

Fern LaVaune Ward Oral History Interview

MIKE ZAMBRANO: This is Mike Zambrano. Today is January 15, 2015. Today I'll be interviewing Mr. Fern LaVaune Ward. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. OK. All right, so let's start off with where and when were you born.

FERN LAVAUNE WARD: I was born 92 years ago tomorrow.

MZ: Wow! Happy birthday!

FW: (laughter) I know it.

MZ: Whoa, OK. So, January 16th?

FW: January 16, 1923.

MZ: Nineteen twenty-three, and where were you born?

FW: On a farm outside of -- in Nebraska, Wausa, Nebraska.

MZ: Wausa?

FW: W-a-u-s-a. My grandparents came over from Sweden and settled in Nebraska, all four of them, and so my hometown is named after the king of Sweden --

MZ: Oh, really?

FW: -- King Wausa.

MZ: Oh, OK, sort of like German a little bit. Does it begin with a W?

FW: No, Swedish.

MZ: No, no, I mean, it's W-a- --

FW: U-s-a.

MZ: OK, where the "W" is pronounced with like a "V" sound, right?

FW: Well, that's -- they --

MZ: Wausa.

FW: Wausa but I call -- it's Wausa. It's a "W" sound.

MZ: OK. Do you have brothers and sisters?

FW: I have a brother that's two years younger than me and a sister who is 22 years younger and a big surprise to all of us. (laughter)

MZ: Oh, some like it. So, there are just three of you?

FW: I'm sorry.

MZ: There are just the three -- you and your brother and sister?

FW: Yeah. My brother is still living. He will be 90 next month.

MZ: Oh, OK. Well, happy birthday to him, too.

FW: Yeah. He just called me to wish me a happy birthday.

MZ: That's nice. What was your father's name?

FW: Harold, H-a-r-o-l-d, Eric Lingren, L-i-n-g-r-e-n.

MZ: You said Lingren was your middle name -- I'm sorry - your maiden name?

FW: Lingren, L-i-n-g-r-e-n.

MZ: Right, and that's your maiden name?

FW: That's my maiden name, yeah, OK.

MZ: What did he do for a living?

FW: Farmer.

MZ: OK, and I assume your mother was a homemaker?

FW: Yes.

MZ: OK. Now, seeing you were born in 1923, you grew up during the Depression.

FW: Yes.

MZ: Can you give me an idea what that was like for you and your family?

FW: It was tough. The crops failed and, you know, it was tough on men because they would do everything to raise a crop -- no rain. You know, the little bit of rain that happened didn't help and I think banks failed during that time and, you know, I was pretty young in the '30s so I remember some of it, yeah.

MZ: What kinds of crops did your father raise?

FW: Corn and oats, barley.

MZ: Did the farm last through the Depression? Did he make it?

FW: Yeah, I mean, they lived through it so I was too young to know the financial parts of it but I know that it was tough.

MZ: Well, since it's a farm, did you all eat pretty well because, I mean, you've got corn, you've got oats, and --

FW: We always had enough to eat but my mother cooked a lot of beans.

MZ: Oh, OK, all right. You went to school, junior high, high school, all in Wausa?

FW: Yeah, well, I went to country school. It was two miles so we had to walk to country school.

MZ: OK. What was that like -- the country school?

FW: Well, it was a one-room school, all eight grades, and we walked. My folks did not believe (laughter) in spoiling the kids, so my brother and I walked, never mind the heat or snow up to here, because we had -- used to have a lot of blizzards back then. I don't think they have that now. They don't have the tough weather like they did when I was young in that area, in northeastern Nebraska.

MZ: Well, I just know it's pretty cold. It's a lot colder than here.

FW: Well, (laughter) 20-below. That was not unusual, yeah, and, oh, yeah, and then I went to high school in the town of Wausa.

MZ: You graduated from high school?

FW: I graduated from there, yeah.

MZ: I'm just curious what kind of -- you must have had some chores on the farm, right?

FW: Yeah. My brother did the outside chores and helped, you know, feed the cows and slop the hogs and whatever, you know, whatever had to be done and I cleaned the house. That was once a week so -- and we had a lot of -- we had a really nice farm; I mean, the area, the farm place, I should say. We had a lot of sidewalks. My brother and I had tricycles and a lot of sidewalk to ride on. You know, it was good for us. But, in the wintertime, I had to help shovel snow. (laughter)

MZ: It sounds like a lot of snow.

FW: It was -- there was a lot of snow, yeah.

MZ: Let me jump ahead a little bit in time here. Well, first, let me ask you this question. What year did you serve in the WAVES?

FW: Nineteen forty-four to forty-six.

MZ: So, you were 18 in 1941.

FW: I was 21. I was sworn in on my 21st birthday.

MZ: I meant to ask you that. You had to be 21 to get into the WAVES?

FW: No. With parent approval, you could get in -- I believe it was 18.

MZ: Oh, OK, all right, with parent approval, you'd get in but if you didn't have parent approval?

FW: Well, at 21, you're of age.

MZ: OK. Do you remember where you were when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

FW: Yeah. I was in Omaha and I didn't know about it. They didn't -- I was living with my grandpa and aunt and uncle because I had graduated and I was working in Omaha and so I was living with them for just a short time. I didn't know it until that night when they turned on the radio and I can remember the concern. It really didn't -- Pearl Harbor didn't mean anything to me because I didn't know anything about it. I knew about Hawaii but not Pearl Harbor. So, anyway, I don't remember that it concerned me too much. I knew it was going to be -- it was bad news but that's about all and it was at night that I heard it.

MZ: You said there was concern, that people around you had concern about it, and that there were --

FW: My family was very concerned.

MZ: In what job were you working at this time?

FW: I worked for Procter & Gamble and I checked the invoices -- distribution.

MZ: Distribution?

FW: Yeah.

MZ: OK. When you -- how did you get into the WAVES? Did you -
- well, yes, of course, you must have enlisted. You said
you enlisted when you were 21.

FW: Yeah, I enlisted, yeah.

MZ: Why?

FW: (laughter) I wanted to go to California. That was it.

MZ: That was it?

FW: Yeah.

MZ: Did they have an office there in Omaha?

FW: You mean, Procter & Gamble?

MZ: Oh, no, I mean for the WAVES or did you go to a recruiting
station or where did you go to enlist?

FW: They had -- see, it's been a long time ago and some of that
--details are a little bit fuzzy. I have a very good
memory but I heard about it. Oh, it was in the W.W.
Building where I worked. I worked on the fifth floor for
Procter & Gamble. The Navy was in that building on another
floor and so I went up there and signed up and was sworn in
and I think we had two weeks to get affairs in order,
whatever that meant, you know, which meant that I needed to
leave my job, go up to my parents' home up in Wausa to
leave my clothes up there. Well, I had taken enough to

last until I got a uniform and then go back to Omaha and they had a banquet for us. There were quite a few girls and we took the train to New York City and then somebody met us at the station and took us to the Bronx to Hunter College and that's where I went to boot camp, at Hunter College in the Bronx.

MZ: Did any of your friends enlist also with you?

FW: No, I was all alone.

MZ: Wow! That's pretty brave.

FW: I was a brave person. (laughter) My mother said she never knew what I was going to do next.

MZ: (laughter) You know, well, while I was reading a little bit about the WAVES, I came up with this question. Up to this point, only men enlisted in military service so you already answered why you did. What did you think about that? I mean, how were you treated? I mean, you're a woman. You're enlisting in the service.

FW: Very well. We lived in apartments and in the building where I lived, they were one-bedroom apartments but there were eight of us girls and we shared one bathroom. There was no problem with eight girls sharing one bathroom which, I think, was a miracle of miracles. (laughter)

MZ: That's pretty good.

FW: Four of us lived in the living room and four -- the other four lived in the bedroom and we had boxy things to keep our clothes in so they were all alike. We each one -- each of us had one of those.

MZ: Like a closet-type?

FW: It was a closet thing, yeah. It had drawers in it. The kitchen was for washing our clothes and stowing luggage, yeah, so --

MZ: OK, so you're at Hunter College. You're in this apartment situation. Do they do like inspections of your --

FW: Heck, yes, every Saturday. Every Saturday morning, they came and we had to stand at attention while they came through and checked everything and we were -- could not leave the building on our own until I think it was about the fourth or fifth week. Then, we were free to go down to Manhattan and -- but only for the day. So, it was good living. I did not mind the military at all. It was -- some of the girls complained and I thought, why did you sign up?

MZ: (laughter) True.

FW: Yeah, I knew it wasn't going to be so strict but it was still different for me; no freedom to get out and about.

MZ: I just want to make sure this is turned on. What did your parents think of you going to the military?

FW: My dad was so proud of me. He had been in the Army in World War I over in France so he was wounded. But, anyway, he was. My mother -- I think she was but I think I got -- (laughter) I think I got my dad's spirit out of that.

MZ: Yeah, well, again, that was very brave.

FW: Yeah, I'm brave.

MZ: Well, I think so.

FW: I was not brave.

MZ: Well, leaving -- a more reserved person, to go out and do that, alone and to do something --

FW: I never thought about it. Maybe, I was brave but I never thought of it as being brave. I wanted to experience what it was like except to grow up in one small little town, never experience anything, and this way I could go travel and see the world. I always wanted to go see the world and so that was part of it. But, I thoroughly enjoyed being in the WAVES. The discipline did not bother me.

MZ: Your brother was two years younger.

FW: Two years younger.

MZ: Did he go in the service also?

FW: He could not pass the physical.

MZ: Oh, OK, so you were the only one.

FW: I was the only one.

MZ: Oh, I already asked you about working. Other than wanting to explore and go to California, did you have any patriotic feelings about enlisting?

FW: Of course, I did, not to save my country from the Nazis -- not that but to do my part and I replaced a man. That was the thing. You replaced a man for active duty. I did. I met the guy, which, you know, was quite an experience to do that because that was the slogan for the women to join the service to replace a man for active duty. You didn't always do that because they opened up jobs for women and, you know -- but I actually did replace a man.

MZ: Before we get more into that, can you tell me a little bit more about basic training? What did you do? Did you fire any weapons?

FW: No. (laughter) We didn't do any of that. We went to classes. Now, I was in Hunter College for six weeks and we went to classes and we went swimming. That was part of the curriculum. But, we learned about ships, airplanes.

MZ: You mean, like airplane recognition?

FW: Different -- different types of airplanes and different kinds of ships because we didn't know where we were going to be placed. We could have been, you know, in the middle of a state where there are no airfields; of course, no

battleships. Yeah, but that was what we did. The food was excellent the whole time I was in the WAVES, in the NAVY.

MZ: Really?

FW: It was excellent.

MZ: That was another question I was going to ask you. I guess you did a lot of physical exercise. Is that fair to say?

FW: Of course, we did -- marched. We marched everywhere. If we had some entertainment at night, we marched because they had entertainment one night a week. It was a movie or one time we had an opera singer come sing to us. I don't remember all of it but, anyway --

MZ: What else would you do in your free time?

FW: Sit around and talk.

MZ: Would you write home pretty often?

FW: I was always good about writing home once a week.

MZ: Would you write just your parents or to your sister as well or just was one general letter?

FW: My sister was not born yet.

MZ: Oh, I'm sorry -- your brother.

FW: My brother -- no, I didn't' write to him. I wrote to my parents and my brother. So, I wrote to a lot of people and then when I got on active duty, a lot of the fellows from my hometown wrote to me. They were in the military and they might have been kind of -- a little bit proud because

they knew a gal who was in the WAVES and I knew the guys, of course, yeah. They were classmates of mine, and so I got a lot of letters from fellows. There was nothing to it; I mean, no romance. It was --

MZ: Just friends.

FW: Just friends, yeah. Yeah, well, maybe, one or two, so --

MZ: Did -- while you're at Hunter College, do you make any good friends with the other ladies that you're --

FW: Yeah, of course, good friends. I mean, we were in one room and if you're going to have a fuss with somebody, it's not the place to do it. We were all in the same place. We went through the same thing and I enjoyed those women -- the girls. That's what -- I lived with three other girls in this room, double bunkbeds.

MZ: What kinds of uniforms did you wear during basic training?

FW: I knew you'd ask me about a uniform. (laughter) I loved that uniform. I felt well-dressed. That's my husband, the pilot. I was the co-pilot.

MZ: Wow, that's a nice picture.

FW: Thank you.

MZ: Well, when you would go into New York, like you said, is this the uniform you would wear?

FW: Yeah, after a couple of weeks, we had -- you know, we were fitted for the uniforms.

MZ: Did you - you didn't -- I read sometimes some women have said that the uniforms that they got didn't quite fit them right so --

FW: Mine fit perfectly.

MZ: Oh, just so I pick it up on the recorder, it's the -- it's a navy blue uniform.

FW: Navy blue. Our shirts were -- we had two shirts and two light blue shirts that came and I loved my hat, and I wish I -- somehow or another, I lost my -- that cap -- hat --

MZ: Your -- it looks like you had a garrison hat.

FW: -- and I wanted to save it but something happened to it.

MZ: But, when you were actually going through like exercises and things, did you have like short -- like a short and shirt outfit that you had to wear or --

FW: Yeah, we wore -- oh, those pants that had the elastic around the legs and, yeah, but we had -- it was wintertime. It was cold up there. So, we did all our exercising in the gym.

MZ: Oh, OK. You said - what year is this again?

FW: Nineteen forty-four.

MZ: What time -- you said it was cold so is it around --

FW: New York City!

MZ: Is it the beginning of the year or the end of the year or -

-

FW: January.

MZ: Oh, OK, so January 1944.

FW: I was sworn in on my 21st birthday, tomorrow.

MZ: OK. So, when you were done at Hunter College, do you -- where do you go from there, from Hunter College?

FW: Well, we were given our choice of what we would like to do and so I enjoyed payroll, in that area. So, that's what I put down and so they sent me to Bloomington, Indiana to Indiana University and that's where I studied storekeeping.

MZ: I'm sorry. I should have asked this before. Did you ever have to take any kind of aptitude test or you just chose what you wanted to do?

FW: I think we chose what we wanted to do. But, it was more than one choice. I think there were three. But, I was lucky. I was -- I got to do what I enjoyed doing, keeping records because I -- when I was with Procter & Gamble, I checked invoices. But, that was just the start of it then. But, this -- I did payroll in the Navy and we'll come to that later, I suppose.

MZ: Yes. So, I guess you take a train over to Indiana University.

FW: Yeah.

MZ: How much time do you spend there?

FW: Maybe, six weeks because I enlisted and left in January and I hit San Francisco in June. So, I think it was about -- I think it was probably about six weeks training and we covered all kinds of stores, payroll, and whatever -- whatever a storekeeper could do. That's what we studied.

MZ: When you were done with the course, did you get your rating?

FW: Yeah, I was a Seaman First Class when I went to Indiana University. Then, when I completed that course, then I was a Storekeeper Third Class, SK3c, yeah. Were you in the military?

MZ: Yes, I was.

FW: What?

MZ: I was in the Army for two -- for three years. OK, so, you're done at Indiana University. Then, where do you go?

FW: Then, I had a leave, I think, probably two weeks. So, I went home and then I was sent to Hunters Point in San Francisco. So, that's where I went next and I stayed until discharge.

MZ: So, do you recall when you got to Hunters Point?

FW: I'm sorry.

MZ: Do you recall when you got to Hunters Point, well, what month it was when you got to Hunters Point?

FW: I think it was probably June, 1944.

MZ: Can you tell me a little bit about your job and responsibilities while you were there?

FW: OK. Ships -- it was ships. A lot of ships came in, of course, battleships, any kind, carriers. We had nothing to do with them. I don't mean that. But, it was a big place and they kept building it, adding more dirt, because we were right on the bay and they kept hauling in dirt and making the base larger, and larger, and larger. But, anyway, I worked in the Disbursing Office and we took care of small ships and submarines.

MZ: What kind of disbursement items would you have to deal with?

FW: Money.

MZ: Oh, that's right. You said payroll.

FW: Yeah.

MZ: OK.

FW: Money -- only money.

MZ: How many other servicemen or women did you work with in this office?

FW: Both.

MZ: Oh, well, how many -- how many people?

FW: We had, maybe, 12. We were one building there on the base and one side was disbursing and the other side was personnel so it was -- I mean, there was a large doorway so

that we could go back and forth. It was not necessary but it was those kinds of working conditions. We had a commander. I loved that commander. He was -- they brought him out of retirement for the war, which they did -- a lot of the men -- and he was the nicest guy. Then, we had a Lieutenant Hook and he -- we discovered that I knew his -- some of his family back in Omaha.

MZ: Really?

FW: Yeah. So, when he got married, he invited me and my friend, who was my roommate in the WAVES, and they -- oh, yeah, well, back up. He called me in his office one day and he said, "I want you to take the afternoon off. Thelma's coming out and she's hunting for a house for us." I said, "OK." So, I went with her and we found a darling house down in San Mateo and so then -- and he and I were pretty good friends. You know, I could be -- I got mad at him one day because I was supposed to balance. I was supposed to agree with his figures and it was a relaxed office but, yet, it was military. But, anyway, he invited my roommate and I twice to go down and spend the weekend at their home. So, I mean that was the kind of working conditions; very comfortable but, yet, you just didn't go overboard, you know, the --

MZ: Right. You didn't take advantage of it.

FW: No, you did not. No, it was comfortable and I paid a small ship, a couple submarines, and then I also paid the officers out down in the Ferry Building. I don't know why we had so many officers back there but I had to type the checks for them, though the personnel on small ships and submarines got cash and Lieutenant [Kline?] and somebody with a gun would go into -- down to the bank in downtown San Francisco and get the money for that and I helped several times to count that money, and that is the most boring thing there ever is. (laughter)

MZ: Well, how much money are we talking about?

FW: Well, back then, I think it was probably about \$20,000, which was a lot at that time but to count, you know, 5, 10, (laughter) whatever it was. But -- and pay day was twice a month.

MZ: Were these -- the ships that were coming in, were these ships that were -- that had served in the Pacific and were coming in --

FW: Yes.

MZ: -- for leave or something?

FW: They came in for one reason or another. Some were damaged and I don't know why all of them came in but they -- we had a steady -- we had battleships in there. A battleship -- the one that was in the signing -- peace signing --

MZ: The *Missouri*?

FW: The *Missouri* came in, yeah, and the *Iowa*, and I went aboard the *Iowa*. I liked to go aboard the ship because all I did was just go up in the main deck but to get the feel of a ship. I paid them -- not the battleship. I don't mean that but these smaller ships. Then, they'd come in and sometimes, one time, I had to send the -- all the clothes of one of the sailors that was killed. I had to box those up and send them to the family. I didn't like that. I had to totally -- one ship had been sunk. All the records -- and I had to go back and figure out every guy's pay back from I can't remember. But, it was a big job. I went back to the office at night and worked on that so that those guys could get paid. I finally got it done.

MZ: Yeah, I was wondering. I'm assuming you probably dealt with a lot of back-pay because it wasn't like there was money or a check sent out to the Pacific where they were. They would get paid when --

FW: They had them.

MZ: They did?

FW: They had ships that would go out there for -- they had a mother ship and there were so many smaller ships that were -- I don't know what word to use for that, where they could get their supplies and their money for payday and I don't

know how they paid -- if they gave them a partial-pay because the pay records were really good. I liked the system because they were never overpaid. If they were overpaid, they were underpaid the next payday if somebody goofed. But, it was a no-fail thing.

MZ: Now, you say you get aboard the USS *Iowa* because you wanted to kind of get a feel for it. What did you think?

FW: Well, I was just amazed how big the ship was and went aboard a carrier. I mean, I'm in the Navy. I want to know what it feels like to be on a ship and so, yeah, I didn't go below because that was a man's area and that's -- you know, I was a lady and -- but just to walk around the main deck of a ship. I was in the Navy. I wanted to know what it felt like to be on a ship.

MZ: Right, what you were supporting, what you were a part of, basically.

FW: That's right, yeah.

MZ: You said you went on a carrier, too.

FW: Yeah. They came in. I went on one carrier.

MZ: Do you remember which one it was?

FW: No. We had -- this one guy called. I had the duty one night. I got this phone call and so he had a question. I answered him and hung up, that's all, and he called me back. He said he wanted a date with me and I said, "I

don't date people I don't know," and so I had a feeling he was going to call back and he would state in the conversation the Bataan. I think it was -- well, never mind what the name of -- anyway, so I went down the hall and told Orene. I said, "Orene, I think he's going to call back. Would you like to go aboard a carrier with me?" "Well, yeah," and he did call back and I -- so we said to -- I said, "We can meet you at the gang plank at 5:00 the next afternoon," well, 1700, and I said, "No date involved." He took one look at my roommate and they were married over 50 years before -- when he died.

MZ: Really? Oh --

FW: Yeah, so that's a sweet romance out of that telephone call.

MZ: That's a great story, so --

FW: Isn't it, though?

MZ: Yeah, just by chance. I mean, he calls again and then you ask your friend to go with you and --

FW: Right.

MZ: -- meet her husband.

FW: Yeah. So, that was a pretty neat story.

MZ: That is.

FW: Yeah.

MZ: It is. Wow!

FW: They lived in Reno so I visited them a time or two, yeah.

MZ: Did you ever have -- did you have any other experiences like that when you -- what do you remember that was interesting to you about being out at Hunters Point? You had San Francisco right there.

FW: OK. My aunt and uncle lived in San Bruno, just down the peninsula so I visited them a lot.

MZ: Really?

FW: Yeah. My uncle was head of the Uniform Department in the Emporium, which was *the* big store in San Francisco, and so when I'd go downtown, I always stopped in at my dad's brother. So, I'd go in, always went in to see him just to say hello and so I spent a lot of weekends with them. I had family out there. Then, OK, one of the ships, small ships that I paid, a captain came in and he said, "You have been such a good help to me and the crew." He said, "I'd like to invite you out for chow." They were anchored out in the bay and so he sent his little boat in for me and Orene. He told me, "You can invite two of your friends with you." I said, "OK," so I did -- two friends. Orene was one of them. So, he sent his little boat in to pick us up, went out to the ship. We had to climb Jacob's ladder up the side of the ship. Oh, he also told me, "You girls wear slacks." I said, "OK." So, we climbed up Jacob's ladder. We ate with the crew. Half of them were home on

leave because they'd come in from the Pacific and said -- we ate in the officers' mess. We had real dishes, not trays but real dishes. So, that was impressive (laughter) to eat in the officers' mess and it was such a nice evening; played cards with the guys and then it was time. We climbed down Jacob's ladder, got in that little boat, and went back to the base.

MZ: Well, that was nice of him.

FW: Yeah, and he gave me two handkerchiefs as a souvenir. Oh, yeah, he -- when we first got there, he and his -- he invited us in his office and fixed us a drink. We sat around and visited and just really a really nice evening. Oh, and then I still have those two little handkerchiefs that he gave me as a souvenir.

MZ: That was very nice for him to go out of his way to --

FW: Pardon?

MZ: It was very nice of him to go out of his way like that.

FW: He was just being a nice officer, yeah.

MZ: Your commanding officer -- was that Lieutenant Hook?

FW: He was my next in command officer.

MZ: Like directly above you?

FW: Well, yeah. He was above me. (laughter) I should say so.

MZ: So, who was the officer that ran --

FW: The commander was over all.

MZ: Do you remember his name?

FW: Commander Holton.

MZ: Holton.

FW: H-O-L-T-O-N.

MZ: What was I going to ask?

FW: Then, we had Lieutenant Hook and then Lieutenant Kline so I'm talking Holton, Hook, and Kline. That was the commander, lieutenant, and I don't remember what Kline was; a nice guy. We just had some nice fellows in there. We had parties and just a great fellowship time, and people seemed -- oh, seemed to get along together. We'd go swimming. We'd have picnics. We'd stop at the galley and they'd fix up food for us. We'd get on the yard bus and go down to one of those lakes and just spend the afternoon swimming and just relaxing, having a great time. It was a wonderful place to be because of the office conditions and the men that worked there were really nice. One of the guys -- his name was Denver, Denver [Daly?], and we became good friends and after the war was over, he and his wife -- well, his wife was with him. So, that's how he and I got to be good friends because of her. So, after the war, Frank and I -- by that time, I'd gotten married and we visited back and forth. They lived in Minnesota. We lived

in Nebraska. So, we'd visit back and forth, just -- you know, it was just -- it was great fellowship.

MZ: I'm curious. When you're at Hunters Point, do you already know your husband?

FW: Well, I'll come to him later. (laughter) I was engaged to the guy in the office -- his name was Bill -- as time went on and I knew all of his family. I used to spend weekends with his sister down in San Bruno who only -- who lived only about four blocks from my aunt and uncle. I loved his sister and her husband was in the Navy. He had gone to West Point and he was one of them down in the Ferry Building that I paid. So, anyway, so I spent a lot of weekends with her. It was -- you know, it was great, yeah.

MZ: What was -- I'm just curious because I'm a San Francisco native so I know where the Ferry Building is. What was going on at the Ferry Building as far as paying? I mean, what would -- what would you --

FW: Well, military -- the Navy had offices down there. I never paid any attention. All I did was pay those guys. But, as far as to what went on there, I really don't know.

MZ: Interesting. I never knew that the Navy occupied that building.

FW: Well, they did during the war. That's -- you know, and I paid them time after time and a lot of checks. There must

have been a lot of military in that building -- officers, because those are the ones I wrote checks for, yeah. I got pretty good about using a razor if I goofed up a check and I'd very carefully take that razor and correct -- you know, tape that print out of there so I could do it again. Otherwise, you know, I ruined too many checks. I didn't want to do that, you know.

MZ: Let's see. Oh, what were -- when you were at Hunters Point, do you sleep in barracks there on the base?

FW: Yeah. We had WAVE barracks and two floors, so there were -- eventually there got to be -- there got to be 100 girls there or thereabouts.

MZ: Those barracks with the long bays and you have one floor?

FW: Yeah, right. At first, when we first got out there, we had the second floor of the barracks and then they finally built us a new one. But, anyway, the cooks lived on the first floor and we could hear them sometimes in the morning. They had to get up early, you know, and get the chow ready. But, otherwise, they didn't bother us. We had a separate entrance. It was all private. They -- one night, I woke up. I heard -- I slept on an aisle bunk and I heard all this screaming going on and this was at that time when the cooks were below and they'd had nothing to do with us. I don't mean that. But, anyway, I woke up and

here are two legs running past me followed by a nightgown. Some guy got into the barracks and he went over to Mary and she was an older girl. He tried to choke her. I have no idea what this was all about. Mary did say she didn't know, either. I don't know. But, anyway, she -- (laughter) she chased after him and he ran past my bunk and I was close to the doorway at the end of the barracks, at the end of the floor and go down the steps. Anyway, he got out of there. They never did find him and that's the only time that anything like that ever happened.

MZ: Was he a --

FW: I don't know anything about him. It was a sailor. I know because I recognized his -- I didn't see his face because I was laying like this and I saw this flight -- these pants going by.

MZ: That's bizarre.

FW: Oh, yeah, it was. (laughter)

MZ: You mentioned Orene. Was that her name?

FW: Orene.

MZ: Orene, OK. I've never heard of Orene before.

FW: Yeah.

MZ: What other friends did you have that you worked with?

FW: Well, Abby Jane, Helen. We became four -- we became great friends; I mean, visiting back and forth. Helen lived in

Wichita Falls after she -- she was from Albuquerque but married a guy. Her husband and my husband were good fishing buddies, you know, so we visited back and forth. Then, Orene and her husband lived in Reno and we visited them. Abby Jane married a guy that -- she was married most of the time that we were there and she lived off-base and - - but, anyway, he inherited a bunch of money, half a million dollars, and it kind of went to his head. So, it kind of destroyed her marriage, yeah, after four kids.

MZ: That's too bad.

FW: Yeah.

MZ: She was married while she was a WAVE?

FW: Oh, yeah, you were allowed to get married.

MZ: Really?

FW: Yeah. You were allowed to be married or get married.

Yeah, because one of my friends was married. Her husband was in the military, too, and she was in the military with us. Yeah, and I went to several -- I played the wedding march several times.

MZ: But, if a WAVE got pregnant, then wouldn't she have to leave the service?

FW: That happened one time -- 100 girls out there. Now, the percentages would be much higher now the way morals are but back there, of 100 girls, 1 girl got pregnant and this is

towards the end of the war and we had a big meeting over that. She was kicked out of the military, out of the WAVES, yeah.

MZ: Now, what if you were married and you got pregnant?

FW: Well, that's a different story. You still can't serve. You still have to leave the WAVES. You couldn't serve.

MZ: Oh, you've answered a lot of my questions before I asked them. (laughter)

FW: Oh, yeah?

MZ: I assume your work week was generally Monday through Friday?

FW: Yeah.

MZ: Except you've got to work --

FW: Just normal -- a normal work week. We had -- weekends were free.

MZ: OK. Did you ever feel that you had to prove yourself because you were a woman, kind of like in a man's world?

FW: No.

MZ: No? OK. It sounds like you had it really good, like it was just a really wonderful time.

FW: Yeah, but I worked. You know, I was -- I've always been a responsible person. I had to do the payroll there. I did the payroll and what other jobs I had to do, I did them. But, there was still time for fun. We girls would have a

great time. Sometimes, in the barracks, (laughter) we'd just be laughing and carrying on and playing tricks, you know, and other nights, it would be just as quiet. So -- but living with a bunch of girls, I thought, was fun, yeah.

MZ: Yeah, I can imagine there was a lot of comradery --

FW: There was, yeah, and we had a lounge. There was an upstairs lounge and a downstairs lounge. In the downstairs lounge, you had to be dressed to get in there because that was open to anybody who came in and the guys -- the dates -- would be sitting in there, waiting. But, the upstairs lounge -- we'd go in in our pajamas, ready for bed, you know, and I smoked then and Helen smoked, and we'd go in there and there'd be other girls and sometimes they'd be quiet and sometimes they'd be full of nonsense. It really was a great time of my life but I did my job and I did what I was supposed to do.

MZ: Well, I was going to ask you what it felt like to earn money but you had worked already before so --

FW: Oh, yeah, that was no different. I had a reduction in pay. (laughter) I started out. It really was. When I started, it was \$21 a month.

MZ: Really?

FW: Really.

MZ: Is this at Procter & Gamble or when you got into the WAVES?

FW: No, I'm talking about the Navy, the WAVES.

MZ: What did you make at Procter & Gamble?

FW: Not much. I got a two-dollar raise every year.

MZ: Wow! So, \$21 --

FW: Sixteen dollars a week, I think, is what I earned and maybe it was sixty -- I don't remember. That's a long time ago.

MZ: That's OK, but you said in the WAVES, you earned - you would earn \$21 a month.

FW: That's what it started as a Seaman Third Class and then we were promoted to Seaman First Class when we finished at Hunter College and then when I went to Bloomington, Indiana, I graduated, if you want to call it that, passed the test for storekeeper, third class, and I can't remember then how much I earned. But, then, I passed -- as time went on, I passed the test for storekeeper, second class. You didn't get an automatic pay raise. You had to earn it and then I passed for storekeeper, first class. But, the war ended so I never did fill that.

MZ: I'm sure, like you said, in New York, you went downtown. You went to New York. You'd probably go into San Francisco. How did you feel wearing that Navy WAVE uniform?

FW: Very proud. I felt well-dressed. It was a great uniform. I mean, well, look at it. That thing -- that fit perfect and I was very proud, yeah.

MZ: Let's see. Oh --

FW: Because I felt well-dressed, I didn't -- I've always been the kind that if I was ready to go someplace, I got ready to go. I had the clothes that would look decent on me, good on me. I didn't have to think about that anymore because I would not like to go out being nervous because my hem was not right, you know, whatever, something about my clothes -- it was -- didn't look right or whatever. But, that uniform made me feel well-dressed because it was a suit. It was like I would wear normally.

MZ: Well, it's a nice uniform, too.

FW: But, it was well- -- it was well-made and fit perfect so --

MZ: Do you remember where you might have been when you heard that President Roosevelt had died?

FW: What year was that? I can't remember.

MZ: Forty-five.

FW: Then, I was in --

MZ: April.

FW: -- San Francisco.

MZ: Yeah, yeah. Do you remember -- I guess I'm -- do you remember hearing it?

FW: I don't remember too much about that.

MZ: What about when they dropped the atomic bomb? Do you remember hearing about --

FW: Oh, yeah, I remember that but I don't remember anything special about where I was when I heard about that. I don't -- I knew about it. I heard about it.

MZ: Do you remember anything about any reaction of people around you?

FW: I don't think there was. It was talked about and it was a good thing that happened to shorten the war but I do remember when the war was over. That I remember.

MZ: Do you recall what you were doing when you heard it was over?

FW: I had been home on leave. I had a new baby sister. She was four months old, you know, the sister I told you about, yeah. She was four months old. So, I got home and then I left and went back. I had to go back to San Francisco. I had to go back and I spent time in Omaha with my grandpa and my aunt and she'd packed a big box of food for me because food on the trains back then was terrible -- this big box of food. Well, I sat with a lieutenant and a sergeant. I shared that box of food with them, the three-day trip that it takes -- that it took from Omaha to San Francisco and at night, they went someplace else to sleep

on the train so I got that whole seat. So, I could lay down. Of course, I couldn't stretch out but, anyway, I had room. Anyway, so, the lieutenant said -- well, we had to wait on our luggage in San Francisco at the Ferry Building. He said, "I want to treat you to lunch." I said, "OK." So, we went uptown, had lunch, and as we were coming out of the restaurant, all hell broke loose. We didn't know what was going on for a second there. The war was over. San Francisco came to a halt. I was on a streetcar that went one block. I was going down to pick up my luggage at the Ferry Building and it went one block. Somebody pulled the things off of the wires to stop the streetcar. People came out. Everything came to a halt. People came out and filled the streets and I met two sailors who had been on the train. They recognized me and they said, "Where are you going?" and I said, "To the --," I didn't talk to them on the train. There was no visiting then. But, I said, "I'm trying to get to the Ferry Building to get my luggage," and they said, "You'll never make it by yourself." They picked me up (laughter) and we went over cars to get there. If there was a car in the way and couldn't get around it, we'd go over it, (laughter) all the way down to the Ferry Building and then took -- I got some kind of transportation out to the base and then we were

confined to the base, which was fine with me because I wouldn't have gone downtown (laughter) in that. People went wild. They went crazy. They stripped off their clothes and went swimming in the fountains.

MZ: Really?

FW: Yeah, there was -- it was crazy.

MZ: Well, I guess, if you're going to be happy about something, I mean, that would be it, right -- the war being over?

FW: Well, you know, that's pretty big news and some people really took advantage of it and I guess downtown San Francisco that night and maybe the next day, too. I don't remember that. I do remember how it was that night.

MZ: Well, how much longer were you at Hunters Point after the war ended?

FW: It ended in December and I was -- I guess about four months.

MZ: When was it that you got out of the service?

FW: When?

MZ: When did you get out of the WAVES?

FW: Well, my mother had cancer and, of course, the baby was there, so I went home a little early because mother was going through chemo or they didn't have chemo then -- whatever it was that she had to go. My dad had to take her to Sioux City, Iowa, for treatments once a week. So, I

went home and stayed with the baby while she -- while Dad took her for treatments. Then, when it was time, then, -- because they called me to tell me -- the Personnel Office there. I knew all the people who worked in there. They called me and told me that I had to go to Chicago, to Great Lakes, to be discharged. So, I was up there for a week before I got discharged.

MZ: What did you have to do that whole week, I mean, since it's a long time to get discharged?

FW: Oh, it's a new area. I don't remember what I did. I probably went downtown and did something. I don't remember too much about what I did that week.

MZ: So, from there you went back home and --

FW: I went back to Omaha and went back to Procter & Gamble and worked for a while, and then I remember -- now we're coming to something else. I had been wanting to learn to fly an airplane for a long, long time; never had the money to be able to do it. So, I went to the airport and signed up and learned to fly an airplane and loved it.

MZ: Wow!

FW: I would have -- I wanted to do something with an airplane but women were not at that time -- there were not too many places for a woman to use -- to work in an airplane, I mean, as a pilot. There was this cute guy there and so one

day he asked me to go flying but I had to do all the flying and he was a pilot. He -- but, anyway, our daughter's version is, "When Mother landed that airplane, Daddy was smitten." (laughter) So, we were married 66 years and he died the year before last.

MZ: I'm sorry.

FW: He had 16,000 hours of flight time.

MZ: Really? What was his full name?

FW: Frank Ward.

MZ: You said on the phone that he served --

FW: In the Air Force.

MZ: In Europe?

FW: No.

MZ: Or in the Pacific?

FW: He had an accident. An airplane -- he was flying over the gulf and all of a sudden, he tried to turn the airplane or do something. The -- it froze. He couldn't do anything with the airplane and so he was diving towards the gulf and couldn't do anything about it. The next thing he knew he was flying again. They found out that one of the mechanics had left a wrench in the plane -- in the engine part and that's where it got lodged where he couldn't control the airplane. Then, sometime when they were diving down and he was out, he didn't pull his airplane out of that -- that

dive. But, that wrench or whatever it was, finally got loose and then he came out of it. But, he was not aware of it. I think God was in control of that.

MZ: It sounds like it.

FW: Yeah, and -- but, anyway, so he ended up in the hospital because it damaged his body some at that time -- the pull did. Then, the war ended so he was never -- his group went overseas but he couldn't go. So, by that time, the war ended. So -- and he was a professional pilot and he was a salesman using an airplane.

MZ: Oh, would he fly around the country selling stuff?

FW: Yeah.

MZ: What would he sell?

FW: Siding for mobile homes.

MZ: Wow, so 66 years, huh? What year were you married?

FW: Pardon?

MZ: What year were you married?

FW: Nineteen forty-seven. You know, his mother thought I was going to kill him off early. I married into a -- he had three brothers. Those three brothers married gals that were excellent cooks and then there was me and I never had a chance to learn. My mother did the cooking at home. I did the cleaning, and then I lived in boarding houses and in the barracks and I never had a chance to learn. I can

fry the soup out of pork chops, you know. Just, I can do that. Finally, he held a pork chop up like this and let it go and it went plunk. (laughter) But, anyway, he outlived every one of them.

MZ: Really?

FW: Yeah. So, I made him tough. (laughter)

MZ: Oh, I guess so. Let's see. Well, did you work again after you got married or you stayed home or what?

FW: Well, I worked and then we had a baby boy and I stayed home and took care of him, and then he had -- he got a job with a contract to teach Air Force students and so he did that. He was flight commander for that. I mean, it was a big thing. We ended up in Marianna, Florida, and so that was another great part. But, they met at our house. The guys would meet at our house. They brought the families, of course, and they'd talk about their students that day, how their students tried to kill them that day, (laughter) you know, just -- and the guys would talk about their flying and what happened to them that day and, of course, we women would do our thing and drank coffee by the barrel and it was a great, great life. He -- Frank loved his job and I loved the way we lived and made a lot of good friends.

MZ: How many children did you have?

FW: Two. I had a daughter six years after our boy.

MZ: Oh, a boy and a girl.

FW: Yeah.

MZ: I'm curious but, you know, men could use the GI bill.

FW: I did.

MZ: You did?

FW: Oh, yeah, we're -- I was as military as any man, as any sailor. We WAVES were just as military. We were separate but equal but we worked with them and -- but we had our own barracks so we had our own table at the chow hall. We didn't eat with the men, which I'm glad. I enjoyed visiting with the women and I would not have been comfortable eating with a bunch of strange guys, you know. Just, it was better the way we did it.

MZ: What did you use the GI bill for?

FW: Flying.

MZ: Oh, that's what you used -- to learn to fly.

FW: Yeah.

MZ: How many -- do you have -- how many total hours do you have flying?

FW: I have 50.

MZ: Fifty?

FW: Yeah.

MZ: Did you -- I guess you didn't fly much after --

FW: I flew with Frank all the time after that; you know, not all the time but I got to go on a lot of trips and one time we went on a cruise and Frank -- Frank's boss was a really nice guy and we were friends and he was an ornery so-and-so but he was so good to Frank and me. But, we went on a cruise. We flew down there to Miami Beach -- Miami. The airplane sat on a ramp for over a week. When we came back, the ship came back in, we put all our stuff back in the airplane and flew home.

MZ: Wow! (laughter)

FW: We could use it for weekends if we wanted to go to Florida, which we did, every once in a while, not a lot. We had kids at home and, you know, I didn't want to be stupid about that. But, whenever we wanted to go to Florida, we'd -- we flew to Omaha. But, Frank did that on business and the airplane he was flying then -- it took 12 hours to drive from Little Rock to Omaha. We flew up to Omaha in that airplane, a Mitsubishi, and we made it back from Omaha. I didn't keep track of the time going up there but I did coming back. We flew from Omaha to Little Rock in an hour-and-a-half.

MZ: Wow!

FW: Yeah.

MZ: Well, it beats 12 hours on the road.

FW: Yeah.

MZ: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that maybe you'd like to bring up, anything -- any memories or, I don't know, anything, any part of your job that you did?

FW: Well, I did go to work for the government when Barbara was about the second grade and worked for the government until -- in ASCS, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation, so it had to do with crops in Little Rock and so I worked for them for, gosh, almost 25 or 30 years, whatever it was, and loved my job there. God's blessed me on jobs because I think (laughter) -- and when I retired, I had to deal with county people in 75 counties and I had to deal with the administrative clerk because I did payroll. I checked the payroll and when they had -- with increases or promotions, it all had to come through me. But, anyway, when I retired, it was like Christmas. Those county people just -- they were so good to me and so nice to me when I retired. Presents -- (laughter) I got so many gifts.

MZ: Good. Well, I think that pretty much concludes the interview.

FW: OK.

END OF AUDIO FILE