

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
MAYBELLE L. EWALD
Paymaster, United States Marine Corps, World War II.

2007

OH
1105

OH
1105

Ewald, Maybelle L. (b. 1922). Oral History Interview, 2007.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract:

Maybelle Ewald, a Chicago native, discusses her Marine Corps service during World War II. "Mibs" Ewald touches upon her early life; mentioning how the Depression and her need to help support her family as the eldest of four children derailed her plans to attend free community college. Instead, she got a job as a comptometer operator in downtown Chicago before her enlistment on her twenty-first birthday. Ewald cites three reasons for her enlistment: patriotism, having nothing to do with herself while her fiancé was in service, and wanting to get away from her parents' arguments at home. She recalls that her father, a World War I Marine, was ecstatic; but her fiancé was initially very angry about her decision. Called to active duty in September 1943, Ewald trained at Camp Lejeune (North Carolina) and characterizes her basic training as "scary," including the train ride down. Although the women were not trained in combat, they were exposed to guns, gas, etc. and understood they were freeing a man to fight. She says that initially all of her drill instructors were men except for Sergeant Birch who was "the biggest woman she ever saw." Ewald discusses the work she did as paymaster at Henderson Hall in Arlington (West Virginia) and Camp Pendleton (California) that included calculation of allotments and insurance. She illustrates the care given to details and tells of taking a table outside on payday with the captain sitting with "all this cash in front of him." He dealt out the cash while she stood behind him watching because if mistakes were made they'd be up all night. She says she was sent to San Diego and her discharge held up so she could assist in paying the men returning from overseas. She was then discharged in San Diego, but couldn't return home as the men had transportation priority (which she declares as rightfully so). Since her fiancé got home in November and she wanted to be home for Christmas, she and two fellow women Marines hitchhiked from San Diego to Dallas where they were able to get transportation home. She talks about her marriage and raising six children first in Elmhurst (Illinois) and then in Mazomanie (Wisconsin). She speaks of finally joining the Women Marine Association in 1999 and that she communicated for a long time with several of her service buddies, but eventually stopped. Ewald tells of calling her best buddy, Ruth Riddlin, during a trip out east for elder hostel and their meeting in the hospital where the nurses put polish on Ruth's fingernails for the occasion. Finally, she touches on the military experience of her late husband, who was involved in bomb disposal, claiming that his letters were quite censored.

Biographical Sketch:

Maybelle Ewald lives in Mazomanie, Wisconsin where she recently retired, at age eighty-two, as the oldest EMT (emergency medical technician) in Dane County, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, 2007.
Transcribed by John P. Danish, 2008.

Interview Transcript:

- John: This is John Driscoll and today is September 19th 2007 and this is an oral history interview with “Mibs” (Maybelle) Ewald, Ewald?
- Ewald: Ewald.
- John: And this is at her home, close to Mazomanie, Wisconsin and “Mibs” thanks an awful lot for agreeing to the interview. Um, why don’t we start at the very beginning? When, and where, were you born?
- Ewald: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, St. Ann’s Hospital, and um, but, but we didn’t live there at the time we lived in, ah, I think it was Erie, Pennsylvania or something—my mother came home for my birth. I was the oldest child, so it was a first child.
- John: When were you born?
- Ewald: Ah, September, ah, I mean July 17th 1922.
- John: Okay. And, um, brothers, sisters?
- Ewald: I had—I was the oldest of four, two girls and two boys.
- John: Okay. And, ah, you were raised in Chicago, or?
- Ewald: Mostly in Chicago.
- John: Mostly in Chicago. Okay.
- Ewald: Yeah. Mostly in Chicago, but we lived in other places, so, Niagara Falls, Erie, Pennsylvania, and things like that.
- John: Oh. Oh. I was raised in Sharon, Pennsylvania, right south of there; it’s an Erie (unintelligible) in, um—early school?
- Ewald: Early school was in Oak Park, Illinois.
- John: Okay.
- Ewald: And I went to Whittier Elementary School, and, ah, I actually graduated for Whittier; but in the mean time I had gone to school in Niagara Falls, second grade in Niagara Falls, and, um, and, ah, several other places and always come back to Oak Park.

- John: Okay. Okay. I lived a bit in Oak Park. I worked for a company out of Cleveland, who bought a company in Chicago, and they put us up at the Oak Park Arms, because the town was dry and the Oak Park Arms was inexpensive. And we could go up and get the El (both chuckling) to go into work.
- Ewald: Oh, yeah, I've been on the El many times.
- John: Okay.
- Ewald: I worked downtown.
- John: How about after grade school, elementary school, high school?
- Ewald: I went to high school—two years in Oak Park and then we moved to Chicago.
- John: Okay.
- Ewald: And I went to—I graduated from Carl Shurz High School in Chicago.
- John: Sure. Okay. Okay. Yeah, and then after school? About when did you graduate?
- Ewald: I graduated in July—June of 1939.
- John: Okay, and then after school?
- Ewald: After school, I went to work—actually; I was going to go to college, because Chicago had a free community college.
- John: Oh, oh, wow.
- Ewald: And so I signed up for it and everything. But turned out, that I was the oldest of four and it was depression, the end of the depression. And there was just no money anything: clothes, or carfare, or anything to get to school, so I finally, I just quit and got a job; and I gave my mother half my pay, 'cause she needed it, and, ah, I worked downtown Chicago, so I took the El.
- John: Doing, doing what?
- Ewald: I was—you won't believe this, because, you'll never have heard of this. I would bet—I was a comptometer (adding machine) operator.
- John: My mother was a comptometer operator (unintelligible)

- Ewald: No kidding?
- John: In fact, don't I see one?
- Ewald: Yes. That is one over there that's right. I wanted my kids to know what uz nobody's ever heard of a comptometer, so ah, so I was a comptometer operator, starting at, ah, starting out at Carson Piriey Scott wholesale house and then, later on, I worked Riggs Optical in downtown Chicago, right by the El.
- John: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?
- Ewald: Oh. Yeah.
- John: Do you want to tell about it?
- Ewald: We all, I can't remember—I was thinking about that, I thought you're going to ask me that. And I was thinking about it, trying to think—I know I did remember where I was; but right now I can't remember where I was.
- John: It was a Sunday, I remember.
- Ewald: Yeah. It was a Sunday. But I know all of a sudden this terrible thing happened, and, and, ah, all of us were taken aback and shocked terribly: United States attacked by Japan.
- John: Yes. Yes. Yes.
- Ewald: People—Men killed, and, it was incredible, hard to believe, that that would happen to us. Because we grew up isolated from the rest of the world in a way.
- John: Oh. Yeah. That's true. That's very true. Yes. We'd gone for a ride in somebody else's car. We didn't have a car. And the car had a radio. We were listening to something. I was six. And I remember my dad—and my dad was really shocked and I remember him saying, "Where the heck is Pearl Harbor?"
- Ewald: Oh. Oh. Well, that's it. We didn't know a lot about the world when I was growing up. I mean everything was strange. I remember reading books about ah, oh, now I won't be able to remember the author, but exploring—in a Persia and places like that, and, oh, that was so different.
- John: Yeah. Yeah. That was so far away from our reality. Yeah. Yeah. What did you do early in the war, before you went into the service?

- Ewald: I worked in downtown Chicago as a comptometer operator.
- John: And then, when did you go in?
- Ewald: I enlisted on my 21st birthday, July 17th 1943. I did not know, at the time that I could have enlisted earlier, but, ya know, I would have needed my parents' signature. But I didn't know that until I actually signed up. So, um, I was engaged to be married at that time.
- John: Okay.
- Ewald: My, ah, husband to be, um, went into the service in February of 1943.
- John: Okay.
- Ewald: And I thought, ya know, trying to think about what's going to happen. Now, I didn't know what I was going to do. And I wanted to do something for the war effort, too. And finally, I thought, I'm gonna sign up, and what service? My father was a Marine.
- John: Oh, was he? Okay.
- Ewald: And, ah, in World War I.
- John: Okay. (both laugh)
- Ewald: And. Um, we'd grown up hearing Marine all of our lives. But my brother—one brother went into the Navy and one brother went into the Army. So when I came along, and was going to go into the service, and decided to go into the Marine Corps. Woah! (both laugh heartily)
- John: I can imagine.
- Ewald: He was ecstatic. And so I'll show you something after while he did. He sent a—he sent a letter, when I—I learned after I was in the Marine Corps, he'd sent a letter to, ah, Colonel Courtney, no, ah, Colonel Chesney—I got to think about that one. And, um, telling about his daughter who'd joined the Marine Corps and everything. When I heard about that one, I was absolutely floored. I mean, what did he do? And, ah, but, that's what fathers do.
- John: Yes. Yeah. Yeah, that's why you picked the Marine Corps, because of your dad?

Ewald: I think partly. And I was so impressed with the Marines that from li—
growing up, hearing about it. I wanted to see. And it was new. That was
the other thing.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Ewald: They, ah, the Women's Marines, Women's Reserve was formed in, ah,
February of 1943.

John: Okay. Yeah. Okay.

Ewald: And, ah, so, that was new. I mean, we had heard about the WACS and the
WAVES.

John: Yeah, yeah.

Ewald: And, ah, but, um, I just decided to be a part of the Marine Corps.

John: Where were you inducted?

Ewald: In Chicago.

John: Sure Chicago, yeah. And, then where did you go to basic?

Ewald: Camp Lejeune.

John: Camp Lejeune. Okay.

Ewald: Yeah. Yeah. All of us went to Camp Lejeune, at that time, except the very
first ones went to Hunter College. The very first Women's Reserve

John: In, in, ah?

Ewald: In New York. But I, ah, was probably in the second or third class in Camp
Lejeune.

John: Okay. Early. Okay.

Ewald: I was, I was called to active service in September 20th of 1943.

John: Okay. What was your basic like?

Ewald: Basic?

John: Yeah.

Ewald: (pause and heavy sigh) Scary! (both laugh heartily)

John: Yeah. (both still laughing) Well, talk about that a bit.

Ewald: Yeah. I, I laugh when I hear, ya know, when the Marine Corps, Quantico Museum, was dedicated and Jim Lair was the speaker?

John: Yeah.

Ewald: Did you hear that?

John: No. I didn't hear it.

Ewald: Whoa, well, you missed something, because he talked—I think I have a copy of it. Maybe I give that to you, because he talked about when he got in the Marine Corps.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Ewald: And it was—I laughed when I heard his story, because I could relate to it. I could relate to every part of it. But, ah, our service—we were not trained in any combat situations. But we were exposed to things, to guns, and exposed to gas, and we had to go into a tent and all of that sort of thing. And, ah, but, we learned a lot about the Marine Corps history. And we learned about the kind of jobs we would be asked to do. Because, ah, when I went in, when I enlisted, ah, the phrase was free a man to fight.

John: Yeah. I remember that. Who trained you? If the women Marines were that new, there couldn't have been any senior non-com's.

Ewald: Um, they were, um, we had a—I'll never forget Sergeant Birch. She was the biggest woman I ever saw. And I don't know if she was really that big. That's why I remember her. And I've got a picture of her.

John: With those stripes on they go so big.

Ewald: I'm telling you. It's just incredible. (searching the photograph) Oh, wow, were? I thought I had it right here. But I'll find it after while. Um, anyway, she was, she was big and tall and impressive. But, ah, our training, I mean our drill training and everything were, ah, DI's.

John: Okay.

Ewald: Men DI's. They did, later, get some women DI's. But, um,

John: Yeah. Okay. And then from Lejeune?

- Ewald: From Lejeune, I was promoted to Private First Class. (chuckle to laugh)
- John: Yep, get that first one on there.
- Ewald: I was transferred to, ah, Henderson Hall, which is the headquarters battalion of the Marine Corps in Arlington, Virginia. And I, ah, um, ah, I worked there for nine months. I was stationed there for nine months.
- John: Doing what?
- Ewald: Doing, ah, paymaster. I was Office of the Paymaster.
- John: Okay. Okay. That's an important job!
- Ewald: Well, it tied in with my training and my background and everything else. And I liked it. I mean I love to work with figures. So, ah, so that's what I worked on.
- John: I remember we didn't have to take our pay. It wasn't that much to worry about. But we always let some ride. I remember that. And, ah, I just would take ten bucks. And let the rest ride. And when it would get up to a hundred of so after—What, ah—how much did you make early on?
- Ewald: Well, it started at fifty dollars and eventually, um, ah, I, I'm trying to think. I think when I made sergeant I was making seventy-eight.
- John: Okay. I think I started out at seventy-six. And I, ah, was sending a bond home, so there wasn't a
- Ewald: Oh, yeah. And I, and that's what we did. We calculated allotments, and insurance, and all that sort of thing. And so, um, ah, I sent an allotment home to my mother, because they were sorely in need of anything. And I bought bonds, or ah, I. I don't know if I actually bought bonds, or if I think I bought those stamps or something.
- John: Oh, yeah. I remember those. I remember, as a kid, somebody give me dime to buy a stamp. So I would go to school and buy a stamp for a dime. And then on the way home I'd go to the post office, sell the stamp, and go buy some candy. (both laugh) I've never talked to anybody in the paymaster world.
- Ewald: Oh, haven't ya?
- John: And it was all cash?

- Ewald: Oh, absolutely. It was all cash. Nowadays, they're direct deposit.
- John: Yeah. Yeah.
- Ewald: And then, in between, they were certainly paid by check. I don't remember. All the time that I was doing it, they were paid in cash.
- John: I interviewed a fella that I worked with at the state, who was at West Point. And he was in the, the, I don't know what, dispersing. And up until he went to West Point like in the early sixties, when he was stationed there, in 1960, the cadets were still paid in cash.
- Ewald: Oh. Oh, were they?
- John: Yeah. And he changed that.
- Ewald: Yeah. I didn't know—I didn't know when they changed? But, ah, I don't remember at Henderson Hall in Arlington, Virginia, how they were paid. But, ah, when I got out to California. I was transferred to California after nine months, Camp Pendleton.
- John: Oh, Camp Pendleton, okay.
- Ewald: And I know there, we worked on all the payrolls the week before payday. And we, um, then on payday they'd set the table outside if the weather was good. And usually it was out there. They'd set up a table. And the captain would sit at the table like this with all this cash in front of him.
- John: Yeah.
- Ewald: And then he would be dealing out the cash, depending on what the payroll said. And we're standing right behind him watching everything he—everything single thing he did, because if he made a mistake, we'd be up all night until we found we found that mistake.
- John: Yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah.
- Ewald: Nothing, there was no slush fund back then, like banks have now.
- John: We had to be under arms to get paid, which meant, somebody would get a cartridge belt. And we would just pass that along the line. With the cartridge belt on you were under arms.
- Ewald: Really. I don't remember that.

- John: I don't remember—I don't know why that was or anything, but, ah, all it took was one cartridge belt and a hundred guys to put it around, just hold it around their waist.
- Ewald: No kidding? I wonder why?
- John: I don't know. I know you were also encouraged to contribute to the Iwo Jima Memorial, too. I don't think that money ever got to the memorial. I think that went to the NCO Club that night. But, yeah, that, that was a part of formality. It was very serious. And, um, yeah, I, I, I can understand that it all needed to be right to the penny. It all had to be.
- Ewald: Yeah. Oh, absolutely. We didn't get away with anything.
- John: Well, the officer would have to make up the difference if he was short.
- Ewald: I don't recall, I don't recall any problem, but, that doesn't it mean it didn't happen. I don't recall, so I can't tell you what happened. I do remember standing there. And watching everything he did, because we didn't want any mistakes. Captain Haden.
- John: Was it much of an adjustment for a Midwestern girl from Chicago to a PFC in the Marine Corps?
- Ewald: Oh, you bet. The first adjustment was when we got on the train in Chicago and we went down to North Carolina. And I remember before we got there, we're wonder, ya know, we're all wondering: What's gonna happen? What's gonna happen?
- John: Yeah. Yeah.
- Ewald: And I remember the train went through, I think it was the B & O, went through this long, long, area, where all you saw was tracks and trees on both sides before we ever got to camp. And I remember thinking: What did I do? My God, what did I do?
- John: (both laughing) Yeah. What have I done? Yeah.
- Ewald: But I, but I wasn't going to undo any—if I'd had the chance. I wouldn't have undone it, ya know, because that's the thoughts that are going through your mind, because you don't know.
- John: Yeah. Yeah. Ah, there must have been tens of thousands of men going through Camp Pendleton at that time. Um.

Ewald: Going overseas? And then I have a story of, about when they were coming back after the war, too.

John: Okay. Go ahead. Go ahead with that.

Ewald: Well, um, when you enlisted in World War II, you enlisted for the duration of the war.

John: Yeah.

Ewald: Well, how do they count your service then—what they did is they gave us points.

John: Okay.

Ewald: So, I think, if I remember right, you got one point for every month.

John: Okay.

Ewald: So, ah, in the Marine Corps, yeah, we did process a lot of young men going overseas. But then, when the war was over, and they all had to come back. So those of us—I had enough points for discharge. But they retained the people in paymaster because they all had to come back and, ya know, and get paid off and the process, and all of that. So, I, ah, I remember, I'm trying to think, my fiancé was home in November and this was in December that they held us back. I could have been discharged. But, um, I'm just trying to think now. How did that worked? Anyway, they held us back so that we could pay these men off. And, um, then finally, our number would come up. And, ah, our points would come up. So, I was transferred to San Diego (California) for discharge. And, um, I had plenty of points. But I was transferred to San Diego (California) and I was discharged there. And then with all these men coming back there was no transportation available. They got it first.

John: Yeah.

Ewald: Rightfully so, and we didn't care. Three of us were together at that time; we'd worked together and everything else. And we didn't care; because they were entitled to that after all they'd been through.

John: Yeah. Sure.

Ewald: So, but we wanted to get home.

John: Yeah.

Ewald: This was the—I was discharged on the 22nd and: Could I get home for Christmas?

John: Yeah, that would have been great.

Ewald: And my fiancé was waiting for me, and, ah, um.

John: Was this the same fiancé from before?

Ewald: Yeah. Yeah.

John: Okay.

Ewald: And, um, he was waiting for me and so. He got home in November. And, ah, so, um, we finally decided to hitchhike.

John: Oh yeah?

Ewald: And we hitchhiked from San Diego (California) to Dallas (Texas).

John: Oh man.

Ewald: And then from Dallas (Texas). I had relatives in Dallas. And then from there I was able to make a reservation on train and come north. And my two friends went on to Massachusetts.

John: Oh, wow, wow, three gals, hitchhiking.

Ewald: Well, it was okay. You'd never do it now. Never, never, never do it now. But with the three of us and I remember only one ride and that one was terrifying. Because this was a guy, who—it was kind of a convertible type car. And he would go—he passed, when he shouldn't have passed. And, ya know, on hills and things.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Ewald: I was so happy to get out of that car.

John: Were you still a PFC?

Ewald: No, I was a sergeant.

John: Oh, sergeant. Okay.

Ewald: And so, that was my story about getting home. But, ah, I got home. I didn't get home for Christmas. I got home on the 27th.

John: Oh, okay.

Ewald: That was okay. They met me downtown and ah, I'm a Midwestern girl. And I grew up with the change of seasons and everything. California was not my—I didn't enjoy that weather. But, ah, um, it was hot in the summer and it was, actually, cold in the winter, at night anyway. I do remember getting off the train on one of the worst days in Chicago, slop, and slush, and everything else, ya know. It was slushy.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Ewald: And I wanted to get down on the ground and kiss it. (both laugh)

John: Yeah. I know. Yeah.

Ewald: Aside from finally getting to meet my family and everything.

John: Yeah.

Ewald: I didn't talk to my mother on the phone, that's another thing, for a year and a half.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Ewald: You couldn't take—only emergencies.

John: Yeah. Yeah, you wrote letters.

Ewald: Oh, yeah, lots of letters.

John: I called my folks from Okinawa on their 40th anniversary, not thinking about the time, the call got there as they were having their party.

Ewald: Oh, how nice.

John: And that took—I had to make arrangements days ahead of time. And then when I got to what we called a phone exchange, it took them an hour or so to get through. It was actually by radio. They were talking on the phone and I was talking on the phone by radio. And that was ten, twelve, years after what you are talking about. So, yeah, everybody

Ewald: Yeah, 1945.

John: Everybody wrote letters. That's the only way to a

- Ewald: That's the only way to communicate. Now, when I, I talk to, um, some—I was an EMT after I quit working, and, ah, I talked to one of our EMT's overseas on the telephone. I couldn't believe it.
- John: Yeah. Yeah.
- Ewald: And also e-mail. We had e-mail back and forth, instant e-mail. You knew what was going on. I couldn't believe it.
- John: Yeah. Wow, that's great. Well, ah, I ask everybody this: ah, you're young, just comin' out of the Depression, getting back into life, everything was ahead of you. And then this terrible thing happened. And you didn't get taken away, but you got—you had to go away from it all. What did you think about that?
- Ewald: Well, I was one of those—I had more than one reason to go into the Marine Corps. I mean, I was patriotic, I had a fiancé, and what am I going to do. I mean, ya know, I wasn't going to go dating or something.
- John: Yeah. Yeah.
- Ewald: So, um, but the other thing was my family. I was the oldest. So I remember all of the arguments they had, my mother and father. My father was not easy to live with. But they, they lived all of their lives together. So, I give them both credit for that. I give my mother a lot of credit!
- John: (both laugh) Right.
- Ewald: But there was that. I just wanted to get away from all of that. That was another thing, so, between the three things, why, I just decided to go in the service.
- John: Ya know, I've interviewed not quite two-hundred veterans and I've never had one, never: poor me, it happens, bad things happen. Terrible things happen! But I don't remember gripping, anyone gripping about it. They had to go. They wanted to go.
- Ewald: Oh, yeah. I wanted to go.
- John: They didn't like the idea. But
- Ewald: There's no question about that. And you hear stories about women, and especially early women, I know my fiancé was—oh, he was really burned.
- John: I was going to ask you. What did he think about that?

- Ewald: He was mad. He was really mad at me. I remember a couple of letters I got, he was really mad that I did that; we weren't married. He couldn't tell me what to do and what not to do. But he did write me later, and saying he didn't like it at first and was really mad at me. But in the end he was happy I did that.
- John: That's great. That's great. So, then you got back, ah, ah. Did you get married right away or did you work some?
- Ewald: No. Well, I didn't actually work. I got back in, um, um, late December and we got married late April.
- John: Okay. Okay. It wasn't too long after, yeah, yeah.
- Ewald: But we had no money. My folks had no money. So what we did was—we lived on a two-flat in Chicago on Keystone Avenue, near Pulaski.
- John: Oh, yeah. Okay.
- Ewald: Do you know where Pulaski is? Pulaski and North.
- John: Oh, yeah, I know where Pulaski is. Yeah, when I was living in Oak Park the company I was at five-hundred North Pulaski, which was
- Ewald: Oh, okay, further South from where I was.
- John: Yeah, but North was right up there, somewhere.
- Ewald: North Avenue.
- John: Yeah, North Avenue, was right up there somewhere.
- Ewald: I think that was about, I forget the numbers. I think that was about eighteen-hundred, or so.
- John: Yeah. Okay.
- Ewald: Yeah, it would have been, 'cause we lived at nineteen-hundred, or so, and, um, 1927 North Keystone was where I lived when I went in and that's where we were, I should say, that's where they were when we came back. So, what we did was, we whitewashed the basement walls, the basement of this two-flat. And, ah, I mean, we cleaned everything up and washed it. And had our wedding at, um, North Austin Lutheran Church, and, then, ah, we had a nice reception there and everything. And so that was great.

- John: That's great. That's great. You don't need a lot of money. It's nice to have.
- Ewald: I borrowed the wedding gown from my best friend. All I had to buy was the veil, so, I don't have a wedding gown.
- John: Yeah. Yeah.
- Ewald: But then we lived, after we were married, in Elmhurst, Illinois. That's where all of my children were born.
- John: Yup. I managed a distribution center in Elmhurst (Illinois) that burned down. It was—it backed up to one of the big highways there. I can't tell you where in Elmhurst, but, um.
- Ewald: What was the name of your company?
- John: Ah, Premier Industrial Corporation of Cleveland. And, ah, this was a distribution center. The orders would come in and stuff would get shipped out. And, ah, Elmhurst was a nice—I liked it. It was better than downtown Chicago.
- Ewald: Oh yeah, absolutely.
- John: It turned out, they had a very good fire department, too, as I found out on the scene. Yeah. They had—well they were—it was an affluent enough suburb to have some money. And they could recruit firefighters from Chicago.
- Ewald: Oh, I see.
- John: And they were—the ones that ah, the real regulars wouldn't leave Chicago. But, ah, some of the good sharp ones were glad to, ah, get out of the politics and all of that, and, ah, get into something like Elmhurst. Yeah. Yeah, I remember when the place was burning, oh, oh, golly; the flames went hundreds of feet into the air. We had janitorial supplies, automotive—good stuff to burn. I remember, I got called in Cleveland. I flew in, flying into O'Hare, I could see the fire. But when we got there were a lot of volunteer fire departments showing up, also. And I remember they had one higher officer standing at the intersection, saying: you guys go in and report to so-and-so, you guys go over here and direct traffic, so; there was some of them that they, they didn't want.
- Ewald: As an EMT we did, we always had the fire department for any kind of an accident. And that's what they did.

John: Gayle told me you were driving until just recently?

Ewald: I was the oldest EMT in Dane County for five years. And I retired at eighty-two.

John: That is tremendous. That's just great. That's great.

Ewald: And that's when I couldn't remember things I needed to remember instantly and I thought: time to quite.

John: Yeah. Yeah. That's great. That's really great.

Ewald: Um, my three sons were born in Elmhurst, Illinois, so, um.

John: Okay.

Ewald: So, um, and my oldest, when we moved to Wisconsin in 1953, my oldest was five, the next was Brian, that was Scott, Brian was, um, three, and Rex was a year-and-a-half.

John: Okay. Okay. Are they still in the area?

Ewald: No, ah, Scott is out in Seattle (Washington), and, um, Brian is in Menomonee, Michigan, Marinette (Wisconsin), Menomonee. And Rex is a lawyer in Monroe (Wisconsin). He's a city attorney in Monroe (Wisconsin).

John: Okay, okay. We have, ah,

Ewald: So, that's an hour away.

John: We have six kids. And the farthest one is Sun Prairie (Wisconsin).

Ewald: Oh, really?

John: And that's great.

Ewald: Yeah, that's wonderful.

John: It's good for us. But, also, it's good for them, 'cause they're growin' up together; because they'll end up going, ya know, goin' all over the place.

Ewald: I made it my job to make sure that they communicate, so, ya know, and now, with e-mail, that's easy.

John: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Ewald: Because you can copy everything. But um,

John: Oh, that's tremendous. What, ah, what did the Marine Corps do to you, other than give you a chance to serve your country. But, what did you take out of that, and bring with you home?

Ewald: I grew up in a home that, um, I learned from my mother that I was a Girl Scout and all of that stuff, you know. Do your job. Do it right. And finish it.

[End of Side A, Tape One]

John: Okay. Ah, you, what, what—one of the things you brought from the Marine Corps was this idea of teamwork? With other people

Ewald: Yeah. Oh, yeah. We ah—we learned, we learned about teamwork. I mean, you have to be part of the team in the Marine Corps, and in life.

John: Yup. Yup.

Ewald: And in life; that's important in life. And, ah, I guess the other thing that I was mentioning is the fact was, ah, I learned to resolve problems by, um, the—if I had a problem with anybody in the Marine Corps, even now, the first thing I would do is go and talk to them.

John: Them. Yup.

Ewald: And try to resolve the problem, or at least, figure out what started it, or whatever it was.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Ewald: I don't have any of those kind of problems in my life. Um, but, um, but that was the other thing. Teamwork was important in the Marine Corps, and in life.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Ewald: So, and, I took a lot of pride in my service.

John: Ah, did you stay in touch with anyone afterwards, any reunions, or get together, or things like that?

- Ewald: Well, I did not join any organization; although I learned, that my father made me a member of the Marine Corps League.
- John: Oh, yeah?
- Ewald: I didn't even know that until recently. I found that in something recently. I found that in something I was looking through yesterday.
- John: I'll be darned.
- Ewald: I was a member of the Marine Corps League in Chicago (Illinois). But I did not join anything; because we had a family and I just didn't have time.
- John: I never, I never did either.
- Ewald: But, ah,
- John: How about getting together with, ah,
- Ewald: But, ah, but, ah, I did join the Women Marine Association in, um, in about 1999, something like that. And it was after my husband died, so, I didn't—we didn't have any conflict or anything. But, um, I was in Woodman's and I saw this woman with a jacket, a red jacket on; it said: Women Marines Association. And I, so I stopped and I said: What is this? 'cause I'd never heard of it.
- John: Yeah.
- Ewald: And, so, she told me about it. So, I've been a member of that every since.
- John: Super.
- Ewald: And, um.
- John: 'Get together with any of the women you were in with?
- Ewald: The—only one is left; my best buddy, ah, was Ruth Riddlin from Massachusetts.
- John: Okay.
- Ewald: And, um, she and I were pals all through the—at Camp Pendleton. And, so, and she, and, um, Eleanor, ah, Ferrari; and, um, Eleanor (Lawrenz or Lawrence), was her name at that time. And, ah, Eleanor is still living. But, but, Ruth is, Ruth died.

John: Oh.

Ewald: But, um, I had not seen her. We communicated for a long time and then, you know when you have family, you kind of drop off.

John: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Ewald: And that happened. And then, um, I was doing an elder hostel out in Massachusetts and I wondered if she was still living. And so, I called and there was no answer for many times. And I called and no answer. And I thought but the phone is still working, so,

John: Yeah.

Ewald: So, I kept it up and of a sudden someone answered. And it was a young woman, and she—and I asked her. And I said: this is a voice from the past for your mother. And, um, she said her mother was home from the hospital.

John: Oh! Oh!

Ewald: And so, it turned out that I—when I went out there. I drove out to Massachusetts and I talked to her sister. And I was able—they took me to the hospital and I was able to meet her after all those years.

John: Oh, yeah. Great.

Ewald: The nurses had put finger nail polish on her fingers and everything to get her ready.

John: Oh, that's great; it must have meant a lot to her.

Ewald: Uh. That was real important. But she has since died.

John: Yeah.

Ewald: And then the one is in, ah, Carpentersville, Illinois; she is still living. But, ah—I should mention one other little thing.

John: Sure. Oh, yeah.

Ewald: She's the only one who still calls me Lenny.

John: Oh, yeah?

- Ewald: Yeah. That was my name in the Marine Corps, because I didn't like my name it's Maybelle, M-A-Y-B-E-L-L-E. And I didn't like that name growing up. It's fine now, but, ah, I mean, I didn't then.
- John: Yeah. Yeah.
- Ewald: So, my middle name is Lenox, L-E-N-O-X.
- John: Okay.
- Ewald: So, I thought, well, they can call me Lenny, they don't know. (both chuckle) So that's what happened.
- John: You had the GI Bill? Or did women Marines get the GI Bill in World War II?
- Ewald: Yes, but, um, we were Women Marines, W-R, Women's Reserves, United States Marine Corps Women's Reserve that's the other thing you should know, which I think you probably do. Um, it's no longer—that's no longer true. Now, a Marine is a Marine, a woman or a man.
- John: Yeah. Yeah.
- Ewald: Um, but, ah, yeah, the GI Bill was available; but I was starting a whole new life and I did not take advantage of it, unfortunately. I wished I'd gone back to school.
- John: I went into the Marine Corps because I wanted the GI Bill and it was—the Korean Bill was going to go out at the end of January, in 1955. And I was goofing off in college; I was gonna have to repeat, I figured, ya know, instead of doing Army, College, or College, Army, why don't I do Army, College the other way, grow up some, get some money, ya know. Well, every other kid in the United States read the same newspaper article I did (Ewald laughs). And, well, the only one I could get into was the Marine Corps; they said they'd take thirteen. And they had twelve definite, and one probable. And I said: I'll go; I didn't think I was number thirteen. But, ah, that didn't bother me.
- Ewald: Oh, well, I'll be darned.
- John: So, I, I,
- Ewald: You mean if you were not one of those thirteen, you wouldn't have been able to get into college, at all?

- John: No. Not college, the service. Into the service to get the GI Bill. You had to be in by the end of January.
- Ewald: Oh, I see; so you had that deadline. Okay.
- John: So, I, so, I ended up in the Marine Corps, no regrets. I don't know what I would have chosen, if I'd sat down and pondered, ya know, and picked. I wouldn't have been surprised if I'd been in the Marine Corps anyway. But it so happened that I had no choice. But I don't regret a day of it.
- Ewald: Where were you stationed?
- John: Um, I got to travel the world. I, I, was—I went to basic at, um, Parris Island (South Carolina), a beautiful, place, God. And I went to basic electronics at Great Lakes (Illinois), and advanced electronics at San Diego (California). And then I was a radio tech with a forward air control outfit we called in dive bombers and we called in gun fire from ships. And I ended up in the Mediterranean with the Italian 6th Fleet. And from there we went all over teaching NATO forces how to do this.
- Ewald: Um.
- John: And I was in Greece, and Turkey, and in Italy, and in Spain, and in Lebanon; and we went to Norway, up to teach the Norwegians. And then the last year they told me: you're gonna stay here and march up and down every morning. You're not going to get to travel anymore. I said: to heck with you. So, I pulled some strings. And I wanted to go to the other side of the world, Japan. Well, I got to Okinawa, which
- Ewald: I heard you say Okinawa before.
- John: So, I spent the last year, there, teaching basic electronics at, ah, (unintelligible) school.
- Ewald: My husband, ah—my oldest son was in radio in the Army; he would enjoy talking to you.
- John: Yeah. Yeah.
- Ewald: But that was in, ah, '70, '72, I think.
- John: These were World War II radios we had; they worked. Well, that's tremendous.

- Ewald: He probably had World War II radios, I know, I remember letters he'd sent home. He was so frustrated with the Army, what they were dealing with, sometimes.
- John: They didn't waste a lot of money. Well, I don't know if they wasted it. They wasted enough. This is a tremendous story. This is just fantastic!
- Ewald: Is it?
- John: Yeah, this is, this is, ah,
- Ewald: Oh. I didn't think my story very exciting.
- John: Oh. Absolutely. Ya know, ya read a lot, ya read a whole bunch of books about World War II. And that just has very little to do with World War II. The stories like this are, I—I interviewed a guy who landed on D-Day in Normandy. And I read Steven Ambrose's books on that; he's a tremendous writer. He was a good friend until he passed away. But this guy, they dropped him a way out. They had to wade in, knee-deep. And when he got into shore and got under cover. He took off his boots and threw away his wet socks; but then, he went for like two months with no socks.
- Ewald: No socks, oh, gosh.
- John: Because they didn't get supplies? Now, that's a real story. Somebody, say the Canadians were here, and the British were here; but that's, to me,
- Ewald: Yeah. Doesn't tell the details, what's going on.
- John: (laughs) Some guy with no socks (both chuckle)—well, this is tremendous. Is there anything else you want to add to this?
- Ewald: Well, I do want to say, that my husband, to be, was in the Army. And, ah, he was in bomb disposal.
- John: Oh, wow! Oh, wow.
- Ewald: And, so, ah, ya, knowing he was in bomb disposal; but you couldn't communicate. I mean the letters I would get.
- John: Yeah. Yeah.
- Ewald: And, he couldn't write anything.
- John: Yeah, that's true. Okay.

Ewald: Anything like that he would write like that would have been censored.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Ewald: And people nowadays don't realize what happened then, I mean, now you have instant communication, where everybody is. But back then, and if we were fighting the same kind of war it might be different. But we're not; so, but, back then everything was censored.

John: Yeah. I remember letters from my uncle, blacked-out (unintelligible)

Ewald: Not even any addresses; you had an APO address and stuff like that. But he was in bomb disposal, so, I, I, donated, um, a lot of his stuff. That's what, about bomb disposal, that's what I donated to the veterans museum.

John: Okay.

Ewald: Because I didn't know what to do with it. And, I thought, it belongs somewhere.

John: Yeah. And they'll make use of it. Yeah, that's great.

Ewald: So, um, there was one story about him, when they had a real problem. They had to, they, they couldn't progress or something. I don't remember what that was about, but, ah, he finally—they had this bomb that was deep in the ground. And he finally went down head first and defused that bomb.

John: Oh, man.

Ewald: And that was written up in the paper. So,

John: Talk about doing your job and doing it well.

Ewald: Doing it right. Yeah. (both chuckle) So, he went through the Battle of the Bulge and all of that sort of thing. So, he was with, um, I forget now. Oh, I should have looked that up.

John: That's okay.

Ewald: Which Army and, ah, group he was with.

- John: I, I interviewed a guy in Madison (Wisconsin) here. He was in the Army, Engineers; he was a hard-hat diver and I thought maybe that he—and he spent the whole war over there. We would go in and blow the heck out of port. And then the Germans would blow the heck out of the port when they pulled back. And then we'd come in and need the port. And his job was to get out there and cutting up all of that stuff, so we could get ships in. And, ah, again, talking about bomb disposal and, some of those things, some of the things people did. I just—and, ya know, these weren't soldier sailors; these were kids, young people, no background at all in the military; and yet, they did a remarkable thing.
- Ewald: Oh, yeah.
- John: Yeah.
- Ewald: You got a Marine, a woman Marine, that did a remarkable things. She was a control tower operator; I'm sure they've got hers, her, um—I know they—she's, she's signed up for every, um, story that needs to be told, so I know you've got her.
- John: Yeah. Yeah. Most of the fellas I went through boot camp with went to, somewhere in Tennessee, Memphis, I guess, to be tower operators. But I was lucky enough to get in, picked to be in electronics school, and, ah, and, ah.
- Ewald: So, now, you must be ah, really savvy, in all the technician, computers and stuff.
- John: I, I have some of the most wonderful grandkids you've ever seen that are great with that. I, um, I did the electronics. And when I came out I started in the space race, earlier space programs, as a junior engineers, engineer. But then, for some reason, I got moved into a purchasing slot. And I was a purchasing agent for the rest of my life. So, um, then, I came to Wisconsin, as the head of state purchasing and so my electronics stuff goes back to soldering irons.
- Ewald: Oh, really. Okay.
- John: But I've got some brilliant grandkids that can help me out, ya know.
- Ewald: Oh, well, I'm a computer person.
- John: I see your, your
- Ewald: This is my office.

John: I see your Apple up there.

Ewald: I'm adding onto my house. This all looks terrible in here; but I'm adding onto my house. And so, I'm sorting out stuff. And.

John: Yeah.

Ewald: And, ah, getting ready for that addition to be put on.

John: I, ah, I write, books, history, the Nineteenth Century, before, during, and after the Civil War.

Ewald: I like history.

John: And, so, I'm on a computer all the time.

Ewald: Oh, I see.

John: So, I have no problem picking up the phone and saying: Chris, this thing just did this, what do I do to straighten it out?

Ewald: Oh, really.

John: And one of the grandkids will tell me.

Ewald: I have a grandkid like that; he actually worked in the Apple store.

John: Oh, super.

Ewald: In Bellevue, Washington, and to get a job like that, as a technician.

John: Ooh, wow.

Ewald: But he's in college now, so.

John: Yeah. Okay. Anything else you want to add to this? Or, ah, after we've done the tape can we take a minute and go through some of your pictures?

Ewald: Well, I wondered if you'd—I brought some stuff out. Yeah.

John: I'm gonna shut the tape off, unless you come up with something you want to add to it; then I can turn the tape back on.

Ewald: Okay. That sounds good.

John: Go ahead.

Ewald: Well, I just thought of something else I should insert and that was about my mother. My youngest brother was in the Navy; my middle brother was in the Army; and I went into the Marine Corps. So, she had three stars on a flag in her window.

John: Okay. Yeah, I remember those.

Ewald: Do ya? No gold stars; but three stars in her window. She was very proud of that. I think some people still do that; but I haven't seen any, anywhere.

John: I saw one in the last week or so.

Ewald: Did ya?

John: And, ah, I was with one of my grandkids. And I pointed it out, then, of course—you could buy those at Murphy's Five and Ten. And, um, I remember people buying them, some had one, some had two or three. And I remember Gold Stars. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay, I'm gonna shut this off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]