



FLORENCE (OTTO) BOUTWELL
USNR, LT.(jg)

I, Florence Barbara (Otto) Boutwell, was born in Camden, New Jersey, October 7, 1919. My father, Charles Frederick Otto, was an elementary school principal and my mother, Florence Bernice Penn, was an elementary school teacher.

People did not travel much in those days. Except for taking the Public Service bus twice a year to shop in Philadelphia, I had not been out of the state of New Jersey until I joined the Navy in 1943, during World War II.

When I came home to Merchantville, New Jersey, for Christmas in '43, during my second year of teaching in Salem, New Jersey, I noticed that there was a service flag in every window on my street, except ours. The reason: we were four girls and my father had flat feet and a family of four children and was not allowed to volunteer.

I had recently read in the paper that the services were accepting women. I wanted a service flag in our window. My Grandfather Penn sailed fishing parties on the ocean for a living and I had spent every summer at Beach Haven, New Jersey, by the ocean. It seemed natural that I should volunteer for the Navy.

I was sent to Smith College, Northampton, MA to Midshipmen School. Shortly after I arrived there, one morning at muster, all who had had business training were asked to step out of line. I was one of those.

I was sent to the Business School of Harvard University to be trained for the Supply Corps. My classes were in famous Longfellow Hall and I lived in a Radcliffe dormitory. The training was speeded up. We women were needed to replace men at desk jobs. They were badly needed in combat in the islands. We were called the Sixty Day Wonders.

I was commissioned Ensign on graduation. My class was the first group of women ever to participate in a Harvard graduation.

I was sent as Accounting Officer to the Naval Supply Depot, Velox (Spokane), Washington. Shortly after I arrived there, my commanding officer received a memo ordering him to appoint an officer to write a month by month history of the Depot for the Archives in Washington, D.C. There were only 32 officers on the base, all males except me. The rest of the workers at Velox were civilians. The military men were there either for R&R after fighting in the South Pacific or were on their way to the South Pacific.

The job of Depot historian was given to me, "the only somewhat permanent officer on the base." I am grateful for that assignment. I always loved writing and it started me on what later was to be a consuming hobby.

We 32 officers did not live on the base. I lived at the Women's Athletic Club on Wall Street in Spokane, The mail orderly gave me a ride to and from the Depot each day. As the only woman officer on the base, I participated in everything the men did, including their gunnery, marching and exercise programs. As a part of the exercise program, each officer was ordered to plant and tend a fifty by fifty Victory garden. In New Jersey I had had no farming experience and at lunch one day was lamenting that fact to my fellow officers.

It so happened that a lieutenant in charge of material inspection in the Northwest Area and stationed in Spokane was visiting and having lunch at the Depot. He said farming was his thing and offered to help me plant my Victory garden. Each Sunday that summer he and I had lunch at the nearby Zepp Inn and then went out to the Depot to do our gardening. By the end of the summer, we had record-setting crops. Since we each lived in one room and neither of us had cooking facilities, we didn't know what to do with the produce. "Let's get married and put our vegetables in a freezer," he said.

We were married with crossed swords in the First Presbyterian Church in Spokane. Except for visits, he did not return to his home in Kansas and I did not return to New Jersey. We lived in Spokane.

We had three daughters and gardened together for fifty three happy years. Lieutenant Commander Laurence Albert Boutwell passed away December 6, 1997.