not too much, and then the other one, she lives down in Iowa. She comes up every so often.

T: When you get together with any of these women or talk to them, how often do you find that your time in the WAVES comes up as a topic of conversation?

B: It comes up whenever we're together. But the thing is what we talk about is the fun we had. That's what we talk about. It's never a serious talk with us.

Like fellows, it's different. They went through so much. Like my husband. But then you couldn't get him to talk about it. There's no one likes to talk about the war. My husband, he went through hell [as a Marine in the Pacific], but you could hardly... (*trails off*). I feel so bad because I wish he had done this [what you are doing, this kind of interview] for my boys.

T: Let me ask you about that. Your husband was a US Marine Corps veteran of the Pacific. Did you meet him only after the war?

B: Right.

T: After he was out of service?

B: I actually met him in high school, but never had a date with him.

T: So you knew him or you knew who he was.

B: Yes. Then after the war I met him down at a VFW convention and started to talk to him, and that was it.

T: You were married in '47. And you two were married for a lot of years. You knew he was a Pacific veteran.

B: Right.

T: Did he talk much about it to you?

B: No.

T: Let me ask you. Was it a case of you didn't ask or he didn't tell?

B: I guess, probably, I didn't ask a lot of questions. Every so often he went to his friend, Dick. He and his friend went in the service together as young men.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

B: I think he went in at seventeen or eighteen, with his buddy. Actually my husband tried to get in the Marine Corps two or three times and they refused him because of his eyes, but then they allowed him to come in. I don't know whether it was because he was so persistent or what, but he went in the Marine Corps. Then afterwards Dick and Joe remained very, very good friends.

T: Joe was your husband's nickname.

B: Right. They remained very, very good friends. In fact, actually the two of them died two weeks apart, believe it or not. They would talk a little bit about the service

or things they did or stuff when they were together, but never really hash it out like a lot of the guys will. I've got some young men that I went to school with and they will gladly talk about the Marine Corps. Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. And I thought, if Joe was only here, I wonder if he would have really joined you or if he would have just sat and listened to you talk. He went through hell.

T: Where was he in the Pacific?

B: He was in New Guinea [1943], Peleliu [1944], and Okinawa [1945]. He was overseas thirty-three months. The only time he got R and R was, he was in Australia for R and R when he got hit in the neck. He got the Bronze Star, but they awarded that to him when he got home.

T: They went through some tough times in the Marine Corps.

B: Oh, yes he did. A lot of times you'll find that the ones that really went through an awful lot are the ones that don't talk about it.

T: Were you ever curious to know more than your husband was telling you?

B: I wish I would have been more curious than I was. I knew what he had gone through and I knew it wasn't easy and I knew he didn't like talking about it too well. I guess at that time I was just so glad that he was home and he was mine. That's all. To this day I regret that I never made him talk about it. Especially because of the grandkids. I know they would have loved to have heard a lot more from Grandpa about it.

T: Was Joe bothered by nightmares, things like this?

B: At first he was. His mom said he was.

T: How about when you were married to him?

B: No.

T: So he got over that part of it rather quickly because in '47 you two were married.

B: Yes.

(2, A, 50)

T: So you were curious and you wish you'd pushed him a little more.

B: I wish I would have. Very much so.

T: Did he have photographs that you knew about? Things you could kind of pick us little hints?

B: He had some photographs but you know, over there in your foxhole you aren't taking too many pictures.

T: So the really difficult times weren't on film.

B: Actually, like I said, he had thirty-six months in the service. And three months were in boot camp. And it was all rush, rush, then at the time, to get him overseas. So all I heard about from Dick and him was when they had the weekends off. The Marines. What they were doing on the weekends. Sleeping in hotel lobbies and stuff like that, but after they both came home and were discharged, just like that they never went any place. Right to discharge when they got back. So he went through hell.

T: What did your husband do? What kind of work was he doing after he got out of the service?

B: He retired as a postal clerk.

T: Here in St. Paul?

B: Yes.

T: Once you got back to St. Paul it was the end of 1945 when you were discharged from the Navy.

B: Right.

T: In what ways did St. Paul seem to be a different place to you?

B: There at the time was the rationing of a lot of things. And apartments were hard to get.

T: Did you go back to live with your mom?

B: Yes. Because I know when my husband and I got married we had to lease an apartment from my brother, at the time we got married.

T: Still hard to find a place to live and you were married in '47. So finding a place was not easy even then.

B: And at the time, luckily my uncle worked at Cardozo's. You don't remember. That's another big place. And we got a refrigerator and stuff from him. But those things were hard to get at the time.

T: So by 1947 you were sweating finding a place to live...

B: Right. And find refrigerators.

T: So some of this stuff was still hard to find.

B: Hard to come by.

T: Did you and Joe have a car?

B: Joe and I didn't have a car until my second son was a year old.

T: So a number of years you managed to do without a car.

B: We rode streetcars and buses.

T: How about clothing? When you got back to St. Paul, was clothing hard to get or could you get pretty much what you wanted?

B: Shirts I know were real hard to get. For guys, because I recall when we got engaged... and of course, at the time I was working at the railroad and I would go down to Cook's every week. It was a men's store that was kind of nice. I'd go down there all the time and ask for some shirts, white shirts, because that's all my husband wore, was white shirts at the time. Then that Christmas, of course I just deluged him with white shirts and he couldn't believe how many I got, but I just saved them. I knew that clothing wasn't that easy to get. I think at first when he came home he had a tough time getting some clothes too.

T: When was he discharged from the Marine Corps?

B: He was discharged in November of '45.

T: So he was out pretty quickly too.

B: Yes.

T: So he remembered things being, clothing for himself, being difficult to get.

B: Right.

T: And this didn't disappear right away. By '47 you still had to pull strings to get an apartment.

B: Right.

T: Had you and Joe looked for apartments before you depended on relatives, or not?

B: No. In fact, I think actually, I think it was my brother that probably was instrumental in telling us we could lease his apartment. That's probably why we chose to get married at that time.

(2, A, 117)

T: Otherwise you would have had to wait until you found an apartment.

B: Probably. They weren't that easy to get. Of course, within our price range you know. He wasn't even a postal worker at the time. He was working at Farmer's Union. He's another one that had quite a few jobs until he started at the Post Office. But when he came home we took advantage of the GI Bill and he went to Brown Institute.

T: Brown Institute, where is that?

B: In Minneapolis. He took electronics. Also broadcasting.

T: So he used GI Bill benefits to go to school.

B: Yes. And I did too.

T: You used GI benefits too?

B: I went to Rasmussen, it's a business college. It was in St. Paul at the time.

T: What kind of GI Bill benefits could you get as a Navy veteran?

B: I went to business school. I could have probably gone to college. In fact, I went out to see about going to St. Catherine's [in St. Paul] because I always wanted to be a Phy. Ed. Teacher. I went out to St. Kate's and I said, I would like to work and go to school. And they as much as told me, as a freshman you cannot hold down a job. You could never do both, so that kind of cured me of going to college. So that's when I resorted to the business college. Then I learned comptometer work. At the time it was kind of like key punch type of thing. I learned that. That's when I went down to the railroad then.

T: Do you remember what kind of GI Bill benefits you got?

B: No, I don't recall. They paid for the whole thing. And they gave you a little bit each month. Stipend.

T: So you got a stipend and tuition benefits.

B: Right.

T: And you were living at home still.

B: No, I was married then. Yes.

T: So it was after '47. You could still use your GI Bill benefits, though.

B: Right. I went down to Rasmussen after I got married because he was working nights and I had my niece come over because she lived only about four blocks away, and I went to night school two nights a week. Then after I got done, that's when he went to Brown Institute. He could do that because he got a job at Brown and Bigelow and he was working nights and then he went to school during the day. He was offered a job out in California in broadcasting, but it was in Blythe, Arizona.

T: That's in the desert, isn't it?

B: Yes, right. We had three kids by then. No way could we move at that time. He had a beautiful, real deep voice, and he would probably have been a very good radio announcer, but we couldn't afford it. And he fixed televisions then too. But that went by the wayside.

T: So you both used GI Bill benefits to go to school.

B: Right.

T: So it really did help you then.

B: Yes.

T: So being in the Navy helped long after you were in there.

B: Yes. In fact, now that I recall, I didn't do comptometer work at the railroad. I took it after I was married. I never went back to the railroad after I was married. That's when I started staying home most of the time.

T: You had three kids. That's a lot of work too.

B: Right. I went to school and I think I started work when my youngest one was in sixth grade, so I figured I had stayed home long enough.

T: When you got out of the service, what would you say was the hardest thing for you readjusting to a peacetime economy and life as a civilian?

B: I don't know. I guess it was because I liked the Navy work. When they started the work at the railroad it seemed like it was rather boring.

T: Not quite as exciting?

B: Right. Not quite as exciting as the Navy.

T: Is that Washington versus St. Paul, or is the Navy job versus the railroad job?

B: I think it was the job itself. Because I could hardly, I don't know why. I made good money at the railroad. But it was never one of my favorite places to work, and yet I was foolish. All those gals that stayed there, their retirements skyrocketed. But I didn't like the job that well. So I was very glad to get pregnant and quit *(laughs)*.

T: Now could you have stayed at the railroad if you wanted to?

(2, A, 182)

B: Oh, yes, I could. I could have gone back, but I didn't want to go back. But I was fortunate at the time too, when I worked at the railroad, because if you had a child they paid to have the baby. I was lucky. Then of course, I didn't realize it, but I got pregnant right after that with my son because the two are fourteen months apart and they paid for that too, and I never dreamed they would. That was just a surprise. I was very surprised about that.

T: That was a good place to work, in that respect.

B: I was fortunate. But I never wanted to go back. And I don't really know why, because I liked the people. But I just thought the job was so boring. It wasn't much of a challenge.

T: Did it change around the office? Once the war ended did more men start come back to work there or not really?

B: Some of them came back. I don't recall whether too many. See I wasn't really back that long either. Only through the end of '46.

T: To sort of sum up, let me ask you this: when you were in the service and when the war was on, what did the war mean for you personally? What was it all about?

B: I guess it affected me mostly because having a brother in there. I could hardly wait until it got over so he could come home, and yet again, after he went in the service, it seemed as though there was a big gap between him and I because he was so much older. We didn't have the closeness of a brother and sister relation.

T: He was seven or eight years older.

B: Right. I guess I was anxious to have it over so people would go back to a normal life and live the way they did before, and not have to live in fear or how some of your friends would come back or never come back. That's the one thing I think you always worried about. Which friends you lost.

T: Did you know people that didn't come back or came back wounded?

B: No. Luckily I don't think I had one that I knew that died in the service.

T: Boy, is that fortunate. When the war was on, it was clear that the Germans and the Japanese were the enemy so to speak. For you, how did the government, the military, help to form in your mind, the image of what the Germans or what the Japanese were like?

B: I think you have a real bitterness against the Japanese. You get that formed.

T: More than the Germans do you think?

B: Probably. Probably more because of the bombing, because of Pearl Harbor. That probably stuck with me more than anything.

T: Was there any kind of talks, or films, or whatever, that the military showed to try and create in your mind an image of what kind of people we were fighting?

B: No, I can't recall that. Other than when they'd come home and talk about some of the guys that they'd encountered overseas. But of course most of the time what they encountered was there behind a bayonet or a gun or something. That was about it.

T: So when you do look back on the war now, many, many years later, how do you reflect on the war now? Fifty-some years later and your participation in it?

B: I wish I would have been a little more observing about what was going on. And I do think there was probably my immaturity. I wish I had paid a lot more attention to what was going on around me than I did.

(2, A, 237)

T: Do you feel you missed things by just not being very observant?

B: I just wish that I had made my husband talk more about it because he was there. He did it. He saw it and came back. That's the regret I have, is that I didn't get him to talk more and to tell my grandkids all this, because it was a true great experience. But you can't do anything about it. It's all over now.

T: And you and Joe weren't dating or weren't engaged then, so he wasn't writing to you when he was overseas.

B: Oh, no. In fact, like he said, "You probably wouldn't have kept going with me." Because his mother had to write to the commanding officer telling him she never heard from her son at all. So Joe finally got called, when he was overseas, by the head officer telling him he'd better get and write his mother.

T: He was not a regular letter writer.

B: No. No. That's when he said lucky you didn't go with me then because you wouldn't have ended up with me because I would have never written you a letter. But that's just the kind of a guy he was.

But you know he got hurt on Okinawa, on Easter Sunday. On that Easter Sunday, I wasn't in the family of course then, but his mother said to the family, Curly got hurt today. And the next thing she hears is that he got hurt that day. That woman, she amazed me. She was the most amazing mother-in-law. She was just a honey of a mother-in-law. She could practically tell you, if you walked out the bedroom and had a séance, and she could have probably said you were going to have a kid in nine months. I don't know what there was, but that woman could tell you if you were three months pregnant. She could look and say are you having another one? It was fantastic. She did that with all of us. Of course she had ten kids herself. Maybe she recognized the look on your face (*laughs*).

T: Last question. What do you think is the most important way that the war changed your life?

B: I think life in itself... I saw so many facets of how girls lived in my barracks. How they behaved. I guess I vowed that when I got home, that if I did find someone that I really loved, it was going to be for good. My eyes were opened. I guess I was a very naïve young lady when I went in the service, because I couldn't believe how some of those girls were living.

T: What do you mean by that, Betty?

B: I had a roommate that was chasing every night. She was one of these that knew how to put makeup on and was slim, trim, and just perfect when she'd go out on dates. She had this one Marine Corps man that she was dating all the time, and yet she'd open up the locker and there was her husband's picture, and he was overseas. That just boggled my eyes. I lost all respect for her after that. I was just naïve because I just thought, how could you possibly do that for a man that's over there fighting for you, and you're back here playing around? My eyes got opened wide to the facts of life and the way I wanted mine to turn out, and thank God mine did turn out really great. I was very lucky. Very lucky.

T: So in a sense, that experience of really being exposed to people who acted very, in very different ways allowed you to mature a little bit quickly.

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B: Right. I think so. I think the service made me mature in a lot of ways, and I wasn't quite as naïve when I got back home.

T: All in all would you call the service a positive experience?

B: Absolutely! No hesitation. But you go in there with good morals and you come out with them. If you don't want them you don't come out with them.

T: Sounds like there were plenty who didn't have good morals around you.

B: Yes. But there were probably eighty percent that did. It was just like anything else. There only has to be one bad apple.

T: Betty, thanks for your time here today.

B: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW