

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DELORES (DELEMATER) MUELLER
Clerk, Women's Marine Reserve, World War II.

2007

OH
1058

OH
1058

Mueller, Delores, née Delemater, (1920?-). Oral History Interview, 2007.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 20 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 20 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Delores Mueller, née Delemater, a Green Bay, Wisconsin native, discusses her service as a Marine during World War II. Mueller explains that after she became bored with a job making Army clothing at Green Bay Clothing, she enlisted in the Women's Marine Reserve in 1943. She discusses attending boot camp at Camp Lejeune (North Carolina). Assigned to Camp Elliot (California), Mueller tells of her duties as an ordinance clerk for the 1st Marine Division. She addresses living and eating separately from the men, dances at different Marine bases, and friendships with other female Marines. Mueller reflects that civilians treated female Marines normally but some servicemen thought the women were only in the service to get a man. She states she married a career Navy man and was discharged after becoming pregnant. She touches on her membership in the American Legion, Green Bay Women's Post #539. Mueller describes her four brothers' military service.

Biographical Sketch:

Mueller enlisted in the Marines at age twenty-three, in 1943. She was born in Rose Lawn (Wisconsin) and, at age three, her family moved to Green Bay. Mueller married a sailor in the Navy, raised four children, and, after his retirement from the service, they settled in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2007.

Transcription by Cathy Cox, Sept. 2007.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011.

Interview Transcription:

Terry: This is an interview with Delores Mueller, who served with the United States Marine Corps during World War II. The interview is being conducted at 1:45 p.m. at the following address of 2543 Hazelwood Lane, Green Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of February 15th, 2007, and the interviewer is Terry MacDonald.

Ok Delores, can you tell us a little bit about your background as to where you were born and grew up at?

Mueller: Well I was born in Rose Lawn, Wisconsin, which is near Pulaski, Seymour, that area in there. And um, my grandparents lived out there, and my mother and dad lived out there also. And then we moved to Green Bay in 19—well, when I was three years old. I graduated from high school in 1939, and I waited, after the war—I was 23 when I joined the service.

Terry: When you grew up—what's your family's maiden name?

Mueller: Delemater [sp?]. My grandparents on my dad's side lived on that same road. See, 'cause my mother and dad farmed on that road. So then—and the farm kind of went kaput. So we moved to Green Bay then when I was three years old.

Terry: And did you have any brothers and sisters?

Mueller: Oh, yes. I had four brothers and one sister. And at the time I was in the service all four brothers were in the service at the same time, and I was the only Marine—except my one brother. He joined the Navy and then he got out of the Navy and joined the Marine Corps. He knew which one was best. [Terry laughs] So anyway, he joined the Marine Corps, but we were all in the service.

Terry: So you were 23 when you went in?

Mueller: I was 23 when I went in.

Terry: So what made you—what was the reason for you to sign up?

Mueller: Well, my brother Ray worked at the Green Bay Clothing and so did I. And here I was snipping threads on pea coats and army coats and everything, and I just decided, "Hey, this is not what I want to do." So I decided to join. After he—he joined the Coast Guard and then I joined the Marine Corps.

- Terry: And how did you determine the Marines versus the—
- Mueller: I liked the uniform. [both laugh] I liked the uniform and I didn't, I didn't know how to swim. And if I'd have joined the Navy I would have had to swim, and I just didn't care for the Army uniform. [laughs]
- Terry: Ok. And uh, did anybody else go with you?
- Mueller: No I—no I went—there were two girls, two sisters from De Pere that went in the same time as I did, they left[??] same time as I did. And when I joined, it was still the Reserves. It was Women's Marine Reserve Association. *Not* the Association. Women Marines Reserve. And I don't know the date after that that they dropped the Reserve, but—when I tell anybody who—when I went in—“Oh, you were in the Reserves.” Well, yeah, but we didn't—see we didn't go overseas, and I think that was probably why we were called the Reserves. But we never did go overseas until probably the end of '44, close to '45, something like that. Then they went overseas.
- Terry: So when you went in to—your boot camp or basic training—where did they send you to do that?
- Mueller: We went to—we took our basic at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. And it was about three months with it from—between the time that I enlisted until the time I went because they didn't have any place to put us. So we were into the first barracks in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The first—in the boot camp, we were in the first barracks.
- Terry: Does that mean--
- Mueller: They were building the barracks.
- Terry: Were you one of the first Women Marines?
- Mueller: One of the first ones.
- Terry: Ok. And what year was that?
- Mueller: Uh, 1943. February 13th, 1943 I think is when the Women Marines went into existence. But it was soon after that and I can't remember the date. But anyway, it was about two, three months before I—before I got—but um—we felt good about ourselves, you know, and when we got there it was, it was good.
- Terry: And was it—pretty strict? 'Cause the Marine Corps was known to be a lot more—

- Mueller: Yes.
- Terry: --regimented than any of the other branches of the service?
- Mueller: Yeah, they were strict. We had to get up at four o'clock in the morning and run around the barracks for, for exercise and things like that. But, we only took it six weeks. And now I understand it's like three months. They're a lot more stricter now than they were.
- Terry: Was there a lot of physical training, or marching?
- Mueller: Well, we had our calisthenics, and we had our marching. Every morning we had to—we had calisthenics and we went through a regimental type thing.
- Terry: And what was the barracks like? Was it—
- Mueller: Oh. [chuckles] We were on the second floor and it was just *rows* of bunk beds. And you had to right across from your bunk bed—it was just in a little area, *wide* open, and they'd come around and check, to see if it was in order or anything. There was—were no closets. We had our lockers at the bottom and then our clothes. But everything was wide open. We had no, no privacy whatsoever. So.
- Terry: And were you in a separate area?
- Mueller: Yeah, it was Area One at Camp Lejeune. That's where they did--trained the Women Marines.
- Terry: And six weeks? And what happened after the six weeks then?
- Mueller: Six wee—after six weeks, we each had—each of us had two weeks mess. We had to go in and wash pots and pans and things like that in the mess hall. So that's we did. Well then we were—my bunkie and I were transferred to Camp Elliot, San Diego. Which was an intern base for fellows coming from boot to go overseas. This is where they learned to, to—fight in the jungle, so to speak. They'd go out at four o'clock in the morning and wouldn't come back till nine, ten o'clock at night.
- Terry: And what was your job?
- Mueller: I was in ordinance. Ordinance and um—order transport. And ordinance was strictly in guns and ammunition. I was a clerk, and what we did was check—everything had to be down on paper so to speak. Everything that went overseas had to be down on paper—every nut and bolt and

everything. So that's what I did. I worked—it was a makeshift office in the ordinance building.

Terry: And how was the living conditions in that—

Mueller: It was fine. In the barracks? It was fine. Yeah. Everybody was, you know—

Terry: And how was the food?

Mueller: Good. We had our own cooks. We had our own cooks, our own galley and everything. So, yeah—and if the girls wanted something special, they always said, “Sure, we’ll make it.”

Terry: So they kept the men and the women separate? I mean—

Mueller: Yes. Area One at Camp Lejeune was all women. And we were in the first barracks like I said, but then I think there's two or three barracks that were built after that, so—

Terry: And how about in California? Was it pretty much the same?

Mueller: We had one—yeah. It was much the same thing. But we had our own building. But it was, it was kind of right in the general area, of the administration building and everything. But we used to have guys come in there and see if they could walk through and whatever, you know. [chuckling]

Terry: So did they keep you pretty busy all the time?

Mueller: Oh, yeah. We'd—there was always the bulletin board—always had dances on Saturday nights, at a different camp and stuff like that, and they would boot you—over there and, you know, it was fun. We enjoyed it. And then you work with fellas that were crazy--[laughs]—did a lot of—we had one fella, that he really had a sense of humor that was way out. And it was clean. [laughs] It was clean humor. So we enjoyed it.

Terry: And how long were the uh—the Marines—the regular Marines there for—were they there for like for three or six months or something?

Mueller: They were—no. I think six weeks was their training. They'd come from boot camp, hit Camp Elliott, and then they'd be sent overseas. Along with all the guns and ammunition that we would mark down on paper and everything. It was the 1st Marine Division that we—we kept account of.

Terry: And uh, you said there was dances and different things that—

Mueller: Different bases like Camp Miramar, Camp Pendleton, that's all I—

Terry: Were they all Marine bases?

Mueller: Yeah. And they used to bus us from our place over there. We used to get off the bus and, "I'll take that one," "I'll take that one," "I'll take that one." [both laugh] Guys standing there and waiting, you know. But uh—we all went in and just had a good time. And at the end of the dance we'd get on the bus and come back to our own base.

Terry: Did they ever have any USO show-type things come?

Mueller: In San Diego they did.

Terry: In San Diego.

Mueller: But not, not, while we were there. Not while *I* was there, anyway.

Terry: What was your rank when you were—

Mueller: PFC.

Terry: And did you meet any—or make friendships with other lady Marines?

Mueller: Oh yeah. Like Ruth um, Ruth—*Phyllis* Tarosa. She was my bunkie. We had a gal named Polly, too. She was in our crowd. She was crazy. I don't know if I have a picture of her or not.

Terry: Did you keep track of them after you got out?

Mueller: Phyllis I did, but then all of a sudden she was gone, and I never got—yeah, this, this was the Three Musketeers.

Terry: Ok, and what Delores is showing us is pictures of her while she was in the Marine Corps with friends of hers. And she's in uniform. Very sharp.

Mueller: Oh this is a, this is a better uniform.

Terry: Oh yeah.

Mueller: And that's our platoon, down at the bottom.

Terry: And where was that at? Was that Lejeune?

Mueller: That was at Camp Lejeune. Those are just pic—I had a lot more pictures but I don't know what happened to 'em, they got—this is our, our platoon.

Terry: Is this your boot camp?

Mueller: That's our boot camp platoon. That's our graduation picture.

Terry: She's showing us pictures of the different things. And it's interesting to see in the banner in the background is US Marine Corps Women's Reserves. USMCWR. That's interesting.

Mueller: So like I say we were one of the first—first ones that went in, that's why they called us Reserves.

Terry: So the Marine Corps, they didn't ship you overseas then, huh?

Mueller: No, no. Later on they shipped them over to Hawaii, but that's the furthestest [sic] they got.

Terry: So did you spend your whole time in California?

Mueller: Camp Elliott.

Terry: Was there anything interesting that stood out in your mind that happened while you were in there?

Mueller: No, that's why I say there was nothing, because we just did—went to work and did our work and came home, and that was it. And yes, you wrote letters and—

Terry: You said you came home—did you have any leaves?

Mueller: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. I went home on leave once. But um, well it was two weeks, ten days, something like that.

Terry: When you got out of the military, how did that come about? I mean the—

Mueller: Oh, I got married and got pregnant. [laughs]

Terry: Well that answers it! So—

Mueller: And I married a Navy man. And we, we—he stayed in the Navy. So we—

Terry: So what year was this?

Mueller: 1945.

Terry: Oh, ok.

Mueller: So we traveled all over the next twenty years—or actually eighteen years, because he had just—

Terry: So you became pregnant and the Marine Corps—you had to get out, because they didn't allow—

Mueller: Well I got *married first*. [laughs]

Terry: Well—I understand--

Mueller: Yeah, you had to get out. They wouldn't, they wouldn't let you stay in. *Now* they let you stay in if you get pregnant.

Terry: And then your husband stayed in the Navy.

Mueller: He stayed in the Navy.

Terry: Oh, ok then.

Mueller: So then we traveled all over.

Terry: And you met your husband out—

Mueller: In the Navy, yeah.

Terry: --out in California?

Mueller: Yeah.

Terry: Where was *he* originally from?

Mueller: New York City.

Terry: How did you get back to Wisconsin then?

Mueller: Well, when he retired, from the Navy, it was—I asked him, I said, “Do you want to go to Wisconsin or do you want to go to New York?” He said, “We’ll go to Wisconsin.” It was his choice to come back here. So that’s what we did.

Terry: And you settled in the Green Bay area then?

Mueller: Settled in the Green Bay area.

Terry: Now when you got out, did you—were you able to use any of the GI Bill?

Mueller: No. I was able to, but I didn't.

Terry: You didn't use it.

Mueller: Well, I had kids. You know. And that sort of stopped me.

Terry: When did you find out about the American Legion Post?

Mueller: Oh that was—well I've been in the American Legion 56 years. So, figure back—1950.

Terry: Is that when they formed the Post here in Green Bay?

Mueller: Well, I think it's 58 years, something like that. It's 58 years old.

Terry: And you were able to get in the regular American Legion? Or?

Mueller: In the regular Post. *We are* a regular Post. *Not* an auxiliary, like they had it in the paper for Jeannie Christianson's funeral. And a lot of people in Green Bay didn't get that through their head that—a women's organization had to be an auxiliary, they couldn't be a post, they had—and so. And it's still going on, like the paper the other night. So. But I've been in 56 years in the American Legion then.

Terry: Did you have some children?

Mueller: I had four children all told.

Terry: What did they—when you told them you were a woman Marine, what did they think?

Mueller: "So?" [chuckles]

Terry: Is that right?

Mueller: "So?"

Terry: No big deal, huh?

Mueller: No. No. 'Cause they saw all kinds of military people wherever we lived, you know. It was on—

Terry: Oh, yes.

Mueller: --camps and stuff. Military was part of their *life*. I know my oldest daughter when we came back here, she says, “Do I have to take another history class?” Because she had had *eight*—eight years of history *before* that in different schools all over the—you know. She says, “Do I have to take history *again*?” I says, [chuckles] “Not if you don’t want to.” But um, that’s the way it was, you know. I mean, they were brought up with military people and so—

Terry: I got to ask you—when you were out in California, or in, out and around Camp Lejeune—how did the civilians treat the women Marines? Was there anything—

Mueller: It was ok, you know—no, the *men* didn’t want us there sometimes. Because they thought that we were there for—just to get a man, or something, you know. But the civilians themselves, they were nice. I never had any problem with ‘em. Maybe other girls did, but I never—

Terry: And the same way in California? They didn’t—

Mueller: Same way in California.

Terry: Probably because there was so many military out—at that point.

Mueller: And a lot of those places, military people shopping there, in the stores and so—that was their life, you know. That was their livelihood, so they had to be nice to them, otherwise they just—just wouldn’t go back, you know.

Terry: So how did you think overall your time in the Marine Corps—what was—

Mueller: I’d do it again in a heartbeat.

Terry: A very positive one for you then.

Mueller: Oh yeah, it was. Of course the Marines, they *drum* things into your head—[chuckles]—you never let that go, you never—once a Marine, always a Marine.

Terry: Is there any other thing that you’d really like to bring out about your time in the military, any experiences that you can remember real plain?

Mueller: That was a million years ago! [both laugh] No, nothing really, no. I just, like I say, I’d do it again in a heartbeat if I were—and if I hadn’t gotten pregnant and married I probably would have been a career person. When I think back now I probably would have been.

- Terry: Delores, I just want to—I know you had brothers that served in the military along—when you were in the military. Could you give us an idea what branches—their names and what branches of service they served in?
- Mueller: My brother Ray Delamater was in the Coast Guard.
- Terry: Did he serve overseas?
- Mueller: He was up in Alaska. Up—Iceland—up in—he served on an icebreaker. And it was a kind of an outpost. I don't know what kind of a ship it was on though. But it was—it was called an icebreaker. But anyway, that's where he was. And my brother Jim was in the Army. Dick was in the Army. And of course my brother Bob was in the Navy, *and* the Marine Corps, so—
- Terry: So your brothers that served in the Army, did they go overseas?
- Mueller: They were stationed—one was—no two of 'em were stationed in Germany. But different, different places.
- Terry: And your brother in the Navy?
- Mueller: Well, when he was in the Marine Corps he was a guard in Annapolis. That I remember. But uh, yeah he was on a ship but I can't, I can't tell you—
- Terry: So your family then—your mother and father had quite a—
- Mueller: Well, my dad—my dad died when we were all young. I was 11 years old when my dad died. But my mother, she was concerned. She—when I went into the service, she says, “Are you going to go overseas?” I says, “No. We don't go overseas.” “Well good then,” she says. “Then I won't worry about ya.” You know, so—but she knew I could take care of myself. [laughs] But, yeah we were all in, and we'd, you know, correspond back and forth and—I don't know I was—when I left home for that 20 years so much had gone on with my family, you know. I don't know where their letters are or their discharge—we've got my brother Ray's discharge and everything. In fact, my son has his flag from his coffin. And he put that into a thing, and put a thing underneath, so, he's got that. So.
- Terry: So you're a—
- Mueller: Sort of from a military family.

- Terry: Yeah. A military[??] family.
- Mueller: We all had our military dues, you know. So. All except, Ray and Bob are gone—they're dead, but—the other two boys are living, and my sister. My older sister's living. She was the oldest one, and she stayed home. While I—I don't—yeah, she was married. She was married when we went in. [rattling in the background [silverware?]]
- Terry: And so, when you said you were right out of high school you were working in the clothing—
- Mueller: Green Bay Clothing, which--
- Terry: And that was a—you said that was a defense type of industry.
- Mueller: We made pea coats and Army jackets and stuff like that. During the time that—well, most of the time when I was there—but they really only made winter coats, you know, out of wool, and railroad jackets and things like that. But we were mainly working on pea coats and Army jackets. And I got—[laughs]—turning a coat I can—sometimes I used to do it in my sleep, looking for threads—that's what I had—to snip the threads. It was all piecework. So.

[End of Interview]