

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ANITA (TEMPLE) POWERS
Navy WAVES, World War II

2007

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Powers, Anita, née Temple, (1924?-). Oral History Interview, 2007.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Anita Powers, née Temple, a Green Bay, Wisconsin native, discusses her experience as a Navy WAVE during World War II. Powers recalls being dissatisfied with her pay as a library page, deciding to enlist in the Navy, and getting her parents' consent. She talks about boot camp at Hunter College (New York) where they marched everywhere and she took classes such as Naval history. She mentions living in dorms and taking aptitude tests, and she states that for Christmas they were allowed half an hour for lunch instead of twenty minutes. Sent to Norfolk (Virginia), she describes being put on an interservice information booth team that helped service personnel figure out train routes and schedules at the Norfolk and Western Station. Powers talks about renting subsistence quarters and occasionally going to dances on her time off. After V-E Day, the station became less busy, and she discusses being sent to the Naval Operating Base (Norfolk Naval Base) as an office worker. She mentions that she would write home and she recently put all her old letters together into a book. Powers states her fiancé, who was overseas with the Army, did not want to her to enlist and he almost broke their engagement over it, but they did marry six weeks after she was discharged. She mentions joining the American Legion Madelyn La Canne Post 539 and keeping in touch with other servicewomen.

Biographical Sketch:

Powers, a resident of Green Bay, Wisconsin, served in the WAVES during World War II. After a year of college and a summer session of library science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Powers enlisted in the Navy, where she earned the rank of Storekeeper Third Class. After her discharge, she married an Army veteran and they adopted four children.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2007.

Transcription by Cathy Cox, 2007.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

Terry: [This is an] interview with Anita Powers, who served with the United States Navy WAVES during World War II. The interview is being conducted at 948 Regent Lane, Green Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of January 25, 2007, and the interviewer is Terry MacDonald.

Anita, could you give us a little bit of background on your life circumstances prior to going into the military?

Powers: Ok. I was born in Brown County. In fact I've lived all my life in Green Bay, except for my stint in the WAVES. I was the oldest in a family of five. At the time that I enlisted I was working at the Brown County Library. I had one year of college, and then went to work as a page at the library. I had one short course, summer school, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in Library Science. That fall, after having been at the school in Madison, I came back to my job. A little bit satis—*dissatisfied*—with my pay scale, after talking to librarians from other parts of the state. A friend and I, who also worked at the library, on our lunch hour one day, on a whim, went over to the recruiting offices, the Navy recruiting offices. And talked to a Navy recruiter. And ended up deciding to enlist. I was 20—had to have my parents' consent because I wasn't 21. My parents thought it would be a good experience for me—I was a very, very shy, self-conscious, naïve, young woman.

Terry: Well, Anita (Anita laughs), when you were down in Madison, the University was used as a training center for a lot of—

Powers: Yes, yes.

Terry: Military people.

Powers: Yeah, there were—oh, gosh, what the heck were they called—there were guys there that were on training—oh, it was Navy, too—you ran into some, yeah. But I was only there six weeks, so—

Terry: So, your parents were kind of in favor of you going in.

Powers: Yes, but my girlfriend's parents wouldn't sign for her, they wouldn't agree to it. So she never did go and I did. At the time, because this was already 1944, after I did enlist, I had to wait—I think it was about two months before I was called. But in the meantime I had to go to Milwaukee for a physical. Got a voucher for the train—train ticket and a voucher for a meal. I'd never been on a train. My mother—went—with me. Which is how young and naïve I was. So. Went to Milwaukee, had my physical, and came back and waited to be called.

- Terry: In the meantime, did anybody else sign up that you knew?
- Powers: Not that I knew about at the time. Later on I learned that—oh, gosh, I think—I can think offhand of three of my high school classmates who enlisted in the Navy. In fact, one, Jan, belongs to our Legion Post.
- Terry: So when time came for you to go into the Navy, where did you go?
- Powers: Well, we—there was a troop train, that I boarded in Green Bay and it made stops along the way. And we went to New York, to Hunter College in the Bronx. And it was six weeks boot camp.
- Terry: Now, [were] all the women at that time pretty much [the] same age group as you?
- Powers: Some older—yeah, but—I was probably one of the youngest, when I stop to think about it. I was probably one of the youngest in my section, platoon, whatever we were. You know, so—
- Terry: What kind of—what did you do in boot camp?
- Powers: (laughs) Well, somewhere I've got my notebook, where I took notes on the classes. You basically learned—you learned Naval history. Well, you learned how to identify the officers. And what the different stripes were. And who you had to salute. You had um—you had PT every day. You marched everywhere. You marched to your classes, to mess. They marched you to church on Sunday. You could choose which services you wanted to go to, but you had to go. (chuckles) And you got marched there.
- Terry: Was Hunter College—was that a regular college?
- Powers: *Yes*, it was a woman's college.
- Terry: Oh, ok.
- Powers: Yes. So, our dorms were actually small apartments with eight girls to an apartment. Um, we had double-decker bunks. Four to a bedroom. And you had inspection on Saturday morning, you had to clean—uh, they came around, it was a white glove inspection. That kind of thing. Um, I'm just trying to remember some of the other things—well, you learned even a little bit of aircraft identification, um—ships, um—the different classes, um—oh, what else? That's what comes to my mind right off the top of my head. And then, when you're through boot camp, you had taken some aptitude tests, so you could choose if you wanted to go to a school. Well,

none of the schools that were available for us at that time were of any interest—I didn't want—I didn't like math, although I had an aptitude which surprised me. I didn't want to be a secretary. I'd been—you know I'd worked in the library, and that was my love. Well, they sent me down to Norfolk, Virginia, for something that was to do with libraries, and it turned out to be something totally unrelated. So, when I got—we were still in boot camp at Christmas—um, we actually got a half an hour for lunch that day instead of twenty minutes—and um—

Terry: So it was a pretty strict regimen.

Powers: Oh yeah, oh yeah. You got marched to the mess hall, you lined up by your seat, and you sat, and you all got up at the same time and you went through the line to get your food. Yeah. Um, I still correspond with a couple of the gals that I worked with, later. Some have died, but um—anyway.

Terry: So when you got down to Norfolk then—

Powers: Well, then I sat around the receiving station for a few days while they figured out what to do with me. So I mostly helped out around there, answered the phone, and, you know, did chores. And then, they were putting together a team to man information booths in the two railroad stations—information booth for military personnel. The Norfolk and Western Railroad came in by train. The CNO and the Pennsy [Pennsylvania Railroad] came in by ferry. The passengers were transported from Cape May—now there's a bridge—came by ferry into Norfolk. So there was an information booth at each of those locations. The railroad station and the ferry station. And we had, morning to early afternoon shift, and then afternoon to evening shift. So after the last train or ferry came in. Our team was made up of two WAVES, two SPARS—Coast Guard—two women Marines, two Sailors, with an Army Captain as our CO. And basically we were there to relieve the um, railroad people at the ticket office, because there were hordes of service personnel, in and out. And the people behind the ticket window didn't have time to give them detailed information about train schedules. Somebody wanting to go to Wheeling, West Virginia, or wherever. So we sat behind our counter with a railroad guide, which I learned how to use, and looking up train schedules, giving them the best route to get home, and what they—what the times of the schedules were so they could just walk up to the ticket office and say I need a ticket—here. And—

Terry: So you were dealing with mostly people who were coming back from overseas, or just everybody?

- Powers: Sometimes they were coming in on orders, and how do I get to Little Creek, Virginia, how do I get to Langley Field, how do I get—wherever. And that's of course when the war was still going on in—well, *all* fronts. After V-E Day, when things shifted more to the West Coast, the need for our services diminished, and eventually they closed down our information booths.
- Terry: So where did you stay at that time?
- Powers: Well, the neat—at first I was at the receiving station in the barracks. Well then, we got permission to live off-base on subsistence quarters. But our captain had to approve of the rooms, so I found a room in a—a little old lady's house. She had—she rented out one, two, or three bedrooms—three bedrooms? Yeah, I think so. Shared a bath. (laugh) And that was it. So you got subsistence quarters, and ate in a restaurant or whatever for a year. Really wasn't like being in the military a whole lot, except for while you were on duty. And then once—but it was interesting. You—you met such a wide variety of people from all over. And sometimes it was families coming in, trying to find somebody, or how to get somewhere, or they're supposed to be meeting somebody. And it would be very, very busy around the train—times of the train schedules. The Norfolk and Western station was at the foot of Main Street. And um, that was not a nice part of town, at that time. And if we worked the two to ten shift, the Stationmaster would stand and watch us get on the bus, to make sure we were okay. (laugh) We—you never walked down Main Street by yourself.
- Terry: Is that—wow! When you mean it wasn't a good part of town, was it heavy with the bars or something like that?
- Powers: Yeah. Yeah. Tattoo parlors, all this kind of—yeah. Yeah. That no—if you—well—especially for a very naïve person like I was at the time, I wouldn't have chanced it. (both laugh)
- Terry: So the people you were working with that time—would you stay close friends with some of those people?
- Powers: Yes. Yes. And um, a couple of the girls that were my roommates when I was first at um—and then later when I went back to the base, for the last few months after they closed the information booth. Yeah, there's one—well—Sylvia's died. Um—I always heard from them at Christmas time, and now—the last two years I haven't heard from the one of the Marines, so, I'm just—I'm going to try and track her down and see if—
- Terry: Did you kinda hang out together after you were off—

Powers: Yeah.

Terry: --in your free time?

Powers: Yeah. Mm hmm. And the gal that was my roommate, in the rooming house, didn't work with *me*. She worked in another office. Um, and we stayed friends and stayed in touch for a long time. But she died of breast cancer a number of years ago.

Terry: Was there a lot of things to do on your time off—or being with the military all over the place? (Powers is saying ummmmm throughout the last half of this question)

Powers: There were—well there was the USO. They had dances. Um—no, there wasn't a whole lot to do. And I was too shy to go off on my own. A couple times I went—one time at thanksgiving I had—what did we have—we had a five-day pass. And I went home with one of the Marines to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania—to visit her family. But, um—dances, yeah. Once in awhile you got invited aboard—you know they'd have a notice up on the bulletin board—a ship that was in port was having an open house, or having a dance, and you could go aboard ship, and—

Terry: So you mentioned earlier that when the war ended in Europe, it kind of phased out your position there.

Powers: Right.

Terry: So then you went to the—

Powers: I went to the NOB, Naval Operating Base, which now they just call Norfolk Naval Base. Stayed in the barracks, and um, I worked in an office then. Basically keeping records of troop movements, filling out *paperwork*. (both laugh) Or making group reservations, too. Um, for the railroads, for troop movements. So—

Terry: Were you given a rank and anything, like a Yeoman or—

Powers: Oh. I was a Storekeeper, actually. Had to take a test for that—you had a manual to study. I actually ended up as a Storekeeper Third Class. SK3. So—

Terry: So how long did you end up staying at the Norfolk Base then?

Powers: I'm thinking it was probably the last—couple, four months probably. Maybe not that long. I don't remember precisely when we—you know I saved—my mother saved all the letters I wrote home.

Terry: Did she.

Powers: Yes, she did. Which I didn't know she had done. And um, when they moved to Florida in 1964, she handed me this big shoebox full of my letters. Which I promptly put away because I had little kids, and life was hectic. And um, when I was—just before I was 75, I got 'em out and put 'em in order, and read them over again. (Terry laughs) And at 75, when you see yourself as a twenty-year old, it is a riot. And my daughter typed them up for me, and I took them to a printer, and had a book—little booklet—made for each of my kids, and um, there's one in the Brown County Library, Local History department. My little bit for posterity. So, if I were to look over those again it would probably refresh my memory a little bit more. But—

Terry: Did you get discharged, then, from Norfolk?

Powers: Norfolk, yes. Yes.

Terry: The war in the pacific was over then—

Powers: Yes.

Terry: Can you tell us what it was like at Norfolk when they heard the war was over?

Powers: Um. People in the streets, church bells ringing, um—just wild excitement. Yeah.

Terry: Just a big relief for everybody, huh?

Powers: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Terry: So then when they mustered you out, what did um—did they ship you back to Green Bay?

Powers: Yeah. Yeah. You got out on a point system. At that time. You got points for each month that you were in the service. And when you had enough points, then you were discharged. You were able to be discharged. So, if you had served overseas you got extra points, you know, but basically stateside—I think it was two points a month.

Terry: Was it similar to the regular Army and the Navy, the same point systems used?

- Powers: Yes. 'Cause my fiancé, then who became my husband, was in the Army. And he was overseas, so—actually he was gone three and a half—he was in the service three and a half years.
- Terry: When did you meet him?
- Powers: High school.
- Terry: And he was in—he was already in the Army when you decided to enlist?
- Powers: Yes. Yes. And, um—
- Terry: What did he think of you going in?
- Powers: Well, I found out later he almost broke our engagement. I got a—he wasn't getting mail on a regular basis at that time, he was in England at a replacement depot waiting to be assigned to something else. And when I got a letter from him telling me not to do this, I was already through boot camp and down in Norfolk. It was too late. (both laugh) Yup. So, um, he just thought that was no place for a nice girl like me. I used to get really, really, *really* upset with people who cast aspersions on women in the military. I said, "What's the difference if a young woman goes away to college, or if, like some of my friends did, they went to Washington, D.C. and worked in offices? You're away from your family, you're away from home, you're on your own. What difference does it make where you are? You are who you are, you know. Being in the military isn't any different than—." Well, that was my take on it anyway, and I used to get really upset.
- Terry: So you were home before he got back then?
- Powers: Actually, no, he got out March 22nd, I got out May 15th, and we got married June 29th.
- Terry: Well, good for you.
- Powers: I bought my wedding dress in Norfolk.
- Terry: Did he happen to come home—did he see you when you were down there?
- Powers: That was the biggest disappointment of my *life*. I got a call from him, after he got home. And I hadn't seen him for two years. And he was going to come and see me. And I had told him the train schedules, I had reserved the hotel room for him, etc. etc. And a couple days later he called me again. His father and his step-mother had talked him out of

coming. Because it would be foolish to spend the money when I was coming home soon. Ah, that was the biggest disappointment of my life up to that point! I said it wasn't just that I hadn't seen him for two years, but I wanted *him* to see what *I* had been doing, and I wanted to show him off to my friends, 'cause he was a good lookin' hunk. (both laugh) You know—but that's one of life's disappointments.

Terry: So your time for discharge came about, um—how did you feel about it was time to get out?

Powers: Oh, yeah. It was—I was ready to go home. You know. I never regretted—it was a good experience. I made friends. And um, somebody asked me one time why I had enlisted. I said, "It was pure patriotism." It was *your* bit for the war effort. It was something I could do, so that was, pure and simple, that was it. At that time—I don't even know when they did the GI Bill—and I do regret now that I didn't take advantage of the GI Bill. But all I was thinking about was getting married, settling down, oh.

Terry: And that was pretty much what everybody—

Powers: --everybody wanted to do. Right.

Terry: You got married in June, right after—

Powers: 1946.

Terry: --after you got out of—

Powers: Six, six weeks after.

Terry: Did you keep working?

Powers: Nope.

Terry: You didn't go back to work, then.

Powers: No, at that time—that wasn't what everybody *did*, you stayed *home*. (laughs) And then, um, eventually we adopt—over a period of time, we adopted four children when we found out that we couldn't have children. And we were a foster home, for about 19 years, and—so—

Terry: When you got out then, were there any veterans organizations that—

Powers: I got recruited to join the American Legion. (laughs)

Terry: Now was that the regular—

Powers: We had an all—you know, it was the all-women's post, the Madelyn La Canne Post 539. And um, one very, very diligent, uh, ex-WAC, was really good at recruiting new members. So—I think my second child was about a year old, so that would have been—wait a minute—yeah—so I was already out—well, I'm a fifty-year member, so—I was already out ten years, probably, before—

Terry: What's it like with all women—are you pretty active with it?

Powers: Not so much anymore. I have other things—well, and I'm slowing down a little bit. (both laugh) A wee bit.

Terry: But when you first joined, it was pretty—you were pretty active.

Powers: Yeah, I was an officer—I was Commander—I was Membership, for awhile. And the association is important to me, the people are important to me. But it's not my *life*. For some, I think it's much more important and their activities revolve a lot around the Post, or the Legion.

Terry: Did you ever meet up with the people you served with?

Powers: Yeah. I saw Sylvia—she was the other WAVE. After she lived in Florida, one time—well, it's when my parents were still living in Florida—and uh, it wasn't too far out of our way, driving, to stop and see her. And um—but that was the only time I saw her, and about three years ago, I got a note from her son, a couple months after Christmas, telling me that she had died the previous August. And then Marie, the Marine in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, I visited—trying to think when it was—we visited at least once. And then the gal that was my roommate lived in Indiana. And one of the times that my husband and I went to a—my sister was living in Indiana at the time and we were visiting her—and it was about an hour's drive away to see Rina(sp?). And I called her and we went down to visit. At that time, she was undergoing treatment for breast cancer. And wasn't sure what her outcome was going to be. And later I heard from one of her children that she had died. And, I found—well I had—I'm trying to go through pictures—what a chore—and I thought, maybe her kids would like the snapshots that I have of Rina and me. And um—but how to find them. So I went to the library, the local history department. And uh, the librarian showed me how to access the social security records. And uh, I found *her* obituary—or her death listed. And then it listed—'cause I had no longer saved her address, and I didn't know if her husband was still around—well then later I found *his* death notice, too, which listed the children, and their places where they lived. So the two boys were easy to find—they didn't change their names. So I found one of them and called. And asked if they would like the pictures of their

mom. 'Cause I figured by this time, *they've* got kids. And so I sent those off to them.

Terry: That was nice. So looking back on serving in the military, what did it mean to you overall? And I know you briefly kind of mentioned about—

Powers: What did it mean to me? Well, basically, I guess it was just that, that I—I was participating in something that was um—important to my country. For preservation. So—

Terry: Are you glad you did it?

Powers: Oh, yeah. I never regretted it. I learned a lot. (laughs) I sure did. But um—I still was a shy, self-conscious person even after a year and a half! (Terry chuckles) But, you got used to um—you know, the give and take, and the joking back and forth with, um—not just the people you work with, but the people that would come up to the information booth. Sometimes, they just wanted to talk a little while, too. So—and once in awhile you'd end up with a date. (chuckles)

Terry: Well, Anita, is there anything else you'd like to bring up in the interview?

Powers: Only that I never thought about what I did as being anything not worthy. It was just what you did for your country at that time. It wasn't anything unusual, dangerous, exciting—it was just your little bit for the war effort, really.

[End of Interview]