

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

MARIE M. REINHARDT (DOLORES COLLA)

Cryptographer, Navy, Cold War Era

2015

OH
1996a

OH
1996

Reinhardt, Marie M., (b. 1929). Oral History Interview, 2015.

Approximate length: 54 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Marie M. Reinhardt, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, discusses her service as commissioned officer and a cryptographer assigned to the Communications Headquarters of the 11th Naval District in San Diego (California) from 1953 to 1955 before returning to Milwaukee and joining the Navy Reserves from 1956-1959. Reinhardt outlines growing up the child of immigrants from Sicily, early education and earning her degree in special education and how her brother's death after World War II influenced her decision to join the Navy. She describes struggling to make weight and going to Officer Candidate School in Newport (Rhode Island) and her service with the 11th Naval District, Communications Headquarters in San Diego (California). Reinhardt reflects throughout the interview on being able to relate to enlisted soldiers more than other officers and how being a child of immigrants affected her experience as a commissioned officer. She mentions returning to Milwaukee, enlisting in the Navy Reserves in 1956 achieving rank of full lieutenant before her discharge in 1959. She mentions teaching special education, technical writing through the UW-Extension Program and at MATC [Madison Area Technical College] and forming the United Women Veterans' Group. She outlines family life after her military service. Reinhardt reflects on the importance of her military service to herself, the nature of war, appreciating the memories of soldiers who died in conflict.

Biographical Sketch:

Reinhardt (b. October 17, 1929) served with the Communications Headquarters of the 11th Naval District in San Diego (California) from 1953 to 1955 before returning to Milwaukee and joining the Navy Reserves in 1956 and was discharged in 1959.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Angie Polinsky, 2015.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2017.

Reviewed by Rachelle Halaska, 2017.

Abstract written by Rachelle Halaska, 2017.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of OH1996.Reinhardt_file1]

- Polinsky: Good afternoon. Today is June 16, 2015. This interview is with Marie Mary Reinhardt, who served with the U.S. Navy and Reserves—Navy Reserves during 1953 to 1955 and 1956 to 1959. This interview is being conducted at Mary's home [REDACTED]. From this point forward, we will refer to you as Mary. The narrator and the interviewer is me, Angie Polinsky. How are you today, Mary?
- Reinhardt: I'm fine. Thank you.
- Polinsky: Good. So the first thing I want to do is tell you or ask you if you want to describe yourself for me.
- Reinhardt: [Laughs] That's an interesting question. I'm eighty-five years old. I'm living in a senior complex, which is a very good one in that people here are more like family. And I live—I've been here almost—well, nine years I have been here. And it's a good place to be.
- Polinsky: Good. Can you tell me about your background and life circumstances before you entered the military? Like the year you were born and about your family.
- Reinhardt: I was born a few days before the Great Depression, and I was born October 17, 1929. My parents were immigrants from Sicily. So they came to America, and there were some conflicts of culture because they grew up in a different place. And it took some time for them to adjust to the American way. So my siblings and I had to learn two cultures, which was most interesting. And we were the first generation from—born in America.
- Polinsky: And where were you born?
- Reinhardt: In Milwaukee.
- Polinsky: Milwaukee. And can you tell me about your sisters and brothers?
- Reinhardt: I had three sisters and a brother, so there's a total of five children.
- Polinsky: All right. And can you tell me about your education? Did you go to school? For how long?
- Reinhardt: I—it was—when I was born, I weight like ten pounds. Four months later, they diagnosed me as suffering from famine. And that was a rough start. And so I was enrolled after first grade into a special kind of a class where delicate children where we were given hot breakfasts. We were segregated from the rest of the school. We took—we were given lunches, hot lunches. We rested in the afternoon. We had cots and pillows and blankets, and every day they took our temperature. Every week we were weighed.

And after four years, I guess they decided [laughs] I wasn't making much progress, so I was sent back to regular breaks. And I went through grade school, regular grade school and regular high school. And because of getting some scholarships in high school when I graduated, I was able to go to college.

However, my parents, being of the old school especially my father, thought it was—you know, girls don't go to college. Boys go to college. Girls don't go to college. But I think I must have been a bit passive resistant. [Laughs] And I decided this is an opportunity for me to learn, to learn more. So I continued on, and I did well and finished college. And that's when the Korean War started. And I decided—when World War II was going on, it was a time when those of us who were in school, teenagers—we realized the drama, the terrible things that happened in war. And I was too young to join [laughs] anything, so I applied for a commission. And with some difficulty because I was still very, very thin, but I ate my way. [Laughs] Ate malt—I mean drank malts, ate pies and cakes and candy and finally got to the very, very bare weight that they would allow me in. So I think it was a lot of determination and maybe luck.

[00:05:16]

Polinsky: Can you tell me a little bit about—you said that your parents came from Sicily.

Reinhardt: Mm-hm.

Polinsky: Did they learn to speak English?

Reinhardt: Not easily because, many immigrants did at the time, they settled in areas where people from their particular ethnic group lived. So it was like a little ghetto in some ways. But they went in the street. You know, they were very bright people though they didn't have any formal education. But they were very bright people, and Papa had a business. And Mama helped him.

Polinsky: So you said that your dad thought that girls don't go to college, so you didn't go. Or you did?

Reinhardt: I did.

Polinsky: Oh, even though he said not to?

Reinhardt: Well, he said he thought that was foolish. But I did.

Polinsky: And when you went to college, what did you go for?

Reinhardt: I was interested in art at the time. But then since I was a special ed student myself, I went into special education mostly mentally retarded. But at that time, they hadn't distinguished the different types. Types of specialties like learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, trainable, hearing impaired. So we had many combinations in the same classroom because they hadn't figured out.

Polinsky: How long were you in college?

Reinhardt: Four years.

Polinsky: And you got a degree?

Reinhardt: Mm-hm.

Polinsky: And what was your degree in?

Reinhardt: In special education.

Polinsky: And then did you go into the military after that?

Reinhardt: No. I taught a year in Fond du Lac (Wisconsin). I had never been away from school. College was just about—was right in the neighborhood. All I had had to do was walk to it which, when we had children, I decided no. They were going to go away to college, and they're going to learn things and learn about themselves. But for me, it wasn't feasible. I mean just to be going to college was special.

Polinsky: So after you taught for a year in Fond du Lac?

Reinhardt: Then I decided to apply for a commission.

Polinsky: Join the military?

Reinhardt: Yes.

Polinsky: Okay. So what I'd like you to do now is describe your entry into military service. So you said you were teaching. Why did you decide to enter? You were enlisted. You weren't drafted. Why did you enter? And how did you feel about it?

Reinhardt: Like I said before, the—we grew up during World War II. And my brother was in the Navy. And he was one of the casualties of the war. So it was always Navy for me.

Polinsky: Your brother died during World War II?

Reinhardt: No. He died right after at the VA hospital.

Polinsky: Okay. From injuries?

Reinhardt: Well, he had some physical problems and mental problems. And so he was a victim.

Polinsky: Okay. So you entered partly because?

Reinhardt: Well, I just—

Polinsky: Wanted to follow in his footsteps?

Reinhardt: Right.

Polinsky: Okay. And how did you feel about it? Were you—

Reinhardt: I was excited about it. I wanted—I knew that I didn't have a chance to ever leave home. And I figured this is—well, teaching in Fond du Lac taught some things. It was kind of a test to see if I could live away from home. And I did that. But then I figured yes, I could do this.

Polinsky: Where did you enter the military?

Reinhardt: I entered, well, from Milwaukee to Chicago [inaudible] in Chicago. And went to Newport, Rhode Island.

Polinsky: That's where you did basic?

Reinhardt: Mm-hm.

Polinsky: Do you remember that unit number?

Reinhardt: We were—our class was W13. [Laughs]

Polinsky: In Rhode Island.

Reinhardt: Mm-hm. Newport. Yep.

Polinsky: Do you remember your induction interview and physical?

[00:10:02]

Reinhardt: Yes. I do.

Polinsky: Would you like to tell me about it?

Reinhardt: [Laughs] Like I said, I had barely got in because of the weight. I was very, very thin. And the—I had to be 112, and I ate all this crap [laughs] to try and gain weight. But when I went to see the doctor, he said, "Oh, you're healthy." So he put down—what was it like—105. There is a story to that. Maybe I shouldn't tell that story. [Laughs]

Polinsky: You can tell any story you want.

Reinhardt: Well, when it came time for the weighing in, I knew I hadn't reached the minimum. And I had to dress an outfit with a peplum blouse top. So I took Papa's big work apron shift, wrapped all kinds of coins, and stuffed them in my peplum jacket.

Polinsky: So you'd weigh more?

Reinhardt: Yeah. Well, [laughs] of course, we had to do almost nothing, but the doctor said, “Oh, you’re healthy.” He said, “I think this would be a good experience for you.” So then I got—when I was notified I got to—think it was just a few days before the class was to convene. And I was very nervous, excited. And I lost some of the weight, and I would get sick every morning. Even when I was pregnant, years later, I never got morning sickness. But for that, I did. [Laughs]

Polinsky: So you went to basic training in Newport. Can you tell me about your basic training?

Reinhardt: It was intensive. Most of the girls—well, I shouldn’t call them girls. They were women. Went to some prestigious schools in the east. They came from really nice backgrounds. Their parents were professional people. I did feel out of place.

Polinsky: You did?

Reinhardt: Mm-hm.

Polinsky: Why is that?

Reinhardt: Because my background was so totally different from theirs.

Polinsky: But you all had the same uniform on.

Reinhardt: We did. You’re right. But they could say well, they’d been here, and they’d been there. And they did this, and they did that. So I learned by watching a lot and listening a lot.

Polinsky: Can you describe the camp and its facilities?

Reinhardt: We had a barracks. Women's officers' quarters. And we—like I said, our classes were very intensive. Not only academic classes but we had a lot of physical ed things and learned things like that. We did a lot of marching. And we’re very proud when we finally got our uniforms.

Polinsky: Mm-hm. What did you train for?

Reinhardt: Actually, it was more like an orientation and taking classes like logistics and ships, the airplanes and nautical—ships and planes and all the things pertaining to the Navy.

Polinsky: When you were done with basic and you went on to your advanced training, what was that for?

Reinhardt: That was the extent of our training. Four months.

Polinsky: Four months.

Reinhardt: And then we received our orders.

Polinsky: So you only went to basic? You didn’t get special training in a certain field.

Reinhardt: No. The—it wasn't even called basic. It was training.

Polinsky: It was just called training. Do you have any memorable instructors or girlfriends that you met during that time?

Reinhardt: Oh, I corresponded with a few of them. I think the girls who came from the Midwest—we sort of have more in common. And we chummed around together. Some of the women did enter the program with friends. But I didn't. I was—

Polinsky: Independent.

Reinhardt: Yeah.

Polinsky: Yeah. Do you have any memorable stories from your time in training? Any goofy pranks or fun things you did?

[00:14:33]

Reinhardt: Oh, learning to swim. I almost didn't pass. I almost didn't graduate from college because I had to pass the swimming requirement. Well, I figured when I was in college, I had four years to learn. Then I thought, Oh, maybe I won't finish college, so I didn't pay much attention until that time for graduation was coming up. So I had to work very hard. And the day that I took my test my classmates [laughs] lined both sides of the pool and shouting encouragement. [Laughs] And I tried so hard to get to the other end. And [laughs] when I did, they all clapped.

Polinsky: Okay. So we're going to go on now to your first duty station. You can feel free to tell me stories, but you can say places, names, as much as you can remember. So I'm going to ask you to tell me about your first assignment or your first station.

Reinhardt: My first station was Comm 11, 11th Naval District in San Diego. That was attached to the communications—headquarters communication.

Polinsky: Can you tell me how you got there?

Reinhardt: Oh, we had our break between finishing indoctrination school and then going to our first assignment. So we were able to spend that Christmas at home. Then I flew out there.

Polinsky: You flew. Do you remember how you felt flying out there? Like did you have any—

Reinhardt: Excited.

Polinsky: You were excited. Did you have any—Korean War was going on.

Reinhardt: Yes.

Polinsky: So did you have any emotions about being deployed or what might happen?

Reinhardt: No. I just figured what will be, will be. I was trained, and we'll just see what happens. I had thought that they would probably send me to Great Lakes to train sailors, who were not really—a lot of education. But I mean that was my specialty. But they didn't. They sent me to communications.

Polinsky: Can you tell me your duties in what you did?

Reinhardt: Well, I went into—it was communication watch officer.

Polinsky: So you were an officer in the military?

Reinhardt: Right.

Polinsky: Because you had college?

Reinhardt: Because I had that. If I hadn't, it would have been totally different. I know that.

Polinsky: So your duties. You were telling me.

Reinhardt: We were to see everything was working fine, sign papers, and just keep everything in working order.

Polinsky: So back during these fifties as a woman officer in the Navy, did you have any trouble with the male soldiers or male seamen? Did they give you a hard time?

Reinhardt: No. They did not.

Polinsky: They respected you?

Reinhardt: They respected. I think a lot had to do with your presence. And I really believe that the person—the officer in charge is due respect, but they have to earn it. And that was very strong in my mind.

Polinsky: So did you—when you were in San Diego, did you—were you deployed out on a ship at all?

Reinhardt: No. [Laughs] I was—after a few weeks as communication watch officer, I was transferred because of—national agency check. You know what I mean? That that was clear except my mother and father didn't have certain numbers. They wouldn't let me go into cryptography.

Polinsky: Oh, you're talking about security clearance.

Reinhardt: Right. But as soon as we got that information and the numbers, they were very, very careful in the Navy. They wouldn't allow you to work in cryptography if you had strong connections with people in Europe, you know, close relatives—

Polinsky: So it took you awhile to get your security clearance?

Reinhardt: Right.

Polinsky: Okay. Do you have any memorable experiences about your time in San Diego or memorable people?

[00:19:43]

Reinhardt: Oh yes. [Laughs] I do. I remember one time when it's—[humming noise starts] that's the air conditioner. One time when this—it was a rainy night. And in cryptography or in communication, you do the watches. Twelve day watches. I mean it's three days evening, three days nights, three days mids, and then Sunday two hours off. So this was late at night, very rainy. When this tall officer comes in. And he has all his black clothing on and raindrops, and he comes up to me. And he says, "Where is the command post?" He was new. So I directed him to the command post. And as soon as we entered, there was something going on in the command post. Soon as we entered somebody shouts, "Attention." [Laughs] So then I realized he was the commandant of the whole Naval district.

Polinsky: Oh wow.

Reinhardt: Yeah.

Polinsky: And you didn't know.

Reinhardt: I didn't know because I couldn't see. He was so tall. And he was wearing the—his raincoat and protection. And then there was one thing where—oh. I didn't—they closed it, the women's officers' quarters. This sailor would get in on the bus. The bus that had take down to the headquarters building. And he would stop dead in his tracks when he saw me. I'm sitting down. And he'd stand there, and he'd salute. "Good morning, ma'am, sir." And whenever I'd see him, I'd kind of slink in my [laughs] chair and think, "I wish he wouldn't do that."

Polinsky: Maybe he liked you.

Reinhardt: Oh whatever. [Laughs]

Polinsky: So were you—did you—so you were in San Diego. How long were you there?

Reinhardt: For the entire time.

Polinsky: Oh you were—so you weren't deployed at all?

Reinhardt: No.

Polinsky: Okay. So did you get any awards or medals while you were there?

Reinhardt: Well, I was promoted to lieutenant JG [junior grade]. We got our ribbon and the medal for the Korean Conflict.

Polinsky: What were your impressions of the facilities while you were there?

Reinhardt: San Diego was a beautiful place. The building we were in was right by the harbor. And it was a tall building. Well, maybe not real tall. Maybe about five or six floors and different divisions. It was adequate. Of course being in cryptography, we had our own section. No windows. Locked doors. A great opening and—so it was different. Yeah. It's—we didn't get to see too many people. And we had to get to know these people.

Polinsky: What did you do on your time off? Anything fun?

Reinhardt: Oh, we went to Tijuana. Saw the bull fights and went to Hollywood. Oh, when the visiting Navies would come to town, we would be invited because we were attached to the commandant. We would be invited to some of the functions.

Polinsky: What kept you going during your time in the military?

Reinhardt: I think I was determined that—I figured if I could do this, serve the watches like this, and go to work in the middle of the night, go to work during the day or evenings that I could do most anything after that. So that encouraged me especially when Papa said to me when I left that morning I left to go to the Navy. He came in and pressed \$10.00 in my hand, and he said, "You get sick, and they'll send you home," which was very discouraging because I thought maybe he was right.

Polinsky: Can you describe a typical day?

[00:24:52]

Reinhardt: Usually, it was—at work? Okay. Depend. You come in to relieve your—the people on the watch, and you come in. And you find out what's been happening and what the things to watch out for, and you do what—the best you can. Go around. See if everybody is doing okay. And you sign messages. And then when you're in crypto, that's entirely different. I mean you're the only—well, you would have probably a chief with you. And you'd encode and decode messages.

Polinsky: So you were actually getting messages from Korea?

Reinhardt: We got messages from all over.

Polinsky: From all over. That you were decoding. And so you were really a crucial part of the war.

Reinhardt: Well, yeah. I was—right. We had to be so careful because you could compromise the entire communication system if you made a mistake.

Polinsky: Mm-hm. Was there anything you did for good luck?

Reinhardt: I prayed. [Laughs] I think that was inborn in me. There was something I was going to tell you.

Polinsky: We were talking about a typical day.

Reinhardt: Yeah.

Polinsky: And you were walking me through checking.

Reinhardt: Oh, we were warned. One time the commandant—or the captain of our division called us in together. No matter what watch we were on, he wanted us all together. And he wanted—he [inaudible]. He said, “The enemy knows who you are.” Scared the hell out of us. And he said, “Be careful. Some could be very friendly to you, but they may want some information. And to be—just to be on guard and know that what we say and what we do here, you would—they would like to know that information.” So we [laughs]—I stayed with—we were—we didn’t have the woman’s officer’s quarters. We had to get our own. And there were a bunch of us who were in communications.

Polinsky: So you didn’t live in the barracks?

Reinhardt: No.

Polinsky: You lived off post with some other—

Reinhardt: Other communicators.

Polinsky: That were female?

Reinhardt: Right.

Polinsky: How many of you lived—was it an apartment or a house?

Reinhardt: It was an apartment. There were four of us.

Polinsky: Four of you. So they were—were you pretty close with them?

Reinhardt: With at least three of them. No. At least two of them. One was a little different.

Polinsky: How so?

Reinhardt: How so? She wasn’t a real warm person. And well we thought was funny. She didn’t think it was funny. [Laughs]

Polinsky: How did you and your friends entertain yourselves when you had time off?

Reinhardt: Well, dating got to be a problem because of the timing being on watches. Weekends. We were—many times we were working or sleeping. And for entertainment, we would sometimes get together as a group of communicators, and the male—the men and the

women. And oh, we had a beach party one time. And we went down to Tijuana for the bull fights. And we did things. And then when the admiral would have the visiting navies come, we would be invited to those functions, which was really quite different for me. I mean [laughs] from my background. It was just like a movie set. I said, “Wow.”

Polinsky: Do you think if you weren't an officer you would have enjoyed the Navy as much as you did if you were—or just a seaman?

Reinhardt: I think I would have done very well as a seaman because I had more in common with people than I had with the officers.

Polinsky: Mm-hm. Did you pull any pranks with your friends or do anything goofy?

Reinhardt: That's a very good question. No. Because it wasn't always we could get together because everyone was on different watches.

Polinsky: Do you remember if there was any entertainers that came to the boat—the post?

[00:29:57]

Reinhardt: No. And if they were, we probably were working.

Polinsky: Okay. Can you describe—so you said you lived in an apartment. And so I assume that you—did you eat on post? Did you eat at the post facilities?

Reinhardt: I did.

Polinsky: Can you describe for me the food? What was it like?

Reinhardt: [Laughs] It was wonderful. I got introduced to foods I had heard about but had never tried. Because my parents sticking to their own ways cooked the things that they cooked in the old country. And so I got to eat avocados, which I love. Didn't know about that. Mushrooms. And rare steaks. That was an eye opener. I mean it was not—that was not common at home.

Polinsky: A steak?

Reinhardt: A rare steak.

Polinsky: Why is that?

Reinhardt: Well, they just cooked the heck out of it. [Laughs]

Polinsky: Yeah. Did you take any leave?

Reinhardt: I did.

Polinsky: And you said one time you went to Tijuana. Did you get into any trouble down there?

Reinhardt: No. No.

Polinsky: Did you go anyplace else when you were on leave?

Reinhardt: Yeah. We went up to a place called Hemet, California. And then to Hollywood. [Coughing] And I took a Navy flight to San Francisco which was another neat experience. [Coughing] I had to wear a parachute.

Polinsky: Do you want to take a break to get some water?

Reinhardt: No. I'm fine. Yeah. I had to wear a parachute. And I had was—had my dress blues on. [Laughs] And just getting out of the plane with all these officers and enlisted personnel, and I'm the only woman. That was a neat experience. Scary as heck.

Polinsky: Do you have any funny or unusual stories that you remember?

Reinhardt: Well, except for that one with the sailor calling ma'am, sir. Oh, there must have been—there were some where I did go out a few times. And I have to tell these men, "Well, I'm working that day," or, "My hours," so that was difficult.

Polinsky: So now we're going to talk about—so you were in San Diego the whole four years?

Reinhardt: Right.

Polinsky: So we're going to talk about the discharge—your discharge from the military. Was the Korean War still going on when you got out?

Reinhardt: No.

Polinsky: No. So the war had ended.

Reinhardt: The war had ended.

Polinsky: And how did you feel about the war and how it played out and ended?

Reinhardt: It was not a successful war. I think there—we're still bearing signs of that it is—it was not completed. And I still feel that there's turmoil between North and South Korea. And I remember someone from my class, high school class, really affected me, he was missing in action. And I remember him as a nice kid and—yeah. It was a difficult war.

Polinsky: Did they ever find him?

Reinhardt: Not that I know. I would really like to know.

Polinsky: What was his name? Do you remember?

Reinhardt: Yeah. His name was Jerry Miller.

Polinsky: And he was from your high school class?

Reinhardt: Right.

Polinsky: At the end of your tour, before you got out of the military, how did you feel? Were you wanting to reenlist? Or were you ready to get out?

Reinhardt: When I [coughing] entered the Navy, it was more or less I needed to find who I was. And I figured in two years I should know who I am. And I was eager to go back to help—to work with the special ed kids. I really was. I found that I had a talent for that. And our classroom was really special. So I knew I wanted out, but I still wanted to be affiliated with the Navy. So when I got back home, I inquired about classes for Naval officers at Marquette. And for four years, I took classes there.

[00:35:13]

Polinsky: Do you remember what your homecoming was like?

Reinhardt: Oh, my parents were so happy. Oh, I could tell you stories [laughs] how the first time I came home on leave that Mama and Papa kept looking at each other. And after a few days, I said, “What the heck is going on here?” And Mama was smiling broadly. And Papa was—finally, I think that I was going to be a changed person. I was going to be seduced. I was going to be smoking. That was the worst thing. Smoking. And they were watching for signs for me to take a cigarette. And that was supposed to be terrible. And then Mama said, “She won’t be smoking.” Papa said, “Yes. She will.” [Laughs]

Polinsky: And you weren’t?

Reinhardt: I wasn’t.

Polinsky: No. So you were a good girl.

Reinhardt: Yeah. [Laughs]

Polinsky: So how did you feel when you arrived home after being done in the military?

Reinhardt: Well, the first weekend I was home, I stood up for—I was a bridesmaid for my friend’s wedding. And it was good to get back home, and there were some adjustments, I was not the same person I was when I left. And I think Mom and Pop saw that.

Polinsky: Did you have any problems readjusting to civilian life?

Reinhardt: No. Because I had the association with going to Marquette and the two weeks of—each summer for training duty.

Polinsky: What did you do after you left the service? You went to Marquette. And then what did

you—

Reinhardt: I went back into teaching.

Polinsky: Back into teaching.

Reinhardt: I left. I got home in August and started teaching in September.

Polinsky: Do you have any veteran's benefits now?

Reinhardt: I'm not—oh, well, yes. I use the facilities at the VA. I get my meds through the VA. And physicals.

Polinsky: Do you have any disability?

Reinhardt: Getting old. [Laughs] I know what you mean.

Polinsky: No. I mean like disability percentage through the government.

Reinhardt: No. No.

Polinsky: And you were discharged under honorable conditions?

Reinhardt: Yes.

Polinsky: Did you get any medals? You were showing me your medals and citations.

Reinhardt: Right.

Polinsky: Could you tell me what—about them?

Reinhardt: Well, let's see

Polinsky: So you have a box here that has several medals in it.

Reinhardt: Well, here—you don't—that was an ensign lieutenant junior grade. And through my coursework at Marquette and the training duty, I became a full lieutenant.

Polinsky: Okay. So those are your insignia.

Reinhardt: Right.

Polinsky: Yeah. And your dog tags.

Reinhardt: My dog tags. And this—I don't remember. Let's see. Military service for American—for America's Memorial. I don't remember.

Polinsky: So you have two medals in there.

Reinhardt: Yeah. This is the Korean.

Polinsky: Oh, that's for serving during the Korean War.

Reinhardt: Right.

Polinsky: And then you have another medal.

Reinhardt: Yeah. And I think that had to do with being at the memorial for women that they—when they had that in Washington.

Polinsky: Okay. So you said you don't have any disability compensation. Did you have any injuries while you were in the military?

Reinhardt: No.

Polinsky: No.

Reinhardt: Except my broken toe. [Laughs]

Polinsky: Oh, you broke a toe.

Reinhardt: [Laughs] Yeah. But that was at the Marine Corps Depot where they had the movies. And they're not supposed to allow people to come in after it gets dark in the movie house. And some latecomers came. And I was sitting like this. And I think my toe was in the—caught between the seat ahead of me. So someone came and sat down and really hit my toe.

Polinsky: Oh no.

[00:39:54]

Reinhardt: Yeah. But that was—just a sad story. Sob story.

Polinsky: Did you continue any close friendships that you had made with your service—fellow [inaudible]?

Reinhardt: For a number of years. I still hear from one person. She must be in her nineties now. She was an enlisted person. And she just was so, so good. She helped me a lot. I got along mostly with the enlisted people because I could relate to them more. And I still hear from her.

Polinsky: Well, that's good. Do you remember her—or her name is?

Reinhardt: Jo.

Polinsky: Jo.

Reinhardt: Jo. J—O. And Ragal is her last name. R—A—G—A—L.

Polinsky: So we're about half way now. We're going to take a break for a few minutes.

Reinhardt: Okay. Would you like a refill of your Pepsi?

Polinsky: Hold on one second.

[End of OH1996.Reinhardt_file1] [Beginning of OH1996.Reinhardt_file2]

Polinsky: Okay. So we're back recording with Mary Reinhardt. Today is June 16, 2015, and this is part two. So we'll just get back into it, Mary. After you left the military, did you join and become involved in any veteran's organizations?

Reinhardt: Except for going to Marquette and the two weeks of training duty, no.

Polinsky: So you didn't belong to the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] or American Legion? Have you attended any reunions?

Reinhardt: It might—no. But there were three of us who formed United Women Veterans' Group here in Madison. Because there seemed to be a need for women veterans to get together and have an organization so the four of us founded this group, United Women Veterans. And it's still going. Some of our members have passed on because a lot of them were World War Two especially the Marines. Wow. They are really something.

Polinsky: Looking back, how do you feel about your military experience? What has it meant to your life?

Reinhardt: It's opened up all kinds of doors. It's let me see what the other half of the world was like. I might have been naïve when I entered, but I learned a lot. I think I'm a better person forever being in—I mean for ever having been in the service. And I'm proud, very proud, that I had—have served. I'm sure you are too.

Polinsky: Yeah. Do you have any other stories or anything that you'd like to—

Reinhardt: I have many stories. I've written—I do write a lot. And I have stories about my Navy experiences. I'm gonna call it "good morning ma'am, sir."

Polinsky: Oh, you're writing a book?

Reinhardt: Yes. And my children are also interested in reading some of the things that happened. I was trying to find today where I kept it, but I can't remember where because I'm sorting through a lot of my writings. I write here for the newsletter about some of the experiences we have here. And then my teaching—teaching was another place where there's so many interesting things that happened in teaching and how we learn. And you

have to give credit to those kids. When you show them love and attention and understanding, they just blossom.

Polinsky: How many years did you teach for?

Reinhardt: I taught all told six years. But here in Madison, I did a lot of teaching special ed. Hearing impaired and mentally retarded and—

Polinsky: Do you have any other careers during your life?

Reinhardt: Yes. I taught writing, for UW-Extension and for the technical college here [Madison Area Technical College]. Yeah. I've done so many things.

Polinsky: So tell me. Were you married?

Reinhardt: I got married in 1960.

Polinsky: Can you tell me how you met your husband?

Reinhardt: It was at a Christmas party. I had been engaged to another person a few years before that. But I knew it wasn't going to work, so I gave up the engagement. And then I was engaged with—or I could have been engaged to someone from Italy. But no way was I going to go to Sicily to get married. And then I met my husband.

Polinsky: And what was his name?

Reinhardt: His name was John.

Polinsky: John. And so you married in 1960.

Reinhardt: And we moved to California.

Polinsky: Oh, California.

Reinhardt: He got a job at the Division of Highways. He was a civil engineer.

Polinsky: And how many children did you have?

Reinhardt: We have three.

Polinsky: Three. Boys? Girls?

Reinhardt: Two boys and one girl.

Polinsky: And can you tell me about them?

Reinhardt: They're great. [Laughs] They really are. You do the best you can with the kids. There's really no book that you can follow. They're all different. The two boys live—one lives

in Minneapolis [Minnesota], and the other one lives in Menomonie, Wisconsin close to Eau Claire. And Marie lives here.

[00:05:13]

Polinsky: So you see her a lot?

Reinhardt: I do. She's—we just came back from the graduation of my son's twin's graduation from high school up in Minneapolis.

Polinsky: How many grandkids do you have?

Reinhardt: Seven.

Polinsky: Seven. Do you have any great—grandkids?

Reinhardt: No. [Laughs] I keep telling them, “You better hurry. Before—I would like to see them before I pass on.”

Polinsky: [Laughs] And your husband. He passed away?

Reinhardt: Yes.

Polinsky: And when was that?

Reinhardt: That was—let's see. He died in '60—he died in 2003. So that was twelve years ago.

Polinsky: Do you have any really memorable stories that you want to share about him? Maybe something your kids have never heard before.

Reinhardt: Oh, that's interesting. I think they've heard most. He was—[laughs] he was very smart. That I remember. He didn't think he was, but he was. And he was more—the person he had the ideas. And then his department implemented those ideas. And he loved fishing and hunting. I learned to fish. I loved it.

Polinsky: Sounds like you had a wonderful marriage.

Reinhardt: We did.

Polinsky: Yeah. What would you tell someone who doesn't know anything about war?

Reinhardt: That it's a horrible thing. Even if you watch some of the movies about war, you don't get the same gut feeling if you were living through it or knew someone who was in it. And it's all such—so foolish. All the money going into wars could be used in more positive ways.

Polinsky: Yeah. Did anything really surprise you when you were in the military?

Reinhardt: I think what surprised me was some people take things for granted. They don't realize that you're here to do something. That you just don't take without giving. Does that sound funny?

Polinsky: No. That sounds accurate.

Reinhardt: That we have a mission. And I don't think people think about that as much today as when things were more rough years ago.

Polinsky: What didn't you expect about your military experience?

Reinhardt: I didn't expect the people to be shallow. To go back to what I believe have previously said. That drinking, fooling around that I realize it wasn't only the military. It's all over. But that took a while for me to say, "Okay. This really goes on."

Polinsky: How is your life different now than if you hadn't been in the military?

Reinhardt: I'm much more appreciative of what I see, what I feel. And appreciative that I had a good marriage and I have three great kids. And my grandchildren respect me. And it's such a good feeling for the grandchildren come up. And they hug you, and they help you. I'm very grateful.

Polinsky: What do you want people who listen to this interview to know?

[00:09:56]

Reinhardt: That when it comes down to what's happening in the world you just don't sit by. That it does impact on your life and the life of those that you love. And that you take your freedom as something very special and not to be taken granted. It's something to you.

Polinsky: Can you tell me why it was important for you to do this oral history interview? Or why did you agree to do it?

Reinhardt: Because I think it's important for people to know. When you think—when you go to the Vietnam Memorial and you see all those names or you go to Arlington Cemetery and you think about all those wonderful young people who have passed on, so young. They didn't fulfill their lives. And that is earth shaking. And especially if you have someone, like my brother—what would have happened to him? How would he have felt? I mean he was loved. And he would have made a good uncle. And that—

Polinsky: How old was he when he passed?

Reinhardt: Twenty-two.

Polinsky: Twenty-two. And he was—was he missing in action or no?

Reinhardt: No. He was—he took part in the invasion of Normandy. And I think he brought the troops into the shore. And I think the things he saw, witnessed.

Polinsky: So he died in Normandy?

Reinhardt: No. He died at the VA hospital.

Polinsky: Oh, you said that. Yeah. So he was injured, and he—

Reinhardt: He—I think he mentally lost it. And then he was also physically—had contacted TB [tuberculosis].

Polinsky: Well, I really want to thank you for sitting down with me and telling me your story. It's been a pleasure. And before we go, do you have any questions, or do you have any extra thoughts?

Reinhardt: I think this is a great thing that is being done. For people to know and get some insight about the past. We learn from the past. We don't always use the past [laughs] to make changes. But it's good. Luckily, my grandchildren or even my in-laws have not been part of war, which is a blessing. But who knows what's ahead. Do you have children?

Polinsky: I do. I have a fifteen-year-old son and a twelve-year-old daughter.

Reinhardt: Oh really? Interesting ages.

Polinsky: Yeah. Four years apart. My husband didn't want to pay for two colleges at the same time.

Reinhardt: Oh yes. We had three in college at the same time.

Polinsky: Oh my goodness. [Laughs]

Reinhardt: Oh yes. It was something. I remember when we were able to put money in the bank. I don't believe this. [Laughs] We can put money in the bank now.

Polinsky: Because you grew up in the Depression where people didn't put money in the bank.

Reinhardt: Oh gosh. No.

Polinsky: Yeah. They were afraid.

Reinhardt: Yes. Because they lived through the Depression. Exactly.

Polinsky: Wow. Well, thank you very much.

Reinhardt: Well, it was very interesting because it was thought provoking questions.

Polinsky: Thank you. Good. Well, I'm going to stop the tape now.

[End of OH1996.Reinhardt_file2][End of interview]