

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
EUNICE H. HALL  
United States Army WAAC (WAC)  
World War II  
2003  
**[Edited by Eunice Hall]**

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**Hall, Eunice H.**, (1919- ), Oral History Interview, 2003

User copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca. 110 min), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 2 sound cassettes (ca. 110 min), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **ABSTRACT**

Hall, a Stoughton, Wis. native, discusses her experiences in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), eventually serving in the 6669<sup>th</sup> WAC Headquarters Platoon as a clerk typist, often located near to the front. She describes entering the WAACs, including specific details on the uniforms and basic training at Fort Des Moines (Iowa). After attending Army Administration School at Hendrix College (Arkansas) and a transfer to Camp Ruston (Louisiana), Hall relates in detail the WAAC day parade and entertainment. She talks about the advanced field service training at Fort Devens (Massachusetts), her transfer to Camp Patrick Henry (Virginia), and the preparations for departure on the troopship, S.S. Empress of Scotland. She describes living conditions on the troopship, camp life at Camp Don B. Passage in Casablanca (Morocco), traveling on a troop train to Mostaganem (Algeria), her responsibilities as a clerk typist, and the social activities of the WAACs. She discusses the creation of the Women's Army Corps. She talks about the transport to Naples (Italy) and Caserta (Italy). She discusses the activities of Thanksgiving and Christmas 1943, their winter gear, and leisure time. She speaks about a visit from the WAC director, seeing the site of the Volturno River crossing, touring the war-torn countryside, moving their unit through Italy, and living in tents. She describes the 1944 Easter service at Teano (Italy), forming a softball team, a week's rest on the Isle of Capri (Italy), and seeing Marlene Dietrich. She also describes her landing at Anzio, and the experience of being closer to the front lines. She describes the living conditions and social activities in 1944, particularly the hardships of winter. She refers to receiving news of President Roosevelt's death and then describes VE Day. She discusses the discharge points earned by WACs, her return to the U.S., and her employment working for the Army at Camp McCoy (Wisconsin). She lists her awards and her post-war work for the military in Washington DC and Greece, then settling in Baltimore. She also mentions being interviewed for a graduate level thesis written about her unit. She has been involved in the AmVets, the VFW, and went on a ten-day tour of Italy.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Eunice Hall (b. May 25, 1919) enlisted in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and served in Algeria and Italy as a clerk typist. She achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant by the end of the war, continued to work for the military, and eventually settled in Baltimore (Maryland).

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

Transcript edited by Eunice Hall, Abigail Miller, and Rachel Reynard, 2004.

## Interview Transcript

John: Today is October 28th. This is John Driscoll. I am a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum and this is an oral history interview with Eunice Hall. We are doing the interview at Eunice's home at 201 South Yellowstone Drive in Madison, and Eunice, thank you so much for being willing to do the interview and for inviting me over here to your house. To begin, will you tell me just some about your early life, where you were born, where and when you were born?

Eunice: I was born in Stoughton, Wisconsin, on May 25, 1919. My home town was Oregon, Wisconsin. My parents, now deceased, were John E. and Esther M. Onsrud. They were hard-working Norwegian farmers. They had five daughters and two sons.

John: Eunice, can we stop? Your last name was?

Eunice: O-N-S-R-U-D.

John: Okay. I may ask you to stop and spell every now and then if it is okay. Go ahead.

Eunice: Oh, sure. And one of my brothers is deceased. My first eight grades were spent in country schools and I graduated from Stoughton High School in June of 1937. I spent one year at Whitewater State Teachers College and six months at Groves Barnhart Business School.

John: Groves-Barnhart?

Eunice: Yes. In Madison. I worked as a switchboard operator and did various clerical jobs before entering the service.

John: I see. Take your time, as you--

Eunice: Oh, I thought you were going to ask another question.

John: No. What were you doing, well, let me go back and ask a question I ask everybody. Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Eunice: Oh, yes.

John: And do you remember what you were doing?

Eunice: Well, let me see, I was in Biloxi, Mississippi, for a year visiting friends. And I came back in the fall of 1942.

John: Okay.

Eunice: But, prior to that, President Roosevelt had signed a bill creating the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, in May of 1942. And when I returned from Biloxi, Mississippi, in the Fall of 1942, I decided that I would want to join the WAACs. And so I--it was in November that I completed an application, which I obtained from the Army Recruiting Station in Madison, and mailed it to the Induction Station in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And I thought joining the WAACs would be an exciting adventure. Then a "notice to proceed" by train to Milwaukee on December 16 was received.

John: If I can interrupt here, did you have idea of what the WAACs were, or did you know anyone who was in the WAACs?

Eunice: No, I did not. I did not have anybody. I just went to Milwaukee by myself. It was something that I did on the spur of the moment. I am like that, once in a while.

John: Okay.

Eunice: And, so I proceeded to Milwaukee by train on December 16 and on December 17, along with a large group of women, I reported to the Recruiting and Induction Officer and I was interviewed, given mental alertness tests, had a physical examination, filled out questionnaires, and took the oath of office on December 23, 1942. Then they sent me back home to await further orders. Joining the WAACs was an opportunity to serve my country and to serve overseas. I was the only one in my immediate family that entered the service. I had two cousins who were in the service.

John: Did you have brothers or sisters?

Eunice: I had two brothers, but they, one was too young, and the oldest one received an agricultural deferment. Now you will want to know about my basic training.

John: Just whatever you think of.

Eunice: In January, 1943, I received orders to proceed to Chicago by train, to arrive at 9:00 a.m. on January 25. I joined a group of women leaving for Fort Des Moines, Iowa, arriving there at 9:30 p.m. We were met by a WAAC corporal and two WAAC officers who directed us to our barracks. We dropped our luggage, selected bunk beds and were led to the mess hall for a quick meal. The next morning we were awakened by a corporal's whistle at 6:00 a.m. Four weeks of basic training was about to begin. We were given the rank of AUX, which stands for Auxiliary, and were assigned to Company 10, Regiment 3, Army Post Branch. We were immediately given our allowance of clothing. There was a shortage of

WAAC clothing in certain sizes so in the first week, some of us wore civilian clothes along with men's overcoats and stiff leather gloves. I was issued a man's overcoat and gloves which were too big, but marched in them I did, until I was issued the proper size. We were also given a woven Army cap and galoshes. Our hat issued at the time was the Hobby hat. Later issue was the overseas cap. Our shoes were brown leather. For my double-A width foot, they fitted me with size 9B, explaining that I needed extra width for marching. During the second week, we were properly fitted for our uniforms. Olive-drab for winter, khaki for summer. And included were shirts, skirts, ties and a brown handbag.

John: Something I missed back there. Your hat, it was a Hobby hat?

Eunice: Hobby hat.

John: Hobby hat. Okay.

Eunice: I also have pictures, John, if you want to see them.

John: No, that is fine. I just want to be sure I get the right spelling.

Eunice: Yes, the Hobby hat. It was named after Colonel Hobby, who was the first director of the WAAC.

John: Oh, okay. H-o-b-b-y?

Eunice: Right. When, I didn't mention that, did I? Can I go back?

John: Sure. Oh, absolutely.

Eunice: When President Roosevelt signed the bill creating the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, on May 14, 1942, Oveta Culp Hobby, of Houston, Texas, became its first director, with the rank of colonel.

John: Okay. Okay.

Eunice: Basic training consisted of kitchen police duty, which is known as KP. Marching, drills, calisthenics, barracks and personnel inspections, tetanus, typhoid and small pox immunizations, lectures, classes on military training and first aid, defense against chemical attack, defense against air attack, rules and regulations, supply, organization of the Army, instructions in the use of the gas mask and a few others, interviews and classification tests such as mental, medical and mechanical. A commander was in charge of Company 10, and it was made up of three platoons, a commanding officer for each. And each platoon was made up of four squads, a leader for each, and each platoon commanding officer was in charge of a

barracks. Each squad leader was in charge of her squad for a week. I was squad leader in February and had to assign fatigue duty each morning to seventeen members of my squad. The fort used to be an old cavalry post but was taken over in the summer of 1942 as a training center for the WAAC. It was called the First WAAC Training Center. For the first five days, our living quarters were once stables, and used during the cavalry days, but later converted into barracks. Then we moved into Boonetown, an area on the fort consisting of new barracks, stone buildings built for the WAAC. The fort was located six miles from the heart of the city of Des Moines. During the weekend, February 13-14, we were confined to our barracks to prepare for the visit of the First Lady. Our barracks had to be in A-1 condition. At 2:00 p. m., February 14, all WAAC companies marched in review to honor the First Lady, Eleanore Roosevelt. After four weeks of basic training, we thought we could endure almost anything. This is my first assignment, coming up.

John: Okay.

Eunice: On February 24, 1943, the first contingent of WAACs to be transferred out of Fort Des Moines departed by train at 9:00 p. m. We arrived in Conway, Arkansas, about 11:00 a. m. on February 25, and marched one mile to the dormitories of Hendrix College. The campus was taken over by the government for the purpose of instructing WAACs in all phases of Army Administration School. We were enrolled in Class One, WAAC Branch Number Three, Army Administration School, for a six week course, at the Arkansas State Teachers College. Opening exercises commenced on March 1. Subjects covered were military organization, operations, functions, military correspondence, communications, records and reports, typing, filing, mimeographing, and many others. In addition to classes, there was a recreation program which included basketball, volley ball, parties and dancing. On March 6, a group of WAACs went to Little Rock, Arkansas, thirty-five miles away to march in a recruiting parade before the civilian population and soldiers at Camp Robinson. On April 6, we had a military parade in which all four companies participated. Brigadier General Lewis, Washington, D. C., and administrative officers were in the reviewing stand. Graduation exercises were held on April 7 with numerous military and civilian dignitaries present. There were 249 graduates, all receiving the rank of AFC, Auxiliary First Class, \$54 a month. Some salary, hunh?

John: Well, you were, you know, ten years later, twelve years later, I was making the same thing.

Eunice: Were you?

John: Yea, right out of boot camp, \$68 a month.

Eunice: Okay, my further assignment. New orders were issued and on April 8 I left with a group of women by train for Ruston, Louisiana. Now I changed it to women. Years ago, they were called girls and boys, in World War II.

John: Okay.

Eunice: But I changed it to women.

John: Okay. To where in Louisiana?

Eunice: Ruston.

John: Okay.

Eunice: We were assigned to the 42nd Regiment, Branch A, WAAC Training Center Number 5, at Camp Ruston. The camp was built for male prisoners and barbed wire was everywhere. We lived in temporary barracks, and used the "For Men Only" latrines. Upon my return from a ten-day furlough, I was assigned as Duty Sergeant in the WAAC Casual Company. Colonel Hobby, the WAAC Director, was on an inspection tour and spoke to us in May. About one hundred WAACs personnel left for Shreveport, Louisiana, on May 8 to participate in a parade in honor of WAAC Day. The parade took place on the streets of Shreveport with hundreds of spectators lining the streets. There were two police escorts, followed by the Barksdale (Air Corps) Field Band, then the WAACs, and I was one of six leaders in the front row. Local recruiting office personnel, soldiers in three jeeps, and Saint Vincent's Academy Drum and Bugle Corps. The Women's Club of Shreveport served punch and popcorn. Later, an all Negro orchestra of Barksdale Field furnished music for a soda pop dance. We had dinner with the soldiers, then toured the field with our escorts. Later in the evening, we were entertained with a floor show put on by an all Negro cast, orchestra, a comedy team, a tap dancer with a wooden leg, and the Ink Spots.

John: Wow.

Eunice: Remember the Ink Spots?

John: *The Ink Spots?*

Eunice: Yep.

John: Oh, yes, absolutely. Yea.

Eunice: On May 15, we held open house for the people of Ruston and vicinity. We served as receptionists and guides. We had planted different kinds of shrubbery which

we dug up from a near-by woods, raked the area, cleaned our barracks and many other duties that had to be done to make a good appearance. The people were very curious to see how a WAAC really lived. A few days later, a group of us were interviewed by a WAAC officer from Camp Polk for the possibility of serving overseas. My name was put on the list of those to be transferred to the staging area at the 5th WAAC Training Center at Camp Polk, near Leesville, Louisiana, for overseas service. Those who signed up for overseas duty departed Camp Ruston on May 21 and were assigned to the 41st WAAC Training Regiment, at Camp Polk. To our horror, one of the women and I discovered we were put in the wrong compound. There were several compounds. After some explaining, we finally were put in the overseas compound a few days later and assigned to the 161st WAAC Headquarters Company. We had very little time to get ready before we were to depart for Fort Devens, Massachusetts, on May 27. We were excused from a briefing to be given by the base commanding general. We spent two days stenciling duffel bags, packing, laundry, etc. I received a big birthday cake from home and left it on my cot to share with the whole barracks, and I was lucky to get a piece. It was very hot at Camp Polk. We were on tropical time, which meant we got up at 5:00 a. m., got our work done and had the rest of the day off, during the hottest part of the day. Three companies of WAAC personnel departed Camp Polk on May 27 by troop train for Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Fort Devens was located about three miles from the small town, Ayers, which we visited a few times. We arrived at Fort Devens on May 30. For the next seven weeks, we received advanced field service training for overseas duty, training nearly identical to that given men. Such training included hikes, climbing cargo nets, first aid, advanced map reading, defense against chemical and air attacks, compass use, malaria control and how to mess in the field. We were gassed, dispersed and taught to seek cover. Given brief lessons in French and Spanish, swimming and jiu-jitsu. We had to at least learn how to float. Two of the women taught me how to float in a nearby pond, because I didn't know anything about swimming, and I was determined.

John: Yea.

Eunice: I was assigned to the office, typing and taking care of the duty roster, besides going to classes. One of the women griped about an assignment I had given her. Later, she became my best friend. I got involved in my non-professional skills as a hair dresser, giving home permanents, shampoos, sets, styling and cutting hair which continued throughout my military career.

John: That must have made you very popular.

Eunice: Oh, I was very popular. My WAAC friends were, I had a lot of customers.

John: I believe it.



- Eunice: During the first week at Fort Devens, Washington — I assume it was the War Department — radioed 5th Army Headquarters to the effect that a platoon of fifty-seven women and two officers be formed and trained for special duty overseas. Meanwhile, I received a three-day pass to see mother, who was ill. On June 3, fifty-seven women and two officers were selected from the 161st and 162nd WAAC Headquarters Company. The 182nd WAAC Headquarters Platoon was then activated. We were told to report to separate barracks and were given special treatment. Our platoon was chosen for an experiment in the integration of women into the tactical field units. As we would learn later, this meant that we would move with the 5th Army as the troops advanced, rather than being stationed in a permanent rear area.
- John: Oh, I see.
- Eunice: The officers were the commanding officer and the supply officer. The Table of Organization included telephone operators, teletype operators, stenographers, clerk-typists, clerks and administrative clerks, a platoon sergeant, a company clerk and a mess sergeant, two cooks, a cook's helper and a utility repair woman. On June 14, we participated in a colorful parade in honor of Flag Day. All the WAACs marched with a WAAC band. In the parade were the flags of allied nations with Old Glory in the lead. On June 29, one of our WAAC sisters was taken suddenly ill and died three days later.
- John: Oh, wow.
- Eunice: We were so sad to lose her.
- John: Eunice, do you know what she died of?
- Eunice: Well, they weren't sure, but it was a cerebral hemorrhage.
- John: Oh, that is tragic.
- Eunice: Yea. She was from Taft, California. She was, I think, would have been twenty-four years old a month or so later. Yea, wasn't that awful?
- John: Yes.
- Eunice: So we all attended a military funeral for her in Ayers, Massachusetts. On July 8 it was Fort Devens Night at Symphony Hall in Boston, Massachusetts. We were entertained by a two and a half hour Pops concert. One of the WAACs and I spent a day in Boston, toured the city and saw a stage show featuring Cab Calloway and his orchestra.

John: Oh, wow. Yea.

Eunice: I'll describe life in the military. Now, this is a biggie.

John: Okay, that's great.

Eunice: On July 18, the 182nd WAAC Headquarters Platoon boarded a train bound for the embarkation point, Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia. For ten days we were in a staging area under heavy security restrictions. We were unable to make a telephone call without prior permission and were closely watched by Military Police. The days were very hot and the mosquitoes were wild. Inoculations were given to all troops going abroad. A lot of men fainted. But, as we left the clinic, we, the WAACs, left the clinic and walked past the waiting crowd, we did not react to the shots until we were in our barracks. We took our turn at KP duties. One morning when I was on KP duty, Sergeant Sterling Holloway was on the same shift. He was a shaky-voiced comedian of stage, screen and radio who went over to Africa on the same ship. He was one of the Yardbirds who later performed with Special Services in a show called "Hey, Rookie!" in the Casablanca area. And he was a character.

John: His last name was?

Eunice: Holloway. Sterling Holloway. The waiting finally ended on July 28 when the platoon received orders to fall in. Fully loaded with backpacks, we marched one mile in a drenching downpour and up the gangplank of the troopship, the S. S. *Empress of Scotland*.

John: I remember interviewing a bomber pilot who went across on the *Empress of Scotland*.

Eunice: Did you?

John: Yea.

Eunice: Same time?

John: I'm not sure about the time, but I know it was the *Empress of Scotland*.

Eunice: July 28, '43. At Hampton Roads, Virginia, unaware of our destination. We were housed in comfortable staterooms, ten women to a stateroom, and we ate in the officers' dining room. The Red Cross treated us to sewing kits, cigarettes, soap, writing paper, envelopes, cards, a book and candy. The S. S. *Empress of Scotland* set sail early morning of July 29 under sea and air escorts. It was an uneventful

trip. The weather was beautiful except the last two days which were rainy and cool. During the day we sat on the deck and looked out over the vastness of the ocean and watched the big waves roll as the ship moved and rocked. The deck was shared with officers, nurses and Red Cross workers. The enlisted men were housed in the lower decks. We had boat drill once or twice a day. The cast of "Hey, Rookie!" was on the same ship and entertained us. Our voyage aboard the S. S. *Empress of Scotland* came to an end at 2145 hours, that is 9:45 p. m., on August 6. It was dusk on the ninth day when we finally saw land and there was much rejoicing. As we came closer, a large city of stone buildings lay before us. We had reached Casablanca, in Morocco. We prepared ourselves for debarkation, and what a sensation it was to walk down the gangplank as pictures were taken and set foot on foreign soil. Cheers of welcome from the GIs rang from all sides for American girls are here. Along with our gear, we were taken by trucks a few miles away to Camp Don B. Passage, a staging area in a field of white powdery dry soil like walking in flour. It was our introduction to tent living, sleeping on cots, five to a tent, and soil beneath our feet. We fished our flashlights out of our barracks bags and headed for the latrine one half mile away, and then settled in for the night. The next morning we woke to the exotic sight of Arabs riding their burros and camels, going to market in Casablanca. Men were aboard, with women walking behind with baskets on their heads. From now on, the familiar routine of everyday life, eating, personal hygiene, dressing, housing would take on a new and different character. We were first introduced to K-Rations and C-Rations, canned and dehydrated foods. We discovered the versatility of the Army helmet, besides being an essential piece of wearing apparel, it served as a sink and laundry basin. We could say we were really roughing it.

John: You know what we found? The most, one of the better uses for that thing, also?

Eunice: What?

John: It was something to sit on.

Eunice: Oh, yea?

John: Out in the field, you didn't have a chair. You could sit on it. Go ahead.

Eunice: Sure. On August 8, Senator Meade, from New York, who was on a tour of camp areas, visited Camp Don. B. Passage.

John: Is that Camp Don B. Passage?

Eunice: Camp Don B. Passage.

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

John: Okay. This is the beginning of Side 2 of Tape 1.

Eunice: Okay.

John: This is great.

Eunice: The morning of August 9, we were taken to Casablanca to see the city before we left. Our first trip on foreign soil was about to begin, and many more were to follow. We left Casablanca on a troop train consisting of two coaches and ten or twelve boxcars, called Forty and Eight, designed during World War I to hold forty men or eight horses. We used two of the boxcars, thirty women to a boxcar, along with barracks bags, musette bags, helmets, gas masks, bed rolls, mess kits and food. We slept in shifts and those who weren't fortunate enough to get to the floor slept across barracks bags with Army blankets for cover. We took turns dangling our feet out the door and standing in the doorway to watch the Moroccan landscape inch by inch. For three days and two nights we traveled through beautiful ranges of the Atlas Mountains above green, fertile valleys. We existed on C-Rations, bread and jam — no butter — canned juices and canned fruit. When it was time to eat, the cooks tore open wooden boxes containing cans of beans and hash, We each took one and waited our turn for the can openers. We drank warm water from our canteens. The only stops were at public toilets, dirty marble buildings with holes in the floors. Surrounding the cars were natives selling fruits and vegetables which we were forbidden to touch, and begging for candy and gum. On occasion, we would give them some. During our trip we were so crowded we could not change clothes and we were covered with soot. The train finally pulled into Oran, Algeria, on August 11. We were met by seven-foot tall black Senegalese soldiers who helped shift our baggage to Army trucks for the fifty mile trip to Mostaganem, Algeria.

John: Where?

Eunice: Mostaganem, Algeria.

John: Okay.

Eunice: Tired, hungry and dirty, we arrived at our new home, a huge two-storied stone building which was formerly a girls rug-making school. There was a huge balcony along the upper floor with a huge courtyard below, where we hung our wash. The rooms were large with high ceilings and tiled walls. We slept ten women to a room on Army cots and lived out of our barracks bags. Our mess hall was in the building as well as a large recreation hall where we spent our free time writing letters, entertaining and playing games. We were more interested in getting a shower and washing our hair even if the water was cold and we had to

use GI soap. GI stands for Government Issue.

John: Right.

Eunice: Eating, even if it was still C-Rations, and sleeping, even if the cots felt better than the boxcar floor. The next morning we had a spectacular view of the blue-green waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The day was free to get ourselves settled before going to work. We had a beach picnic and swam in the sea. We were trained to fire the M-1 rifle on the beach. We started our new jobs at the 5th Army Headquarters on August 13. I was assigned as clerk typist and later as clerk stenographer in the clothing and equipment section of the Quartermaster Corps, working for several colonels and majors. One of the women, and a friend, was secretary to Colonel William P. Sullivan, the Quartermaster. Besides taking dictation and typing various letters and reports, I typed requisitions for clothing for the troops. These requisitions would be sent to the States to be filled and the clothing shipped to the 5th Army for distribution. One of the women was assigned as secretary to the Commanding General of the 5th Army, Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark. We took turns being CQ, Charge of Quarters, in the platoon orderly room, being responsible to see that all women were in their rooms by eleven p. m., which we called "bed check." We notified the commanding officer of any problems, answered the phone, etc. Three of the women became my best friends. Our offices were located in a huge marble building three-quarters of a mile from our building. We walked to the office in the morning but got a ride at noon and at night. We worked seven days a week, with half a day off. Our half days off were usually spent sightseeing. Living in Algeria we were exposed to Arab and French cultures. There was a definite contrast between the two. We were kept busy socially, too. Parties on the beach, sing-alongs, swimming, dancing and activities in the recreation hall. Soldiers stationed in neighboring towns invited us to dances. They would pick us up in trucks, and take us back. We were allowed only three hours out at night. And, of course, we had refreshments. Sometimes cake, pie, punch were served at dances. We acquired a little mascot, a brown puppy which one of the women got for a package of Double Mint gum. So we named it Double Mint. We started a Protestant WAAC choir. Soldiers in another camp put on a quiz program in which there were three WAAC participants. We all had a chance to get up on stage, a truck, and speak over a loud speaker, giving our name, home town and state. On July 1, 1943, President Roosevelt signed a bill creating the Women's Army Corps. On September 1, patriotism was deeply felt when the entire platoon reenlisted in the U. S. Army as members of the Women's Army Corps, after being discharged from the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps the day before.

John: Ah, Eunice, one of the other women that was in the WAAC mentioned that. When you were discharged from the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, could you have gone home if you had not reenlisted?

Eunice: Oh, yea. We could have.

John: But most of the women--

Eunice: But the whole entire platoon reenlisted.

John: Signed over. Okay.

Eunice: In a short ceremony, we all took the oath of office making us soldiers in the Army which meant we would be under the same rules and regulations and have the same privileges as the male soldiers. The band played a few numbers and General Clark gave a short talk. After the ceremony, we received our WAC ribbons which we were proud to wear. General Eisenhower once stated that he would like to see the WACs stay in the army, particularly overseas, as they are very valuable. He said, "If a single one of you go home, it is one too many." The headquarters fellows gave a wonderful dance party in our day room which was decorated with colored streamers and bouquets of flowers. Each WAC received a corsage of roses. Refreshments of grapefruit juice, cake and cookies baked by our WAC cooks were served. During the week of September 12-18, I went on detached service to perform special work in another WAC company. Those women were living in tents and had much further to go to work. They had a lot of water in their tents due to a recent rainy spell. The 5th Army Headquarters moved out early in September for the Italian invasion, leaving our platoon behind as part of the headquarters rear link. D-Day at Salerno beachhead was September 9, 1943. In the evening of September 22, a group of fellows built a bonfire on the beach and we all gathered on the sand and roasted wieners and had coffee and peach pie, then we burst out in a chorus of songs. One of the fellows had a beautiful voice and entertained us with a few solos. By September 28, we found the weather turning colder which meant it was time to start wearing our olive drab uniforms. Double Mint kept growing and becoming more mischievous. He would grab at our stockings on the line and drag our shoes away. We would limit him to one-half rations for his misbehavior. The show, "Hey, Rookie!" was staged for the benefit of the WACs and Navy personnel in the evening. See, he was still pretty active entertaining us.

John: Yea, yea.

Eunice: On October 8, ten WACs went out to a French home in the evening and were most welcomed by the proprietor. About ten of the soldiers invited us out there for dancing and food. The French homes were not very appealing on the outside but when you entered the homes you got an entirely different impression. We were greeted by the soldiers and their officers, two French officers and the owner of the home. The evening started off with introductions and the usual question,

“Where are you from?” With music coming from the radio and a Victrola, dancing was in progress. We paused for an occasional drink and candy. Later we were taken into the kitchen where a huge table with a white table cloth was set with two large plates of different kinds of sandwiches and a big chocolate cake with chocolate icing, and two candles. It was the sergeant’s birthday, so we sang “Happy Birthday.” The next evening, one of the women and I went to the hospital to visit some of the WACs and many of the fellows who were confined there. They were so glad we took the time to visit with them. The bombardiers who were going back to the States hosted a dinner dance for us on October 13. They served chicken omelets, tomatoes and onions. We were often guests at chicken dinners. Different organizations gave dances and all.

John: Sure.

Eunice: Movies were available, among them “The Fighting 69th.”

John: Oh, yes. Pat O’Brien, Jimmy Cagney.

Eunice: We had a food kitty in which we would put a few francs. When someone went to the market, they would buy oranges for us. We had a radio. We would listen to different programs like Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, and other musical programs. On October 26, the captain took us all on an eight mile hike outside of town. We went over hill after hill, most of the way in about six inches of sand. That was grueling. On November 1, one of the women and I, along with a couple of Navy fellows, drove to a nearby city in the mountains and stopped at a well-known restaurant which is built on the mountainside. We walked out on the terrace and looked down on the city on one side and the Mediterranean on the other. It was a spectacular sight.

John: I’ll bet.

Eunice: In November, we had an inspection of our rooms conducted by our commanding officer. Everything had to be in A-1 condition according to Army Regulations. Christmas packages were beginning to arrive. Six of us and a lieutenant went shopping in an Arab store. The Arab made all the things he sold. All handiwork. Mainly jackets and purses, were made from fine wool material and were decorated with gold metallic trimming and colored cords. One of the women bought a sleeveless jacket. It was quite beautiful and a real bargain at \$20. We stopped at the marche — I think that is how you pronounce it — the market, for curiosity. Saw countless vegetables, some of which we could not name. We each bought a kilo of huge, delicious olives. On Armistice Day, November 11, there was an afternoon parade in town with French, English and American soldiers, along with French WACs, and our platoon participating. In the afternoon, while in the park, we saw this immense convoy just off Mostaganem. About seven p. m., it

had been attacked by planes. We saw two ships blow up and be sunk. We kept thinking about all those boys out there. We learned on November 12, the next day, that we would be moving after three months at Mostaganem so we packed up barracks bags and musette bags and gathered together gas masks, canteens, mess kits, bed rolls and so forth for the trip. The next day found us boarding trucks for the long, cold ride to Mers-el-Kabir (I don't know if I pronounced that correctly) on the Mediterranean coast. There the Navy transport, U. S. S. *James O'Hara*, was waiting. We were now exposed to Navy life. We realized the dangers of this trip but every precaution was taken for our safety. We were the first WACs to be assigned to an Army and the first to leave North Africa. Oh, we had a lot more "firsts."

John: Yea.

Eunice: We lived in staterooms, had double-decker beds with soft mattresses. We had sheets, a pillow, bed spreads on bunk beds and we used our own blanket. We had lockers with a mirror on the inside of the door. The bathroom was very modernistic with hot and cold running water. Each morning and afternoon we had boat drill. After our last meal, we had church services. A choir was formed and performed during services. Programs were arranged and given by the talented fellows on board. We ate delicious food on trays in the dining room with piped music. Books for our reading pleasure were obtained from the ship's library. Life belts had to be worn. Our three-day voyage took us to Naples, aware of the possibility of being torpedoed. November 17 was a cold, damp, windy and foggy day. We saw the coastline of Italy for the first time, having sailed past the Isle of Capri. The U. S. S. *James O'Hara* was unable to pull all the way into the harbor so the troops were put ashore in invasion barges. We were all loaded down with our gear as we touched the Italian mainland. Our platoon became the first WAC's, and the first American women, with the exception of the nurses at Salerno, to set foot in war-torn Europe.

John: Oh, wow. Okay.

Eunice: The harbor showed the horrors of war. Ships of every size and kind, and every conceivable condition, were lying on their sides, some with bottoms up, others sunk with nothing but mastheads sticking out of the water. Naples, the second largest port in Italy, was a mass of crumbled stone and twisted steel. The city was captured about six weeks before our arrival. It was in shambles. Scenes of great destruction would be repeated as we followed the combat troops up the boot of Italy. Along with our gear, we climbed aboard trucks but waited for quite a while before proceeding to our destination. Wave after wave of GIs came off the troops ships, going off to battle and singing along the way. We finally moved, passing along the way bivouacs of American and English soldiers sleeping in pup tents on the cold, wet ground and mud a foot thick. Thirty-five miles later we arrived at



our new home, Palazzo Realio, a hundred-room palace located in the town of Caserta. It was to be our home and workplace for the next several months. We finally found our rooms on the top floor and tired after climbing flight after flight of stairs with packs on our backs. Our rooms were spacious and comfortable. Some of the rooms in this building were papered in silk. There were paintings, frescoes and statues around. There was no heating system in the building. It was damp and cold. We ate in the basement, standing at long tables, waiting in long lines; outside were poorly-clad, barefoot children begging for our scraps, which we would put on whatever container they brought. We stood in another line to wash our mess kits. We worked in the headquarters offices on floors in between. Certain areas of the building had been bombed and were closed off. It was quite a challenge to negotiate the stairs and corridors without getting lost. Everything was in this massive building to afford us entertainment and recreation. Opera house, theaters, dances, USO shows [United Service Organization], and parties. Holidays, birthdays, and special events were always excuses for parties. On November 19, the 182nd WAC Headquarters Platoon was disbanded and reorganized under the new designation of the 6669th WAC Headquarters Platoon (Provisional). The headquarters fellows hosted a dance party to welcome us to our new environment. A few days later we were told to move from the top floor, so we had to gather up all our gear and move a few floors below. We had an Italian woman to clean the hall ways and the bathrooms. We always gave her something, candy, food, etc., for which she was very grateful. The people were starving for food and clothing and so happy to get anything. We again formed a choir with WACs and enlisted men. The director was a corporal, and a talented singer who often sang solos. We practiced for one and a half hours on Thursday evenings. November 25 was Thanksgiving Day. Church services were held in a large room, and we faced a large opening in the ceiling. You know, bombed out. As the room was very cold, we had to wear our overcoats. We had a turkey dinner with all the trimmings and pumpkin pie. A few items of clothing were issued to us. Two pairs of wool knee socks, field jackets, trousers and inner liners, a few olive drab wool shirts. We also got two foot lockers. A laundry had been set up by some Italians. It took a week before our garments were back. Every Saturday night was set aside as a dance night. On November 30, a group of soldiers from the front came down for a rest. They held a dance for us. How great it was for them that they could enjoy themselves before they had to go back. Rome was not too far away, so we could go there to sight-see and shop. December 6, after months of taking cold showers, we now had hot showers. One of the GIs in our office gave the secretary and I tickets to the opera *La Boheme*, which we saw in the theater. It was presented by an all Italian cast of talented musicians and singers to a full house.

John: Oh, wow.

Eunice: Yea, that was a superb show. December 7 was the anniversary of Pearl Harbor. We went to the 5th Army Headquarters dance. The ballroom was decorated with

colored streamers and a box-shaped covering over the huge light was decorated with the 5th Army insignia. Highlight of the evening was when the 5th Army mascot, GI Jinny, a small burro, made her appearance on the dance floor. She wore a blanket with the 5th Army insignia sewn on, which the fellows had made. In the evening of December 8, Colonel Sullivan hosted dinner for the enlisted personnel in our department in appreciation for the work we had been doing. On December 15, a reporter came to my place of work to interview me. He wanted my opinion on the bill of absentee voting for the armed forces. I favored the bill. My opinion was broadcast to the States that afternoon, stating my name and home town.

John: Oh, great.

Eunice: December 20 we got a Christmas tree in Caserta for our room and we decorated it and put our presents underneath. There was a PX [Post Exchange] in Caserta where we did some shopping, and I remember we were only allowed to buy three Cokes a week. One day in December a group of us toured Pompeii and Naples. While at Pompeii, we witnessed the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. December 24, the Quartermaster Section had a party for officers, enlisted men, we, the secretary and I. The choir sang at Protestant services at 9:30 p. m., and then at the Catholic chapel at 11:30 p. m., for Christmas Eve Midnight Mass, which was broadcast to the States. Afterwards, we all went caroling. After church services on Christmas Day, we had a turkey dinner with dressing, mashed potatoes, peas, crushed pineapple, fruitcake and coffee. Along with five other WACs, I was made corporal. The postal service did an excellent job during the holidays. Even the GIs at the front said their mail arrived in reasonable time. January 19, 1944, Joe E. Brown, the comedian, dropped in to see us. He put on a show for the 5th Army Headquarters. Do you remember him?

John: Yep.

Eunice: We had tops made for our field shoes, so they would look like combat boots. And January 21, a beauty parlor was set up in the day room. Two Italian male operators ran it. Everyone got a permanent at a cost of \$2.50. Can you imagine?

John: Yes. Wow.

Eunice: Either machine or machine-less, and a hand electric dryer was used. Colonel Hobby, the WAC Director, was on an inspection of WAC installations. She spoke to us in the Royal Opera House, after which each of us were presented to her by our commanding officer. On January 28, the first split in our platoon happened. The forward echelon, that was the communications personnel in the forward echelon, moved to a bivouac area near Presanzano. They were billeted in pyramidal tents with orderly room, and day room. January 30, Colonel Sullivan

gave three of us the afternoon off and told Andy, his chauffeur, to take us for a ride. On the way, Andy showed us the spot where our troops had difficulty crossing the Volturno River. The river was very narrow and quite muddy, also winding. We went up toward the front, but not where we would be under fire. Roads were in bad condition, but could have been worse, had they not been somewhat repaired. Torn-down bridges had been rebuilt. Towns were war-torn. People were poorly clad and hungry, living among the ruins. They stood in awe as American women passed by. Farming was being done by oxen. Oxen and burros were the only means of transportation. We stopped in one of the quartermaster bakeries and had lunch. One of the officers took us on a tour and showed us how bread was made in the Army.

**[Beginning of Side A of Tape 2.]**

John: Okay, this is the beginning of Side 1 of Tape 2.

Eunice: In February of 1944, the headquarters fellows put on a dance for us to celebrate our being overseas six months. Valentines Day was an exceptionally busy day in the Quartermaster's Section. We three WACs were kept busy typing and taking dictation all day long. There was typhus in the city of Caserta so we were restricted from going there. Also in February, we had cold, damp weather and no snow. In the mountains it was very cold with lots of snow. There were many British soldiers eating with us. Our Red Cross room was jam-packed with them. They had a Red Cross of their own, but liked ours better. A few Italian soldiers also ate with us. There was well over a thousand eating every meal so the lines were quite long. A company of Air Force WACs arrived and lived in Caserta. The few Air Force WACs living with us hated to leave and join them. The 5th Army had a radio station. We could listen to a variety of programs including Cecil B. DeMille Radio Theater, Bob Hope's programs and music programs from London. Each of us received a wool knit sweater from the Red Cross. We were authorized to wear them only to work and around the quarters. On March 6, we all had our physical examinations. The medical doctor gave us a forty-five minute talk before the examination. We were relieved from work for an hour on March 10 to see the actor, John Garfield, and three female singers perform. The show was held outside. A large platform with a canvas top was erected for them. We stood in the rain to watch. Our platoon signed up to donate blood for the troops. On March 12, Colonel Sullivan was promoted to brigadier general at noon. He was presented with a big cake in the shape of a star made by one of the QM [Quartermaster] bakery companies. I had the honor of cutting and serving it to the personnel. That night there was a headquarters dance and each woman was given a corsage. Refreshments were ice cream, doughnuts and pineapple juice. You ever notice pineapple juice was used a lot?

John: Yea.

Eunice: Either juice or canned pineapple. Four actresses, USO showgirls, were living with us. On March 22, the forward command post moved to Teano. On March 23, the rear echelon moved near Sparanise. Thus began the echelons leap-frogging up the spine of Italy with stays as short as a week. We were now living and working in tents, in an olive grove on the side of a mountain. A Lister bag containing our chlorinated drinking water hung from a tree. There were four or five girls to a tent. We liked living in tents. It was much healthier than that big, cold building at Caserta. After cutting away stumps, raking the grass and gathering sand for a floor, hammering a few boards together for a clothes rack, raiding the mess hall for some boxes for dressers and various odds and ends, we finally put up our cots and arranged our tent area to be as comfortable as possible. On March 25, two Red Cross girls moved in a tent next to ours. Two French WACs moved in one of the tents, also a nurse. Some of the men put a stove in each of the tents for warmth during these cold spells. Now we can heat water to do our washing. We had been issued high four-buckled overshoes so we could walk in the mud. There was lots of it, because of the rainy season. One of the women carried stones down from the mountainside and sprinkled them on our tent floor, which made the muddy floor more compact and easier to walk on. You've heard of the mud in Italy?

John: Oh, yes. I spent time in Italy. They say "Sunny Italy," but when it gets muddy and cold, it gets muddy and cold.

Eunice: Oh, it was terrible. The fellows put up a day room tent so we had a place to take our dates. A few Italian women did our laundry for us. Our offices were in tents, also. We sat at our typewriters with muddy boots and typed with much difficulty when the papers had to be anchored. The movie, "Phantom Lady" was being held outside. We were told to bring our own chairs but it was too cold to sit through it. General Sullivan took his secretary and I for a ride in his staff car. Saw some interesting parts of the country and he told us some interesting stories about Italy. We liked living and eating in tents. We got more fresh air walking back and forth to work, to meals. The food had improved and we were getting butter. It was a treat. April 4, I was usually the first one up in the morning, so I got the stove started so it was nice and warm when the other women got up. The British soldiers gave a concert in the evening of April 4. Easter Sunday occurred on April 9. Sunrise services were held at 7 a.m. on the side of the mountain behind our tents. After the service, I went to work for an hour and then the choir left for the forward echelon at Teano for Easter services which were broadcast to the States. The services were held high on a knoll overlooking a patch of white daisies. Chaplain Brown gave the sermon. General Clark spoke and the Army band gave a concert. We were hoping it would not rain but as the broadcast began, raindrops began to fall and a drizzling rain continued throughout the day. The choir sang with raindrops trickling down our faces. In the audience were officers, U. S. enlisted men, British soldiers, WACs, nurses, Red Cross workers and USO

entertainers. The service was also broadcast in the evening over the 5th Army radio station. April 15 photographers from the Public Relations Office took individual pictures of us for recruiting purposes. I was one of four women interviewed on the evening of April 16 about our WAC careers by a WAC lieutenant from Africa for radio publicity and recruiting purposes. General Sullivan gave the quartermaster WACs the rest of the day off. His driver took us to one of the quartermaster bakeries and had dinner with the commanding officer. The captain took us on a tour of the bakery and gave us three loaves of bread and a beautifully decorated cake. On top was written, "Welcome, Quartermaster WACs." There was a treat for all when we got back. General Sullivan treated us well.

John: That is great.

Eunice: He was a great gentleman, regular, typical Irishman. April, 1944, I organized a WAC softball team. I was chosen captain of the team and became its pitcher. We practiced three times a week. We competed with other WAC companies nearby and with the forward echelon. Volleyball, badminton, and horseshoes were also played at Sportland Park. Mosquitoes were becoming more numerous as the weather got warmer. Mosquito nets, insect repellent and Atabrine tablets were standard issue to guard against malaria. The mosquito nets served as a canopy over our cots and had to be tucked in. We took half a tablet of those lovely yellow pills called Atabrine every night. They had a tendency to make one ill so we took them in shifts so there wouldn't be too many ill at one time. They never affected me. On April 27, our platoon was held in high esteem by General Clark for our performance and efficiency in the face of whatever dangers and hardships came our way. In a public ceremony near Teano, he presented our platoon with the 5th Army plaque with clasp. It was awarded for meritorious service during the month of February. He pinned the Medusa ribbon on a small representative group of WACs. We would later receive the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque, thereby becoming one of the few units to receive both Army plaques. After the ceremony, our commanding officer informed us that General Clark had arranged for a week's rest for us at the Isle of Capri.

John: Oh, wow.

Eunice: We went in groups of five every week. On April 29, I was promoted to the rank of T-4, or sergeant. On May 1, General Clark inspected our quarters and office. We were all quite busy for a few days getting everything in tip-top shape. A WAC and her boss, a brigadier general in the Quartermaster Division, arrived on May 3 from North Africa on business. General Sullivan told a few of the quartermaster personnel to take the WAC for a ride and show her some of the quartermaster installations and other points of interest. We traveled about a hundred and ten miles, toured the bakeries and ate our meals there and toured a laundry company.

The first marriage in our platoon occurred on May 8. On May 10, we went to the beach which had just opened for our use. The beach was lovely with nice white sand and had a few volley ball courts. We played a game in the deep sand. Target practice was also available. We later saw the movie, “Thousands Cheer.” Since movies were being held outside, we had to bring our own chairs. May 15, Marlene Dietrich toured Italy. A few of us WACs went to see a USO show in which she performed. We all were given cards to mail for applications for ballots for the next election. May 18, Allied forces finally occupied Monte Casino in Italy. May 25, celebrated my birthday overseas, having a party with friends at the beach.

John: And you were how old?

Eunice: Aah, I was twenty-three when I got in, so I guess that made me twenty-four.

John: Okay.

Eunice: On May 27, Marlene Dietrich ate with us in the open mess — I got a picture of it — for enlisted men and WACs. She came down the aisle of tables to greet us. She wore the olive drab winter uniform, trousers, shirt, jacket and boots. She was a real trouper. She stood right behind me. I could touch her.

John: That’s great. That’s great.

Eunice: We started to wear our summer uniforms at the end of May. On May 30, Memorial Day, the WACs along with a number of Military Police were guard of honor at an impressive service at one of the American military cemeteries. We stood for forty-five minutes, facing the speaker’s platform. On the platform was the speaker — I don’t know who the speaker was — and chaplains of the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths, three Allied officers. The speaker placed a large wreath by the flag. A volley was fired across the graves. Then Taps were sounded and the flag was raised to full mast. The 5th Army Band played the American and Allied anthems. After the service, we took a few flowers and decorated the graves. June 5, the 5th Army troops started a big push which resulted in our platoon moving nearer the front lines. On June 4, the forward echelon moved by truck to near Sermoneta, on the outskirts of Rome. On June 5, General Clark and 5th Army troops traveled through the streets of the Eternal City amid throngs of cheering, hysterical citizens. They were celebrating their freedom. The city was liberated. The rear echelon boarded trucks and motored to Naples. There we boarded an LST — [Landing Ship Tanks] — and sailed for the now famous Anzio beachhead. June 6, it was an overnight trip, arriving at Anzio at 7 a. m. This was the first time in military history that members of the WAC had traveled by any of the famed landing craft. As we walked off the LST, for sake of publicity, we were met by a battery of news cameras. I got a picture. Then we got

back on and loaded into trucks, and proceeded off the LST to our bivouac area on a high hill overlooking the harbor. We put up our tents amid tall trees and German dugouts, and unpacked our bags. Then we returned to work at the headquarters offices. We had witnessed other bombing raids and risked being torpedoed while on board ship. Now we were closer to the front lines, ten to twelve miles.

John: Oh, wow.

Eunice: Air raids were a new experience as the Nazis were still bombing the harbor nearly every night, so we spent a lot of time in dugouts. When we were awakened by the warning siren, we climbed out of our cots beneath the mosquito nets, donned our helmets, grabbed our gas masks and ran for the dugout, crammed ourselves in and waited for the all-clear siren. One of the girls always slept in the nude so she would wrap herself in a blanket and be on the way to the dugout. One night I got a surprise shower when I put on my helmet, forgetting I had earlier washed out a few things. One day our headquarters was hit when a bomb exploded and one of the women returned from work and found a piece of shrapnel on her cot.

John: Oh, wow.

Eunice: Oh, yes. Dangerous, up there. Bodies of German soldiers were still around. The stench of the dead bodies piled high and wrapped in mattress covers was very real. We could hear and see the artillery. The flashes would light up the sky for a great distance. The boom of the bombs dropped by the Air Force would echo back to us. June 7, several of us went to a military burial service for one of the servicemen at the Anzio-Nettuno Cemetery. That cemetery was a field of white crosses as far as one could see. There was another one, too, near Florence. Another big cemetery. On June 10, five more WACs received orders to proceed to the Isle of Capri for seven days of R&R — Rest & Recuperation. We left by command car with driver for the long ride, about five hours or so, to Naples, and then a two-and-a-half hour ride on the ferry to the island. We got off the ferry and piled into a Jeep, which was waiting for us. We went directly to a villa surrounded by a flower garden, fruit trees, etc. Our rooms were very nice and homey. Off one of the porches, we could look down the mountain slope to the Tyrrhenian Sea. We had our meals in another villa a few blocks away. We were served in courses by Italian waiters and waitresses. It was wonderful not to eat out of our mess kits and stand in line.

John: I'll be.

Eunice: We got lots of exercise walking up and down the narrow, winding roads and sidewalks. A small boat, operated by a jolly Italian man who knew every inch of the island took us to see the many grottoes. We took a motor boat ride around the island one afternoon and one day we went sail boating around the island which

took us six hours. During that time we stopped at a restaurant for a delicious meal prepared by an Italian family. A horse and buggy ride up near the top of the mountain to see the church of San Michel was a novel experience. At the enlisted men's base, ice cream and cake were served at 3:00 p. m. every afternoon. The Isle of Capri was very beautiful and a great vacation spot. Most of the residents spoke English. Saturday morning, June 17, we left this beautiful paradise. The boat trip to Naples took two and a half hours. We met our driver, had dinner and started on a five hour journey by car. When we got back, everything was torn up and our tents dismantled. Practically all the sections had moved. We slept that night in the open with mosquito netting over us and, would you believe, it rained?

John: Oh, yes.

Eunice: The next morning we arose at four-thirty, got the trucks loaded and we were ready to leave at 8:30 a. m. Sat in the trucks for the next five hours waiting for all the trucks to assemble. Finally, at 2:30 p. m., we were off for a long truck ride. Arrived at our new destination, Tuscania, at 9:00 p. m. We skimmed the outskirts of Rome on the way. The region around Tuscania was very fertile, very agricultural, lots of farm lands with wheat fields, corn fields, vegetables, etc. We lived in a wheat field, and in tents again. The forward echelon was a half-mile from us. We had to go up there for showers. Later showers were set up just a few steps from our camp area. We had to contend with a lot of strange bugs, insects, mites, lizards, etc. One morning, when I put on my shoes, I felt something in one of them. To my surprise, I found a seven inch snake so I just dumped him out and he went on his way. Lizards were as numerous as flies, but we ignored them as they came parading through our tents. On June 22, fifty-four members of our platoon were awarded the Good Conduct Medal. On June 24, one of the women and I and our dates had the pleasure of seeing the Eternal City, Rome. Visited many of the historical buildings, walked around the inside of the Colosseum, when suddenly my right leg went down in one of the square holes where a pillar once stood. A scrubbed leg and a bruise were souvenirs. We toured St. Peter's Cathedral. The Pope held mass every morning and soldiers were able to pass before him and kiss his ring. Some of our WACs had this opportunity. On July 5, we moved by truck to Motespescali, near Grosseta. We set up our tents in a thistle field with bramble bushes. Our legs would get scratched up. Hot weather arrived and bugs were plentiful. We had green and white dresses which we were allowed to wear to work. A social event was the celebration of an Air Force squadron's three years in activation with a big picnic on the beach. Fresh milk from the States was a real treat.

John: Oh, wow.

Eunice: A week later we were on the move again, passing many a war-torn village. We set up our tents in a wooded area near Cecina. On July 28, thirty WACs from our



platoon and a few nurses stood honor guard in a ceremony held for King George VI of Great Britain. We had stood one and a half hours in the hot sun waiting. Our commanding officer was presented to the King by General Clark. On July 30, our platoon had a big party to celebrate our one year overseas. Headquarters personnel, General Clark and General Gruenther and their aides, were among the guests. Headquarters Section had lots of parties. If we didn't go to parties, we existed on beans and C-Rations. On August 13, General Clark attended church services. He read the Scripture. The choir stood right out in the burning sun. We got used to going to church in an open field. On August 19, our platoon stood honor guard with the 34th Division in a ceremony held for Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain. We moved to Tavernello in the mountains on September 1. It was a four and a half hour trip on a hot day. Cover-alled GI Janes in a couple of two-and-a-half-ton trucks bounced up and down like rubber balls amid chairs and all our gear we had in our possession over a rough white dusty road. Upon our arrival, we were desperately in need of a shower and had to walk quite a distance to get one. Five tents were put up in a pine grove with a small vineyard in the background. A sixth tent should have been put up. The headquarters fellows had to chop down a few trees first. We arranged our furniture around the stump. Had to haul a few rocks and dirt to fill up a hole at the head of my cot. We moved some distance inland and about two thousand feet above sea level. We were not too far from Florence where we went sight-seeing and shopping. Joe Louis, on tour in Italy, gave an exhibition bout. I did not see it. On September 9, the 5th Army celebrated Salerno Day, a year to the day since they landed at Salerno Bay to invade Europe. Highlights were the presentation of medals to various officers and enlisted men, and promotion of officers in the Headquarters. My boss, chief of the Clothing and Equipment Section, was promoted to lieutenant colonel. Two USO girls, mezzo-soprano and pianist, performed at church service on September 10. They held concerts at the Headquarters, and hospitals, too. On September 21, colder weather and the rainy season arrived. The rear and forward echelons moved to the outskirts of Florence, the forward echelon in tents again and nearly drowning in mud, the rear echelon in a converted tobacco barn. Went into our winter uniforms, olive drab, on October 1. Some of us wore men's trousers and combat boots. Mail situation was bad, probably due to the many moves. One of our WACs was approved for Officer Candidate School. Because of the critical need, several members volunteered to donate blood on October 8. Fourteen women had left and replacements arrived. Some of the women had gone to the States on temporary duty and reported back to their outfits, and some had gone to the States on furlough, to later report to a camp. The theater was packed for the play, "Barretts of Wimpole Street," starring Katherine Cornell and Brian Ahearn, the story of two poets, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning. It was superb. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is buried in Florence. On October 18, Congressman Edith Nourse Rogers — now, Congressman Rogers was the one that introduced the two bills creating the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women's Army Corps

— she introduced both bills and they were later signed by President Roosevelt.

John: Okay.

Eunice: Congressman Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts visited the Quartermaster and the Surgeon General in the interest of textiles. Ten WACs and six nurses were chosen as honor guards to meet her at the plane. Our commanding officer introduced us to her, asking and answering questions. We were issued men's field jackets, which were quite warm for the cold weather. Scottish soldiers held a retreat near our building. Dressed in their Scottish attire, they played drums and bagpipes. October 31, six British ATS — Army Territorial Service — women were attached to our platoon. They worked in the British offices. They took their turn at Charge of Quarters. On November 13, saw a stage show starring Ella Logan, singer with the USO. She had been in the theater several months. Three of the British women joined our choir. Basketball was another sport we engaged in. We practiced and competed with the Air Force women. December 16, 1944, enlisted personnel decorated a large Christmas tree for the Quartermaster Section and a few of the WACs decorated a tree for the squad room. General Clark left on December 16 to command the 15th Army Group and Lieutenant General Lucian K. Truscott, commander of the 11th Corps, became the commanding general of 5th Army. One of our WACs, General Clark's secretary, left to join him and his staff. During the Christmas season, we became more aware of the poverty and suffering among the natives. Also the hardships of our troops on the rugged Italian mountains during the severe winter. There were blood drives to provide blood for injured troops. WACs and headquarters personnel donated. The choir sang at both Protestant and Catholic Mass on Christmas Eve. We went caroling afterwards. Our platoon held open house in our day room on Christmas Day. Officers and enlisted men of 5th Army Headquarters were invited. Many GIs came down from the front lines for an hour or two of holiday cheer. WACs and escorts had parties on New Years Eve. January 1, 1945, the Spaghetti Bowl was the memorable social event of the war, featuring a football game held in Florence between the 5th Army and the 12th Air Force in front of 15,000 cheering servicemen and women.

John: Oh, wow.

Eunice: Oh, that was a wonderful event.

John: Like a Superbowl.

Eunice: Um-hunh. Oh, yea.

**[End of Side A of Tape 2.]**

John: Okay, we're past the leader. Go ahead.

Eunice: Where would be a good cut-off time? Let me see.

John: Just keep going, because we'll be able to tell on the tape where we are.

Eunice: Okay, now where did I leave off?

John: Just after the Spaghetti Bowl.

Eunice: Okay. One of our WACs was chosen as Bowl Queen and I was one of four WACs and one GI chosen as cheer leaders. USO talent including Ella Logan provided entertainment at half time. There was a parade of the 5th Army and 12th Air Force Bowl Queens, a performance by the national baton twirler, Peggy Jean, and a performance by the band. It was a very cold day. 5th Army won, 20-0. January 24, 1944, saw the first real snow storm since being overseas. February 10, four of the forward echelon WACs stood honor guard for Mrs. Clare Booth Luce who was on tour of Italy. A small wood building was erected and installation of a stove near our quarters for us to take showers. More of our WACs were leaving and replacements were arriving. 5th Army radio station had a program called "Old Oaken Bucket" in which soldiers could write in and request their favorite songs. March, 1945, everyone in headquarters was required to take a training program: drills, hikes, calisthenics and orientation talks, discussion of topics such as the GI Bill of Rights, certain phases of politics, certain phases of the war, etc. General Truscott was strict in military discipline. He made an inspection of our quarters. April 1, Easter Sunday, sunrise services were held near the forward echelon. General Truscott read the Scriptures. The service was broadcast to the States. American and British soldiers, officers, WACs, nurses, USO entertainers were seated on wet grass on a hill amid daisies and olive trees. The choir sang with raindrops trickling down our faces. While the portable organ played, rain poured and guns boomed in the distance. April 13, the news of President Roosevelt's death on April 12 reached Italy in a midnight broadcast, Rome time.

John: Oh, wow.

Eunice: On April 14, we listened to a 12:30 p. m. memorial service broadcast from the States. Headquarters personnel remained silent for five minutes at 4:00 p. m. On April 15, a memorial service was held for President Roosevelt. The theater was filled to capacity with British and American soldiers, ATS and WACs. The 5th Army's Chaplain Brown, who had been with us since our days in Mostagenem, left on April 23 for another assignment. April 29, the forward echelon moved to the country between Bologna and Verona. The rear echelon moved to Modena. It was a seven hour rough ride by truck through the Apennines with rain and cold wind blowing. We passed truck load after truck load of German POWs. We lived

in a hotel. May 3, Germans finally started to surrender. The partisans captured and executed Mussolini. The Nazis said that Hitler, architect of the evil world, died on May 1. On May 6, after a week in Modena, members of the rear echelon moved to Verona. We caught up with the forward echelon and lived in tents again. We visited the home of Romeo and Juliet and stood on their famous balcony. While in Verona, VE Day — Victory in Europe — arrived on the 8th. While the war's end lessened the need for combat personnel, it actually increased the need for WACs. Occupation and redeployment greatly expanded the clerical and communications duties of WACs. We were busier than before, it seemed. On May 17, the entire platoon made its last move to Gardone Riviera, on the shores of Lake Garda in the foothills of the Alps. We were housed in a villa but after two days we were outranked by the USO. We had to move to an old convent. The office was two miles away. Italian and German busses provided transportation for soldiers and civilians. The area was very scenic and Lake Garda, with its deep blue waters, was beautiful. May 25, several of the women gave me a birthday party. I was promoted to Tech-3, staff sergeant. May 27, the commanding officer relieved me early of my CQ duties. When I got to my room, I saw the floor, bed and bedclothes in flames. I beat out the flames on the bedclothes and then screamed for help. After I returned to the States, I learned that the convent had burned to the ground and many girls had lost everything. Italians had been celebrating the war's end and shooting off guns, setting off fireworks and lighting huge bonfires. The headquarters was buzzing with activity and the 5th Army WACs, as busy as we were, had thoughts of going home. The 5th Army WACs, who were among the first sent abroad and had accumulated a lot of points, were some of the first women to be discharged. The discharge level was forty-four. I had sixty-nine points and another WAC had seventy-seven, the highest WAC score in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations.

John: Oh, wow.

Eunice: The 5th Army WACs led other WACs in the theater with the highest points. Discharge points were based on total years of service, years spent overseas, campaigns participated in and combat time. We mourned the death of one platoon member prior to our departure from overseas. Two members were evacuated to the United States for medical discharges. One member was evacuated to the United States for medical treatment. Only one member had left on rotation. Between January and May, 1945, several platoon members were returned to the United States on TD [Temporary Duty] and dropped from the roster in May because of VE Day. On June 3, 1945, the commanding general of 5th Army presented the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque to the 6669th WAC Headquarters Platoon. Small groups of the 5th Army WACs started leaving for the States in early June with mixed emotions.

John: Eunice, would you say again that number of the platoon?

Eunice: 6669th.

John: Okay, all right.

Eunice: It was difficult to leave behind the women and office personnel we had been so closely associated with those many months. A few WACs stayed on through the summer and some were assigned to other military organizations. I had visited with an ex-GI here in Madison a year or two ago. He worked in the quartermaster office where I worked. I think he left for the States before I did. Five of us tearfully said goodbye on June 11, boarded a military plane and flew to Naples. On the way one of the women became ill so she and I spent the rest of the trip in the cockpit where she could get more air. We spent two days at the Allied headquarters, checking out. We then flew to Miami with a stop-over in the Azores for refueling. We remained overnight in Miami and then left for our respective discharge posts. At Fort Sheridan, Illinois, I learned I could not be discharged because I had a critical MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], 213, stenographer. Following a thirty day furlough, where I had a joyful reunion with family and friends, I reported to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, for the duration of the war. There I continued in clerical work, and joined the bowling league for recreation. On August 4, the 6669th WAC Headquarters Platoon was inactivated. The platoon which served closer to combat for longer periods of time than any WAC unit were called "the up-forwardest WACs in the world." We were anywhere from ten to thirty-five miles from the front lines. Six 5th Army WACs were married in Italy. A total of eighty-three WACs served with the platoon, fifty-nine original members and twenty-four replacements. A large percentage of platoon members received Bronze Star Medals. In World War II, the Bronze Star was one of the highest awards a WAC member could receive. It was given for outstanding service in support of combat operations. VJ Day — Victory in Japan — occurred on August 14, 1945. The war with Japan had ended. I returned to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, where I was discharged on August 19, 1945, having completed thirty-two months in military service of which nearly twenty-three months were spent overseas.

John: That is remarkable.

Eunice: My discharge papers revealed that my last rank was Tech-3, that I received the Good Conduct Medal, Meritorious Unit Award, European-African-Middle Eastern Theater Ribbon with four bronze battle stars for the Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, North Apennine and Po Valley campaigns, three overseas service bars and the WAAC Ribbon. Sometime in 1946, a couple of ex-WACs started a newsletter chain so that we could keep in touch with each other. However, it lasted only a few years. I still keep in touch with a few of them. In September, 1945, a former WAC friend and I got jobs at Truax Field, Madison, Wisconsin. In

January, 1946, recruiters from Washington, D. C., visited Truax Field to interest clerical personnel to work in the Washington, D. C. area. Then, sometime in the latter part of February, my friend and I received orders to proceed to Washington, D. C., by train, to our new jobs. We were housed at Arlington Farms, a temporary housing development. I was assigned as a clerk in the Adjutant General's Office, located in the fifth floor of the Pentagon, and she was assigned to the Corps of Engineers Office. We were pleased to catch up with another ex-WAC friend who was working for the Veterans Administration. In July, 1947, we were informed that the Corps of Engineers were hiring personnel for a rehabilitation project in Greece under the American Mission for Aid to Greece, part of the Marshal Plan. After much preparation, the three of us boarded TWA flight in the early morning hours of September 6 and arrived in Athens at 3:00 a. m., Athens time, on September 7. I worked as a clerk-stenographer in the Construction Division. In October, 1948, my friends and I left Athens at the end of our contracts and together we toured Europe on the way back to the States. Sometime in 1949, I joined my friends in Washington, D. C., and got jobs at Andrews Air Force Base. I worked for ARDC, Air Research and Development Command, and AACS, Airways and Air Communications Service, as a clerk-stenographer and MATS, Military Air Transport Service, as a research assistant. I was married in 1955 and moved to Baltimore. I then worked for GSA — General Service Administration — as an administrative assistant until I retired in 1975 with thirty years of government service. After I retired I joined the Women's Club of Towson where I was chairman of the Garden Department for eleven years and held several other chairmanships. I was a member of the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland and held several chairmanships in District 3. I am a life member of the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland. In 1982, sometime in 1982, a letter arrived from a student at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. For her thesis, she wanted to do an in-depth study of the 6669th WAC Headquarters Platoon. So delighted that she had chosen our little unit, I was spirited into getting all the information together she needed. She was able to contact several other former platoon members for their input, as well. In 1988, she completed her 176-page thesis titled, "The 6669th WAC Army Corps Headquarters Platoon, Pathbreakers in the Modern Military." She sold copies to our platoon members and I have a copy. December, 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed a law authorizing the construction of a memorial in the nation's capitol to recognize the contribution of women who serve, or who have served, in the armed forces since the Revolutionary War. The memorial was built at the main gate, Arlington Cemetery. Groundbreaking ceremony took place on June 22, 1995, and was completed in 1997. The memorial was dedicated in a two day ceremony on October 18, 1997. I am a life member of AmVets, and VFW. I am a charter member of the Women's Memorial, the World War II Memorial and the National D-Day Museum. Following my husband's death in 1995, I made plans to return to Madison. I settled here in September, 1999, and since then have embarked on a genealogy project and preparing my story of my life in the service. I am an active

member of the Yorktown Bridge Club. Traveling and sightseeing, flower arranging and craft are among other pastimes. On June 20, 2001, I went on a ten day tour of Italy with the 5th Army Association. Along with many ex-GIs and escorts, we covered many places where we had been and where these ex-GIs had fought during World War II. I was the only ex-WAC on the tour. In 2002, on May 19 and 27, respectively, Syttende Mai and Memorial Day celebrations were held in Stoughton, Wisconsin. They chose to honor women veterans in each event. Along with women veterans in the area, I was honored to be on the Women Veterans float in the parade. In preparing for this oral history, I could not help thinking how fortunate I was to have been among those hand-picked to serve with a wonderful group of fifty-nine patriotic women in the 6669th WAC Headquarters Platoon. Also to have worked in 5th Army Headquarters where our services were very much needed as we followed the front from North Africa to northern Italy. Although met with some hardships and sacrifices along the way, we persevered knowing we had important jobs to do, but all the while knowing our soldiers on the front lines were also sacrificing their lives in heat, rain, snow, cold in the rugged Apennine Mountains. I was privileged to have had the opportunity to serve my country in some small way during World War II and to have traveled to many parts of the States, North Africa and Italy. It was an educational experience not to have been missed, which I believe prepared me for a career in the Federal government and my life which followed.

John: That is great. One of the questions I have is to ask how do you feel about all this, but you have kind of touched on it.

Eunice: Yes.

John: How do you feel about, you know, it was an adventure but also you were taken out of your life and shoved off. How do you feel about that? I don't mean to make that sound bad, but it wasn't a normal thing.

Eunice: Well, it was a decision I made.

John: That's right. That's true. Yea. I was giving this, going through this interview yesterday and the fellow who was giving the interview had an interesting point. He had a strange answer. I said, "How do you feel about, you know, having had your life interrupted like this?" And he said, "Well, I thank God for it." And I stopped, and he said, "You know, I had a chance to serve my country." I've just never heard it said that way. But I remember, I don't know if I said this to you before, but Stephen Ambrose, he was a good friend of mine, until he died, but he was talking to a bunch of World War II veterans and he said, and most of them had been telling him, "Well, I didn't do much." "I didn't do anything special." And he said, "You were giants!" He said, "You saved the world." And, when you think about it, you did. The world was in bad shape and we were down, we were

really down right after Pearl Harbor.

Eunice: But we didn't think of that.

John: But you went out and did it. And, wow. What a story. The story, the doctoral thesis, at William & Mary, the college.

Eunice: Yea, William & Mary College.

John: Can I get her name? What I will do is have the Vets Museum get a copy of that. They can, I am sure.

Eunice: Her name, the one that wrote the thesis, was Peg, she wasn't married at the time but she married, by the time she finished, she was married. Peg Poeschl, and her last name is Siciliano.

John: We can have William & Mary make a copy and send that.

Eunice: Oh, really?

John: Oh, yea.

Eunice: See, this is where we were. See, this is Africa. This is Italy.

John: Can I take a look?

Eunice: Oh, sure. Help yourself.

John: Yes, I spent a lot of time just south of here, at Port Lyautey.

Eunice: Oh, did you?

John: Verona, up in here, Pordenone, Udine, Vicenza. I trained the Italian Army. This was quite a bit later, in 1955. But I never made it during the summer.

Eunice: We went all the way, all the way up here.

John: And you went the hard way, following behind the front. I always managed to get there in the winter when it was muddy.

Eunice: And here are some pictures.

John: Oh, yea. Are these pictures of the platoon?



- Eunice: Yea, this is me and one of my friends. This is where we ate outside. We ate outside. This is me right there. We ate outside, big open mess, and Marlene Dietrich came right down back of me here. I could have touched her.
- John: Isn't that great. Oh, that is tremendous.
- Eunice: And then, right here, she was the one on the plane that I took care of when she was sick. And I want to show you another picture.
- John: Can I get date, Eunice, when it was published? It should be on the front or the first page.
- Eunice: Well, she's got 1988.
- John: And the title is here on the tape.
- Eunice: Yes. This is part of the 40 and 8 we were on.
- John: A question I ask, you had the GI Bill. Did you use any of it? After the war.
- Eunice: No, I didn't. I started to. I was going to take the Dale Carnegie course, you know? I started to, and then I didn't finish.
- John: And you mentioned the American Legion and the VFW, I think you mentioned that.
- Eunice: No, the VFW and AmVets. I don't think that picture is in here. The one coming off the LST, that is the one I was going to show you.

**[End of Interview.]**

