

**Marian Keller, nee Naish
Veteran**

**Wade B. Lamb
Herkimer Fulton County Historical Society
Interviewer**

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MK: And I was sworn in on St. Patrick's Day 1943

MK: My name is Marion Naish Keller and I enlisted in wax and I was sworn in on St. Patrick's day 1943 and then a couple weeks later I moved to camp rusten for basic training and when I was on the trip I had a beautiful train ride we went to Albany and all across NY state up to buffalo up through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and up through Chicago, Illinois and then we went south on Mississippi and it was flood time and as long as we were going on the train it looked like we were right in the middle of the ocean it was so flooded. And then we did stop at Saint Louis and had a rest and switched trains. From there we went on down to Memphis Tennessee and from Memphis we went to little rock but when we were waiting at the station a train came and ran into our train, just shook us up good but nobody on our train got hurt but the conductor, oh engineer on their train got killed so we had to wait over there till they cleaned up that mess. And then we went on to little rock Arkansas and when we got into little rock Arkansas the train had to change again so they took us all to the USO and when we got to the USO there was an abandoned building and the women's restroom was in with the vaults and that women came out of there, there was a group of ladies there and they said they would like to take us on a tour of little rock so they took us around in their cars and showed us all the high spots of little rock the capital and the schools and different things like that and then they told us to come to the swim ladies house and they all had made salads and sandwiches and that we had a big picnic in this ladies yard and then when it was time for us to get on the train and they took us back to the train and got the train to back down to Louisiana and then when we got back down to Louisiana then we got a bus we went to this place and that was set up for a prisoner of a work camp and it was outside of Ruston we went past Grambling University which is a university for the colored people and when we got to the base there they said we don't want anybody trying to walk taking a walk into town because we don't think you should go walking through this area so we never could go into town just walking and when they had things there they'd come take us there to the school for it was Louisiana tech there agin tech and they used to come and put on different programs for us if they had a musical program they were going up would put it on for us or a play or different things and then they'd have us come into their school for different programs entertainment and uh, this

place that we went at Ruston was set up for a prisoner war camp and had all the barbed wire all around it and big towers where they could watch over and the barracks were the tar paper covered buildings and I said the train was two, two rows 25 pilot seat back to back no partitions and then they had the wash basins along the wall and the shower was one big room and it had just the shower heads coming out there were no partitions there either, no privacy. And but we had nice officers and we had pretty good meals considering how things were and we had a for a our drill field was an old sugar cane field and one of them was cotton field and we had all that stubble to trip on and it was so hot and so dusty but we made it. And then we got our orders sent to Roswell new Mexico so I had another nice train ride it went all the way across Oklahoma the whole Oklahoma and then part of Texas and then over to New Mexico, I can't think of the name of the place where we had to we had to wait for a train going north and south in order to get to Roswell so we were stuck out there part of the night and we had to wait till morning till the train come down and though there were a station there but it wasn't open we just sat around there and wait and then we got down and Roswell we thought boy we had palace down there they had just built a two story building for us and we had showers shower stalls and a nice of private things we thought we had a palace and we had nice mess hall and that was nice and then we had our then we went to get to our different duties and they gave us a different chest to I had been an eagle scout and then I they asked us if we knew the Morse code and things like that and I could do that so then I got a job working at one of the patrol towers there and this place was so flat sand and just as flat as could be we could see a mountain a hundred and fifty miles away and that was in California. I think it's [unclear] and it was a nice place but I guess I was about fifteen miles from the city and but I worked in the patrol tower for a while but then I hear after a while they start getting these people from other places and then from other places and they'd have barritts for them then we would have to walk past if we went to the patrol tower so then we figured they better put us some place near the main part of the camp there so I got assigned to the message center so

Q: What did you do in the message center?

MK: Well we had to keep track of all the different messages lists and say the orders it came like from one department from another or two certain people you know the directors we had we had to keep track of all those things then we had to put them in separate piles so that when a person came around we could deliver to each place where its suppose to go.

Q: Now were they flying in and out of there every day?

MK: Oh yes they that was a trading center for what is it bombers and for navigators.

Q: So they had bombers going in and out of there all the time?

MK: I mean they had the planes there they had to go in and out all the time they were going in and out but navigators and all different things the one place where they had this what do you call it a little thing that you sit in and that's how they teach the fellows of navigation

Q: A simulator?

MK: Yes a simulator and you got in there and it uh

Q: Link, l-i-n-k trainer?

MK: That's what it was I couldn't think of it one weekend we didn't have nothing to do we would get in there and try playing around with it was fun it was a nice place everybody was good we had we had food and everything. It was a lot better than when we were in the basic training since I always I always drank milk or palmers tea, and we didn't have that we had coffee, and ew that's terrible and they didn't the meals weren't that great but when we went out there the first meal we had we had a nice baked potato and a nice big steak, we had lots of steak out there, it was so good. But no basic was terrible because it was so hot and they couldn't keep things too good back in those days.

Q: How long were you out in New Mexico?

MK: Well I wasn't there really too long because I got married and then I got I got out and let's see from I don't remember how long it was, about four months I was there.

Q: Now who did you marry?

MK: I married Ottomar, I got a picture

Q: And that was your husband? Did you meet him there?

MK: No I met him back here in New York State,

Q: Oh

MK: But he came up there to get married, no he used to when I met him I used to go to see my sister who lived down in new York she was a nurse and she was the supervisor at tribunal hospital and we used to go down to visit her quite a bit and I met him he was on a train he was an NP on the train so I met him there and we used to always write back and forth and this is how I looked when I was in the service

Q: Very distinguished looking

MK: But I'll tell you one thing when we went in the service they said don't take a lot of clothes with you because when you get there you will be issued to your uniform that's a big joke I had a I had a little suit that I had bought for Easter and so I wore that because when I left here we had big snow banks in that and so I figured well it'd probably be cool there but when I got down to basic training we didn't get our clothes and I spent my

time in that little suit during my basic training. And finally we did get some uniforms but they were what they called fatigues and they were green and white striped sure sucker dresses that button down the front and then we had big bloomers and when I said bloomers I mean bloomers that we wore under them and I never did have a complete uniform. This here I had when I got married my commanding officer she let me take her jacket so I would have a complete uniform

Q: I noticed you had a picture of your wedding, could you show us that?

MK: sure and this these girls one slept on one side of me in the barracks and one slept on the other side and the fellow is beside my husband is Jack Burdren and he used to sing in a chapel choir and I used to sing in a choir too when I was there and the other was the chaplain that's John Brant

Q: Did he marry you?

MK: No

Q: The Chaplin on the right?

MK: No that's the Chaplin, no, no, they were all very nice people very I enjoyed some of the choir because they had a lot of fellows but they didn't have too much women but it was nice we really sat up in the balcony behind everybody

Q: How long was your husband in service?

MK: Well he was in for quite a while and then he got killed so...

Q: On active duty?

MK: some time on what was it one of these things training things they had. He was in the twelfth armor division for a he was stationed down in new York when I met him down at armory in new York and then after that he was sent down to camp Campbell Kentucky he was associated in the twelfth armor division and I don't know just what happened but

Q: An accident?

MK: Yes and then after a while I got out before he was killed all because they were changing the WAAC the W-A-A-C they made it apart of the regular army and they became the WAC's and that if you got out then well then there was no no you didn't get any demerits or anything there was honorable discharge there.

Q: What other memory do you have? I notice you got a lot of pictures.

MK: Well these are all the pictures of the service men that have been that people were killed in service and some of them the ones that are missing,

Q: Now there people from Fulton county?

MK: Yup these are people from Gloversville and I'm not sure I got I got these kind of mixed up here and then we had some that some that didn't come back and the prisoners of the war

Q: Now, did you go to high school with some of these people?

MK: Oh yes most of them, yes. This fellow used to live right back where I live now. Used to live on um, right up on my street, this here is I don't know if you know the new baker that goes here but this is her brother and he works over at the water over there and he was on a plane and his plane got shot down and they never found him and some of these other people were the same. This fellow is still around, he comes to our veterans group, Bill Rosa.

Q: He was a prisoner of war?

MK: I got people that were prisoners of war who people that would lost their lives and I know there's a picture of people who just lived right around our neighborhood here so. I'm sure these people who went to school with us

Q: Can we cut for a minute?

MK: Recently our senior group took a trip to Washington and we went they have an women's memorial town in Washington and we went to visit that we went to Arlington cemetery and this is a picture of it, a drawing. We went and we saw the drawings that they had down there in Washington this has a place right over here inside where they put up information I haven't got much down there. Put any women that's been in the service who send in their information and they'll put it on. That's very nice but they got a long ways to go on it. And now we went to different military cites down there and it was a nice trip for veterans I think it was took to from here so.

Q: Very good