

Museum of History and Industry
Historical Society of Seattle and King County

Transcript

Bernice Simet - taped interview, March 16, 1985
corrected and edited transcript, approved May 21, 1985

This is an interview with Bernice Simet on the 16th of March, 1985. The interviewer is Lorraine McConaghy for the Museum of History and Industry.

Q. How were you recruited to the SPARS?

Miss Simet I had determined that I wanted to join the WAVES. When the recruiting officer came to Spokane, the SPAR organization had just newly been set up and they were seeking officers, so she suggested that I join the SPARS instead of the WAVES. She gave certain reasons why it might be to my advantage, as well as to the government's, to join the SPARS.

Q. What were those reasons?

Miss Simet They needed senior officers at the time, and the inducement that she gave me was that I would immediately be commissioned as a Lieutenant, Junior Grade, which is one grade above the Ensign rank at which most officers would enter.

Q. What had you been doing? Where had you been living?

Miss Simet I had been living in Spokane and I was teaching high school there.

Q. When did you graduate from college?

Miss Simet Long ago - Must I tell? 1928.
(chuckling)

Q. Why did you want to enter the service? What were all your motives? Can you untangle them?

Miss Simet Some of my motives were patriotic - I thought that I could do a job for the government. I, at that particular time, was not feeling that I was accomplishing enough in my teaching. And I suppose I had, as most women, somewhat of a romantic idea that I was doing good.

Q. Explain that romance - what was the allure?

Miss Simet The allure was the uniform, the meeting of new people, the travel to a different area, the making of new friendship...

Q. Can I infer that you were restless in your "other life?"

Miss Simet I think you can.

Q. What were the career opportunities for women in civilian

life?

Miss Simet They were largely confined to teaching and nursing. There were some opportunities in business, but not a great many. As a matter of fact, I had been interviewed for a job with an industrial firm, and at the time they needed to fill a position of some responsibility. The personnel officer, whom I knew, told me frankly that, after the war, I would probably be out of a job because it was a "man's company."

Q. Did you feel any frustration as a young woman at that time with this system? If you had wanted a career, your career was so severely circumscribed. Did that disturb you or did you accept it?

Miss Simet I had not originally wanted to go into teaching when I started to college, but I wisely got a degree in education as well as business administration. When I graduated from college, I immediately had the opportunity of taking what they then called a "secretarial job" at a leading bank in Spokane at a salary of \$65.00 a month, whereas even then with teachers' salaries being low, I was able to earn a salary of \$150.00 a month [by teaching].

Q. Well, that says it all, doesn't it.

Miss Simet It does indeed.

Q. Is this a period of time when female teachers were unmarried, and if a female teacher did marry, she was asked to leave?

Miss Simet There was a clause in the teaching contract that required a teacher to resign if she married while teaching.

Q. Just incidentally, what does SPAR stand for? Is it an acronym?

Miss Simet No, it is not an acronym, but simply a nautical term, thought to be suitable.

Q. So, you enlisted. Did you have to teach out the school year, or did you just go in?

Miss Simet I finished the school year. Just coincidentally, it happened at the same time. If I had been called up sooner after the enlistments - I had to wait awhile. I could have left my teaching position. I was free to do that.

Q. Do you know when you went in?

Miss Simet In June, 1943.

Q. What kind of basic training did you experience?

Miss Simet We went through a two months basic training at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, [Connecticut]. That involved many things - certain personnel items, naval rules and regulations, identification of ships and aircraft, and I can't remember some things. We were taught so fast that the information went in our heads four days a week, and came out in the examination on the fifth day. (laughing)

Q. But no boot camp type of physical training?

Miss Simet Not for officers, no.

Q. What were your requirements for being considered for entry as an officer?

Miss Simet There were entrance examinations in certain basics, like English grammar and history and so on. It was similar to a college entrance examination.

And we had to pass a physical examination.

They wanted women for officers who had college degrees, but there was no specification as to what the background should be.

Q. Were there any age limitations?

Miss Simet Twenty to forty-five, I believe it was at the time.

Q. Marital status an issue?

Miss Simet No.

Q. How about race?

Miss Simet No.

Q. What was the mandate of the Coast Guard during wartime? What did they do?

Miss Simet They carried on all their civilian activities, which included lifesaving activities, rescue of boats at sea, patrolling safety of the harbors and coast - all of those activities - and then in addition to that, as a part of the Navy, they had other, wider patrol activities, weather-reporting activities, and they even went with the Navy and Marines to overseas ports where our soldiers and sailors were landing to guard those ports, and participate in actual combat that the Navy did.

Q. Along the northwest coast here, were they (the Coast Guard) involved in any surveillance or reconnaissance?

Miss Simet Yes.

Q. Can you describe it?

Miss Simet I was aware of it, but I really don't know how to describe it.

Q. Were they looking for Japanese submarines?

Miss Simet Yes.

Q. If there had been a coastal landing, or shelling of the shore, were there contingency plans that you would have been involved in? If we actually at war along the coast, was there something special that you were to have done?

Miss Simet The job that I had part of the time was in the duty office - the communications office - and we acted as a center of communication between the various services, the Coast Guard, the Army and the Navy.

Q. So the way the SPARS would have fitted into coastal defense would have been quite pivotal?

Miss Simet Yes, in communications especially.

Q. Were there WAVES and WACS as well in this communications office?

Miss Simet No.

Q. You had more than one set of personal responsibilities - could you describe the jobs that you had with the SPARS over the course of time?

Miss Simet The first job I had was in recruiting, and I was attached to the Seattle office, which is in Coast Guard District 13. And I set up and oversaw the recruiting office in Spokane, where we established contact through the schools and universities, like Washington State University or Washington State College, as it was called then, and the Universities of Montana and Idaho, and other contacts in my district of eastern Washington, Idaho, and Montana to recruit women for the SPAR service.

When that necessity was filled, I was brought over here to the district office in Seattle. At that time, I was in the communications office, or the duty office. As we said, we did everything from soup to nuts. We did everything from checking in Coast Guardsmen who were returning from duties overseas, like Alaska and so on, to handling Navy communications tracking airplanes and boats. As part of the civilian duties, if a fishing boat was in distress, it was our job, from the information they sent in to us over their wireless, to plot exactly where they were to tell the rescue areas how to find them.

There were so many duties attached to that office, I can hardly describe what they were.

When that job was over with, when men were coming back after the war, and even before they came back, they transferred me to the SPAR barracks, which was a hotel existing here on Ninth and Madison, and that hotel had been requisitioned by the Coast Guard as quarters for the enlisted SPARS and a commanding officer in charge. So I had the supervision of their housing, their feeding, their

entertainment, and so forth.

I stayed there until all of them were out of the service, and then assisted in the decommissioning - you know how when they take a ship out of service, they decommission it? - well, this was the same thing - we decommissioned the SPAR "ship," essentially. We turned it back to its civilian owners.

Q. In your recruiting duties, what kind of young women were you seeing? Is it possible to generalize about them?

Miss Simet Well, we were looking generally for young women who had intelligence and stability and character, and partially always, for women who had certain skills. Many, many office people were needed in the service, you know. But in addition to that, we needed women who were intelligent and could be trained. They were trained to do many things, even work in Link training, which was basic training for aviators, and they did things like packing parachutes, and a number of physical things as well as office duties. So basically the young women we looked for were women of intelligence and stability.

Q. What were the requirements for SPAR enlisted women?

Miss Simet High school graduation, and they were given certain basic entrance tests, also.

Q. In commanding the barracks, how many young women did you have - I keep saying, "young women," but I suppose they needn't have been.

Miss Simet They were mostly young. Actually, I can't remember now whether 18 or 20 was the basic age.

Q. Were they single?

Miss Simet Most were single, but there were quite a number that were married, too, and whose husbands were in the service. And some of them lost their husbands while they were in the service, too.

I can't remember exactly how many we had in that barracks, but I think we had two or three hundred.

Q. I don't imagine there was any provision for women with children?

Miss Simet No, no. Not permitted.

Q. Those two or three hundred women living in a barracks in downtown Seattle in the middle of war - there must be some memories that you have of some of them. Could you tell me some?

Miss Simet I remember particularly one young woman who joined the SPARS originally because her young husband was in the Army Air Corps, and had been killed in a training accident. She felt that she wanted to give something to the

country, too. This was in the early days of the war.

Later, about two years after that happened, she remarried. And she married an old friend, a young man that she had known in school who was an officer in the submarine service. And he was lost.

We felt that was a great tragedy. She did a splendid job in spite of that.

Some of the girls, of course, were homesick. Some of the girls had love problems. They'd meet a man, and he'd go off to war. But, in general, it was not too unlike one's ordinary life.

Q. Was it a lot like running a dormitory in a college? Or was it different than that?

Miss Simet They would have more freedom than that, though of course there were certain hours they had to observe, because of military service. But otherwise, they would have more freedom than girls in a dormitory did at the time I went to school, and less freedom than they have now. They have all kind of freedom, now, I understand.

Q. I don't know how to ask this very well, but I was curious about the uniforms. Others have said - civilian women - how difficult it was to keep things clean without dry-cleaning - how did you cope with that?

Miss Simet This was a hotel, and I don't know whether the laundry was there before, or whether the Coast Guard established it but there were adequate laundry facilities in the SPAR barracks for the young women to keep their blouses washed and ironed. I suppose their suits, which were wool, had to be sent out to be dry-cleaned.

Q. Were there very specific rules about the amount of makeup one could wear?

Miss Simet There was a certain length of hair that we could wear, and I don't remember any specific regulations about makeup - we expected them to look like all other American women. To be modest. We had no length [regulation] on the skirts, and we wore them according to the style, which was pretty short in those days.

There was a regulation on the hair length

-

Q. About collar length?

Miss Simet Yes. And then there was a regulation issue on the kind of shoes we could wear.

Q. Oh, so they were government issue?

Miss Simet No, we could wear any black medium heel lace shoes or pumps.

Q. How about earrings?

Miss Simet No, no jewelry. Some of them who had their hair long, sneaked little earrings, particularly toward the end of the war. The girls were having their ears pierced and pulling their hair forward, to show their independence.

Q. Was it your job, as commanding officer, to say, "You must take those earrings out"?

Miss Simet Yes, it was my job to discipline them.

Q. How did you discipline them?

Miss Simet The only way we had of disciplining them was of revoking some privileges they had. For instance, if it was a serious offense, we might revoke a weekend pass, but nothing drastic.

Q. If a young woman were to become pregnant, would she be asked to leave the service?

Miss Simet She had to leave, yes.

Q. Did that happen?

Miss Simet It was rare.

Q. Did you ever see any incidence of homosexuality in your barracks?

Miss Simet Never. I remember there was one case where there was some suspicions, but whether it was unfounded or we were unable to pin it down, nothing was done.
I don't think it was a problem.

Q. These girls were mostly clerks working in offices, like the liaison communications office?

Miss Simet Yes.

Q. Packing parachutes - was that something that occurred here in Seattle?

Miss Simet No, that would be at an air station.

Q. I had read that there were 13,000 SPARS during World War II - do you have any idea, beside the 200 or 300 who were stationed at your barracks - how many there were in Seattle?

Miss Simet I simply don't remember, but there were probably a hundred SPAR officers. (After some thought, Miss Simet considers this to have been an exaggeration.)

Q. Within the barracks, was there a racial mix among the girls?

Miss Simet They were all white.

Q. Was there a segregation policy? Was there a barracks somewhere else with black SPARS?

Miss Simet Not that I know of. It never came up, within my experience.

Now I know they do have them

Q. When you were recruiting in Spokane, no black women ever applied? No Indian women, either?

Miss Simet No.

Q. What you say the social life was like for the girls in the barracks?

Miss Simet It was quite varied. Of course, the SPARS that were living in the barracks met people through church, through their enlisted women's club, and they were invited to go to dances like down at Fort Lewis or when a big ship was in port. They provided their own amusement, just like civilians.

Of course there was a shortage of men - there were more women around at the time. So some girls lacked dates, and not all girls had dates all the time, but there was a normal amount of dating and amusement.

In some ways, they provided for themselves, and they had good times.

Q. Were you much involved in those good times, or did you have to remain somewhat aloof from them?

Miss Simet Aloof from their social life.

Q. You yourself, as an officer, where were you staying?

Miss Simet I had an apartment.

Q. You did not have a place in the barracks, or a place of your own that was assigned to you by the Coast Guard?

Miss Simet No. All of the SPAR officers were given subsistence and quarters allowances. As a matter of fact, as an officer, except when we were on duty - and there was always an officer on duty, 24 hours a day - we were not allowed to live in the barracks.

Q. You and I both know Frances Owen, and she had SPAR officers living in her home during the war. That was an enormously helpful thing, I'm sure. How difficult was it to find housing? My impression of Seattle is that it was just crowded as could be.

Miss Simet It was very difficult, but somehow we always managed to find something. Originally, when I first came here, before I could find an apartment, I had relatives in town and lived with my aunt and uncle.

Actually I didn't move into my apartment until I became commanding officer of the SPAR barracks. You see, that was a civilian ownership, and through the management and ownership of that building, they had other

buildings in town, and that's how I found my apartment. Otherwise, I wouldn't have had any.

Many of them bunched up, and lived together. Do you remember the Lowell Apartments? Quite a few of them lived in the Lowell. And the hotel on Sixth and Spring that used to be the Spring Apartment Hotel, and I think is now the Kennedy Hotel - we called that SPAR Harbor, because so many SPAR officers lived there.

And I think I told you last night that a group of them rented a big house on Mercer Island that belonged to President Roosevelt's daughter (Anna Boettiger) and we just lived in various places.

I don't remember that any of us had any help, particularly, in finding places to live.

Q. It surprises me that you didn't. It just seems like you were cut loose to cope on your own.

Miss Simet I think that possibly people who were willing to rent rooms, and who wanted to rent rooms as a way of earning income, listed places with the Coast Guard, and some referrals were made that way. But for those who preferred to live more independent, like in an apartment, they did it on their own.

Q. Did the male Coast Guard officers live in this same way? You could call it freedom, or being cut loose...

Miss Simet Yes, I think so.

Q. Somehow it seems so unmilitary, to be scattered all over the city. You'd think if there were a crisis, you'd all be driving your cars from Mercer Island and Capitol Hill!

Now the Coast Guard just could have put an ad in the paper, and hired a slew of administrative assistants and secretaries. Why did they choose instead to put women in uniform?

Miss Simet Well, no one has ever told me that. But having worked in business for many years - for I never went back to teaching - and working in Personnel, it occurs to me that possibly it was a means of looking for stability. When you enter the service, you take an oath, and you are never your own boss, until you are out of the service. You take orders from up above.

That's a possibility, but no one has ever told me why they chose women.

Q. I agree with you. It's a military labor draft, in effect.

Miss Simet Yes.

Q. When you were a SPAR officer, did you ever feel that the range of duties available was limited because of your sex?

Miss Simet I'm not sure that ever really occurred to us, at the time, because there were certain jobs that women

had no background training for, like the duties of people on the ships, or any kind of combat duty, or manning lifeboats, and that sort of thing.

We considered certain activities to be men's activities because they required the physical strength and the background education of a man. I think we felt that anything women could do would be activities that could be done within an office or a laboratory or a hospital or that sort of setting, and we weren't limited.

Q. Did you know of any women becoming involved in cryptoanalysis and coding?

Miss Simet There may have been - I do not know of any?

Q. I was curious about that. It seems like an occupation almost better pursued on a ship than stuck on shore.

Miss Simet Probably they really were. In the communications office, those communications officers were all involved in that. I don't know whether they were involved in breaking codes, but they were involved in coding and decoding messages. But they may not have been involved in the actual breaking of codes, which is a highly skilled job - but they could learn it.

Q. Did you replace a male officer when you came to work here?

Miss Simet Yes, I did.

Q. And did he go onto sea duty?

Miss Simet Yes. But I didn't replace anybody in recruiting duty - that was different.
But I replaced a man in the duty office and he went straight out to sea.

Q. So you could see very directly what your coming in had done. What was your reception from the male officers?

Miss Simet It was varied.

Side B

Miss Simet Some of the old-time Coast Guard male officers resented having women come in - they didn't think they were capable. And some of the younger men resented women coming in because it meant that they were released to sea duty.

And many young men, I'm sure, had joined the Coast Guard rather than other services because they they felt they had a better chance of not fighting the war!

But I say "some of them," not all.

Q. So by some, you were met with enthusiasm?
I think your remarks are very perceptive.

was challenging and could do.

Q. The last position that you held was commanding officer of this barracks - did you enjoy this or not?

Miss Simet I enjoyed it and if there had been a situation then where there had been large groups of SPARS, who were housed in barracks, and I had that kind of a job, I would have enjoyed that.

Q. Would it be fair to say that you viewed joining the SPARS as a war-related experience rather than as a part of your working career?

Miss Simet Strictly as a war-related experience.

Q. And yet your motives were mixed between patriotism and bettering your situation.

This is something you've answered in part already, but would you say you received specialized training in the SPARS which you could not ever use again?

Miss Simet I had had no training at all for recruiting, no training at all for the duty officer operations, and no training for the SPAR barracks job, except that I had had considerable personnel administration background in my college education. While I was on that job, I was sent for a brief personnel training course which was administered at Purdue University, but was primarily for WAC officers. There were six SPAR officers in that group and I was one of them.

We had outstanding teachers at that school and I learned a great deal there, and profited from it. But the rest of it was on-the-job training.

Q. As the war drew to a close, how was it made clear to you that your services were no longer needed? I know that you did not want to stay but there must have been some who did. How was the fact that soon there would be a need for far fewer SPARS brought home to you?

Miss Simet I think we just had a general notice that this would be going on and that the period of decommissioning and of releasing people from the service would be based upon the local needs. As certain jobs were no longer needed, those people would be released.

Q. Is it equivalent to a lay-off or to being fired? Or neither?

Miss Simet It isn't equivalent to either of those. It was simply that the military service was over.

Q. And you were let go with an honorable discharge and certain benefits. As a woman, did you receive those benefits? The ones that I'm aware of are financial assistance with educational goals?

Miss Simet Yes.

Q. And one that interested me, and I couldn't tell whether women had this opportunity, was preferment in re-employment at the job you had held before you signed on. Did this apply to women as well as men? I know, at Todd Shipyards, if a man had held a job there before he was sent to the Coral Sea, he was at the top of the list for getting back in. Did this happen for women also?

Miss Simet You know, I'm not absolutely sure what the business world did about that. It never occurred to me to find out because at that time, I had been teaching school, and I was on leave of absence, so I could have gone back with the same benefits as before, and my three years of service would have been the same as three years of teaching. So I would have been reinstated.

 So that was true in the school system, but whether it was just my local school system or everywhere, I just don't know.

Q. So this was not an issue that came up. You did not have to advise your charges on this in the barracks?

Miss Simet No.

Q. Did they have personnel people who handled these kind of questions?

Miss Simet Yes, the personnel office handled that.

Q. And again, you may not know this, was there preferment in civil service hiring?

Miss Simet Yes, there was. Our civil service applicants were given the same preferment percentage that men were in upping their grades on in the exam.

Q. Were there any other concrete benefits to service that I've left out that you recall?

Miss Simet If, for instance, I needed it financially, I would have the same benefits at a veterans hospital that a male veteran has.

 I can be buried with an American flag wrapped around the coffin! (laughing)

Q. At Arlington? (laughing)

Miss Simet Yes!

 And of course, if I had wanted to buy a house I would have had the veteran's financial benefits, but not necessarily the bank's preferment. They didn't allow women to buy [homes], and they wouldn't extend mortgages to women as freely as they do now.

Q. Even with Uncle Sam as co-signatory.

 Your postwar career, did it surpass in excitement and

Was your pay on a direct par with the male officer you replaced?

Miss Simet Yes, exactly.

Q. You may not have noticed this, but if you did, what would you say was the popular image in movies and books and comic strips, of women in uniform? What was the popular perspective on women in uniform during the war?

Miss Simet I don't really know whether I'm capable of answering that.

Q. You mentioned romance - Were you treated with respect by the general public?

Miss Simet In general, we were treated with respect by the general public, but there was quite a large minority of people who did not treat women in the service with respect.

Q. What was their attitude?

Miss Simet Some of them thought that we were keeping their men from staying in safe home jobs. Some of them felt that there was homosexuality, and that was what drove women to do this sort of thing. Some of them thought that women were in the service simply because they were out to "get a man." Some of them looked down on women in uniform in the same way that, at times, the population has had a tendency to look down on men in the service.

But I don't think that that was so widespread. In general, I think that women in the service were respected.

Q. Did it ever become a problem of morale with women that you knew?

Miss Simet Not particularly.

Q. Did it ever occur to you that you were breaking barriers for women, by working in uniform during the war?

Miss Simet Yes, I think it did. I know it did to me. I know that after having had these three entirely different kinds of jobs doing things that I had had no training for, and no inkling of how to handle, and a very short time to learn, I felt that I could learn any job that I wanted to. And I think that a lot of women who did different things felt the same way.

We really did break some barriers.

Q. Was that acknowledged in training? When you mentioned the Coast Guard Academy, I forgot to ask you - were your instructors women?

Miss Simet The instructors of my class were women but they were the first women officers who were entrusted to act as instructors. They replaced men. We were their first

victims. (laughing)

Q. Did they address this question with your class, to say "We are the first," and "You are the first," and this is something very special?

Miss Simet Yes, I think so.

Q. It must have made you very proud.

Miss Simet It did.

Q. When you were here in Seattle, did you get to meet women in the other services? Was there much socialization with the WAVES, for instance?

Miss Simet Not very much. Each group was so large that there was no need to mix with the other groups, and there was not much opportunity.

Q. Were you aware of any particular successes or difficulties that WASPS, and WAVES, and WACS experienced? Were you interested in their experience as it paralleled their own? Did you see a commonness, in that you were all women in uniform or were you preoccupied with your own problems?

Miss Simet Preoccupied with our own problems.

Q. When you joined up, were you anticipating a career in the military or were you not?

Miss Simet No, not at all, and after the war was over, and we were out of the service, we had an opportunity to stay in the reserves, if we wished. And a few women did, not very many, and then later on, a few of them were called back into active service, if they wanted. But it was a very, very small number.

Here in Seattle, I elected not to stay in the reserves because the organization here didn't have opportunities that we needed for keeping up our status in the reserves through training. The Navy did, because there was a large Navy organization here.

I thought that living here in Seattle, I would have had to sacrifice my vacations every year for seventeen years to go to a place like, say, San Francisco for my Coast Guard duty. Because a certain amount of duty was necessary every year - you had to do a few weeks of active duty. And it was not compatible with my job. I just didn't think it was worthwhile - if I had, it would have been financiall beneficial, because I would be receiving a nice little pensioin right now.

Q. What would have changed your mind and made you want to stay in?

Miss Simet The only thing that would have induced me to stay would have been an attractive job - a job that I felt

responsibility, match, or fall below, your wartime career?

Miss Simet I only had two jobs after the war, and one of them was a strictly temporary job. As soon as I got out of the service, and was a civilian, I went to Japan for a year and worked for the army as a teacher. I taught the occupation soldiers, not children. I was engaged in an Army education program.

Q. What did you teach?

Miss Simet Typing and shorthand - very boring.
Then when I came back, I went to work as personnel officer for an insurance company, and I stayed in that job until I retired. And that was a very challenging job, a good job. I found it quite exciting.

Q. Did your service record or your service experience help you in your later life?

Miss Simet Yes, indeed. The personnel training I got at Purdue certainly helped me and the experiences I had at the SPAR barracks certainly helped, and my confidence was enlarged. After the experience of learning three different jobs and doing them all successfully - I'm sure because I got promoted! - I felt that I could do anything successfully. It did a great deal for my confidence.

Q. What rank did you have when you left?

Miss Simet I was a lieutenant, senior grade.

Q. As a younger woman, talking with you it seems to me that you opened doors for me and for others, is that the way you perceive your experience?

Miss Simet Yes, I believe so. I think it opened doors for women in government service and in the armed service, and I think that it's proved by history, by the women who are in the service now and are contributing their share.

Q. What was your impression of Seattle?

Miss Simet I grew up in eastern Washington, and taught in Spokane but I had been in Seattle a number of times. I knew Seattle and I knew people here in Seattle.

I don't know whether this comes from my own observation or the observation of another person I met who came from the middle west, and she felt it was a cold city, and that people were not as friendly. However, I think that one can't judge a city by how it behaves during a time of war when people were immersed in the war mentality, war thinking, war worries, war jobs.

In general, I think Seattle was as fair to women in the service as anyplace in the United States and I think that's proved by how many of the SPARS remained in Seattle after the war and settled here permanently.

At least a fourth of the SPAR officers who

had no connection in Seattle at all remained here as civilians after the war. That was true for the rest of women [in uniform], too.

Q. However, you were not, you've told me, welcomed with open arms and a great deal of warmth.

Miss Simet Some organizations were warmer than others. There was a club for SPARS, but it came in late in the war, and I guess I was so busy at the SPAR barracks that I didn't have the chance to participate in it much.

 I do remember one thing. The Washington Athletic Club gave us women officers privileges for a very nominal fee. That was one club that did that for us, which I thought was a fine gesture.

Q. Was it literally an athletic club where you can play racquetball and tennis and so on?

Miss Simet Yes, they have those facilities, but it was a place for us to entertain friends and take them to dinner and so on. It was important to have a place to entertain our out of town friends and family.

Q. Was there an officers club?

Miss Simet Yes, we had privileges at the Navy Officers Club.

 At that time it was on Pier 91.

Q. What was it like inside?

Miss Simet Oh, very nice, very attractive. We went there a lot to dances and dinners and things - lots of dances.

Q. When you living in your little apartment, were you cooking for yourself?

Miss Simet Yes.

Q. With a ration book, like everybody else?

Miss Simet Yes.

Q. So your job occupied you forty hours a week, or was it more than that?

Miss Simet Twenty-four hours a day - you were actually never really off duty. We were subject to call at any time. Of course, in a practical way, we had eight hour days like everybody else.

Q. What was your transportation?

Miss Simet Bus. Except when I was on night duty. Then the Coast Guard provided limousine service.

Q. The Japanese-Americans, of whom there had been a great many in Seattle, had been gone by the time you arrived here. Were there any repercussions that you could see? Was there any talk about that still, or were they simply absent?

Miss Simet They were just absent.

Q. By the time you entered the service, it seems to me from reading the papers of the time that the absolute crisis and emergency had passed, and that there was a certain degree of optimism that the United States would ultimately win the war, however long it might take.

Miss Simet It was about the middle of the war. We had been in the war about a year and a half. We hadn't passed that point in the Pacific.

Q. What is your perception of that time? Were you very busy?

Miss Simet Extremely busy. Just extremely busy. I don't really remember. We were so involved in our activities. I didn't have, personally, the personal family involvement that many people had because there was no one in my immediate family involved in the war.

 My closest connection - the source that I had for worry or grief - came not from family considerations, like it was for most people, but thinking of the boys that I'd taught in school who were being killed.

Q. Did you keep up correspondence with them?

Miss Simet Not much - one or two. I kept up correspondence with other people who knew them and who were still living where they were because I was in Seattle. I was writing to people in Spokane and Walla Walla, and it was particularly the Walla Walla ones. I had only been in Spokane a few years, and the Walla Walla ones I knew were the age to be involved, more than the others.

 In my own generation, men in my own age group, some - but not as many - were involved in the actual killing that the young G.I.'s were involved in. They, being older, would be in the officer class, or would not be in the army.

 I was past 35, and most men my age had families, which would exempt them from this active service. I just didn't have that personal involvement to the extent that many of them did.

Q. I should think you must have seen a lot of grief in those younger women.

Miss Simet Yes, indeed, like the one I told you about who lost two husbands. And there were others who lost young men that they had met in the service. Many were either in the service because their husband had already been killed, or they had lost boyfriends, brothers...

 I'll tell you about the Christmas of 1945.

The war was over, and many of the women were anxious to get out and go home. They had to stay until their jobs were eliminated, and Christmas came. What to do to keep up their morale and entertain them?

So we had a little room decoration contest in the barracks there. During the war, it wasn't possible to purchase much by way of decorations because prior to that time, all of our Christmas decorations - the shiny balls, the tinsel - had come from Japan. There just wasn't any available in what we calaled the time stores then.

So what could we do? We had a little contest in room decoration for those girls. We had some prizes that we got from our PX, the Navy Ships Store, and we went around with cameras to photograph all the trees that the girls had gone out in the country to get or bought. It was entertaining and interesting.

Another thing we did was that Magnin's put on a style show for all the girls, enlisted and officers, to show them what clothing was available and how styles had changed, and what they could buy, and suggestions for making themselves all glamorous after the war.

Those were two particular events I remember that were fun that we did to entertain the girls and make them feel part of it.

Q. Did they think of their uniforms as stylish and attractive, or as dowdy and heavy?

Miss Simet The WAVES and the SPARS had the same uniform, except for the insignia. And they were nicely tailored, navy blue wool suits, designed by Mainbocher, with white blouses and a tie. Most of them felt nicely dressed; I always felt well-dressed, except in my original suit. When we went to the Coast Guard Academy, tailors came up from New York to take the measurements for our suits and we were fitted, so they would fit all nice.

Well, it was so hot and humid in the summer, and our training was so strenuous, with all this marching that we did, that between the time they took the measurements for our suits, and the time they delivered the suits, they were all two sizes too big. We had lost so much weight!

"What's happening to these women!", they said, "They're not the same size they were beforehand!"
That was kind of amusing.

Q. So you were doing a lot of marching around.

Miss Simet We did a lot of marching, yes. I didn't think of that as exercise, though, it was just marching.

Q. Was it to music?

Miss Simet Oh, yes.

Q. And did you have women training you in this, or did you have a man?

Miss Simet Women. They were fumbling around, because they were new at it, too.

One of the first things I had to do here in Seattle, when I got back, though I can't remember what the occasion was even - there was a big parade in town, and I had to lead the parade with the SPAR barracks. I was terrified! I knew that I would stumble, or misstep, or something of that sort.

Q. So this was in '43, this big parade?

Miss Simet Yes, it was in '43.

Q. What did you do with your suits, afterward?

Miss Simet The best ones I had, which were tailor-made, I took the insignia off, and had the collar changed a little bit, and wore them as civilian suits until I left Japan. Then I sold them to a European woman friend who was returning to Spain.

And my cheaper suits, that I didn't treasure so much and that were a little older, I sold to people who hadn't been able to get good wool things during the war.

Q. Wool was scarce, wasn't it, for civilians during the war?

Miss Simet Yes.