

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Betty Prieve, U. S. Navy,
World War II

2004

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Prieve, Betty M. Whitney, (b. 1923), Oral History Interview, 2004.

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Betty Whitney Prieve, a Merrill, Wis. native, discusses her service as an airplane mechanic in the Navy during World War II. Prieve says she and her brother, Ed Whitney, were both in the Navy Air Corps and it was Ed's service in the Navy that was her inspiration for choosing to enlist. Prieve mentions working at the Allis-Chalmers defense plant in Milwaukee (Wisconsin) and an incident where there was steam engine explosion inside the plant. Prieve relates that she joined the Navy when she was "just shy" of age twenty-one, the mandatory enlistment age, and she needed her father's signature and those of three references because she was a woman. Prieve speaks of her swearing in at Wausau (Wisconsin) and going to Hunter's College (New York) for six weeks of basic training. She discusses her training at the Navy mechanics school in Norman (Oklahoma) and meeting up with her brother, Ed, while at the school. Her mother became pregnant while Prieve was in service and she speaks of family resentment that she didn't come home to help her mother. Prieve discusses her transfer to Lakehurst (New Jersey), where she worked on airships with the rank of Aviation Machinists Mate Third Class; the danger of explosion in work with hydrogen airships; and life as one of a few women working alongside men. She mentions that she would go out on patrols for three days and three nights at a time. Prieve discusses her feelings upon learning of her beloved brother's death and returning home for his funeral. Prieve relates her later assignment to Ford Island (Pearl Harbor) where she was appointed to first division and describes "flushing" out the cockpits in which pilots had been shot. Prieve describes V-J Day reactions in Pearl Harbor and waiting until 1946 to go home because she didn't have enough points to leave. Prieve speaks emotionally of Christmas caroling aboard a hospital ship and having the injured patients sing back to them, "A People Free." She tells several stories of fellow WAVE mechanics; one who was killed when an engine tipped and crushed her and another that had a silver plate put in her head after a propeller took the top of her head off. She speaks of her homecoming and subsequent marriage in 1946. She had four children in five years, divorced her husband, and moved to Milwaukee where she became very active in the American Legion.

Biographical Sketch:

Betty M. Whitney Prieve (b. 1923), a Merrill, Wis. native, served as an airplane mechanic in the Navy during World War II. Since 1969, Prieve has been a member of the American Legion serving as Milwaukee County Commander. Prieve also belongs to WAVES International Women of the Navy, as well as Navy Club, Allied Vets, and was director of the Honor Society of Women Legionnaires. Betty Prieve now resides in Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed & Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2004.
Transcript edited by Brooke E. Perry Hoesli, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 2008.

Interview Transcript:

John: This is John Driscoll, and I am a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. And today is March 11, 2004. This is an oral history interview with Betty Prieve, of Madison, and Betty is a World War II veteran of the United States Navy Air Force. So, thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview and for coming in. And why don't we start with where and when were you born?

Betty: Merrill, Wisconsin.

John: Okay, when?

Betty: September 9, 1923.

John: Good. Something about your early life? Family?

Betty: My early life, my parents moved to a farm next to my grandfather's. Mother always helped grandfather because I never had a grandmother.

John: This is fine.

Betty: I always helped. Ed, my brother, and I both helped out our parents with the milking and the outdoor chores, like haying and that. With horse and wagon. I had four sisters and I also had a younger brother. He was born when I was in Navy school down in Norman, Oklahoma. He was seven years younger than I, but he was in the Vietnam War.

John: I see.

Betty: And my brother was in the service, in the Navy Air Corps with me. My brother and I, we graduated and were confirmed at St. Johns and graduated from high school together.

John: What high school?

Betty: Merrill High School.

John: Okay. And you graduated together?

Betty: Sure.

John: Okay.

Betty: She had double trouble. She really did.

John: A question I ask, and it's important. Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Betty: Yes, I do.

John: What were you doing?

Betty: I was, it was my senior year in high school and they took us to the auditorium, the whole school. And then they announced it. They played the radio. No television. And that is when they told us. And a lot of the boys that I was in high school with had gone into the service.

John: What got you to go in?

Betty: I went into, I took a class at a vocational school, and then I went to Milwaukee. And I was employed in Allis-Chalmers, which was a defense plant. And the pier next to us was where they did, I did, making blades for the steam ships propellers. And one of these steam engines blew up in the plant.

John: Oh, wow.

Betty: And so I joined, and when I joined the service, it wasn't like the girls go in now. You had to be twenty-one, and I was just shy of it. So therefore I had to have my father's signature. Not my mother's. And three people from Merrill that knew me personally.

John: Okay. And you went in at Milwaukee?

Betty: Yes. Well, I was sworn in at Wausau. Well, Merrill and Wausau, and they had a Navy recruiting station, and I went in. When I was called, I went in, a week later or something, and then we were sent to Hunter's College, in the Bronx.

John: Oh, sure.

Betty: That was basic. We learned a lot.

John: Why the Navy?

Betty: Because my brother was in the Navy.

John: Okay.

Betty: We always did things together. But the last time my mother came to see me, here to Wisconsin, we were sitting on the picnic bench which I had outside my home, and she asked me about certain things, what I did. With my brother and I when we got into trouble. And I said, "Mother, I didn't tell you then, and I said, I'm not going to tell you now." And she said, "That's why you both got it." We knew that. And then when I was in basic, the course they put you through at that time, they put you through a lot of tests for what you were suited for. And they wanted me to be in the radio tower control. And I didn't want that, because I knew my brother was at Norman, Oklahoma, which is the Navy School. And that is where I was sent.

John: Okay. How long were you at Hunter College?

Betty: Six weeks.

John: Okay. And that was, basic consisted of what? Testing but what else?

Betty: Well, you'd drill, and you'd march here from there, you know. And, well, recreation. We learned what we can do and what you couldn't do in the Navy. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed my whole Navy experience.

John: When did you go in? When was that?

Betty: '42. I was sworn in in '42 and I went in in January of '44. And at the Navy school, of course, my brother and I had gotten together quite often and, you know, the Navy Regs way back then, with women, were very tight. And I think they are kind of loose today. They should check more into the background of the women that go in. The women in the Navy rank higher than those who went into the Army. They have to know more. But when I was at school in Norman, Oklahoma, we got up at 4:00 o'clock. We marched to chow. We marched back. We marched to school and then when we were at school, we never were allowed to sit down. We stood.

John: Oh, yea?

Betty: Well, see, I was a mechanic, right? Mechanics. We went to school right with the boys and we stood at these, almost. And you stood there for an hour and a half before you got a fifteen minute break, and then you went right back to it again.

John: I've never heard of that. That's great. Well, not great.

Betty: And then after that you went to calisthenics, whatever. Then you went to chow. Then the afternoon, you went to [unintelligible], and then you were rushed off to

study. And we were some sixty girls, to the first deck. I was on the second deck. And I knew a lot of girls. I enjoyed them.

John: This was mechanics school?

Betty: Yes.

John: How long did this last?

Betty: I don't know.

John: It's not important.

Betty: About three or four months, I think.

John: Okay. Then where?

Betty: Well, I want to tell you.

John: Don't let me get you off track.

Betty: My brother and I used to meet at the canteen. There was the mechanics school, the sheet metal school, and then there was ordnance, which my brother was in. And we were coming home from the canteen, and we were laughing and joking, and we were holding hands walking along, and the Shore Patrol stopped us. And we told them we were brother and sister, and we were allowed. And he wouldn't believe us. He says, "I'll see you at Captain's Mast at five o'clock in the morning." Well, at five o'clock in the morning, I got a call to the barracks. "You don't have to go." I says, "The dumb fool. Why didn't he?"

John: That's great.

Betty: And, also, when I was there, it was March, and then I called my brother and said I wanted to speak to him, because I had just gotten a letter from my mother. I knew she was pregnant. After I was born, otherwise I wouldn't know it. And to the rest of the family I was the sister that wouldn't come home and help. But I got a letter from mother. I knew she was pregnant. In March, I got the letter from her, and she says, "Would you please tell Junior." Because we didn't call him Clarence, that was my dad's name. And so I went down there, and we were talking, and I told him, and he said, "Betty, stop clowning around." And I said, "Here, read it for yourself." And he sat there, and he was dumbfounded.

John: I can imagine.

Betty: But we didn't have to go back. And, also, I delivered all my books that I had, scrapbooks that I had, to the Museum, and you will find in there we wore dungarees. We wore, what do you call those things? Just like a jump suit. Only they were all buttons. And on there it is that I am the last one to wear it. I guess I was in the last bunch. Well, each girl had turned it back three cycles to me. The only restriction was that, when you got this, you couldn't sew a button on, you had to use safety wire. Look, if you don't understand, because everything they do on an engine, you have to safety wire.

John: Oh, okay.

Betty: And they took a picture of me, with my backside. And then I went to Lakehurst, New Jersey, which is lighter than air.

John: Lakehurst.

Betty: New Jersey.

John: That's where the...

Betty: Hindenburg blew up. And when I came on base, an airship had just touched the roof of the hanger, and it went "pff."

John: Oh, wow.

Betty: They had handlers when they come in. They let down ropes, and they have to tie them to the things, whatever it was. And that's when it happened. It was something to see. I'll never forget it.

John: Yea. What, they didn't still use hydrogen, did they?

Betty: They did then.

John: Did they?

Betty: It hit, and you're gone. And the only thing they did for us on the airship, I was on the XLM- I forget the number, the airship faced like this, and the john is down here, and when you go up, you go up for three days and three nights.

John: Oh, wow.

Betty: And you are the only girl in the whole crowd. Well, that's all right. Boys were

fine. They treated you like brothers. They did. And they had bunks, and they had a galley in there. And this john, the only thing they did, there was a paper sack in the bottom of the john, but there was curtain around it. Pretty delicate, you know.

John: Okay.

Betty: Absolutely. When you flushed it, it went [unintelligible].

John: Well, you were part of the crew, then?

Betty: Yes.

John: I see. What did you do?

Betty: Airplane mechanic.

John: Oh, you were the mechanic on the crew. I see.

Betty: One of them. Each engine had one. I had the left engine. I was trying to think of the Navy word for it.

John: Port and starboard?

Betty: Starboard. And my girlfriend was on the port. Well, we were only the two girls in the first division.

John: How big a crew did an airship have?

Betty: About sixteen.

John: Oh, I had no idea it was that big. Oh, wow.

Betty: These that you see now, they are littler.

John: What were you doing? Patrol?

Betty: Yes. On the East Coast. You know, the waters are restricted to ten miles out. And there was a German submarine one time when I was up. We didn't go after that boat but we were there. And so we got to see a German sub. And I thought, huh! And the navigator said, "Don't worry about it. If they shoot us this high, we'll just go up out of range." And they did.

John: Wow. That is interesting. And you would go out for three days?

Betty: Three days and three nights. You wore the same clothes. And the first thing I did was head for the barracks.

John: That is amazing. I've never heard that.

Betty: And, well, while I was at Lakehurst, a sailor that I knew came and he said they had just got a jet engine in, and would I like to see it.

John: I see.

Betty: And, of course, it was barricaded, but we climbed up. It was something to see. You know.

John: Airplane engine?

Betty: Yea, a jet engine. A jet airplane engine. It was the first one that came out.

John: Wow. That must have been interesting.

Betty: Yes, it was interesting. And I have to tell you one more.

John: Sure.

Betty: We had a chief. We called him Old Sulky. He had hash marks all the way up his arms, all right? And he didn't quite like women until we said we could do it. You know, we carried a tool box like that for each side. And he says, "Whitney, I want you to take these orders across the mat." You know across the mat. There was Brazilian people that they were teaching to fly and navigate one of these. And to pick up something over there. Don't ask me what. And I said, "But, sir, I don't know how to drive." And I didn't. Because girls didn't drive way back then.

John: Okay. All right.

Betty: And he says, "Whitney, I gave you an order." And I said, "Aye, aye, sir." And one of the boys, we were back in this big hangar. And he met me on this one. I got it started and then he jumped in beside me in the Jeep. And by the time I got back, I knew how to drive. I knew how to drive back and forth.

John: That's great.

Betty: And the other experience was, we got our, when you got your rate, which I had got, then you had to call roll call and exercise. Now, there is about a hundred and

some boys out there, no older than me. And I only weighed a hundred and ten pounds, soaking wet. I did. And here, you had a flight jacket and flight pants and flight boots on, you know. So, they danced around for a while, and they were thinking, "It's a woman. Just a girl." And I yelled at them a couple times. And then, I talked to the [unintelligible] and he said, "Betty, what are you going to do about this?" I said, "I'm cancelling all leave." He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "You bet I am." And the next week, believe me.

John: Yep. What was your rate?

Betty: AMM Third Class.

John: Aviation Machinists Mate Third Class. The level of a sergeant in the Army or the Marine Corps. Yea. Well, you either get their attention or don't, and you certainly did.

Betty: Well, they knew I wasn't going to take any chance.

John: That's right. How long were you at Lakehurst, as air crew?

Betty: Till '44. The spring of '44. Because I didn't tell you, but I had gotten a letter from my brother, he was flying missions bombing Japan, and flew over Luzon, and I thought, oh, we always wrote every week. And there wasn't. And then I got my overseas orders. And then I got, I went and picked those up. And here comes the chaplain, because I always did the church thing and sang in the choir. And I said, "Nope, I'm not going to do it today." And he said, "Betty, will you be serious for one minute?" And then he told me my brother was dead.

John: Oh, wow. Oh, man.

Betty: And then I ran into, you always have a WAVE officer. Her name was Mable, because we said she would be ever able. You know. And one other thing, we had cattle trucks, and they took us from the hanger back to the barracks. And the girls that were yeomen and boosters didn't want to ride with us because we had dirty jeans. Well, there was oil. But, I also played baseball. I pitched, and we never lost a game. We didn't. They never got a hit, against us.

John: That's pitching. That is.

Betty: And I also got a medal, because I bowled, and when you bowl, one person had to be back there setting the pins.

John: Setting the pins. I did that.

Betty: Yes, but I got a medal. Champion.

John: Then what was involved in going overseas?

Betty: You had to volunteer. Women had to volunteer. Remember, I volunteered to go in in the first place, and I volunteered to go over. And I went home first. They had a memorial for my brother. And also for Richard, he was another classmate in high school. The Christmas before, we were together and he was home and I was home for Christmas. And when he left to go overseas, he hugged my mother who cried but she didn't go down to the train. She said, "Betty, you go." I had four sisters. And we went down to the train, and he hugged everybody and said goodbye to them, and he just stood there and looked at me, didn't want to say anything, but this letter I got from him, that day, I didn't know it then, but every time they went on a mission, they had to write somebody, and I was that person. When I think about it now, I had all of his letters in a box. And my husband at that time destroyed them.

John: Oh.

Betty: I also [unintelligible] go back to Hawaii. We shipped out on the *Madisonian*, which was a luxury liner, but then it was turned into a troop ship. And the women were in the middle section. I know, we saw the airships, or blimps, that we used to go on, and they went out as far as ten miles out, and then they returned to shore. And all the girls went over the edge. And here is old Betty, she didn't. And then we were out three days, I think, and we had seen a ship south of us. We saw it coming. It was a freighter, but we didn't know what it was. And they alerted us to that. But that night, at chow, the captain said, "Land ho, we will dock in the morning." Here, I was sick all night. And a corpsman came and sat beside me. I was green. And I know when we were debarking, they asked me, "Do you want to be carried off?" And I said, "No. I am going to walk." And I'll carry my bags too!

John: That's great.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

Betty: But at Lakehurst, we wore dungarees. It was a lot of hard work. But you make your own fun with your own people, you know.

John: Yep. You landed at Pearl Harbor?

Betty: We landed at Pearl Harbor and then I went to Ford Island, which is Pearl Harbor, in the middle of Pearl Harbor. And I was appointed to first division, I was in first

division in [unintelligible]. I don't know what else to tell you.

John: What were you doing? Were you in airships, also, at Pearl?

Betty: No. They didn't have airships there. You had to plane. We were eight hours on and off. And in the papers that I gave you, the flat tops were aircraft carriers. They loaded, and in forty-eight hours they picked up all their supplies and then they picked up, you had to go through all those planes. And I always worked on instruments. And there was times we flushed the instruments.

John: I don't understand that.

Betty: Sure, you do. There were some pilots in planes the pilots were shot, and I meant body parts.

John: Oh, I see.

Betty: And so we flushed them.

John: Okay. I see. Yea. Wow, what an experience.

Betty: Then, after the war, we went back to regular duty, thank goodness.

John: But you weren't flying?

Betty: No. I didn't.

John: But you must have missed it. Did you miss it, not flying in the airships?

Betty: Well, the nice thing about it was that I didn't have to fly and still kept my flight pay.

John: Oh, okay. All right. Yea. And you got to take a shower every day. What was the reaction there at V-J Day?

Betty: See, the Navy thought, that is in the scrap book, too. That was in August, sometime. The Navy ships bombarded with flares and stuff all around Pearl Harbor, and the girls all went out and celebrated. I know one girl that said, "Betty, aren't you coming?" Barbara Newly. We were in basic, we were in school, Navy schools together. We were stationed at Lakehurst together. And I said, "Barbara, no. I can't do it. My brother..." She said, "I understand."

John: Sure.

- Betty: Also, when the *Missouri* came back and most of the ships at Pearl Harbor. See, Ford Island is like this in the middle of Pearl Harbor. And they asked us if we wanted to go aboard it. And I said, sure. I went. I love history.
- John: Sure.
- Betty: And I wanted to see the other side of the question, or the controversy, or how that works. So I went aboard, and we were shown through the ship. And I was standing up about where they signed it, down here, and the photographer who was on the ship, he said, "Would you like an unpublished photo?" And I said, "I would love it." And that is in there.
- John: Oh, wow. Tremendous. I was on it, I belong to the History Round Table. In fact, we have a meeting tonight. And a bunch of us summer before last went to Norfolk and toured the, no, not the *Missouri*, the *Wisconsin*. Sister ships. The *Missouri*. Wow. That must have been something. And that just a short time after the surrender, wasn't it?
- Betty: Yea. Where the *Arizona* is buried. The *Oklahoma* was laying on its side in front of it. I can't tell you where the other ships were because when they took us up, one said, personal. There were a lot of dead bodies there, too. And if the wind came that way, from where they were buried, you could smell it. So, I know where the *Arizona* was, I know where the *Oklahoma* was. And they don't give enough credit to the *Oklahoma*. But that is the way I feel. And I also got a chance to go to a village. There were so many Jeeps allotted. And if there was liberty, I always saw that Barbara and I had a Jeep.
- John: Okay.
- Betty: And we went up to the, what is the Army base?
- John: Fort Schofield. Schofield Barracks.
- Betty: You could see where the bullets were. And that wasn't cleaned up. And the barbed wire was all there.
- John: I was there, and I saw the holes in the concrete walls. How long were you at Pearl?
- Betty: Till '46.
- John: Oh. Now, didn't most of the service people get out right after the war? Did they

keep you over, or?

Betty: Well, I didn't have enough points.

John: Okay.

Betty: And then, I have to tell you. I really don't have to tell you.

John: Hey, this is your party. Whatever you want.

Betty: It was Christmas Eve. And, you know, I always went to church and sang in the choir. And we had gone around. I went home after service, because I knew I was going home in a couple weeks. So I went back to the barracks, and then a chaplain came up and he said, "Betty." I knew they were going to take a launch out and cruise around the harbor. And he came up and said, "We really need you." But I am not going. I am not, now. Because we went to some freighters and some tankers. And we sang.

John: What a lovely thing.

Betty: And we came to the hospital ship. And it had only docked that afternoon, and we start singing Christmas carols. And the boys came out in hospital gowns, helping each other, on crutches, in wheel chairs. And they kept us singing and singing. And then when we said, we really have to go. And they said they wanted to sing a song back to us. And they sang A People Free.

John: Wow. What a beautiful, beautiful story.

Betty: And then we went around, you know, I don't know if you know it, but Pearl Harbor is like a clover leaf. And then on this side, we were invited to sing, I was trying to think of the flat top. And the off deck had a bomb that hit there and we were late, too late for everything. And they said, "Come back and eat Christmas dinner."

John: How nice. Yea. Wow. That is a beautiful story.

Betty: But I can't hear that song.

John: Oh, I can imagine. Sure. Wow. What a beautiful story.

Betty: Well, you know, they all, some of the boys from that ship went to Ewa. You know what that is. Ewa Hospital, it's that beautiful hospital up on the side of the mountain. The Punch Bowl is right next to it, which is a Naval cemetery. But the

boys went either to there, or they went to the Royal Hawaiian Resort thing. They had put a fence around it. That was for R & R before they came back. And I think, too, if the boys were given...they were given a couple weeks in R & R, they wouldn't be having the trouble they are having now.

John: Yea, that is true.

Betty: I have had Desert Storm boys and I have met really some from Vietnam. He was shot in the stomach. I know, they would talk to me, because I am like a sister. And I won't repeat their stories. They're too bad. Then I came home in January.

John: January of '46?

Betty: Yes. And I got married in '46. I forgot to tell you but in '41, I met my husband and he was in the Army. And he served at Guam, Bougainville, New Guinea, and Canton Island. And then he came back to Aida, on the east side of the island. They were getting ready for the invasion of Japan. And when they were on the high seas, then the war ended. And so he went for the occupation of Japan. So, what am I supposed to say?

John: Yea.

Betty: First day I am married, fine. I had four children in five years, and you can't just go out. I was too darned proud to go on welfare. And so I stayed with him and he was with somebody else. He rolled the car. Which I got fixed. And he ended up in the hospital. His buddy was the sheriff. And he was the one who told me, called and told me. And I said, "Let him stay there." See, we lived on a farm. And he didn't come home. And so I did chores with the kids, and I fed them. It was my son's sixth birthday, my youngest son. And then I went, I took the kids to school. We belonged to a country Lutheran church, and they had a parochial school. And after I bought school supplies, then which I never did school supplies, and I just took the kids to a show. And, of course, they couldn't get over that. So, after a few phone calls, his brothers came up and got me. I went in and signed for him, because I was the only one that could do it. And they said, "Aren't you going to go up and see him?" And I said, "No." And I said, "I'll go home if I have to walk the eleven miles to get home."

John: Okay.

Betty: But that is the way it went, after we got divorced, I still [unintelligible].

John: Yea.

- Betty: I went to Milwaukee and took a state job. And around '69. And then I joined the American Legion. And you can look through my stuff. I gave her all my Legion stuff.
- John: Okay. I was going to ask about, you did join the American Legion.
- Betty: Oh, sure.
- John: How about any other vets organizations?
- Betty: I belong to the Waves International Women of the Navy and also [unintelligible] and also the American Legion. And I also belong to the Navy Club, Allied Vets. I was on the veterans board at the War Memorial.
- John: Okay.
- Betty: That was very interesting. And I also was director, I was Milwaukee County Commander and I also was director of Honor Society of Women Legionnaires. It gives, it is a thing where you are voted by your peers to be able to join. The Boxcar Guides, they didn't have to prove themselves. Well, it isn't.
- John: 20 and 4. That is half of 40 and 8. Looking back, this took so many years out of your life, but it was also an important thing. But, how do you feel about having served?
- Betty: I am very proud to. My stand for God and country.
- John: I write, and a good friend of mine just passed away, Stephen Ambrose. And he was giving a talk to a bunch of World War II vets once. And he was a very flamboyant speaker, but he really meant this when he said, "You know, you people were giants!" And everybody just kind of looked at him funny. And he said, "You know, you went out and you saved our world." And when you think about it, you did. Every one of you doing your thing. It made this a better world. That is a tremendous story. That is a remarkable story.
- Betty: I have gone to Women International. They have a convention every two years. Where they list the different veterans. I am thinking, you know, veterans benefits. Oh, stuff. And all these, it was up to you whether you took the trip. I went to Washington, D. C. That was the second time. The first time, Barbara and I, Barbara's mother was stationed down in Washington. She was training pigeons. So, we took the train out of Philadelphia and went down to Washington, and of course it was one party after another, and her mother called and said. "Where were you girls?" Then Barbara said, "She is coming up to see us." And I said, "I am

going to be gone.” It was a fun part.

John: You stayed in touch with this Barbara. Any other friends that you’ve stayed in touch with?

Betty: A lot of them are gone. I should have told you when I was at Pearl Harbor, they said, “Well, you girls never got hurt.” A lie. A bald faced lie. A girl that I lived with. I lived on this side and she lived on this side, you know. War stories. She was also a mechanic in the fourth division. And an engine tipped and crushed her.

John: Oh, wow.

Betty: It was bad, but the worst part, her parents didn’t want her body brought home. So she is buried at the Punch Bowl. And I had another girl that I kept track of, Helen. She lived down in Texas. And, as you know, at that time, they didn’t push a button. They had to crank them. And it took the top of her head off. And she had this silver plate. And whatever else the United States, they said, ‘You girls never got letters like we did. Dear John.’ Yes, we did. My one, she just went ballistic. And while I was in Milwaukee, some of these Viet Nam vets, I used to help them with their stuff. They said, “Well, we get treated so shitty.” They did. And, I said, “Why don’t you form your own documents, form your own pool, and just be a doctor. I can tell you who will help you and who can help you do it. I know from experience that you got it right.”

John: Okay.

Betty: I know they used to ask some of the girls to come to their Christmas party. And they said, “Oh, here comes mom!” And I just felt belonging.

John: Sure. That is remarkable.

Betty: So, what else do you want?

John: Ah, this is a remarkable story. That story about singing at Christmas at Pearl Harbor, that is beautiful. Anything else you want to add in there? It’s your story, you know it better than I do.

Betty: In October, ‘44, when the WAVEs came into being, they always had a birthday party. And I met this one guy, I knew him in my home town. They sent out pink invitations. And he, of course, he got one. They had a crew, a pilot and such that could fly planes, whatever. He was, I knew his sister. And I didn’t really want to offend the other guy. And I guess he was so embarrassed that he was the only one there, he was the only one that got the invitation. There are some funny stories.

John: Yea, you remember the funny stories.

Betty: And the way you were always asked. She was so quite. Her name was Betty. And his name was Kraft. He was a photographer. They had a home on the mountainside. At Christmas time, the mountainside was just red at sunset. They also had a beach house on that side where we were always asked to. And they had two houses. There was a sailing ship, boat. And we could go out and swim. And one day, it tipped. Out by Revan Island. Do you know where Revan Island is?

John: No.

Betty: It's south of Oahu, down by the southern part. Then Maui comes, over there. But this one guy was Barbara's cousin. He hit coral rock.

John: Oh, wow.

Betty: And I used to be able to swim. And we dove and dove until we found him, and we had to dive some more to find the crank so we could get back to shore. And then we got into the deep, and there was a Navy station over on that side of the island. And we didn't have nothing, just dog tags. Not dog tags. And we got his head bound up.

John: Was he okay after that?

Betty: Yes.

John: Oh, okay. Wow, what a story.

Betty: But his cousin I didn't go out with a couple times. And he was, he proved to be a minister. [Unintelligible]. I got proposed to.

John: But you didn't say yes?

Betty: No, I couldn't. I had to go home to see my mother.

John: Sure.

Betty: Because she said, she asked me when I got home, she said, "You know Harry should have been you." Harry was their adopted son, child. And I said, "Mother, I want my own children." But she had a rough time. Her and my dad were divorced while I was in service. That was another thing.

John: Yes, I can imagine. Being so far away.

Betty: See, I was one of the few that kept in touch with my dad. And my mother. And mother said, "Well, I'll sleep in your sister's room." You know. She was real against it. I could see her point, I suppose. I said, "Don't worry. He won't be here when you come.?"

John: Okay. That is a remarkable story. I need to get a...

Betty: I was the Milwaukee County Commander.

John: Of the...

Betty: [Unintelligible]

John: Okay.

Betty: Why not?

John: I am going to shut this off.

Betty: [Unintelligible]

John: Okay, I'll leave that on, then.

Betty: I've got my dog tags here.

John: Oh.

Betty: I hope I didn't lose them.

John: Oh, yes. Okay. Oh, yea. Tremendous.

Betty: This is my brother and myself.

John: Oh, okay. Oh, wow.

Betty: And when we were shipping out, they offered me a higher rate. I didn't have to take anything. Just these. Now, this is my...

John: Oh, yes. The DD-214. You know, I should have mine shrunk down and coated like this. That is a great idea.

Betty: They gave me these when I enlisted.

[End of Interview.]