

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HISTORY OF THE MARINES (WR)

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NO. 65

MARY L. McLAUGHLIN MURPHY LECKIE

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THE HISTORY OF THE MARINES (WR)

INTERVIEWEE: MARY McLAUGHLIN MURPHY LECKIE

INTERVIEWER: EVELYN M. CHERPAK

SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE MARINES (WR)

DATE: MAY 13, 1998

EMC: This is the first oral history interview with Mary Leckie, who served in the Marine Corps, Women Reserve during World War II. Today's date is May 13, 1998, and I'm conducting the interview at her home at 67 Brook Street in Barrington, Rhode Island. Mary, I'm so glad that you've consented to give us this interview on your service in the Marines in World War II. And I'd like to begin the interview by asking you where and when you were born.

ML: I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, August 28, 1921.

EMC: Did you spend your growing-up years there?

ML: Yes. Until I was seventeen.

EMC: What did your parents do for a living?

ML: My mom was a housewife, and my father worked for the Providence Journal Bulletin. He was --oh, gosh, I can't think of the word--he was a compositor. He was Foreman of the Composing Room.

EMC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

ML: No.

EMC: You said you spent your first seventeen years in Providence. And where did you move to after that?

ML: Barrington, Rhode Island.

EMC: Just where we are now. Did you graduate from Barrington High?

ML: Yes, 1939.

EMC: Just before the war began. What did you do after high school?

ML: I went to Katherine Gibbs School.

EMC: Where was that located?

ML: Providence.

EMC: In Providence. Was that a two-year school?

ML: Yes.

EMC: And that was a secretarial school, wasn't it?

ML: Yes.

EMC: Well, you graduated, I assume, from that. And what kind of work did you do after you graduated?

ML: My first job was in the Home Service Department of the Red Cross, which dealt with Service people. When I went in, of course, it was mostly World War I veterans we were working with. But as it developed, we were doing work for the Service for furloughs--you know, getting the information for emergency furloughs and taking care of some of the wives that followed the sailors to Rhode Island and things like that. Social work.

EMC: Oh, more social work.

ML: I was a secretary.

EMC: That's what they were doing. Were you located in Providence then?

ML: Yes, in Providence.

EMC: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed, December 7, 1941?

ML: I was sitting in the den at my home at 26 Mosher Drive in Barrington when the news came over the radio.

EMC: What was your reaction to that?

ML: Shock! And, I'm sure my then-boyfriend was with me and, of course, the first thing was that he was ready to enlist immediately.

EMC: Did he?

ML: He waited until after the first of the year so he'd be home for Christmas. My request.

EMC: Oh, that's nice. Did you have any inkling that this event would change your life at all?

ML: I guess it kind of hit me at the time.

EMC: That it would.

ML: Sure.

EMC: Well, you waited a little bit until you decided to enter the military. And why did you decide on military service?

ML: I thought about it for quite a while, and I got applications from all the services and didn't do anything about it. And then my girl friend called me up one night and said, "Come on up." I said, "No, I was going out." And she said, "Well, I want to show you something." I said, "I'm going out." She said, "I enlisted in the Navy today." I said, "Oh?" And, it so happened I had only a Marine Corps application left; I had given all the others away. So I filled out the application and put it in the mailbox--'cause she wasn't going without ME!

EMC: Oh, for Heaven's sakes! Isn't that interesting. Did you have any overriding motivation for joining the Marines?

ML: Not really. I tell everybody it was to get butter--because of the rationing. You only got sixteen points a week, and it was sixteen points for a pound of butter, and my mother was buying meat, instead. So I tell everybody I went in so I could get butter.

EMC: So it was the only application you had left, but you, obviously, had given them away to others to join the other services. How did your parents feel about your decision to join the

Marines?

ML: Not very happy.

EMC: Why?

ML: Well, I don't know. I think my father thought that just certain types of girls were going into service, or something, and he was very, very much against it. He did take me to the train when I went, but he didn't talk to me from the time he heard about it until the time I went.

EMC: Oh, boy!

ML: But then he was all right. He was fine after that.

EMC: What year did you join the Marines? When did you enlist?

ML: I enlisted on February 22, 1944.

EMC: So you did wait a little while--a couple of years--before you made your decision. And when were you sent off for training?

ML: April 4, 1944.

EMC: They had you wait a couple of months before they sent you



off. Now, where did you go for your basic training and indoctrination?

ML: Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

EMC: How did you get there?

ML: On a very slow train. We left here. There was another girl and I, and we had met the day we enlisted. And when the train came into Providence--it had a load of people from Massachusetts, from Boston, and everything. Then we went down, we picked up another bunch from Connecticut in, I guess, New Haven, then into New York, and then to Washington. And in Washington we picked up a sleeper train--and I don't remember the hours, but I know that from Washington to Camp Lejeune, we had no food, and we didn't get there until after supper the next night. We had left early in the morning, and it was after supper the next night we got-- And they had to round up food for us because we hadn't eaten for almost twenty-four hours, I guess, or something like that. We were exhausted.

EMC: I can imagine.

ML: We were sidetracked somewhere along the line, I guess troop trains were going, or something. It was horrible.

EMC: Oh, yes, it sounds horrible. Was it hot then?

ML: Well, it was hot. Once we got to Camp Lejeune, it was hot, yes. Training, it was hot.

EMC: So you were with a group of other women Marines, then, going down.

ML: Oh, yes.

EMC: I guess they had to get--

ML: Well, from Washington down, that's all we had, women Marines.

EMC: I should have asked you where you went to enlist and where you went for examinations.

ML: Boston.

EMC: Oh, you went to Boston. For your exams and whatever.

ML: Sworn in in Boston.

EMC: Sworn in. Well, when you got to Camp Lejeune, what was your general impression, do you remember, of that site, that base?

ML: Well, we didn't see much of the base.

MC: Oh, okay.

ML: All we saw was our little territory which consisted of--I don't know how many barracks--so many barracks and a chapel and a sick bay. The base is all divided up into all these sections, so that's all we saw.

EMC: So you were kind of cordoned off.

ML: No, the church wasn't there. The church was up at the end of ours, so we could go up to go to Mass or anything like that. That was all we were allowed, and then right back into our territory. No, you weren't allowed off at all. The six weeks you were in boot camp, you weren't out of your own territory.

EMC: Did you live in temporary wooden barracks?

ML: No, they were brick barracks.

EMC: Oh, I see. And was it one long room, or--? Did you have you a cubicle?

ML: No, no. It was all we had. We didn't even have closets; we had clothes racks. We went up one side--the door was in the middle, and

we went up one side, then down the whole other side, and then up this side to the door. Our platoon was just inside the door, up, and then a few bunks on the other side. And in the middle were just racks, and we had our foot lockers because we didn't have any clothes closets, at all.

EMC: Did they issue the uniforms immediately?

ML: Not immediately. No, you had to be fitted for them.

EMC: Right. But, soon.

ML: And I think, we got fitted within, maybe, four or five days--three or four days--I don't know. We got fitted for them.

EMC: Did you like the uniform?

ML: I guess they did give us our dungarees.

EMC: Oh.

ML: I guess they gave us those.

EMC: Work uniform.

ML: Yes. I think they did give us those.

EMC: Did they give you a summer uniform first?

ML: Yes. It's a corduroy. It's like corduroy, but it was cotton-  
-with green-and-white stripe.

EMC: Oh, seersucker. Seersucker.

ML: Seersucker, yes.

EMC: Uniforms. And they were green?

ML: Green-and-white stripe.

EMC: What did you think of the uniform? Did you like it?

ML: I loved it. I loved the uniforms. Yes.

EMC: What kind of shoes did you wear?

ML: Well, we were given-- Before we went into service, we were given chits to go get three pairs of shoes because, of course, shoes were rationed. You couldn't get shoes then. So we had to bring three pairs of shoes with us. And then that was one day off we got in boot camp: we had to go get other shoes because they were worn out from marching. And if they couldn't fit you--and which

they couldn't fit me--they took a busload of us down to Wilmington, North Carolina, and gave us chits for the shoes. And then we had free time in Wilmington, which was nice.

EMC: Oh. Oh, that's interesting. Well, you mention they were worn out from marching. I assume you had to march all the time.

ML: All the time. Yes.

EMC: Everywhere you went.

ML: Oh, yes. To classes--yes, classes--and, then, of course, on the drill field, too.

EMC: You had the regimental reviews then.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Was it every week or--?

ML: Well, there was--we had one real big one. My mind is gone.

EMC: Oh, that's okay.

ML: Who was the big woman? We had to wear lipstick the color of the red on our hats. Montezuma red.

EMC: Oh, for Heaven's sake.

ML: And I can't think of her name. She was a famous--

EMC: Jacqueline Cochran, maybe?

ML: No, no, no, no.

EMC: Elizabeth Arden?

ML: No, it wasn't Elizabeth-- Was it Elizabeth Arden? I don't remember. But she was at one of our regimental reviews, and that's when she made her presentation of the new color. There was another color before that by another company, but this one became the official one. And that's the only lipstick we could wear.

EMC: Oh, isn't that interesting. Did you wear fingernail polish?

ML: Fingernail polish, the same color.

EMC: They really coordinated you. When you were there for six weeks, what kind of classes did you take? Do you remember what you were studying?

ML: Government, History, Military Rules and Regulations, Health-

- That's all I remember.

EMC: Did you have tests?

ML: Oh, yes. Just like being in school.

EMC: Was your whole day in class?

ML: When you weren't marching.

EMC: When you weren't marching, but--that's what you did. Did you like the marching and the drilling?

ML: Yes, I loved it. I love marching music.

EMC: You must have had a drill instructor.

ML: Oh, yes. We had men drill instructors.

EMC: And how did they treat the ladies?

ML: Nasty. And they laughed at us. They'd turn around and laugh behind their hands with us and got a big kick out of us, you know. But they could be nasty. But they didn't mean it.

EMC: Did you find boot camp stressful at all?



ML: No.

EMC: How did the other women feel about it? Did you get any feeling from your fellow recruits?

ML: I didn't know anybody who didn't like it. I really didn't. We all got along well. Our platoon--we were the rebels--we had a good time. We laughed all the time. Like in the barracks-- As I said, our platoon started here. For some reason or other, we always got our shots before the other two platoons and-- No, the other platoons got them before we did. And they'd be moaning and groaning over the shots, and we'd get still laughing. We were always in trouble talking until eleven o'clock at night. And then they'd be calling, getting the Sergeant because we were keeping them awake.

EMC: How many in your platoon?

ML: I don't know; that's the picture--

EMC: Oh, maybe, about 30, at least, it looks like.

ML: So, the next day, we'd get our shots, and they'd be saying, "Wait until tomorrow. We're gonna keep YOU up." And the next night we got our shots, and we still laughed all night. It didn't bother us at all. No, we had a good time. I didn't know of anybody that-

- I never heard anybody make a remark about they wished they didn't come or anything like that.

EMC: Oh, well, that's good. Did you have any contact with any of the male Marines other than the drill instructors there?

ML: No. Not in boot camp, no.

EMC: You felt that you adjusted easily to the discipline of military life?

ML: Oh, yes.

EMC: No problem conforming. Did you ever have to do KP duty?

ML: Oh, yes! Yes.

EMC: Now, what did that consist of?

ML: I did it. We graduated from boot camp. Before we were given to our assignment-- Some people were given assignment right away, but I was put in that, in KP duty. Then, after a while, I was up at Cherry Point, I had another KP duty.

EMC: What did you have to do for KP duty?

ML: Wash dishes, clean off the table.

EMC: That kind of thing.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Did you have a graduation ceremony?

ML: No, we had a review.

EMC: Regimental review.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Did anything unusual or amusing happen during this training period, Mary, anything that's outstanding?

ML: I know we had one girl--she was older than the rest of us-- she was probably about 30, or something, so she was older. And her name was Piquelle, but, there, we all called her "Pickles." And she got very put out: "My name is Piquelle." So, then, we'd say, "Okay, Pickles." Well, the night we got through boot camp, we were allowed to go to the movies-- Oh, there was a dance. In fact, the movie theater at Camp Lejeune was opened for the first time at that point, where we had a dance. Of course, we had to march over to the mens' quarters-- We had a dance. And we came back and, no Pickles.

Now, as much we couldn't stand her because she drove us nuts-- she'd go "tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk", and we would laugh--she was missing. Well, we were hysterical; we were all so worried about her. And, about half an hour later, she came strolling in. She had gone to the movies for herself. We had all gone to the dance, and she had gone to the movies. We all got together looking for her.

EMC: The missing Marine!

ML: Yes.

EMC: Did you have any entertainments there at all in the evening, other than this one time?

ML: No.

EMC: It was all work.

ML: You were out there all day; you were studying; you were so tired, you went to bed.

EMC: Yes, no time for holiday or anything. Did the recruiters there, or the people in charge of the boot camp, ask you about any preference for the type of job you would be placed in after you finished?

ML: Oh, yes.

EMC: What did you say that you wanted to do?

ML: I never told them that I knew how to type because I wanted to get away from that kind of thing. But then they offered me Storekeeper's School, and I didn't want it because I wanted to get away from anything to do with office work. I never did, but I wanted to get away from it.

EMC: Sure. Do you remember what you expressed a preference for?

ML: Not really. I don't remember.

EMC: Where did they assign you and to what type of job?

ML: Cherry Point, to secretarial work. Clerical work.

EMC: Now, was Cherry Point a Marine Air Station?

ML: Marine Corps Air Station.

EMC: A Marine Corps Air Station. Cherry Point. How far away was that from Camp Lejeune? Was that in a different area, entirely?

ML: No. It was just up the road. My son lived at Camp Lejeune--

at Jacksonville--when he was stationed at Cherry Point. He just commuted every day, about 40 miles.

EMC: Oh, so that was pretty near. They assigned you to clerical work there. Did you need any special training or any special school for that?

ML: I have a statement in there that I went to some school--I don't know whether it's in that paper--It must be in with those papers. I don't remember going to any school.

EMC: Other than the two places where you were.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Did you have any time off after boot camp? Did you get any vacation?

ML: No. No.

EMC: --directed immediately to this job?

ML: Yes.

EMC: You went immediately to Cherry Point.

ML: After the KP duty-- Two weeks KP duty, and then up to Cherry Point.

EMC: Who were you working for then and in what office?

ML: I worked in the Combat Conditioning--the Synthetic Training Department in Combat Conditioning Department.

EMC: What was that?

ML: Combat Conditioning-- Synthetic Training is all gunnery and navigation and recognition and link trainers and all that kind of stuff. And I was in Combat Conditioning which trained for jungle living, survival--with a swimming pool, like jumping ship. Under the ships, I used to light the pool on fire, and the boys would jump overboard with their full packs and have to get out. Then they also trained-- The fellas we trained were for recreation work Overseas. If they had time to play ball and everything, we had all the rules and regulations and trained the fellas to run teams and things like that.

EMC: Oh. So that was kind of interesting.

ML: It was interesting, yes.

EMC: You really had to be very tough to undergo that Combat

Conditioning.

ML: You had to be tough.

EMC: What did you like about this job?

ML: Well, I could say I was the only girl with 103 guys, but--

EMC: A riot!

ML: But that wasn't really it. No, I did like it because it was really interesting and we were getting new people all the time because they would come from Parris Island. We had a lot of the recruits up from Parris Island and put them through school.

EMC: Oh, I see.

ML: So that it was a constantly moving thing. We had our own staff. I forget how many fellas were on the staff, itself. But then this other bunch that would come up, you know, 60 or 70 of them. Every month there'd be a new group coming in.

EMC: Oh, yes, so you got a new crew. Was there anything you didn't like about the job?

ML: Not really.



EMC: Did you work eight hours a day?

ML: Oh, yes.

EMC: Five days a week?

ML: Yes.

EMC: Any Saturday work?

ML: Yes. Usually, half a day on Saturday.

EMC: Well, they worked you quite a bit. Where were you housed during this time period?

ML: We were housed in the women's quarters. Those barracks were temporary barracks--first end of the Base. We had our own--we had four barracks, and they built two more, so we had six barracks. We had our own cafeteria, our own lunchroom, and we had our own recreation hall.

EMC: Oh, oh, that's great. Were you kind of segregated from the rest, again?

ML: Yes. We were like a quad, and the fellas were not allowed

inside the quad. We didn't allow them in our barracks. We had sitting rooms. We had a downstairs sitting room and an upstairs sitting room; the boys never go up to the upstairs sitting room. Some barracks-- It's up to the girls if they let the fellas into the downstairs sitting room, but we didn't because we had 24-hour jobs in the building. And the girls'd be walking around in towels and everything like that, so we were not allowing fellas into the barracks.

EMC: Well, that's interesting. Did you have any social life during this time frame?

ML: I didn't bother much. We had the movies and we had dances and we had big-- You know, entertainers would come and everything. We'd go down to the big drill hall for those things.

EMC: Do you remember anybody famous who came to Cherry Point?

ML: No, I don't. I know Tyrone Power was stationed there.

EMC: Oh, he was?

ML: And I saw him. That was another funny experience.

EMC: Oh, do tell it.

ML: I was working up in the headquarters office of the Synthetic Training Department, and we worked-- This was--I'll tell you about the fire afterwards-- This was after the fire, so we were all in temporary buildings. I heard a jeep stop, and I turned around, and I looked, and it was Tyrone Power. He came around--and, of course, I was right opposite the door-- He came around the door and, of course, I was supposed to yell "Attention!", and all I did was sit with my mouth open and never said a word. And then the CO came out, and he yelled "Attention!." But, I was just so shocked to see him.

EMC: Oh, yes. He seems to have gotten around because I've interviewed other ladies who met him, too.

ML: He was going down to Link Trainer.

EMC: Atlanta! Yes.

ML: No, no, he was going on a trainer at Cherry Point.

EMC: Oh, really.

ML: Well, that was part of our department. And he was going down to take his lessons, you know, to work on a link trainer. But, anyhow, I didn't yell "Attention!"

EMC: Which you should've. Well, that's interesting. You mentioned

that there was a fire, a disastrous fire, in Cherry Point. And when was this, and what happened?

ML: That was in June, 1944. I just saw something about it not too long ago in the paper, or somewhere or other. It was when I first got there and I was a 'casual,' which meant they put me wherever they wanted me--put me wherever they needed help. So I was delivering mail, and I went down to this building, and I went in. The fire had just started, and the fire engines were just coming when I got there. Anyhow, it went through the place, and I went out the window. And it ended up that it was one of the fellows I worked with afterwards--but, at that time, you know, you know nothing about them, but-- He helped me out the window. And then the fire came, and it was horrible; it was just awful. It destroyed the whole building.

So, then, I had to deliver mail to the hospital, which was not too far. I went over to the hospital, and they were bringing them in--burned things. We had one girl, who I never knew--but, of course, others girls in the Company knew her because she was from our dorm--and, eventually, her mother was staying with us in the dorm. Her hands were all melted and she just was like--had webs. Her one breast was burned off and-- She was very, very bad. But she-- Eventually, they got her up to Washington to the hospital. She came to visit a few times; she came down afterwards. They cut her fingers and--seemed to be all right. Oh, she married a fellow that was burned, too--come in from Overseas. But it was a terrible,

terrible.

EMC: Terrible thing. And you said there were casualties.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Any women casualties?

ML: There was one woman lieutenant, I know. And I thought there were a couple of enlisted women, and I'm sure that there were some men. I think there were three or four casualties.

EMC: Do they know how this started?

ML: No, because we were all interviewed afterwards, and it came out that they think it was cleaning fluid--something cleaning the floors and some hot water--

EMC: Ignited.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Oh, that's horrible. I think that is mentioned in several of the books I read, the fire at Cherry Point. And you were right there in the midst of that and, fortunately, were safe.

ML: Oh, yes. In fact, I was late getting back. I couldn't get anybody to take the mail. And, of course, when you're first in Service like that, you're so afraid of everybody, and nobody would take the mail. Well, I kept waiting, trying to get rid of this mail; I didn't want to go back to the office with it. And when I got back to the office, they got mad at me because I was so late getting back. And I was saying, "The fire"--they didn't know anything about it--I'm saying, "The fire, the fire." "What fire? What fire?"

ML: You could see it--

EMC: Billowing, I'm sure.

ML: By that time, yes. So that I didn't get into trouble, or anything. At first, I was in trouble.

EMC: What was your rate?

ML: Corporal.

EMC: You were a corporal. Was that the final rate that you had?

ML: Yes.

EMC: And when you went in, what were you?

ML: Private.

EMC: You were a private. Okay. So you went up the ranks a little bit.

ML: Oh, yes. Way up.

EMC: Just another step or so. Did you ever have any time off during your year and a half at Cherry Point? Any leave?

ML: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

EMC: And where did you spend your leave time?

ML: Home. I came home.

EMC: Any other trips at all?

ML: No. Well, I used to go-- Well, after that when they broke up the Synthetic Training Department--the people were all divided up into different sections, I worked in with Bombardier School. And then the other fellas, the Celestial Navigations, some of the fellas I knew best, they used to go to Washington and once to Florida. They had to get their flights in, so the Bombardier School officer--it's a warrant officer--he tried to get it so that I could

go and get flight time, but it didn't work that way. But I used to go with them sometimes. They'd go to dinner in Washington, go down just for a ride. Atlanta a few times.

EMC: Oh. So you'd go in the plane.

ML: I wasn't supposed to be there.

EMC: I know.

ML: Yes, three or four of us.

EMC: I would think that you wouldn't be.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Oh, but that's interesting and kind of different. How did you feel about summers in North Carolina? Did the heat bother you?

ML: Oh, I don't remember it bothering me too much. We had a beautiful beach at Cherry Point.

EMC: Oh, you did?

ML: And we had sailboats and all different things, yes.



EMC: Oh, that was great for recreation.

ML: Yes, so it never bothered me too much.

EMC: Well, how did the men treat you at Cherry Point?

ML: Very good. Never had a problem. All these people that do so much talking now, I don't know what they're talking about.

EMC: No harassment or anything. No, not at all.

ML: No, not at all. And we had fresh guys like you'd get if you were--no matter where you were. And, you know, if somebody'll say something, you just have to brush them off, that's all. But never real harassment because-- Well, the way I was--the way I worked--I had a lot of brothers, so nobody could bother me because-- There was another girl and I knew that if anything happened these guys would gang up on them.

EMC: Oh, I see.

ML: I was protected by them.

EMC: Yes. Oh, well, that's good. Did you ever meet any civilians when you were on your leave, and how did they react to women Marines? Did you ever hear any compliments?

ML: It never bothered me. One time I was home, and I went out with two of my girl friends. We were in the Biltmore Hotel in Providence, I guess, and this one sailor was there. No, it wasn't a sailor; it was a soldier. Well, we were talking to him, and he was talking about the girls in Service, so I just let him talk and talk and talk. I wasn't in uniform because I had sent my uniform to the cleaners, so I just let him talk. And I just took out my ID card and showed it to him. Well, right away, he got all flustered. He said, "Oh, you're different. You're--." I said, "No, I'm no different."

EMC: So, in other words--

ML: Just because you have a uniform, they think you're anything but a lady, you know. Well, then, I shut him up in a hurry.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Were you at Cherry Point from April, '44, to October, '45? So you were there a good year and a half.

ML: Not April. From June. April, I was at--

EMC: Yes, April you went--all right.

ML: Whenever the six weeks were up, I don't know. May, I guess, I went to Cherry Point.

EMC: Well, when VJ Day came along in August, 1945, what was your reaction to the end of the war?

ML: Well, it was great because I was married then.

EMC: Oh, you were?

ML: Yes.

EMC: Tell us about that.

ML: I got married in November, '44.

EMC: Oh, you were? And where were you married?

ML: New York City.

EMC: And did you marry someone you met in the Marines?

ML: I met him here, at Crescent Park at the roller rink. That's a long story.

EMC: Oh. Okay. That's a long story.

ML: No. Actually, Arthur and I were engaged; then he didn't like

me going into Service, so he broke the engagement. In the meantime, I had met John--Johnny--at Crescent Park at the roller rink. So when he came back from Overseas, we got married.

EMC: Was he in the--

ML: Navy.

EMC: Navy. And you were married in November, 1944, in New York City. Were you married in uniform?

ML: Yes.

EMC: Did you have to get permission to get married?

ML: Yes.

EMC: And where did he go after that?

ML: From there, he went out to Washington--the State of Washington. And then I went back to Cherry Point.

EMC: Well, did you see each other within the year?

ML: Yes. We saw each other sometime in the spring, or late winter/early spring.

EMC: But it was a long-distance--

ML: Oh, yes.

EMC: --relationship, writing letters, I assume.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Oh, well, that's interesting. So you had joined in February, '44; married, November, '44. No wonder you weren't dating the soldiers and Marines.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Well, back to VJ Day. You were very happy about that, I assumed.

ML: Oh, sure.

EMC: And how did you celebrate on VJ Day?

ML: Well, the day that-- We got home from work, and we had heard rumors that it was over. Some of the girls had radios in their lockers, so we all went and grabbed radios and listened to them and everything. And then, of course, all hell broke loose then:

everybody screaming and hollering and marching and banging and-- you know--it was just bedlam. Then that night--I don't know-- everybody was just walking around. The band was out playing and banging drums and--just a lot of excitement and everything.

The next day, of course, two of the fellas that I worked with and two other girls were gone out crabbing. They said, "Let's get away from here." So we walked out to the Coast Guard Station--it was quite a walk--and this one fella had crab traps out there, so we got the crabs. When we came back, the Dining Hall -- There was no food put out; nobody was cooking, not a thing. So these fellas just went in, got the butter, got the pots and cooked the crabs and brought them in the bushel basket. And then that's how we sat, eating--cracking the crabs and eating them. There was no soda. We only got two cans of soda--there were three of us--and they got two beers, and that was it. The slop chutes were closed. And everybody was drunk: the whole base.

EMC: Oh, really?

ML: Oh, gee. That's why I showed you the pictures of-- We were the only five sober people on the base. And that's when they came around rounding people up to get them back to the barracks. And there was the general. He joined us and shared the crabs with us.

EMC: He must have been the CO of the base?

ML: Yes.

EMC: Oh, what a riot.

ML: We were all sitting in the gully. "What are you doing sitting in the gully?" Big basket of crabs with us.

EMC: Oh, that was something.

ML: We had a good time 'cause we had been out crabbing and having a good time out there all day. So, it was nice.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Did you ever have a chance to meet the Director of the Marine Corps Ruth Chaney Streeter?

ML: No. I never met her.

EMC: Or saw her?

ML: I think I saw her. I think she was at one of our reviews during the war years.

EMC: Probably.

ML: I think she was at one, although I'm not sure. It seems to me I did see her somewhere.

EMC: Did you think that the Marine Corps Women Reserve was a smoothly run organization?

ML: As far as I know. I couldn't find fault with it at all.

EMC: Did anything else amusing or interesting or outstanding happen during your year and a half at Cherry Point?

ML: Not really. That I know of.

EMC: When were you discharged?

ML: I was discharged, October 18, 1945.

EMC: And was that at Cherry Point?

ML: Yes. And it was a direct discharge. I don't know whether I was the first one or one of the very first ones that got directly discharged by the Commanding Officer of the base. Usually, it had to go through Washington and then you wait your turn. But, then the order came down that the Commanding Officers could discharge. So I was discharged. And I was discharged early--because I wouldn't have been out until, probably, May--but, my husband had the Distinguished Flying Cross for meritorious service, so he got an automatic discharge. So because he got an automatic discharge, I



got an automatic discharge.

EMC: Oh, that's great! Yes. His honors there. Did you have any process to go through when you were discharged?

ML: No. They just handed it to me.

MC: And away you went.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Did you receive any medals for your service?

ML: No.

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

ML: I was glad to go. It was over, so it was time to go home.

EMC: Did you make any friends there that you kept in contact with afterwards?

ML: Oh, yes. I have one I'm in contact with, still.

EMC: Oh, that's great. Do you feel that the Marine Corps Women Reserve had a strong sense of esprit de corps or camaraderie?

ML: Definitely.

EMC: During the Basic Training, I'm sure, they instill that. Did you know of anybody who was discharged for any reason at either Cherry Point or Camp Lejeune?

ML: Yes. We had one girl in our company there--pregnant. I heard of another one, too, but I don't know directly. But this girl was a sad case. She was a very innocent little girl, and she got duped.

EMC: Yes.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Did you have any preconceived expectations when you entered the Marine Corps of what it would be like?

ML: None, whatsoever.

EMC: So you were open to a new experience. How do you feel about the experience looking back at it today?

ML: I am very glad and very proud that I served. I don't know whether I would serve in these days the way things are, but, the way it was then--

EMC: Did you feel that you were a pioneer in any sense?

ML: No, never even crossed my mind.

EMC: Did the Marine Corps have any impact on you, career-wise, at all?

ML: No.

EMC: Do you feel that this wartime experience in the Marine Corps Women Reserve made you more independent and self-reliant?

ML: Definitely. Definitely.

EMC: Do you feel that women's expectations or your own expectations changed when the war was over as to what you could do and what you could be?

ML: Not really.

EMC: Well, you mentioned that you were discharged in October, '45. And where did you settle after the war?

ML: New York City.

EMC: Did you work after that?

ML: No. I worked for a little bit, in the Red Cross in New York. But then I got pregnant a very short time after that, and then I didn't work for years. And my children-- I worked later on.

EMC: Did any of your children join the Marine Corps?

ML: My son. My youngest son.

EMC: Was he career?

ML: He was career. He was retired as a major.

EMC: Did you talk to him about your Marine Corps experience?

ML: No. We used to kid about it when we were young. My oldest son went into the Navy as his father was in the Navy, and my youngest went into the Marines, for me. So we had one in each.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's great.

ML: I wanted my girls to go in, but they weren't interested.

EMC: Well, at least, somebody did.

ML: Oh, yes.

EMC: And that kind of followed your footsteps. You kind of mentioned that you returned to Barrington after being away for forty years.

ML: Well, my husband died in January of 1985, and my children were all scattered. At that time, my oldest son was in England, my daughter was in California, my other daughter was in Chicago, and my son was in Camp Lejeune--Cherry Point. But he was going to Hawaii the next year--or in that spring. I never called New York home, so I just decided to come home. We had talked about moving. We were going to move, anyhow. So I moved. I came here. There was no reason for me to go any place else, so I came home.

EMC: And you married a second time. This is kind of interesting. I want to put this in.

ML: Well, when I came home-- I had always been in touch with Arthur. My parents, eventually, moved next door. He had bought his parents' home, and my parents, eventually, moved next door. So, when we would come up-- I got to know his wife real well, and our children played together when we came up and everything. Then his wife died in December of '84, so when I came up, he helped me do things around the house and everything like that. And we just got back together again.

EMC: Isn't that amazing. And that was the first-- That was the fellow you were engaged to originally.

ML: Yes.

EMC: Who didn't like your going into the Service.

ML: That's right. Then his own daughter went into the Army.

EMC: What comes around goes around, I guess.

ML: Not only that, his son is a priest, and he married us. His oldest son.

EMC: Oh, isn't that nice.

ML: It was very nice.

EMC: It came full circle, then.

ML: Yes.

EMC: That's great. Do you have any other comments on your service?

ML: Not really.

EMC: I want to thank you for participating in our oral history program on the Women Marines in World War II.