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OHNR: OH-2012-39 DOI: 07 June 2012
 TRSID: [REDACTED] DTR: 18 July 2012
 QCSID: [REDACTED] Text Review: 10 Aug 2012
 INAME: NIBOUAR, Helen Text w/Tape:
 IPLACE: NSA, National Cryptologic Museum, Conference Room,
 Ft. Meade, MD
 IVIEWER: COOLEY, David P.

Cooley: This is NSA Oral History 2012-39. Today is 7 June 2012, and we are talking to Helen Nibouar, a civilian SIGABA operator for the Army Air Force during World War II. This interview will focus on Ms. Nibouar's efforts during World War II. My name is David Cooley, and I am the Oral Historian for the Center for Cryptologic History. This interview is being recorded in the conference room of the National Cryptologic Museum. The interview is UNCLASSIFIED. Helen, welcome. We in the Center for Cryptologic History appreciate you donating your time for this retrospective look at your efforts as a SIGABA operator during World War II. With that in mind, would you provide us an overview of your academic background, and how you became involved with the SIGABA and the Army Air Force during World War II?

Nibouar: Yes. My name is Helen Nibouar now. It was Helen Breese, B-R-E-E-S-E, at the time. I had graduated from high school in Oklahoma and was unable to attend any further education. So I lived with an aunt and uncle for a couple of years; then I moved to Washington, D.C. 'cause I had friends there. And I worked in a storage company, and that's where I was working when Pearl Harbor was bombed. And on the radio, they asked everybody who could type to please come and apply to be a clerk-typist, which I did. Got the job; was there a very short time. And it's rather coincidental, but at a water fountain in that building, I met a girl who was telling me she was learning to be a cryptographer and asked me why I didn't come and do that. And I thought it sounded glam...

Cooley: Now, Helen, where were you working at that time?

Nibouar: In that...in Washington, D.C. in a...one of the government buildings. See, one of the big government buildings. They had rooms full of clerk-typists. And those...

Cooley: Do you remember what department you were working for? Were you...?

Nibouar: Well, I really don't and... Yeah, I'm pretty sure it wasn't the Air Force. I think it was, you know, just, like the Army Department.

Cooley: Okay.

~~Derived From: NSA/CSSM 1-52
 Dated: 8 January 2007
 Declassify On: 20320108~~

UNCLASSIFIED Page 1 of 16

Nibouar: What we did there was we made out cards for every young man that was rushing to get in to the service, you know, to fight.

Cooley: Uh huh.

Nibouar: Some, of course, were drafted, but many of them were just volunteering. And they needed their background history. And we had file cards; and that's what we did all day long, was type these file cards with their name, home address, birthday, you know, education and all that; and had huge files of it. And it was...you know, like an 8-to-5 job...day job. And I did that, and I met this girl. And she was learning to be a cryptographer in the same building on a couple of floors below us. And so, I did go downstairs and get interviewed. And even though I didn't have the education—you were supposed to have at least two years of college—and they said they would try me out.

Cooley: Now, do you think that was Arlington Hall where you were?

Nibouar: That's not right...a main building right in Washington, D.C., is it?

Cooley: No, it's...

Nibouar: Arlington Hall?

Cooley: No.

Nibouar: No, see, it was...I can almost see the building, but I have no idea what the name was. And it was a small room, and they didn't even...I don't recall that they had the SIGABA in there. We were learning on a metal thing that you slid the tapes back and forth, I guess, which is a little bit what the cryptanalysts use.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: But that...I guess by that, he could tell, you know, that I could...And he knew I could type...

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: The major that interviewed me. He knew I could type, and I think he gave me a test on that. And he then sent me to where...You know, I don't remember using the SIGABA because...until they sent me right from there to Florida to an air base.

Cooley: Uh huh. So you had initial training as a cryptologist in Washington, D.C.?

Nibouar: Yes, a very...Yeah.

Cooley: Okay. Did you...?

Nibouar: A very short time.

Cooley: Well, I was going to ask how long was that? You can't remember? Was it a couple of weeks or...?

Nibouar: Just... Yeah, like a few months.

Cooley: Oh, a few months.

Nibouar: Uh huh. And I think most of that time, I had to be there until they could write letters to my friends that I knew in Oklahoma—like the people that I...at the school where I graduated and...

Cooley: Uh huh.

Nibouar: And just people in...all...Anybody that knew me probably from childhood, they had to get written letters from them, saying that I could be classified. So I...

Cooley: Alright, your...They were doing your background clearance, then?

Nibouar: Yeah.

Cooley: Yes.

Nibouar: Absolutely, the background of...to make sure I was okay ((she chuckles)), you know, to do it. And I'm pretty sure that's... Because I got very little training there. Most of it was on-the-job, you know, on my first job.

Cooley: Okay. So what happened...? You got your clearance and then you went down to Florida. Now, what did you do down in Florida?

Nibouar: I was stationed there at Morrison Air Force Base...

Cooley: Uh huh, as a civilian. And then...

Nibouar: As a civilian.

Cooley: And that's where they taught you how to use the SIGABA?

Nibouar: That's right. They...All the officers-in-charge...First, we had a different one on each shift. But they were all trained. And in a very short time, they could train the girls to do it. As long as you could type well and, you know, stay up on the midnight shift, I guess, you could say ((she chuckles))...

Cooley: Uh huh.

Nibouar: We typed the messages. And this place was...The airplanes from Memphis, Tennessee flew...stopped there. Then they went to Borinquen Field—a little island ((Puerto Rico)). A couple of stops, and flew planes to Africa. Dropped them off. And then, they would deadhead back to Memphis and pick up another plane and come through. And that's why they had to be really very classified because, you know, they didn't want anybody to know how many were being sent over there and what type and everything.

Cooley: ((He acknowledges.)) Now, how many people were working with you, typing messages on...or decla...decoding messages on the SIGABA machine at...when you were in Florida?

Nibouar: Yes...

Cooley: Do you remember?

Nibouar: See, I can't remember exactly, but it seemed like it was more like five or six, because we rented a house there in West Palm Beach, and all stayed together.

Cooley: Mm hmm.

Nibouar: And so, I would say we had three bedrooms. There must have been about four or five of us—maybe as many as six. And that was helpful because, you know, then we...because we had to be so careful not to even mention...Everybody knew we worked at "the Field" they called it—Morrison Field.

Cooley: Uh huh.

Nibouar: Everybody knew we worked there. Well, not everybody, but, you know, the people we rented the house from, and people we would meet: "Oh, we're clerks out at the Morrison Field." Nobody knew. And, you know, if we happened to go out with any of the men when they had a layover there, they didn't know. We just said we worked at Morrison Field and worked shifts, and that's about it.

Cooley: Now, did they give you a time period that you were going to be at this location, or was that just your standard job?

Nibouar: They did not give us the time, but I can't remember exactly how long I was there. And they just came in and said they need some people at Hamilton Field, California: "Are any of you available or would like to go? Or could we transfer you?" And of course, I was okay to go. So I think they sent about three of us. Some of the ladies were from the East Coast permanent...I mean, that's where they grew up.

Cooley: Uh huh.

Nibouar: And they didn't particularly...

Cooley: Want to go.

Nibouar: Want to leave there. So I went to Hamilton Field, which is outside of San Francisco and...

Cooley: Do you remember when that was?

Nibouar: ((She chuckles.)) No.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: I'd have to...I guess if I could backtrack...try hard and backtrack to...right when I left Oklahoma and make pretty good guesses, but I didn't do that. So I couldn't do it just off the top of my head.

Cooley: Okay, alright. Was it less...? Were you in Florida for less than a year?

Nibouar: No, I was there I'd say a good year and a half.

Cooley: Year and a half? Okay.

Nibouar: At least.

Cooley: That's good.

Nibouar: Uh huh.

Cooley: That's good. Now, let me ask you about the training. Again, go back to

the training you had before you went down to Florida. How extensive was...or how extensive was the training you got at Florida in operating the SIGABA machine?

Nibouar: In Florida?

Cooley: Or wherever—the training you got for the...

Nibouar: Well, actually, as I said, I got that pretty much in Florida. And the officers in charge of the code room were the ones who would teach us. And when you think about it, if you're a good typist, it was very simple to operate. You know, just set it up and then just typed [sic] and type and type. And the officer was completely in charge of us in every way. I mean, he was responsible for us to keep our mouth shut, and everything. It was a really big job.

Cooley: Now, did you have...? Were one group in charge of coding messages and another group in charge of decoding messages? Or did you move back and forth in that duty?

Nibouar: Actually, we moved back and forth because when we'd come in, we just...he would...the officer-in-charge would just say, "We have this stack over here to decode, and here are the encode, ones coming in."

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: And, you know, we just more or less did some of each or... We'd all... It depended on how many we had. We shared them, you know, so that everybody was busy the whole time. We very seldom... Well, we had to take a break 'cause it's... you know, it was hard.

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: But actually, some of the officers-in-charge also were more strict than others about, you know, getting it done.

Cooley: How much...?

Nibouar: ((She chuckles.)) They wanted it done. They had shifts also, and they wanted it cleaned up on their shift. But we almost never could do that because there would be some left for the next shift. And if we had a problem with a particular message, after we worked on it, the officer-in-charge would work on it, you know, to...

Cooley: Okay. How much...?

Nibouar: Get it where...

Cooley: Yeah, yeah...

Nibouar: It needed to go.

Cooley: ((He acknowledges.)) How much checking was done with the messages when you encrypted them...or encoded a message or decoded a message? Did you have somebody come in and check you, or did you work in teams on the message? Or how was that done, do you remember?

Nibouar: No, we did it individual. And as I recall, I believe the officer-in-charge read the incoming ones to make sure they were, you know... Some of them were very short and some would be longer. But many of them were pretty short because it had to do with the... where the plane was going; where they were going to make their first landing, their second landing; and where in Africa or wherever they were going, going to leave it. See, a lot of it was like that. And then, there would be some that had to do with one officer needing to talk to another officer, maybe even in the code room or the headquarters. You know, a lot of messages went to the headquarters of the different air bases.

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: So they knew what, you know, was going on all the time...

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: Over in Europe, see?

Cooley: Right, right. Now, let me ask you. With the training that you had and the amount... the use... just the hands-on experience you had with the SIGABA, how much actual and theoretical understanding of the operations of the machine did you have? Did you really understand what the machine was doing to encode the message?

Nibouar: Not really. And I think that they weren't... They didn't really want us messing around with the mechanical part of it, except to set it up. And they would help... Occasionally, the officer-in-charge would help us if we had... like we weren't able to get... Like I told you, if a wrong letter was sent and it... we couldn't get it going, they would help us with that sometimes. But that would be the same thing we could do, but I guess they felt real responsible to make sure we could get the message decoded or encoded. Well, it'd be when it was decoded that we had this problem. And see, they stressed us not making a mistake at all.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: Really! That was very important.

Cooley: Uh huh. Now, did you have somebody... again, a partner that checked the message after you typed it, or...? And you would check theirs after they typed theirs before you send it on? Or how was that...? Was there a...?

Nibouar: No, it... It was... It pretty much... It... They all made sense. Real easy. The message... It just did most of the time, even with one letter not quite right, they...

Cooley: Uh huh.

Nibouar: You know, they made sense, and we knew... as we typed it we knew... Because we were supposed to type it and then hand it to the officer, you know, right away.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: Because it was up to him...

Cooley: To decide...

Nibouar: You know, to make sure it was correct in every way. But, you know, we were young enough that we were real good typists, so we just didn't need a lot of, you know, re-reading or not understanding what they were saying. I don't remember there being much of that at all.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: It was just plain and simple, I guess you'd say.

Cooley: Okay. Were there special operating procedures that you had to use for the SIGABA? I mean, did you have like a two-person rule? Were there two people that had to be there...

Nibouar: No...

Cooley: When you operated a machine or...?

Nibouar: No. The officer... The code room is usually fairly small, and the officer walked around all the time behind, and looked over our shoulders all behind... you know, behind us and made sure... Well, he was probably interested in it being all correct also as we're typing. And sometimes they needed them in a hurry, and he would stand there and just take it like hot off the machine ((she chuckles)) to the... whoever needed it.

Cooley: Right. Now, you said... Let me make sure I'm... I want to make sure that this is correct. You said in Florida, there were four or five machines in the code room. Is that correct?

Nibouar: I believe so. Now, see, I just can't remember exactly, but I don't... Now, maybe possibly two of the ladies were on that teletype code thing. And if... Say if there were four or five of us, and maybe only three did the SIGABA.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: It's just so hard for me to remember.

Cooley: Now, I... The follow-on question: was it the same when you were out in California, outside of San Francisco?

Nibouar: Yes, uh huh.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: Very much the same.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: Very much the same.

Cooley: Alright, so that was kind of standard operating procedure then?

Nibouar: Yeah, uh huh. Yeah, each one was very much the same. And, of course, very classified: no one could come in the building, I mean, in the room—ever, ever, ever. Except those who had their classification and the officers

in charge, of course.

Cooley: Now, how long did you stay at California?

Nibouar: Well ((she pauses))... It seems like I wasn't there... I was there at least a year, I believe. But someone in Hawaii needed some cryptographers. And once again, they asked, you know, if we would go. I've often wondered, if they couldn't get someone, if they would have left us there or sent us back to Washington or what. But anyway, several of us went there. I'm trying to think who all went. Maybe three. And then, they'd have to get others probably from Washington to come to take our places. See, I don't know exactly how that worked. We just did what we were told and...

Cooley: Right. Now, what...? Was this in 1944 or '43? Do you remember when you went to Hawaii?

Nibouar: Well, s... No, I don't, but, see, I was in... It all started when it was bombed, in Washington, D.C. I was there. See, that's where I was when it was bombed. So it had to be several years later because I had been to Florida and California; probably about six ...?

Cooley: So it was probably late '43? Maybe early '44 when you went out to Hawaii?

Nibouar: ((She pauses.)) Isn't it terrible? I can't remember that.

Cooley: That's alright. Don't...

Nibouar: ((She chuckles.)) I just...

Cooley: That's fine. That's fine.

Nibouar: No, as I say, if I had sat down with a pen and pencil, maybe I could have kind of gone back over it. It seemed like I was at those places... I know in Florida I was there several years because my brother was in the Navy and he visited me there. And then, California, I don't... It seemed like I wasn't there that... just a real long time. And ((she pauses))... Mmm, I don't know... I just can't remember.

Cooley: Mm hmm. Now, is...? Where did you go when you went out to Hawaii? Were you at Hickam or...?

Nibouar: No. Somehow I was with the Army... Is it Fort Shafter ?

Cooley: Fort, yeah, Shafter, okay.

Nibouar: Yeah. They had an underground code room. All the others, see, were just in buildings. And they had the... mostly women that plotted airplanes somehow wherever they were. You know how they move it around with that wand all over the...

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: Map and so on? And they kind of moved them up to one end and put us, you know, at the other end. Apparently, they had... they were classified... very classified also. And see, that was Army. I mean, it was

an Army base...

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: Fort Shafter.

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: I never did work at Hickam there.

Cooley: Okay. Now, did...?

Nibouar: No...

Cooley: When you went over to Hawaii, did they provide you housing?

Nibouar: Yes.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: Yes, they did. In fact, we started out in barracks, which were extremely noisy and it was awful hard to sleep during the day, you know, when we worked at night.

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: And they knew that. And as soon as they could, they had a house with several bedrooms that they let us stay in.

Cooley: Now, was this...? Do you remember, when you went out to Hawaii, were you the first SIGABA operators to go out there? Or were you replacing people?

Nibouar: I don't remember that we replaced people, unless it was military—you know, airmen and...maybe. I don't think so. It...And yet, it was set up when we got there.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: 'Cause that's exactly the same machine we had used before.

Cooley: Alright. Now, let me ask...go back on a maintenance question here. Did you ever have to switch the rotors on the SIGABA machine?

Nibouar: As far as I know, we did not. Like, take one out and put another one in?

Cooley: Uh huh, right.

Nibouar: No, I don't recall us doing it. And I think that was the lieut...you know, the lieutenant or whatever in charge.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: If...I don't remember them doing it, actually.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: I really don't. I just sat down, and set it up and started typing. But they *must* have had maybe someone...No one...I don't remember anyone coming in from outside and doing anything in the code room.

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: It seemed like if there was any kind of maintenance, the lieutenant or captain in charge had to be responsible for it.

Cooley: Okay, alright, good.

Nibouar: Well, sadly, I do not remember their names at all.

Cooley: Mm hmm, okay.

Nibouar: You know, change it around. I just don't remember the names.

Cooley: Can you describe the performance of the SIGABA? Now, you said you were a good typist and everything. Was it fast and reliable? Was it easy to use, or was it quirky or...? Do you remember anything...?

Nibouar: It... Actually, to me it was... The only thing was the keys weren't as light as the typewriter. And I imagine that's because of it's having the rotors in it. And you just got used to that in a hurry. It just wasn't as fine and light a touch as best I can remember. But the keys were exactly like the typewriter, and, you know, we could do it pretty fast.

Cooley: Was...? Do you remember whether it was a slower process because of the rotors having to shift every time you touched a key? Or was that something that you rarely noticed?

Nibouar: We rarely noticed. It went real smooth, real smooth. I've even tried to think since I first talked to the people in your office that... of, what the size of the rotors were. You know, I just... Somehow, that has just left me. But they had to be real precise to go... for us to be able to type as fast as we could. You know, real precise.

Cooley: Mm hmm, okay.

Nibouar: I just can't imagine anybody inventing that.

Cooley: Right. Now, did...? How long were you in Hawaii? Do you remember that?

Nibouar: Ah, well, I was there when the war ended in Europe, which was after that, wasn't it? ((She chuckles.))

Cooley: Mm hmm.

Nibouar: Yeah, because I remember a huge celebration.

Cooley: Mm hmm. And then...

Nibouar: Because it wasn't a...

Cooley: And then, when did you transfer to Japan?

Nibouar: Well, as soon as it was safe—which was very quick. Like, for instance, the first people... the first women that went over, were the... they called them "Nisseis", the Japanese American...? You know, they have a big colony of Japanese living in Hawaii. And the ones who could speak English were the first ones to go over as interpreters. And I don't know how many went—not very many. But I'm sure they were, you know, in the headquarters over there or something. And then, the next American

women went over, and we went on a ship to Japan. And when I first got there, I was working for...in the building that was AACS ((Spoken as ACE))...Let's see. It was Air Force. It was run by the Air Force. And then, shortly after that, we were transferred to a code room in MacArthur's headquarters in the Dai Ichi Building.

Cooley: And what kind of work...? What kind of schedule did you have at that time? Was it more of an 8-to-5 schedule then?

Nibouar: No.

Cooley: Or were you still working shift?

Nibouar: The whole time, it was working shifts. And we were housed in the (B% Kan Da Kai Kan), which was the Japanese Y. I believe it was the YMCA, not the YWCA. But they just vacated it and put a lot of Americans in it, and we were in with that group.

Cooley: Mm hmm. Well, what about security, especially when you were over in Japan now? Did they...? Was [sic] there any precautions taken because you were in the coding room, operating a SIGABA? Was [sic] there any precautions taken in terms of security for your housing?

Nibouar: None that I...Absolutely none. I think they always put us together though, which was very helpful because, you know, we all knew the rules by then, of course. ((She chuckles.)) And we didn't have transporta...No. The bui...The...I don't remember that we had transportation from where we lived to the Dai Ichi Building. I cannot remember how we got back and forth. I have...I'm in touch with one...Oh, no, she didn't go to Japan. See, some of them dropped out and went either back to Washington or some place else. They weren't...I don't have...I'm not in touch with one of the ladies that went the same way I did. I just did...And we had orders just like the military...

Cooley: Okay.

Nibouar: To either fly or go by plane or go by...or train or go by boat.

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: Just...They just gave us orders. We had no choice about anything, and all...Our biggest order was to keep our mouth shut.

Cooley: Mm hmm. Now, let me...About that, let me ask you one other thing. You were a civilian employee. Did you have the option of opting out of this? Once you got into it, if you...could you have said, "Gee, I don't want to do this anymore," or, "Could I go to work some place else"?

Nibouar: Well, you know, I never thought about that. I never thought of it once because, you know, I was single and I had a job. ((She chuckles.))

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: And when we were in Japan, when I first got there, we were paid in yen, not American money. And then, they finally fixed it. You know, as more

Americans moved over there, they...we got paid. But no, it never entered my mind. And when I left Japan, it's because I...I guess I was a little bit homesick. I'd been gone a long time. I went back to Washington and got a job there, back in the code room at the Pentagon.

Cooley: Mm hmm. Now, do you remember how long you were in Japan?

Nibouar: Mmm...Ah, let's see. I knew I was there at least two years, maybe longer.

Cooley: Oh, wow.

Nibouar: Yeah, it had changed rapidly. Just rapidly everything got better and, you know, it just...It was really easy. We were not allowed to...We had to eat in our quarters, and it was all furnished by the Americans. We were not allowed to eat on the Japanese market at all—or go hardly. We didn't go much out.

Cooley: Was that more a security concern or the fact that they didn't want you infringing...

Nibouar: Anything happened...

Cooley: On the limited food that those people...the Japanese had?

Nibouar: Yeah, we...It was just not safe to eat the food. And I think they must have had some concern about our safety. But, you know, I must have been over there pretty long because I climbed Mount Fuji, and I went to the big hotel and spent a weekend there with my friends. And we were...We used, you know, the military transportation. We didn't have a...anything.

Cooley: What's your fondest memory of being in Japan?

Nibouar: Well, actually...The Japanese people, it was amazing to me, were excellent. They bent over backward. They were happy to see any Americans there, and I don't remember...Of course, there was a language barrier, but...Like any place else, some of them, they learned to speak English in kindergarten, I think. You know, some of them. So it was...After about six months, I would say it was, I ventured out. But I was not scared, but real apprehensive all the time for a while. And it was old time Japanese when we first moved over there, but it changed in a hurry for the better. And it kept changing rapidly until, by the time I left, like I say, I didn't mind traveling or...Like I took the train with my friends to Kyoto and looked around there. No problem at all. They just seemed so happy that we were there.

Cooley: Did you ever meet MacArthur?

Nibouar: No, but ((she pauses))...Well, it's a long story. I ended up meeting my husband at the base in Florida. When I got to Japan, he had just transferred there from China. He's a navigator.

Cooley: Uh huh.

Nibouar: And then, he ended up being one of General MacArthur's navigators. Well, when I...We dated the whole time I was...almost the whole time.

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And then, when I decided I had enough of Japan, I was going to come back to Washington and try to go to Europe. And he followed me in about two weeks, and we got married. And that's when I... And I... And we went back to Japan. He had to sign up, stay a year. And then, after we came back from the States, I didn't work as a cryptographer anymore. I could have (1-2B)...

Cooley: When you came back the first time, you worked as a cryptographer in the Pentagon.

Nibouar: In the Pentagon.

Cooley: Is that correct?

Nibouar: Yeah, in the Pentagon. Went back to the Pentagon, yeah.

Cooley: Okay. And how long did you stay there?

Nibouar: That was a very short time, because I had applied to go to Europe. And since my husband-to-be came, and we decided to get married, I, you know, withdrew that. And the... He had to... He was about ready to come back to the States, so... He had to sign up for a year—to stay over there for another year. So I thought... I just went back with him and got my job back there (2-3B)...

Cooley: Alright, so you... then you went back to Japan...

Nibouar: Uh huh.

Cooley: After you got married?

Nibouar: Uh huh.

Cooley: Alright. And you got the same job again?

Nibouar: Uh huh.

Cooley: Oh!

Nibouar: In that time, they asked me to instruct cryptography to... or the SIGABA to these really young soldiers that were enlisted, and they were interested in it. And I worked in a complete different building, and it was a complete different job. We met, you know, every day. There would be maybe 20 of them—15 or 20? And we went... It didn't take that long, but that's how long they wanted me to stay and do that. And I truly do not remember if they left and another group came. You know, I don't know if I had the same groups the whole time that I did that. And they were wonderful, and very enthusiastic about learning, and very careful. And they all had, you know, clearances.

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: TOP SECRET clearances.

Cooley: Right. Now, let me ask you, especially now that you're talking about you were training other people to use the SIGABA. Do you remember at any time you were involved with SIGABA operations, was there any... ever any

upgrade to the system—the physical system or the...or anything like that? Or any new operating procedures that you recall?

Nibouar: You know, I don't recall any. I think it went just like from the beginning. I do not remember if they were bigger or more efficient or easier or anything. It just seemed to me it was pretty much the same all the way through. Now, one thing I did want to mention. I don't know how important that is, but when I was in...When we moved our...My job from the Air Force part over in Japan, that was just there just a short time. Then they opened the one there in MacArthur's building.

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: At that time, they had a new system whereby, when we typed a message...Right at the beginning, after we got it...the code fixed and everything...Right at the very beginning, it would say "EYES ONLY." We had to stop and get up; leave the machine; and the officer-in-charge decoded the message, and hand carried it directly to General MacArthur there in the building, see?

Cooley: Oh.

Nibouar: I never saw one of those. If it...

Cooley: So as soon as you got to that "EYES ONLY" statement in the message, then you stopped typing and the officer-in-charge took over?

Nibouar: That's right. Yes, and he just took it in his hand...No copies or anything—just that one—and took it to General MacArthur's office. I just thought that was really, really interesting myself. And of course, I was just *dying* to know what was in it!

Cooley: Right.

Nibouar: ((She laughs.)) Never...They... Oh, they made that really clear.

Cooley: Uh huh.

Nibouar: You stop immediately and get up from the machine and don't look back. Get the officer. And he sat down and then hand carried it to General MacArthur. So that was a really big responsibility, I guess is the word I was trying to think of. Because, you know, once we'd sit down and it start making sense, we just went as fast as we could doing it. But they really made sure we didn't do that. ((She chuckles.)) We had to stop.

Cooley: Now, what...? In terms of security, let's go on a little...What were you partic...? What kinds of concern...? Did you have to sign a consen... a security consent form when you started the work there, and what was your...? What were your options in terms to being debriefed out of SIGABA clearance and SIGABA capability? Did you have any situations? You know, after you left Japan for the second time, what did they tell you about your responsibilities in terms of security?

Nibouar: Do you know that I don't remember anything, anything at all. It...It's kind of strange now when you look back over it. But I think there were many

things that happened similar to that during World War II simply because it was all so bad and people were so absorbed in it that I just think they... I don't know. I guess they just trusted us somehow. I don't remember one thing. And I hope I'm right about that. I wish I had... I were in touch with some of the ladies that could remember maybe a little better because I just... I don't remember a thing about it. Nobody told me to... And of course, it just left... I... It was so ingrained in me that I just never, ever talked about it, ever! And it... This is not for a record, but I think it's so strange that right now, as old as I am, all through the rest of my life, if someone told me they wanted to tell me something but "please don't tell anyone" or "don't tell the lady that they were talking about"... or somebody else, I couldn't do it.

Cooley: Uh huh.

Nibouar: I... You know, I just couldn't do it. It was... It just took me back, and I would not... And I still to this day, I just have that feeling that you ask me not to tell it, so I don't tell it.

Cooley: Mm hmm, okay. So you don't, then... When you...? When...

Nibouar: I wish I could... Is there any way to find out anything about that? It seemed liked I would have been debriefed...

Cooley: Yeah.

Nibouar: You know, somehow.

Cooley: Then, your husband was still in the military, wasn't he?

Nibouar: Yes, uh huh.

Cooley: Yeah.

Nibouar: Yeah, we were stationed in several places after that. You know, I was just busy being a mother then. Quite a chore!

Cooley: Yeah. So is that why you left? Did you start a family?

Nibouar: You know, when we... when our time was up in Japan, and we were sent to Sacramento, I didn't even check to see if they had a code room or anything. I just thought, you know, when you get married, you don't work. ((She chuckles.))

Cooley: Yeah, yeah. Well, that...

Nibouar: Because that was...

Cooley: I mean, that was standard back then, wasn't it?

Nibouar: Yeah, it was.

Cooley: It was, so...

Nibouar: And I never thought about it. But I will say that we were stationed... Let's see. Some... Maybe it... I think it was right there in Sacramento, I heard some lady saying that she had a job there in a code room. Seems like I did, but I don't know why they'd have one there, because I think it was

kind of a training thing. But somewhere along the line afterward, I heard one lady say, "Oh, I worked when I came back and..." But now that I'm thinking about it, it may not even been a code room. It may have been just a job, you know.

Cooley: Yeah.

Nibouar: Because it was so unusual for women to work after they got married.

Cooley: Right, right.

Nibouar: You're talking to an antique! ((She and Dave laugh.))

Cooley: Well, a very good antique! A very well-informed antique, let me tell you. This has really been interesting. And we really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us, Helen.

Nibouar: Well, I'm lucky that I'm still going, and I still see very well because I sew all the time. And, you know, I don't walk with a walker cane or anything. I'm really very, very lucky. So I hope I've been helpful. But I just...I should have been thinking about it a little bit more and trying to backtrack on the times. But they may be close enough to be chronological so you can do something with them.

Cooley: No, no, this had been very good.

Nibouar: Oh...

Cooley: Okay, Helen. Well, we'll do that. We'll send you forward this transcript, and we'll be back in touch with you to try to talk again, if that's okay.

Nibouar: Sure is!

Cooley: Alright!

Nibouar: Thank you very much.

Cooley: Thank you, and bye bye.

Nibouar: Okay. Bye bye! ((TR NOTE: Audio ends at this point.))

////////////////////////////////////End of transcript////////////////////////////////////