

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

LEOLA DE BROUX DILLHUNT

Air Traffic Controller, Women's Army Corps, World War II

2007

OH
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Dillhunt, Leola de Broux (1923-). Oral History Interview. 2007.

User Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 32 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 32 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Leola de Broux Dillhunt, a native of De Pere (Wisconsin) discusses her World War II service in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) at Spence Field (Georgia). She reflects on her childhood in De Pere, where she excelled in academics and won a scholarship to St. Joseph's Academy. Dillhunt details spending a year in business school in Glendale (California) before the United States entered the war, and then returning to Wisconsin to work at the Fort Howard Paper Company (Green Bay). She reflects on needing her father's approval to join the service as she was underage, and feeling hurt by her father's willingness for his children to enlist. Dillhunt references ultimately deciding to wait until she could enlist independently in the WAC.

She explains her job as an air traffic controller on base, which she was placed into due to her high IQ. Dillhunt describes instances of racism and sexism she experienced in the south, including her choice not to wear her uniform off base for fear of confrontation and her friendships with African American soldiers. She describes meeting her husband, being married on base and her feelings of disappointment at being forced to leave the service after becoming pregnant. Dillhunt outlines returning home to Wisconsin at the end of the war and starting a family, as well as she and her husband's struggles with tuberculosis. A mother of 12, Dillhunt reflects on her happy memories from her time as a WAC and expresses her children's pride at having a mother different from others.

Biographical Sketch:

Leola De Broux Dillhunt (1923-) was born in De Pere (Wisconsin) where she excelled in academics. She completed a year of business college in Glendale (California) before enlisting in the Women's Army Corps at the age of 21 and serving at Spence Field (Georgia) as an air traffic controller. Dillhunt married on base and left the service after becoming pregnant. She spent her adult years in Wisconsin, making use of the G.I. Bill and mothering 12 children. She was an active member of the Women's American Legion Post and looks back on her service proudly.

Interviewed by Terry McDonald, 2007

Draft Transcription by Cathy Cox, Wisconsin Court Reporter, 2007

Abstract written by Mary Kate Kwasnik, 2014

Interview Transcript

McDonald: This is an interview with Leola Dillhunt who served with the Women's Army Corps [WAC] during World War II. The interview is being conducted at approximately 10:15 a.m. at the following address of 122 South Jackson Street, Green Bay, Wisconsin, the following date of February 15, 2007, and the interviewer is Terry MacDonald.

Liz [Lee], can you tell us a little bit about your background, as when you were born and where?

Dillhunt: All right. I was born at home at 802 Third Street, in West De Pere [Wisconsin]. Let's see—I have--I'm the oldest of six. My brother Maury was three years younger than I, but he died at forty-three with leukemia. And that was sad because he was my pride and joy [laughs]. Nobody knew he was my brother 'cause he had blond wavy hair, and I was real dark, and—

McDonald: What was your maiden name?

Dillhunt: Ah, maiden name was de Broux--d-e, capital B-r-o-u-x. And *that* got mispronounced--de Brunks and de Brox. Yeah, and let's see—I was the oldest, then my brother Maury, my brother Jim, my brother Fran who was the baby, and then my sister's in there. I think she's six years younger than I am--Margaret.

McDonald: And did you go to high school in De Pere?

Dillhunt: No, I did not. I won a four year scholarship to St. Joseph's Academy. I always said when I was a little girl--we'd go by--I said, "Dad, what's that house over there?" I liked houses. And he says, "That's where the nuns live that teach in De Pere. And they've got the high school there." "That's where I'm going to school." Whenever we'd go by I'd say, "That's where I'm going to school." And if I hadn't won the scholarship I wouldn't have. 'Cause the oldest of six that come before—to pay [laughs] what you had to pay to go to the academy. And then I had to take a bus. Catch it at 7:00 o'clock in the—ten after 7:00 in the morning—which wasn't easy to do. I lived on Third Street, and the bus went down to the Y and back, so--he'd go real slow [Terry laughs] and I'd run through [laughs] the gardens and catch him on Fourth Street, [Terry laughs] So he used to call me "Dagwood," [comic book and cartoon character often depicted as he is rushing to get to work].

McDonald: So did you graduate from the academy then?

Dillhunt: So I graduated from the academy, yeah.

McDonald: And what year was that that you graduated?

Dillhunt: In 1941.

McDonald: Did you go on to college then?

Dillhunt: Uh, no, let's see—take that back. My Aunt Lou—my godparents never had any children, and Aunt Lou was from Marseilles, France—a World War I bride, war bride, and they wanted to adopt me, “Cause you've got six kids.” You know somebody like Aunt Lou would come up with that. And, of course my family said “*No-o.*” And I said, “Well, what you can do, you can come and take me back for a month for my graduation present when I graduate from the academy.” So they did. They came and got me, got out there, Aunt Lou liked me, wanted to know if I could stay. So we talked my dad into lettin' me stay, and then of course December the 8th was uh--World War II broke out. And I was out there when the war started.

McDonald: And where were you at?

Dillhunt: Glendale, California.

McDonald: Oh, Okay

Dillhunt: And—yeah, we were there—in fact, I lived here, two houses from the road. Here's the road, and here's the fence up between us and the Air Force base. So we saw—oh, it was terrible. They'd come at night. They'd do—what did they call that? They'd come in, and they were—they'd come down, and they'd make touch landings and then go up, fly around and do that, and they'd do that for like—start at 11:00 o'clock at night and do it for two, three hours. Ugh. So I was a night owl—I read [laughs] while they were doing that.

McDonald: So when the war broke out then--what made you decide to go into the service?

Dillhunt: Well, first of all, Mom was a worrywart. So I promised her that when my college—I said, “If you make me come home now I've got nothing because I won't have my year in at business college out there.” So they let me stay, and then in June I went back. They took me back home; we drove back. Uncle Jim had ways and means of getting gas stamps [laughs]. Back then you had to have a gas stamp.

McDonald: So they drove from California back to De Pere?

Dillhunt: Back to De Pere, yeah.

McDonald: Wow.

Dillhunt: So that was quite a—quite an undertaking back then when—

McDonald: How long did that take?

Dillhunt: It took us three and a half days. And the last one we kept driving till we got here, like 2:00 o'clock in the morning. And so I was back home again, and Mom was satisfied.

McDonald: So you had a year, one year—

Dillhunt: One year of college. And the fact that that was the year out there and going to college—my year was like taking two years here at the business school. And that's what got me the job at Fort Howard [Fort Howard Paper Company, Green Bay, Wisconsin]. A.J. Lee, who was hiring and interviewing me, he said he figured for a little girl, five-ten and a half little girl from West De Pere, that was something having gone to college out in California. And so I got the job. And that's where I was when I decided to join the Army.

McDonald: And what made you join—what made you do that?

Dillhunt: Well, I had couple of reasons. And I followed—one of the biggest things was that I didn't have a boyfriend in the service or anything, having gone to the Academy and then being out of town and everything. And the boy I was engaged to was over in England somewhere—

McDonald: Oh, he was in the service.

Dillhunt: Yeah, he was in the service. He was a staff sergeant in the service. And so I did—the girls were running around on their boyfriends. That's something I wasn't going to do. But I discovered—having been gone, I didn't know who was engaged to what, you know, and then discovered, no, that isn't the guy she's engaged to. He's over here, and somebody else is over there. And I was so disgusted that I didn't know what to do 'cause there was nobody else to pal around with. I got mad one day, and I said something about, "I'm going to join the Army." And my dad says, "Good!" "Oh," I said, "no, the only thing is you gotta sign for me." 'Cause I was—at then you had to be twenty-one I guess, and I was—I'm eight what? Eighteen. I'm not twenty-one anyway. And Dad says, "Good. Whenever you want to go down, I'll sign for you." Okay. If I go in I'm going to do it under my own. I'm not going to let--go in 'cause Dad signed for me and let me go.

McDonald: What did your mom say?

Dillhunt: Oh, my mom was all against it. My dad--I didn't understand at the time--he tried to get into the Seabees [Navy Construction Battalion], but he was 3 months too old. [Approx. 3 sec. public address system interruption] voice comes over loudspeaker) And let's see, what was my—

McDonald: Your dad wanted to go into the Seabees.

Dillhunt: Oh, Dad wanted to go into the Seabees. But he was three months too old. And they wouldn't take him. So my brother and I decided we wanted to go into the service. He was happy to have somebody going in his place. Where I thought my dad was—after all he's—'cause Dad was one of these, you know, strong opinion, “Oh, all these women working in the factories and goin' off to the Army, and they're running around, and they're doing this.” And I thought, “He's going to let me go, sign for me to go? He doesn't love me, right?” [Terry laughs] How your mind goes. So—anyway, he said he'd go and sign for me, and I thought, “Changed my mind.” [both laugh] I waited till I was twenty-one and I went down and signed myself in.

McDonald: So did your brother go in then?

Dillhunt: Yes, my brother went into the Marines. And 'cause I remember when we'd come home--we've got pictures somewhere, him in his Navy outfit and me in my WAC uniform. And so that was really somethin'. But Dad was very proud of having two of us in the service.

McDonald: So when you went in—where did they send you?

Dillhunt: Let's see—I went to Milwaukee--overnight I think--down to Chicago, and down to Fort Oglethorpe [Georgia]. That's—

Unidentified

Woman: [Inaudible]

Dillhunt: Ten what?

Unidentified

Woman: Iowa?

Dillhunt: No, no, down in Tennessee somewhere down there. I mean, I forget [laughs]. At eighty-three I've forgotten a lot of things! [Terry laughs]. And I haven't thought about 'em in a long time.

McDonald: And that was boot camp, or--

Dillhunt: Well, whatever. Yeah--

McDonald: The usual training?

Dillhunt: The Army, the WAC, yeah, basic training. And I remember the weather was really beautiful. And then there was two of us that were coming out and for some reason or other I ended up at the control tower down in Georgia, at Spence Field, Moultrie, Georgia.

McDonald: Can you just tell us a little bit about—at your basic training were the women all basically the same age as you, or did it vary?

Dillhunt: First of all, I was probably one of the younger ones. But, being five-ten and a half, wherever we went I was always the *tallest* one. So I got to be the pivot point when we marched. The poor girls in the back [laughs] had a hard time with their little short legs keeping up! And then I was the guidon [flag carried to signify the unit] bearer and I loved to march, which was unusual I guess, but I did enjoy marching.

McDonald: What kind of living facilities did they have for you?

Dillhunt: Let's see—we lived in barracks, and naturally I had the lower bunk with my long legs, and my little short girl friend, Goldie, had the upper bunk. So we slept in our bunks, but I made her bed on the upper bunk [laughs], and she made mine on the lower one. [laughs]. There was no way I could get under there to make a bed that looked good [Terry laughs]. And--but that's the way the Army went, you know.

McDonald: And was your basic training—was it hard for you? Or—

Dillhunt: No, I loved it. I lapped it all up. I was a tomboy from the time I grew up, and my dad always wanted--you know, I was the oldest one—his wife never did anything with him, but I liked doing everything Dad did. So I got to be—I knew what every tree was between here and [laughs] [inaudible] where I was born.

McDonald: Did you get some time off after basic to come home, or did you just go—

Dillhunt: No, no, I went--let's see—basic training—I remember we went down the—on the riverboat for—a whole gang of us before we left. I don't remember. I think I did. I think I went home for—yeah, I went, I went home. And so I was here and got to say goodbye to everybody, and I laughed because they would have never taken me because, hah, I'm like I

said, tall and skinny, and I only weighed 105. So they wouldn't take me when I went down. They said, "Nope. You gotta go." So they sent me back home to put ten pounds on. And believe it or not, it was hard to do because I was out every night, dancing and running around and doing everything, and I said, "Well, what you should have told me to do was to go home and do nothing and eat." And then I said, "Well, what happens? You know, I'm not going to stay at that weight." Once you say "I do" they've gotcha! Three days later I was back down to 105 [Terry laughs], and never did go over that till I got pregnant [both laugh].

McDonald: Where did you go--to Georgia then, you said?

Dillhunt: Yeah. Spence Field, Moultrie, Georgia. And that's as far as I got because I met Larry. The first day on the post, I'm coming down—we had an, old chapel in the pines, in the middle of the—and I'm coming down, and Father—who's with me? I don't know—anyway—Father Wilders is coming out of the chapel, and he says, "Oh," he says, "I'd like you to meet our organist. Larry Dillhunt, Lee de Broux." And fine, oh, and very devious—I thought he was pretty handsome, and the fact that he was a little bit taller than I was, which was unusual—most of the boys was down here, and I could look at 'em, and—

McDonald: And he was in the service?

Dillhunt: And he was in the service, and he was—he had been in for four years.

McDonald: Already!

Dillhunt: And-- 'cause he was one of those that they--what, what did they used to do? [laughs] He didn't join the service—

McDonald: They drafted him.

Dillhunt: They drafted him. And it's funny, because the week before he met me he told—was talkin' to Father Wilders, and he says, "Well, you know," he says, "here I'm going to be thirty-one, and I've never met anybody that I wanted to marry." He says, "Maybe the Lord wants me to be a priest." Well, that was the last time [laughs] he said he wanted to be a priest. He met me three days later [both laugh]. And Father told me about—and we laughed because my mother said, "Oh, you can't be marrying somebody you don't know his family." And his mother's dead, and his father's—he was raised by his grandmother. I found out Father Wilders was going to tell him, "You can't marry her, you don't know anything about her [laughs], you don't know where she comes from." But the grapevine, you know how it is, got back to me, and so I called Mom up, and I says, "Mom, you don't have to worry because," I says, "Father Wilders was

worried about Larry marrying me.” So I said, “I don’t think you [laughs] have to worry.”

McDonald: How long were you going together before—

Dillhunt: Four--I never told my kids that because you know how they never went long enough. Four months to the day, just about. But it was one of those things we knew he was going overseas, and I didn’t want to have him go over until we were both married, so--

McDonald: So you got married on the post down there?

Dillhunt: Yup. In the little chapel in the pines.

McDonald: Were you able to bring him home to introduce him to your folks?

Dillhunt: Let’s see--we did, but not then. Oh, yes, we did—we got a—we split it—we spent half of the furlough up in my—in De Pere—and half of it in Covington, Kentucky where he was from. So that we could meet each other’s relatives. And it was something traveling back then. Ohhh— ‘cause—and the biggest thing is traveling in uniform they’d make somebody get up and let you sit down, and I’ll never forget—racism back then. This friend of ours on the post with a gorgeous tenor voice—and he used to sing over the radio range, and he’d sing at our masses. So of course nobody knows that he’s—this is a colored lieutenant from New York singing—and he tried to get in, and they weren’t gonna let him in. He was singing for my wedding. And I forget, Father had [laughs] to go down and sign him in. They forgot to say he was coming in, and they weren’t going to let him in. And we’re out traveling on the bus, and so he gets up and lets me sit down. All of a sudden the bus stops out in the middle of nowhere. The MP comes back, and he says, “*You can’t sit there.*” You know how they could talk. They didn’t all like women in uniform. I said, “Why?” And the Lieutenant says, “Why?” “*It’s*”—he didn’t say colored—he says—I forget what he probably said—“That’s the Negro section,” or something anyway. So I stood up, and to make a point, I didn’t sit down for the soldier who let me sit down in our section, but then, you know, you’re a topic, and so the lieutenant stood on his side [both laugh] and I stood on my side, and we rode ten miles into town that way, talking. I mean, we’re friends, and he said, “You know, the hard thing here is,” he said, “they won’t recognize me when they find out that I’m black.” And he said, “When I go into town, they don’t want to have anything to do with me because I’m a college graduate and I’m from New York.” So he was—outside of Larry and a few of us that, you know, didn’t care where he was from--and you found a lot of that when you were-- And down in Georgia I wouldn’t have dared walk down the street with him even though Larry was with me ‘cause Larry’d take a poke at

'em and he'd lose his stripes, and we'd—I mean it was really complicated back then. It was really bad. Especially from up here where—what, we've got colored football players, and we all revere them, you know. It was so, so, so different.

McDonald: Hmm. So when you were down in Georgia, what was your duty on the Army post?

Dillhunt: When we went in my IQ was high enough so that they sent me to school. I ended up in the control tower as a control tower operator. The other girl that came with me out of basic training—I don't know where she ended up. Anyway, I wouldn't like to have been where [laughs] she—I don't remember, but anyway, I got the control tower.

McDonald: And so were you an air traffic controller? I don't know if that's what they called them at that time.

Dillhunt: Ah, gotta stop the press [laughs]. I had to stop and think, it's so long since I've thought about it. Anyway, I was the one there, and I would talk 'em down, and I would tell 'em that they could land, and all of this—

McDonald: And what kind of shifts did you pull?

Dillhunt: Six hours on and six off.

McDonald: And was it real busy? Fairly busy?

Dillhunt: Yes, it was very busy because it was a preflight tower. They turned into a preflight so that we had all these boys—like I said, they did all this touchdown, and all, a lot of things—so I got to be up in the control towers. I'd be on six hours and off six hours, and it made a big difference because everybody else, all the WACs, were on a different schedule than I was on. I was on the men's schedule. And so I would get into trouble here and there with it, but—

McDonald: And what kind of barracks—did you live in barracks there, too?

Dillhunt: Yes, lived in barracks. And like I said, the upper bunk would have been much better, but you took whichever one they gave you, and so Goldie had [laughs]—the little short gal had the top one, and I had the lower bunk.

McDonald: And with your schedule being a little bit different than the rest of them, did that cause any conflict?

Dillhunt: Well, yes, it did because I'd been on six hours and I come in, and I want to go to bed and sleep, right—for six hours before I get up. Well I got to go out instead—one eye open, one eye shut [laughs]—before I can finally—and about the time I'd get into bed it was time to do something else. And, oh, it wasn't good, but when you're young and twenty-one, oh, you can live through anything.

McDonald: So Larry was at the same post there?

Dillhunt: Yes, yes.

McDonald: I guess for entertainment, you must have went out?

Dillhunt: We had a nice NCO [Non-Commissioned Officers] club. And the WACs of course could go, too. But the—so you got to meet all the sol—the—even—let's see, I don't know why he could go—staff sergeant—I don't know. Anyway, we used to go over there, and we'd dance, and my favorite song was *Always*. And soon as we'd walk in the door, Larry knew all the band members—they'd switch and they'd start playing *Always* so [laughs] everybody knew we had arrived[Terry laughs]. When we arrived they played *Always* for us. Yeah.

McDonald: And so how long were you together before Larry then had to ship overseas?

Dillhunt: Let's see—I followed him out to California, and we were saved by the end of the war. He was supposed--this was on Saturday, and I figured this was our last night together, on Saturday night. And the war was over, and he was going to go out on that Monday morning. He was going to be shipped out to California, and so he didn't so then he—oh, and then they kept freezing him to his job. And I'm pregnant, and I want to get home. I don't want to end up having my baby in Richmond, Virginia. And so I'd get ready to go, and then they'd freeze him. Finally, I said, "Larry, I got to go." So I managed to get a flight—somebody cancelled—and I got as far as Ohio, and he lived in Covington, Kentucky. Well, then from there I managed to get back up here, but it wasn't easy to do.

McDonald: So when you were pregnant with—did--

Dillhunt: That's how I got out. This is the only way you could get out of the service back then, was if you got pregnant.

McDonald: They didn't let you stay in.

Dillhunt: I was one of the few that was legally pregnant [both laugh]. I was married and pregnant. A lot of them got pregnant to get out because they'd been in like three, four years and didn't want any more of it.

McDonald: Can you just—you mentioned before he was saved by the end of the war—what was the reaction, both your and his reaction, when you found out that the war came to an end? 'Cause he was headed overseas.

Dillhunt: Yeah, it was a big sigh of relief. We were very happy. We didn't know what was going to come next. And then he ended up in the--they kept freezing him 'cause he was a staff—he was the sergeant in charge of the—where they were going through the clothes, all the rigamarole, and so we'd say, "Oh good, he's going," and they'd say, "Up," freeze him to his job again 'cause they couldn't get anybody to take his place. And so I headed back up here, and I got to—finally got home, and he did too I arrived home on the 21st, of December, and Maria was born on the 6th of January. So it was—

McDonald: Pretty close—

Dillhunt: Pretty close [laughs].

McDonald: And how long was it before he got to get discharged, or did he get—

Dillhunt: Yeah, then he got—they came through--what was it? Thirty-five months of—anybody with over thirty-five months of service was eligible for discharge. Of course, he'd been in for four and a half years so he was out.

McDonald: And he came up to live here—

Dillhunt: He came up here, yeah. Because he had—he had no home to go to. His brother, both brothers were—I don't know if they were even married, and his grandmother had died. And that was who he had lived with, so—

McDonald: Did any of your other family members go into the military? You said your one brother— [Approx. 3 sec. public address system interruption]

Dillhunt: Yes, my brother Maury was a Marine. And, my sister didn't get in of course. And then my brother Fran—I don't remember now, but at that time Maury and I were just the two that were in 'cause I can remember the pictures of us both in uniform.

McDonald: And did he make it back okay?

Dillhunt: Yes. But he died at forty-three with leukemia.

McDonald: So then when your husband came back up here to De Pere, was he able to find a job and stuff?

Dillhunt: Well, we were very fortunate. My dad owned Badger Wood Products in [laughs] De Pere, and my husband took over the office, running the office, and he worked part time in the office and part time in the—then they got big enough he just took over the whole. ‘Cause then they ended up with another building so he was—yeah, he taught himself shorthand, typing, the whole bit. He’d gone to go to college just like I had. That was my—my background was—I was always taking college subjects so I could go on and get my—I did get two years on the GI Bill, though when I got—

McDonald: I was just going to ask you if you took any of it.

Dillhunt: Yup, I was one of the first women that went to the day college, St. Norbert’s, when they opened it up to women. Otherwise I had been going at night.

McDonald: Did your husband use any of the GI Bill?

Dillhunt: Uh, no. Just—I think he went a couple months, but not—no, because he ended up out at the “San” [Hickory Grove Sanatorium, De Pere, WI], with TB. We were both going to school, and he wasn’t going to go in and have x-rays taken. His mother had died with it. He said, “I’ve all these years, and I haven’t got it. I’m not going to worry about it now.” And Dad insisted that he go in and take x-rays. They took x-rays, and they said, “Somebody goofed.” He had —when he went into the Army. It showed up of course that he’d had, that he’d had—I think Dr. Gutheil said it shows three times with the scar tissues that he’d had it, and he never knew he’d ever had it. And so we--that was bad. So he ended up out at the “San”—two years. He had to wait for surgery. It took two years before he could get in. Then he was better than anybody else ‘cause there was nothing—all the disease was cut out. Of course he was minus two-thirds of his lungs.

McDonald: Did you join any veterans organizations? Were they pretty prevalent in the Green Bay area?

Dillhunt: Yes. When I was out visiting Larry [Approx. 5 sec. public address system interruption], and Grace Paulus, she was GI Joe, and she had—she was recruiting for the American--Women’s American Legion Post. We have one of the few women posts in the--I guess all over the country, in fact one of the few in Wisconsin. And she says, “Oh, you’re in the Army.” “Yeah, I was in it.” “Oh, good!” [laughs]. Felt that I’d be good in the American Legion. So, somewhere along the line I was the post commander one

year. And then the second time when I became--I ended up out at the "San" with—I ran into somebody—‘cause like I said, Larry--couldn't get it from Larry--they said somebody out there has a bad case of TB that's jumped—because I had—it was—it got me in the throat. And it was lucky that I had enough sense to say something about spittin' up blood. And it was in the throat, and it never got any farther. So it never got into *my* lungs, but then with Larry—back in those days that's what they were doing. And it took that long—it took two years before he got down to have them cut out two-thirds of his lung.

McDonald: So then you were pretty active in the Legion, then--

Dillhunt: Oh yeah, I was always—

McDonald: Over the years.

Dillhunt: Very active, yeah.

McDonald: Did you make any real good friends when you were down in Georgia, in the Army that you kept in touch with over the years?

Dillhunt: Not with the people, per se, but Larry's friend Ray married my friend Thea when they were—when we were down in Spence Field, Moultrie, Georgia. And so they came back up to Chicago where she was from. And so we were in touch, but then finally—I don't know what happened. You know how that is, correspondence. I love to write, but everybody else doesn't. And I would have kept up, but if they don't answer you back, you're out of luck! [Terry laughs]

McDonald: What would you say your overall experience of serving in the Army was?

Dillhunt: Let's put it this way, I loved it. In fact if I hadn't gotten married and got—always told 'em, the kids [??] I said, "You're lucky I met your dad and we got married 'cause," I said, "otherwise you wouldn't be here." I said, "I'd be running the WACs today." [both laugh] I mean, that was—I *liked* being—well, and the biggest thing, being as tall as I was—I was always getting saluted, so I'd just go ahead and salute them. They'd think I was an officer.

McDonald: And what was your rank?

Dillhunt: Buck, Buck Private. [laughs].

McDonald: Buck Private?

Dillhunt: But these basic training, you know, they'd see the little—on your emblem on—they didn't know that you weren't—so I'd just go ahead [Terry laughs]—make their day. I saluted 'em! [laughs] Oh, that was (laughs) while I was--

McDonald: So, you really enjoyed your time in then.

Dillhunt: I enjoyed it, yes. And, yeah, there was a lot of--in town—well, wherever we went, I usually made friends wherever we lived, and she was—oh, I'm tellin' you—the lady that we lived with--she was *so* prejudiced. And I didn't know whether I dared tell her I was a WAC or not [laughs] until after we had the room and were moved in. Oh, women in service, we were garbage, you know. Especially down in the South, it was—in these small towns—boy, I'm telling you. I didn't dare wear my uniform and go downtown with Larry. I took a chance on running into my CO out of uniform, rather than walk downtown with my uniform on.

McDonald: Wow.

Dillhunt: They'd pick a fight with 'em. They did not like women in uniform.

McDonald: What was your children's experience when you told them you served in the Army? What did they think of that?

Dillhunt: Oh, they all liked it. They were proud to have a mom who was in the service.

McDonald: Yeah.

Dillhunt: A little bit different than anybody else.

McDonald: That's right.

Diillhunt: Nobody else had both parents—[laughs]

McDonald: Yeah.

Dillhunt: And of course Mom always had another story to tell. So they enjoyed that.

McDonald: Is there anything else you'd like to make a comment on about your military—

Dillhunt: Well, let's put it this way, if they didn't like it they never told me, so-- [both laugh] The Army was good, and like I said, if I hadn't met Larry and got—I would have made it a career. I would have stayed with it. But

back then you couldn't—I mean, once you were married and got pregnant that was it. You were out. But—and then of course by the time I—

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

McDonald: This is Side—Tape 1 Side B, an interview with Leola Dillhunt. And she's talking about her family now. Lee, can you tell us a little bit how big your family is?

Dillhunt: Well, back when I had one little girl, my Aunt Lou from Marseilles, France says, "How many kids do you and Larry plan on havin'?" I says, "Oh, well, I might as well plan on twelve. I'll probably have that many anyway." And I said, "Don't say things that you don't want the Lord to hear you." I have twelve kids!

McDonald: Twelve children.

Dillhunt: And twelve grandkids and four greats.

McDonald: Wonderful family, huh?

Dillhunt: And nobody went more than three kids. [both laugh] They didn't follow in their mother's footsteps.

McDonald: Did the grandchildren know you were in the Army?

Dillhunt: Oh yes, yes.

McDonald: What did they think of that?

Dillhunt: I think they're kind of proud of it. They've got a grandmother who's so different from anybody else. And my oldest son, he's got a mother who was in the service, and a mother-in-law [laughs] who was in the service which is really unusual.

McDonald: Yeah.

Dillhunt: And, no they—as far as I know, they never told me. If they objected they never [laughs] told Mom. I was so glad when—I never thought about getting into the Legion, but I always said my dad I'm sure is up there prouder than hell 'cause he started the—in De Pere I think—the American Legion Post down there. Anyway, I think—and then the KCs [Knights of Columbus]—he was into everything. And so then I come along, and I ended up bein' one too

McDonald: You said you were the post commander here for awhile. Did you hold any state offices?

Dillhunt: No, I—let's see, what happened—haven't thought about it long enough.

McDonald: How big was the post if you had the women—

Dillhunt: Oh, what was it, twenty? It was small, very small. And, yeah, that and my graduating class in the academy was one of the small ones, and they all got [laughs] bigger after that. Being a woman in uniform back then wasn't always easy. And like I said, I was—I felt better being out of uniform and running into my commanding officer than being in uniform with Larry and have us run into somebody in the South down there. They were so, so, so prejudiced about women in service and anything except being a homebody. And so it wasn't easy.

McDonald: You mentioned about renting a place where you lived off base—

Dillhunt: Yes.

McDonald: And they wouldn't rent to the military if you were—

Dillhunt: Oh, yeah, but if they'd—she was very prejudiced, the lady, and she got to know me first before she saw [laughs] me come home in my uniform. And so that—I was different. I was from the North, so that was—I was a little bit different. But, no, they were very, very—and that—oh, I'm tellin'—oh, it reminds me--I remember his little girl. She was about three years old, and she was just *adorable*, that--the Lieutenant, and he said "No," he says, "Life wasn't easy." And I said, you know, you never thought about it from *their* side, what it would be like, all the time you heard, you know—

McDonald: You don't recall how he got stationed there, because didn't they have segregated units at the time in the military?

Dillhunt: Yes, but he was—he wasn't in—that was when we were in the lower echelons. He was, what was he, in that he was a lieutenant, and he was on and off the base. I think he had something to do with the flying, which made it entirely different than if you were just a GI Joe.

McDonald: Oh.

Dillhunt: And he was brilliant. He had--I think he had his Ph. D., Ph. D. from one of the colleges up there.

McDonald: Oh, he might have been a flying instructor or something—of some sort, huh?

Dillhunt: Right. He said it was hard, because he said, “Outside of you and Larry and a couple of others in the choir,” none of the whites would associate with him, and he said none of his people would because he had a degree and he was from up north. That was as bad as being white.

McDonald: So he probably—and there probably wasn’t very many Negro soldiers at the time at all.

Dillhunt: No. Oh, we had--that was the worst part of it. We did have one unit that was all Negro. And most of those wouldn’t have anything to do with him because he was a lieutenant.

McDonald: And they were all enlisted people.

Dillhunt: So I mean you—you got it no matter what when you were down there. Wasn’t good.

McDonald: Did you ever keep in touch with that gentleman?

Dillhunt: No, I lost track of him somewhere along the line. All of a sudden I got-- Larry got shipped out to California, and I followed him. I went up to Green Bay and then followed him out there. And we just got out there and then the war ends. It was no fun traveling back then, believe me, on those old, old--those old trains [laughs]. I was always—it was fun because when the men found out—‘cause I had to wear my uniform, what is it, I think the first twenty-four hours after you’re out, discharged—and some silly rule, or it might have just been one of ours, I don’t know—and so when they found out that I was ex-GI and I was pregnant, they’d get up and let me sit down [laughs], and I’d say, “I don’t have to, you know, just being—I’m fine.” But we’d do that, and sometimes we’d just stand, stand and hang out [laughs] instead to have our conversations.

[End of Interview]