

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ELSIE J. (KRAMOLIS) LAJCAK
Truck Driver, Marines, World War II.

2000

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Lajcak, Elsie J., née Kramolis (b.1916). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 65 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Elsie Lajcak, née Kramolis, a Moquah, Wisconsin native, discusses her service as a truck driver with the Marine Corps Women's Reserve during World War II. Lajcak explains she was inspired to join the Marine Corps by a cousin who was killed in action. She describes enlisting in 1943 and attending classes during boot camp at Hunter College (New York). She talks about living in dorms with other women Marines, buying her own uniforms, marching in a regimental review, and, on Easter Sunday, going in to New York City where a Navy veteran treated her group to lunch. Lajcak speaks of motor transport school and her first duty assignment at Camp Lejeune (North Carolina). She tells of learning to drive trucks and some training snafus: tearing down the Signal Corps' wires while driving at night and stalling an entire convoy when her truck got stuck in a ravine. Lajcak addresses being segregated from the men, curfews, and being required to sign in and out. Sent to Air Station Cherry Point (North Carolina), she reports that the officers would not let the women drive until they were ordered to by an officer at Camp Lejeune. Lajcak tells of riding a PBJ (B-25) airplane at night and says, "We did all kinds of things I guess that we shouldn't have." She touches on her uniform, wearing lipstick, and getting a demerit for having off-black socks. She mentions recreational activities. At Air Station Mojave (California), she recalls transporting troops through the mountains and picking up hitchhikers. On the way back from a delivery, she tells of going horseback riding with a sergeant and a colonel; partway through the ride they traded horses and hers took off down Hollywood Boulevard. Lajcak recalls seeing the Marine pilot trainees strafing cars and having dogfights with the Army cadets from Victorville (California). After signing up for overseas duty, she discusses driving trucks and buses at Air Station Ewa (Hawaii). She touches on shipping to Hawaii on the *USS Lurline* and eating in the officers' mess. She speaks about dating and says the majority of male Marines were glad to have women serving. Lajcak confesses she had "a lot of stupid experiences driving": almost being hit by a landing plane, knocking down a guard station, getting a truck caught on a tree branch, and shaking up passengers during her first use of air brakes. She recalls the buses being old and inadequate. She describes singing in the choir and, on Christmas, picking up girls in Honolulu to go caroling. The night the war ended, she recalls people firing tracers in celebration and somebody stealing her bus. She mentions shipping home aboard the hospital ship *Consolation* and volunteering for mess duty there. After discharge at El Toro (California), she states she went hitchhiking though Canada in uniform. Lajcak mentions being in the Inactive Reserve for four years, keeping in contact with other women veterans, and marrying a man from her hometown.

She reveals she was the first woman commander of the American Legion in Oshkosh (Wisconsin), as well as serving as adjutant and on the executive committee. She states she is the chaplain for the Marine Corps League in Oshkosh and describes the League's activities.

Biographical Sketch:

Lajcak (b.1916) served in the Marine Corps during World War II. Stationed in air bases in North Carolina, California, and Hawaii, she was discharged at the rank of staff sergeant. She settled with her husband, Ed, in Oshkosh (Wisconsin) and raised four children.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000.
Transcribed by Jennifer Kalaidis, 2010.
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

- Jim: We're off and running. So, Elsie where were ya born?
- Elsie: I was born in a little town called Moquah, M-O-Q-U-A-H, Wisconsin.
- Jim: I've never heard of, I thought I've heard all Wisconsin.
- Elsie: It's in Bayfield County.
- Jim: Oh. When was that?
- Elsie: That's, um, 19 –
- Jim: Your year of birth.
- Elsie: 16, okay –
- Jim: 1916?
- Elsie: 1916.
- Jim: [Laughs]. Alright. And, um, you grew up in that town?
- Elsie: I grew up, mm hmm.
- Jim: And, how did you get involved in the service?
- Elsie: Well, I was working in Chicago at the time and, well, women were joining the other service organizations and I saw a little write-up in the Tribune that said that the Marines were going to start recruiting women. So, I thought we'll wait until the Marines. And I had a cousin in the Marines and he was, um, missing in action, and after that he was pronounced dead in action, so I felt, well, he was one of my favorite cousins, and I thought, well, this is what I will do, and I did. And I had a friend, shirttail relation that was eager to go too, so we went together. So it was a little bit easier–
- Jim: Right.
- Elsie: To go with someone than to go alone.
- Jim: Tell me the process of how you got into the Marine Corps. How did you do that?
- Elsie: Well, we had to – downtown they had –

- Jim: In Chicago?
- Elsie: In Chicago, mm hmm, yeah we had to enlist.
- Jim: I mean there was an office, and you just walked in –
- Elsie: And there was an office, mm hmm, and we had to be tested – have a test, have physicals and we had to have, well, give our years of education and –
- Jim: Sure. The exam –
- Elsie: I don't remember if there they had picked where – what we would want to be – which, which job we would want to hold in the service. And, I had put down radio operator first because my cousin had been one and second was motor transport, so I got motor transport. And, yeah, that was –
- Jim: So how soon did they call you to service after that sign up?
- Elsie: A month. A month, yeah.
- Jim: Tell me about that experience. Where did you go and so forth.
- Elsie: Oh, we went to, um, to New York – the Hunter College, the old college campus – and that's where we went to our boot camp for six weeks, and it was with WAVES and SPARS. The Navy and the Coast Guard already had their training, so we trained not with them, but in the same area.
- Jim: Were you the first class?
- Elsie: We were the first class.
- Jim: Oh, my goodness. How many?
- Elsie: There were some officers. I can't tell you how many, I don't remember how many –
- Jim: Roughly. Fifty? Sixty?
- Elsie: Oh, more than that. More than that, yeah. And we had all the training – not too much physical, except for marching – but we had to take all the classes, like airplane recognition and map reading and the gas – different gases that they could possibly be used and, um, military – military whatever or another [laughs], and quite a few classes that we had to take.
- Jim: So you stayed in the dorms there at Hunter College?

- Elsie: Yeah, mm hmm.
- Jim: And you ate there, too?
- Elsie: Yeah, they had a mess hall for us. And – the first night we came, the WAVES were in charge – you know, Navy, and – the Marine Corps – and, um, so we kinda got a rift a little bit. [Laughs]
- Jim: [Laughs].
- Elsie: And the first – we had to go and collect our linens, our bedding, and they put us in one – I forget what they called them – and then a little bit later we got moved – the same evening we had to go after drive – riding the train all the way to New York. And then we went to eat and we had rarebit on toast, and I had never had rarebit, and I thought it was rabbit, we were gonna have rabbit. We had a little bit of cheese, dried cracker, and then in the – we had a group of six in one quarter, so it was six in one cabin, and we had double bunks. And, in the morning, we heard the WAVES going to the mess hall, the mess men, and they go, “UP! UP! UP!” [Laughs]. So that was kinda funny. Then they – we had a line up, and they started. “Wipe off your lipstick! Wipe off your lipstick!” Everybody had to wipe off their lipstick and they threw a little container of milk – like we had little glasses on our tray – and I forget what else they threw on – we felt so insignificant, so undesired. [Laughs].
- Jim: That was at breakfast?
- Elsie: Breakfast, Then we went on to, you know –
- Jim: Get your uniforms right away? Or is that –
- Elsie: No, we were there almost at the end – they gave us our uniform, so we had trained in our civilian clothes. So they had nothing – had nothing for us.
- Jim: Oh you trained in your civilian clothes.
- Elsie: No. In our civilian clothes, and, then one day the uniforms finally came and they gave us each – I think it was \$200 – two \$100 bills. and we went down the line, and we picked up our uniforms and our caps and our trench coats and our scarf and our – whatever we needed we picked up, and then at the end you had to pay for it with that money they had given you.
- Jim: Was the \$200 enough?
- Elsie: Yeah, oh yeah. At that time –

Jim: It covered it, yeah.

Elsie: Yeah, at that time it was enough. And we had our –

Jim: Did somebody have to show you how to take care of those uniforms and put them on?

Elsie: Well – they had them tailored for us after we tried them on.

Jim: Oh, that was nice.

Elsie: Yeah, mm hmmm. And then we had our Easter Sunday where we were allowed to go into New York, and we went to the – the Protestants went to St. John's the Divine for Easter services, and the Catholics went to St. Patrick's Cathedral. So, it was nice. And we took a tour around New York, and a group went together – not all of us together, but our group. And we went to a Chinese restaurant – a real nice Chinese restaurant – and there was a man there that had been in the Navy, and he treated us all to a meal, so that was kinda nice.

Jim: Sure.

Elsie: And then we had our regimental reviews – first regimental review – and –

Jim: How'd your marching go?

Elsie: Good, yeah. It went – there were a lot of us. I should have brought some pictures and things so you could see that, but there were many of us.

Jim: Did they give you a weapon?

Elsie: No, no weapons.

Jim: You didn't have any weapons.

Elsie: We did later on in California. We had rifles – a rifle range.

Jim: But not here.

Elsie: No, not at boot camp. But we had the marching and the –

Jim: You said you went into the motor pool business; did you get some experience with that?

Elsie: I went to North Carolina.

- Jim: That was after you left boot camp?
- Elsie: Mm hmm.
- Jim: How long was the boot camp?
- Elsie: Six weeks.
- Jim: Six weeks. So your first duty assignment was in North Carolina?
- Elsie: In Camp Lejeune. Camp Lejeune, went to a motor transport school, and I can't remember, but it was approximately three months that we were there, and we drove trucks and all kinds of military vehicles, things like this. And we drove out in the boondocks and the Signal Corps – this was – we had night driving – the Signal Corps had strung up their wires, and of course we couldn't see them with our night driving, and we ripped down all the wires [Laughs]. "Situation Normal all fouled up." That's the way it was. And I had my truck, and it went down a ravine and at the bottom was a mud hole, and I got stuck there and I held up the whole convoy of vehicles [Laughs]. So then the sergeant's really angry, you know because you did this, but the thing stalled there and I couldn't move it.
- Jim: So how'd they move it?
- Elsie: I don't remember anymore. But, um, and – well then we had our –
- Jim: Now how many were you – at that time, how big of group were you about this time?
- Elsie: Well, maybe twenty-five motor transport, but there were others that went to other schools. So we had a whole troop trained full when we went down there.
- Jim: And how did all the guys receive this influx of women Marines?
- Elsie: [Laughs]. Well, pretty good. Pretty good. They would whistle at us, you know –
- Jim: Sure, of course.
- Elsie: And they would shout at us and so fourth. But most of them were good.
- Jim: You were pretty segregated from them?

Elsie: We had our own barracks and our own mess hall – not always our own mess hall all the way through, but we did there, we had our own mess hall and our own mess men and cooks and bakers went to school there, our own cooks and bakers and, you know, they had different schools at Lejeune. And we went out into the country on – with our trucks, you know – and that was kinda fun. We would stop some place and they could –

Jim: Were these practice exercises? Were you carrying regular Marine soldiers?

Elsie: Just ourselves.

Jim: Just yourselves.

Elsie: Yeah, we would have instructors with us. But otherwise the women would each drive our own vehicle.

Jim: They were teaching you how to operate the vehicle – that was the purpose of it.

Elsie: Yeah, mm hmm.

Jim: So how long were you there?

Elsie: I don't know, like three months. Then we went to Cherry Point. Cherry Point, North Carolina, and there they wouldn't let us drive. There was just a very few of us –very few went to Cherry Point – they had us sit in the office, and we'd take turns and take the commanding officer when he wanted to go somewhere in his limousine, we would drive him until our captain from Lejeune said, "Put them to drive." So then we drove buses – International buses – and we drove the small ones, they're like, um, milk trucks almost – and trucks to pick things up.

Jim: How'd that go?

Elsie: Good, it went good; yeah, we had no problems that way. And I don't remember – I think we had our own mess hall there too – I just can't remember that anymore. And, um, oh, we went in the – Cherry Point was an air station, so there were plenty of airplanes and the young fellows that were flying, and we went up on a B-25, and we got a night flying – there was a practice taking off and landing, and we weren't allowed to do this, but we did, and the officer of the day met us when we [Laughs].

Jim: Came back?

- Elsie: [Laughs]. Yeah, we did all kinds of things I guess that we shouldn't have. We had our inspections, you know, what do they call it, the "white glove inspections." It don't matter how much you clean in the sand country –
- Jim: You'll find something
- Elsie: [Laughs] And , yeah, one day we were supposed to – there too we didn't have any dungarees. We had some uniforms that – I don't know where they picked them up, somewhere at a second hand store or something, some –
- Jim: Did you have some regular sailor uniform dungarees?
- Elsie: We didn't have any. They gave us something, but it was not, it was not a dungaree until later on. Well then –
- Jim: It was a trouser of some kind?
- Elsie: Yeah. And a cap. And we were supposed to have white socks with black shoes, and my socks – I had one pair that was just a little off color – and I got demerits for it, for having a –
- Jim: The wrong color.
- Elsie: [Laughs]. Yeah. And yeah, we drove through – the one thing we had to do was when the – what do they call, the alarm, for the bombing, if there was a bomb –
- Jim: Air raid.
- Elsie: Air raid.
- Jim: Warning.
- Elsie: And we had to – no matter where we were – we were supposed to lay down flat on the ground. So here we'd probably be on a date somewhere in the boondocks [laughs]. It's funny now, you know. But I suppose they had to train people so they were trained. So we went to school there and we learned about, um, how to put the vehicle brakes down, what to do and things like this.
- Jim: Did you learn how to repair your vehicle?
- Elsie: Very little, very little.
- Jim: But a little more than just putting gas in it?

- Elsie: Yeah. Well, that we didn't have to put in – we would take it to the motor pool and they would put in the gas and check it out for you and tell you if you had any problems with it.
- Jim: Sure.
- Elsie: But, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed living with the girls and working and having our time off.
- Jim: Sure.
- Elsie: We would – we were lucky enough to go on certain shows they would have, you know, take the whole group, men and women, and they'd have something we'd go to. At North Carolina, we would go to the beaches where we went deep sea fishing. Then I'd write my diary or write letters home and everyone thought all we were doing was having a grand old time, they didn't realize the hours we put in. [Laughs].
- Jim: What time did they get you up in the morning? Six?
- Elsie: I think probably six. We had to do our own –
- Jim: Laundry?
- Elsie: Duty or laundry, yeah. I can't remember--
- Jim: Laundry?
- Elsie: No, I mean a walk –
- Jim: Guard duty?
- Elsie: Guard duty, mm hmm. And I – what do they say when you stop somebody?
- Jim: “Halt?”
- Elsie: Not “halt,” but–
- Jim: “Who goes there?”
- Elsie: Yeah, “Who goes there?” And I forgot that I was supposed to say that, and it was an officer, and it was night and she was so angry because I –
- Jim: You said the wrong thing?

- Elsie: [Laughs]. I stopped her, but it made her go again! This has been fifty-seven years or something, so some of those things I have forgotten [laughs] but sometimes they come back to me, yeah. So we had our own officers. The officers did go to training – just the head of us enlisted personnel – and I think – I don't know if it was Parris Island or somewhere else they went – they didn't go to Hunter like we did.
- Jim: I see.
- Elsie: But by the time we got to Hunter, we had all –
- Jim: In California?
- Elsie: No, Hunter was the one in New York.
- Jim: Oh! The Hunter College!
- Elsie: Yeah. We still had the Navy officers; we didn't have our own officers. And then from Cherry Point we put in for Mojave, California and, troop train, we went. Mojave was another air field, small, and there we drove everything – from a scooter to a semi – everything we drove. There they let us do everything, you know, so that was a little different. And it was a very small base, but we went by the troop train and then up the California coast and got dropped off at the different Marine bases along the line. So there was just the few of us. It wasn't that few, either who went to Mojave and out in the desert.
- Jim: How many? Roughly?
- Elsie: Oh gosh.
- Jim: Roughly?
- Elsie: Roughly. Well, I would say at least a hundred, yeah and they were put into all kinds of work though, not only motor transport, but –
- Jim: I understand.
- Elsie: Yeah, they had the –
- Jim: Must have been a lot of clerks among them –
- Elsie: Well, there were clerks, but they were tower operators and parachute riggers and, um, the trainers – the link trainers – and radio people, and,

just the PX, you know the cooks and bakers, our own laundry, things like this –

Jim: The girls did that too?

Elsie: Yeah, everything.

Jim: Well, you certainly released a lot of men for active participation.

Elsie: Well, that was the purpose. And they were very happy to have the women come in because things were so fouled up in Washington, because, you know, from one war still going on in Europe and then all of the sudden here we are in Japan, and the men, a lot of them weren't trained for secretarial work, so they were really happy to see the women coming to straighten things out there in Washington – all the records and all those – yeah, and –

Jim: How long were you in Mojave?

Elsie: Well, I went in 1943, it would have been '44, '45. I would have been – just a few months, because then I went and I signed up for overseas duty, and we went to San Diego for overseas training.

Jim: That was from Mojave?

Elsie: From Mojave, yeah, and there we had to qualify for swimming, and we had drilling, and – I can't remember what classes we took there. We weren't there too long, and then we went to Ewa, Hawaii, which was also an Air Force base.

Jim: When did you go to Hawaii, do you think?

Elsie: Well, it must have been the last part of – like in January of '44. Because by – the war was over in –

Jim: '45.

Elsie: '45. Wait a minute – we went there – it must have been the end of '44, not January.

Jim: I see.

Elsie: Yeah, because then we were there a year, and we left right after the war – we left December over on for ship on New Years. Going there, we went on the *USS Lurline*, which was a converted liner, and because there was such few of us, they let us eat in the officers' mess and we had the waiters,

you know, with the towels hanging over their arms and the great big beautiful menus and the filet mignon and all those things, and then as the girls left the dining room, very shortly, before they ate – [laughs] and all along the way and everybody was sea sick, up what they called ladders. They called them –

Jim: Right. We in the Navy called those –

Elsie: You were Navy? Uh, yeah, ladders.

Jim: Yes, those were the ladders, right.

Elsie: Go up the ladders.

Jim: The Marine Corps too, by the way.

Elsie: Yeah, that's what I mean. We were Marine Corps. And I got seasick only once. Once coming and once going. It seemed like once that went, I was all through, I was just fine, and we put in for – volunteered for – mess duty.

Jim: In Hawaii?

Elsie: No, no, on the ship. On the *Lurline*. And, um, there they had – no, no, coming back we did the mess duty, not going. Going there we got to eat three times, but the men got to eat only twice, and so we would take some of the good stuff from our dining room, and we would save it so – so then we'd sit on the deck and then we would [laughs, unintelligible]. It was hardly fair – we'd save our beans, you know, but we'd have filet mignon.

Jim: Oh my. They must have resented that.

Elsie: No, I don't think so. They didn't, no.

Jim: What air base were you at in Hawaii?

Elsie: Ewa. E-W-A. And it was, that was bombed by the Japanese, E-W-A. Barber's Point was Navy.

Jim: Yes, I was there.

Elsie: We were connected. Now I think it's all taken over by Barber's Point, it's no longer Ewa. And I was there 'till the war was over, drove buses, trucks too – trucks over those roads there, you know, just primitive in those days in Hawaii, they were not like they are now. And we'd have to go to Pearl Harbor and pick up supplies and we'd stop at Red – It was Marine

barracks – and we’d stop there, and the cook would be making donuts, and we’d [laughs] stop on the way, dope off a little bit along the way. And we really enjoyed Hawaii, we went to a lot of picnics, and –

Jim: You must have had just all kinds of attention from all the other service guys, you must have had –

Elsie: Well –

Jim: A date any time you wanted.

Elsie: Yeah, well they used to call us “BAMs,” you know, broad assed Marines, so we’d call them “HAMs,” half assed Marines. [Laughs].

Jim: [Laughs].

Elsie: Well, I did go. We had a little outdoor theatre, the steps were made into the side of a bank, and this one fellow I was going to have a date with – I don’t remember his name – but, um, he called us BAMs, you know, so I brought a tape measure, and I measured him and he was broader. [Laughs].

Jim: [Laughs]. Oh cute, that was good.

Elsie: We had different experiences. Some of them were – I don’t think the majority were opposed to us. They enjoyed having the women there. But we drove around the base and one day I was driving a what we called the cattle wagon – and what cattle wagons were like a semi where they haul the troops –

Jim: Oh, yeah.

Elsie: And the field was right here and the, and the road went around and a big plane was coming here and it didn’t – I think there was a sign that says “Watch for oncoming –”

Jim: Low flying planes.

Elsie: Yeah. And if I hadn’t stopped right then he would have taken right the top of that rig off. But I had a lot of stupid experiences driving. One day I took the guard shack – the same thing driving the cattle wagon and they had, like, chicken wire filling in, and, um the guard shack. I had to come around the guard shack and cut – go into town – and a corner, just a corner of the guard shack, and one of those chicken wires – I hit the thing and it turned around. I knocked the whole thing down [Laughs].

- Jim: Oh my god.
- Elsie: And, I had three days off, but I didn't get punished and the fellow said if it was a man, he would've had to go to the brig [laughs].
- Jim: Brig! Oh my.
- Elsie: That was one experience I had. I remember a branch – I had to pick up what we called the gooks, you know the Hawaiian workers that worked on the base. And I picked them up and hauled them wherever they, these – I think they lived most in the town of Ewa and some little town close to there and I caught a branch of a tree where I parked, caught in one of those wires. I remember they were all excited and all shouting, but I didn't hurt anything that time. But once they – I had to drive a van for revile, and they didn't have a regular three ton truck. They gave me a five ton with air brakes, and I didn't know air brakes, and —
- Jim: You hadn't driven with that before?
- Elsie: I had never with air brakes, no. And when I stopped – Oh! [Laughs]
- Jim: Good rush to the front? [Laughs]
- Elsie: Yeah, rush to –
- Jim: Smashed!
- Elsie: Smashed.
- Jim: Oh, boy.
- Elsie: All different little things like that. I remember, you know, when we had – when they started enlisting the black – we didn't have any black women, but there were men, and they had their own barracks. And I had to drive early in the morning way out around a big coral dump and all by myself and this big black fellow, and we were friends with them and all, but I didn't know him, and I was a little bit leery, you know, and he had a big apple – things you don't forget! [laughs]. And he asked me if I would like it. I don't remember if he offered me the apple or if he just offered me a bite of the apple. And the coral was white and hot, and we had real – the buses were real inadequate.
- Jim: You mean the ones that would take you into Honolulu?
- Elsie: No. The ones that –

- Jim: That you had to drive?
- Elsie: That we had to drive. And, um, we would take a hunk of coral and tie it in the door so – to keep the door open, so we'd get some fresh air because it was so hot and they were such old, beat up things. And we finally got together and we went to the Navy, to the Navy officers, and he saw to it that they got new buses, new buses for us.
- Jim: Where they like the school buses that we see around?
- Elsie: They were an International bus. They were, I think, a little bigger than – well possibly like the school buses.
- Jim: Not too hard to drive?
- Elsie: Well, they weren't, no. You had to shift, you know, and the trucks we had to learn how to downshift –
- Jim: Samurai's, they had a lot of shifting in them, didn't they?
- Elsie: Yeah, well we didn't often get a big semi, but we did have the smaller semis. Yeah, so we had to learn how to downshift, upshift. I can't do it anymore [laughs]. I can't do it anymore. Well then the war ended, and –
- Jim: What was your rank then?
- Elsie: I was, must have been a staff sergeant. And they all – everybody met at our area – everybody piled up there where the women were, and we could see **[End of Tape 1 Side A]** the – again I forget what they shoot the ammunition and it lights up –
- Jim: Tracers.
- Elsie: The tracers. The tracers from the ships, and we could see it, we could see that all light up the sky. War had ended, and everybody of course celebrated, had a grand time, and somebody stole our bus – and when the fellows wanted to go somewhere and they took the bus, because we had it parked right outside of our quarters there, and didn't find it until the next day [laughs]. But I don't think they got punished, not at that time. With the war ending, everyone was so delighted.
- Jim: Pretty loose then.
- Elsie: We were supposed to. They were going for that big push, and we were going to be transferred to Guam and then the war ended, so then we never did get to transfer to Guam.

- Jim: I see.
- Elsie: But some of the girls went – they were in a show, some kind of a show they had put on. And at Guam, there were no women at that time – and so they flew them there and they put on the show for them, for the fellows. We got to fly when there was room, with the trainers – not trainers, the bigger ones – and we got to fly to the big islands, and tour the big islands and do things like that.
- Jim: Was there a large group of you in Hawaii?
- Elsie: There were three barracks full and we had double Quonset barracks, quite a few there were. We didn't all leave at once when the war ended, but they started shortly after, and I stayed until the end of December then, and then we went on the hospital ship, the *Consolation*.
- Jim: I've been aboard that.
- Elsie: Have you?
- Jim: I was on the *Haven*.
- Elsie: Oh, oh yeah. Well that's where we volunteered for mess duty, and they had these great big wooden tables that weren't attached and the ship – when the waves go – the tables would slide back and forth, and one of the girls got stuck between the two tables [laughs].
- Jim: Oh my!
- Elsie: And one of the girls was really seasick – Brooklyn (??) – and when she saw how much fun we were having and she got over being seasick real fast.
- Jim: Got her mind off it?
- Elsie: She could join us too. So that was –
- Jim: Yeah, must've been a fun trip back on a hospital ship.
- Elsie: Yeah, it was, but it was a rough, rough voyage. Going there on the *Lurline*, one evening we were surrounded by other ships, by morning they had – I guess it was a danger area or why they were there to protect the ships – and by morning, they were all gone. And, um, the waves were so high, and we were taught what to do in case we had to abandon ship, and

we'd look over, you know, and I'd say, "I'll go down with the ship."
[Laughs]. I'd rather than jump into the –

Jim: You had life jacket drill then?

Elsie: Yes we did. I forgot about that, yeah we did. We had to have them with us all the time, yeah, that was a rule. We had to carry it with us. We had church services, which were nice. I got a bible that was autographed by the chaplain, Navy chaplain. We watched the movies – would sit on the deck, and watch them from the back – the back of the screen – it was fun. I think on the hospital ship it was more – I think the fellows – I don't remember how many fellows were on that ship – but I think they were treated more like civilian days.

Jim: So did you keep in contact with the girls that you served with?

Elsie: For a long time I did. I went to – two years ago – they had dedicated the women's memorial at Arlington, so I went there and I – the last girl I was in touch with – or last lady – was from Florida, and we were going to meet there, and we didn't find each other, and she died shortly after that, so I never did – and she was the last one that I kept up with. But I have joined the State and the National Women's Organization – Marine Organization – so there were a few that were stationed where I was, but I was – I didn't know any of them before.

Jim: Well, it was a nice experience for ya.

Elsie: It was. It was very good. I really enjoyed it a lot.

Jim: For a young, single girl it was been terrific.

Elsie: Well I had a –

Jim: None of the girls were married, as I understand?

Elsie: We couldn't – no.

Jim: Right.

Elsie: No, we didn't get married. The only one that I know – that I know of that got pregnant and was discharged.

Jim: Right away, I'll bet (??)

- Elsie: And one that went AWOL, and they caught her because she was carrying the Marine purse – you know we had the purses hanging over our shoulder bags – and I don't remember where they caught her.
- Jim: Was this in United States or in Hawaii?
- Elsie: I think in the United States. Most of them – they enlisted, they went in. They were very strict with us; it was more like they used to be at the college dormitories.
- Jim: Sure.
- Elsie: You know, we had to sign in, and sign out, and you had to be in at a certain time, and sometimes we would have to drive till midnight, but see then we had special permission to be gone. But they were very strict with us. We had our own area – fenced in area – and go back to Lejeune, there we weren't fenced in. We had our own area, not fenced in, and every once and awhile they'd catch a man that was trying to get into the women's barracks. But I remember when the fellows came back from Guadalcanal, and they were bitter, bitter you know – I remember we used to pick up troops at Hickam field, and take them to R&R –
- Jim: To a rest area.
- Elsie: Yeah, we had to do that.
- Jim: When those fellows came back from Guadalcanal they must have been surprised to see a woman driving.
- Elsie: Yeah, well we were at Lejeune.
- Jim: Because they probably didn't know about you.
- Elsie: Yeah, we were at Lejeune at the time already. Yeah, they were there and then, in Mojave they were coming back, and, um, yeah – the majority of them, they were surprised, you'd hear them say that [laughs]. You know, to see a woman --
- Jim: What's this war coming to? [laughs].
- Elsie: We had to keep our hair short, keep up above the collar, you know. [pause]. Like I said, there was –
- Jim: How about cosmetics? You had to supply your own?
- Elsie: Yeah. They the PXs (??), you know, joint PXs –

- Jim: Sure. No rules about lipstick?
- Elsie: No, no – see the Marines have the red chord on their cap – on their cover – and it matched the lipstick you wore [laughs]. They didn't designate the lipstick we had to wear.
- Jim: But the girls just naturally picked the right color.
- Elsie: Yeah. And we had, in Hawaii – while we sang in the choir in everyplace, everyplace I was stationed – and in Hawaii, there were so few in the choir, we joined together choirs together. And they had –
- Jim: You mean with sailors – women sailors? Or men Marines?
- Elsie: Well no, men Marines. No, we didn't have any – we had all Marines on the base. And Army, Army installations at EWA, not Navy, Navy was right connected to us. And we went at Christmas – we trimmed up one of those cattle wagons, and we drove around. It was full of straw, and we caroled around, and then we went --
- Jim: On a sleigh ride.
- Elsie: And then we went to Honolulu and picked up the girls from a college there – I think it was a Catholic college or high school – and had them sing with us at the services. And then the chaplains had a little gathering for us, and then we had to take him back to Honolulu and that took the rest of the night, you know, because you had midnight services and you dropped them off at their homes, wherever they lived in Honolulu, so that was kind of nice to do.
- Jim: Did you have a get-together with any of the WACs?
- Elsie: Um, no. I don't recall that we did. They used to have a dance or something at – or have a beach party, where they would invite the women, where we would, you know, go to their beach parties and their dances – but I really don't remember being anywhere with the WACs.
- Jim: And the WAVES?
- Elsie: WAVES, we had the – the medical was WAVES.
- Jim: So you did have some interaction with them?
- Elsie: Yeah, I have a good, good friend of mine.

- Jim: Were their experiences about the same as yours, as far as you can tell?
- Elsie: I think so. They lived with us, you know, we lived together, and, we didn't – there was no –
- Jim: Differences.
- Elsie: No.
- Jim: Treatment, or--?
- Elsie: No. One of the girls got married, I stood up for her. And her mother was Jewish, and we were good friends for a long time afterwards, after the war, and then I lost contact with her too.
- Jim: How about veterans' organizations?
- Elsie: Yeah, I belong to the American Legion and I was the first woman commander in Oshkosh [Wisconsin] with seven hundred members, mostly men – there were very few girls – but now we have – so that way it started more women joining, and then I was an Adjutant for twelve years – I was commander twice –
- Jim: Of the Legion?
- Elsie: Of the Legion, oh. And, I have been on the executive committee for twenty four years, for one thing or the other. And then I also joined the Marine Corps League, and I've been their Chaplain for quite a few years, and um, I work with them, I think I straighten them out a lot.
- Jim: [laughs]. Where is that located?
- Elsie: That's in Oshkosh too. Well it's about three miles out. It's really out past the Winnebago State Hospital – I don't know if you know where the hospital is. It's about, I'd say, maybe five miles out of town.
- Jim: Now this league, how does this – how big an area does this encompass now? People from how far?
- Elsie: Well, all the neighboring towns. Fond du Lac has a Marine Corps League also.
- Jim: Oh, so it doesn't go too far. Just the two counties?

- Elsie: No, but every once and awhile some of them come. Yeah, oh, well, it doesn't matter. Wherever. Wherever they – because they are very few Marine Corps Leagues.
- Jim: What's your main occupation? Recruiting women Marines or what?
- Elsie: Who?
- Jim: Your league.
- Elsie: Oh no. We do all kinds of things – like scholarships for the youth, we sponsor a baseball team, we go to the veteran's hospitals and entertain – we entertain – we have a mental hospital that's close. And then we have the county, and then the rehab, so we go there and we entertain or we – we're invited to come and help them with their entertainment, and the Marines are – most of them that are active – what I call Marines, Marine League -- they're from the younger, they're Korean and younger. There are very few of us that are WWII. So a lot of them are still working. But we got a beautiful drill team, and they're invited many places to go and perform.
- Jim: What, the League?
- Elsie: The Marine.
- Jim: The Marine League has a drill team?
- Elsie: Oh yes.
- Jim: Of young girls?
- Elsie: Oh no. This is – I belong with the men.
- Jim: Oh, I see!
- Elsie: Yeah, we have only one. No girls. And American Legion is the same way, its all men and women – we don't have any detachment or post of our own.
- Jim: I see. And how many women Marines are in your outfit?
- Elsie: Well I think there are only two of us that are active, yeah. Only two of us. It's a small organization there – just a few over a hundred.
- Jim: Did your unit get a combination by the government at the end of the war?

Elsie: I don't know. I don't know if they did or not.

Jim: You don't recall?

Elsie: I don't know.

Jim: Did they give you a medal or anything?

Elsie: You mean now?

Jim: Or anytime.

Elsie: I don't know. Well, I didn't get a medal that I recall. I don't remember.

Jim: I was thinking about a unit service types.

Elsie: I don't know if they did. See we didn't join – my husband and I were in Detroit – and we joined there for a short while, and then we came to Oshkosh and I don't know that we joined immediately. And so we wouldn't have been there for when they started the detachment in Oshkosh. I don't know, I should ask and see if they did, I don't know. But, I was Marine of the Year.

Jim: Oh really?

Elsie: Yeah, and I got a –

Jim: For what area?

Elsie: Just from our area.

Jim: Oh, I see. That's nice.

Elsie: Yeah, I got a nice, beautiful plaque.

Jim: Oh, terrific!

Elsie: And a medal to wear and then I got another plaque for work that I did.

Jim: That's nice, that's very nice. The girls still going into Marine Corps now?

Elsie: Yes. Now they're – see, we were considered Reserves, but we had to be in for the extent of the war, we had to stay in and sign up, and then they went immediately into regulars, and a lot of the girls stayed in. Yeah, they keep recruiting.

- Jim: A lot of them stayed in after the war?
- Elsie: Yeah. I went into an Inactive Reserve after the war for four years, but I was inactive, but they didn't call me back to the Korean War. [Tape fades out and pauses] Do you have anymore questions? [Laughs].
- Jim: No, unless you can think of some experiences you haven't mentioned.
- Elsie: Experiences, oh gosh. I can tell you one not – well, yeah I had to drive – this was back in California. I had to pick up the sports team and haul them to the neighboring stations, bases where they would play baseball. And, um, drove to Hollywood and then pick up all the guys that were on duty, on liberty after playing baseball. They had to meet me at a certain place, take the bus, and then drive through the mountains, back to our base, with all these guys that played softball – I mean baseball – or basketball, and then along the way all these hitchhikers we'd pick up. Navy, you know, from Inyokern and Marshfield and all over –
- Jim: On your way to Mojave?
- Elsie: Pick 'em up – haul them all in my bus through those mountains, and I'd put that bus out of gear and go down those – can you imagine how stupid –
- Jim: Out of gear?!
- Elsie: [laughs]. Isn't that something?
- Jim: How long did it take you to wear out the brakes?
- Elsie: Well, I guess not. It didn't wear them out [laughs].
- Jim: You'd have slid into Mojave Desert in a mess!
- Elsie: Yeah, dumb. I'd pick them up – all along the way, they'd be hitchhiking – I suppose people would drop them off and it would be night and, um –
- Jim: Well you had quite a busload by the time you got down to the airbase.
- Elsie: Yeah, but we didn't – that's all the further I could take them was as far as Mojave. Oh, and another thing that happened: I had a bus assigned to me. We had civilians, some of them that worked at the base. Some even lived on the base. And we had to pick up the children and drive them to school and drop them off and pick them up again. And I had a bus assigned to me for running these children to school and back, and one day something was the matter with my bus, so they – no, that was the bus I had – and

anyway, the bus I had – not the brakes, but the steering gear went out – and it rolled to the curb, right into the town of Mojave – it just happened that that was the bus they were going to take to take the workers back to Tehachapi through the mountains, and if that hadn't gone out for me in town, it may have gone out on that mountain and they wouldn't have been able to steer it. So it was just sheer luck that it went out for me and not for them. So, that's what we had to – we had to pick them up and drop them off. We used to sneak back on the base, you know, and not go through the guard, and the fence would be – there'd be a little ravine and the fence would be like this on top so underneath there'd be a little space and we'd go and [laughs] walk through the boondocks, crawl underneath the fence!

Jim: Oh my! Did they have any rules about drinking?

Elsie: I don't recall that they did. I know the fellows – that was one thing I had to do was pick up all those drunks in town and then some of them were so drunk I had to walk them to their barrack's doors so they'd make it [laughs]. I guess they were allowed to stay out probably later than we were, and –

Jim: You had to be in by ten?

Elsie: By ten. Unless there was something like driving – if we had to drive, we had to drive until midnight and then we had to –

Jim: Even if there was a dance you had to be in by ten?

Elsie: I don't recall. Probably not. I think then they checked –

Jim: Probably gave you an extra hour or two.

Elsie: They checked us in and checked us out though. You had to be checked in, checked out.

Jim: Well, looking back, do you think your experience was worth it?

Elsie: Oh yeah, it really was. I had a sister that was an Army nurse – she was older than I – and um, so we sort of kept up with each other, but she got to see a lot of overseas – she went to Europe and then went to Japan afterwards for rebuilding of Japan after the war.

Jim: She still alive?

Elsie: No, no she's not.

Jim: Yeah, she must have had some great experiences.

- Elsie: Yeah, very few that we – you know, service people don't tell of their experience. Either people don't believe them, or they think they're bragging or something, and they don't listen. So when – the fellows will talk to us women about experiences, but they won't to the general public. Somehow they --
- Jim: I know how to get 'em! [laughs]
- Elsie: You do?
- Jim: Oh, yes [Elsie laughs], you have to be able to talk their language.
- Elsie: Yeah, well –
- Jim: So they're comfortable. That you understand –
- Elsie: Yeah, that you understand, or they think we understand.
- Jim: That we appreciate what they're doing.
- Elsie: Yeah.
- Jim: Yeah, I interviewed a Medal of Honor winner yesterday.
- Elsie: Oh, did you?
- Jim: In Peoria, Illinois. Vietnam. The story was incredible.
- Elsie: In Vietnam. Baker, he got the Medal of Honor, black. Colonel. Major? I was in Idaho at Christmas and he was signing his book – the book signing – and he signed my book, so I read that, and he told about the experiences had as a black company – I guess they were a company? And, very nice man, very nice. And there's so many people that – I don't know if they don't read or what, but they don't know that we had the Japanese that were in those camps up there up in Washington and Oregon, you know – that they had their own – they enlisted and had their own company or battalion – battalion probably --
- Jim: Yeah, 555th. And the 100th Infantry. There was two, two groups.
- Elsie: And the blacks also were together. They weren't mixed into –
- Jim: Not until the Korean War. Truman insisted that the military –
- Elsie: They were afraid that they wouldn't know how to fight.

- Jim: Pretty ignorant, yeah.
- Elsie: And still we had Marines that they recruited later on that couldn't read or write that came from the South, but they did recruit the blacks before –
- Jim: Well they found in Vietnam the blacks fight every bit as good – or better – than the white men. That's all nonsense. Well, I can't think of anything else. Anything else?
- Elsie: There'd be a lot of things, but that's alright.
- Jim: Well, you've got a story and I'm just here to listen to you!
- Elsie: Well, I had to drive a truck – this was at Mojave – I had to be the driver. I worked for the Officers' Club. And we had to go to the bank. First of all, it was in Los Angeles, Hollywood. We had to go to the bank there. So I had to drive and we had to take the money – you know, in money bags. So the sergeant had to come that was from the Officers' Club, in charge of the Officer's Club and then we had to have a corporal with a weapon to protect the sergeant with the money and I had to drive the truck! [laughs] Well, we – on the way back, we had a little time, so we stopped at a little – what is it where they rent horses, you go horseback riding?
- Jim: Corral?
- Elsie: No, no – whatever, anyway, we parked the truck there and we got three horses. And, I got a woman's horse, one that would trot nicely and all. And we went out on the trail – I forget what they call it – and my horse was the only one that would do anything, so they decided that I should give up my horse and take one of theirs, which we did. And while we were changing, one of the fellows had to go to the bathroom or something, and I got on one of their horses and my – the horse I was on – took off, with me on him. And hanging on for dear life, I had my whole arm underneath the saddle and we crossed – must've been at that time Hollywood Boulevard – and I don't know if they thought this was a show or something, and they were honking horns, and I went right through traffic, all the way back to where we rented the horses. And the man was so angry! The other horses came after us – after me and the horse – they came and they left those two guys over there, the one of them –
- Jim: Oh, the horses came without riders!?! [laughs]
- Elsie: Yeah, without the riders [laughs]. And so I had to go and settle with this man at the stables and take the truck and go back and pick up these guys

out on that trail. They were bent over in half, laughing, they thought it was so funny, and they didn't know what I had gotten from the [laughs]

Jim: The owner.

Elsie: From the owner.

Jim: [laughs]. It must have been exciting going down the street with automobiles on either side of you! You're lucky the horse didn't fall.

Elsie: Oh, it was terrible! I was scared to death! It isn't like it is now, you know, it isn't, it wasn't that busy and it was a boulevard. As far as I recall there were only cars coming from one side, that I don't know, but they stopped and they're honking horns [laughs]. That was one experience. I'd like tell one that is not my experience, but one of the other girls had to go into Los Angeles, I guess, in Mojave too, and pick up the mattresses. We used to have those blue and white mattresses, the skinny ones, and send them there to be cleaned, and she had to go and pick them up with a truck, and she had her truck loaded, and it broke down on the way. And one of the fellows had come – Reisner, the name was Reisner – had to come from the – from our transportation unit with a Wrecker, and so he pulled the truck up on a winch, and then he took it and swung it back and forth so the mattresses all left [laughs]. He got in and there were no mattresses, and of course she had to report it, and they put him in the brig. And he was real angry with her because she reported him. The guys just do all kinds of things. I remember them having dogfights up there with the fellows from Victorville, which was an Army Cadets, and they had the little trainers – and our Marines had the – they had trainers too – but I think at that time it was probably the F4Us. And they'd be up there having a regular dogfight! You could see them just like flies and mosquitoes and how many of them would land in the desert track. It was people, you know civilians would never know that, but there'd be another one smashed up on the desert and they would strafe the cars – strafe the cars on that, you know. Kids, well they were kids! I had to take a bunch of them out – what they did I don't know – but they had to go and haul rocks and I had to drive them out on the desert to haul rocks, so they stopped and they got a case of beer! [Laughs]. Oh yeah. We had to pick up ammunition, you know, from the ammunition dumps and things like that. We had to pick up where they had a truck pound. [Knock at door] Time to close up. Oh, hi, you found us! [Someone enters the room.]

Jim: You picked up the ammunition.

Elsie: Ammunition, yeah, the vehicles, and in Hawaii, they were on that island, and we had to pick those up. [Yells to someone else]. We're here!

Jim: Just about done.

Elsie: Yeah, well that's about it. Well, I got – after Hawaii, I went to El Toro for the rest of the –

Jim: You were discharged from El Toro?

Elsie: Yeah, El Toro, and there I had an office job, and we had to discharge the civilians that were working on the base and whatever. And I had a jeep assigned to me, and so when I got bored, **[End of Tape 1, Side B]** [Both laugh] I'd take off with a jeep, so that's where I got discharged, from El Toro.

Jim: You didn't get to take that home though?

Elsie: No. No, but I was just thinking I would buy a jeep. You can't even get them now, they take out all the – they won't sell them to you. They take out all the – motors.

Jim: You mean the old military.

Elsie: Yeah. So I got discharged there, and then we hitchhiked all the way up through Canada and up the coast and through the --

Jim: Who did?

Elsie: A friend and I did.

Jim: The two of you?

Elsie: Uh huh.

Jim: Oh, that was fun.

Elsie: Yeah. We were still in uniform, we stayed in uniform –

Jim: I was going to say about that –

Elsie: We stayed in uniform, so we had the protection of the government, yet.

Jim: The 'quasi protection', right.

Elsie: [laughs]. Yeah.

Jim: So then did you use the GI bill?

- Elsie: No, I didn't, but my husband did. A lot of the girls did. I should have, yeah. They went on to college and –
- Jim: Get an FHA loan or get an education or –
- Elsie: Yeah. I had – I took that test, they gave us a test – and I went and had two years of college credits, so that I could pass, so I got that. But, um, no a lot of the girls went on. I got married instead. [laughs]
- Jim: Right away afterwards?
- Elsie: No it was –
- Jim: When you came back to Wisconsin?
- Elsie: Yeah. It was about a year and a half after.
- Jim: So what did you do when you went back to Wisconsin?
- Elsie: What did I do? Well, I didn't do much of anything. We got home from our trip in September, and I stayed at home on the farm, and then I went to Detroit where my husband Ed and was working there because he had enlisted after –
- Jim: That's where you met him?
- Elsie: No, he was from my hometown.
- Jim: Oh my goodness!
- Elsie: My hometown, yeah. But he was working in the –
- Jim: That's only in movies.
- Elsie: [laughs]. Yeah, yeah. He was working there, so I got a job then, and I went to work at Hudson's. You know, Hudson's, the Department store? And we left there, and he went under the GI bill and in Minneapolis he went to barber college, and we had our kids and –
- Jim: Then where'd you live?
- Elsie: Well, we started in –
- Jim: How'd we get to Oshkosh?

- Elsie: Well, he went to school in Minneapolis, and then we went to Woodruff, Wisconsin, where he had his first job as apprentice, and then from there we went to Oshkosh and then stayed there. A friend went through and he said, "Well my barber needs an apprentice." So then he had to be an apprentice for three years and journeymen and master barber and shop manager, and on and on and on and school and school and school. And we had four children, and that's my youngest –
- Jim: Grandchildren?
- Elsie: We have three.
- Jim: Great Grandchildren?
- Elsie: No, we married late. Do you have?
- Jim: I got one of those.
- Elsie: You have?
- Jim: Yep, I've got one.
- Elsie: One? We married late, you know, after the service and didn't have – well, very shortly had children, but um, yeah, so.
- Jim: Super, thanks!
- Elsie: Thank you. I heard about – I don't know if you were the one – but through the American Legion I know they were asking people to write up their service history and keep it for posterity [laughs]. Yeah. Well.
- Jim: Right. Good.

[End of Interview]