

**Carol A. Crowley, Chief Petty Officer  
Veteran**

**Bob Guzman  
Chemung County Historical Society  
Interviewer**

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**BG:** From Athens, PA, Carol. What service were you in and when did you join?

**CC:** I was in the Navy, and I joined in April of 1968.

**BG:** Is that a right out of high school kind of thing.

**CC:** No, actually. I worked in town for about three years, but the job wasn't going anywhere, and I decided I wanted to change. So, I changed and went in the service.

**BG:** When you were looking for a change, what drew you to the service?

**CC:** Well, basically equal pay for equal work. Which at that time, you weren't getting equal pay if you worked in the area. I wanted to be able to travel which I figured being in the service I could travel at the government's expense and just meet new people and be able to get out into the world.

**BG:** Why the Navy of all the services that you could've chose?

**CC:** To tell you the truth, I like their uniforms [laughs]. Blue is my favorite color.

**BG:** You saw plenty of it over the years. Is it still your favorite color? That may have changed over the years [laughs].

**CC:** Yes, it is.

**BG:** You went into the Navy and basic training. After basic training you had some career choices to make. What choices did you make?

**CC:** I decided I like working in supply because when I worked in the area as a civilian, I worked in the bank in the booking department, and I liked working with books and things like that. Supply was close what I did as a civilian. Hence the field I eventually chose to go into.

**BG:** You stayed in that field throughout your enlistment?

**CC:** Yes.

**BG:** I've got a list here of several facilities that you worked at or were assigned to over your career. Including being in New Zealand.

**CC:** Yes. I was with operation deep freeze in Christ Church New Zealand. That's the stopping point for the people of the National Science Foundation. When they go down to the Antarctic that's the last stopping point before the Antarctic.

**BG:** Did you actually get to the Antarctic yourself?

**CC:** No, I was going to go down for thirty days. They had me all outfitted and everything in their big snow suits, but the day that the plane was supposed to leave they had a white out down there and they couldn't leave. Everything got backed up and unfortunately, I never got a chance to get down there. I was kind of disappointed because I always wanted to go down there to see what it was like.

**BG:** That would be a very interesting thing. Any other interesting places that you did get to go to?

**CC:** Well, of course I was in the first contingent of women to go aboard the ship, and I was on the USS Vulcan. After I got on board that ship, we got to travel to see different destinations overseas. We really got to see quite a few ports that normally if I were a civilian I would never have gotten to see.

**BG:** How many women were in that initial contingent?

**CC:** I think there was about sixty-seven, sixty-eight around that.

**BG:** That many aboard that one ship?

**CC:** Yes. We were all in one room. Unfortunately, it was kind of tough in the beginning you know.

**BG:** How many sailors aboard ship total? What was the total count?

**CC:** I think when we were underway, if I'm not mistaken, between seven and eight hundred.

**BG:** So, the women aboard ship represented really less than ten percent.

**CC:** Yes, it was very small.

**BG:** I was surprised by that number. Sixty-eight would be a large number to me to suddenly put aboard the ship.

**CC:** Well, we went in phases. The women officers, they went first on board to get things set up for the enlisted, which that was the group I was in. When we finally went on board then most everything was in place for our [unclear] compartment.

**BG:** Give me some of the ports of call that you've hit while you were aboard ship. You were aboard more than one ship, correct?

**CC:** Yes, I was also aboard the USS Yellowstone. Later on, I had a couple of shore duty stations before I went on board that ship. And of course, being on that ship I

got to see some other ports too because that went underway also quite a few times. While we were in the Caribbean, we went to Scotland, Rome, we were all over in the Mediterranean area. France, Spain, quite a few places.

**BG:** Tell me about when you first boarded the Vulcan. You're in the initial contingent of women to go aboard a ship and they chose to put you aboard the Vulcan. What type of a ship was it?

**CC:** It was a repair ship. What it did basically, until we went on board, it sat in port, and it was in Norfolk, Virginia which is a major east coast port, and these ships would come in and the Vulcan would repair these different types of ships. You know, destroyers even aircraft carriers. All kinds of different types of ships. It was an older ship, I think it was a World War II ship that they had converted over to a repair ship. I think originally it was a troop-carrying ship. It had double plate metal on it, from back in WWII when they had a lot of problems with submarines.

**BG:** Until you got aboard it stayed in Norfolk and the ships came to it?

**CC:** That's correct. They said, some of the other sailors that were already on board, that it was basically welded to the pier. When we got on board, and of course because of the news media and everything, they decided we better set sail, so they had to repair their own ship basically to get underway and stir up all those coffee grounds that had accumulated around it before it.

**BG:** [Laughs] Great line. "Stir up the coffee grounds". What was your job aboard ship?

**CC:** I was a storekeeper, and I worked in the supply department providing supplies to different divisions on the ship that needed different parts to repair these other ships that needed repair work done.

**BG:** When did you go aboard the Vulcan?

**CC:** Let's see, that was 1978 I believe it was.

**BG:** Half of your career in the Navy had been ashore and now you go aboard your first ship. Then you came back to shore duty to a couple of different stations and then back to sea again. How much change was there in preparation for a woman aboard ship in attitudes about a woman aboard ship between the Vulcan and Yellowstone?

**CC:** Oh, it was almost a one hundred-and-eighty degree turn around because when we first went on the Vulcan, of course it was a man's world, and they didn't really appreciate the women being there. Of course, they told them they had to tone down their language and act more gentlemanly towards the women and you know, when they're out at Sea they want to do what they want to do. But when I went on Yellowstone, the women were more accepted. It was just an everyday way of life.

**BG:** How much time span are we talking? From sixty-eight when you went aboard the Vulcan until... when did you go aboard the Yellowstone?

**CC:** That was, I think in the later eighties. I think it was like eighty-six maybe, so it was a large time span between the two. Of course, the Yellowstone was already outfitted for women, it didn't have to go through a lot.

**BG:** So, you didn't take away anything from the crew that was aboard? Because no matter how you look at it people who were aboard the ship before the contingent of women came aboard would be bound to say "well we used to have... but now we don't"

**CC:** No, exactly. I think that was a lot of the problem, because you know the men said, "well we don't have air conditioning in our birthing compartment why should they have air conditioning" So there was a problem there.

**BG:** Did you see much of an improvement over the time you were aboard ship? Just within the time you were aboard the Vulcan.

**CC:** Yes, you know eventually. There were still some pockets of resistance but most of the sailors said "You might as well like them because they're not going to go away. Get along with them best you can". There's always that no matter where you go.

**BG:** I would think that some of the resistance had to be broken down by going to sea because it was obvious you're not going to go off ship to get away from the women, you're going to be together and have to rely upon each other in great measure while you're at sea.

**CC:** Exactly. They have what they call a buddy system. You know, when you go into a port you're never supposed to go alone. They always told us to make sure we had at least one buddy with us to kind of watch over us. So, the other sailors they kind of watched over us when we got into these ports because they've been there many times before and probably were used to the civilian community overseas whereas we weren't. So, they were telling us, more or less, stay away from that area or you know, do this or don't do this.

**BG:** Would you recommend a career in the Navy to a young lady from Athens, PA that's graduating high school or have a few years away from high school at this point?

**CC:** Well if they enjoy being away from home, which when I went through bootcamp, there was a lot of young ladies that went in with the idea the same as mine. You know, they wanted to travel, but after they got away from home, the home life, they got into this totally different environment where everything was basically dictated to you. You were told what to wear, when to wear it and all that. They just couldn't understand why they couldn't wear what they wanted to wear so there was a large dropout rate from bootcamp. If they can deal with discipline

and regulations, yes, it is a good life, I think. Of course, there's bumps in the road no matter where you were but if you enjoy traveling and understand the policies of the service.

**BG:** You retired as a chief?

**CC:** Yes.

**BG:** For those who don't understand Navy rank, why don't you tell me where a chief stands within the enlisted ranks.

**CC:** Well, the highest rank in the enlisted rank is an E9, at least in the Navy. I was an E7 so I was two ranks below the highest possible rank that you can get but when you become a chief you have different living areas from E6 and below. You have a lot more extras I guess you could say than an unlisted person would have, and of course more responsibility too because you're in charge of more people now.

**BG:** Were you a chief when you were aboard the Yellowstone?

**CC:** I made chief aboard the Yellowstone.

**BG:** How were you accepted by the male chiefs? Because I have always known the Navy, the chiefs are a very, very select group. A very close-knit group. How did they accept you as a fellow chief? As a colleague?

**CC:** Well, when I went on board the ship, I was an E6, and I got to know a lot of the chiefs while I was in E6 or first class in the Navy. At that time, I mean women chiefs, it wasn't unusual for a woman to become a chief, so they accepted me pretty much. There wasn't a problem, because there were other women chiefs on board the ship before I came. We have what they call an initiation ceremony when you do make chief that you go through. They see what kind of metal you're made out of, of course I went through it. They get you up in the middle of the night and you stay up all day long and they play little games and everything.

**BG:** Do you want to expand on that at all? I won't push you in that direction if you don't want to go there because I know it's kind of a secret thing.

**CC:** Yeah, it's a secret deal you know, and they close off everything so that other people can't see what's going on. I know at one time they were complaining about it because a lot of people got injured. But when we went through it, they made things look like it was... other than the goldfish we were supposed to eat. That was one thing I wouldn't do because I like animas, even little goldfish. I refuse to eat a goldfish.

**BG:** [Laughs] But you were still a chief and you were still accepted.

**CC:** That's right.

**BG:** I've kind of picked up on this from looking at your resume here, this whole thing about being number one, a woman in the military and then a woman aboard ship and maybe I've made too much of that. Are there other areas of your experience in the Navy that you would like to talk about besides the fact that you were in this initial contingent that went aboard ship? Are there other things that you did and saw that you want to make sure are recorded for people to know about in the future?

**CC:** When I was in New Zealand, that was a beautiful spot to be in and I got to do a lot of touring around the countryside. When you go overseas to different areas it's a whole different culture. For some people it's hard to get adjusted to but in the military, you're supposed to have more of an open mind about different things like that. It was pretty easy to adjust to their culture and they got to know us, and we got to know them. I enjoyed all my tours I had and the different ports I was in when I was on board ship and meeting a lot of foreign people that I probably would never have met had I stayed in the area. It was just interesting to meet different cultures and to see the way they live and to talk back and forth about our cultures versus theirs and everything.

**BG:** Do you still stay in touch with many of your former comrades?

**CC:** Well, some of them I did for a while but unfortunately you know I've lost contact over the years.

**BG:** It has been a while hasn't it. I was just realizing eighty-nine, it's nearly fifteen years now. You're coming up on fifteen, fourteen years since you were retired.

**CC:** Yes, it's a long time.

**BG:** What else would you like to tell me about the Navy and your experiences. Things that people wanting to know about the Navy in general would find interesting or about a woman in the Navy with some of your special experiences.

**CC:** Really anymore, a woman in the Navy isn't any different than just being in the Navy. They're pretty much accepted now as a part of the Navy. It's just not the women in the Navy being separate. I enjoyed it because it gave me a chance to get out into society. When you first go through boot camp you have to learn a lot of things about service that can be hard to understand. They have rules and regulations and there's certain things you do but I don't know, I enjoyed it, other than like I said having a few bumps in the road. Overall, I really enjoyed it.

**BG:** At this point, we haven't been on tape very long, but we've pretty much covered the subject. If you don't mind I'm going to kind of go through the stations that you've been at and just mention them to see if they trigger anything in you that you want to tell as added and then we'll just wrap up. How's that sound to you?

**CC:** Okay.

**BG:** Bainbridge was your recruit train, and you mentioned some of that. Anything else you want to mention about Bainbridge?

**CC:** When I went through, of course that was quite a while back, they had certain regulations about you had to do your hair up every day or every night you know, and you had to wear a lipstick. Now, I don't imagine anything like that. I thought that was kind of strange.

**BG:** It is, that would have been the last thing I would have expected.

**CC:** Because it was all about looking nice back then. We never were told we were going to sea, we never had to worry about training on weapons or anything like that. It was all about looking nice.

**BG:** Did you at some further point get weapons training? Did they ever bring that into the picture?

**CC:** Yes. Actually, my first weapons training was on, I believe it was the Yellowstone. It was that far along down the line, because in the Navy there's no real need to have weapons training unless you're a seal or somebody that's going to be in actual combat. You're on a ship and they have their weapons. Of course, when I was on the Vulcan, they always said the only weapon they had was the rotten potatoes [laughs].

**BG:** You went to Memphis, Tennessee from boot camp. What kind of a station was that?

**CC:** I was in a training command where different sailors went there for different types of schooling. When I was first stationed there, of course I wasn't a storekeeper at the time, so I checked students in the various schools in the area. I got to there again meet a lot of different people.

**BG:** Jacksonville, Florida; Naval Air Station.

**CC:** We work with aircraft down there and aircraft parts and that was the beginning of the computer era I guess you would say down there; Where they had these big card machines and I worked in a big hanger where they put all the information on these punch cards so I can run them through on those big machines.

**BG:** Oh yes, the card sorters. Punchers and sorters, I remember them.

**CC:** Yes, card sorters.

**BG:** From there you went to [unclear], Maryland. Back to Maryland.

**CC:** Yes, back to Maryland. I worked in the galley there which meant I didn't have to worry about going anywhere to eat. We were always first to eat. Then for a while I worked in clothing. What they call clothing in small stores, it was where they issue out the different uniforms.

**BG:** Food is always important [laughs]. Then your trip to New Zealand. Detachment Delta, what a great name for an outfit, “Detachment Delta in New Zealand”. How long were you there?

**CC:** I was there about a year and a half I believe.

**BG:** That is a good amount of time to be able to see the area.

**CC:** Right, and I never lived on base because they didn’t have any housing for permanent people over there, so I lived in a house that was out in the community. It was really nice because the lady that owned the house took care of all the yardwork and everything, so I didn’t have to do any of that. Of course, I didn’t have a lawnmower or anything, being over there.

**BG:** Now was the reason that you had to live in the community because you were a woman or because there just wasn’t enough space on the base for everybody that was assigned there.

**CC:** It was everybody who lived off base. Didn’t matter whether you’re a woman or officer or whatever. Everybody lived off base, but we were a very close-knit little group because we were there year-round. The Science Foundation came down, they were only there for just a few weeks and then they’d be gone, down to the Antarctic. So, you know, more transient people than we were. There’s only I think, maybe, thirty or forty. It wasn’t very large.

**BG:** Oh! That small a detachment. So that would make a fairly close-knit group just by virtue of the fact of being the only thirty or forty Americans around there.

**CC:** Yes, that’s right and of course we had days where we could wear civilian clothes to work. So, they weren’t as rigid in their regulations there as they would be if I was in the states.

**BG:** Then came the Vulcan. I’m only skipping it because we’ve talked about it a good deal unless there’s something more you want to say about the Vulcan. How long were you aboard? I don’t think I asked that before.

**CC:** No. Let me think. I think it was a couple of years that I was onboard that ship.

**BG:** Then you went back to Jacksonville, Florida. Then from there to Norfolk.

**CC:** Norfolk, yes. I believe, was it, [unclear]?

**BG:** Yes, whatever all those initials mean [laughs].

**CC:** Well, that was the real beginning of the computer era, and they were bringing in the computers. What we were doing, our command was tasked with, is going out to the various ships that they were installing these computers on and training all the personnel on how to use the computers. Unfortunately, we didn’t have that much knowledge to begin with ourselves. We were learning right along

with the students. We'd have separate classes ahead of time before they'd send us to South Carolina.

**BG:** Also, you traveled a good bit out of Norfolk, then to various ships and various ports.

**CC:** Various ports, yes and even the marines. We went down to some Marine duty stations to train the marines also. We traveled around quite a bit training people.

**BG:** From that assignment, then you went aboard the Yellowstone. You were aboard the Yellowstone for how long?

**CC:** I think it was probably about a year and a half. I believe it was around that time.

**BG:** Then back to Portsmouth. I was going to say back to Norfolk but no it was Portsmouth.

**CC:** It's not far from Norfolk, same general location. Then I retired out of Portsmouth.

**BG:** What did you do at Portsmouth and how long were you there, that last assignment before you retired?

**CC:** I was there probably about a year. I wasn't there very long, and I worked in supply there also. I was working in PSD, that's a personal support detachment there. Portsmouth is the big Naval Hospital down there. This was the personnel department that handled all the medical people that came off ships or offshore command to go to the hospital.

**BG:** This was at the time of the Vietnam era, so while you never actually got over to Vietnam, you were serving around that era and so on. How did that affect the services in general, sailors in particular?

**CC:** You probably remember back then it was a bad time for anybody that was in the military because I remember especially when I was stationed in Memphis, when I first got there in order to be able to wear civilian clothes, we had to go through what they call a [unclear] inspection. When I first got there, I hadn't done through it yet and so we had to wear our uniforms out on Liberty, which wasn't a good idea. I'll tell you, people would make comments to me when I'd be walking down the street. I even got spit on a few times by people because people didn't believe in the military being Vietnam. It was a rough time for us then because there was so much hate out there about the military being in Vietnam.

**BG:** I would've expected that of all places that Memphis, Tennessee would have probably been the last one where you would receive that, or not just Memphis but a lot of that area would've been the last area where you would've received that kind of treatment. They would've been much more supportive I would have

thought but not at all.

**CC:** No, it was bad during that timeframe and of course then when we were able to wear civilian clothes then a lot of people didn't know. They tell you don't bring up that you're in the military but of course when I was first stationed there I didn't know. I was out on Liberty in my uniform, and I was proud of my uniform, and I was proud of my country but there's a lot of people that weren't at that time.

**BG:** That's going to be a tough time.

**CC:** That's why, with the Gulf War and all that I'm glad that people support their troops now more than they did back then.

**BG:** Okay, not the happiest note to leave this on but I'm glad that we got that into the mix. Was there a time at which you thought that you might be assigned to a ship in Vietnam or assigned to a base in Vietnam.

**CC:** [Laughs]. No, basically back then women were kept away from combat as much as possible. Of course, like they said if you're out at sea and something happens, what are they going to do. You're going to be there. But so, they try and keep women out of the combat area back then.

**BG:** Carol, any closing comments before we end the interview?

**CC:** I was glad to serve in the Navy, and I would recommend it to anybody that enjoys traveling and a change of life.

**BG:** Carol thank you very much for participating in the process. You've had some unique experiences because you're a woman and because the era in which you served. So, this is valuable to have this information. Thank you very much.

**CC:** Well, thank you sir.