

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
CAROL G. BEHLING MCLEESTER
Cryptographic Repairman, Army, World War II.

1996

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McLeester, Carol G. Behling, (1921-2007). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Carol G. Behling McLeester, an Amery, Wisconsin native, discusses her Women's Army Corps service in a Signal Corps unit during World War II. McLeester discusses teaching at a country school prior to the war, wanting a new job, and being hired by the Army Signal Corps to attend school in Missouri as an under-engineer trainee. After working for six months at Wright Air Force Base (Ohio), she tells of being recruited to the 2nd Signal Corps Battalion and basic training at Fort Des Moines (Iowa). Assigned to Arlington Hall (Virginia), she describes advanced training and work as an electronic cryptographic repairman. McLeester compares working for the military as a civilian and as an enlisted person, stating that civilians "were treated as if we were part of the military." She characterizes the other women recruited for Arlington Hall as educated, and she recalls being amazed by the amount of drinking done by women in basic training. McLeester describes a typical day at Arlington Hall, says she often had to work the night shift, and speaks of doing maintenance on a vacuum-tube operated forerunner of computers. She talks about free-time activities such as movies on the base, Navy dances in downtown Washington, D.C., and sight seeing. McLeester claims that by the time she enlisted, she felt women were accepted as a useful part of the Army. She states she saw the celebrations in Washington on V-E Day and V-J Day and watched Roosevelt's funeral procession. After her discharge, McLeester discusses working another year at Arlington Hall as a civilian cryptographic clerk. She tells of doing transcription work on a typewriter with a Russian alphabet keyboard. McLeester touches on using the GI Bill to attend the University of Minnesota and states that veterans were very good students. She tells of marrying a Marine veteran and eventually moving to Madison (Wisconsin) to work for McArdle Labs. She states she didn't join veterans organizations for a long time because they didn't welcome women veterans, though she eventually joined a WAC veterans group in Milwaukee. McLeester also describes her activities with the United Women Veterans and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Biographical Sketch:

McLeester (1921-2007), née Behling, served in the Army from 1944 to 1946. Prior to her military service, she graduated from River Falls Teachers College in 1941, taught rural schools in St. Croix County (Wisconsin) for two years, and worked at Wright Air Force Base as a civilian. After her discharge at the rank of TEC 4, McLeester earned a degree in home economics from the University of Minnesota, spent eighteen years at home raising four children

in Minnesota, and worked for twenty years as a research specialist at the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research (Madison, Wisconsin). She served as treasurer and lineage research chairman for the Governor Nelson Dewey Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution and as vice president of the Madison Chapter of the United Women's Veterans.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.
Transcribed by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff.
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011.

Interview Transcript:

- Mark: Okay, today's date is October the 8th, 1996, this is Mark Van Ells, Archivist at the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Carol McLeester, a Veteran of the Women's Army Corp in World War II. Good afternoon and thanks for coming in.
- Carol: Great.
- Mark: Um, let's start at the beginning I suppose, why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- Carol: Well, I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota but I grew up in Amery, Wisconsin, up in Polk County.
- Mark: That's up north somewhere.
- Carol: Up north, near the Twin Cities, uh, living with my grandparents, my mother and my brother and sister, and my grandparents. And, my maiden name was Behling, Carol Behling, when I was in service. And I went to River Falls State Teacher's College and I taught country school for two years. Which I didn't enjoy [laughing] all that much; I was –
- Mark: Why was that?
- Carol: Well, discipline was a great problem. [laughing] I was very young. Started teaching at nineteen and I was small and uh, this first, the second school I had, the teacher had been drafted that had a man teacher to keep order and he had been drafted for war service and I had lots of discipline problems, so I decided not to teach anymore, to look for another job in the summer of '43. First of all, you asked what I was doing, Pearl Harbor, I was still teaching then.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Carol: So in the summer of '43 I looked for another job and couldn't really find anything. Some places I went they wouldn't hire me, they said, "Oh, teachers are even going to be frozen in service and have to continue teaching whether they ought to or not" [laughing] because of course many of the men had been drafted. So I finally found a job, they hired me actually almost military. I was hired by the War Department, the Army Signal Corps to go to school for six months. I was called an under-engineer trainee and they, I was hired as a civilian, but they sent us to school at the University of Missouri for six months training and electrical engineering, basically it was just a very condensed, concentrated course. A lot of math, sixty of us started out and thirty of us completed the course with the understanding that we would be working at Wright Air Force Base, a base in

Dayton, Ohio, and we would be working in military air craft work. So I did, I spent the six months in Columbia and then to Dayton Ohio and there was a large, uh, WAC contingent stationed there, at Wright Air Force Base, and one of the teachers from River Falls Teacher's College whom I had known when I was there was an officer there, in the WAC base. So I got to see her quarters and see the military women, and anyway, I had worked there about for six months when special recruiters came there recruiting for Arlington Hall, Virginia, still in the 2nd Signal Corps service. So a friend of mine and I joined, again, we joined specifically to be sent to this assignment when we enlisted in this military to be sent to Arlington Hall which was right outside Washington D.C. It had been an old girl's college that had been taken over by the military and it was the 2nd Signal Corps Battalion doing cryptographic work for the repair, uh, for the pentagon. So it was it was the big headquarters for cryptography during the war and my title after I got there was an electronic cryptographic repairman. My friend was assigned to the same place but she was a cryptographic clerk. And, uh, of course everything we were doing was very secret supposedly but, it was interesting. I was replacing a man for war. I worked in a shop with two fellows who were both for, if not eligible for military service and we had our complete military drills and training and marching and GI inspection and taping [laughing] and the works. It was a large contingent and it was, we were right outside Washington D.C. so we could--

Mark: It was a nice place to be at this place.

Carol:: It was a good place, a very interesting place. By that time it was '44 when I went in, the summer of '44, and by that time there were a lot of service men returned from overseas, that had already been in battles overseas that were there in Washington plus of course, still many new recruits going in, but it was exciting.

Mark: Well I would like to discuss wartime Washington with you but I'd like to go back also.

Carol: Yes.

Mark: And discuss a couple of things. First of all, you worked as a civilian --

Carol: Yes.

Mark: In the defense industry and --

Carol: Right. And that's when--

Mark: That's when you entered the service. And I thought perhaps you could explain how that was different, how that perhaps wasn't different to be both, at once a civilian and later on--

- Carol: Yes, well even as a civilian, it was interesting. It was pretty interesting because I looked over all these papers this morning. We were treated as being part of the military establishment. We were not to talk, we were big papers about what was treason and what you were not to say to anybody and you were not to pass that on any information you learned and even though we were civilians working for the military, we were treated as if [laughing] we were part of the military.
- Mark: Except for the uniform perhaps.
- Carol: Except for the uniform. Right. And, a little more pay. As a civilian then we got later on while we were in the [laughing] military but uh, I was even surprised that I had sort of forgotten, that when we got to Dayton, of course when we were in Missouri, it was full-time school. It was all day. We were to do our studying and homework in the evening and classes were steady, all day long and when we got to Wright Air Force Base, we were working eight hours a day, six days a week. We worked Saturdays too! And, [laughing] that looking back on was kind of surprising.
- Mark: Yeah. Now you mentioned, you mentioned that you joined the WACs because you wanted this particular position. I am wondering if there was something --
- Carol: Yeah,
- Mark: --more to it though, for example, was there some patriotic sense that you could--
- Carol: Oh, absolutely!
- Mark: Did you feel that you were doing enough as a civilian and that entering the WAC's--
- Carol: Well, no, because, after all of this training when we got to Wright Air Force Base, my job was as a clerk, okay. A radio parts clerk. So here I was going through these manuals and catalogs checking numbers and it was really, it got to be very really tedious work [laughing] and, uh, you know, and joining the military just did look at that point to be more exciting than what I was doing.
- Mark: Now, were you aware that if you entered the service, your pay was going to go down?
- Carol: Oh, sure. Sure.
- Mark: It wasn't an issue I take it.
- Carol: That wasn't, no, well, ya know, in the military all your clothes are furnished and all of this, you know, your room and board, and so you sort of broke even. [Laughing]

Mark: Yea, I suppose in some sort of way.

Carol: In a way.

Mark: So I would imagine you had to go up to basic training somewhere.

Carol: Yeah, at Fort Des Moines.

Mark: Why don't you just describe the basic training experience to me. I went through basic training about forty years later and I there was the things that I remember most about my own military experience. So why don't you just walk me through the steps like you get on a train and go down there and --

Carol: Right.

Mark: Describe the drills, and --

Carol: Right. Well, I left the Twin Cities and I had been at Dayton, Ohio, but they sent me, I mean I could go back home then for my pre-service [laughing] visit home. There were other people had been recruited for this group of sixty people that went from the Twin Cities down to Fort Des Moines with me on the train and uh it was a lot of women, a lot of girls together. As I say, this first group picture here was at Fort Des Moines. This was our company, the officers and our particular company and I remember even though this short period of basic training just looking at the picture I think I could remember the names of some of these girls that I went through basic with that I didn't ever see again.

Mark: Yeah.

Carol: Really, you know, because it was such a short time. Now, several of the girls that I was with at Arlington Hall with, I've kept in touch through the years and some of those, a couple of those, at least I have seen since then. But, uh, this short period of basic training I never saw these people here at all [laughing] and but it was exciting and it was marching and drilling and physical exercise.

Mark: Yeah. Now, those women who went into the WACs then, were they at all different than the ones that you had worked with as a civilian? I mean that I was assuming that the WACs would have a greater section of people.

Carol: Our, our group that went down to Missouri, ah quite a number, or most of those I think had had college training, had had some college. I'd had the two years at River Falls, the teacher's course, and so I think most of us, and the ones who were recruited specifically to end up at Arlington Hall, were mostly college graduates. When we got down to basic training, of course, many of the people in the group there were not. Many had had, lesser amounts of education and you know,

actually, my friend and I that had enlisted together, she was sent to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia for her training and I was sent to Fort Des Moines. But, when we got to Arlington Hall, then eventually, it was a highly educated group specifically for more difficult assignments.

Mark: Yeah.

Mark: Yeah, now one of the things I remember from basic training is that it brought together people from all different parts of the country.

Carol: Right.

Mark: I had traveled a little bit and I was still amazed --

Carol: Right.

Mark: At some of the diversity.

Carol: Sure.

Mark: Was it the same?

Carol: Right. Absolutely. There were from everywhere. There was New Mexico, Texas. There were from all over.

Mark: This cause any problems perhaps?

Carol: [Deep breath] Not really.

Mark: Sometimes you hear about --

Carol: [Sigh] [laughter]

Mark: --Southerners still fighting the civil war in or in other cases it may be

Carol: I don't remember anything like that. [Chuckle] There were girls in the group who went out and did a lot of drinking [much laughter] already then in basic training I was rather surprised at that point [laughing] even though I had already been, ya know, school in Missouri, worked in Ohio, I hadn't run into other women that did that amount of drinking. Back when I was first in college, nobody drank, [voice tone lowers] girls didn't drink, ya know [laughter].

Mark: Or smoke in public or whatever the case may be.

Carol: [Laughter]

Mark: Um, okay so you went to basic training and then you went to advanced school, and where was that again?

Carol: Uh, the base, Arlington Hall, Virginia.

Mark: Yeah.

Carol: Yeah.

Mark: And then you were in Washington during the war?

Carol: Yeah. It's right outside of Washington. It's near Roslyn I think. But, it was just, we would just get on the bus anytime. Twenty minute bus ride to downtown Washington.

Mark: Why don't you just describe a typical work day for me, if there is such a thing.

Carol: Well, I worked both, most of the time I worked days, but I was on a night shift, some of the time. The graveyard shift, which I found very difficult, very difficult to stay awake while I was at work [chuckles]. And to try and get some sleep the next day, daytime when the other girls were in and out of the barracks, and so on, but it was just get up in the morning. For a while, I led the calisthenics in the barracks for a long while, get up, calisthenics, breakfast at the mess hall, go to the lab that I worked in, worked in the shop, and I was assigned, oh, many different things. One of the first things was get the shop in order and keep the tools all in good condition [chuckles] and, and you know make peg boards with the pattern that I had and everything up and so on and then at one point my boss decided one of the things that most needed repairs were the IBM electric typewriters. So I was supposed to learn how to repair one by taking one apart [laughter] every screw, you should have seen it, which was completely, had nothing to do with anything I had been trained for, and I managed to get it all apart and no way in could [laughing while talking] have put any of that back together again. But then after that I did get sent to other more of the work that I was sent in to do.

Mark: Yeah.

Carol: And actually, the, they had there was the forerunner of computers. They had a place as big as, um, oh much bigger than a football field, undercover Quonset huts or something I suppose that everything was vacuumed tubes and relays and that had to be kept running. And so we would go in and test, ya know, something would go down in the system. It was the pre-computer age, before transistors were invented.

Mark: Yeah.

Carol: It was all vacuum tubes and we'd go in, test the relays and or test for a burned-out vacuum tube and replace it and keep the system running. And that was the, what they did the cryptography on. And it was, tried to keep it repaired and working.

Mark: Um. So you worked six days a week did you say?

Carol: That was at Wright Air Force Base. I think, when we were in service, I think it was just at Arlington Hall, I think it was just the five days. I'm not sure but I was surprised when looking over this uh, pre-service stuff that one of the things they said was, you know we could accumulate some vacation time and sick leave but we worked six days a week.

Mark: So, so, so when you weren't on duty, what did you do to occupy, um, your time?

Carol: Oh! We saw a lot of movies. Movies came on the post, the new movies. So I think they showed at least two a week, on the, I mean two different ones a week, so we saw movies and of course we went into Washington for dances and evening dances. They had a huge, um, Navy dances were held for all service people. Free to service people. The Navy band played and it was the second floor of a huge building in downtown Washington that had dances twice a week. Wednesday nights and Saturday nights and open to all service men and women and that was a lot of fun ya know. We went regularly, take the bus in and a group of us go together and. It was exciting. And then we sight-seen. We saw all the sights in Washington. Went to Mt. Vernon, and then went on our leaves or furloughs. First we explored Philadelphia one time and then went up to New York City. They had a women service center which was across the street from the St. Patrick's Cathedral. It had been a Rockefeller mansion and had been converted for women in war time. And I know one of the times I was there, there were women from the Canadian army, I believe that were staying there too. And it was \$.50 a night. [chuckle] And in this huge mansion, but of course many of the rooms though had extra bunk beds and so on installed and so we could spend a furlough in New York city and go see Frank Sinatra and Gene Crupa's band and the radio shows and just explore. To me this was all very exciting.

Mark: And at the ripe old age of, what were you about 22 now?

Carol: Yes, I was 22 when I went in, yeah, about 24 went I got out. So it was chance to travel and so—

Mark: So, at first there was a lot of reluctance among military officials to let women in the military though. There weren't very many in the military before World War II.

Carol: Right. Right.

- Mark: And there were various concerns that military, that the brass had and a lot of them had to do with relations between men and women and that sort of thing, and um, how do you feel the military treated you as a woman?
- Carol: Well, by the time I went in, in '44, it was no longer the Women's Auxiliary Army Corp. It was the Women's Army Corp. We were already part of the Army then. And, I think that by that time they definitely had accepted the women as being very useful.
- Mark: Yeah. So in the work place I think you had mentioned you worked with men.
- Carol: I had worked in the shop. The work that I did I worked with two young men who were not draftable. So--
- Mark: They were civilians then.
- Carol: Yeah, they were civilians. Right. I worked with these two civilians. My direct boss was an Army officer and then the, there was a lieutenant and then a major above him in our section so we were working under you know I was military. Uh, quite a few, we had a mixture of even doing the clerical work of civilians working with the Army personnel.
- Mark: I was wondering if a woman soldier had a particular rank if she outranked the male soldier, how that sort of thing went. [Chuckling from Carol] You did not have that experience too often I take it.
- Carol: I don't think so. No. Um, you know we had our promotions. From PFC to Corporal to ah, but since mine was Tech, there was a Tech 1, a Tech 2, up to a Tech 4 I believe it was, so it was like getting my sergeant stripes, but it was technical. So I wasn't really over anybody or you know directing anybody.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Carol: Now, I did go back, right after my discharge, within after my eight months, no, within four months after my discharge. I went back there and worked one more year as a civilian.
- Mark: Yeah, I saw that on the sheet.
- Carol: Yeah, in the same place, but then I was a cryptographic clerk that year. So by that time even the Army officers, the two officers that I had worked under had been discharged and were working still in the same unit as civilians.
- Mark: Yeah, was that fairly common then? To have done that?

- Carol: I think so. You see it was, it you depending on your number of points and how long you had been in service, many of us didn't get our discharges for almost a year after the war was over but then it was the convenience of the military you were let go, even the officers and so on that unless they wanted to be career I suppose they would have stayed in. But I know these two officers that I was under were civilians then.
- Mark: I think it might probably be they got paid better too!
- Carol: Yes. [Chuckling] Probably.
- Mark: So you stayed in Washington pretty much all the way through the war then?
- Carol: Yes, the two years I was there. I was there in Washington to celebrate the Victory in Europe Day, the Victory of Japan day, and of course everybody went into town for both of those. It was like you would see all the descriptions everywhere else, the streets packed and everybody celebrating and so on. And then I was there for Roosevelt's funeral. I went in and stood in the streets and watched Roosevelt's funeral go by. So ah, it was a very exciting time to be at Washington and yes we felt that what we were doing was important.
- Mark: And you stayed in the service until when?
- Carol: Um, --
- Mark: It was quite a few months after the actual end of the war?
- Carol: Almost a year. It was June of '46 I was to start, see Victory of Japan Day was August of '45 and they signed the treaties and stuff soon after that so it was almost a year before.
- Mark: Yeah, and all those machines they needed to be uh, maintained.
- Carol: Oh, right! Well, the interesting thing to me at least looking back on it, I said I went back a year and worked as a clerk. And, at that time, the work I did was transcribing written letters with a typewriter that had a Russian alphabet keyboard. And so I was punching the tapes that would be used uh, back in the days of ticker tapes uh, [chuckle] like IBM cards later, but I was working on a typewriter with a Russian alphabet keyboard so by that time all the interest was in being able to read Russian codes.
- Mark: So you see, I was going to ask how your work perhaps changed over time
- Carol: I am sure--
- Mark: In terms of volume, in terms of copy--

- Carol: I am sure that that was an important part of it. The fact that by then they were trying to keep track of what the Russians were doing for sure [laughter].
- Mark: Now, in those two years as you were maintaining the machines, were there new machines that came in, the new technologies?
- Carol: Not that I knew of, not that we knew of. Like I say, I can remember these, see once I got my discharge and then went back and worked there as a clerk, I never saw that equipment that I had used earlier. This big building with all the vacuum tubes and relays that we would be trying to adjust and keep working so maybe by then they had new stuff but I didn't see it. I was sitting there typing [much laughter].
- Mark: Yeah, doing the same old thing.
- Carol: Doing.
- Mark: So, um, when the war was over and it came to be discharged, was there an option for you to if you wanted to stay in the military?
- Carol: They didn't give us the option, no. Uh, well, I guess that we could have because the reason I say that is because one of my best friends did stay in. She got, that worked with me at Arlington Hall. She got sent to Officer's Candidate School and then she was sent over, she was stationed in Germany, but she did stay in, she did her twenty years in the military. So I guess we could have chosen too. [Chuckle]
- Mark: But, there weren't recruiting officers trying to get you to stay in and that sort of thing?
- Carol: No, No, I don't remember. She must have indicated at some place, you know, her decision.
- Mark: Oh, oh. Would you have wanted to? Had you been presented with that option?
- Carol: No, no.
- Mark: Why was that?
- Carol: Well, but the war was over and I wanted to get out of [laughter] it and I didn't want anything so [more laughter] to do other things.
- Mark: Well, and so you got out, and you did get on with the rest of your life then?
- Carol: Yeah.

Mark: As you got out of the service, what were your main priorities in life?

Carol: Well, first of all I had thought I would go back to school. The GI bill which was this marvelous opportunity they had given us. I only had the two years of college which was all I needed for the teaching in the rural schools, and so I was going to go back immediately to school. But then when I decided to go back to Washington and work the year I worked as a civilian. I postponed my going to college. But then I did go to the University of Minnesota and got my degree.

Mark: And you went on a GI bill.

Carol: Yes, absolutely.

Mark: Did it cover all your expenses?

Carol: Oh yes, it was great! They gave us, well, \$75 a month allowance, cash allowance for living expenses. They paid for all our books and tuition and I was taking home economics, get away completely from the electronics [laughter] and stuff that I had been doing, a complete change. So I was taking home economics and like for a dress-making class, a sewing class, they would pay for our material and pattern, and scissors and pins, and everything we needed and the same for any of the other courses we took. Uh, so it was great at that time you could live on \$75 dollars a month.

Mark: Yeah.

Carol: Rent a room to live in. Pay for your clothes and food.

Mark: Um, I have talked to a lot of ex-GI's who went to school here in Madison, and --

Carol: Uh-huh.

Mark: And I assume things were pretty much the same.

Carol: Yeah, well you see I went up to the University of Minnesota but I am sure it was.

Mark: And that campus is filled with GIs after the war?

Carol: Yes, oh yes. All the campuses, and of course many of them were much older than the traditional students had been.

Mark: Right.

Carol: Especially the men who had been in the service. A lot of them were older.

- Mark: Right. Now there was a lot of fear among the administrators that the veterans would not be very good students and in fact they turned out to be very good students. They studied very hard.
- Carol: Yes, indeed.
- Mark: Was that your experience and your observation?
- Carol: Oh, yes. Yes, a lot of them were very good students and they were more mature.
- Mark: You went to school before the war and then after the war so--
- Carol: Yes.
- Mark: You can perhaps compare the two schools were very different too.
- Carol: Yes, yes, River Falls was a small college; now it's part of the Wisconsin system. But it was a little state teachers' college and pretty much concentrating on agriculture, you know, to train teachers and train agricultural students. And, the University of Minnesota was a big institution, so.
- Mark: Now, I'm pretty sure that for men, most of the students at the time were better, but for women perhaps it was different because there were fewer women in the service.
- Carol: There were fewer women and there were maybe a fewer, a smaller percentage of the women. I would guess, a smaller percentage who used the GI bill, made use of the GI bill, many of the women didn't, didn't do it.
- Mark: Yeah, so in college, of the women you knew in college, how many of them roughly were veterans, do you think, were you unusual?
- Carol: I don't remember very many at all in my classes that were veterans, the women. I knew there were lots of men who were veterans in my classes.
- Mark: So you finished school um, and then what did you do?
- Carol: Well I got married six months before I graduated. So, got married, graduated in June, graduated in December, just basically kept house and had four children [laughing].
- Mark: I was curious if your husband was a veteran or not?
- Carol: Yes, oh yes. He was a veteran of the Marine Corp **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** and he was going to school too on the GI bill. So we met, I met him there.

- Mark: You went to work for McArdle Labs eventually.
- Carol: After we moved to Wisconsin.
- Mark: In town here--
- Carol: Yes, I worked for almost 20 years here on the campus, with McArdle Lab.
- Mark: Um, I just have one last area that I want to cover really, and that involves veteran's organizations and reunions and that sort of thing.
- Carol: Okay, I'm in the United Women's Veterans but I didn't join any veterans group until about eight years ago.
- Mark: And, why was that do you think?
- Carol: In the first place, I never got any invitations from uh, of course, I wasn't overseas, but even the American Legion that was in this country, anything that ever came to the house was addressed to my husband to join the American Legion. They did not invite women to join. Women were welcome to join if they wanted to join their auxiliary, if they were the wife of a male veteran. But they didn't make women welcome. And they certainly never sent and I did not even know about a WAC veterans group which I guess maybe has been in existence for 20 years or more, not right after the war, though, it wasn't. But I didn't know about it until I visited a woman out in California who had been in service with me and she belonged to the WAC veterans group and had attended a big reunion at Fort Des Moines and was very excited about it all and she gave me the forms and then I joined. But there was no WAC veterans group here in Madison, the closest one was in Milwaukee. So I joined it large and later transferred to the group in Milwaukee because a woman from Madison was driving back and forth every month from the meetings there [laughing] and I had somebody I could ride with but that group just disbanded, the chapter in Milwaukee of the WAC veterans.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Carol: Oh, too many of the people were getting older and they could not find anybody to take the jobs and so that WAC veteran's chapter has just, there are other chapters other places, but that chapter in Milwaukee has just disbanded. But our United Women's Veterans which after all has about 100 members throughout Wisconsin and that's Navy, Marines, Army, WAC and nurses, um, is still going strong. We do have quite a few, some younger or even some presently in the service, so we have younger members too.
- Mark: Yeah. I am interested in why you decided to join the WAC veterans even once you eventually learned about them, what possessed you to sign the membership

card and send them the \$5 bucks or whatever it was. It's a voluntary organization and I just interested in --

Carol: Yeah,

Mark: --wanted to know why you volunteered.

Carol: Huh, well, you know, talk about shared interest, military service. A great much of the work that's being done now even by the United Women's Veterans group is services for veterans, uh, particularly promoting services for women veterans. The women veterans were very neglected for a long time even when it came to medical services. The medical services were all aimed at the men and there weren't the, the veteran's hospitals didn't study women's ailments [chuckle] or concentrate on them at all. So it's more a matter of uh, being interested in, in--

Mark: Right. Has that, has it paid off in your experience in your observations when you joined 10 years ago whatever it was, have things improved over that time? Do you think your efforts have paid off or is there still a lot of work to be done?

Carol: Oh I think there is still work to be done. Certainly women veterans are much more visible now than they were. I mean we were invisible for a long time. We were married raising families mostly, and pretty busy with our lives and, uh, --

Mark: Is there a social component to it as well?

Carol: Oh, definitely, definitely, sure.

Mark: So these meetings, how often do you get together?

Carol: The United Women Veterans here in Madison, we're once a month.

Mark: Are you what you call an active member?

Carol: I'm at the moment, I'm first vice president of the group [much laughing]

Mark: How did that happen?

Carol: Well, I kept saying no I cant do anything you know, but to belong to any group I kept saying I'm too busy, I'm too busy, my problem of all the time I took on so much work from my Daughters of the American Revolution group that I kept saying that I don't have time, I am not going to take anything more on, but finally when they said well would I be first vice president, I said okay well, I would try. I can chair a meeting if I have to, if the president doesn't show up. But I have been very active in my Daughters of the American Revolution group and I even for six years now, I've been representing my Daughters of the American Revolution chapter at the Memorial Day and Veterans Day services at the Capitol

in which we lay a rose and take part in the ceremonies and representing again my Daughters of the American Revolution chapter on the Wisconsin Veterans Council and so I attend all of those meetings. And you know not representing the United Women's Veterans group because we have somebody else there, but still kind of wearing the two hats.

Mark: Yeah,

Carol: Both groups, so--

Mark: Um, those were all the questions I had, is there anything you would like to add or anything? Anything we skipped, left out, anything you want to go over again?

Carol: [Laughing a lot.] Well, it was an important time in my life. It was a big change. By the time I got out of service, comparing myself to many of my, especially my high school classmates, who had married right away out of school, and had children and had never been anywhere, and so on, my life had been very different the first ten years after I was out of school. It had been very exciting I thought. Useful, I hoped.

Mark: A positive experience!

Carol: Yes!

Mark: I guess that's a good place to stop. Well, thanks for coming in. I appreciate it.

Carol: Well, I enjoyed it.

Mark: It was very interesting.

[End of Interview]