

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ELLA ANN WIBERG
Yeoman, US Navy WAVES, World War II.

1995

OH
166

Wiberg, Ella Ann Rabe, (1921-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Wiberg, a Hallock (Minnesota) native, discusses her World War II Navy service in the WAVES and subsequent employment, education and involvement in veterans organizations. After mentioning her reaction to Pearl Harbor, Wiberg speaks of joining the WAVES in 1944 where she touches upon basic training at Hunter College (New York), a visit to New York City, yeoman school in Stillwater (Oklahoma) and assignment to the Naval Training Center in Farragut (Idaho). She mentions her reasons for joining the WAVES, her family's and town's reactions, and talks of other women's reasons for joining. Wiberg discusses public acceptance of women in the service, the reactions by some service men and mentions being the first woman assigned to the service school at Farragut. Discussing her German heritage, she recalls being labeled a "bull-headed German," and her father's views. She speaks of her elation at war's end, her husband's 99th Infantry reunion, and lingering animosity toward the Japanese. Wiberg discusses job hunting in the post-war years, getting a civil service job, using the GI Bill, and how she learned of it. Wiberg mentions setting up a Homemaker program for Catholic social services in Waukesha (Wisconsin) and before she concludes the interview describes her activities and involvement with the American Legion and the National WAVES veteran's organization.

Biographical Sketch

Wiberg (née Rabe) (1921-) born and raised in Hallock (Minnesota), joined the WAVES in 1944 and served in Farragut (Idaho). After discharge, she went to work with the Kittson County Welfare Board and other civil service jobs while completing her bachelor's and master's degrees.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by WDVA Staff, 1995.

Transcription edited by Jackie Mulhurn and John McNally, 2006.

Mark: Today's date is July 6, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview with Mrs. Ella Wiberg, presently of Brookfield, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Second World War, the first WAVE we've interviewed for this project. Good morning. How are you doing?

Wiberg: Good morning, Mark. How are you?

Mark: Thanks for agreeing to do the interview.

Wiberg: You're quite welcome. I'm pleased to do it.

Mark: Let's start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Wiberg: Okay. First of all, I was born and raised in a little country farm near Hallock, Minnesota.

Mark: I'm not sure where that is.

Wiberg: That's up in the northwestern corner of Minnesota on Highway 75 leading into Canada. It's the highway that takes you up to Winnipeg.

Mark: Way up there.

Wiberg: Yeah, way up there. I lived on a farm about one mile from the Red River. The Red River of the north which goes north. Born and raised at home on October 5, 1921. I'll tell you a little bit about my family. There were ten children in my family, six girls and four boys. My father came from Germany.

Mark: He was born there.

Wiberg: My father was born there. My mother was born in Nebraska. They went up there to work for Jim Hill, the Great Northern Railroad baron. That's where my father went to work. I went to country school and graduated from the country school, the 8th grade, and then went into town, Hallock, and went to high school there and graduated in 1941. Then I went to work for the Kittson County Welfare Board and I stayed there until 1944 when I went into the service, May 4, 1944. I enlisted in February. The reason I went in was because I wanted to see the world. The small town of Hallock had about not quite 1,000 people and I just thought that there was more out there than Hallock. My sister had already joined the Marines. So we more or less joined within a few weeks of each other. I chose the WAVES and I don't really know why. I guess I liked their uniforms [chuckles]. I was sent to boot camp in Hunter College, Bronx, New York for six weeks.

- Mark: So that's where you had your basic training, right? Is that also where you got sworn in and learned how to wear the uniform and all that sort of thing?
- Wiberg: Well I got sworn in when I enlisted. I enlisted in February and they called me in May. Most of the girls didn't go in right away. I was sworn in at that time and then we went to Hunter College where we received our uniforms, how to wear them, how to salute, and they taught us Navy protocol. Everything about the Navy. We marched and we marched to the Mess Hall, stood in line, put our food on that little plate, sang along, had all kinds of crazy songs and I enjoyed it. I was home sick but I enjoyed it. We didn't live in barracks. We lived in apartments that the government took over when they decided to put the WAVES boot camp at the Bronx. Then they assigned us to different schools if we were to go on for more training they sent us to more schools. I was chosen for the Yeoman's school. I had been a secretary so I continued in the line of work that I was in. I went to Stillwater, Oklahoma to the A&M College. The government took that over too. There were some sailors there that were being trained in various schools but I don't remember that part of it. I went there for two months and then was assigned to Farragut, Idaho.
- Mark: That was a big training base if I'm not mistaken.
- Wiberg: That was a naval training and distribution center. It's near Coeur d'Alene, up in the mountains. Well, more or less the mountains, I guess. Then I was the first woman assigned to the service school which was the radio school. There were four of them. I can't remember one of them. The only ones I can remember are the radio school, the storekeepers school and the signal school. The fourth one I can't recall. I was supposed to be the secretary to the Commander to replace the young man that was his clerical worker or his secretary if and when he was called to go over seas. Well, he was never called so I never did get that job, but I was kept busy just keeping track of all the grades of the young boys in radio school and it kept me quite busy.
- Mark: I'd like to go back and cover a couple of other things. In your basic training. I went to basic training, but forty years after that, and I remember all the screaming and yelling and four letter words and that sort of thing, but that probably wasn't the case with you. Is that true?
- Wiberg: I didn't hear it. If it went on I didn't hear it. Me, I kept my ears shut. [laughs].
- Mark: Was it rigorous discipline, Yes, Sir; Yes Ma'am and all that sort of thing?
- Wiberg: We said, "Yes, Sir." At that time we didn't say, "Yes, Ma'am." It was all, "Yes, Sir."
- Mark: Even to a woman?

Wiberg: There were men there training us. But we had to say, "Yes, Sir." We had to learn how to salute. We had to salute everybody from lieutenant up and even below just to learn how to salute. Anybody that was a Warrant Officer; being in the Navy you remember it. We only had one shore leave. We went into the city of New York. We only had one weekend.

Mark: I was going to ask you about that. You had just come off the farm, basically.

Wiberg: Actually, I was living in town by that time. We moved into town when I was a sophomore in high school. My whole family, my mother--we lost the farm and my mother and dad moved into Hallock. I actually was in a small town.

Mark: But New York is a big town. I was interested in your impressions. You said you wanted to travel and see the world. Well, New York is quite a destination. I was interested in your impressions.

Wiberg: It was amazing for me to see all the tall buildings, I just couldn't believe it because we didn't have tall buildings in Hallock, just little short ones. I don't remember that leave too much. My sister came from Philadelphia with her little girl and so I spent more of my time with her than I did with another one of the girls, one of the WAVES. So we didn't go real far. I hadn't seen her in a long time so we did a lot of visiting. I know we went around and just looked at places. I remember we went to the Opium Cellars. They had those in New York at that time.

Mark: What is that?

Wiberg: Some place in New York, I'm not sure where it was. Those are kind of vague memories.

Mark: I was also interested in what sort of women were joining the WAVES at that time, like in your basic training group for example, where did they come from? What sort of backgrounds did they come from? Did they join for reasons similar to yours or different ones?

Wiberg: Some of them joined for the same reasons. One of the girls that I know here lives in Waukesha, she was married at the time and her husband was killed. He was killed on a street down in the south someplace because the Southern people were angry that the Yankees were coming down there and someone shot him. She'd been married six weeks. I understand she came in because she wanted to fill her husband's shoes. That's an unusual case. Most of them wanted to get away from home. I think that was the biggest reason. Remember, women were not supposed to do any of this stuff.

- Mark: One of the questions I was going to ask was did you get any sort of adverse reactions from your family or relatives or friends or something because women weren't expected to join the military? Some looked with disdain on that sort of thing. I was wondering what reactions you got personally.
- Wiberg: No—I never got any reaction, in fact, my mother was very proud of me and my sister and I had two brothers in the Army at the same time so there were four of us. My mother was very proud of us and so was the whole town. My sister and I were the first ones to go into the service and I don't think very many other women from Hallock joined the service. I think there was one more SPAR that went in but we were the only three at that time. When I was in Farragut, we would go to Spokane, Washington or to Coeur d'Alene. The people treated us very, very well. I never had a problem. If somebody had a problem, maybe they made their own problem. The girls that I traveled around with, we never had a problem and the people were very, very nice. And going to the stores, couldn't buy much in clothes because we had to wear uniforms and we would just kind of browse around on our day off or something and they were wonderful. They asked us all kinds of questions and said they were very happy that women were finally accepted. So, I found no adverse reaction to women being in the service.
- Mark: Even among some of the old salts in the Navy? The men your age who were in the service at the time, what was your relationship with them and perhaps, the brass too.
- Wiberg: Well, I didn't have too much to do with the brass, but I was with a lot of the enlisted men and we used to go on leave together. We'd go on the buses and go into town. They were not happy that we were there, especially there were two in the office that I was assigned to. They were cordial to me. They treated me with respect, but I know they weren't happy because they were afraid they were going to get sent out. That was the biggest problem with most of the women, if they had any adverse reaction was that we were replacing them.
- Mark: What was the slogan, you could enlist so you could free up a man to go to the front or something?
- Wiberg: Yeah, that's right.
- Mark: You're saying some of these guys were afraid that you were going to send them to the front.
- Wiberg: That's right. It was our fault that they would be transferred out. That didn't happen in my office. Those two men were still there when we all got discharged. I don't know how they select these people. Personally though, I feel that the women were needed because they did need men on the front lines and as the war went on, who knows how long it would have lasted. Thank God it ended in four

years. It was '41 when we were hit at Pearl Harbor and the war ended with Japan was '45.

Mark: If you would perhaps describe a typical work day that you may have had, or was there such a thing?

Wiberg: Well, yeah. We had to work normally five days a week. We didn't work on weekends. But we had to stay on duty. We couldn't leave the base, only when we had the free weekends. We lived in barracks out in Farragut -- very nice. We all had our own little drawer or something that divided the bunks. There were three sets of bunks to each cubicle. At the end of that each one had our own place to hang her clothes and put all our personal belongings. Then there was a front desk and women were assigned to that. I wasn't. I never even got KP. I must have been pretty good. We'd get up in the morning, go to work, as I remember at 8:00. I had to get on a bus because Farragut is a long base from one end to the other and so there were a lot of buses running, like a city. I'd get on the bus and go about three to five miles to the other end of the base and then go to work and then at 4:30 or 5:00 whatever time we quit, we'd just get back on in the evening, go back and go to our Mess Hall and eat supper and then sort of have the evenings free. Like I said, I never had KP duty and I never got duty at the front desk, because women were assigned to that as their job. Mine was to go out to the radio school. I had one incident that I remember. I was going, somehow I must have been sent on some kind of an errand, I was standing by the mail box, it's quite rural out there, I was standing by the mail box and we had German prisoners of war there. A bunch of them were being sent back to their brig and shortly after that I was called to the Commanding Officer's office because he was told that the POWs were heckling me. Well, I never heard it. Whether I wasn't listening or I couldn't hear them because I remember it was quite windy, and they were going to reprimand them because they weren't supposed to be doing that. When I told him that I didn't hear it, one of the German men who were in there, he was so relieved, you should see his face [laughs]. He turned from sour to happy. So I sort of saved them, but I wouldn't do that for an enemy but they didn't do anything to me. But, they were treated quite well there. They did a lot of the cleaning and things like that. There weren't that many of them. I'm not sure how many were there.

Mark: That brings up something I was going to ask you about anyway and that is your German heritage and in World War II we fought against the Japanese and the Germans at the same time. I was wondering if you or anyone in your family had any particular reactions or feelings or anything like that having to do with your German heritage and fighting another war against Germany?

Wiberg: Well, my father died in 1940 so it was before the war started, but I remember, I was born in '21 right after World War I but I can remember my father saying that he was very upset that the Germans had fought his adopted country because he

loved the United States and he was really upset. He said, "Why are they doing this to us?" They really had no right and he didn't see any reason for it. That was the only thing I ever remembered. That was before we went to war the second time. I'm sure he would have had the same reaction. My father came over at age 16. In fact, we were there last fall. We went to find my father's home. He was from a town called Eppe, Germany just north of Frankfurt and we didn't find the house or anything like that but I saw his baptismal entry in the church book and the church where he was baptized. That was rather interesting. He came at 16 and worked his way up. He became a farmer.

Mark: Back in World War I many Germans in the United States were ill treated. Did your father experience that same sort of thing?

Wiberg: He didn't say much. My dad never talked much. But us kids when we went to school - we weren't treated all that nice. They always called us bull-headed Germans, I remember that. That was not very nice. I suppose some of that came from World War I.

Mark: What about World War II? While you were in the service dealing with prisoners and we were fighting the Germans again, was it even an issue?

Wiberg: No. Not for me it wasn't. I can't even remember bringing it up. I think by then we were beginning to realize that "Hey, if Germany has to fight us again, we'll have to end this war once and for all," and hopefully not have another war. Germany doesn't talk about the war. We found that out last year when we went there. See, my husband was in the 99th Infantry and he went through the whole battle. We went there to see the battle ground. Then we went into Germany. Everybody was celebrating in Belgium, but nobody said a word in Germany, not even my relatives. I found some of my mother's relatives because my mother's father came from Germany too. So, I'm German as far back as I can go. You would think that I would have some ill feelings, but I don't. I was born and raised in this country and, my father, was very proud to be an American, so I think that all helped.

Mark: I also wanted to ask some more questions about some of the other WAVES. Did they come from specific parts of the country? Did they come from all over?

Wiberg: They came from all over.

Mark: And, how did these people get along? You mentioned that this woman's husband was killed by people in the south who didn't like Yankees. Was there any of that sort of thing - regional tensions or something like that?

Wiberg: No. I just found this out lately - just the other day when I was interviewed for an article in the Waukesha part of the Sentinel and it was in there. I've known this

lady since I started this WAVES group and she never told me about it. That was the first time I - I knew he'd been killed but I didn't know how. I can't recall that there was any kind of adverse feelings one way or the other. But I was in Stillwater, Oklahoma and I didn't have a problem there. I guess it all depends on people. You asked me where I was in 1941. Early in the morning I woke up to the news that they had bombed Pearl Harbor and I guess I was just plain sick. I couldn't believe that they'd do something like that. And, here they'd been negotiating in Washington and there they were flying on top and killing all our people. To this day, I don't have any animosity to the Japanese and I don't treat them unfairly. I still feel in the back of my mind that these people did not have any right to do that to us.

Mark: Yeah. It was a complete surprise at the time.

Wiberg: After the war, I think there was more animosity toward the Japanese than toward the Germans.

Mark: After the war.

Wiberg: Well during the war and after the war. I remember being home and people would say, "I'm not buying any Japanese products." The men and women did not buy Japanese products after the war - for a long time. Even today, I look twice before I'll buy something made in Japan. Now that's terrible, but that feeling is still there. Sometimes you have to (buy Japan's products) because there is nothing left to buy.

Mark: Like trying to buy a camera or something?

Wiberg: Well, it came up again the other day because everybody is using these Fuji films and they are very good. I have seen them. My husband, he too feels that he does not like to buy anything that's made in Japan, but he said "well I'm gonna try it." I think it will eventually fade, but its going to take a long time. These men that served, they're the ones that got into the thick of it. I just came back Sunday from Pittsburgh where my husband's 99th Infantry met. They have been meeting for 46 years, every year. There were 1300 men and women and families there at the Hilton for about 4-5 days. It was absolutely wonderful. But even there you hear little hints of it. You know, "Hey, these Japanese, they did us in," especially those that fought in the Pacific.

What else can I tell you? Where was I when the war ended?

Mark: When the war in Europe ended - there were kind of two endings actually.

Wiberg: Yes. Well, we were elated. I think I must have been at the barracks yet - I don't think I was at work. We were happy that it ended, naturally, but I don't remember

a lot about it. We didn't read a lot of newspapers when we were in the service. Why, I don't know. They were there, but I'm sure we just didn't take the time to read it. My mother wrote and told me about it and how she felt, I had two brothers over there, my brother John and my brother August were both over there and she was happy that the war ended. The one was already home and the other one had just been sent over to Germany. Then when the war ended in August 15, I was in Farragut, Idaho and I was elated because I knew I was going to be going home pretty soon. Then after about six months I wished I hadn't been discharged, I wished I had been able to stay.

Mark: Why is that?

Wiberg: Well, I think that I would have been able to get a little further in the service than I did as a civilian. But, not until after I was married and I decided to go to school to get a college degree, I would probably have fared better in the service than I would have on the outside. But, I was lucky. I went to school and I used the GI Bill, by the way. I think that was one question you wanted. I started at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and then I went one semester and I went part-time, and then we moved here to Milwaukee in '51. Then I went to the University of Wisconsin Extension and picked up a few more credits and then I quit. I can't remember exactly why. Then I lost my GI Bill because you had to continue and I lost it then and then I got pregnant and my son was born and I took care of him. When he turned 12, I decided it was time to go complete my schooling. So, at age 46, I went to the University of Wisconsin in Waukesha on a part-time basis. The Wisconsin Veterans Affairs helped pay for my education as long as I went part-time and they paid for pretty much all of it until towards the end after I got my Bachelor's degree I went on for my Master's and then I paid for most of that myself. I was going full-time then. So, I got a Masters Degree in Social Work in 1974.

Mark: Do you think you would have pursued that much education had you not been eligible for these benefits?

Wiberg: No. Because I didn't have the money. When I got out of high school, there was no money. I had to go to Minneapolis or Grand Forks, North Dakota. There was nothing in that little town. More schooling was out for me. Well, I came from a family with ten children so there wasn't much there. I think a lot of the men and women didn't have the money to go to school. But when I go with my husband, you should see the engineers, the lawyers, most of those men got an education because of the GI Bill and many of them would not have had it if it hadn't been for that. I think that was the best thing the government did for their military.

Mark: I'm kind of interested in how you learned about the GI Bill, 'cause I've interviewed quite a few women now and some were very aware that they were eligible for these benefits and some claim that they didn't know that they were

eligible for them. And, then I'm interested to know how you found out about it - was it perhaps through your husband or were you counseled in some way?

Wiberg: Part of it was my husband but it was in all the papers. When we were in boot camp, we couldn't read any newspapers. They wouldn't let us. We weren't supposed to know anything about what was going on in the outside world and even in Farragut, I never read a lot of newspapers. So for whatever reason, people even today, don't read the newspaper. I read the thing from end to end. That's how I found out about it but mainly my husband had gone through on the GI Bill. We were married in 1948, September 4th and he was going to school at the time. He had one quarter left at the University of Minnesota and that too, helped. The GI Bill was there for me to use but once I got married we didn't have much money, I was working and you don't do a lot of things when you don't have the money you need to start out with. So he finished. He went on the GI Bill.

Mark: I've got a couple of questions about post-war adjustments and readjustments back into civilian life. The men I've interviewed, I always ask them if they had any sort of personal or psychological readjustments they had to make back into society and many of them have been combat veterans. I'll pose the same question to you too. Did you have any trouble getting back into civilian life -- reestablishing yourself?

Wiberg: No. I went back to work at the Kittson County Welfare office within a year - I got my job back.

Mark: Was that through selective service or did it just happen to be open?

Wiberg: No. The Kittson County Welfare Board is the same as the Human Services now. At that time they had old age assistance and child welfare and we gave, you know, money to give to these people and especially in old age assistance they were given their monthly check. I went right back to that job, then I took a civil service exam at home because I didn't want to stay at Hallock anymore. I took a civil service exam and at that time it wasn't difficult to get a job after you took a civil service exam. I got a letter from the Veterans Administration in Minneapolis asking me to come and work there. I never searched for a job. I never went running around for a job like people do today. I never did that. Even when I moved to Milwaukee, I just went to all the civil service offices and found a job. You didn't have to have resumes or anything like that. I took the civil service exam and accepted the job in Minneapolis at the Veterans Administration. I was there from the fall of '46 and I stayed there till about '47 and I got another job and I transferred out of there into the Fish and Wildlife Service and I stayed there until we moved to Milwaukee in 1951. So, I actually worked civil service until I got pregnant and our son was born. Then I never worked for civil service again.

Mark: Did you get veteran points?

- Wiberg: Yeah. They gave me five points. For a disabled veteran it was 10. So if you made a 90 or 95 on your exam, they add five points to it so you get higher up on the list. That's how they hired them. The higher you are on the list, the more chance you had of getting a job. You're right. I forgot about that.
- Mark: Were they very many people who didn't serve who got jobs during that time in your experience?
- Wiberg: I think most of them got jobs through taking the exam and getting on the list. It's hard now -- very difficult now. In fact, when I got out of the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, in 1974, I went to the Veterans Administration because I had had back problems at work. I worked in the Social Service Department in the Veterans Administration in Minneapolis. First I worked in the Manager's Office and then they transferred me down to the Social Service because of my background, my experience. I could not get a job at the Veterans Administration. I never did get a job there. I finally landed a job in private and went to work at the Catholic Social Services in Waukesha and I set up the Homemaker Program. I organized it and implemented it. It's going strong today. That was the time that they needed people to look after the elderly - like me. They'll be looking after me pretty soon. [chuckles]
- Mark: Home loans. I'm trying to go through the list of available benefits.
- Wiberg: Yeah. They were there but we never got it.
- Mark: You never used one.
- Wiberg: No. Our first house we built it was a lot cheaper to get a loan through our insurance company and a lot faster so we never used our home loan. We did get a pension from Minnesota. My husband got about \$350 - depends on how many months you were in. Minnesota paid what they called a soldier's bonus.
- Mark: Yeah. A one-time payment. [9 second silence] Did it help at all?
- Wiberg: Sure. You'll laugh when I tell you what we did with it. We invested it in the stock market. We were both working so we were okay. We didn't have a lot of money left over, but we had enough to get along. We took that money because it was, to us, a gift. We took the \$350, \$400 and put it into the stock market and we've been playing the stock market ever since.
- Mark: Successfully I hope.
- Wiberg: Yep. We're doing okay. My husband watched everything so between us we did very well on the stock market. Not so much the bonds, mostly in the stock market. You can't sell and buy fast - you gotta go for the long-term. Okay.

Mark: I got one last line of questioning and that involves veterans organizations and the way I got in contact with you was because you were involved in the WAVE Veterans. I want to start out by the years immediately after the war. Did you join any groups like the Legion, the VFW or any smaller groups?

Wiberg: I joined in Hallock. My sister came home and this other lady came home - there was a SPAR, a Marine and a WAVE and the Legion men came to us and asked us to join. Some of the women said they could not get into the Legion - the men didn't want them. They had put them into the auxiliary.

Mark: I've heard that.

Wiberg: I never had that problem. In fact they came to seek us out. I joined in Hallock and then I went to Minneapolis and I joined a women's veterans organization, not organization it was the Women's Legion. There were several because women couldn't get into the men's Legion. Then I came here and I joined the one where my friend was because I had a friend from Milwaukee that I chummed around with in the service and she was the Commander of the Bayview Post and then we finally transferred - I belonged to 449 in Elm Grove.

Mark: Is that a women's post or not?

Wiberg: No. That's a regular Post. Ours was 449 and the women's in Milwaukee is 448. If you join one American Legion post you can go to any one you want. They can't tell you you can't come. I'm not real active. I go to all the meetings here at our post just to keep the guys on their toes since I'm the only woman that shows up.

Mark: Do you think that's important?

Wiberg: It's important to me. They cleaned up their language a little bit too since I sit there. When I first came there it was really rough. But finally, they are acknowledging me and they are always glad to see me and everybody greets me when I come in. So I'm going to get more women to come but, I'm the only one that shows up.

Mark: I was going to ask if you were treated well by the men in the veterans groups. You seem indicate that when you were in service that wasn't a problem.

Wiberg: No. I never had a problem with people anyway, I guess. I guess I talk a lot so they can't say anything [laughs]. Before I know it, I've got them disarmed. I was in Washington, D.C. at the ground breaking of WIMSFA, Women in the Military Service for America and they were really starting to realize what the women had done and we've finally after 50 years, I think we're being accepted in most areas. What else have I got to tell you?

Mark: Did you feel that you hadn't been accepted before?

Wiberg: No. Lik I said, way back when as far as being a German, I think the kids in school when I was in grade school, I think that was the worst discrimination I had ever suffered and, of course, kids don't know any better and we didn't know any better some time. That wasn't even talked about.

Mark: As far as the WAVES veterans group, when did you get involved with them? I get the impression it's a more recent

Wiberg: In 1986 I went to my first National WAVES meeting in Albuquerque, NM and that's where I was appointed State Director by the President. I came back to Wisconsin and I started the WAVES National unit - Badger Unit 39 in Wisconsin. We have two units now. One up in Green Bay and hopefully we're going to get one in the western part of the state. I started that. I had 97 charter members, the most of any unit in the WAVES National at that time. We are number 39 and we have 140-some units now. I'm very active with that.

Mark: Sounds like its a successful venture too, I'm wondering what about locating the WAVES.

Wiberg: Oh, that's very hard. A lot of military groups have that problem. I was lucky because there was a lady from Iowa that had something called Midwest WAVES. They were about four or five states in the upper midwest and she had started it a long time before I even got involved and she gave me a list and one of the girls here in Milwaukee had the list. I never knew about hers. Never found out about it until then. All of a sudden they started coming out of the woodwork and I started writing to all those women and I got a lot of publicity at that time. I worked real hard to get publicity so I picked up a lot of them in these smaller newspapers. These little community newspapers, there's where you get most of your people that read them. The bigger papers you don't get much because they're kind of hidden. One by one, we're still picking them up. When I was at the ground breaking in Washington, a lady came up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder and said, "How do I get to join WAVES National" and I had my hat on, so I told her and then I talked to everybody, you can tell [laughs]. I find a lot of them, even if they weren't in the service, they know all about it and they come to me and say, "Hey, I knew someone in the service." It's all by word of mouth. I've gone to every reunion, we meet every other year, we've met since '86. I'm going to Boston in 1996 and I'm, hopefully, going to go to Hawaii in 1998.

Mark: Sounds like fun. What makes you want to go to these reunions because Hawaii is a long ways away obviously you have to travel there for a reason, I'm wondering what

- Wiberg: A nice vacation, number one, but I'd like to meet those women, they have about 20 in their unit. We have about 140 units and our unit, 39, has about 140 members. I want to go and meet those people. I want to see and help them. They are going to need some help. I guess maybe because its going to be a nice vacation.
- Mark: Have you met people that you served with when you go to these things?
- Wiberg: Not when I've gone to them. I have found them here in Milwaukee. Several of them that served with me in Farragut. There is one out here in Waukesha I never knew where she was until I started this unit and her name happened to be on this list I was talking about and it happened to have her maiden name on it. I recognized it and she is probably the one besides my friend that was already here that I was already in contact with. The only two that served together at Farragut. I never found anybody that had served at Farragut in all the conventions that I've gone to. I don't know why. There were a lot of girls from Milwaukee that were out there in Farragut.
- Mark: As you can see, you've exhausted my line of questioning, is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you think I've missed?
- Wiberg: No. Maybe after this is all over with I might think of something. If I do I'll jot it down and send it off to you. By the way, you're connected with the Museum. I went there a few weeks ago and [tape malfunction, blank space] it was the best year and a half I spent in my life.
- Mark: The service was?
- Wiberg: Yes. That's why lots of times I sit here, especially when I'm so active with these people now, that's when I think more and more that I wish I had stayed in, but you do what you have to do and there is no sense in worrying about it or feeling bad. I hear that from a lot of women that I'm dealing with now when we have our meetings. I hear it all the time. "I wished I'd stayed. I wished I'd stayed." By the way, our unit is called Badger Unit 39, we have about 40-45 women that come to our meetings which is very good.
- Mark: One other thing too [interview ends abruptly]