

Marie Dolan
Narrator

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Interviewer

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PL: Patricia Lent

MD: Marie Dolan

PL: Why don't you begin with when you entered service?

MD: I was working in a defense plant in an office and I was happy go lucky person, I had taken a few college courses but didn't want to amount to much of anything. I was joking always, I lived with a sister and brother in law, because I was raised on a farm in northern New York where there wasn't too much opportunity for work, so I came down to stay with them. My brother in law was a veteran in World War one and he had been badly wounded and he was a marine. So, when it came out that the Marine Corps were going to accept women, I said I would like to join with not even meaning it, and he [brother-in-law] said they wouldn't take you and that is when it all started. So I pinned myself into a corner by applying and the next thing I knew, I was called to go to Washington D.C. to be transferred to camp, was issued for boot camp.

PL: What age were you?

MD: I was about 23 or 22, I can't remember now. Well, I cried all the way to Washington. I didn't really want to go in the [unclear] but I sort of put myself in a position with friend saying, oh you know I'm joining, and it was really quite daring to join the service at that period. It was not considered quite nice. So anyway, I had done it and I had to go, I'd hear girls around me saying, "isn't this wonderful", and I'd think, 'oh my goodness what kind of a home did you have?'. I could not understand how they could like it, I admired one girl who escaped camp [unclear], she got there and she managed to get back to Ohio. I wouldn't have been able to find my own barracks much less to get back to Ohio at that point. I thought she did

rather well but she was before the battalion and I don't what ever happened to her. So boot camp was very, very rigorous. They tried to make it as much like the men's as possible. I think we did learn a lot about our potential because they would say 'okay, fall out' and you went to take a shower and be back in three minutes. We really shaped up, worked hard and got through that. Then I did not know what to ask for, for an assignment. We did have a choice supposedly, but 25 of us were chosen to go to Georgia State College for Women in Milledgeville, Georgia. We lived in the old governor's mansion and they were condensing a, they called it store keeping but it was actually accounting paymaster and it was basically what we learned. Of the 25, I have really been puzzled about this, there were three girls that had nervous breakdowns that seemed like a rather high number to me anyways.

PL: So they left the service?

MD: I don't know what happened to them. They really had nervous breakdown, couldn't speak, that kind of thing. We had very little liberty, I think at one time maybe we had one weekend that we could go into the hotel and stay in Atlanta. Pretty much we were not acquainted with the South any of us or most of us. So we were fascinated with the culture, it was so different from the Yankees in the North. They loved to take us and show us the town, the biggest thing they could show you would be the cemetery and they talked about the civil war as though it was yesterday. When they were talking about the war, you didn't know which on they meant, but it was very gracious. We ate at white table clothes, that kind of thing. If you didn't look under the cloth to see the bugs then it was fine. So at the end, there were waves there we were always told when we were at Georgia, that we must come out first. We did, we had to have the highest grades, and the marines were always told that they could compete. Then I went from private to private first class which meant about five or six dollars more a month, but for a girl in the waves, she would become a non-com which would be equal to a sergeant. So promotions were very different between the different services.

PL: What was your pay?

MD: Well, I finally worked up to sergeant for seventy-eight dollars but before that it was fifty a month. So we got our orders and we were all able to go home first,

then we had to report to El Toro, California. Quite a few of the girls who were in Star Keepers School with me went there and the other half went to the Mojave Desert. We lived in barracks in El Toro, the room I was in had eighty-eight girls.

PL: So El Toro was an air Station?

MD: A Marine Corp air station.

PL: A Marine Corp air Station in Santa Ana, California?

MD: Santa Ana yes, it was only about seven miles from Laguna and it was half way between San Diego and Los Angeles. It was a great place to be stationed. So recreation for people on the base wasn't that good, probably we would have like electricians or something. But they have entertainers from Hollywood that would come down and do dances every Saturday night. Rudy Vallee came just about every other week or so. Dan Tapping was our recreation officer and he was married to Sonny Henny. So he had friends in Hollywood, he would arrange for any of them to come, so we didn't really want any of them anymore. I saw enough of Bob Hope that I'm tired of him yet. Sometimes for Johnny Mercer, if they didn't have a crowd, they would make some of us stay overnight on Friday nights, if we were supposed to have liberty, to hear Johnny Mercer. They were called the Pied Pipers and we called them the pick pockets because we didn't like it that they stole our time. Jo Stafford was a singer in that group.

PL: So you were exposed to quite a few celebrities though.

MD: A great many of them but we didn't have much to do with them. Laguna Beach was our favorite place to go on Sunday, they had a lovely beach and that really was getting away from the military. We had many opportunities but we did not trust the people in Los Angeles, the entertaining crowd. If we got sunburned in Laguna, you were penalized, it was like getting a venereal disease, and it's the same category. You belong to the government and you must be very careful, the uniform on the other hand was a great protection. We didn't have much to do with them purposely and weren't even tempted because we were very sophisticated. Now one thing, as I said the uniform was great protection and we had a five day pass after I've been there about a year. This other girl and I, my Bunkie, most of the girls I

was with had better education than I, she had her Masters from the University of Michigan and she said 'I'd love to go up and see where Steinbeck wrote about [unclear] and so on'. We set out hitchhiking deciding we'd go as far as we could and well we ran out of money which we didn't have much of, we'd turn around and go back. We got to San Francisco, I remember we went and saw Agent Miss Pinafore and we ate crab, Dungeness crab. We liked it so much, we got kind of sick on it. We really thoroughly enjoyed San Francisco and took just had enough money to take the train back to the base. She was the perfect person to go with and we did visit where Steinbeck wrote about tortilla flat. I can't remember all the other things that we went we saw the usually things you would see in San Francisco. There was a nice train that goes along the coast and it was really quite pretty, the ride was pretty.

PL: When you were granted leave, you were free to go where you wanted to?

MD: You had papers saying what time you had to be back and so forth. We didn't have a lot of time off. We were treated like little kids in many respects, you couldn't go into town on a week night without having permission. So most of us signed up to go to Santa Ana Junior College, I got in twenty-two hours of college going into Santa Ana Junior College, it was an interesting thing for me.

PL: What kind of studies did you pursue there?

MD: We took history, English, I don't think anything besides History and English but then we took lots of different courses in those fields

PL: Now, were they paid for by the government?

MD: I think we paid two dollars a course or something like that. The teacher told me that she could tell the girls [that were] from the East because we had better backgrounds in education than the ones in California. California was very experimental back in the depression years and they didn't believe in teaching the alphabet for example, I don't know how they ever filed anything. The teachers were interesting and I think well qualified. We'd go at least a couple nights a week into classes. Anyway, I was assigned to a supply office, all materials received on the base went through our office. Each one of us [marine girl] from the group that I

came from, not by design I don't think, replaced three, not men, but three civil service worker. It took over a period a time, it was by attrition. We could handle their work, they were not –

PL: But were you working alongside male Marines, how were you accepted as females?

MD: The male Marines would be in and out with reports. My immediate bus with a civilian and there was a navy officer that sat opposite him in the same office. [Unclear] that was a marine officer, he was new. I never wanted to be an officer myself, in the Marine Corp. it's different. They're like house mothers, they don't really know the work at all, they just kind of sit around and boss and they don't really get into things. By the time I had served there when the war ended, I had many offers from good jobs in California because I was acquainted with a lot of people in different companies.

PL: You had been promoted, when were you promoted to sergeant?

MD: Well not too soon, I remember being very disappointed. I don't remember when I made corporal but I made sergeant probably was there a year or so but that was another thing. Most Marine officers you can depend on, but there was one woman in charge of us that was kind of a floozy and she just had us put our names in a hat and draw, which none of us liked it, none of us liked it at all. We thought that in some ways she ought to figure it out a little better or try to.

PL: Marie tell us about communicating back home, how about the people back home that wouldn't think you would enter the service and did you keep in touch with family?

MD: Well my father, just the only thing he ever said was 'please don't stay out there when it's over with'. I did get home, we could go home for a fifty dollar ticket, if you were willing to take the [unclear] train. So after I don't know how long it was, I made one trip how and I remember making it in the month of May because I was living out in the desert and desert was pretty bleak. I just wanted to see the greenery of New York State. So I did come home and when I was going back there were a whole lot of mothers with babies headed to the west coast to say

goodbye to their men that were going to be going overseas and they wanted them to see the children. Another woman and I didn't have any children, we worked all the way across helping with these poor women and I dreaded what would happen because you get into San Diego and you might not be able to sleep in anything but a tent. Those that were going to surprise the men really worried me most of all. I think in '45 that they wanted to make a movie and warner brothers were to make the movie, I suppose it was a recruiting movie or something. It was a regular movie that people would see in the theatre, Andrea King had the lead and I never heard of the man who was opposite her. They made the movie so proudly we serve and I wish the Marine Corp. memorial people would find that movie, I'd like to have it to see it again, I saw it several times years ago.

PL: Was it filmed on your base?

MD: No, some of us were picked to go up to warner brothers to be in the movie. We were fascinated with how you'd do it. We were in one dance scene in the PX or whatever, rec hall, and you had to put booties on over your shoes so that they wouldn't make any noise. The lights really made your makeup, they put max factor on all of us and it just dripped right off of our cheeks. They gave us tickets or chits to eat in the cafeteria, well the first couple day they let us and of course we had our fill of gorgeous fruit salads and all sorts of lovely things and we got to eavesdrop on what the women were saying. One actress was saying 'I don't know which one I'd rather be seen with, this one or that one', we were quite surprised, I'd say we were kind of green you know.

PL: So the food was quite different than from what you had back on the base?

MD: Oh believe me yes it was. It was fattening for one thing, it was a meat and potatoes thing on the base. Anyway, about the third day they made a different chow line for us and didn't let us eat in the cafeteria because I guess we were breaking them. I saw everybody, Barbra Stanwyck was the darling of the place, Ethel Barrymore was there and I just saw all of them, it was very very interesting.

PL: So the name of the movie again was?

MD: So proudly we serve.

PL: So proudly we serve and what studio was it?

MD: Warner Brothers. That was quite an experience. So that and my trip to San Francisco were two big highlights. The other was to go –, we did used to go down to Mexico on a Sunday but you had to be back across the border by four o'clock. We never saw the bull fights, I wanted to see one of them, probably wouldn't have liked it but I wanted to see one. We did learn one thing about going down to Mexico, if you bought a bottle of Chanel for five dollars it was just colored water, it wasn't really mixed and we fell for it. They sold nylons that didn't last the first afternoon. Tijuana was not as bad as it is, I saw it twenty years later and believe me at least it wasn't as crowded and awful as it is now.

MD: I did make wonderful friends in the service and I have kept in touch with them, quite the number of them. But when it was to get out I went back to Syracuse and enrolled in Syracuse University where I did my undergraduate and graduate work.

PL: I don't think we covered this, what city were you in when you officially entered the service?

MD: I was in Syracuse.

PL: It was Syracuse.

MD: Yes, I was with a sister and brother-in-law. That was where I went back but I went to live on campus. That was a very interesting thing.

PL: So you, did you actually go to school under the G.I bill?

MD: Yes. Every time they raised the allowance, the university raised their costs. I loved those years, I graduated in two and a half years and then I got my masters. I was in psychology and I was in Phi Beta Kappa. I always think the [unclear] made me more serious minded and make you know your own potential.

PL: Where were you the day when the war ended, where you still in the service?

MD: I was still in the office, the supply office in El Toro. The worst part of the whole ordeal there was that you didn't know if it would ever end and you think jeez, I would like to get on to something else. I wish we had more electric on what was going on because we really didn't have any idea very much.

PL: Compare to today, when we just saw a war on television. You weren't eligibly because news was collected by newspaper and radio in that timeline.

MD: That's right, that's right.

PL: How long after the war ended did you get discharged?

MD: I was discharged in January. What date was the war ended, August or something?

PL: Yes, the following January '46?

MD: Yeah. I think you had to have points, didn't you?

PL: Points –?

MD: I don't know whether I had to stay that long.

PL: Qualify? I was saying if you had to qualify for a discharge?

MD: I don't remember much about that. I think that it was about the same as the other girls did. I really have a great deal of respect for the way Marine Corp. is operated. We do have some ex marines like Oswald who seem to be affected in a different way, but for the most part I think that in the Marine Corp. you learn your own potential, you surprise yourself.

PL: So you kept in contact with some of the people who were in service with you, maintained those relationships?

MD: Yeah. Yes, I have one girl in Minnesota that I get in touch with and I may even call her once in a blue moon, because of course we're all getting old now.

PL: Do you belong to any veterans' organizations?

MD: I belong to the Marine Corp., let me see if I can remember the name of it. I'm Senior vice Commandant of the Southern Tier Chapter of the Marine Corp league of the State of New York. What we do, we're a very small detachment, and actually the southern tier meets in Bath. We have a very good time together, now they want Bill, Bill was a, my husband, lieutenant colonel in the air force. He is entitled to visit any military station in the country so we visited about five this past year. They wanted us to come to Bath and tell them about it, so we're going to go in June and tell them about it.

PL: We backtrack a little, you came out of the service as a single person and then you married at some point, your first marriage?

MD: Yes. Yes, I was coming across the country on the train and I really wanted to put everything military behind me and think about what I was going to do and all the decisions that would come up. There was this really good looking Marine, he was a platoon sergeant, that's quite a rank in the Marine Corp. everybody wants to be a gunnery sergeant. He had slash marks and lots of medal, he was going out to get a pillow while I was sitting with a young boy who was really a pest, just a nuisance. So I stuck out my foot, the marine men always treated us very well kind of stand offish a little bit. Unless if you needed them, if asked them for help, if you were off somewhere and you didn't know which way to turn or where to go for something they would always be very nice. So I tripped him and I kept asking him all the dumb questions like 'where have you been, where have you stationed, where are you headed' and all that sort of thing. He was sort of shy, very shy really and I found out afterwards that he hadn't talked to a woman like that for years. He had been aboard ship and he was in all the major battles practically in the pacific. He said he was afraid of what he'd say. Well anyway, this other fella went away and he sat down with me. We were both headed for Syracuse and we both had married sisters in Syracuse, he was heading to his sister's house and I was headed to mine. In those days they used to make you team up for a taxi, so we were put in the same taxi. I thought probably he would call me in a day or two, he didn't help

me with all my luggage or anything because he had practically everything that he could bring home he did. So he had too much to carry, but he did help me carry it up onto the porch and so he knew where I lived. As I say I thought he would probably call me, but he didn't. He was home forty days and he didn't call me until he got back to Philadelphia. He wasn't discharged yet, so he was waiting to be discharged down there, then he started calling constantly. All the time I was in Syracuse University he came up weekends. He got me through math, he had never taken that math but he got me through it, a math course that I had trouble with. We had a very nice marriage and two sons, he died in 1994 and so I met another military man that I liked and I married again last fall.

PL: Happily?

MD: Yes, very happily. I was surprised, now I mentioned that we were able to visit all those different air bases.

PL: Yes, that was just recent.

MD: Navy, coastguard, all of them. Seeing women with rifles was a jolting to me because –

PL: So you were comparing your experience in training to what they're doing today?

MD: Yes, with what they're doing today. On the other hand, the bases were different too. I don't know what they use to be like but Camp Lejeune for example, I was down there, it's like a city. They have a big high school and middle schools and daycare centers and all the things. I think it's almost a different culture entirely, I wonder and now of course they are all very qualified, nobody wants just to volunteer. They want somebody that knows, who is willing to get down to study and really learned to be very abled. Now I think they want to get along with the smaller –

PL: Your bases in the forties were primitive are you saying, compared to what they are today? Without any of the many facilities of daycare, schools.

MD: Yes, we didn't have any of those things really.

PL: You just had basics?

MD: Yes, very basic basics. Just almost like barn liked rooms.

PL: You said that you became aware of the differences of the qualifications to enter the service?

MD: Yes, I don't think they'll just take anyone now. Of course it's a great privilege because they'll put you through any kind of training you want and I think the pays better, I don't know what it is but I'm sure it's much better. It was different with us, we'd meet in the officers mess but they were very polite and nice to us there. They're taught to be polite too I guess, to behave properly. I think there's that discipline that shows and also the integration is wonderful. The black and white worked together, eat together and just be as friendly as can be.

PL: Compare that to what you saw in the forties.

MD: Oh, well the only thing the blacks could do in Georgia was mess duty or possibly some driving jobs or close order drills, some people thought they were cute because they were more graceful or something. Incredible bias and one of the things that bothered me terribly. We went from Milledgeville to Atlanta on the bus and they talked about you have that blacks have to go to the back of the bus. Well that's not a good description, the blacks have to get off and then if there is any room get back on after the whites get on. So that meant that any old lady who was lame or sick or something she to get off and then get back on.

PL: And when you witnessed this it made you feel bad, upset?

MD: Of course it did. Well of course we didn't understand it then.

PL: It had not been exposed to it in the north.

MD: I'll tell you this black help at the Georgia State College for Women. The black help didn't care too much for the Yankee girls, I suppose they thought we'd get them in trouble, they liked the southern girls that were there. They knew what they were dealing with. After my marriage, my first marriage, it didn't have anything to do with the service for a number of years. But after my husband died I wanted to volunteer work for the Marine Corp. League and I've done house calling on house bound people, the veterans who were house bound. Women as well and there's a women's group that I met with occasionally, that's more a social group, I haven't done that as much. I think the privileges for veterans are very good. My first husband is buried in Arlington and I think he would have been very proud of that. So I don't think there is too much else I can tell you.

PL: Well you've certainly told us a lot Marie and shared an awful lot of your memories with us. You're free to add anything more that you could recall. You did say that you are going to donate a book. Can you tell us about the book you're going to bring in to Heather?

MD: Oh and the book camp. Yeah there might be some snapshots of groups that I have and I just haven't gotten them out but I will do it.

PL: This was a book that was put together?

MD: Well in high school it would be a yearbook.

PL: Like a yearbook only a book of boot camp?

MD: Boot camp. So it has pictures of our group and I'm awfully sorry we didn't put more addresses on because there were girls that thought about it a great deal and haven't the vaguest idea where they are. I asked at the women's memorial, I went to that, when they opened the women's memorial in Washington D.C., I went down with a veterans group. That was a gorgeous day, but I asked about different names people can register there but the ones I was looking for I didn't find.

PL: Were your instructors included in that book?

MD: Yes, oh yes. In fact we had two drill instructors in boot camp that my husband later had, the marine Mr. Doyle, aboard ship.

PL: So they were off to active duty?

MD: Yeah. I can't think of anything else I could tell you.

PL: None of the women marines in your time of service were allowed to be assigned to active duty, isn't that so?

MD: They could not go but finally they made it so that they could go to Hawaii and a couple girls I knew, asked to go, and did very well over there. One was ahead of a radio station last I know. There was opportunity there but my father had told me not to go and although I wasn't probably the best disciplined, I couldn't do it when he didn't want me to.

PL: So even though you didn't really want to or really intent to enlist in the service, did you ever regret?

MD: No. I regretted it for the first six weeks. I couldn't understand how anybody could like it. Get up at five o'clock and be doing calisthenics outdoors, when it's cold and clammy. It's not that much fun.

PL: But after your initial adjustment to it you accepted it? You enjoyed the service?

MD: The fact that you do this, and you feel good about yourself if you got through it.

PL: Certainly you could. Well it was an important time in your life and important historically. We do hope that you bring your book into us Marie and appreciate taking the time to share your memories and your recollections your experience in the United States Marines. Thank you.

MD: Thank you.