

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
MARJORIE J. STEWART

WAC, World War II

2002

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Stewart, Marjorie J., (1921-), Oral History Interview, 2002

User copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono

ABSTRACT

Marjorie Stewart, a Burnett, Wis. native, discusses her World War II service with the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women's Army Corps in the post reproduction center at Freeman Field (Indiana). Stewart talks about her decision to enlist, parental disapproval, basic training at Fort Oglethorpe (Georgia), and initial disappointment about her assignment to Indiana. She comments on the public opinion of women in the WAAC and her feelings about it, decision to reenlist in the Women's Army Corps, and her duties in the reproduction office. Stewart details military life including dating on base, drinking and smoking, participation on the Army baseball team, meeting her husband, and being married at Freeman Field. She relates information on race relations at her base including a demonstration by a black detachment in the post movie theater. She mentions her pregnancy and decision not to disclose this in order to remain in the WACs, her role closing the base at Freeman Field, and her trip with a young baby on a troop train to Keesler Field (Mississippi). Stewart touches upon her use of veterans' preference to find employment, and the GI Bill to further her education, membership in the American Legion, and keeping contact with friends from the WACs.

Biographical Sketch

Stewart (b. April 21, 1921) served with the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps and the Women's Army Corps during World War II. She married Mondell Stewart, a man serving in the Army, and eventually settled in Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer John K. Driscoll, 2002.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, 2002.

Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

- John: Okay, this is October 29, 2002. This is John Driscoll. I am a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. And we are doing an oral history today with Marjorie Steward, at her home on High Point Road, in Madison. Good morning, Marjorie, and thanks for agreeing to the interview. Could we start with your early life, where and when you were born, and some of that before your military time?
- Stewart: Okay, I was born in Burnett, Wisconsin, on April 21, 1921. The oldest of four children. My dad worked for the Milwaukee Road, as a laborer. And, of course, in those days, my mother was a housewife, right? I grew up in a loving family. We never owned a house. In those days it wasn't that important that you become a homeowner, right? And then, of course, that was in the days of the Depression, so we didn't have a lot of money, but we had a lot of love and relatives, and family, and I guess in a small town like Burnett, we were in the middle of an agricultural community. We didn't realize there was even a Depression. I mean, there were no newspapers. We didn't get a newspaper, we didn't have a telephone. We didn't get a monthly periodical, a magazine. We didn't, the focus, our social life centered around the school and the church. And we had, you know, Burnett was a little community of less than a thousand people.
- John: Where is Burnett?
- Stewart: It's between Horicon and Waupun. And probably northeast of Beaver Dam. In that area. Right, it also sits on the edge of the Horicon Marsh.
- John: Okay. Beautiful country.
- Stewart: So I had grandparents who were farmers at Atwater, which is between Burnett and Waupun, and I had grandparents who were my mother's parents in Waupun. My dad's parents were Dutch and German, and represented the good old *gem_tlichkeit*, and I spent a lot of early years up on the farm with my grandparents, and a couple of aunts and uncles. You know, at that time, we were not married and I have really pleasant memories of that. My grandparents in Waupun were more staid and stoic, and a little wealthier, and, of course, they had put my mother through school, and she had a teacher's degree, and she was a teacher until she married my dad. And, in those days, you couldn't teach after you were married. Rarely could you even work after you were married. I have all this in story form, comparing the differences between my two sets of grandparents. I guess I have always preferred my dad's parents, because they represented the good old card-playing, beer-drinking, fun-loving, and they were just fun to be with. They all lived, well, I never knew my real grandmother. I had a step-grandmother,

from my mother, she lost her own mother when she was nine years old, and this kind of made that relationship a little different than, but anyway, when I was in the eighth grade, we moved to Horicon, and known for its Horicon Marsh, and the geese. I finished high school there, and when I graduated in the midst of the Depression, in 1938, I had four jobs. I worked in the morning getting lunch for a couple who owned the grocery store. And they just wanted a hot lunch at noon. And as soon as the lunch, and they came in and sat down, I was through, because I didn't have to do any of the clean up. I also cleaned twice a week for teachers that my parents knew, she was a teacher. I don't know how she could teach and be married, but she did. And they hired me to clean twice a week, vacuum and dust, and, you know, wipe the floors. And then I worked in the city hall for the city clerk. Molly Bernges. And I did his typing, and he was the city clerk. And I did the water bills, and the tax bills, and if the mayor came in and wanted a letter, which was one of my most embarrassing life's moments. I had taken shorthand in high school, and the mayor came in. He was young, unmarried, and asked me if I would take the letter. I took it in shorthand. When he left, I couldn't read it. I was so embarrassed. But I was young and impressionable. I said I had four jobs. It must have been three.

However, while I was maintaining these three jobs, there was an opening in our newspaper office. And the head of the Horicon Reporter called out school superintendent, and asked if he could recommend anyone. And he said, "Yes, I have someone in mind." And he suggested, because he knew I was interested in writing, and I had hoped to go to school, and go for journalism, but that didn't turn out. And in those days. So I was interviewed, and I got the job, and I ended up working in the Horicon Reporter. For the reporters, and they were real task masters, I mean, for the Rhodes. So there were four, two employes and another gal, and I, but she soon left, and moved to Waukesha. And that left me. But I ended up running the presses, and setting the type for ads, designing the ads for the papers, you know, where you would throw the type in by hand, learning how all the places the type fell, and learning about white-spaces, and then I ended up running the Linotype. Which is the machine that drops the metal, you type and the type is made on metal slugs, and it drops these slugs into trays that they use to print the paper. And I was the only Linotypist, the only printer. And I know they really liked me. But they were hard to get to know. I mean, anyway, then of course, along came World War II, right? And you kept seeing all your friends going into service.

John: Let me interrupt, Marjorie. Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Stewart: Yes. I was, Pearl Harbor Day, I even wrote a story on this, "Where Were You?" Pearl Harbor Day, I was in church, practicing for the Christmas program with my first grade Sunday School class. And I know somebody came into the church, and

told us that they had bombed Pearl Harbor, so that broke up our rehearsal. And we went home, and I know my dad was listening to the Chicago Bears football game, and I came in, and to this day I don't know why they didn't interrupt that with a bulletin. But I know I broke the news to my parents, and this was really distressing, you know? I lost a classmate in Pear Harbor. Tommy Filipski. He had been our prom king. And we had four boys from the Horicon area at Pearl Harbor, but Tom was killed. One of them was just interviewed last year. I have his interview, because I have been going to some of the class reunions, and Jimmy Mahail, who was there, was at the class reunion, and then the Horicon Reporter eventually went out, like some of the small town papers do. And the Citizen took up the news from the Horicon area, and the surrounding communities. And he was interviewed, and he told a real interesting story about being in Pearl Harbor at the time. And he also was a classmate of mine.

I worked in the Reporter for a while but things became harder and harder. I guess I had hoped to go to college, but in those days college wasn't as easily accessible as it is today. My parents did make arrangements for me to go to a teacher's college and stay with a relative, but a real unfortunate set of circumstances entered there, and I never got to do that, although I never wanted really to be a teacher. I was quite active in the church, in Sunday school, and in choir, and I also belonged to the Horicon bowling team. However, they bowled on Wednesday nights, our paper came out on Thursday nights, and the Horicon Reporter, because he was short, you know, there were so few employees. They had their son, Mr. and Mrs. Rhode, and me, were the responsible for getting out this paper. And we also handled the State Cancer Bulletin. You know, and getting that out, periodically. And we had a lot of wedding announcements, and, you know, all of this type. And those were all my bailiwick. I still, that old press that you fed by hand, right? And you couldn't get too much ink, you had to keep it, you know, just at. It wasn't automatic, and every so often you had to feed the ink in there. But, anyway, the Wednesday night Linotype started, they wanted me to work Wednesday nights, and I wanted to bowl. I was young. I was also missing all the friends that, you know.

And I finally mentioned to my folks that, maybe I would like to enlist in the service. Well, my parents were not in favor of this at all. What was I going to get into, right? So, I thought about it, and I wrote for the material. I ended up giving notice to the Reporter, because if I hadn't been able to get into the Army, I was going to live with an aunt in Waukegan. And work down there. An aunt that I had been close to on the farm in my earlier days. You know, these family. And the Reporter said, I gave them, I think, six weeks notice. Well, they dawdled and dawdled, and they told me they couldn't find anyone to replace me. So, I said, okay, I would stay on. I felt a loyalty. You did, in those days. Right? But the wanderlust, or the desire to leave was getting too great, and I finally, no, then I

heard that different people were being interviewed, but they wouldn't accept any of them. So this kind of rankled me.

John: Was this for the Army?

Stewart: No, in the Reporter. As a replacement, and I found out that they were turning them away. So, I went back to the Rhodes, and I said, I had heard this and I was giving them two weeks notice. So, at that time, Mr. Rhode was really upset, and he said, "You know, if you leave, you will never be able to get back here again." Which, I learned later, was against all the veterans' policies, right? So, I took my physical, and I passed.

John: Where did you take your physical?

Stewart: In Milwaukee. My dad worked for the railroad, so I was able to travel, you know, by train.

John: So did mine. We had a pass.

Stewart: Right, a family pass. One of the benefits. Then I started, I still have all of the papers which I was going to donate, telling me when to report, and all, and what to bring with us. The dates to report. Now, I am a little fuzzy. I know my dad, my mother and dad, my dad never got vacations in those days. So any time he took off was without pay, and I know my mother and dad took me down to Chicago. And put me on the train to Georgia, because I had my basic training in Fort Oglethorpe.

John: Oglethorpe, in Georgia?

Stewart: In Georgia, right near Chattanooga. It was in February, I don't know whether it was the 23rd, because I entered, enlisted, on the 24th. So I don't know whether I took my oath in Milwaukee, and had to report like a week later, or whatever. I am just kind of fuzzy. I'm not that young, anymore. Anyway, I still can, to this day, can turn around and wave goodbye to my mother and dad. You know, as a babe, never been out of state, I don't believe. And, what was I really getting into? However, I remember basic training. It's weird, the things you remember, the thing I remember most was all the marching and drilling, and then I was, being short, I was always in the rear, and when they said, to the rear, march, I always had to lead. And I kind of dreaded that. I worried about mis-stepping. You know, we grew up with the good old work policy. Do the best you can. I must have done a good job, because I was selected for Army training in Denton, Texas.

John: Now, when you were at Oglethorpe, who trained you? Women's Army Corps members, or soldiers? Who were your instructors?

- Stewart: You know, I don't even remember there. I don't remember much at all, except I thought the barracks were rather dark, crowded. And I know we had an incident with a window, where a gal got her hand or arm caught between, trying to open a window. And this is about all, and I remember another thing. We were taken on a field trip to Rock City, you know, the rock gardens, near Chattanooga. And going on that inclined railway. And how beautiful. I have postcards which I also was going to donate. If you want to stop for a minute, this can tell you. [Looking at photographs.] I think it was led by women. I wrote on the back. Remember, all this was new, you know what I mean? To someone from a small town.
- John: The service club. Oh, here is a review, with, those must be, did you call it the WAC, or the Women's Army Corps? What did you call it?
- Stewart: Maybe I should put that on tape.
- John: Oh, and physical training. And the old wooden barracks. Yes. Okay. Gas masks. I remember those. I always took mine off too soon, and ended up crying, crying. I didn't realize how much you could cry. Oh, yea. Oh, that is something. If you would like to donate any of that, let me have Gayle Martinson, the archivist, get in touch with you.
- Stewart: I also have some uniforms, I think.
- John: Oh, they would love to have those.
- Stewart: And pictures, postcards, and I have got letters from my husband. If you want to turn the tape back on.
- John: I'll have Gayle Martinson, she is the professional archivist at the museum, about donating anything. I'd rather she did that. I am sure she will want to give you a receipt. I know they would love to have anything. Anything like that is so precious and rare. Well, how long were you in Oglethorpe, then?
- Stewart: Through our basic training, which was four or six weeks. You don't have the tape on, do you?
- John: Yea, I just turned it on.
- Stewart: Four or six weeks. And, by the way, you asked me. I enlisted in the WAAC. I know that because later we were given the chance, well, I'll get into this. At the end of basic training, I was picked, along with the other girls, to go to the special Army school, Army Administration, in Denton, Texas. We were not in barracks there. We lived right in a women's college. There I definitely remember all our

instructions were, all our instructors were men. Because in one of my books, I have all their pictures. I don't have their names, but I know I have their pictures. It was very, very extensive training. Another book I want to donate, and it must be about two and a half or three inches thick, of all the things we learned in this six weeks. We also had drills, and physical training, and there were dances with some of the other army posts. You know, Texas was quite a military. I enjoyed my training there and I know I was told that, I know I got good marks. Among the top. Also, there, I should back up a bit.

When we were in basic, we were given aptitude tests. Again, we were given aptitude tests, and we were given, we were interviewed about where we would like to go. And, of course, my choices were easy. My first choice was California. My second choice was California. My third choice was California. To me, you know, California, represented the Mecca. However, when we got our orders, I was sent to Indiana. To an Army Air Force base at Freeman Field, Seymour, Indiana. It was a small field where we trained the army cadets, Air Force cadets, for their last six weeks of training, and then they were given their wings. We were the first female detachment, so, of course, we moved into new barracks at the edge of the field. And I was really disappointed, and I know I asked why I was sent to Indiana, so close to home, when I wanted California, and I was told that, because my scores were so high, in Texas, that they wanted a good staff at Freeman Field.

John: Darn!

Stewart: Right. This didn't turn out to be all bad, however. It was a small base which, after a few weeks, became almost like my home town. It was less than two thousand on the post. I was assigned to the post reproduction, naturally, because my MOS was 26, Printing.

John: You still had ink under your fingernails.

Stewart: And so I was assigned to the post reproduction. It was not at the post headquarters. It was at the opposite end of the field, way down by the line. Way with the mechanics, and I know we were right next door to the Link Trainers. Because I became good friends with one of the fellows in the Link Trainer, who had, he was going to apply for a patent for a gyroscope. I think it was called a gyroscope. So that they could have these planes, and know, it would. And I typed the papers for him to apply for this. I did this on my own. I worked for Lieutenant Wammeldorf. Harry Wammeldorf. Who was over both the photography office and reproduction. I started out doing stencils, multi-graphs, where they burned. However, they had men in there to run the machines, so I wasn't, except I did all the typing and the office work. And later I became more like a secretary to Lieutenant Wammeldorf. He was good friends with the army chaplain.

John: Go ahead. We are getting close to the end. I'll switch the tape in a minute.

Stewart: So, I also did work on my own typing the church bulletins for the army chaplain. And he became a good, good friend. Well, it was during this time at Freeman Field that the Congress passed the WAC, where you could, making it the Womens Army Corps, instead of the Womens Army Auxiliary Corps. So we were automatically, oh, I don't know how long this was. Maybe we were at the field six, eight months. I have the dates somewhere, but I don't have them in my head. And we were automatically out. We could go home. I know we could go home. We were through. Unless we re-enlisted in the WAC. We just weren't automatically turned over. We had to reenlist.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

I know this to be true, because I sat in the chaplain's office with the chaplain, I think his name was Henderson. And I could confide in him. And I said, "You know, I have mixed emotions about re-enlisting." I said, "What bothers me most about the WAAC is the national reputation that it has for women being so morally loose." I am sure you heard this. And I said, "You know, all my friends are good friends," and I said, "I can't say this to them, but I would hate to have this taint my reputation that I was in an army where we were known as morally..." And he said, "Marge, let me give you some good advice." He said, "Wherever you go, people who know you will know what you are, and," he said, "people who don't, you'll never change what they think, anyway."

John: That was great advice. Yes.

Stewart: And so I re-enlisted.

John: Marge, do you know, did many women decide not to reenlist?

Stewart: I don't believe there were many. I think the majority re-enlisted. But I was really bothered by this, because I grew up with good morals. Believing, you know, I didn't date a lot at the field. I had friends, and my closest friend was Florence Hendricks. And, of course, to this day we slept alphabetically in the barracks.

John: I never heard that.

Stewart: So, I was with the J's and the H's, and the... Later, when I moved to Milwaukee, I did meet some girls that were in Seymour with me, but I wasn't close to them when we were there, right?

John: Their names were further down the alphabet?

Stewart: W, right. S and W. They were even in a different building. Our barracks were comfortable, nice. We had a good commander, a good leader.

John: Now, again, were most of your officers and that, women?

Stewart: Yes. In Texas, they were men. That I definitely remember. But in Freeman, we had our own WAC detachment. We had our own WAC day room, our own WAC cook, mess. And we all had to serve, every two weeks in the kitchen. Kitchen police, KP's. Or else CP, where you were, you know, patrolled the barracks. We had to be in bed by eleven every night. Most of the time I got KP. I didn't get the CP. I did get a gig. We were gigged, you know. I did get a gig because Lieutenant Riley came through one day. She was our head. And I was quite a pack-rat. I saved all my letters from home. And she opened, and found all these letters. And, of course, I got a gig, right? We had our own beauty shop. And we were in kind of our own area in the field. It was also an interesting area because later it was the first area where they had helicopters in the country. Freeman Field, and, you know, the helicopters, golly, in those days they were noisy, and they were right in back of the women's barracks. But we were told we were some of the first ones in the country to have them. I enjoyed my job in reproduction. Walked back and forth every day, because it was way down next to the line. I guess the line is what you call it, next to the mechanics.

My parents were able to come down and visit me. I have pictures of their visit, and they were given quite a tour of the field. Somewhere along the first fall that I was there, Florence and I were good friends. She was from a little town in Wisconsin, up near the Mississippi. She met a fellow on the line, a mechanic, named Morris Knight. And she introduced me, they introduced me to a fellow by the name of Bill Yuminsky, from Boston. So I started seeing Bill. We weren't allowed to have men in the barracks. We either met them out on the street in front of the barracks, or they could come and meet us in the day room. There were always plenty of people in the day room. You know, you never had any privacy. I was going with Bill quite steady even when my parents came down. And we were planning our first Christmas, our first New Year's Eve dance. By this time, I had stripes, so I could go to the NCO club. We were planning our first New Year's Eve party at the NCO club. At the last minute, Bill hopped a ride to Boston. He got a chance to go home. Of course, this left me devastated, without a date, on New Year's Eve. And so Florence and Morris said, "Come along with us, anyway." And I said, "No, I don't want to go." Well, they talked me into going. And I was one of the few, few WACS on the post that never smoked or drank. And it was well known around the post that I didn't smoke or drink. And we went, I went along to the NCO club. Well, because I was without a date, and had a lot of friends. I had a high profile job because I worked down in reproduction, where

people were in and out, and knew the Link trainers. The field hospital was way on the other end. We were on like the northeast corner. The field hospital was the southeast corner. I worked out on the southwest corner. And the towers and everything were on the northwest. Well, I started saying hi to different people at different tables, and they all offered me a sip of this and a sip of that. And the next thing, this is in my story, you should read this. The next thing, I started getting sick. So I hiked to the ladies room, and I was really sick. And I came out and one of the girls who knew a medic was sitting at one of the tables, and she said, "Marge, you look pretty sick. Why don't you join us?" So I sat down and it was about eleven o'clock. Suddenly, I was aware of somebody sitting next to me. And he said, "Hey, I just got here. How about a drink?" And he poured a drink. And I got up, left the table, and went back to the ladies room. I just took one smell, and when I came back, I put my head on the table, and I must have passed out. And when I came to, I don't know if it was a minute, or a couple minutes, I heard him say, "What she needs is some fresh air. I'm going to take her outside." So, here, he helped me get a coat. He helped me, you know, we went out and we walked in the Indiana New Year's Eve. And this is how I met my husband.

John: Oh, what a story.

Stewart: And then we started going together. He called me the next, he took me home, he walked me until I felt a little more comfortable. He took me and dropped me off at the barracks, and the next day he called to see how I was. And he was the sergeant in charge of the dispensary, at the station hospital. Then he called me the next day at work and invited me to a movie. That's how we courted. We went to movies all the time. You know, it was all the latest movies. Well, somewhere in July or so, Florence and Morris decided to get married, and they asked my husband and I to stand up. And then my husband and I, he started talking about it. But we both had kind of reservations, and I said, "You know." We used to go after the movies and sit in the NCO club and talk every night. He would have his beer. I would have my coffee, and a bacon, lettuce, and tomato. And I said, "Why don't we write and ask our parents what they think?" So we both wrote home and I grew up a good Lutheran. He grew up in a Mormon family. My parents said, "You know, we have always trusted you. We respect your decision. Whatever you decide to do. We have always trusted." You know, they wrote this. His mother did not write. We promised to let each other read the letters. His mother said, "You know, I am really disappointed. I expected you to come home and marry a good Mormon girl." But we married anyway. At the army chaplain.

John: Yes, you have the picture there. Where was he from?

Stewart: He was from Fairview, Utah, which is about a hundred miles south of Salt Lake, about fifty miles south of Provost. Almost near Mount Pleasant. His hometown is

less than a thousand. We had the biggest post wedding, the chapel, we were married in the chapel there. We had the biggest wedding they had ever had on the post. He had a high profile job, and so did I. Where we each met our own, you know. And we went to Cincinnati for our honeymoon. And spent every day watching the Reds, Cincinnati Reds and the St. Louis Cardinals play. They won the pennant that year. We were both baseball fans. A lot of amusing things happened, like when we decided to get married, you have the same rigamarole of getting blood tests, and all of this, you know, in those days. Working in the hospital, we took our blood tests there. However, they switched my husband's blood.

John: Oh, wow.

Stewart: Purposely. They had a lot of, in those days the blacks and the whites were separated. We didn't have any black females. No black WACS in our. But they had a black detachment at the south end of the field, and this is one of the things my husband had to give a lot of the shots for gonorrhea and syphilis, and those things. So the technicians in the lab switched my husband's blood, and when he tested, it came out positive.

John: Funny!

Stewart: And he tested again. And again. And he couldn't believe this. Because we weren't even intimate, you know. He could not believe. And he thought maybe he caught a needle.

John: Sure. That would be frightening.

Stewart: And after he spent an agonizing few hours, then they admitted they had switched somebody's blood.

John: Did he shoot any of them? He should have.

Stewart: However, they ended up giving us a card, and they paid for the license.

John: You mentioned, were there any black WACs?

Stewart: I'm not sure. I don't even remember any. You know, growing up in a small town, in Horicon, or Burnett and Horicon, I can remember the first black I saw, in a butcher shop. You know, a man came in one time, and we all stood in awe. You know. He was different. I don't remember even any in basic training. However, this isn't to say there were not. I don't, and I have my Denton army text, my book, we had a year book in Texas, with all the pictures, just like a class book. And I

don't remember any in there, because I went through there a couple weeks ago.

John: While you were there, were you getting news of the war? What was happening with the war? Were you able to keep up with it?

Stewart: Probably through the newsreels. You know, remember, in those days, because we went to every change of movies. That is what you did. And they had the newsreels then, telling us. But really not any of the, like we would get today. Like CNN, it is continual coverage, right? And I can't remember that we did.

John: I remember the newsreels. Of course, I was about ten years younger. But I remember. Yea. Okay. A lot of paperwork in that, to get married, though? I've talked to other people who complained about all the approvals.

Stewart: Not really. We were on a smaller base. I think they had to contact Colonel Runquist, you know, but both my husband and I had good reputations, and it isn't as if he was marrying an outsider. I mean, like one of the Seymour groupies, or whatever. In fact, we rarely went into Seymour. There were a couple of amusing things when I was in the WACs, I was on the Army baseball team, and I was not known as a fielder. But some of the articles called me the "Slugger." I was known for my hitting. They kept me on the team because of my hitting. We traveled around the area, around the state. You know. However, one day I was in the field, had my glove on, a ball came my way. Caught it on the end of my finger, on the un-gloved hand, and split my finger through here. You know, this. Took me over to the dispensary and who should be sewing up my hand but my husband. At that time, we were going together. He put in like four, five or six stitches, and he said, "You know, maybe it's best if you don't play ball any more." But incapacitated me for quite a time and for years, I had, you could see the scar here.

John: You know, I just, I was baking the other day. I was baking my great-grandmother's recipe of wine and nut loaves for the holidays and I cut my, I was washing the mixing bowl. Dropped it, and I cut myself here. And I went down and they glued me back together. They didn't use stitches. He said, "Well, you better put something on there." And I figured, oh, he is going to stitch it. He said, "No." He said it was Super Glue. I don't know. But he glued it. So, your husband-to-be was sewing you back together. That's great.

Stewart: We had the first Christmas that I was at Freeman, I didn't even know my husband then. I didn't even know Mondell then. First Christmas we were at Freeman Field, I did not get a furlough. I was not fortunate enough to get a furlough. I could go into some of the reasons why. They had nothing to do with me personally. Anyway, I wasn't able to go home for Christmas. So we had a nice Christmas dinner there, the turkey and all the trimmings. However, in the afternoon, we were

all relaxing in the barracks, and we got a call that our services were all needed wherever we wanted to volunteer. One of the mess halls had an outbreak of, what do you call the stomach.

John: Food poisoning?

Stewart: Food poisoning. By eating tainted turkey and dressing. You know what it was called. Ptomaine poisoning. They had an outbreak of ptomaine. So the girls volunteered at the hospital, because they were admitting one patient after the other, and I volunteered at the hospital office. I don't think I could ever be a nurse. And so I did help with all the posting of the records. But that was interesting. We spent our Christmas helping out with this outbreak of ptomaine.

John: You know, with all the people they were feeding all through the war, it is a wonder that there wasn't more of that. That's great.

Stewart: And another interesting thing, that I found interesting, once every six weeks, the reproduction section had to work around the clock, from eight in the morning to eight the next morning. Twenty-four hours straight. This was down in the line, away from our barracks, and the reproduction section was mainly men. We did hire a little clerk later. But we had to get out, we had to be there and run the special orders that they brought down from headquarters, assigning all the cadets their new headquarters, because they now had their wings. So once every six weeks, because every six weeks they graduated a class. Or however they rotated their classes. Maybe it was once a month. But I know at twelve o'clock they would take us over to a men's mess hall, the whole group of us, and feed us, so we got fed. Bring us back. And we had to work around the clock getting these special orders out. And at four or five o'clock in the morning, there would be knocks on our door, where these cadets would want their orders slipped to them. You know, they were curious where they were assigned, or going. Overseas. And we were pretty careful not to violate this. I didn't want to end up with a court-martial.

John: You mentioned not being able to get off. Furlough, leave, just getting out for a weekend, or an evening. Were you able to do that? Or were you pretty much...?

Stewart: We could get passes.

John: But you couldn't, for instance, get a week back home?

Stewart: I did, in February. I went back home after I met Mondell because my dad was reading in the paper, I was home at the time they lost that training flight, at Freeman Field, due to a foggy, rainy night. And six different young pilots were

killed. And my husband, you know, Mondell, had to go out and help pick some of these up. And this was hard. In fact, they were telling me, the girls were telling me that I missed a sad, sad funeral. It was a real foggy, dreary day and one of these pilots did not have a home to go to. So they had the funeral on the field and it was, the girls said, it was one of the saddest things. And we had, in the mornings, the Reveille, and at night, or am I mixing it up?

John: No, Reveille in the morning, Taps at night.

Stewart: And we always had to stay dressed for Retreat, and be out on the parade ground. Then we could go to the mess hall, our WAC mess hall. And we could go either to the day room or to our barracks. But after I started going with Mondell, we usually went to the new, you know, they had the newest movies on the post. We saw every one. Those were the days with Betty Davis, Joan Crawford.

John: And you could remember who the stars were.

Stewart: Barbara Stanwyck.

John: How, in general, was the food?

Stewart: I had no complaints. I didn't think it was that bad, at all. Another interesting situation that my husband and I were caught in was we went to the theater one night. The little post theater. And those were the days when they still segregated the blacks from the whites. And our field was kind of winding down. There were rumors that our field was closing. We got to the theater and, all of a sudden, during the movie, there was a big uproar. And the blacks decided they were going to sit wherever they wanted to. And this was one of the first demonstrations. I know, I was very frightened, because they decided they were just going to, this black detachment, they were going to exert some of their pressures. And we didn't know what we would be caught in, too. You know, we were in our usual, you kind of always knew where you would like to sit. And, it did end up without much incidence. They did quell that uprising. And we were pretty much separated from the blacks. I don't know whether they had their own, I really never was into their area. I never saw the cadet area. And, of course, I would never, we would never be allowed in the BOQ, the bachelor, the officers, you know.

John: Yea, I think the armed forces were still segregated until right before the Korean War, wasn't it? I think Truman was the one who integrated them. While I was in, it was fully integrated. I guess, back then, it was still segregated, yea.

Stewart: Around Christmas time, well, this is kind of interesting, but we were married in September, September 2nd.

John: Of 19...?

Stewart: 1944. We were able to live off the post. At first, we obtained a room in Seymour. And I wrote an interesting story about that. We got a pass. They had a bus into Seymour. I don't know how far we were out from Seymour. We weren't right in the city of Seymour. Found a nice, charming little house, where she rented an upstairs bedroom. Because we could still eat on the post. And we still had to perform our duty assignments, like CQ, kitchen police, KP. My husband, every three days, had to be on duty at night. And about a week in this room, I started developing a bad rash. And I went to the station hospital, and the doctor took one look at me, and he said. I thought, I am allergic to my husband. You know. He took one look at me and he says, "You know, I don't know where you are sleeping, but that is bed bugs."

John: Oh, man.

Stewart: So we got out of the room immediately. Went back. We both lived in our barracks. And I was so afraid I was carrying them back with me.

[End of Side B of Tape 1.]

After that, we did obtain off-post housing. And we could almost, it was right outside the gate. So we lived with a lot of civilian wives, a lot. And we still had our duties, you know, KP. However, around Christmas time, I discovered that I might be pregnant. But I did not want to leave the army. We went to, maybe I'm not real proud of this, but we went to one of Mondell's majors, Major Root. And he gave me a physical. Determined that I was pregnant. But he also did not state this. And he stated that I had back problems, and probably should be relieved of KP for a while. However, as fate would have it. I was going to continue for a couple months. As fate would have it, they decided to close Freeman Field. Well, I didn't want to be transferred to another base, so I admitted I was pregnant. Not that this was a big, it wasn't a big falsehood. It was, you know. I just didn't want to be dismissed immediately and have to go home. I wanted to stay as long as I could. I had a job I liked. I really enjoyed what I was doing. However, they decided to close the field, and they were going to close it like early February, February 15th. Yea. So they asked, even though I was pregnant, if I would stay on and help close the field. So I ended up helping type all the special orders, and transferring everybody out. And when they closed the WAC barracks, I lived with Major Root and his wife, in their house off the post.

John: Oh, that was nice.

- Stewart: I mean, so we knew, we had good reputations. It wasn't, because they didn't do this for everyone. And this is one of the values, I think, of protecting your morals, your...
- John: Absolutely. You're right. When they closed the base, then, did you eventually come back to Wisconsin?
- Stewart: I went home. My husband was transferred to Montgomery, Alabama. And then he was transferred to Lincoln, or maybe Lincoln was, then he was transferred to Blyville, Arkansas. And I went down to stay with him for a while. Still pregnant. And then he was transferred to Biloxi, Mississippi. And that is where he was discharged, eventually. And at one, I should back up. He had polio when he was six years old. So he had an arm that he couldn't raise up to change a light bulb, but he signed a waiver to get into service. I don't know if they do that today, but he signed a waiver.
- John: I have never heard of that. That is interesting.
- Stewart: And they took him in, then, on limited, you know, he could never claim a disability for that. Because of that, he didn't get, he was always disappointed he didn't get a chance to go overseas. As far as I am concerned, we were interviewed about being, we could have had a chance to go overseas, and I chose not to. I felt that all the stresses, this is even before I met my husband, I felt with all the stresses of being a woman, and you had different needs. And I didn't need that. I was adjusting to just being away from home, in the States. And I enjoyed what I was doing. Meeting friends. I didn't do anything that real important, but I guess I did contribute.
- John: Oh, you were there. That is the important thing. Just being there. You know, sixteen million people, all doing their thing. Then, did you and your husband settle back here?
- Stewart: After the service, I went down and I lived with him at Keesler Field, for a while.
- John: Which is near?
- Stewart: Biloxi. Which is really a nice, in fact, our, I went down there when our daughter was six weeks old. My dad arranged, this is another interesting story. I have all this down in stories of my life. My dad arranged for me to travel by train. You know, you didn't fly in those days. And I was traveling from Milwaukee to Chicago on the Milwaukee Road, and then catching a train down to Biloxi. When I got to Chicago, they didn't have a reservation for me even though it had been confirmed. So they put me on a troop train. This was the biggest shock of my life,

because I was on a car, a troop train, a Pullman, the only woman with a six week old baby in a car with young soldiers and sailors. I was frightened to death. Because I thought, if Marsha should cry in the night. But my dad had told me, he said, "You know, Marge, one of the things, when you get on the train, give the porter a real good tip." So I did that. So he was always there with the heated bottle, and, you know. These were the days before the disposables. But these fellows loved Marsha. They each, all, wanted to hold her. When it was time for me to eat, they kept her.

John: You had a train full of baby sitters.

Stewart: I never met such wonderful, you know. But I think of all those people, people, I thought back to what this chaplain said. "You know, people who meet you will know what you are."

John: Yea, I remember riding as a kid, we lived in Marion, Ohio, and the family was in Sharon, Pennsylvania, and we would ride on the Erie. And these weren't troop trains, but they were full of soldiers. And I remember a lot of times sitting on a suitcase in the aisle, because there just weren't any seats. And even the platforms at the end of the cars were jammed with guys, probably out there catching a cigarette, or something. Yea, that must have been something.

Stewart: Well, this must have been one of the times when I was thankful Marsha wasn't a colicky baby. Oh, my surprise when this was a troop train.

John: Well, then, afterwards, did you come back to Wisconsin?

Stewart: After he was discharged from Biloxi, Keesler, we drove to Wisconsin. He had picked up a second-hand car there, one without even a heater. Cause we had to stop in some place in Kentucky and have a heater installed. You know. Frigid. And we just lived in Wisconsin that summer. But, eventually, we decided, he had been in med school, he was going to be a doctor. And he had his pre-med in. And so that fall, we headed back to Utah, and he was going to go back to school in Logan, Utah. However, another big shock. You couldn't get into the school, after the war, because, you know, the shortages, paper, pencils, you name it. And you couldn't even get near a college. So, he was able to line up a job helping some doctor in Logan. We lived there for a time. And he got an offer of a better job up in Soda Springs, Idaho, working for the Cariboo County Hospital, so we went up there, and he was a lab technician. And kind of a jack of all trades, in those days. You know, you helped out where you were needed. And we lived there until Marsha was almost two years old. That was an interesting town. I could write a book about that town. And we met a lot of friends there, however, I started having problems. And one of the interesting situations there, he worked for a Doctor

Johnson, who had been head of the Utah Medical School, the University of Utah Medical School. He was retired, and he only came back to work in the hospital because of the shortage of doctors. He had a small practice in Moscow, Idaho. One day he told Mondell, "Would you have your wife and daughter, and you, come and talk to me in the hospital?" So, we went in to talk to him, and he said, "I have an offer for you." He said, "Mondell, I will put you through medical school, pay all your expenses for your wife and your daughter, and you, if, when you get through, you will come back and take over my practice in Moscow."

John: Wow.

Stewart: So we went home, and talked it over. He said, "You don't have to give me a decision now. Think about it." And we were both of the old school, if you made a promise, even verbal, you kept it, right? We drove out to Moscow and looked at the town. Well, it didn't even have paved seats. And it was just one of these, the part of Idaho we were in was a lot of retired ranchers. And in the summer, they would go out on their big cattle ranches, and in the winter they'd live in these little towns. And just get into trouble. Right? And we ended up turning this doctor down. We just felt we couldn't commit ourselves to a life in Moscow. Now, we often think back, both my husband and I are never ones who decide you are going to live a life of regret. Once you make a decision, it is made, and you live with it, right? So, whether this was ever good or bad. But, anyway, the gist of the story is that I developed a real high blood pressure there, and I developed a bad bladder infection. And ended up having surgery. Could never have any more children, or advised never to. And the doctor suggested maybe it would be better if I would go back home, that they didn't feel that the high altitude was, I guess, too, they knew I was awfully homesick. I was out in an area, I liked the Mormons, I admired their religion, but I could never accept it. It's just, they have wonderful points, good points, but they are very, very clannish. And they would never, his, my in-laws were wonderful to me. They still are. Except my father-in-law and mother-in-law are dead. But I am still in real close touch with his sister, and his brothers. They just never could accept I had my own religion. And, of course, I couldn't practice it. There weren't many Lutheran churches, there weren't any other churches. The closest church was a Presbyterian in Mount Pleasant.

So we came back home. I had an uncle in Milwaukee, who was a detective in the police force. He found my husband a job. He used his influence, got my husband a job working for Milwaukee County. He knew Alex Perch, the head of the Health Department, and he got my husband a job working for the institutions, and he never did get back to school. And we never, my husband always said, "I don't think I'd have been a good doctor, anyway." And I ended up, I had thirty-eight years with the government.

John: Okay. At the state, or federal?

Stewart: Federal.

John: Federal, okay. With what agency?

Stewart: I started out in soil conservation, as a temporary typist. They needed somebody to do a typing job for the agronomists, the forester, and the biologist. They were getting out a pamphlet. Well, of course, with my printing background. And I was a good typist. I did, I guess, a super job, and they recommended I take the civil service test. They all gave me high marks, but I knew how to white-space, I knew how to paragraph, you know what I mean? It's printing. You know, you pick up things all along the way, right? And I started out with soil conservation service and then, in 1966, when Kennedy abolished our office in Milwaukee, I ended up, or they kept a little cartography office there. And the cartography lab, and I ended up, of course, with my veterans preference, working for the cartographer. And then when they abolished the office completely, again, I was held on to close the office. I had been working in personnel at the time. I transferred to Social Security. And I really dreaded that. I thought it would be sitting and taking old peoples' claims, but it ended up being everything but. Disability, young survivors, you know.

John: Along that line, you said you got a preference because you were a veteran. Did you get or use any other veterans benefits afterwards, or did your husband?

Stewart: Yes, when I went to Social Security, they wanted, you couldn't just go as a clerk. You had to go as a steno. I started out as a clerk-steno. I ended up as a supervisor. But in order to get this clerk-steno, I had to go back and brush up in my shorthand, but I decided to go back and take court stenotype. So I went for a year to stenotype school, along with working. And they let me take the job because I was a full-time student. I got this paid under veterans benefits, and at the end of the year, when I was fully qualified as a court stenographer, or to take stenotypy, then they picked a couple of the students to go on for court reporting. And there were two of us, a fellow and me, that were picked for court reporting, because of our grades, and all this. Again, hard work makes right. However, I turned it down. I just felt I didn't need the pressure of a court reporter. I mean, really high pressure.

John: I have a cousin who is a very successful one, but, yea, very high pressure.

Stewart: But I was picked for this. So I did use veterans benefits for that. But at the present time, I am not qualified for any veterans help, or drug programs. I know I have a brother-in-law who comes, they live in Watertown and he comes in to Madison every three months. He had to have a physical at the VA. But, I just wouldn't be

qualified. Even though my husband and I are both veterans.

John: Why is that, I wonder?

Stewart: First of all, I don't think Vern is service connected, either.

John: Oh, it would have to be service connected?

Stewart: A disability. But, then, it is also, they have other programs, based on income. Ending up as a supervisor in Social Security, I have a fairly comfortable income. So I wouldn't qualify income-wise there, at the present time.

John: What about reunions, or that? Do you ever get together with anyone, or stay in touch?

Stewart: No, but interesting enough, I am a charter member of that Women's Memorial, in Washington. And just the other day, I got, in fact, our little grand-daughter, Sara, went to Washington early this year, and I said, "Sara, when you visit Arlington Cemetery, would you take a picture of the Women's Memorial?" Instead, she went in and got me a certificate, where you are registered, they have your service. I treasured it. I put it away in a safe place, and the last three or four days, I have been hunting. I cannot, in fact, I got a paper cut on my pinky.

John: I'm glad to hear that other people do that, because I do that.

Stewart: I put it in a real safe place.

John: And it is still there.

Stewart: And it is still there, safe.

John: There is a set of legs for this recorder that I put in a real safe place and they are still there.

Stewart: Anyway, when I got this notice the other day, it was a newsletter, and their catalog, and requesting a donation, if I chose, to the Women's Memorial. And I noticed in there they have a web site, if you want to locate people. So I went on the computer, and I looked into this. But there wasn't anything remotely close. I looked both under the Air Force and the Army, because we were really assigned to the Army Air Force.

John: And when the Air Force split, a lot of Army people went with them. Yea.

Stewart: And we probably would have stayed with the Air Force but, you know, those were the days when it was the Army Air Force, right? I did belong to a couple of the Legion posts after we got out, because I had some of the cards, the memberships, but through our traveling, and through the areas we were in, and having this young daughter, and working, I dropped those. However, when I worked at Social Security, one of the girls, it was in the same building as VA. VA had the upper level and we had the lower. And one of the girls there had been with me and this is what I started at the beginning of the interview, to say that she was, this was Mildred Wolf. And I would see her quite often, but I didn't know her when we were in the service.

And we were friends with Morris and Florence, however, he stayed in the service and eventually we just grew apart.

John: Yes, I made a lot of friends, and I stayed, we stayed close for a year or two, and then jobs and marriage and kids.

Stewart: Interestingly enough, I still send Christmas cards to the last set of friends that we had at Keesler Field. He was with my husband in Blyville, and transferred to Keesler. And we went through three marriages with him. He didn't divorce his wives, he lost them. They live in Indiana. But I still send Christmas cards. Then, for a long while, we sent cards to someone in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and then in Soldier Pond, Maine. But, eventually, either they passed on, I know the one in Wilkes-Barre passed away. And he never married.

John: Well, that is great. This is a great story.

Stewart: It's nothing really exciting.

John: No, but it is a story, and, as I keep saying, you were there when the nation needed people to be there. That's what so many of these stories are about.

Stewart: I never, ever regretted making that decision. I never regretted marrying my husband. We were married fifty-six years when he passed away. Had a good life. We traveled a lot, and, of course, his parents being in Utah, we went back and forth to Utah. And, then, of course, his being a rock-hound, we'd go by way of Amarillo, and he knew rock-smiths there in Amarillo. So this opened a lot of avenues for us, too. And we loved to go up to Canada. We went overseas three times, even to Russia.

John: Oh, did you? That is interesting.

Stewart: We were in Russia when they first opened travel to Russia. Our first overseas

adventure. From a little girl on, I always thought I was Scandinavian, with a name like Johnson. And I always wanted to go to Norway and Sweden. And when my husband got, said we'll go on a trip when I get my first four weeks vacation. He ended up working for Harnischfeger in metallurgy, and one day he called. We were both great Cubs fans. And he said, "Marge, instead of sending for tickets to opening day in Chicago," he said, "make plans for our vacation. We are going to Norway and Sweden." So we went on a three-week tour to Norway, Sweden, Finland, and they had just opened travel, we were a week in Russia.

John: Oh, that is great.

Stewart: We loved that. Then we went to Central Europe, and then the one he liked was when we went to England and Scotland. He, being Scottish. He always claimed, that is how I got interested in genealogy. He claims that he was related to Mary, Queen of Scots. You know, they can trace that way. I suppose, if we trace back, we're all related.

John: Well, that is interesting. That is a tremendous story. I'm running out of tape here. Any, well, as you said, you were very proud to have done this, and that is a wonderful comment on a life in the service.

Stewart: And, it opened up avenues for me that probably wouldn't have been available. I keep thinking if I hadn't enlisted, I'd still be living in Horicon, married to... Because one of the fellows, the fellow that I went to the prom with, the week that I promised to marry Mondell, we had a planned wedding. I mean, it wasn't just running to the justice of the peace. We had thought this out. But the week before I was to be married, I got a letter from this fellow I went to the prom with, who went to my church at home. And who was always there, a friend, asking me to meet him in Memphis, to marry him. He was in the army, too. Well, this was kind of a hard letter to write to a friend.

John: Sure. Well, I'm going to wrap this up. I am just about out of tape here.

[End of Interview.]