

HISTORY  
OF THE  
USMC, WR

NO. 60

MARILYN MORRISSEY HAYES

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

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INTERVIEWEE: MARILYN MORRISSEY HAYES

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE USMC, WR

DATE: NOVEMBER 17, 1997

C: This is the first oral history interview with Marilyn Morrissey Hayes of the Women's Reserve of the Marine Corps. Marilyn served in the marines during World War II. The interview is taking place in Mahan Hall in room N-22. Today's date is November 17, 1997. Mrs. Hayes, you're the first Marine Corps women reservist that I've interviewed, and I'm very happy that you were able to come today to talk about your experiences in the Marine Corps during World War II. I'd like to begin the interview with some background information on yourself and your family, and then we'll get into your Marine Corps service. Can you tell me where you were born and when you were born?

H: I was born right here in Newport, Rhode Island, on June 10, 1920, and I'm happy to be here, too.

C: What did your parents do for a living?

H: My mother was a practical nurse, and my father was some kind of mechanic. He worked for the Buick garage, and at the end of his life he worked right here on the Newport ( Rhode Island) Naval Base as a maintenance man.

C: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

H: No.

C: Did you spend your growing up years in Newport, Rhode Island?

H: I did.

C: When did you graduate from high school?

H: In 1937.

C: And that must have been Rogers High School.

H: Yes, it was. We just had our sixtieth reunion.

C: What did you do after high school?

H: I worked for a woman who lived across the street from me who was a philanthropist, named Miss Agnes Storer. I worked for her for a while, and then I worked for the John Steven's Shop, which is the oldest business in the country. It was established in 1705. It's located on upper Thames Street, 36 Thames Street.

C: And what was it?

H: It's a stone carving business. When I went into the Marine Corps, I went in as, oh some funny name, Chancellor of the Exchequer was one of the titles. They [John Steven's Shop] always had some funny titles. It was just this little stone carving shop that's still in existence up there, and some of the funny designations they used, which would mean "receptionist," during all my Marine Corps time, whenever anyone had to see me or something, out they'd call with this "Chancellor of the Exchequer." It was set up as a university; Chancellor of the Exchequer, John Steven's University. Then I had some long title, but it was awfully funny and it haunted me all my time in the marines. "What's this business?," they'd all ask.

C: Oh, yes; they wouldn't understand. It sounds like a highfalutin title. So that was your work experience. Was this Miss Storer related to Horatio Storer at all?

H: Yes, she was his daughter.

C: Oh, she was. Very interesting, because we have a scrapbook he donated to the Naval Historical Collection. Apparently he collected information on naval officers and we have some letters and imprints that he gave us. So were you working at the John Steven's Shop when World War II began?

H: Yes.

C: What was your reaction to the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

H: Oh, I had friends there. I can see us in the middle of the afternoon, a great many of us gathered together for a radio program, and we heard this news; our friend Mary O'Connell Walsh and her husband were out there. We were all beside ourselves, hoping

to hear. And out in a few weeks came the Life magazine. The pictures in Life magazine, and they were all right there. Mary had on all her jewelry, she didn't think she'd ever connect with her husband or her belongings again. That part was really funny, but we really were horrified because we were all her bridesmaids, and things like that. So we were waiting to hear the horrible news. Absolutely horrified.

C: Did you have any inkling that this would change your life at all, the beginning of the war and the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

H: Oh, I think we did, yes. I just think we thought things were never, ever going to be the same, and at that time there were a great many naval officers housed along Washington Street where I lived. Everyone had them in their homes. My mother had a couple on our third floor and their futures concerned us all.

C: As boarders?

H: Yes, roomers. The whole picture was different.

C: Why did you decide on military service?

H: There was a man named Harry Hopkins who was FDR's man-in-charge, and his widow, I mean his divorced wife, was the Red Cross manager over here at the Naval Hospital, and she lived with mother. Her son Steven, still only eighteen, went over, went across [the Atlantic] and was killed. At that time a lot of the girls connected with John Steven's University used to go and volunteer at the Naval Hospital. We did all kinds of things, to provide entertainment for them, visited the sickest, ran dances, things like that. When Steven Hopkins died, I really was

terribly touched, and I think that was the reason, right then and there. I was going to replace him.

C: That's a very positive and good motivation. Why did you select the Marine Corps over the other services? What was attractive about the Marine Corps?

H: I guess it was that Steven Hopkins. I don't know if it was that or not. We were so enmeshed with activities in that Naval Hospital. I remember some awfully sick marines, more than other people I guess.

C: So that's what kind of attracted you, I guess?

H: My father had been in the Navy, but I always wanted to be in the Marine Corps. I don't know why.

C: Wasn't that interesting? And this Steven Hopkins was in the marines then. So your personal connection with his mother and the others must have been the motivating force for you to join the marines. When did you enlist in the Marine Corps?

H: I really don't know, but remember I had been at the Ice Capades in Providence and I went over to the Marine Corps after that and enlisted. I must have called to find out something about it, but I went over and enlisted after that. I went over there after a matinee in Providence.

C: That must have been January 30, 1945, that you must have decided; I remember that from your papers. How did your mother and father react to your decision to join the Marine Corps? Were they supportive?

H: They were very supportive. My mother was shocked and my father was so proud he went right out and got a flag to put in the window that had a star on it. [which signified people in the service at that time]

C: Oh, that's great. So they had no problem with you enlisting. Did they express any trepidation about you joining the marines, of all services?

H: No, no.

C: You enlisted in Providence. Did you have to go up to Boston for any tests?

H: Yes, I did. I took my physical and some type of a mental test up there.

C: When did you finally report for duty? Was it around March 1945?

H: I guess so.

C: Where were you scheduled to report for training and indoctrination?

H: Camp Lejune, North Carolina.

C: Did you go by yourself via train, or did you go as a group?

H: Went as a group, a big group.

C: Where were they leaving from?

H: Boston. The group generally was from Boston. They stopped to pick me up in Providence.

C: Do you remember anything about that train ride?

H: Well, I had my hair cut off, that was one thing. I had braids around my head and one of the Woman Marines told me that "hair may touch but shall not cover the collar" and your hair must come off. I protested that my hair did not cover my collar, because it was around my head, but she cut it off with somebody's fingernail scissors. The other thing that I remember drastically was when we arrived, they put a court martial on right at the depot and scared us all right out of our minds because this girl was sentenced to something like prison for something she had done. I believe it was that she sold food from the kitchen or something like that. I'm not sure what it was, but she was a Woman Marine. We were all horrified and scared to death. I'm sure it was done on purpose, now that I look back.

C: Yes, probably to whip you into shape or something. Well, you arrived at Camp Lejune for basic training. Did you stay in barracks there?

H: Yes, we stayed in barracks.



C: Wooden barracks, I presume. What did your basic training consist of? What did you have to do during the day?

H: Oh, it was very strenuous. Lots of physical exercise. People would pass out, drop off like flies, myself included at times. I was scared mostly, not knowing what was ahead of me. Lots of climbing ropes, going up nets, push-ups. A lot of physical training. We had lessons in the afternoon. Drill sergeants were really very, very strict and severe. They'd scare you to death, everyone of us.

C: I'll bet, and they were male drill sergeants.

H: Not always. There were woman drill sergeants also. They were platoon leaders. The men were there, but generally we were taken care of by the women.

C: Did you have to march to class?

H: Absolutely. March to everything.

C: How did you bear up to the physical exercise? Were you used to that?

H: Yes, I was used to it. It wasn't so difficult for me, but I was scared much of the time. And I too, would drop, faint, right in formation. But I got over it very easily, two or three weeks into it. I was a survivor.

C: Do you remember what the classes were like that you had to take in the afternoon? What were you studying?

H: I don't remember. I remember having books.

C: Probably Marine Corps history, procedures, and the like. You would say the Marine Corps boot camp was stressful at first, but got a little better once you got used to it. How did the other girls react? Did you make any friends during the bootcamp and how did they react?

H: Yes, lots of friends. We all had to stick together to keep going. One of my friends couldn't eat; she absolutely couldn't eat. She was terrified. She hadn't ever been through anything as rigorous as that. She wasn't used to physical education. But we sort of hung together. I never left that base. I did go to Onslow Beach on Valentine's Day, which was still part of the reservation, that was so huge. We went swimming on Valentine's Day I remember. Many of my friends used to get off weekends and went into Durham and places like that, but I never left the base. I don't know why. Some of my friends must have done something I wanted to do. I can remember picnics by the river, and that kind of thing. Slept, I slept a lot.

C: Yes, right, to get your energy back. What was the Marine Corps food like? Was it decent?

H: It was all right. We all had to serve a time, you know, behind the counters dishing out food, scraping plates, wrapping up garbage, and running automatic potato peelers which would make large piles of foam. The peelers would peel the potato down to about the size of a golf ball.

C: Oh, that was mess duty. And Peter Soderberg, in his book, talks about how the girls did not look forward to mess duty; they hated it.

H: You had to get up awfully early.

C: And how long did the mess duty last? A week or a day?

H: I don't remember. Not too long I don't think.

C: But everyone had to take her turn. Did you socialize or fraternize with any of the marines on base at all during your time there?

H: No.

C: So you were totally segregated. Did anyone that you know of drop out of basic training?

H: Yes, there were a few girls that were sent home. They just couldn't hack it.

C: Yes, that's what I thought. Did you find it easy or difficult to conform to the discipline of military life?

H: Oh, I don't think so difficult; no. My mother ran a pretty tight ship.

C: Yes, people were more disciplined in those days. Can you comment on the uniform that was issue to you? Color? Style?

H: It was that Marine green skirt and jacket, khaki shirt, a couple of neckties, and a cap. And as I said, at Camp Lejune before we left there, when the uniforms were issued, there were a couple of tailors who ensured that the uniform was not to Marine Corps standards, but looked best on you, and they really did a great job.

C: So they tailored it to your figure. Oh, that's good. It wasn't just the standard issue. So you were at Camp Lejune from March to the end of April for you basic training. Where were you sent after that?

H: I was sent to Quantico.

C: Did you volunteer for that position or were you assigned?

H: I believe I was assigned. I think I put in for somewhere else, California, in fact. But I was assigned to Quantico.

C: And what was at Quantico?

H: Marine Corps schools, and the FBI had a school there, infantry, Field Artillery Battalion. Also there was an air station there.

C: So it was quite large.

H: Yes, it was large. And on the day I got there a fellow Newporter graduated from Marine Corps schools and in those days the first person you saluted as an officer had to give you a dollar. So the minute we got off the train, they told us this thing, so we all went over to where the graduation took place and out came a fellow Newporter and I got a dollar from him.

C: Oh, isn't that something. That's a unique custom. What was your billet at Quantico? What were you assigned to?

H: I was assigned to motor transport at Marine Corps school. I got my training there. You had to repair a flat tire, measure pressure in the tires, change oil, and that sort of thing.

C: Oh, so you had to maintain the vehicle, so you had to learn how to do that. Was that an extensive training?

H: I can't remember. It seems to me that it was quite long, actually.

C: Did you find that difficult to do? Change a tire especially?

H: No. I suppose they helped us. We changed a tire on a jeep. We were responsible for it, and as I say, I had three vehicles.

C: And what were they?

H: It was a jeep for the field. There were a lot of activities that took place in the field at Quantico, and really far out on the Reservation. A station wagon to take and bring my colonel, his name was James E. Kerr, around the base. And a Buick for trips to Washington. It must have been about 25 miles up to DC. I took care of those vehicles, but I had some young men who worked with me who were very helpful. Vehicles were washed and polished every day.

C: So you were responsible for everything regarding those three vehicles?

H: Yes.

C: Now that was a non-traditional job for a female, wasn't it?

H: No, there were four or five of us.

C: But in the grand scheme of things, it was not something you would do on the outside, so it was non-traditional in that sense.

H: Yes.

C: But there were other women drivers there.

H: Yes, I had a friend who was the driver, for General O. P. Smith. I think that was the best job there was on the base. Sometimes we exchanged things if they went back and forth. We all loved General Smith, and he died in DC while we were in Quantico.

C: Now you mentioned that you had the jeep for going out into the field. Would you take your colonel out into the field? You were his assigned driver? Did you have maneuvers out there?

H: Yes.

C: What did you like about this job?

H: I guess I liked it because I was my own boss, so to speak. I could bring the car home if I wanted to at the barracks, the station wagon; I had it there a lot. So if it was raining, or I wanted to go to church, or something or other, I was free to use it, which I didn't have to do very much. I guess I liked it because I was the one who was responsible. And Colonel Kerr was a very interesting man.

C: What was interesting about him?

H: He was "irascible." But he was very kind and good to me. And he ran the Marine Corps schools in a very severe manner, and he was tough on all the men, but he had a heart of gold, and he was awfully good to me.

C: So you had a good boss, a good person to drive around. Was there anything you didn't like about this assignment?

H: No, I loved it.

C: Were you on call all the time?

H: No, if he wanted something special he usually let me know. I'd be there, but if it was some day I was supposed to be off... I can't imagine doing what else; I was pretty much at his beck and call. But he was very fair about it.

C: So you were on duty for eight hours a day while he was at the Marine Corps schools?

H: Yes, I would say so.

C: Did you have to go to Washington often?

H: Yes, maybe once a week, or something like that.

C: I wonder why you were selected to be a driver. Was there anything in your background?

H: No. They needed so many heads at that time for that slot.

C: So you were just picked and trained to do what you had to do. Did you have other passengers besides the colonel?

H: Yes, quite often. In the field we would fill the jeep with the driver and three others. We would drive so fast and so furiously. It was quite an experience for me. Driving sixty miles per hour when I was used to driving thirty-five. But I had good luck and everything worked out.

C: Did you ever have any mishaps with the cars while they were in then?

H: I did have an unfortunate experience once when Colonel Kerr was not there. He sent two colonels and a lieutenant colonel to DC for something and we got to someplace out of DC on our way to Washington, when I stopped for a school bus. The colonel said, "We haven't got time for this. Proceed corporal, proceed." I told him I would not proceed. He told me I had got to do it. There were loads of kids entering the school bus. So I passed the bus very carefully, and there was a



policeman right at the corner, so he pulled us over. The colonel said we were in a hurry and the policeman said, "I don't give a damn. You go right up this road here and see the sheriff." So we went up to the sheriff and they took us into this house and held us up for I don't know how long. The fine was thirty-five dollars. None of those colonels had any money and I had a traveler's check and I had to pay for it.

C: Did you ever get reimbursed?

H: No.

C: That was awful. And you were right; you shouldn't have passed that bus.

H: Yes, I shouldn't have let him push me into it. But I was at fault.

C: Did you ever chauffeur anyone important around, any political figure?

H: Not that I can remember.

C: Where did you live during this time frame?

H: I lived in barracks over on the Potomac, I don't remember the name of it, but it was very pleasant. You could go down to the beach and swim. It was a nice setup.

C: Did you socialize with any of the marines?

H: Oh, lots of them. There were lots of parties at NCO clubs. We did all kinds of things. I still keep in contact with my bunkmate who lives in Chevy Chase. We still talk about all the things that we did together. We often went to DC for a play, or music. We went to Fredricksburg a lot. We used to go to Fredricksburg for Sunday lunch sometimes. We enjoyed Fredricksburg; it was very nice. There was always something for us to do.

C: Then you weren't that far from DC.

H: No, and the train took us right up there so it wasn't that far to go.

C: That's great. Did you make many friends?

H: Yes, I had lots of friends.

C: Did you date many Marine Corps men?

H: Oh, a few. They used to take us to fancy parties up in DC to dances at hotels, plays and concerts. We went to lots of places. It was fun.

C: So your experience there was very positive. Were you on call on weekends?

H: No.

C: Now you mentioned when we talked before that you had encountered Mildred McAfee Horton, who was Director of the WAVES. How did you happen to meet her? On what occasion?

H: I'm not too sure about this, but it had to be one day when she was in Washington. I was there, and I probably had my colonel there. She just came and spoke to me and asked me how I got in, what I was doing, how I got my job, did I like it. She was very kind.

C: Did you ever meet the women in charge of the Marine Corps Women Reserves, Ruth Chaney Streeter?

H: No, I don't even recall that name. Major Hamblet, Julia Hamblet. But I don't know what she did.

C: Did you ever meet anyone else famous during your time at Quantico?

H: Oh, war heroes I'm sure, but I don't recall any names.

C: I know Tyrone Power was in the marines.

H: I'm speaking of people like Barney Oldfields.

C: Did you ever encounter civilians during this time, and do you recall how they reacted coming into contact with a woman marine?

H: I don't ever remember anything that wasn't a positive experience.

C: That's good. Do you remember V-J Day at all, August 1945. You had been in the corps about six months. Do you recall if you celebrated, and what your reaction was?

H: I remember that I didn't often go to the NCO club, but all my friends went down there that night. They were all so wild that I think I got a ride home early because I had a job to go to in the morning. I was more apprehensive than anything else; elated but apprehensive.

C: So there were wild celebrations on the base. How did you feel personally about the end of the war?

H: So relieved because so many of my friends were away, and my husband to be would be coming home.

C: Oh, were you dating someone from Newport at that time? What branch of the service was he in?

H: He was in the army.

C: And was he in Europe?

H: Yes, he was in military intelligence in France.

C: Were you corresponding with him during this time frame, and do you have any of those letters.

H: Too many. I am about to burn them.

C: Oh, don't because they are priceless.. We would love to have letters from a woman marine to another fellow in the service. Don't trash them, don't burn them. If you ever want to clean out your attic, or whatever, we would be happy to take them. What was the highest rate you received in the Marine Corps?

H: Corporal.

C: Now, you mentioned when were chatting that your last post in the Marine Corps was Washington, DC. Now how did that transfer happen and why?

H: I think that was normal procedure to transfer you out. No one left from Quantico and the job; you went to DC and I don't remember how long I was there except it was the summer and awfully hot. The only way we could sleep was to get Turkish towels and put them in the fountain, cold and wet, and put them on us and knock us out so that we could go to sleep. We went to headquarters Marine Corps which was very close to do some type of a job, I believe it was clerical.

C: Do you remember when you left Quantico, what time frame that was?

H: No, not really.

C: When were you mustered out? Discharged from the marines?

H: I suppose it was June 1946.

C: So you stayed in a good ten months after the war ended, a good fifteen months in total, since you enlisted for the war and the duration. So you were discharged in Washington, and must have been living in Washington.

H: Yes, at Henderson Hall.

C: That was in Arlington, Virginia. Do you remember what the discharge process was like at all?

H: No, I remember it was some big parade grounds or something. A great many of us were discharged at the same time.

C: How did you feel about leaving the Marine Corps?

H: I was anxious to get home because so many of my friends were returning.

C: During your fifteen months did you ever have an opportunity to go home?

H: Oh, lots of time. I'd bring four or five people home because there was so much going on in Newport, it being a Navy town. We'd come back and fill my house up and have a good time.

C: What was Newport like during the war, during this time frame?

H: So lively! There were so many people here who really didn't have any connections so they were out to have some fun and meet people. We had loads of people in

our houses up and down the street. A lieutenant's wife lived with mother for a long time. They had a mutual friend up in New London. And she lived there and then came to Newport and lived here three or four years. And there were always young men who were at PT school over here. My mother, I wonder how she survived because there were always loads of people at our house all the time; endless meals, cooking and all.

C: So she had these roomers in all the time, because there was a great housing shortage in Newport, so these people have to be farmed out to private homes. Can you tell us where you lived at Newport at this time?

H: Over here at 53 Washington Street.

C: Facing the water. Oh, that's lovely, a perfect place. Did Newport have an O club in Traver's Block?

H: Yes, it was. It was over the entrance to the casino. We had lots of parties there. That was a huge place. I can't remember if that was after I came home, or before I left, but I think after.

C: Did you receive any medals once you were discharge? Did you receive the ruptured duck?

H: Yes, I did.

C: That indicated your discharge.

- H: I did get some ribbons, which meant something, I don't remember what. I don't have them anymore.
- C: Do you think you would have stayed in the Marine Corps if you could have? Women didn't have a choice and they were trying to disband the women's reserve by September 1946.
- H: No, I wanted to get home. I was twenty six, twenty-seven maybe.
- C: Do you think that the women's Marine Corps reserve had a strong sense of esprit de corps?
- H: Oh, yes, definitely.
- C: How did you feel about the experience looking back at it from this vantage point?
- H: I thought it was a very happy time in my life, except for the rigors of that first part of the basic training when I wasn't sure if I was going to make it. The rest of it I really enjoyed it; I enjoyed the people, and the people I worked with.
- C: Did you ever experience any harassment or discrimination?
- H: No, not really. I got along very beautifully along those lines. At Quantico you weren't allowed to fraternize with the officers. I had a lot of good times with the officers. We would meet at the depot and go to DC or Fredricksburg to a dance, or something like that.



C: Even though you weren't supposed to fraternize, you did. Well, it was wartime.

H: All of us did.

C: So you would say the men accepted you?

H: The young men that worked with me at the motor pool were great. It there was something the matter with the car, they would help. They would take a run if you needed to go someplace at a certain time, if they wanted to get out early, or I wanted to get out early. We worked very nicely together.

C: The colonel, he treated you well?

H: Yes, very fairly. I had a lot of respect for him.

C: Well, that's good, that's great. Did this experience affect you at all career-wise? Did you feel like you were a pioneer in joining the Marine Corps as a female?

H: No. It's probably because, as I've said before, I spent so much time at the Naval Hospital in those days.

C: Did the wartime experience make you more independent and self-reliant?

H: Oh, I suppose so.

C: Had you ever been away from home before that for any extended period?

H: No, I don't think so.

C: So this was a first for you, in respect for being on your own. Did you feel that the expectations for women in general changed once the war was over?

H: History has proved that one.

C: Did you maintain any friendships from your time in the service?

H: Yes, I kept in contact with a lot of people, almost all of who now have died. But I still have two friends, and we keep in touch.

C: Oh, that's great, that's fantastic. I know a lot of women have told me that, that they've kept in contact with these people. Did you settle here in Newport after the war?

H: Yes.

C: When did you marry your army friend?

H: I married him in 1947; we've been married 50 years.

C: Oh, that's great. You married him shortly after you got out. Did you work at all after you were married and you came home? You were discharged in June of 1946.

H: And I was married shortly after. I'm sure I did, but I don't remember. I imagine I may have. There is a woman now who lives at 86 Washington Street named Ade

Bethune whose mother was a Belgian Baroness and lingerer; she made very fine lingerie for a great many rich, famous New York ladies. And I worked for her for a certain time. I had worked for her before I worked at the John Steven's shop, and afterwards. I may have filled in there for a while. Now I think I'm sure I did because Baronne de Bethune made my wedding dress, so I must have been right there now that I think about it. So I think I must have worked until maybe when my first child was born.

C: Do you belong to any veteran's organizations?

H: No. I have a couple of friends that are always saying to me I want you to come to Rich Higgins-something or other, in town but I've never gone.

C: Do you have any other comments about your service in the Marine Corps, anything outstanding that happened, anything amusing that happened during this time frame?

H: No, it was just too long ago for me to recollect that kind of thing. It was a happy experience. I loved it. I really did.

C: Oh, that's a positive, very, very good to hear. I want to thank you very much for coming in today to discuss your experiences in the Marine Corps, some 52 years ago. Thank you very much.

H: It was my pleasure.