

**WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT**  
**ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Jerry Rita Jolliff Brunton

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: 24 July 2015

[Begin Interview]

TS: Well, today is July 24, 2015 and this is Therese Strohmer. I'm at the home of Jerry Rita Brunton in Morehead City, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Woman Veterans Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina of Greensboro. So Jerry why don't you go ahead and state your name the way you'd like it to show on your collection?

JB: I'd like it to state Jerry Rita Brunton—Delete.

TS: Delete. [chuckles] Go ahead say it again.

JB: Jerry Rita Jolliff Brunton.

TS: There you go.

JB: That was my maiden name.

TS: That's alright. Okay. Well, Jerry why don't you start out by telling me a little bit about when and where you were born? You need those glasses?

JB: Yeah.

TS: Okay. I'll grab them for you. Those are the ones? When and where were you born? You don't have to talk right into it, we can just talk like this.

JB: Okay. I was born in central Ohio, out in the country, in Union county in 1931, April 22.

TS: April 22. So it was a rural kind of area?

JB: Yes.

TS: [unclear]

JB: Strictly out in farming country.

TS: Yeah, were you—

JB: It was about ten miles north of—northwest of Marysville, Ohio.

TS: Okay. And so, do you have any brothers or sisters?

JB: Yes. I have—I had five sisters and one brother. And all I—all I have left now is a brother and a sister.

TS: Yeah. So there were seven of you?

JB: Yeah.

TS: Okay. That's a big sized family.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Did your parents both work?

JB: My daddy was a—he worked on a farm. And then he ended up working on the railroad, and then Mother—they had some family problems, and they were divorced, and then she—she worked at a foundry—the Marysville foundry in town—

TS: Okay.

JB: —for a long time; that's where she retired from.

TS: Oh, is that right?

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Yeah. And so, was she raising you by herself mostly or—

JB: When I got into my teenage—early teens, Daddy—that's when they separated.

TS: That's when. Okay.

JB: Then Mother was raising us, yes.

TS: Yeah. Did you stay in the same place?

JB: We stayed on the farm. We had—We had wonderful people that owned the farm, we lived on their—in their farmhouse, and it was just a wonderful place to grow up.

TS: What kind of things did you get to do?

JB: Well, I got into a lot of trouble. [both chuckle]

TS: What kind of trouble did you get into?

JB: Mischievous.

TS: Well, you definitely need to talk about that.

JB: [laughing] Well, it's just like I was a—I guess I got bored, because I remember one time I said to my brother—we had some corn and we shelled—and I said, "Let's see who can get the most kernels of corn up their nose." And he won the contest [chuckling], and he had to go to the doctor—

TS: Oh no.

JB: —to get it taken out.

TS: Now, did you get in trouble for that or did he? Or both of you, maybe?

JB: What do you think?

TS: I don't know.

JB: I think so, yes.

TS: [chuckles]

JB: Yeah, they—there are a lot of stories they tell about me. [chuckling]

TS: Now, where were you in the hierarchy of the siblings?

JB: I was second.

TS: You were second, okay.

JB: Yeah. Yeah. My sister Jeannie, I always admired her because she was so smart and she ended up graduating from high school early. She got a scholarship to go to college. She was studying to be a doctor, and I think she only had about a semester to go and she dropped out—she had to work—and then she—that's when she joined the navy.

TS: Oh, okay.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Oh, this is a sister that you said she was—

JB: Yeah.

TS: Oh, okay, eight years in the navy, right?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: Yeah. Yeah. She was older than me. Year and a—About a year and a half older.

TS: Yeah. Okay. So you're growing up on the farm with your family. Now, did you have a bunch of kids that lived nearby or that you hang out with or—

JB: Well, we used to—we—it was—we lived down—there was a main road and then we—we lived down the—the gravel road.

TS: Okay.

JB: Now, it probably was about a mile from any—any of my friends that I used to go play with. So we had to—Mother would tell us when we have to go and when we had to be back, and we had to be back and we did. We did what we were supposed to.

TS: Came back on time.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: So if you're born in '31—so you're a young girl during the war; World War I.

JB: I was just going to share with you about—No, it was World War II.

TS: I'm sorry. [chuckles]

JB: I remember—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: I made you a lot older than you are. I'm sorry, Jerry. Okay.

JB: [laughing] I feel that way sometimes.

TS: World War II. Yeah.

JB: But—I remember the Sunday morning that we had just finished breakfast and the radio was on and it told about the bombing at Pearl Harbor.

[The attack on Pearl Harbor was a surprise military strike by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service against the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on the morning of 7 December 1941. The attack led to the United States' entry into World War II]

TS: So you were about ten then.

JB: That was pretty scary.

TS: Yeah.

JB: Because here we lived in Ohio, and in those days you didn't know how far it was to get to Hawaii.

TS: Right.

JB: But I just thought, "Oh my God, they're going to come and bomb us."

TS: You didn't realize how far away Pearl Harbor was at that time?

JB: No. We had no idea.

TS: So it was really scary.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

JB: So that was the first—and it was a—there were four of us kids at that time. And then there were two—the [unclear] girls were about ten years younger than us. But we were always very patriotic. I loved [General of the Army Douglas] MacArthur. And we always had a flag up on the wall, and we'd always have our ceremonies [chuckles], and we'd do—that was a—that was a really—that day really impressed me.

TS: Yeah.

JB: So I've always been patriotic.

TS: Yes.

JB: And I was too young to go to World War II. [laughing]

TS: Right. Right. Yeah, you were only ten. I don't think they're going to let you in.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: I wouldn't have—I wouldn't have passed anything.

TS: Well, do you remember much about the [Great] Depression at all?

JB: I was born on the Depression, I know what my parents told me. But we lived on the farm so we were lucky because we always had food.

TS: Yeah.

JB: We always had someone to come and bring us food.

TS: I hear that a lot about people who grew up in the rural—

JB: Yeah, but the people who lived in the cities, it must have been awful.

TS: Yeah. But you don't personally remember much about it.

JB: No.

TS: Because you were pretty young.

JB: It didn't really—No negative impact on my life.

TS: Yeah. As a young girl growing up in Ohio country, what kind of things, besides getting your siblings in trouble, did you do for fun?

JB: Oh, my girlfriend and I, we—we both—we were cheerleaders when we got in high school. Did the normal stuff. There was one day that I got mad at Mother and I jumped off—out the front—the upstairs window—off the porch—and I went over to my friend a mile away—Marianne—I said, "Mary, I'm running away."

[chuckling] And she said, "You can't go alone," so she went with me.

TS: How far did you get?

JB: Up to Akron, then we come back. [chuckling]

TS: How far away was Akron?

JB: Oh, that's way up on the [Great] Lakes. We're in the central Ohio so it was—we got a bus or something.

TS: That's a ways. I was going to say—

JB: Oh my God, yes.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —that's not just, like, walking distance.

JB: I was serious.

TS: How long were you gone?

JB: A day. [chuckles]

TS: Oh. Did you get in trouble when you got back?

JB: I don't—I was probably in trouble but it was nothing bad.

TS: They were just glad that you were okay probably.

JB: Oh yeah. I think that was it. Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

JB: Well, we always entertained our self when—when Mother was working. We lived in a farmhouse that had a metal roof and we'd go out there and dance and do things, and the neighbors would call Mother when she got home, "Did you know your kids were out there dancing on the roof?" Then we—Then we'd get in trouble over that.

TS: [chuckles]

JB: But we kept doing it. [chuckles]

TS: Now, did you have any, like, church events; did you have dances or things?

JB: Or what?

TS: Church events at all? Do church or—

JB: Yeah, I grew up—When I'd go to Grandma's in Columbus—we'd go there lots of times for the summer—and I would—she was a Nazarene, so that was a whole different kind of

religion than I was brought up with; I was Methodist. That's the way I grew up till I got out of high school.

TS: And then when you were going to school, did you enjoy school?

JB: I did. Yeah. Yeah. Some of the—I—I talked to my sister and—I think there were a few kids that had—they had more than we had, because their dads were farmers or something like that, but I've talked to my sister and we—we didn't have much but everybody else didn't have much so you never—there was nothing to compare it to.

TS: Right.

JB: And so, you—you all just—all just—we just had fun.

TS: You didn't know what you didn't have.

JB: No.

TS: Yeah.

JB: No.

TS: Now, did you have anything about school that you liked; favorite teacher, favorite subject?

JB: I don't know. We did—We took home ec [economics]. I didn't like English. Oh my God. I mean, I sweat when I write things because I hated those rules. I didn't understand why I had to learn what a dangling participle or all that crap was. Pardon—Pardon me. [both chuckle]

TS: It's alright.

JB: But I've done okay.

TS: Yeah.

JB: I had to write a paper to get certified as a holistic nurse so—

TS: So you were made to do that.

JB: —I passed.

TS: Yes.

JB: [laughing]



TS: Well, for people who are, kind of, reading or listening to this interview, and they didn't grow up in the forties or fifties.

JB: Yeah.

TS: What kind of expectations did you have, like, for your future? What did you see? What did you think was possible for you as a young girl?

JB: I think I probably—when we were younger it always felt like thirty-five was really old and that was the end of life.

TS: Sure. I think they still think that. [both chuckle]

JB: But for me, when I was in high school, I knew I wanted to be a nurse.

TS: Oh, you did?

JB: And during the war—this is what happened—a lot of the men got called to war so you—During that time you had to have two years of Latin, two years of Algebra, two years of Geometry, and if there was only—you could only get one year. When you graduated you didn't have enough to go to college. So that's why I never became—I became a nurse when I was forty-five I guess.

TS: A lot older. Yeah.

JB: Yeah. But I always wanted to be a nurse but it just wasn't—

TS: Yeah. You didn't have the—

JB: There was no way I could do it.

TS: Right. To get into college for that.

JB: Yeah, because they really were stiff on the requirements.

TS: Yeah. Well, what else, growing up in the fifties, do you remember that you enjoyed that, like, you'd tell?

JB: Well, we used to—like, when we were kids in grade school we always—there'd be swings, we'd go out and swing, we'd play ball. I remember my sister—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: What kind of ball?

JB: Baseball.

TS: Baseball.

JB: The big fat ball. And my sister and I, we played on the same team, and I don't know if there was anything else that we played. I didn't take—I wasn't—didn't do any—I sang in the—in the—when they have choruses, since I've always loved music. So we'd always—in the Spring I think—would have a farmer's whatever where we would do a big play—all the kids in the grade school—and we all had a theme, and I was in—remember in high school I was in the play; the—our senior play. We did get—We did work and make money, and we did go to New York [City] and Washington [D.C] for our senior trip.

TS: Oh, you did?

JB: Yeah. Yeah. We were chaperoned by a couple teachers.

TS: Do you remember what you got to see when you went to New York? Anything interesting?

JB: I really didn't like New York.

TS: No.

JB: It was too crazy. I come from the farm. There was too many people there. [both chuckling]

TS: How did you get there? Did you take a bus or—

JB: I think we must have taken a bus. Yeah.

TS: Yes.

JB: But I loved Washington [D.C].

TS: Oh, yeah.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Not New York but Washington.

JB: Yeah. I loved Washington.

TS: What was it that you liked about that? Didn't seem as busy?

JB: I don't know, just being the capital and just being where our nation's capital was. Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

JB: And then we did stop in—I think we did Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh? Yeah.

TS: Philadelphia [Pennsylvania], maybe?

JB: I can't remember, maybe we did. But when we went to Washington we got to see [Thomas Jefferson's primary plantation] Monticello and all of the different—

TS: The monuments.

JB: Yeah, what were there at that time.

TS: Right. The Washington Monument and the—

JB: Yeah.

TS: So that was kind of neat.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Well, what year did you graduate, then, from high school?

JB: Nineteen forty-nine.

TS: Nineteen forty-nine.

JB: Yeah.

TS: What did you do after that?

JB: I went—When I was in high school I worked in a restaurant. Everybody should work in a restaurant. You learn—You learn a lot of stuff.

TS: What do you learn?

JB: Well, you learn how to serve people and that the—that the customer's always right.

TS: Yeah.

JB: You also knew that some of those guys that owned the restaurant, they thought they could take liberties—to do little things with you as a woman; they'd feel your—whatever.

TS: Oh, really.

JB: Oh, yes, it was—yeah.

TS: How would you respond to that? What did you do?

JB: I didn't like it.

TS: But, I mean, could you—

JB: I don't know. I think I probably just—instead of saying anything to anybody I just sort of tried to avoid him.

TS: Oh, okay.

JB: Yeah, but that—

TS: That kind of sexual harassment.

JB: Yeah, that was—that's—in a restaurant that's—they just thought, well, you're working for them—well, they just sort of take liberties.

TS: How long did you do that?

JB: No longer than I had to.

TS: Yeah.

JB: Then I—Then I went to work for [unclear] Scott and Son, and I worked in—as—in the mailing room.

TS: Okay

JB: And that was good because I learned how to—to divide up things, like, by zip codes and stuff like that, and I learned how to stuff envelopes, and it's helped me in my business life, because when you have to do all those things on your own, if you know how the system works you can save yourself a lot of time.

TS: Yeah, that's true, isn't it? That is true, yeah. [chuckles]

JB: But, I was—I was not—Oh, my first job was farm bureau, and I was accounts receivable, and I loved that job. I really did love that job.

TS: What'd you like about it?

JB: I just liked the numbers; the balancing; if you get a mistake, find it and get your books to balance. Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Keeping everything in order and—

JB: Yeah.

TS: Well, that's kind of neat.

JB: Yeah.

TS: When did you decide you'd go into the WAVES? [United States Navy Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service] What happened there?

JB: Well, let's see. I was getting—Let me say this. I know even when I lived on the farm—I think back—I was sort of like—always had, like, a wanderlust ; I was not happy seeing the dust rolling down the road every once in a while. [chuckling]

TS: Right, that was not enough for you.

JB: That was not enough for me. I—I guess I just—I was just bored. And I—My sister joined at the—at the [Columbus?] Naval Air Station.

TS: And she became a nurse, you said, right?

JB: She was a corpsman.

TS: Oh, right because she—she had to drop out of the school.

JB: Yes, she was—she never got—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: But she got the corpsman, okay.

JB: Yes, she did.

TS: That's interesting, alright.

JB: And, there again, it was very interesting because we never—never talked much about what she did.

TS: No?

JB: But when I was stationed—she was at the sick bay, that's where she worked, and—but after I got out of—I got discharged, the Korean War was still—conflict was still on, and she ended up getting sent to Camp Pendleton in California. And I didn't know until later years that she worked with a lot of those guys that come home. She never talked about it.

TS: From the Korean War? Yeah. But you were both at the same naval air station in Ohio?

JB: Yeah, when we first started.

TS: Okay. Well, so tell me a little bit about—talk me through—you're thinking about going into the WAVES. If you can. The best you can.

JB: I don't know. I guess I just went down to naval air station and joined up. And for a couple—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: You were influenced by your sister being in?

JB: Yeah, I think—I think it was because she was down there and I thought, well, it was close to home and I could join down there. And so, there was a couple—I know there was one fellow from Marysville, we'd ride—I'd ride with him on the weekends. And we did—I didn't really have, like, basic training like the other women, but you had the training; how to handle your clothes, how to do your bunks, all that stuff you had to do. But you didn't—there was not a lot of marching, and stuff like that.

TS: Where did you go for your basic?

JB: There wasn't, it was just on—on—at the naval air station.

TS: Really? Okay.

JB: Now, if I'd stayed longer, I probably would have been sent off somewhere.

TS: Okay.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: My sister ended up going to Great—

TS: Great Lakes?

JB: Great Lakes.

TS: Yeah. So you enlisted?

JB: Yeah.

TS: And they didn't send you to a basic training? They just said, "Why don't you just come work right here, right now?" Is that what happened?

JB: I don't know. I just went down there and I just—I guess I passed the test and—

TS: Yeah.

JB: Then they said to me, "Well, what would you like to do?"

And I said, "What do you got?" I liked air traffic control, but I think I couldn't qualify.

And then they said, "Well, would you like to be a parachute rigger?"

And I thought about that, and I thought—then when they told me that you got to jump after you pass—graduate with a chute—I said, "Well, I think I'll pass that one up."  
[chuckling]

TS: Yeah, you didn't want to jump out of the airplane.

JB: I didn't, no. And while I was there—I know I've talked to some of the other women, and I ask them—some of the women I say, "Did you ever experience any sexual harassment?" For me, the—it was embarrassing more than anything. We had—Lots of times if you had to do something and walk across the hanger, oh my God, that was not good because everybody'd whistle and yell, and I guess it's good for your ego or something, but I—I felt really uncomfortable.

TS: Well, you're kind of, like, put on the spot and—

JB: Yeah. Yeah. You didn't quite—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: The spotlight on you and you don't necessarily want it, right?

JB: You didn't quite know what to do.

TS: Yeah.

JB: So.

TS: Did that happen all the time?

JB: I don't know. I don't—I just remember when it did happen.

TS: Yeah, it made you uncomfortable.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: I don't think—I don't think it was a lot.

TS: Yeah. Now—

JB: We had—We had planes that come in from all over the country, they—it was a training—training station.

TS: Okay. What job did you finally end up doing?

JB: That's the one I did. I stayed in and did the—the switchboard.

TS: The switchboard, right.

JB: Yeah.

TS: We talked about that off tape though, so that's why I'm asking you again.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: You did the communications switch—

JB: Yeah.

TS: —switchboard, the PBX. Do you know what the PBX stands for? You don't—

[PBX is an acronym for Private Branch Exchange. It is a private telephone line used within an organization. The term was originally used by switchboard operators who had to manually manage company switchboards using cord circuits]

JB: Public—

TS: Something.



JB: It's PBX; it's an exchange.

TS: Oh, exchange. Gotcha. What kind of things did you do for that? What kind of hours—a typical day?

JB: I think it was just regular 8:00 [a.m.] to 5:00 [p.m.].

TS: Was it?

JB: Yeah. There was a woman—you're going to go see Ida [?]  
—and she was telling about, "I just don't think we need to work." Oh, my goodness. Anyway, she gave her thought about having to wear any kind of a uniform when we'd come to the meetings.

TS: Oh.

JB: And I said "Ida, why don't you remember when they used to post what was the uniform of the day? It was your whites or your dungarees or your dress." She'd forgotten, I think. [chuckles]

TS: That's why you got your little vests with your white shirts and—

JB: Well, we—when we organized our group we decided what we were going to wear.

TS: Okay.

JB: And the one thing that I tried to insist on—that I tried it—that they get the ribbons and put them on because—

TS: What's the name of your group?

JB: Women Vet—I'll give you—

TS: Well, you can just say it for the tape.

JB: Women Veterans of Coastal North Carolina.

TS: Okay. Yeah.

JB: And it was started five and a half years ago, and it was started after I went to the largest parade in North Carolina and there was not hardly any women in the parade, and I said "We live here with all these bases around us. There's got to be women veterans that live here."

TS: Right.

JB: So I put a letter to the editor, and I got three World War II women. That's how we started our group.

TS: That's how you started? That's neat. That's neat. Well, when we were talking before we turned the tape on you were talking about when you were doing your job at the communications, one of the things that you were the most afraid would happen.

JB: Oh. I was always scared to death I was going to cross lines with the CO [commanding officer]. I mean, it wouldn't be hard to do.

TS: No.

JB: [chuckles] Because you got to make sure your holes are lined up, and this is pull and that's push.

TS: Now, see, somebody today that doesn't really know the history of telephones like that, because we got our cellphones, we just put them in our pocket and we walk around with them, right?

JB: Yeah

TS: Explain what your job really was, like more in detail, to somebody so they can kind of get a grasp of it.

JB: Okay, what your job was you—you had—it was like a board that was in front of you, and you had lines that—lines with plugs on them. And ones in the back would be—I think were incoming or outgoing, whatever, but you were taking your hand on all of the calls that come into the base, and then you would have to take that call and take the—the connecting—

TS: Like, you have a receiving end and a sending end?

JB: Yeah, receiving and sending. And you had to make sure that you plugged the—that line into the right hole. I mean, you could—I mean, it could have been chaos.

TS: Yeah. How'd you know—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: [unclear]

TS: How'd know which hole to put it in?

JB: Well, there were—it was identified; there would be little things above the holes so that you would know.

TS: Okay. Had little names?

JB: Yeah. And you had—you had a wire that you pulled up, and that was where it was coming in, and then you had this—then you'd answer and there were little—little switches; like little things that stick up and you do like this.

TS: Oh, like little toggle switches.

JB: Yes, toggle switches.

TS: Okay.

JB: And then when you knew where it—the call was going to then you would take the other line and plug it in so that you had a connection, and then you'd listen to make sure if they were connected.

TS: Talking to each other.

JB: Yeah. Also—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: And then you hung up, right, or did you keep listening?

JB: Well, no. No.

TS: No.

JB: Maybe once or twice. [both chuckle] You're pinning me down, aren't you? I don't know, I just—I loved—like, the CO was from Georgia—

TS: Yeah.

JB: —and he'd talk in that southern drawl, and his wife—that's what I was intrigued by. I loved to hear—because you never heard that before in Ohio.

TS: Right, different voices, and things like that. That's kind of neat, yeah, because somebody today's not going to know what the heck—

JB: And you would sit there all day long, and it was a board—it was like a wall at the front—

TS: Yes.

JB: —and then you had, like, a little desk. It was like this, and then you had—this is where the wires here, and then you had these things.

TS: In front of you?

JB: Yeah.

TS: Now—

JB: And you'd sit in the chair all day.

TS: Now, how did you know a call was coming in?

JB: There would be a light.

TS: A light.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Now, did you wear any headsets or anything?

JB: Oh yeah, you had to wear this thing, and then you had a microphone.

TS: Oh, okay.

JB: As a matter of fact, I did take a picture of—once when I was seeing something about the old timey, I did take a picture and put it somewhere with my stuff, so it'd show that that's what it was, because you're right, nobody knows what it is.

TS: That's right, nobody does, because they don't have those anymore, I don't think, hardly anywhere. Maybe somewhere in the world they have them, but—

JB: No.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: —not much.

JB: And, it was—you were—it could be disastrous if you didn't know what you were doing.

TS: Yeah.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Now, did you have any, like—

JB: And I didn't realize that until now we're just talking.

TS: Yeah.

JB: I mean, you really had to know what you were doing. You'd think, well, that was just an incidental job, but it wasn't.

TS: No, communication's pretty important.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: Because you had the whole base.

TS: Yeah.

JB: You had all the different extensions that you had to—

TS: Yeah.

JB: —make sure they connected with them, yeah.

TS: Yeah, so you were like the Lily Tomlin [American comedic actress] [unclear]—

JB: That's—You know how she was with that headset?

[One of Lily Tomlin's characters was Ernestine, a rude telephone operator.]

TS: [chuckles] Yeah.

JB: That was me.

TS: Yeah. When you described the headset I was thinking of her. I was thinking, "Hold please," or however she said it with her nasally voice. "Party in the first party, connecting to the party in the second party."

JB: Yeah.

TS: So did you enjoy that job? Was that interesting for you?

JB: Yeah, I was—I was happy doing it. Yeah. Yeah. And then there was times when the Gooney Bird, the [Douglas] C-47, if they had to transport something or someone across country, if you—you could go—what did they call it?—you could get a hop.

TS: Right, a hop.

JB: And if—You had to make sure you could get—you could ask for leave—but you had to make sure that you got back before the leave was up.

TS: Right, you need enough—

JB: You didn't want to get stuck somewhere and you couldn't get back.

TS: And not get back.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Did you ever take any hops?

JB: Oh yeah.

TS: Where did you go?

JB: Once I went to Latham, Kansas, and once I went to the naval station in—what—what is it? Norfolk? Yeah.

TS: Oh, Norfolk.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Over in Virginia.

JB: Yeah. Yeah, but I don't know if I stayed over or not that time.

TS: Did you know anybody that—

JB: Nobody.

TS: You just kind of said, "This sound interesting. I'm going to go there"?

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: You just get on, sit in the back of the Gooney Bird, and just take off and go. You didn't even have a parachute. I mean, you just—[both chuckle]

TS: Well, it sounds like you did have a little bit of wanderlust going on then.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Now, how about the uniform; did you like the uniform that you had to wear?

JB: I loved the uniform. I loved the summer uniform.

TS: Yeah. What was that like?

JB: It was a seersucker, and then we had those buttons that are on the front there. There were buttons and they clipped—

TS: Yes.

JB: —they went all the way down, and there—it just had a nice—a nice skirt, it wasn't straight, it was flowing. It was like—what do I want to say? It was sort of full, but it was just comfortable, and then you had your hat, the mast—a garrison hat that [unclear].

TS: Yeah. And now, where did you live?

JB: Lived in the barracks on the base.

TS: How was that?

JB: That was good. Yeah, we had—I was—I wrote down here we had—I think it was three or four officers, and lots of times we'd have people that'd come in TDY [temporary duty] and stay. There was four officers and five enlisted women on the base. And you had to learn to live with other people, and some of them maybe you weren't too comfortable with. [chuckles]

TS: Was it an open bay or were there just rooms or how was—

JB: It was like—You had your own quarters. You had double decks [bunk beds].

TS: Okay.

JB: And then you had a common area where you showered and you did your laundry, and all that stuff, and then in front we had a living room, and we did—officers and enlisted, we—because we were close quarters we did—

TS: Fraternize.

JB: Fraternize, yeah.

TS: Yeah. There were just two people to a room or—

JB: Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Did you enjoy your roommates?

JB: Well, this one girl, she was—she didn't have very good hygiene.

TS: Oh.

JB: So she sort of was like—but she was okay.

TS: She smelled.

JB: Sort of. [both chuckle] She wasn't quite sure what to do.

TS: Yeah, that's not pleasant to be around.

JB: Yeah, but she was your mate so that's who you had.

TS: Yeah. Now, did you meet people from all over? Mostly local or—

JB: I can't remember. And—Like, we had a NCO [non-commissioned officer] club there. We had a place where you could do tennis, all that stuff.

TS: Recreational facilities.

JB: And we had a PX [post exchange], we had the sick bay.

TS: And you said your sister was on the same base as you for a little bit.

JB: Yeah. Yeah, she worked sick bay. Yeah.

TS: What'd you do for fun there? Did you stay out of trouble?

JB: Yeah, I had to. [both chuckle] Yeah, it was interesting that I wanted to—I never had a driver's license. I never had the chance to learn to drive. Well, in those days, if you were in the service you just went down to the [Division of] Motor Vehicles and they gave you a driver's license. You didn't have to take a test.



TS: Really?

JB: So when I really learned to drive was when I stationed—my husband, I went with him after I got married, we were stationed in Wichita Falls, Texas. That's where I learned to drive. The old 1949 Chevy.

TS: But you had a license before you knew how to drive.

JB: [chuckles] If you were in the service you could go get a driver's license.

TS: Yeah.

JB: They didn't even check you.

TS: Now, what about the Korean War? What were your thoughts about that? Was that already happening when you went in; when you went and enlisted.

JB: I went in in '50.

TS: Yes, seems like it—

JB: And my husband and I got married in '50—in '51, that's when I got out.

TS: Yes.

JB: He was already over there. He was an aircraft mechanic.

TS: He was in Korea?

JB: Yeah. Wait a minute now. He was—No, he wasn't. I guess what drew me to join was the fact of how I felt about World War II, when all that happened, and then when this other happened.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: With the Korean War? Got some—

JB: Conflict.

TS: —patriotic—

JB: Yeah, I think that—

TS: —sense.

JB: —that—Yeah.

TS: Was there anything that you thought you'd want to do for very long?

JB: I—You don't—I didn't think like that. It was just—

TS: You were just young and doing something.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: You did things—You just did what you did when you did it.

TS: Yeah.

JB: And then I married—When you got married you were out of the service. So then I went with my husband down to Texas, and I got pregnant. That was an interesting thing.

TS: Yeah.

JB: To have a child—a first child—away from home, didn't know nobody. In those days, you just lined up like a herd of sheep when you went to the doctor. You just didn't know who you were going to get, and you'd just say "Oh, I hope I get the one I like."

TS: Right.

JB: And so, I had my son, and you had one—you had—your choices for anesthetic was a spinal, spinal, or a spinal, so I had a spinal. I was scared to death.

TS: They said that was all you could have, huh? Yeah.

JB: And then I come back, and then my husband went—then he went to Korea. He was an aircraft mechanic, and he ended up getting a Bronze Star; I guess he pulled a pilot out of a burning plane. But his brother was in the army, and oh my God. I mean, the stories he told when he got home.

TS: In Korea?

JB: Yeah, he fought on Old Baldy hand to hand. I mean, and the conditions in Korea were awful.

[The Battle of Old Baldy was a series of five military engagements for Hill 266 in west-central Korea from 26 June 1952 to 26 March 1953. When the final engagement ended,

the United Nations forces had suffered three hundred and sixty-seven casualties while the Chinese suffered an estimated eleven hundred casualties]

TS: Yeah.

JB: It was hot in the summer, and then freeze to death in the winter. It was—It was not a good war.

TS: Right.

JB: And it wasn't even considered a war.

TS: Right.

JB: I always correct people when they say it's a war; it was a conflict.

TS: Right.

JB: We ended up where we started.

TS: Yeah. What did you think about that at the time, when you were a young girl? Did any of that cross your mind about—

JB: It impacted me.

TS: Yeah.

JB: The things that Norm told—I mean Red told me, because he—he was an aircraft mechanic, so he was—he was connected with ammo, and he probably heard all of that stuff, and then when his brother was over there and fighting.

TS: Yes.

JB: Yeah. It was—Yeah.

TS: Well, if you're thinking about that time period in the fifties, is there anybody that you would consider like a hero to yourself?

JB: I think all those—who I really loved—no, that was World War II, wasn't it?

TS: Well, you can have heroes in World War II. Who were your heroes then? You said McArthur, right.

JB: I loved McArthur.

TS: You said McArthur.

JB: I loved McArthur.

TS: Anybody else? Did you like President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt or Eleanor or—

JB: I liked—Yes. Yes, I liked what he did. Yeah.

TS: What'd you like about him?

JB: And I loved [British Prime Minister Sir Winston Leonard Spencer] Churchill.

TS: Churchill? Yeah. What was it that drew you to Churchill?

JB: He was just a tough old fella, and I ended up—my second husband was a Brit, and I thought "Oh, my God." He was typically British.

TS: Yeah, what does typically British mean? I don't know.

JB: Hanging in there by your—till the end, like this. [chuckles] [From your?] fingernail.

TS: [chuckles] Okay.

JB: But I just loved Churchill because, I mean, he inspired his people. I mean, without him they probably wouldn't of won the war. I mean they wouldn't of been where they were.

TS: Yes.

JB: He just—The things he said was just like Roosevelt, and like [President John Fitzgerald] Kennedy. They were powerful words. They meant something.

TS: Very motivating. What'd you think of Eleanor Roosevelt?

JB: I didn't think anything. I thought she was okay. I thought she was doing okay.

TS: Yeah. How about—

JB: And the thing was, we knew that Roosevelt was paralyzed. But that was—He just really covered a lot of that up. Maybe he wouldn't have been the person he was if he didn't.

TS: Right.

JB: Because you know how people would say, "Well, he's a weakling," or whatever. But I admired him for what he did.

TS: Oh, you mean if he hadn't covered it up then that would have come out maybe more negatively.

JB: I mean, like when you'd see him public.

TS: Yes.

JB: They would very carefully pick—come and lift him up. It wouldn't be a great big—

TS: Right.

JB: —folderol. "Oh, we got to get him out of the wheelchair."

TS: Right.

JB: "Prop him up." You know what I'm saying?

TS: Right. It was already up when the cameras started rolling.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Or not cameras but—

JB: Yeah.

TS: —the radio and everything.

JB: That was a sad, sad day. And then in those days, there was no newspapers. I mean, he—he died at Warm Springs [Georgia] and, I mean, that was—that was tragic, I thought. Yeah, that was very sad.

TS: Yes. Do you remember the end of that war, World War II?

JB: Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, I was in Columbus, Ohio when they celebrated—

TS: Yeah.

JB: —the VJ [Victory in Japan] Day. Yeah. Yeah.

TS: What did they do in Columbus, Ohio?

JB: They were just—everybody yelling, and screaming, and jumping around, and doing all that stuff. [both chuckle] Cheering. Yeah, I had to go down.

TS: So you were about fourteen, or fifteen?

JB: Probably.

TS: Yeah.

JB: I guess so, when you think about it.

TS: Yeah, just a young girl really.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Well, that's neat. When you got out of the service, out of the WAVES, you had to get out because you were married? You didn't have another choice?

JB: Well, I got pregnant.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Oh okay, so pregnant you had to get out.

JB: That was—That was a sure thing.

TS: Would you have liked to have stayed in?

JB: I look back, and I think I would have, but I don't know. I just—I don't know. I guess for me, I really—I just sort of did things as they come. I think when I look back, yeah.

TS: Well, that was a rule then so it's not—

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: It was another twenty something odd years before women could stay in and be pregnant.

JB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

TS: So it was a long time—

JB: Yeah.

TS: —between the time you were in it and that rule was changed.

JB: Yeah, because we were just early on—

TS: Yes.

JB: —[unclear] World War II, and then the first year of the Korean conflict.

TS: Yes. Well, what—

JB: But others—I—And I used to think, well, I wasn't in very long, but you look at some of these women, they weren't in very long either.

TS: No.

JB: At that time.

TS: I've interviewed some who have just been in for a couple months.

JB: Even in World War II.

TS: Yeah

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

JB: Yeah.

TS: That's true. That's true.

JB: And then I didn't know I had any benefits, but when I went to Florida, and this one girl she—she was a—she was a WAVES national member—that's a national organization—and she—I joined it, and she said we were—it was right there at Bay Pines [Veterans Affairs Healthcare System]—she said, "We need to get the women to sign up. We need to get them to sign up." So everybody we saw—when we first went—and I didn't know I had—and she said, "Go and let them tell you whether you've got any benefits." I went, and I was shocked that I would get—

TS: What kind of benefits did you have?

JB: I'd get medical benefits. Nobody ever said anything about any—I don't know if I would have qualified for—for schooling or not. But anyway, I just started going to Bay Pines, and while I was in Florida I—most of my care was at Bay Pines. While we'd tell—every woman told other women, "Go and let them tell you."

TS: Go to the VA [United States Department of Veteran Affairs]?

JB: Go to the VA out there, and go to—what's it called?—to see—see if you're qualified. And so, when we first went there you had to go sit with all of the men in this great big room, and they'd call your name, and you'd just wait. You might be there all day long. Before I left—because what we did, one whole floor was dedicated to women veterans.

TS: What year was that, Jerry, that you started going?

JB: We started in 1990, and probably—I left there in two thousand and—when'd I get up here? I came here in 2010, so probably the first part of the 2000s is when there was dedicated for, and they had—a woman veteran was in charge of that. And we had—It was like going to your own doctor; you just go right in there, and they would tell you—if you needed to be referred, they'd refer you out. It was wonderful.

TS: Big change.

JB: Oh, yeah.

TS: Yeah. Women had some kind of validation of their—

JB: Yeah.

TS: —of their service by—

JB: But, like, you'd come here and go to Durham, it's like going back to—

TS: Is it?

JB: Ninety-ninety at Bay Pines.

TS: In Florida?

JB: Yeah.

TS: Well, when you were in the service did you ever feel like there was anything particularly physically difficult for you to do?

JB: No. No, I don't think so.

TS: How about emotionally?

JB: No.

TS: Not really. Just the stuff you were telling me about, like having to deal with the guys cat calling you as your walking through that—

JB: Yeah.

TS: Sexual harassment and stuff.



JB: That was uncomfortable, because even though I liked to be whistled at I'd—it just was—if you—

TS: You'd like to choose who was whistling at you, maybe. Right?

JB: This whole great big thing was like oh, I got to keep walking over to that corner. Well, I kept walking. [chuckles]

TS: Did you have any favorite songs? You said you liked music. Any kind of bands you'd listen to?

JB: Oh, yeah, I knew all the songs.

TS: You have all the great bands [in your era?].

JB: Oh, yeah, knew all the songs. I just come across my packet of [*Your*] *Hit Parade*. We used to always—when we were kids on the farm, the *Hit Parade* would come on the radio every Saturday night, and you could hardly wait to see what was on the top ten. Then you'd go buy the magazine and learn—learn the words, and you'd listen to the music.

[*Your Hit Parade* was an American radio/television show, broadcast on the radio from 1935-1955 and televised from 1950-1959. The show aired the most popular songs of the week every Saturday evening.]

TS: Sing along.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: So that's how you learned it. Huh?

TS: Did you have a favorite artist that you liked? Musician?

JB: Oh, I liked all the bands. And when we were kids, we—we'd go to Columbus, and you'd get to see Sammy Kaye [American bandleader and songwriter]. All the big bands would come to the local theaters there. Yeah.

TS: Good.

JB: Yeah.

TS: How about movie theaters? Did you get to see any of the great movies of that era?

JB: We had an old theater in town, yeah, and I remember one show that Mother would not let us go to, and I'd love to see it now; it was *Dust to Dust*. It was something about [chuckles] sexual stuff.

TS: Oh, but you weren't allowed to—

JB: No, never got to see that. I never got to see—

TS: Don't know. You're pointing at me, but I don't know, Jerry.

JB: What's the one with, "I don't give a damn"? The woman in Georgia.

TS: Oh, *Gone with the Wind*?

JB: Yeah, we didn't get to see that either.

TS: No. Did you get to see *Casablanca* or—

JB: Probably those, but some of those ones were risqué.

TS: A little risqué? Off limits to you, huh? Think about that today. What's risqué and what's—a little bit of difference, huh?

JB: I can't stand today. I cannot stand today. Nothing is sacred. In my opinion.

TS: Well, when you joined the WAVES, at that time did you consider yourself an independent type of person at all?

JB: Type what?

TS: Independent. Are you independent? Were you as a young girl?

JB: Yeah, yeah, I felt—yeah.

TS: Could pretty much go—

JB: I was ready for it. I was not—not like that one girl I said was my roommate.

TS: Right.

JB: She sort of was not ready for it.

TS: Not ready. Wasn't her—

JB: No.

TS: —something for her.

JB: She was really sort of wimpy. Internalized—

TS: Not really sure why she joined up probably.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Maybe.

JB: But I guess I just liked the adventure of it; doing something different, new. You know what I'm saying?

TS: Now, how long was your husband in? Did you get to—

JB: He had—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: So you were a dependent—

JB: —already been in for a couple years when we got married. We were stationed in Wichita Falls [Texas] about a year, then he went to Korea, and then he got out.

TS: Then he got out.

JB: He was in about four years.

TS: Okay, so he didn't make it a career or anything?

JB: Well, he ended up coming back and he joined the Air National Guard—

TS: Oh.

JB: —and he spent the rest of his career in the Air National Guard.

TS: Oh, okay, so he did stay with the service then.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Yeah. Did you ever think about doing something like that, or could you? You probably couldn't do it at that time.

JB: No.

TS: Join it.

JB: And then every once in a while I'd get something about joining up, and then [chuckles]—but no, I never—once I got out I never really thought about doing it.

TS: You had a family in its place.

JB: Maybe there was an opportunity, I don't know, but I had ten kids in—five kids in ten years, so I was busy doing other things.

TS: Yeah, raising kids.

JB: And it was like, I'd already done that, and I felt good about what I did.

TS: Yeah.

JB: You know what I'm saying? Yeah.

TS: Well, what do you think about the kind of options that women have today in the service?

JB: Well, I think it's—it's great that they have choices, and I think it's—now, some of the stuff they do, I wouldn't want to do. But I think it was time; it was time. And I think there's still sexual harassment that goes on. I think that needs to be taken care of. Our whole group sent a letter to [Defense Secretary Chuck] Hagel when that general down in Fort Bragg, he got out—he walked out of there free. Nothing. When we were—When I was in Florida, they sent an administrator from Fayetteville—that had been sent there because he had sexual harassment charges against him—he came to Bay Pines, Florida. So our group, all our women, signed a petition sent it to the—who was—who was it? Is it—

[In 2014, after pleading guilty to adultery with a subordinate, Army Brigadier General Jeffery Sinclair was reduced to the rank of lieutenant colonel and fined twenty thousand dollars, but avoided jail time.]

TS: Secretary of Defense?

JB: Yes. And we said, "We don't want this man here. Why did you send him? He's already sexually harassed women. We don't want—" His ass got shipped out of there.

TS: Well, good that you all joined together to—

JB: Oh, yes. We all signed a petition to get rid of him.

TS: Yeah.

JB: But I want to tell you, when I was down there, I had a group [unclear] on either of us, and they were already organized like [U.S.] Army, [U.S.] Navy, Marines, all that, but there was like—about a thousand more women total. But, I mean, I had letters. I ended up having to burn them because, I mean, what was in them; what women had shared with me.

TS: Well, how did the letters come about? I didn't quite follow that. I'm sorry.

JB: Well, they—they joined our group.

TS: Oh, okay.

JB: They joined our organization.

TS: Yes.

JB: So they knew—

TS: This is in Florida?

JB: —that we were supportive of whatever.

TS: Yes.

JB: There was a big rehab center down there for women.

TS: So you saw a lot of—

JB: There was quite a bit of it.

TS: —activity of sexual harassment.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Sexual assault as well.

JB: Well there—there were stories, and we heard about them. Yeah.

TS: Yeah.

JB: It seemed to be that a lot of them were by the sergeant majors.

TS: Higher in rank?

JB: Yeah.

TS: On the lower enlisted women.

JB: With their enlisted and stuff. Yeah. But that—that needs to stop. That needs to stop.

TS: Yeah. How is it going to stop?

JB: I don't know because, look, a couple years ago all the women politicians got something going and all of a sudden something happens and it goes back down to the bottom. I don't know. But it's still a man's world. And I'll tell you what, I—it just irks my ass when you—you can be walking around with that on and your hat and everything, look right through you. A woman—A what?

TS: They don't recognize you as having served, you mean?

JB: Yeah. I don't know how the women today feel, but what I—from the one precedent when Dolly was sharing stuff with me, she said that they wanted to—they gave her some award, and they wanted to acknowledge her as a woman. She just said "I want to be acknowledged as an airman." So have we not gone back to everybody wears the same uniform?

TS: Instead of looking at their gender.

JB: Yes.

TS: Well, do you think there's anything now that women should not be permitted to do, as far as a job goes, in the service?

JB: No, if they—if they want to do it, and they can do it, just like all those women that went through all this training to be able to be—what is it?—combat ready. Now, they weren't very successful, but at least they let them do it. They didn't think they were going to—Their bodies are not made like men. You know what I'm saying? That's one of the things that's against them. But, no, I think they should go as high as they—if they have the opportunity.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: If they can do it, then let them do it. Is that what you're saying?

JB: Yeah.

TS: What about all the ruckus that was going on about the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and the—gays in the military, that happened. What is your—Do you have an opinion on any of that.

["Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was the official U.S. policy on military service by gays, bisexuals, and lesbians. The policy prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members, while barring openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual person from military service. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was repealed September 20, 2011]

JB: Well, let me say this, when I—when—there were times we'd go out and go to—as a group, go to bars or something, and I remember—

TS: When you were in the service, you mean?

JB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JB: I remember one night we were out, and this one women was feeling my leg, and I thought, "I don't like that." So—

TS: What did you do?

JB: I just moved. [chuckles]

TS: You moved. Just like you did for the men, you moved for the woman too.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Okay.

JB: Yeah.

TS: Stayed out of her way like you stayed out of the men's way.

JB: Yeah, just got out of the way.

TS: Okay.

JB: But how I feel when I even—when I really think about this, as far as same sex marriages and stuff, I feel—and I've known a lot people that are gay. They're wonderful people. They're loving people. They're—They have—give a lot to society. They're very

intelligent people. But I feel—this is my own personal feeling—I don't want their life. As long as they don't try to put their lifestyle on me they can do whatever, but I mean—

TS: How would they be putting it on you though? I mean, what would they do to—

JB: If they—they pressured me in any way.

TS: Yeah.

JB: You understand? Like to tolerate them or whatever. I don't know. It—

TS: Well, do you think they should be able to serve openly in the military, I guess, is the question that I wanted to ask. Is that okay that they do that now, because before they couldn't, and they had to be hidden, and—

JB: Well, let me say—let me—I've known—I've known people who have had children that were trans—that did the transitional operation.

TS: Oh, the transgender.

JB: Transgender. It's got to be hell to be one person, one sex, living in another sex's body. I think—I think they should have the freedom, because it wasn't their fault.

TS: Right.

JB: You know what I'm saying? Maybe sometimes, but overall whatever they—and I—just recently I watched a thing about a young—some people—young folks that completely transitioned, and it was like—it's traumatic, and even when they do it it's traumatic. But—

TS: These are probably—

JB: I don't think—

TS: Yeah.

JB: Probably—It's just like what I said about somebody feeling your leg or whistling or cheering something. Probably it—if it can be handled, probably, among your peers. You know what I'm saying?

TS: Unless someone, like, crosses a line?

[Speaking Simultaneously]



JB: Unless it really got—yes, I think that's it. That right there.

TS: Then yeah. So they're fine—You learn, "Okay, I'm not that—"

JB: Yeah.

TS: "—so I don't want—" And whether it's a man or a woman, you don't want the—

JB: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

TS: —the advances, and if they just stop then you're fine with it.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Yeah. It's interesting because, probably, these kind of issues, they weren't talking about really in the fifties, or even sixties.

JB: They might have had names for people who were a little odd. You know what I'm saying?

TS: Right.

JB: But, no, we never—

TS: That's interesting.

JB: We didn't talk about that.

TS: Yeah.

JB: But it was—when you look back, it was there.

TS: Just because it—

JB: And like my sister, God bless her, I mean, she—she always was—when we had the shows, she always put Daddy's hat—but she was always wearing men's stuff, so I mean, that's where she was in her life, and she had her friends, and she grew older, and so there she was in the navy. I—I didn't—I didn't see that. I just didn't—I just looked at somebody for who they were.

TS: Yeah. Yeah.

JB: But it gets really, sort of sticky.

TS: How does it get sticky?

JB: Well, I just—I just think that if you're uncomfortable with it, how do you handle that discomfort, you know what I'm saying?

TS: You mean the person themselves or somebody—

JB: If was somebody around me.

TS: Okay.

JB: You know what I'm saying? That's what I'm saying, and that's for me. Like I said, I—as long as you are what you are, fine, but don't try to get—don't try to make me be that, or whatever.

TS: Right.

JB: Pressure me to accept you, or just let it be. You have to be natural about it. Does that make sense?

TS: I see. Sure. Of course. Oh, I know what I wanted to ask you about. You have five children.

JB: Yes.

TS: Four boys and a girl, right?

JB: Yes.

TS: Have any of them been in the military?

JB: No, but I'll tell you what, when the Korean War/Vietnam War was ending my oldest son would have been about ready to be—to be drafted, and I said to myself, that was not—it was a political war, and those people were dying, and when they come home they got spit on. I would have taken my son to Canada. And I am a patriotic American. I would not have allowed him to be in the war.

TS: He didn't get drafted?

JB: No, but if he had been another year he probably would have.

TS: Yeah.

JB: But that's how I felt.

TS: Yeah. If it hadn't been Vietnam do you think you might have felt differently about [unclear]?

JB: Probably. Yeah, if it was like World War II, and stuff.

TS: Yeah.

JB: I mean—But that—that Vietnam War was just too—too—just political. I mean, you didn't have to be a rocket scientist to figure it out.

TS: What about today? If a young person came to you today and asked about going in the service, what would you recommend?

JB: I think it'd be a great opportunity. Because, I mean—and I think they're getting more picky, aren't they, about who they choose? Or are they? I don't know.

TS: I'm not sure. It's a good question. I'm not sure. Well, have you ever thought of yourself as a pioneer, as a young WAVE? Not very many of you in 1950 that were serving.

JB: I wonder how many there were.

TS: Not that many. I'll email you the statistic, okay?

JB: I would like to have that.

TS: I'll look it up for you. Sure.

JB: I would like—

TS: Nineteen fifty to '51.

JB: How many—

TS: How many WAVES there were.

JB: Yeah.

TS: I can send it to you. It was definitely less than 2%.

JB: Really?

TS: Yes, of the military.

JB: Well, what I feel now—

TS: Yes.

JB: —I feel proud that I was a woman that stepped out of the everyday way of being at my age. I felt patriotic, but I feel that what I did has allowed every woman that's passed

behind me to come and do whatever she wants. The world is her oyster. That's what I feel. They can do whatever they want, but they have the opportunity. Yes, I guess I am a pioneer. [chuckles]

TS: That's good, because you went in at a time that not everyone was doing it. And the type of environment that you were in, as you say, wasn't necessarily all that welcoming all the time.

JB: Yeah.

TS: So—

JB: I think—I really—Now, had I gone to—Now, you talk to some of these woman who were at big bases, went to like Hunter College and some of those places, they might—they might have been different thoughts there. You know what I'm saying?

TS: Right, different experience depending on where they're at.

JB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

TS: How many people are there. Yeah.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Someone talked with me about the dating scene. It's like they never ever had to worry about having a date because there was plenty of young men that wanted to go out with them.

JB: And, let me say this. Really as boy crazy as I was, I never—when I was at the naval air—I don't think—I don't remember going out on a lot of dates.

TS: No? Just having a good time?

JB: Yeah.

TS: Not really an official date neces—

JB: If we went out, we went out—

TS: In groups?

JB: —the WAVES went out.

TS: In groups?

JB: We went group.

TS: Yeah.

JB: That's the way we went.

TS: Yeah.

JB: But I—I really can't say that I can remember dating any of those guys.

TS: Not until you met your husband then, I guess.

JB: I met him when he was home on leave.

TS: Oh, okay.

JB: In the home town.

TS: Oh.

JB: That was a bad—I should have—that was—Anyway, life went on.

TS: That's for a different book, I guess, right? [both chuckle] Okay. You talked a little bit about patriotism. What does patriotism mean to you?

JB: It means to me that when the national anthem is played I stand at attention, and if they sing it, or sometimes I sing when other people don't. I'm just—I'm just proud that I live in the land of the—what is it?—the home of the brave and the land of the free. And when I felt that feeling in May [emotionally]—[unclear] member of Havelock Chamber [of Commerce], and then they've got all of the military bases. Well, you feel like you were military when you go there because you get recognized for who you were, what you did. But I sent a letter to the editor to say that I am proud to be an American, [crying] with all of the people that served, men and women. There's a lot of men that haven't been recognized.

TS: Yes.

JB: I think one of the things—if they don't belong to American Legion or VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] or any of that. I had a young fella that I was acquainted with in Florida, and I told him—I said, "You are a veteran." No, I didn't. I said, "You served your country. It might not have been during the war," and now he recognizes he was a veteran.

TS: Yes.

JB: He didn't belong to American Legion. Because, see, some of those—those discriminate; if you didn't go across the pond [serve overseas], or if you didn't do this, or you didn't do that.

TS: Yes, they're selective.

JB: A lot of—A lot of the World War II guys that were supposed to finish that honor flight, they never—there was forty-three of them here that the people never did take to Washington. And they—For three years they had an opportunity to remember us. They didn't. Nobody did anything.

[An Honor Flight is conducted by non-profit organizations dedicated to transporting as many United States military veterans as possible to see the memorials of the respective war(s) they fought in in Washington, D.C. at no cost to the veterans]

TS: What do you mean by they didn't remember you? They didn't—

JB: They did nothing—

TS: They didn't take anyone—?

JB: —for Korean conflict veterans.

TS: They're just World War II, they were taking.

JB: Well, the World War—I mean, the World War II—

TS: Yes.

JB: But when it come for those three years—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: The honor flight? Is that—

JB: The first honor flights or anything, they've done nothing for us. And it—It's just like when I got that medal. I sent in for it, and I waited, and waited. And I sent a letter. I said, "Are we forgotten again?" And boy I got my—I got my medal.

TS: Explain what medal you're talking about.

JB: That Ambassador of Peace.

TS: We talked about all of that off the tape so—

JB: Oh, okay.

TS: —just tell them a little bit more detail what that's about.

JB: Oh. [both chuckle]

TS: We talked about a few things before we got the tape going, Jerry, sorry.

JB: Well, in September—the first part of September—I get a lot of emails from my—I'm a life member of WAVES National, and I belong to [Unit #] 144 over in Raleigh, and so Norma [Schrader], the president, sent me—always sends her stuff, and I saw this thing that says "The American Legion Posts." One of the posts were—had been—they had been in contact with the South Korean government that if anybody—male or female—whether you went to Korea or you stayed in America—if you served June 1950 through June of 1953, you could send a letter to the South Korean government with your DD214 [Discharge Papers and Separation Documents], and you would be sent this Ambassador of Peace medal. So I sent mine.

TS: Yes, it's very pretty. We'll have to take a picture of it, I think.

JB: Yes, it's beautiful.

TS: We'll get a picture of it.

JB: And they sent a beautiful certificate from the South Korean government thanking me for serving.

TS: Yes.

JB: And my daughter, she had her dad's; the one who served in Korea. I told her about it and she sent for her dad's. You could whether you were alive—

TS: That's nice.

JB: —or still—or passed.

TS: Just talking to you today I can recognize that it's very important for you that women have recognition as veterans.

JB: Yes, right.

TS: And you briefly said what the name of your organization is, and you started with the four—three or four before World War II and yourself. What's that grown to now? How many do you have?

JB: We've got about thirty-five paid members.

TS: Yeah.

JB: And its—Our biggest issue right now is health issues; it doesn't make any difference if you're younger or older.

TS: Is that right?

JB: There's always things that are happening. Yeah. But we're—

TS: So that's what you're advocating for, some help with health issues?

JB: No, it's just natural. I mean—

TS: Oh, I see.

JB: One of the things—I've talked to the new woman veteran service officer, and she wants to get the women—See, a lot of women don't—have not signed up for their benefits. I—Somebody caught me in 1990 and said, "Jerry, you've got to go. Let them tell you whether you qualify."

TS: Right.

JB: And I—I mean, that was wonderful. And it's like right now I get a lot of my care in the community, but I still go the VA because I think some of the things I can get for medicines, I don't have to pay for it. I pay—I go on the means[?] level, you know what I'm saying?

TS: Right.

JB: So I'm still connected to the VA, and if I ever had—when I almost died a couple of years ago somebody came to bedside, and said, "Do you want to go to Duke [University Hospital] or do you want to go to VA in Durham?"  
I said "I'm getting good care here." But I could have been flown over there. So that's nice to know that I have—

TS: So you think an awareness about women and men knowing about their benefits, whether—

JB: Yeah, a lot of men don't know either. They think, "Oh, I didn't do anything. I didn't get any medals. I didn't go to war. I didn't do this."

TS: Right.

JB: But you served.



TS: Well, do you think that your life has been different because you decided to join the WAVES back in 1950?

JB: Probably, because I did—stepped out. See, that's the thing. Let me say this, and you've probably heard this—World War II and Korea—all of the women were tagged as whores because we joined the service. That's what we had to live down with the people back home. But we—we were having fun. [laughing] We were free! Is that awful?

TS: No. No, I have heard that. That you're either that or you're a lesbian or—

JB: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they—there were names for us.

TS: There was no middle ground for you.

JB: I didn't give a crap. I really didn't. I was doing—

[Speaking Simultaneously]

TS: Well, would you do it again?

JB: Huh?

TS: Would you do it again?

JB: Sure, in a heartbeat. As a matter of fact, until I was forty-eight or something every once in a while I'd get something that said, "Would you—" and I'd say to my husband—I said, "I want to go back!" [chuckling]  
"You're too old."

TS: Well, it's great that you're part of that organization; that you helped get that going again, so.

JB: Yeah, because, I mean, they need to—they—See, if you talk to most of those women—were in World War II or Korea, they said—when they got out they went back to being mothers and teachers and librarians and nurses, and they never got acknowledged for anything. When the second honor flight left from here—Now, when you talk to Ida, she was on that honor flight trip. Because when I found out we had World War II women, I said, "You women are going to go." I said, "You led the way for me. You're going to go on that flight." So we had five of them go. And they tell about when they come back, and they come into New Bern airport [Coastal Carolina Regional Airport], there's always—the citizens come to meet them. They—The people were thanking them for their service, and they said it was the first time anybody ever acknowledged them for what they did. And I had—Compared to some of their jobs—Like, some of the women that were the—

that broke—that worked on the [enemies' secret] code—to this day will not tell what they know.

TS: Right.

JB: Can you imagine a woman not being able to tell something because they were always saying we were gossipers?

TS: Yeah, and keeping it a secret all these years. Yeah, no, I've talked to one or two who haven't said anything.

[Speaking Simultaneously]

JB: So there's been women who had very, very important jobs.

TS: Yes.

JB: All of our jobs are important, but some were more important than others.

TS: Yeah. Was there anything on here that you wanted to add? That you wanted to talk about that we hadn't talked about yet? I'll pause it to give you a chance to read it. Here.

[Recording Paused]

TS: We'll start that and I'll let you tell me. Okay, Jerry, go ahead. There's something in your barracks, something fun?

JB: Yeah, our—we had one big building, and it was divided down—right down the middle, and on one side was WAVES and on the other side was a BOQ [Bachelor Officer Quarters].

TS: Okay.

JB: It was—I mean, we'd go to walls [knocking sound, chuckling]. We'd be talking to the guys.

TS: I see. Yeah.

JB: That's what I wanted to say.

TS: So you were being kind of sneaky.

JB: Yeah. We weren't fraternizing, by the way.

TS: But you were.

JB: We were talking. [laughing]

TS: Now, was it in Ohio?

JB: That was at the naval air station in Ohio.

TS: Yeah. Now, did we cover everything else that you had written here?

JB: Yeah, I think so.

TS: Let me glance at it and see.

JB: Did—Have you talked to Wendy Stokes? She was army.

TS: No.

JB: Vietnam.

TS: You can give me some names after.

JB: Okay.

TS: We'll do that so—

JB: Because she was in when it transitioned from WACs [Women's Army Corps] to U.S Army. She was one or two of them in a camp of a thousand men. They got—They had to separate, and they were put way out in the boondocks, and they didn't like it any better than the guys liked it.

TS: Yeah, I bet not. This is something we didn't make clear, I guess. When you joined up at twenty-one you actually joined the naval reserve for the first six months.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Then you went to active duty.

JB: It was right there on the same base.

TS: So you did your basic during your weekend duty.

JB: Yeah, that's what I did.

TS: Oh, okay. That's why.

JB: Yeah.

TS: We were trying to figure out why. Alright, that makes sense.

JB: Yeah, I—Somehow or another, it didn't impress me, but I did it, I guess. [both chuckle]

TS: It's alright. Well, is there anything else you want to add that we haven't talked about? Do you think we covered it maybe?

JB: I think that's good.

TS: Yeah.

JB: Yeah. Yeah.

TS: Alright. Thank you, Jerry.

JB: You're welcome.

TS: Thank you for your service.

JB: Yeah.

TS: I'll go ahead and turn it off.

JB: I thank you for your service.

TS: Well, thank you.

[End of Interview]