

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Dorothy Robe
Current home town: Savage, MN
Age: Not given

December 7, 1941, started me on my life's journey. I would graduate from Steinmetz High School in Chicago the following June with much greater concern for the future than I had ever imagined.

The young 18 and 19 year-old boys in my class joined the military even before graduation. When June came, I was happy to find a \$12.00 a week job at J.B. Clow & Sons. Women were hired immediately because the young men went to war. This began to puzzle me and I started thinking that women could join the military and release men for combat.

The WAVES were organized in 1942 and I joined the following year. My boyfriend was on a ship in the Pacific and I felt the Navy needed me, too. In the Fall of 1943, after aptitude tests and medical exams, I was accepted as an Apprentice Seaman, Class V-10, in the U.S. Naval Reserve. I completed six weeks of boot-camp at Hunter College, New York, and then went on to advanced training in accounting at Georgia State College for Women. While in Georgia, I lived in the old governor's mansion, since Milledgeville had been the capitol until Nov. 1864 when it was moved elsewhere because it was in the path of Sherman's march to the sea. We knew the building was historic in more ways than we were accustomed.

Orders came from Washington that WAVES could go overseas, but only as far as Hawaii. My graduation day came and I chose Glenview Air Station near Chicago. My mother lived in Chicago and was going through the loss of my father, so I felt I should be stationed closer for her sake. My title was now Sk/3c and I was assigned a desk in the supply office at Glenview Air Station. We lined up early in the morning for muster and responded to roll call. Some of our chiefs were regular navy and they brought a new dimension to our earlier training.

Facing our daily work of typing orders for supplies would often bring smiles but sometimes a somber "oh no." That would be after one of our planes had crashed and one or two caskets were ordered. One day we had an order for a casket for Ensign Ennis, the bandleader Skinny Ennis's brother. We would share it quietly with one another, hoping we didn't know who had crashed.

Sometimes an order came from the Captain that a surprise would occur the following Saturday night in the big hangar. We knew that a famous orchestra would be playing for a dance that night. Lucky me; one of the instructor "fly-boys" asked me to the dance and, during the evening, invited me to fly with him the next day. First, I had never flown and I was nervous. The next day, I was outfitted with a parachute, which almost dragged on the ground, and was helped into the back cock-pit of an N2s. Between take-off and landing, the experience was the most fun and fear I had ever experienced. Roll-

overs in an open cock-pit were not what I expected, but I survived. My pilot was sent to the Pacific later and I pray he survived.

Training films were used a lot and Hollywood did their share. My friend Vi Mall and I were called to the big hangar one day to inventory an advanced fighter delivered for a film to be narrated by the actor Robert Taylor. We spent time inspecting the plane and probably more time inspecting the movie star standing on the tarmac with his crew. It turned out that I would receive Robert Taylor's autograph because my boyfriend was in charge of flight gear.

Back in June of 1945, I was sitting in the mess hall with a few of my friends when two sailors came in and the one I thought was very handsome sat down at my table. His name was John Robe and he was just back from 23 months overseas. Over several weeks, we started dating and he worked in flight gear the day Robert Taylor arrived. When John asked for his autograph and later gave it to me, he also asked for my hand in marriage.

Getting married in the service requires signed permission from the Captain. I followed orders and requested a pass to have my gown fitted in Chicago at Marshall Fields. While standing in the bridal room, I was told by two shore patrolmen to get dressed and go with them. Later, while driving back to the base, they explained that while I was gone my orders came through to be transferred to Great Lakes Naval Station. My group had already left, so I was driven there by these two gentlemen.

I was fortunate to meet and work with some great Americans who served our Country far and above anything I would do. I was honored to pass in review one day for First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt and to sing with the WAVE choir at Carnegie Hall under the baton of Jose Iturbi. The discipline and sense of service in a time of crisis has carried all through my life. Although my sailor has passed on, we had almost fifty years together and three great children.