

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
ROSE F. (JROLF) RAY  
Cook, Army, World War II.

2008

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**Ray, Rose F., née Jrolf**, (1918-2010). Oral History Interview, 2008.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Rose F. Ray, née Jrolf, discusses her World War II service in the Army as a cook in Alliance, Nebraska and a mess sergeant at Sedalia Army Air Field. Ray talks about her parents' immigration from Brazil and her childhood in Racine and Milwaukee (Wisconsin). After high school, she touches on working at Allis Chalmers and enlisting in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. Sent to Daytona Beach (Florida), Ray speaks of attending cooks and bakers school and dehydration school, living in tents, and being spooked by Florida wildlife. She tells of once being assigned as assistant mess sergeant and, after cooking for and feeding 700 women, being so stiff and tired that she couldn't work the next day. Admitted to the regular Army in 1943, she contrasts her civilian and military paychecks. Assigned to Alliance (Nebraska) as a cook, Ray addresses living conditions, helping cook at a WAC mess hall, and homesickness. Promoted to staff sergeant, she tells of being assigned to Sedalia Army Air Field (Missouri) to discipline a kitchen staff that was not working well together. Ray mentions having to demote someone, the improvement in attitude of her staff, and doing all the holiday cooking with the other officers. Ray addresses keeping her mess hall clean, organizing women to hand-sew curtains, and writing letters home. She details meeting and dating Fred Ray, her future husband, who delivered food to her kitchen as a quartermaster. After getting orders to go to India, she tells of going home on furlough and getting mail from Fred. She describes marrying Fred six weeks after her furlough and recalls how angry the officer in charge was when Ray asked to cancel her trip overseas. Ray talks about living in a rented room off-base with her new husband, being discharged only two days apart from each other, and going home to Milwaukee. She talks about other family members who were also in the military during the war, describes her and her husband's adjustment to civilian life, and mentions the military had offered her rifle training, which she refused. Ray states her most memorable day of service was when she carried the flag in Florida.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Ray (1918-2010) served in the Army from 1943 to 1945. Her maiden name, Jrolf, was misspelled "Grolf" on her birth certificate, and as a result her paper name in the Army was Rose Grolf. Ray served as a cook at Alliance (Nebraska) and as mess sergeant at Sedalia Army Air Field (present day Whiteman Air Force Base). She married Fred Ray, had a daughter, and eventually settled in Janesville (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Ellen Bowers Healey, 2008

Transcribed by John Danish, 2008.

Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

**Transcribed Interview:**

- Ellen: This is an interview with Rose F. Ray, who served the Army from February 28, 1943, to May 15, 1945, during World War II. This interview is being conducted at Rose's home at the following address: 2705 East Milwaukee Street, Janesville, Wisconsin, on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The interviewer is Ellen Bowers Healey. [pause in tape]
- Ellen: Rose, would you state your full name, your current name?
- Ray: Rose Frances Ray.
- Ellen: And what was your maiden name?
- Ray: Rose Francis Jrolf
- Ellen: And can you spell that for me?
- Ray: J-R-O-L-F, but the J was G in the Army because a midwife misspelled it on the birth certificate.
- Ellen: Tell me a little bit about your parents; where did they come from?
- Ray: They came from the plantations of Brazil. They, my mother and father, met in Brazil on the plantation but were married in Milwaukee, Wisconsin around the 11<sup>th</sup> of June, 1910.
- Ellen: And before they were located in Brazil, where did they come from?
- Ray: I really don't know; I think they came from Italy, but I'm not sure. But the owner of the plantation went to Italy and asked all that wanted to come to work could come and the boat took them to the plantation, sugar plantations, in Brazil.
- Ellen: Okay. And how did they get from Brazil to Milwaukee?
- Ray: From Brazil, ah, my dad and a couple of my uncles, they jumped on a boat and were stowaways until they got halfway by the ocean and then they were found, and they worked on the boat until they got to Ellis Island and they got off at Ellis Island; I don't know if that's in Canada or not. But then they came to Milwaukee and worked at the Pfister Hotel, and then they sent—after they were here three or four months, they sent for the Delveccio family, which they were staying with on the plantation. And then the Delveccio family by boat came and landed at Ellis Island. And from Ellis Island they by train went to Milwaukee and they stayed with the

family, the Betucchi family, because they would harbor all these people that came from across. And they understood them and they found them work and they found them homes.

Ellen: You mentioned the Delveccio family. Why did you mention the Delveccio family?

Ray: 'Cause that was my Grandma's name, maiden name, Delveccio.

Ellen: And how do you spell Delveccio?

Ray: D-E-L-V-E-C-C-I-O, Delveccio.

Ellen: You said your mom and dad met in Brazil?

Ray: They met in Brazil but were married in Milwaukee. What did I say? 1910?

Ellen: Yes.

Ray: Yeah. In 1910, then they married in Milwaukee. He knew my mom in Brazil and my uncle Vince came with my dad and uncle Angelo, who later married my mom's sister, so they all knew each other.

Ellen: When were you born?

Ray: I was born July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

Ellen: And what was your home town?

Ray: I was born in Racine, Wisconsin, because my mom and dad, after they married—well, in fact, the whole Delveccio family were in Racine, Wisconsin. My uncle bought a farm for Grandma and Grandpa Delveccio, and my dad lived out there; he built a home. They all helped one another build homes.

Ellen: Where did you go to grade school?

Ray: I went to grade school, North Racine School. And for a time I went to the Catholic school, St. Patrick's, but the public school was closer, so in the first and second and third grade I went to Racine, the North Racine School.

Ellen: How many brothers and sisters did you have when you were growing up?

Ray: I had two sisters and six brothers.

- Ellen: And where did you fall in that group of, ah, is it nine?
- Ray: There was Phillip, the oldest, and then Lorraine, and then I was born, and thereafter, you know; after me was James, Anthony, John, Freddy and Frankie.
- Ellen: Did you go on to high school or not?
- Ray: Yes. Then in 1928 we all—well before that my Mother had a grocery store in North Racine; she ran a grocery store. And then she had too many children so they sold the store and moved to Milwaukee in October of 1928. And in April of 1929 we moved to 5013 West Greenfield Avenue in West Milwaukee. And there I went to finish my grade school and I went to West Milwaukee High School and there is where I went to work at Allis Chalmers, the manufacturing company, and in 1942 I joined the Army.
- Ellen: What did you do at Allis Chalmers?
- Ray: I was in the factory. I did winding, winding of coils, but I was not very good at it. [chuckles]
- Ellen: You said in 1943 you joined the service. How did you go about doing that? Where did you go to join the service?
- Ray: Ah, after, it was war. Who were they then, that [unintelligible]? I can't remember now.
- Ellen: Okay, when you worked for—
- Ray: After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and my two brothers enlisted and two brother-in-laws were drafted my Mom just thought the world had come to an end. And I said to her, "Mom, would you like it if I went and helped them?" She said, "I would love it." So I went downtown and signed up. They said you have to take an exam. I took the exam. I didn't think I'd passed it, but a week later got a nice letter that I had passed the exam and to come down and take the oath.
- Ellen: What did you sign up for?
- Ray: The Women's Army.
- Ellen: Okay.
- Ray: And, um, yes, to help the soldiers.

Ellen: Okay.

Ray: And then on February 28, 1943, I took the oath to help the veterans. I left home March 15, 1943, and went all the way to Daytona Beach [Florida] and the train would stop at different cities and pick up all those that had enlisted to help. By the time we got to Daytona Beach there were hundreds.

Ellen: Now were these women or men or both?

Ray: All women. All women!

Ellen: Okay.

Ray: Yeah. It was the Women's Army, the Auxiliary that we'd enlisted in and we went to training schools that were different kinds: office, secretary, postman, mechanics, nurses. I chose cooks and bakers school because I thought that would be easy. And enjoyed every minute of it. I got high marks, and they said, "Would like to go to dehydration school?" I said, "Absolutely," so on to school I went, to dehydration school, and I can't remember how many schools after that.

Ellen: Where was dehydration school?

Ray: Also in Florida.

Ellen: At Daytona or somewhere else?

Ray: I think it was Daytona, yes; I didn't leave the base, I don't think.

Ellen: How long did you stay in Daytona? How long did you train there?

Ray: I was in Daytona until September; then there was an announcement that the women were going to be admitted to the U.S. Army and get all the benefits that the men got, so those that wanted to leave could leave. I chose to stay and I was sworn into the U.S. Army in September of 1943 to get all the benefits that the soldiers would get. My salary was twenty-one dollars a month, which was almost a little over two dollars a day.

Ellen: How did that compare to your civilian salary, when you were working at Allis Chalmers?

Ray: A very large difference because, ah, in 1941 I would say I was getting about eighteen dollars every two weeks, or fifty dollars a month, anyway;

it was about that, so there was a difference. But I was in the Army; my sisters worked at the supercharger and they were making fifty dollars an hour at that time, thirty-five dollars an hour and I was gettin'—

Ellen: Where were they making thirty-five dollars an hour?

Ray: Well, ah, it was a lot of money at that time, in the wartime. At Allis Chalmers in the factory they were making things for the bombs and all of that. And they were making a *lot* of money and me, I was just a little bit, but I was happy.

Ellen: Describe your living situation when you were at Daytona. Where did you live, in barracks or apartments or what?

Ray: When I was—when I landed in Daytona Beach my eyes almost fell out, I was led to a tent and that was going to be my living quarters. We were all—it was called “tent city” and we girls were all placed in different tents. There were, let's see, two, four, six, eight; there were about ten women to each barrack, to each tent.

Ellen: What was inside the tents?

Ray: Just bunk beds. I had a top bunk because it was very different and I was afraid, but there were enough women, you know, to help because there was snakes galore, ants, roaches, any kind that you can imagine. I was lying on my bed, on my bunk, the top bunk, and I saw a spider this big crawl on the ceiling; I made one leap and I jumped out of that bunk bed and landed ten feet away, I was so afraid. Some of the girls said, “That's common here. Why are you gonna be afraid?” They just stamped on it and killed it. Well, we were in tent city when I got my orders. Well, first of all, we had the opportunity to get out or join the Army; I chose to join the Army. That was in September of 1943.

Ellen: How many of the other women made that choice?

Ray: I don't know exactly, but there were many that got out because they could go to work and make a lot more money, you know. There were a lot of women that did leave, but there were just as many that stayed in. That was September; in October I got my orders to go to Alliance, Nebraska as a cook. And when I got there I met Sergeant Grubbs; she was a lovely person, and I was the Assistant Mess Sergeant.

Ellen: How do you spell Grubbs?

Ray: G-R-U-B-B-S, Grubbs.



- Ellen: Were there any other ladies from Daytona that went to Alliance with you?
- Ray: No, no, I was the only one.
- Ellen: Okay.
- Ray: And, um, well, Grubbs met me. She was very nice to me, very happy, and because I was her assistant then we had barracks; I moved into a building! The barracks. And the sergeant and her assistant had a separate room. It was a room about, well, as wide as that kitchen, you know.
- Ellen: So, it's about eight-by-eight?
- Ray: Yeah. I had a bed and Grubbs had a bed and we each had a barrack, um, what do you call it? Well, you know, I don't know; it was a wooden chest, you know. You know what they are. I don't know if the Marines had any, would, how, say, I'm beginning to, ah, and we had a footlocker, and so it was a wonderful , a wonderful and—
- Ellen: What was your rank at the time that you got to Alliance, Nebraska?
- Ray: A Corporal. A Corporal; I had one stripe. I think it was Corporal, and then—
- Ellen: Why were you at Alliance? Was there a base there?
- Ray: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. We was the WAC mess hall; I was transferred to a WAC mess hall to help Sergeant Grubbs. I did cooking; I helped with the cooking and I remember one, um, not there, ah—
- Ellen: What kind of hours did you have as a cook?
- Ray: Five in the morning 'til five at night. Seven days a week.
- Ellen: Just you and Sergeant Grubbs or did you have—
- Ray: Oh, no, there was about four other women in that. I don't remember their names; I may have them written down someplace. But it was unimportant to me then. I was there all, until, like maybe February, yeah, the next year.
- Ellen: At Alliance, Nebraska?
- Ray: February or March.

- Ellen: How many people?
- Ray: It was a hell-hole; it was horrible. It was prairie. There were no houses; only animals ran on the prairie. But, you made the best of it.
- Ellen: And this was for the Women's Army Corps, the WACs?
- Ray: Army, the Women's Army Corp, and there was about two hundred women there but—
- Ellen: Was it just women and no men?
- Ray: Just women. The men—but they had separate quarters, you know, they had their own quarters.
- Ellen: Did you get any liberty? Did you get time off?
- Ray: Well, you could get down the PX and you could go—they had a hall where you could go and there's music and you could dance and you'd be—but I, my brother had been killed, and you know, I was down in the dumps. I never left the, I never left the barracks.
- Ellen: Where was your brother killed?
- Ray: In Milwaukee. It was an accident. And then, in about February I got my orders to go to Sedalia Army Airfield. I got another stripe and I was a Staff Sergeant; I was made a Staff Sergeant and I was going to have my own mess hall, and—
- Ellen: And, where is Sedalia?
- Ray: Missouri.
- Ellen: Missouri. And, how do you spell Sedalia?
- Ray: S-E-D-A-L-I-A, but it's longer than that, Sedalia. Well, I was really surprised and happy; then I got to Sedalia. See, when I was in Daytona Beach and I had gone to cooks and bakers school and I had gone to the sergeants school, ah, the Lieutenant, no, not Lieutenant, the Mess Sergeant broke her arm, she had gone horseback riding, and they chose me to be the Assistant Mess Sergeant. It was a job that almost killed me; it was only about three days, but that one day, I helped to make the chili and there was a kettle half this table and I with a big paddle was, ah, what was silly, I had to stand on a chair. And, I'll tell you what, my arms were so tired. And then seven hundred women came. We got orders that seven hundred

women were coming in, they were being at Daytona Beach, you know. Another group of women: seven hundred of them! Holy Mary, I had to stay and help, and help, and everybody had a job, and I thought I would pour the coffee; that was the easiest job, you know. The coffee and the chocolate and the tea. Well, after you do that for seven hundred people, I couldn't move my arms, they were so stiff and so sore. And I just didn't know what to do, but I did go to sleep finally. And the next day I got up and my arms were stiff. I couldn't go to the mess hall. But then they said, "Well, you have to have a couple of shots, so line up." Everybody lined up. One poked me here, one poked me there. I was, they didn't need—if I were in the air they didn't need those, ah, ah, what do you call 'em?

Ellen: Your arms were sticking out like wings?

Ray: Yeah.

Ellen: Yeah, okay.

Ray: And, I, well, it was, my life was very interesting. There were days that I would cry silently. I missed home, missed my parents. But the next day I got up and I was chipperer than ever and helped wherever I could. So then when I went to Sedalia and I was a Mess Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, the officer took me and he said, "You and I gotta have a little meeting." "Fine." "The reason why we're having you come here, because we're having so much trouble in this company. The girls, the cooks are fighting with each other and there's just turmoil; we just can't have anything right. Every day there's trouble. It's up to you, Sergeant, to straighten it out. You are going to be the Sergeant and we will stand behind you. You be strict and you give the orders." I said, "You promise?" He promised. So then I was introduced to the cooks. Yeah, fine, they were a frightening bunch, about ten of 'em. I said, "Now before I'm going to start here, I want a meeting with you girls. You come in, you sit down, and we're going to talk. Remember, I am the Mess Sergeant and I'm giving orders. The first one that fights, out you go; you're gonna be shipped out. I'll not stand for any fighting. If somebody is behind, you help. Everybody's gotta help one another. There's a war on." And so we got along fine. One girl, one little girl, one cook, was a fighter, just a short nothing. She was stripped of her stripe immediately because she was the ringleader of the fighters, see, so—oh, she cried, and cried. I said, "Look, one more fight and you're out of this mess hall." And she was close enough where she could go home, you know, weekends and that. "And if you get shipped out, shipped overseas, who cares, but you're gonna get along in this mess hall and that's it." And we did. Then, oh, about two months later I gave her her stripe back. She changed from night to day. She changed. They all got along. One day, "Oh, Sergeant, we can't get this fire going, oh, we

can't," and it was 5:30, quarter-to-six and, you know, they'd be coming in, so, I went out—[End of Tape One – Side A]—and chopped wood with an axe. That one cook said to me, "You'd better watch out that you don't chop your leg off." But I chopped wood and brought wood in because our stoves had coal and wood on one side and gas on this side.

Ellen: Who usually chopped the wood? [pause in taping] Rose, you were talking about chopping wood in Missouri.

Ray: Yeah, [unintelligible]. And, well, all the cooks got along beautiful then; everybody was happy. And when the holidays came I said, "Look, you girls don't have to cook." The officers, the Captain, Lieutenants, and I, we did all the cooking for Thanksgiving and for Christmas. "You girls have the time off; you enjoy it." And they did; they were very appreciative.

Ellen: And what year was that?

Ray: 1944?

Ellen: Okay.

Ray: Ah.

Ellen: Did you meet any people in the service that you kept in contact with?

Ray: I met my husband.

Ellen: Okay.

Ray: Well, it was 1944. The quartermaster was Fred Ray and he delivered all our stuff, our food, and I had to be nice to him because otherwise, you know, you'd be short of eggs or you'd be short of bread, short of butter. I was always pleasant to him. Finally one day I had such a hard day and I walked down to the officers [unintelligible], officers quarters and I had went to the counter and ordered a beer. I got a beer and I looked around, there was—all the seats were, there was no vacant seat and this one soldier pointed his finger and he said, "Sarge, come here and sit at my table." I went and I sat at his table.

Ellen: And who was that?

Ray: Fred Ray. We had popcorn and potato chips and a couple of beers and then I said, "Well," to Sergeant, "I've got to go home, 'cause 5 o'clock comes early." He said, "I'll walk you home." I was happy. And so he walked me home. He said, "Can I call for you tomorrow night?" I said,

“I’d love it,” you know. And guess what? He had a date with another girl, but I didn’t know it. So the next night I’m in the, ah, what do they call those halls where you’d visit? Well, I went to meet my date in the hall, amusement hall, whatever it was, and there was another woman in there; we were waiting for our dates, her and I. She said to me, “Who are you waiting for?” And I said, “Well, I just met him last night. His name is Fred Ray.” She said, “Fred Ray! You must have made a mistake.” I said, “Why?” She said, “Because *I’m* waiting for Fred Ray.” Well, I don’t know; maybe there’s two Fred Rays? But, anyway, we waited, and finally Fred Ray and his boyfriend came in, and that girl, I thought she was gonna to beat Fred Ray up. And I said, “Wait a minute, I’ll leave.” He put his arms around me and he said, “No; you stay here,” and she left. But was she mad. She could have killed him but, um, he dated me every single night thereafter. We would walk to the PX, get a couple of beers and potato chips or popcorn and walk back. And we did that for six months straight.

Ellen: And this was where and when?

Ray: Sedalia, Missouri.

Ellen: In 1944?

Ray: Yes. And then I got my orders to go to India. Well, I was thrilled, got ready for my overseas furlough, you know. You get your furlough; before you go home everybody gets that furlough. And Fred went with me to the station and we hugged and we kissed and I left for home. I was home—

Ellen: Was this the first time you’d been home?

Ray: Yeah.

Ellen: Okay.

Ray: And, I, I was home two days and I got a big card, *I love you, I miss you and blah, blah, blah*. I was only home two days. I was home two more days and another big beautiful—those beautiful cards! They were this big, *I love you, miss you, and*—and my cousin said to me, “Rose, if this man asks to marry you, you marry him,” ‘cause, don’t forget, I was twenty-five already. I says, “Al, I’m going overseas; I’m not marrying anybody.” She says, “Don’t pass up your luck, kid!” But anyway, I said, “Well, I don’t think, I don’t think so. I’m going to India and that’s it.” Well, my furlough was over and I went to my barracks, then I went to Sedalia Army Air Field and he met me. He hugged me and hugged me, and he said, “Don’t you ever leave me again!” [chuckles] And that’s where we decided, *he*

decided, he wasn't gonna leave me go; he was gonna kill himself and what not. But I said, "Are you proposing to me? If you are, the answer's yes." Well, anyway, he had to buy me a ring, so he took me the next day to the jewelry and we bought a diamond. And the other jeweler said, "Well, if you're gonna just buy the diamond, why don't you just buy the wedding ring, too?" So we bought the wedding ring, the diamond and everything. Then I had to call my Mom and tell her. Well, she was happy. And I said, "I'm not gonna buy a wedding dress or veil, I'm just gonna just get married in the uniform." I hadn't got the money for a veil, or dress, or wedding dress. My Mom said, "That's alright; we'll prepare a wedding for you." And so we couldn't get married—I wanted May, but we couldn't get married in May; he wouldn't wait that long. And then it was Easter and we couldn't get married in Easter. So we ended up getting married February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945, and it was only barely six weeks from the day that I got back from my overseas furlough. And then I had to—

Ellen: Where were you married?

Ray: In camp, in Sedalia. I had to go and tell this officer to cancel my trip; she was madder than a wet hen. She was so mad, so angry that I had changed my mind. I told her my parents were old and they just did not want me to go overseas, you know. And, um, that was it. So, February 2, 1945, we were married and the boys all landed on the beachhead of France and the war was declared over with and my husband was getting out on the point system and I asked to be released from the Army and I, and he, arrived in Milwaukee two days apart.

Ellen: Now, when you were married in February of 1945, you were still on active duty. Where did you live, you and your husband?

Ray: We rented a room from a lady in town. Yeah.

Ellen: And what was the name of the town?

Ray: Well, that was Sedalia Army Air Field.

Ellen: Sedalia?

Ray: It was Sedalia, I guess.

Ellen: Okay.

Ray: No, Knob Noster. Is there a Knob Noster? Well, Sedalia, Sedalia, Missouri.

- Ellen: Okay, so, you were able to get a room when you were there?
- Ray: Oh, yes. We rented from an old lady that was a widow and she was very nice. We had the use of the whole house but we were gone most of the time.
- Ellen: You were still cooks, or you were still a cook and a sergeant?
- Ray: Oh, yeah. I was still a Mess Sergeant. And so then—but at 5 o'clock he was done and I was done, and I think someone gave us a ride or we took the bus home.
- Ellen: Now, where was your husband, Fred Ray, from?
- Ray: Virginia. He was from, ah, Covington, Virginia.
- Ellen: Okay.
- Ray: Yeah.
- Ellen: And, you said you—
- Ray: And my husband was born to a woman out of marriage, you know, out of wedlock, and given away to someone. And Mother Macini was the woman that raised him; ah, she and her cousin raised Fred Ray. Yeah. He didn't never know his real mother or dad, you know, but he was born out of wedlock and given to somebody to care.
- Ellen: Was your husband in the service, in the Army, before the war broke out in—
- Ray: Oh, yes. When Mother Macini died then he enlisted, and he went to, where did he say, Panama? He went to Panama. He was in Panama for five years, I guess, um hmm.
- Ellen: So, he spent quite a bit of time in the Army?
- Ray: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And when he met me, I guess he made up his mind that he wanted to marry me, you know.
- Ellen: And how did you decide when you got—you were discharged on May 8, 1945?
- Ray: May 28, ah, May, I think it was 24; May 8<sup>th</sup> is good enough.

- Ellen: And your husband was discharged just two days later?
- Ray: Ah, we were discharged two days; I came right to Milwaukee, you know, but he had to stop in Fort Sheridan because he was from a different state. So that's why he had to stop in Fort Sheridan and he got home two days after me, or one day after me; he had to stop there.
- Ellen: Why did you and your husband decide to come back to Milwaukee, since he was from Virginia?
- Ray: Oh, well, I was gonna go home; I was going to go home, and that's one thing I said to him: "Listen, you want to marry me, mister, there's one thing. You have to go to Wisconsin; I will not move anyplace else. Wisconsin." And another thing when I went with him, I said, "Are you Catholic?" He said, "Yes. Why?" "Because I would never go with a non-Catholic. I wouldn't want to get serious with a non-Catholic, because I will never marry outside of my religion." He, himself, went to the Chaplain and asked to become a Catholic. And you know, in my mess hall, ah, the girls—ten girls could bring their boyfriend on the Sunday, only ten; otherwise, you know, there'd be too many of 'em. Because my mess hall was a clean building; there was not one cockroach in it. And—
- Ellen: Was your mess hall just for women?
- Ray: Oh, yes.
- Ellen: Okay.
- Ray: Oh, yes.
- Ellen: How did you keep it clean? What did you use to keep it clean with the bugs?
- Ray: Oh, well, I had the KPs. You had, ah, four or five KPs every day to come, you know, to sweep the floors and mop. I got A-rating all the time that I was there: A-1. The inspector said it was the cleanest mess hall down the field. Oh, yes. And we sewed the curtains, you know. When I first got there I thought, "Wow, how can I keep these people busy?" So, I got some material, bought material, and they all helped. I announced anybody that could sew to come and help. Well, I must have got twenty, thirty girls, and we cut the material for the windows and made drapes for every window. And, you know, there was about thirty windows in that mess hall.
- Ellen: Did you have machines or did you hand sew?



- Ray: No, all by hand. [unintelligible] All handmade. Some cut them and others, we all sewed, oh, yeah, and kept them busy laughing. We'd make coffee during the day and had the cook make cookies or donuts, you know, a little treat for us while we were all cooking and doing this and doing that and that's where they all were happy. It was getting them together and they were happy. Now, it was a wonderful—that's why those sergeants in there with all that writing, you know, you're wonderful, you're wonderful. It was, I got a group of people and finally they all were happy and helped each other; it was wonderful. And, you know, a lot of them cried; they were homesick. I'd put my arms around them and tell them, "Look, I'm just as homesick as you are. But we've got to make it, you know, there's a war on."
- Ellen: Did you spend time writing letters home?
- Ray: Yes. Like I say, I bought, once, a hundred stamps because it was near the holidays and it was three dollars, three dollars out of my paycheck. Well, when I got to be a staff, then I got ninety dollars, I think, sixty or ninety dollars.
- Ellen: A month or—
- Ray: Yeah, a month.
- Ellen: A month.
- Ray: I think it was ninety dollars; boy, I was rich! But I spent three dollars for stamps and I thought, "Oh, my god, half of my paycheck!" That was when I was only getting the twenty-one dollars a month and I bought the stamps. Can you imagine spending three dollars on stamps?
- Ellen: What did you do with the stamps?
- Ray: Well, I had to write to all of my cousins that I was okay; then I wrote to my brothers and then I wrote to my mom and dad and my sisters. You know; there's ten or fifteen right there, oh, yeah.
- Ellen: While you were in the service, did you have brothers that were in the service?
- Ray: Oh, sure, that's why I went in. I had two brothers and two brothers-in-law that were drafted.
- Ellen: And where were your brothers serving? Where did they get sent?

- Ray: Well, Philip was in Florida; he had enlisted way before Pearl Harbor, you know. He enlisted for—I guess they enlisted for three years at that time, and then, of course, when Pearl Harbor hit, well, that all froze, or cancelled, you know, and he stayed in; he was in seven years. James, ah, he's, James is right after me, and he enlisted—he had to wait 'til he was eighteen. So he went in January or February of '42. Ah, I can't remember. But it was about four or five months before I went in and he was in Georgia; he was stationed in Georgia. But he, too, volunteered. The others were drafted. Harvey Fardell was drafted and Leroy Schneider was drafted; they were married to my sisters and they did not want to go to war. Harvey, oh, I think he would have cut his toes off to stay home. But he was drafted. He said, "I'm flat feet." They took him anyway. Flat feet, half blind, whatever, they drafted 'em. Well, they took, really, everybody then because the war was intense.
- Ellen: Uh huh.
- Ray: Yeah, it was bad at that time.
- Ellen: While you were in the service, how did you get information? Did you have radios available? Did you have newspapers?
- Ray: Well, we did have radios, I guess, but we didn't, I didn't listen to the radio. I was too busy from five in the morning until five at night, and then you'd take a shower and you was ready to drop. We would take that walk to the concession stand for a beer or a soda water and just to get away from the constant work; that's all it was, was work from five in the morning until five at night. And I'll tell you, then you took your shower, you fixed your hair.
- Ellen: Um hum.
- Ray: It was a long day, seven days a week.
- Ellen: When you got back to Milwaukee, what did you and your husband do? Where did you live and what did you do?
- Ray: Well, when Fred and I got married and we came home, we lived with my mom and dad for a couple of weeks and then we went and lived with my sister a week or two and, ah, well, we got an upstairs unit we rented for twenty dollars a month; it was furnished. Or twenty dollars a week maybe, because we had no furniture and—
- Ellen: Where was that located?

Ray: In Milwaukee on 19<sup>th</sup> and National. And we were, Ray got a job at Allis Chalmers, and we were up there about three months. And I'll tell you, it was furnished. The mattress had a hole as big as a golf ball, as big as, ah, a football. But still we managed. So then we bought secondhand furniture, secondhand stove, and we had gotten money from the wedding and my dad gave us a couple hundred dollars, 'cause that was from our wedding, so we bought a bedroom set with that. And we had a second-hand stove and, of course, I had some sheets and pillow cases, you know, but we finally got a house. My dad bought a house for seven thousand dollars and we moved into it. Because, well, I had, was home long enough and paid board and all of that and they just felt they wanted to do that for Fred and me. So then—and they helped us—somebody sold us a secondhand davenport for twenty-five dollars, so we had a bedroom set, we had a stove, we had an icebox—an icebox, you know, where they put ice in? Do you remember those days? An icebox with—and I had the dishes and that, very few. My Mom gave us a set of silverware to set out and they were the cheapest silverware that you could find, but we started housekeeping.

Ellen: Okay.

Ray: And he worked at Allis' some days, off some days, and I went to work. I had a friend that, ah, she was the manager in a bakery, and so then I'd work two or three hours. I'd go in and I'd wash all of the cases, you know, the glass cases. It was like two hours' work but we did work, and gradually, all secondhand stuff, you know, but, um, the bedroom set was new. Yeah.

Ellen: Did you end up having children?

Ray: One daughter. Well, that's the one.

Ellen: Okay. Virginia?

Ray: Virginia. We had—oh, yeah, the first year I was pregnant. My sister was married seven years, her husband got drafted; they had no children. Ann was married five years, her husband was drafted; they had no children. But when Virginia came, I was not even mother; they were. They took charge of that girl. They thought the world, you know.

Ellen: Rose, I'm going to back to—before we started the interview you showed me some pictures in which you were in snow while you were in the Army. Where did that take place?

Ray: I thought it took place in Florida; is there any mountains, or hills? Or North Carolina? North Carolina, maybe. I can't exactly remember, but it

could have been in Alliance, too. See, I can't remember, but maybe it was in Nebraska, Alliance.

Ellen: Now, how about rifle training or weapons training?

Ray: I never took it. I never took it. They said, um, you know, we're going to—**[End of Tape One – Side Two]**—go out for rifle training and I said, "I'm out; I don't want any part of it," and I never went out for it.

Ellen: But they offered that to women?

Ray: They did offer it, and some women did go to the rifle training, oh, yes.

Ellen: And they gave you a rifle training card?

Ray: They gave me a handbook and I was going to go, but I said no thank you.

Ellen: Why is that?

Ray: Oh, I would, I would never handle a gun. No. No, my dad went hunting. He'd bring home rabbits and squirrels and who knows what else and when those animals came they were always dead, you know. No, I wanted no part of shooting.

Ellen: So you still have your rifle training card, or, booklet?

Ray: No, only the booklet I saved, just in case, you know, but, no, no. That was something that was taboo.

Ellen: When you got—[pause in tape, and interview] Rose, you've got your discharge certificate in front of you. What was your unit? It looks like—

Ray: It's eight-thirteen.

Ellen: Eight-thirteen. And when you were in the service, according to your discharge paper, how tall were you and what did you weigh?

Ray: Five-one and a hundred and twenty-three, yuh huh, sure.

Ellen: And you were a Staff Sergeant when you were discharged, is that right?

Ray: Yes, when I was discharged, I was a Staff Sergeant.

- Ellen: And it looks like you got twenty-eight dollars and eighty cents in travel pay. How did you get back out of the service? How did you get from Missouri to Milwaukee?
- Ray: By train.
- Ellen: Train, okay. And you received a Good Conduct Medal for your service?
- Ray: Oh, yes. And I got a lot of com—ah, from officers, a lot of recommendations, you know. Didn't mean—I just did my job.
- Ellen: Overall, how would you describe your experience in the Army?
- Ray: Exceptional. I accepted everything that was put before me. There was a war on, a serious war.
- Ellen: What were some of—
- Ray: You know the Japs came here and they killed how many of those boys that were thrown in the ocean, they never came up. Yeah, there was a lot of men killed, three thousand.
- Ellen: Hum.
- Ray: Um hmm. Yeah, the Japs came over here. And one of my most thrilling days, memorable days, was when I carried the flag. It was all folded and there was two officers in the front of me and two behind me with flashlights so we wouldn't step on the snakes and I cried because I was defending my country and this flag meant so much to me, and cried. By the time we got to the poles and they were to raise up the flag, the officer said to me, "It's a good thing we're in Florida, because the heat will dry it out in a minute."
- Ellen: Hmm.
- Ray: Oh, yes! That was an honor.
- Ellen: That was while you were in training? No, when did that happen?
- Ray: I was a Staff Sergeant.
- Ellen: Okay.
- Ray: And, ah, that was very, very, exciting. Yeah, my flag. You know, the Japs, they wanted to take our country.

- Ellen: Was that a flag that was presented to you?
- Ray: No, it was a folded flag. I was carrying it and when we got to the flag pole then the officer took it and put it on the, you know, raised it up to fly. Oh, yeah.
- Ellen: And that's your most memorable day?
- Ray: Most memorable, most memorable day in the service.
- Ellen: Is there anything else you'd like to add or say?
- Ray: No.
- Ellen: Well, then.
- Ray: That was, because that's what I went in for, to help my country. Really. And they needed the women, they needed them very bad at that time. Yeah, they needed them. You know, if I were not married I would have went to school after I got out, if I were not married, and probably studied nursing or something like that, you know.
- Ellen: And you said earlier, you were the second group of women that were put into the Army?
- Ray: The second. The first bunch, they called—they didn't know how many women were going to come, you know, they didn't know. And where were they going to train all of these women? So that's when they went to Iowa, they took the horses out of the barns and whitewashed them and put bunks in and that's where the first batch of women trained; um hmm, in Iowa, in the cold and snow and what not. Oh, yeah.
- Ellen: But you were sent to Florida?
- Ray: But I was—and then, you know, those women did so well; they relieved so many boys to go on the front lines, so they asked for more women. And that's when I joined, the second batch of women. I don't know how many there were when I got to Florida, 'cause they gathered a few here, there, and, you know, at the different towns that we went, um hmm.
- Ellen: Well, I appreciate your giving this oral history to the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Thanks for taking the time to talk with me today.

**[End of Interview]**