

**Harriet Terry Cohen, nee Robinson
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on June 23, 2009
Margaretville, NY**

Q: Ma'am for the record would you please state your full name and your date and place of birth please?

HC: Harriet Terry Robinson Cohen. I was born in New York City, November 29, 1918.

Q: Did you attend school there?

HC: Yes, in New York City I went to a public-school High School, I went to graduate school that teaches college at Columbia University where I got my master's degree.

Q: What year did you graduate from High School?

HC: Um, 36. I'm not sure but I think 36'. College was 42' I went to Hunter College in the City of New York.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

HC: Absolutely, every detail as I'm sure most people do. I grew up in the Bronx my folks had a private home and we lived there for 35 years and when I heard about it actually I was taking a walk going toward Fordham road and someone stopped me and told me about it and then I went and took the bus to my best friend's house, she lived some distance away and we heard all of the news over the radio. It was a terrible shock.

Q: You were in college at that point?

HC: What was the date?

Q: December 7, 1941

HC: Yes

Q: Did you notice a change in your life after that moment?

HC: Absolutely, because I'm trying to remember the details of how they got the draft and how people started preparing, families were preparing, for the men in the family to go away and in my immediate family there were three girls, so we all had all of our friends and friends came to the house and everybody was talking about it. They were familiar with it because there was a background that the people that I knew, knew about the Spanish war and they did feel that it would become bigger. That fascism was on the rise and in some way the United States would become involved we knew what was happening in England and there was great involvement, personal feelings about hating fascism.

Q: What was life like at college? Did you have a lot of males leaving?

HC: Well college was an all-girls school, it isn't now but at the time it was all girls. But everybody was talking about the war and my folks wanted me to finish my education because at the time they were recruiting women to fly the planes over to Europe because there weren't enough pilots really and I was very interested in that program but I did stay in school and after I graduated from graduate school I had a degree in counseling and I got a job with the war man power commission which is now the employment office.

Q: Now did they recruit you or did you seek them out?

HC: Now that was interesting, Columbia recruited me when I went to the employment office at college they said now of course you want to get in to something that has to do with the war you want to feel a part of the war you want to do your best and I said "absolutely" so they sent me to the war man power commission and the job that I had was consulting young people coming in because of my degree and people were coming in from school looking for work and not too interested at the time of getting into something they didn't know anything about at the time they were particularly recruiting for the ship building which was around New York, Brooklyn and so forth and people were very interested and it was our job to get them, they took us to the employment office for the war man power. They took us out on field trips to show us all the things you could do, so they were making ammunitions they were making ship building, ship building was the big thing and ammunition. I remember going on a field trip that was two hours away and as people came in to get work it was our job to direct them to that completely and we did that, the whole office.

Q: Were there enough people to fill the positions?

HC: Not really, I remember the office was on 87 Madison Avenue in Manhattan and people came in from all over. I think the fear was that people didn't know what to do how could people go out and work on ship building when they were clerks or sales people and there were training programs to see that they would then fit in and be part of building all of the ships and planes that would have to be done.

Q: Now did you get a lot of women applying for these jobs?

HC: Yes definitely. For many reasons, the main one was that they needed the money because the men were going away and the second thing was that they really wanted to do something to help the war effort and there were big signs to buy war bonds, you know, to help America.

Q: Were they taking job applications from minorities too at that point?

HC: Yes, yes they were.

Q: and what was your typical work week like, was it a 40-hour work week or did you work overtime too?

HC: I don't remember that part I do remember it was a full-time job, I'm thinking back on the salary, I think it was probably \$2,000 a year or something like that. That was a long time ago but what I do remember though is working for the war man power commission they started out immediately and said when you're here long enough and you have a vacation we need you to work for the women's land army, start thinking

about it now. So from the day that I came in on the job I was thinking about what I was going to do a year later when I got a vacation and every year that I was there up until the time that I went into the red cross, which I had to wait until I was 26 to do that, you had to be 26 years old to go overseas with the red cross I went with the women's land army.

Q: Do you want to tell us about the women's land army because most people have never heard of it.

HC: Well I have the card and I'm going to give that to you because that was one of the things that I did say I was so proud of. As professionals and trained college people we were sent out to different locations where the crops were ready to be picked and the first place that I went to the first summer we went out to long island and picked Brussel sprouts and that was interesting and the second and third year that I went, because I think I went for three, I think I went on a double one once and that was right up here at Tivoli where they picked apples and they sent the high school boys not girls it was boys that I was supervising to see that they picked the apples and the apples were underneath the tree and they told us what had to be done and then somebody came and picked up the bushels but they had to see that the crops didn't spoil that was important and it was a national program it was wonderful. I was so proud to be a part of it.

Q: What type of living conditions did you have?

HC: Hard. We were in a farmhouse I remember quite well. I don't remember, there were all women of course and we were in this big farmhouse and it was like dormitory style and I remember that the farmer was very proud that he had a toilet that worked and not an outhouse. That was big, they were very nice and we had help in the kitchen that we had baked the meals but they did have local women that would come in and help with that, it was all volunteer nobody was paid it was all women's land army you were doing it that was the service that was available because you couldn't go and fight overseas.

Q: Did you wear any sort of uniform or just your regular civilian clothes?

HC: Regular

Q: Alright, and how did you get involved with the Red Cross?

HC: Well, of course all of us as a whole staff was a big staff, big, we had a couple of floors in the major building in Manhattan and when you went for coffee or just hangout for coffee time everyone was talking about what did you want to go into the navy , did you want to go in, and they were taking women in all of the services and because I had two degrees I was eligible to do that and somebody came from the red cross and spoke to us and I thought that would be a wonderful thing to do and of course now it's getting toward the end of the war, were going into 1945 and they signed me up right away, I had to go for a lot of physicals and we were sent to Washington the American university with the most fabulous training I was not with the red cross that worked in the hospitals, It was called able bodied red cross that was my title and I was recruited to be a club director and I was trained to be able to go and work with the army and set up a club and have programs that would entertain them and also because they knew the end of the war was coming that it would be educational and inform all of the soldiers coming through that used the club of what the benefits they would have when they were dismissed when

they were out of the service and that was a very very exciting program which eventually led to all of these people going on to college and becoming doctors and lawyers and teachers and so forth and that was all paid for by the government but it was programs that were promoted by the red cross it wasn't just that I remember when I went into the red cross we were trained in Washington and then I was sent on to Honolulu and then on to Japan where I built two clubs that I was very proud of others I worked on other people and was being trained.

Q: How long was the training period?

HC: That was long, because I remember being in Washington for a long time, a whole winter almost. Months, months, probably 3, 4, or 5 months.

Q: And then you went to Hawaii first?

HC: They asked where we wanted to go and my first China, never got there, and then I put down where ever I was needed and I think they thought because of my training as a teacher that it would be important to go where they would be helping people coming out of the service and making the adjustment to civilian life and hopefully getting into the programs that they were already planning and the war wasn't even over then.

Q: Do you remember when you're left the states to go overseas? Approximately?

HC: Early in 1945. I remember I was on the ship when Roosevelt died. And he died in May of '45? April, May was V-day and august was when Japan surrendered. That's the whole period when I was working with the Red Cross.

Q: What was that like when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt? Was it a shock?

HC: It wasn't so much of a shock because everyone knew he was so frail and really dying, I saw pictures of him and I couldn't believe it when he ran for office for the last time and I voted for him he just didn't look like himself because he had been such a strong, handsome, aristocratic person and here was this old tired man but there was great love, great mourning, and a lot of honoring of him in every way because they knew that he had been the person to help England when other people weren't and we sent them some of the planes and the equipment that they needed and he figure out a way to do it even though we weren't in the war at that time.

Q: What was the trip like across the Pacific Ocean? Did you get sea sick?

HC: Oh my, no I was lucky I wasn't sick but the airplane that was hollow there was no seats or anything you sat on the floor.

Q: Oh, you flew across?

Someone else: Well first you took the train across the United States.

HC: Oh yeah, I forgot that part, I'm thinking of going from Honolulu to Sipan. Yeah, we took the train, we went across and that was exciting going with all of the people that were going to work for the red cross and I remember going up the Rocky's where they put an extra engine on to pull us up and it was very exciting and then we did get on, I hardly remember that but uh we did get on and we went to san Francisco and from san Francisco I'm trying to think of how we did that I don't remember the details, I don't

remember the details. I remember coming back but I don't remember going to much except for the flight we were in Honolulu for quite a while, also being trained by the Red Cross getting ready to go in to more not primitive conditions but difficult conditions.

Q: When you got aboard ship and went across to Hawaii was it a crew ship where there soldiers on it too?

HC: No

Q: Just civilians?

HC: Coming back I came back on the hornet with thousands of soldiers on the boat. On the ship.

Q: And you mentioned there was some more training in Hawaii?

HC: There was training everywhere with the red cross, you always had a supervisor, you always had material to read and you were always learning and uh particularly about the army and later in life I was able to be a cracker jack organizer and doing volunteer work in anything that I worked in and I contribute that to the training that I got from the army.

Someone else: You told me too that when you were training the women that were under you like the questions asked the soldiers to draw them out the soldiers couldn't read or write they would help them write letters home in the club. Did you have women that worked under you?

HC: No, that was in Honolulu but not in Saipan, because they were women that were in charge of the local people.

Q: Do you want to tell us a little bit about life in Honolulu? What did they have you doing besides training?

HC: Working in a club and the clubs had been there since as long as the army was there so they were established and to see how things were run and to be oriented to working with the service in the army?

Q: Were there ever any entertainers there at the club?

HC: Yes, all the time and famous people would come through and I would meet them, I remember meeting Moss Hawk, I remember meeting P.T all kinds of people came in that went around the world to different army spots to entertain and even when we had the club when we would get a celebrity to come the army helped us because our club could only handle a couple hundred people and thousands of service people would come out for entertainment, Bob Hope.

Q: Who was your favorite entertainer at the time? Did you have one?

HC: I liked them all.

Q: How long were you in Hawaii or Honolulu?

HC: Not too long a few months and then I was assigned, and they told me where I was going, they said I was going to be a club leader and I have with me the uh, I don't seem to find it at the moment. Where everyone is listed, and everyone had to be approved by

everyone and one thing I do remember is getting all kinds of shots and there was a long list of them before I could go off to Saipan.

Q: You flew to Saipan?

HC: Yup, that's the flight I remember

Q: Do you remember what kind of airplane it was?

HC: No

Q: How was the flight? Was it a long flight?

HC: Uh it was turbulent, I remember that. And I remember there were a couple of pilots on because they would change, and someone would come back and tell us where we were and what was happening and why it was happening.

Q: What was your impression of Saipan when you stepped off the plane? Did you notice any temperature change or humidity change at all?

HC: Well, I hardly remember that. I remember being there and we were on an army post which was unusual. The island had a population of the native people and it was very, kind of the thing you see in national geographic for me when I first came. And then as I worked there a lot of the people came and worked in the club, but they worked as cleaning people and gardeners and so forth, we had a very good relationship with them.

Q: What was the club like? Was there a thatched roof?

HC: I had two clubs and one was a cottage type building and then the one that was built that I was changed to very shortly after was a very big one and I have a picture I can show you. That was when they started to emphasize counseling for people going home to use federal programs to their advantage.

Q: How many people did you have working under you?

HC: Two or three.

Q: Did you find that to be efficient?

HC: No, I found some of my reports where that was always the complaint, we need more help and they weren't able to send them.

Q: How many hours a day did the club operate?

HC: I think it opened early in the morning and went on until late at night as long as it was under the supervision of the army and there were always people from the army assigned to help us and be there.

Q: Were there meals served there?

HC: Snacks and of course the red cross was famous for the donuts and coffee and we used to make them in what we called great big garbage pales and lots and lots of coffee.

Q: Do you recall anything about that experience that really sticks out in your mind?

HC: Well I was written up in a little newspaper that was put out by the service for the people that were there. Do you want me to read what they wrote about us?

HC: This was the daily target, and this was December 4th, 1945. And it said "this picture was taken by Sydney Samoa from the signet core. It shows the service people who wanted to act for the night dressing up as women to do the entertainment and then it says "things run pretty smoothly these days at the shanty club and the personnel sent a casual depot, the girls have the joint jumping every night they can laugh when they think back to the time when they were trying to get started, it wasn't so funny then the shanty club and the early October typhoon hit Saipan and the photo finished and as it developed the clubs entrepreneurs took a route of bad pictures but not for long, the weather was managing to batter down just about everything in sight except the red cross gals spirits. In the middle of the private indoor light stood piles of their supplies, construction materials, plumbing, wiring, tarps, etc. But instead of wringing their hands they wrung some more water out of their clothes and set to work, they coaxed G.I cans of coffee from the mess hall, set up a snack bar on packing cases, lit candles and the party was on, things went like that for three nights and two days until the storm blew itself out. After surviving such a brutal birth, it's hardly any wonder the shanty flourished, the club is virtually always a packed place. They report a 12-piece colored band of versatile musicians and entertained called the "metro domes" which scored a smash hit and so did the "Grand Canyon boys." They loved these big shows where they came in to entertain so it was really two things, they came in to play cards and do jigsaw puzzles and talk and visit and eat but they loved the big entertainment. "The ARC girls who have made the shanty what it is today, Terry Robinson Club Director, Pauline Dempler, George Miller, Laura Biddle, and Theresa Wozac."

Q: Very nice. Now how long were you on Saipan?

HC: Throughout 45. Probably a year, then the war was over in Europe, then the war was over and we were there when the planes were going from Tinian and we knew about that right after it happened immediately cause it was a big, when we dropped the bombs in Japan but as soon as they did we had people coming in from the army and telling us what was happening.

Q: Now you were on Saipan when Japan surrendered?

HC: Yeah and the planes were going from Tinian which was right there and then this club which was being built and really they rushed to get it done because the war was over and they started to process people to go home and the processing and I have to tell you the army did it best but there was thousands and thousands and thousands of men waiting to go home and anxious to go home and it was based on the amount of time that they were away and they hung out in the club and we needed more and more programs but not only did we emphasize the programs to keep hopefully keep them entertained which was very difficult because they wanted to get home as soon as possible but the things they were interested in were the educational opportunities when they got back to the states and what was interesting was they started the marionette islands university and so the people they had started to get teachers to come in so they could get credit when they got home and I also have found in my old records that they gave courses in all sorts of things from physics to political science to whatever they could get group together and get a teacher right away that they gave it university status and credit so they were

able to go home with documents saying that they put so much time into and what the curriculum was that covered. It was very impressive.

Q: Let me go back just a little bit. What was it like when you heard about the atomic bombs being dropped? Did you have any idea about the devastation?

HC: It was shocking.

Q: What about when Japan surrendered? Was there a lot of celebration on the island?

HC: Not really, it was all talk about when the soldiers could go home. It immediately switched, the people I was with was what could we do to help them make the adjustment to going home but, in our case, also knowing about all of these programs that they were going to get for free.

Q: Were you ever in any kind of danger in Saipan at all? Were there snipers?

HC: Well you felt that you were because it was very strict that when you went anywhere you went in a jeep and there had to be two army people with you with weapons because there was still Japanese hiding out on the islands. Not many but they took precautions, so you always knew, but the danger of an attack or anything like that didn't exist.

Q: Did you or any of the people you were with suffer any problems from tropical diseases like malaria or dengue fever or anything like that?

HC: No, we all had fungus infections and would end up occasionally in the hospital where they would treat it.

Q: What were your living quarters like on Saipan?

HC: I have pictures of that, there was tents and part of it was in a tent and there were also shacks and the big thing was fighting over an electric fan. We had electricity, we set that up. I always remember feeling quite comfortable.

Q: What about land crabs or insects or snakes?

HC: I don't remember that at all. I think its interesting your bringing up the physical aspect, we always tried to cover our hair because when we went around, especially in the jeep and you were going anywhere because we had to cover a lot of territory getting from one building to another or one section to another, that the coral dust would blow in the air and so that your hair would feel like cement. We were always washing it, we didn't know about suntan then, so we got very very brown.

Q: What about your dining facility or mess hall? Did you eat with the service people?

HC: I don't remember that too well, we had officer status I remember when we were in Honolulu we ate with the officers and that was quite grand. I have a menu here that I can show you. This is the officers club in Honolulu, and this is what is interesting. Dinner Sunday April 22, 1945 "Shrimp cocktail" 25 cents. And all the prices are "Hotel cut Delmonico steak" \$1. I also remember that the salary was \$75 a month for the Red Cross. I think I had a card that if I was captured, I would have a standing of a measure.

Q: Back then was \$75 a month good pay?

HC: Oh yeah, that was professional to me. I was happy to have that.

Q: I think you touched on this before but how do you think your time in the Red Cross changed or effected your life?

HC: A great deal, first of all living with a group working close to the army I did feel that as time went on that if I had to do it over I would've gone probably into the navy, the air corps, the army not the red cross because I was in uniform and I loved being in uniform I was a part of doing something and I was a part of a group that was important but it wasn't the service.

Q: Have you stayed in contact with any of the people that you served with?

HC: I did for many years and its one of my regrets that I didn't keep at it.

Q: Do you still maintain contact with the Red Cross are you involved with them today at all?

HC: No, after I came home, they did write to me and ask if I would go to Japan and set up bunks there, but I didn't.

Q: What happened when you came back to the states?

HC: That was interesting I came back and decided not to go back to the war man power commission and to get a job with the trade union which was working with trying to better conditions in state run mental hospitals and that was interesting work.

Q: I understand your late husband was a veteran?

HC: He was a veteran yes and he was a war hero and he did a lot of volunteer work also for the trade union and that is how I met him, we met in Albany at a demonstration to get benefits for veterans.

Q: How many years did you have together?

HC: Oh my, 60 almost we married 1947 and he died in 06.

Q: Children and grandchildren?

HC: I have two wonderful children I have four grandchildren and now I have two almost 3 great grandchildren. And I can be proud of all of them, they're wonderful.

Q: At the beginning of the war you didn't mention it, but do you think being Jewish had any impact on your experience during the war?

HC: That is interesting because when I applied, this is Debbie my daughter that is here. And I told my friends that I worked with that I was going to apply to where I did and they said, "They will never take you because you're Jewish." Every place I went I was accepted, and I feel that it was because I had a degree and it had nothing to do with religion. What was interesting also being Jewish when I was on Saipan my brother in law was a Rabi and he was assigned as a Chaplin on Saipan and he would have me come over and do some of the prayers when they would have services and they gave him all these benefits to anything that he wanted he was a wonderful Chaplin and had beautiful services and a lot of people came Jewish and not Jewish because a lot of people wanted to see what the services were particularly at holiday time.

Q: I was wondering at the beginning of the war if a Jewish family had any more information about what was really happening in Europe with the Jews than the general population?

HC: To my knowledge because I worked in a big office everybody knew what was happening because it came down in a variety of ways and it seemed to me that some of the information that I got was through Eleanor Roosevelt who lived in Greengate village of course she lived in the Whitehouse and so forth but there were groups of women who were talking about what was happening with Hitler and I knew about that before I went overseas I knew about that early on, maybe because I was living in New York.

Q: Alright well thank you so much for your interview!

HC: Thank you very much!