

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Julia de la Rosa, Women's Auxiliary Army Corps,
World War II

2003

OH
479

de la Rosa, Julia, (1912-), Oral History Interview, 2003

User copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 25 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 25 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

The Milwaukee, Wis. veteran discusses her World War II service with the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAACs) as a typist and her experiences as a Hispanic woman serving in the Army. She talks about growing up in rural Raymondville (Texas), enlisting in the WAACs because friends were joining and her boyfriend (whom she eventually married) joined the Air Force, and basic training in Iowa. Stationed at Long Beach (California), de la Rosa mentions assisting a female lieutenant with typing, decision not to reenlist in the Women's Army Corps (WACs), and returning to Texas because her boyfriend was also discharged. She comments on not receiving veterans benefits and some pictures of her unit.

Biographical Sketch

de la Rosa (1912-) served in the Woman's Army Auxillary Corps for nine months during World War II. After the war, she returned to Texas although she eventually settled in Milwaukee, Wis.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, 2003.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, 2003.

Interview Transcript

John: Okay, this is John Driscoll, and today is December 9, 2003. And this is an oral history interview with Julia de la Rosa, at her apartment in Milwaukee. Good morning. We just had an exciting morning. We didn't have any electric power for a few hours here but good morning, Julia, and thanks a lot for agreeing to be interviewed. Okay?

Julia: Thank you.

John: Why don't we start at the beginning and tell me, where and when were you born?

Julia: I was born in Raymondville, Texas, county of Willacy County, 1912. May 22.

John: Okay. What county?

Julia: Willacy County.

John: Okay. What, your family?

Julia: My family were very poor. They had their mother, my daddy's mother, inherited a little farm with a lot of cattle, goats. In fact, I was raised with goat milk.

John: Were you?

Julia: And my daddy was a number one hunter and fisherman. I was born with wild meat. I was raised with wild meat and fish, and that is about it of my family.

John: How about school? Did you go to school?

Julia: Oh, yes. I went to Raymondville Grammar School, then I passed to Raymondville High School. I was in the Pep Squad.

John: Okay.

Julia: And from there, when I graduated, I majored in typing. I did a lot of typing, not only for my teachers, but also for my own future. And this is the extent of my high school. Then, when I graduated from high school, 1932, my first job was in a loan company. I worked in a loan company for one guy fourteen years.

John: Oh, okay.

Julia: From there, I decided, that is when Pearl Harbor was hit. My neighbors, two girls, were going to join the WAACs, and they conned me to join with them. So that is when I joined the WAACs.

John: Do you remember what you were doing on Pearl Harbor Day?

Julia: What was I doing? I was with my boyfriend in Harlingen, Texas, watching a movie, and we had to get out because they stopped it. They stopped the movie. They closed the theater. They closed everything in Harlingen, Texas. I think it is about twenty-five miles from Raymondville, where I lived. And that is about it.

John: So, you decided to join the WAACs.

Julia: Well, my boyfriend decided he wanted to join the Air Force because he did not like the Army. He joined the Air Force and he went. We never saw him again. He left San Antonio January 4th. I remember this. And from San Antonio to Shepherd Field, Texas. From Shepherd Field, he was shipped out, landed in Australia. From Australia, he was sent to New Guinea. And there is where he was thirty-six months. I never saw him until he got discharged because he had a lot of malaria. He was then sent to Angel Island, in San Francisco. I guess they docked him there, or whatever they do. And then he was sent to Fort Sam Houston, in San Antonio. That is when I saw him after thirty-six months absence. His daddy, his mother, his sister and I came to see him at Fort Sam. And we couldn't even see him. They wouldn't let us. He was in quarantine.

John: Oh, wow.

Julia: And that was it.

John: Well, when did you join?

Julia: When did I join? 1942.

John: That was right after Pearl Harbor.

Julia: That is right.

John: What would a girl from Texas be thinking when she joined the Army?

Julia: Pardon?

John: What were you thinking when you joined the Army? What did you expect?

Julia: I don't know. I expected to help out.

John: Okay. Okay. That is good.

Julia: That's about it.

John: Okay. Where did you join at?

Julia: I joined in Raymondville because we had a station there. From there they sent me to San Antonio after I joined. From San Antonio, they told me I passed my physical, and then I went back. And they told me they would let me know when. I have the clippings.

John: Okay. Just hearing you tell it. Okay, then where did you go after that?

Julia: I came to San Antonio. They shipped me out to Fort Des Moines, Iowa.

John: Oh, wow.

Julia: That is where I was. January the 28th, and it was cold. Snow up to our hips, in Des Moines, Iowa. And they didn't have coats for us. We had to wear, the best they could do was give us men's coats, clothing. Long underwear and pants and shirts and men's coats. That is when I landed in Des Moines, Iowa.

John: That must have been a real shock from someone from San Antonio.

Julia: That's right. It was. I didn't expect that. I didn't know it was like that. That was my first time I had been out of Willacy County.

John: And that was basic training?

Julia: And I was stationed there. From there, after I took my basic training, they sent me to California. I was stationed real close to Long Beach. I don't remember the name of the place.

John: Sure. This was for, what did you do there?

Julia: Well, since I knew typing, I helped the lady, the lieutenant that was our boss. I helped her type, catch up with her work.

John: And how long were you there?

Julia: I was there until, I think it was September. Yes, in September, I was there. When

they told us, I wasn't doing too much and I was getting bored.

John: Okay.

Julia: I told the lieutenant, I think I'll get out when they told us that in September they were going to make us take the oath all over so that we could have the privilege of free mailing. In September. So then, I told her that I was not going to re-join, that I wanted to go home.

John: I see. Okay.

Julia: Since I had two sisters, single, in my home, and one of them was sick. She got sick. And that left my baby sister all alone there, so I decided I wanted to go home.

John: Okay.

Julia: And that is when I quit.

John: How old were you then?

Julia: How old was I?

John: Yes.

Julia: I must have been about thirty-four, thirty-five. And then, of course, I got a letter from my boyfriend, who was my husband, for me not to take the oath over again, for me to go home because he was going home.

John: Okay.

Julia: And so that was it.

John: That was the whole, how long were you in?

Julia: From January until September.

John: Okay. Nine months or so. And you got to see snow in Iowa. Okay. Great. When you got out, did you have any benefits? The GI Bill?

Julia: Not a thing. Not a thing.

John: That's awful.

Julia: Nothing. No benefits whatsoever. No, we didn't have no benefits. We write letters, we had to buy our own stamps. But in September, like I said, they gave us the opportunity of taking the Regular Army oath over again, so we could have free mailing.

John: That's an awful oath to take, just for free mailings, some postage stamps. And then, after that, then you went back?

Julia: I went back to my home, and I went back to my old job.

John: Oh, did you? Okay. Well, that's great. Looking back on it, that must have been hard on you, from a small town in Texas, to suddenly be in the Army. And you are a little gal. What was it like? Did you have any problems with it?

Julia: No.

John: No problems?

Julia: The only problem was that I did not like Des Moines.

John: Okay. With the Regular Army, any problems being Hispanic? Anything like that?

Julia: I got along very well with all the group. Oh, we had a mob. I have a picture. I'll show you a picture.

John: Okay. Oh, wow. Look at that. Oh, boy.

Julia: I am somewhere around here. I think that is me.

John: Oh. wow.

Julia: And this picture I took before I turned in my uniform.

John: You were a very attractive lady.

Julia: And this is my sister. She was in the Navy.

John: Oh, that is tremendous. What a bunch, huh?

Julia: A big bunch. I'll show you. See, this is her.

John: Okay. Camp Wilmington, California, you were station. Yes.

Julia: Here are some of the girls, here in line for our checks. This is where we were. In Long Beach. This is from Long Beach.

John: From Long Beach, California. Yea. Oh, those are tremendous pictures. Real keepsakes.

Julia: I wouldn't part with them.

John: I'll bet. This is you?

Julia: This is my friend.

John: Here is the one. That is you?

Julia: Yes.

John: In an Army overcoat, and snow. Wow.

Julia: And these are the three girls who were in the barracks, in the same barracks. We were together.

John: Oh, great.

Julia: He was the guy that used to come and see about us. And there is where I was inducted.

John: Okay. Isn't that great? What a wonderful set of pictures.

Julia: I want to show you the picture they took of us marching. I think this is it. They are so old they are tearing.

John: Yea, they are.

Julia: Maybe this is it.

John: Oh, yes. Left, right, left, right. This is your company commander. Oh, that is something.

Julia: Here is me, marching, drilling.

John: There you are.

Julia: These are clippings of several movie stars. They used to entertain.

John: Oh, those are precious.

Julia: And I kept them, and kept them. I says, leave them there, mom. Some day we'll reminisce.

John: They are keepsakes. Oh, that is great. Well, what a remarkable story.

Julia: Pardon?

John: I said, what a remarkable story. And you've got a great memory. You really do. That is great.

Julia: That is the big one.

John: Yes. Now, this is your recruit?

Julia: All of those ladies were together in the same barracks. We had four barracks. You'll be surprised. And a lot of them from Texas. There were a lot of them from all over the place.

John: That's great. What was it like, again, someone from Texas meeting women from all over?

Julia: It was wonderful.

John: Yea, I'll bet.

Julia: And several of them got out when I did. They didn't want to take the Army oath. Well, some had problems at home.

John: Sure. You were in the WAAC? Women's Auxiliary Army Corps?

Julia: Yes.

John: Okay. And then, that was when it became the WAC?

Julia: Yea.

John: Okay. I've talked to other women--

Julia: The used to call us the WAACs.

John: Right. Okay, what a remarkable story. I need a, let me fill this out. This is a release that allows them, I'll type this up and I'll send you a copy, and I'll give them a copy at the museum. This release allows them to let students, teachers, historians--

Julia: Read them.

John: Yea, read them. Okay.

Julia: It was a wonderful experience, but it was, like I say, I hated for my baby sister to be alone after the other one got sick. And she died.

John: Oh, that's tragic. What is your address here, Julia?

Julia: 3460 West Mitchell.

John: Okay. Avenue, street?

Julia: Street.

John: Okay. And do you know the Zip?

Julia: My apartment is number 5.

John: No, the Zip code.

Julia: Did I say 3640?

John: 3460.

Julia: No, its 3640.

John: Okay, I'll correct that. That's fine.

Julia: Sometimes I get--

John: Hey, listen, so do I.

Julia: 3540, apartment 5.

John: What is the Zip code, do you know?

Julia: 53215.

John: Okay, I can shut this off.

[End of Interview.]