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June Miller
June 12, 2004

Interview conducted by Rose Manibusan
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Interviewee: June Miller

Military Rank: Women's Auxiliary Voluntary Emergency Services, U. S. Navy

Interviewer: Rose Manibusan

Saipan

Date: June 12, 2004

--00:00:03 AUDIO DESCRIPTION

June Miller is a Caucasian American woman with white hair, pink lips wearing a white button-up shirt. Beside her is a white lamp and a yellow curtain with white diamond overlay.

—00:00:17

Q: The following oral history interview was conducted by Rose Manibusan, Chief of Interpretation, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Saipan on June 12, at 1 o'clock, to record an oral history interview with Mrs. June Miller who served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. This interview has been made by the National Park Service, American Memorial Park.

For the record, could you please state, state and spell your full name?

June Miller: June S. Miller, J-u-n-e S. M-i-l-l-e-r.

Q: Can I call you June?

June Miller: Yes.

Q: Uh-June, I understand that the National Park Service has your permission to make this recording and to retain all literary and property rights deriving from this. Is this correct?

June Miller: Yes.

Q: Can you please tell us where you were born and the date of your birth?

June Miller: Yes. I was born in Grand Rapids, Minnesota on August 1st, 1924.

Q: And did you grow up there?

June Miller: No, I moved to Winona, Minnesota about-350 miles south of Grand Rapids in the southern part of the state when I was three years old.

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Q: Alright. So where did you go to school?

June Miller: I went to school in Winona, to high school and, um, [unintelligible].. to Winona State College.

Q: Alright, could you tell me a little bit about your family?

June Miller: Well, my mother's family came from Germany and Daddy's parents, mother came from Switzerland and, um-we were able to visit my grandmother's first place in Switzerland a number of years ago. And, um-my father's occupation, actually, as a paper maker in Grand Rapids where there's a plant and paper mill and then, when we moved from there due to the death of his father—he was superintendent of the paper mill and it broke up my father. I mean, he was very unhappy. And he became a railroad man. He was on the railroad for many, many years. He was a conductor, a brakeman on the Northwestern.

Q: And what was his name?

June Miller: Elmer Shue [phonetic]. My mother was a homemaker. Uh-I don't know. She was quite a homemaker.

Q: And I understand you're married?

June Miller: Yes.

Q: And your husband's name?

June Miller: Glenn Miller.

Q: And do you have children?

June Miller: Yes. We have a son who will be, who just was actually just 47, and a daughter who—be 47, and a daughter who will be 53 in a few weeks.

Q: And you're back here for the 60th Anniversary—

June Miller: Yes.

Q: —of the Battle of Saipan?

June Miller: Yes.

Q: And I understand your family members are with you as well?

June Miller: My son and daughter, and then my son's uh-son, Charlie, who is 12, is with us. He wanted to come so—

Q: And I heard he's a history buff.

June Miller: He really is. Yes.

Q: So this ought to be a great experience for him.

June Miller: He's enjoying it.

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Q: I'd like to take you back into time a little bit. Could you tell us where you were and what you were doing when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?

June Miller: I had just left our house and was walking, um-maybe a mile or so to a friend's house and we were going to go to a movie that afternoon and when I got to her house she said," um-we, um-Pearl Harbor has been bombed." And, um, of course all of us, we listened to the radio then, but it really – Pearl Harbor didn't really mean that much, you know, we were in high school. And, um-but then of course, by the next day, and I think it was later that day, everything was just, that was all you could get on the radio. And we talked about it. But then we went out to the movie. I don't even know what the movie was, but, but um-the next day in school of course all the young men weretalking about signing up and there was a lot of um- discussion...of patriotism.

Q: So how did you, how did that make you feel? I mean, you were in high school and you went back to school and I'm sure there probably would have been, or there might have been an announcement?

June Miller: Well, yes. The thing is, we were not as worldly in those days, and the thing is, it was a senior year and immediately the powers that be decided that we were going to have to have, ah-make sacrifices. And the one sacrifice was that we all was graduated in, um-the graduation was, the attire was long dresses for the women, for the girls, and the men wore their suits. So they decided that-that we'd have to save material so we would have to wear caps and gowns and we just hated the thought of that. And then our prom was coming up and they decided that we couldn't have long dresses and that the dresses would have to be short. Well that, see that was more important than the fact that we were at war. I mean, this was important but it didn't, it hadn't, it really hadn't totally, um-sunk in.

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Q: When did you join the military service?

June Miller: I joined the summer of, ah-1944 in August, and at that time, um- a young woman did not become of age until 21. So I had to have mother's and daddy's, um-consent to go in at 20 and then I went in. They called – my name came up in December. I think December 12th I had to leave. It was just a week or so before Christmas, and my brother, who was three years younger, was only 17, went in the second of- August, in the second of

December and I left on the 12th and had to be out at, um-Hunter College on the 14th.

Q: So you were 20 years old when you joined?

June Miller: Twenty years old. Yes, with my parents' consent.

Q: And what motivated you to join?

June Miller: That's really kind of a hard question. I, um-I-I-just wanted to join. From the [unintelligible] – when the, ah-the women's, the WAC, the women in the Army and I was not interested in that. My brother went into the Navy and, um-when the WAVES were uh-formed I just, ah-did know another woman in Winona who joined and I just, I just wanted to go. I don't know why.

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Q: Can you please describe your basic training experience as if you were telling it to a young man or a woman? [both laughing]

June Miller: Well, I went to Hunter College in New York, lasted I believe four months and we lived in, um-apartment buildings that had been emptied and there were like eight bedroom, ah-building and they had two bedrooms, and they put two bunks, four people in each bedroom. And then in the living room area, so that – I had my own room and, and [Laughing] and I went from living one in my own bedroom and all my own amenities to living with twelve other, girls. And, um, we had—and it was in the cold part of the year and we, of course, they issued us our uniforms almost, I think we got them within a week. And, I had an ill-fitting uniform. I was all—I got in the Navy really under the wire because you had to be five feet and weigh 100 pounds and I was five-one and I weighed 100 pounds.

[Laughter from both]

So I just made it. And so, there weren't many uniforms that were that small so I had a rather ill-fitting uniform. And, of course, we ate in a mess hall, and but we'd have to march

every day to the mess hall. It was not in the building we were in. And we marched, it seemed all over. And I was really quite a good swimmer because I grew up on the Mississippi and we always did a lot of swimming and boating and so forth. But we had to go to swimming and but we had to swim, you know, with a-a bag-a big gunny sack on our bottom part and, ah, try to rescue someone. I really don't know why because they had no intentions of sending us overseas. But we had things like that and we did a lot of, ah-of um-exercises and, and drills and, and um-tests. Ah-you know, it was a long time ago. I don't remember every detail [Laughing].

Q: Well, if there—what do you remember most about basic training?

June Miller: I remember the marching early in the morning at 6 o'clock. We, we were up early. And, ah, we had to form down at the entrance of our building and fall in line and then march-to- mess hall. Then we'd have classes, swimming. You know what I mean, it was lot of, it was repetitious.

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Q: Could you please tell us what military branch you uh-were assigned to?

June Miller: Well when I, um-I was—okay, I have to think about this a minute. I became a—I, I did not become a Yeoman but it was in that branch because I was working on my Yeoman badge. I was only in the service 18 months and I was working on my Yeoman badge when, ah-the war ended and so I didn't work any, on it any longer than that because I knew I was going to be discharged. We knew that unless—I didn't even know if we could sign up to stay in. I think they just, ah-um—

Q: Well, you said that you were with the WAVES. What exactly is the WAVES?

June Miller: Women's Auxiliary Voluntary Emergency Services. [brief laughter]

Q: And did your unit have a particular personality or, or, identity- identity? Um-or was it just WAVES. They referred to you as WAVES?

June Miller: Yes. Yes, yes. That's right. Yes. There were lots of different—there were the radiomen, there were all people who were—I think the majority of them worked in offices because if [unintelligible] in Washington, D.C. because we had to fill all of those positions and offices in Washington.

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Q: So what was your first assignment?

June Miller: My first and only assignment is, was in the Bureau of Naval Personnel. We referred to it as BUPERS. And I worked in the Office of Records. And we just kept all of the records up to date, but if the officers wanted to come in and see their—big, big folders—if they wanted to come in and see their records and what had gone into them we could show them. We would go into a room and we would then take the records to them. Then if we had a—oh—maybe a submarine or a ship sunk, had been bombed or whatever, it was really pandemonium because then all the records had to be—we'd have to find out, you know, the people who were in that particular, um—ah—battle and then, um—all—we had to follow through and see that their families were notified and just kind of generally, ah—keep things up to date.

Q: What other duties did you perform?

June Miller: That, that's it.

Q: That was—

June Miller: I didn't, yes. That's it.

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Q: Well, we rarely have um—opportunities to interview women, as I was talking to you earlier, because most of the veterans that do return are men who fought in the battles. From a woman's perspective and then could you explain in detail what it was like to be in

the military service during war time?

June Miller: Well, I-I have nothing to compare it with but, joining the WAVES was probably one of the best things I ever did. I really, um-I loved being in Washington, D.C. I uh-really felt that I was doing something because when I got there and saw all the military and, all branches, all over the city, and I felt a part of it. And, um-I just thought it was important...to do what I did.

Q: What do you remember most about your military experience—I'm-going to back up a little bit. How long were you in the service?

June Miller: Only 18 months.

Q: Eighteen months?

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June Miller: Yes.

Q: And out of all that experience what do you remember the most?

June Miller: Well, you know, um-it was pretty much routine but I will never forget the evening of the 13th of August. And we were [unintelligible] um- we were actually going to put on a play. It was sort of a military, WAVES sort of thing. And, um-the woman who was planning it and in charge she said, "It's up to us, you know, this may well be the eve of the ending of the war." And as it turned out, that's exactly what it was. And I remember that. I remember also I was in Washington when Franklin Roosevelt died. And it was announced on our intercom that the President had died. So, it seems like- the war in Germany had not ended, and then shortly after I believe they closed the Bureau of Naval Personnel for several hours and we went all to our barracks. And then we went, went to the city the next day or day after that, as we watched the, as they took his body and, to the station, uh-Pennsylvania Station. And I remember that's very, very [unclear]—and crowds of people, just like with Ronald Regan, President Regan. And so, I was quite interested in the Roosevelt family. It was a big family...and many hearses, or cars, you know, limousines and

it was...um-

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Q: Can you explain how you felt when you heard that the war had ended?

June Miller: Oh! It was fantastic. It was actually fantastic. Everything was closed in the Bureau of Naval Personnel and of course we all went to downtown Washington and downtown Washington was crazy. It was actually crazy. Um- and um-we, we just—we stayed downtown, walking the streets, I guess, and, and shouting and, and ah-meeting other people and it was, it was unbelievable. It was unbelievable.

Q: Well how did you feel about the dropping of the atomic bomb?

June Miller: I think it had to be done. I, I just think it's sad and when I see and read about it now I have sometimes questioned it, but then when I think that it can save the lives of-many of our men—my brother went into Tokyo afterwards, of course, my husband and, um-you know, it's... a bittersweet thing.

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Q: After the war, when the veterans returned home they eventually replaced the women in the workforce. How did that affect you?

June Miller: Well, we knew that they were coming back into the Bureau of Naval Personnel and bit-by-bit, they let it happened and then by that time um-some of our really close friends—we were mustered out, kind of not all at one time but, you know our name came up. And, ah-so we were saying goodbye everyday to friends. And then I just knew it was time. I—it was over. It was a phase.

Q: And what direction did your life take after war?

June Miller: Well, I then went to, um-Gray School of Art in Chicago to study interior design and I met my husband there. We—he was an interior design student also and as a student

he also did, took some architectural training. And then, um-we got married, 57 Street Church, and um-moved to, we stayed in Chicago for a little while and then moved to Minneapolis. And then we decided we really wanted to have our own design studio. We moved to Rochester, Minnesota. It was very small then, only 27,000 people, about 100,000 now. And we had two children and we now have four grandchildren, two boys and two girls. And we still have our business, believe it or not.

{Laughter from both}

We're kind of phasing out and, ah, it's been a pretty nice life.

—00:18:03

Q: Well it's now 60 years later. If you could tell the youth today about World War II what would you say?

June Miller: Well. I—um, I think as a woman and a mother, especially, you just—I think of my grandchildren being not much—I mean, close to where they could go into the service and it just makes me shudder. And I think my brother, who went in at 17, and it just—I just hate the thought of it. But um, I think World War II we had such a terrible thing going on in Germany with Hitler and-we were attacked, although there are questions about that. And I've done a lot of reading about it and I—I don't know. I—I—war is terrible. I had some of my good friends in high school, and we have a wonderful memorial in our city and their names are, ah,-because [unclear] southern Minnesota and I go to that wall and I see these names and I get very emotional. It's bad.

—00:19:21

Q: No, I do thank you for offering to share your experiences. A lot of people don't understand how war can affect you unless you had some direct connection to it and um-a documentation like this helps youths to better understand that experience.

June Miller: Well, I think it affects people their entire life. It's like you lose- your friend. The other night we were sitting waiting for our cab to bring us here and I said to my

husband, “This is kind of a bittersweet return, isn’t it?” And he really, he really just broke down. Sixty years later. And I think of the people who lost their—women and men who lost their children. I don’t know if they could ever get em... [inaudible]. It’s- it’s tough.

Q: Is there anything that you would like to add to this interview that we haven’t discussed?

June Miller: Um...

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Q: Any message you would like to leave?

June Miller: Well, I-I just, um-I just hope the right thing was done 60 years ago. I was a part of it and I’m glad, I’m glad I was. And, ah-I hope that my grandchildren will never have to see or serve in a world war right now but I hope that they don’t have to serve. And yet, if they do, if their country calls them there’s a certain duty to let them... [unclear]

Q: Well, let me thank you, June, for sharing your experiences with us again and for having us document... [Unintelligible -- Cross-talk].

June Miller: Thank you. I’ve enjoyed it.

Q: It’s been a pleasure.

June Miller: Thank you very much.

[END OF SESSION]

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