

**Margaret Doris Lear, nee Alund
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke
Michael Russert
New York State Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, NY
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on
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MR: This is an interview with Margaret Lear, December 16, 2002. It is a Monday, approximately 11:00 am at the New York State Military Museum, Saratoga Springs, New York. The interviewer is Michael Russert. Could you tell me your full name, date and place of birth please?

ML: Margaret Doris Alund-Lear. I was born in Watervliet, New York. The date was September 21, 1923.

MR: What type of schooling did you have prior to your military service?

ML: I went to Catholic Central High School. I majored in business, but I studied drama and art. I did a lot of public speaking and was in various plays and things in school.

MR: Where were you when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor, and what was your reaction to that?

ML: I was in Catholic Central High School and it was such a shock at the time to all the seniors. Everyone seemed to want to do something. What can we do? I remember talking about it and then my brothers went into the service. One in the Army and one in the Navy. I was very close to my brothers and it was quite a loss without them at home. That was when I saw pictures of women and I thought, this is for me. I'm going! And my girl chum was going to go with me. We were to meet the next day, but I showed up, and she didn't. I signed up in Troy, New York. I really felt that I wanted to do something. I was working in the telephone company and I said no- I want to leave and go into the service.

MR: What branch of the service did you select?

ML: I went into the W.A.V.E.S. (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service- the US Navy Women's Reserve) and they were new to the country. That was for me, I was really excited about it. My parents, of course, said "well, now a third one going, but we can't stop you." I said no you can't. I had never been in a big city. I had never been in Cohoes, New York, but I had my orders and went down to New York City. I was amazed at New York City and had to go to a center where they did all the health checkups and everything. I came back home and they told me I was leaving for the Boot Camp training at Hunter College in the Bronx, which is Lehman University today. So here was a little girl from a small town going down by various means on subways and so forth to get around New York City. But it was exciting and I really felt I was getting somewhere at that point.

MR: Did you ever get homesick at all?

ML: I will tell you that as a little girl, Congressman McNulty's grandmother lived in North

Hoosick, New York and my mother used to let me go up there every year, so I was used to being away that it came easy to me to be in service. I would write letters and correspond, so I just loved every day of my military career. There were so many things that I was fortunate enough to be involved in and enjoyed meeting people.

MR: When did you enlist?

ML: I enlisted in Troy, New York the third week in March, 1944. My active duty began April 6. I had six weeks of Boot Camp at Hunter College. The day we arrived, we received all of our clothing and the next morning at six we had to march to breakfast. The marching was new, the clothing was new. We had cotton stockings because of the war. And to a woman who loved nylons, that was something different to wear! The cotton stockings were heavy, believe me. The short, flat oxford shoes were different also, but we found out we needed the oxfords because of all the marching. They gave us a song sheet and we had to sing on the way to breakfast. Then they informed us there was such a thing as Captain's Inspection. So we girls had to learn how to have everything in the drawers a certain way, and everything had to hang a certain way. And in between times we were so busy marching, and there was so much to learn. For example, we never knew about certain ships and Link Trainers (flight simulators) and all these different things. So we had to learn as the men learned about the Navy and the chain of command.

Another thing we learned was we could no longer decide what we were going to do, we were told what we were going to do for six weeks. It was wonderful training and we shaped up. I enjoyed that. Waiting for our billets (specific assigned personnel position) we had a graduation ceremony in one of the huge armories down there. All I ever knew was the little armory in our small home town. I was never in it though. The experience was very exciting to swell with pride, believe me. When you were marching and doing it right, that took six weeks to be perfect, but we were perfect. The other thing was the people in the Bronx would watch us marching. They would be so excited to see these women learning how to conform. Then we had our shipping orders, we were all going various places. We had our picture taken all together, we had a lot of camaraderie. It was very, very good. We did a lot of studying and taking tests. I would like to say that I ran a switchboard in the telephone company, but I never had to do one in the Navy. For my first billet, they did not know what to do with us. There were so many of us that had enlisted with our group.

My first billet was Washington, D.C., when we got there that was a shock. It was so beautiful. We were sent to the W.A.V.E. Quarters I, which was on the Potomac River. We could see the Jefferson Memorial and the Washington Monument, it was just breathtaking. We had three airports that formed a V, and all the military planes were coming and going all the time. Believe me, for a sailor woman, it was inspiring at the time. At the W.A.V.E. Quarters I, they said "well, we don't know yet what we are going to do with you. Everyone serves a Mess (dining/kitchen) Detail in the Navy, so until we get you a billet we are going to have you in ship's company and you will have to do a Mess Detail. I had never scrubbed floors and we had large, large mops. You had to squeeze the mops out, and the floors in our Mess Hall were wooden. We would feed two thousand through a meal and they kept coming from all over. Officers and enlisted men as well. After each meal, we would have to clean the floor. We would also have to perfectly line up the salt and pepper shakers with a string on all these long tables. I had to take care of the coffee urn which meant I had to climb up onto a bar and get down into it with steel wool. You had to keep going over it with your hands so that there was no residual coffee marks on it.

MR: How large was the urn?

ML: It was about that high (Margaret holds her hand off camera, presumably about four feet high) I was down into it practically to my head to clean it. All the square heads (the large pans that the food was in) also had to be cleaned. Then the officer would come and check everything afterward, we made sure they were cleaned. You wondered, is that what I'm going to do? But you took it, you didn't complain.

We had to wear jeans, I had never worn dungarees. But that was the Navy, you wore the shirts and the dungarees. I remember one time, quantities of food I never liked being near. I had to pluck chickens, I was so sick plucking chickens that I thought I was going to faint one time! [laughs] They said, well we will take you off the chickens. You are doing good on the cleaning. We used to go back to the barracks and laugh and say "Look what we are doing!" But it was interesting.

After the ship's company they said you are going to be down at the Naval Air Station. You are going to paint maps. We understand you took art. Yes, I used an airbrush. They said "But understand it is going to be secret. You cannot tell anyone what you are doing. You cannot tell your parents, you are not to talk about the work. You will be there, but you won't talk to anyone and you will be inspected every day." So we would carry our purses, we wouldn't take any junk in them. They inspected us as we went in and when we came out. We sat at long tables, you could see the maps in the room, whatever they were made with, big white things that they would spray green. Then we would see all these designs that we had to put the roads, the pillboxes and the hills in. We had everything to do on these maps. We were painting them all the time, some of them with an airbrush, others with the tiniest of brushes to paint everything in perfectly. A steady hand was needed. That is what I had, I was able to do it and I enjoyed it. But you would see the other women working but you did not talk to them. You kept your mind on your work. There were large and small maps. Some of the large ones I had never seen until I watched the history program. I got so excited one day, I said "There is my map!" and my husband said "you finally saw one". I said "yes, that is what we were doing." It was only after the war when they told us we could discuss the maps that we had painted. It was kind of hard not being able to tell your parents what you did.

MR: How many hours a day did you work on that?

ML: Oh, we worked all day. We would get there at eight in the morning and then at four o'clock the bus would come. We would go outside, get inspected again, and then be taken back to the barracks. It was very interesting, I did that for roughly four months. Then Mrs. Allen (@13:20 spelling) the Commander, said "You have been chosen to go to Chicago. They are having the biggest bond drive of the war, and you will be a representative of New York State." I said what do, sell bonds? She said "You will do everything. Commander Creedon (@13:38 spelling) will be your boss. You will follow him around and do whatever he wants you to do. You will greet the people coming in, hand out programs, familiarize yourself with the area so you can talk about it. They are going to sell bonds and will have all the radio and movie people there. The Admiral is coming, everyone is coming to see the new equipment we are going to use in this war. They said you are going to see a lot of people, well I didn't realize I was going to see 500,000 people all in a group. It was all day long, but it was an honor. It was wonderful, they put us up in The Drake Hotel which is a gorgeous hotel. They had given it over to the war effort, so it was all military people and it was beautiful. We met so many people there, I can

remember Commander Creedon (@14:40 spelling). He owned a baseball team and was quite famous. I met Gloria Vanderbilt's husband at the time, his name was Pat DiCicco. He was a very interesting man. I also saw the actors Dorothy Lamour and Red Skelton, he was wonderful. I have the write up in the paper I brought with me. So many movie stars, you would escort them to the stage and they would do their bits, it was very, very nice. After us girls did our duty, we would walk down to Chicago. I remember seeing the Christmas tree at Marshall Fields (famous department store). One of the girls told me to meet her and we would have lunch. I did not know they had seven cafeterias in the place so you can imagine my feelings of trying to find her! I was a lost country girl, but it was a wonderful experience to meet all of these people. I was right at home with them, everybody was so nice to me, it was very exciting. I have pictures of the girls from the tour, when I came back from the tour I was so exhilarated.

I thought the experience was so grand, I thought, I don't know what I'm going to do now. They said, "Well, we have a new job for you. You are going to W.A.V.E. Quarters D in Washington D.C. (largest and state-of-the-art training facility). Well I loved W.A.V.E. Quarters I which was new, Quarters D was an older one. You are going to be a Chaplain's Assistant. You can be a Yeoman Striker (administrative and clerical assignment) which takes a year to do it. Commander Tom Fallon (@16:41 spelling) was going to be my boss. He was a very nice Irish priest and very direct to the point when he wanted something. He would say "get this off!" and then I would have to get a letter off to this or that person. He had been on a battleship and he was very interesting. He told me about all the people on the ship when it was hit. He had brought a lot of rosaries with him, but he said even those who were not Catholic wanted rosaries. The fellows were really scared. Our battleship was being bombed and many sailors were badly hurt. He was a very dedicated man who would do everything for the men. He started retreats and brought Monsignor Fulton Sheen to speak. I would like to say, I actually have to say this because Fulton Sheen was remarkable. We arranged for a retreat, and had the lights off. Monsignor Sheen came down the aisle then onto the stage looking down on the audience he scared the daylight out of us. He said loudly "Where are you going?" We all said "What did we do?!" But he was such a wonderful speaker with penetrating eyes. He came several times just to see us. What a remarkable man, if you did not have some kind of faith, he would give it to you. He would make you feel that you better get to church once in a while or something!

Every day in our place, we had to have the flag ceremony. I was part of ship's company (the crew and whole force of personnel of a ship) so we would have to go out and march. All of the groups of W.A.V.E.S. would march out and raise the flag. I think today, since 9/11 when people see the flag, they are getting the feeling that I, and many of us in the service had. We all stopped. If you were on the street, and all the cars around the Communication Annex where I worked, all stopped until that flag got up. It was something, to look around and see this happening. The cars, kids going to work, and we ourselves being in it, it was very exciting. Then at eight o'clock at night it would come down. To this day when I see a parade, people look at me because I am saluting. I feel so deeply about the country and the flag means something.

That was my work, I did a lot of writing. I had to answer letters regarding girls that were going to be married or the young men from Communications across the street. We had to get all their records so they could get married. The Chaplain would take me to Bethesda Hospital, it was one of the biggest hospitals I had ever seen. It would make Albany Medical looks small. I

got lost one time and he found me. If people want to see what war is, they should go in the hospital. Some men had no faces, no legs, no arms. I saw so much to this day I still think about it. What the Chaplain said was "You'll notice the men are walking around with toilet paper. Everybody in the Navy that can walk does a job. It restores their dignity and lets them think they can do something." I did see them all doing little things to keep busy. I was a wonderful experience to see these people.

I was only twenty years old and it was just grand to grow up like that and know what life was about. I can remember the Chaplain saying "You girls go out with all the young, good-looking fellas, but how about taking some of these guys out?" So we started saying "would you like to go to lunch with us?" Cabs were cheap then, thirty-five cents for a whole zone in Washington. The boys would say, "I would love to go out". I have a picture of a young man that I took out, he had only one leg. My girlfriend was going with her boyfriend who had come home and we took this young man with us, it was my last night in Washington. I had been married the month before and I called my husband. I said "I'm going to take a young man out." He said "Do it." I just felt that I should let my new husband know that I was going out with someone [Laughs] It was quite an experience to work for the Chaplain and see all these things. To me, to this day I still feel I would have gone now if my country needed me. I believe America is a wonderful country. I've been to Europe, and I have seen people are not as fortunate to work like we could work and have the things we have. I'm very dedicated to this country. Oh, I have to tell you about my wedding! I had a plumber that used to come in and out fixing things. Even if our typewriter broke he would fix that, he could do anything. When I was going to be married, he said I would like to see you get married. I said yes. I had two African-American women that were maids. In Washington, in the days of segregation, when you went down to Thirteenth Street they had barricades. You could not go over there. The two girls that cleaned the office were so lovely to me, I got along with everybody. They said "we are coming to your wedding." They had saved their money and bought me the most beautiful negligee I ever had in my married life. I had some of the Marine boys there, the Protestant Chaplain stood by me, and the Catholic Chaplain married me. So I had a very beautiful military wedding. When we went down to my wedding dinner, a gentleman came over and said how wonderful you and your husband are, you are so happy. He said "I am the head of the Library of Congress, and it is my pleasure to buy you all a drink. He was so nice to us.

I have met many interesting people. I used to babysit to make money. I made sixty-two dollars and fifty cents a month, which wasn't much. And when you had to buy stockings, lipstick, and various things I babysat for extra money. One of the gentlemen I babysat for was Colonel Beirne Lay, Jr. He wrote TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH. He said "I have a manuscript here all typed, call me if you want to read it. When you get through with it, tell me what you think. I hope someday, I can get something for it. Maybe publish it or have a movie made." He did have a movie made of it. I took care of his baby and he was a wonderful man. I also took care of a little child for the Biddle family. (Prominent military family from Philadelphia, Pa). They were very, very well-known and he was in the Embassy. I met so many people, it was wonderful. I had the pleasure to be in the parade for Admiral Nimitz. Of course, I was one of hundreds of women, but I was in the parade. I got the paper, there was a picture of the parade and we took pictures of it. One of my friends was designated to take the camera. I brought the photos and would like to give them to you folks, if you would like to have them.

MR: How long were you in the service?

ML: From April 6, 1944 through October of 1945. My husband was discharged before me. He

was in the Army, in the Signal Corps and discharged in September. I was going to go to Hawaii, but I was married. It was embarrassing for him to be home while his wife was still serving. So I came home. It was the most wonderful time of my life I thought. I really enjoyed all of it.

MR: Did you ever join any Veterans organizations?

ML: The W.A.V.E.S. have their national group. I brought my cap to show you, we wear caps. I thought you should also see the current W.A.V.E.S. paper we have. We keep up with things.

MR: Have you kept in touch with anyone you served with?

ML: Oh yes, the girl that stood up for me at my wedding has come every year to see us. She liked horse racing, laugh if you will. I liked it, but I would be working so I would let her go with my husband. Then we got together when I retired. She called about two weeks ago, we keep up. I write to other girls and we meet up at these conventions that the W.A.V.E.S. nationally have. It's very nice. I have kept in touch with one of my officers and the Chaplain. He died here in Saratoga, he came from Boston but he was a missionary. He wrote to me after I left saying he had a couple of Yeoman, but they can't spell. You were the only one that could spell! Oh dear. [Laughs] He took me to Annapolis, and all kinds of places and meetings where I met a lot of people. I am a very fortunate woman. After the war I was very busy, and I'm still busy being involved with things. I was always happy with people and through the years I have done a lot of lecturing for women's places in unions.

MR: Did you ever make use of the G.I. Bill?

ML: No, I was going to, but then my husband did. I decided to go back to the telephone company and worked there until my children came along. Then I did not work for sixteen years. Afterward I went back to the telephone company again, but everything was different. They were going into computers.

I said, I feel like an antique. I've been in every kind of telephone company you have had. So I ran one of the first computers that they had. Fifty-two buttons to learn how to do long-distance on the computer! But I did that.

Then I was asked to be a union representative. I said, well I don't know and they said "Oh, you are going to do it it." So I only lasted a few months being a representative and then went on the Executive Board of the Union. I then felt I might as well go back to school and went to Russell Sage College (women's college in Troy, NY) and Cornell University (Ivy League school in Ithaca, NY) for a two-year program for labor management. I came out with all A's and B's, and A's in Economics, which was good at the time. After that I did a lot of lobbying in Washington D.C. Gerry Solomon (N.Y. Representative) was going to run for office, I was on the board for the League of Women Voters so we got acquainted. I said I am going to vote for you and we stayed friends. For many years I would call and say what I did or didn't like about what they were saying. I have pictures of his family events, his daughter's wedding and everything. He was a man's man and a good person. I also remember meeting Senator Jackson and so many others in Washington. I attended seminars at Cornell, Rutgers, and Yale and learned a lot about unions. I was one of two women in a class of twenty-six down in Albany in the Russell Sage/Cornell group. The men, at that time in the 70's were very insulting. They felt a woman's place was in the home. I remember a couple of them saying "why don't you stay home with your children?" and I said "no, I am going to work and I am going to learn. Before I was through, all of the men all stood behind me and said "you did fine" and were really nice to me. I felt that once they knew me, it was great. I loved the union work.

When Hugh Carey ran for Governor of NY I was non-political as far as saying who I would vote for. But Mary Anne Krupsak (Lieutenant Governor of NY) asked me if I would help them, I said I would speak on women's rights and getting out to vote. My children used to say "Mom's going to be on tv again." And I was many times, once I was down in Poughkeepsie, NY and my sister-in-law called my husband and said "I thought I saw your wife on tv." He told her "yeah, she's in Poughkeepsie, she is on again." But I had a strong belief in my country. I believe if people have a mouth, they should open it and speak their opinion. They should not say what anyone should do and then expect to have things done for you when you don't take an interest in it. So I would go to town meetings and various things, but that is the way I am.

MR: You said you have some pictures you would like to show us?

ML: Yes, I brought everything with me so you could see it. But you can understand, I really loved the Navy. I've got so many there (photos off camera) that's the little Navy hat and medals....women get medals [laughs]. Items shown are:

Now this is the W.A.V.E.S. National hat [Margaret holds up a rectangular navy blue cap]. We had to have something to bring back the memories of our Navy hats so the girls picked out this [circle insignia has an anchor in middle and W.A.V.E.S. National in text around image]. We wear this hat and a white shirt and black tie to all our conferences. The outfit gives us something as a memory for our everyday life as W.A.V.E.S.

Black and white newspaper article showing Grace Hopper (computer scientist and U.S. Navy Rear Admiral). Our government thought she was the best woman of all times to help them with the computers. They did not let her retire, she just kept working. A very, very important person. I got that picture from when she stood next to me, I am right behind her, at the W.A.V.E.S. National Convention, that was good.

And these are my medals, believe it or not, I have the American Campaign Medal (Margaret holds up the medal on a ribbon). I am very proud to have a medal, I never expected one. They sent me a letter and told me I got that. This is the World War II Victory Medal, that is an important thing to have too. [She holds up that medal]. It's nice to have.

These are the pictures of the Admiral Nimitz parade, they had so well done. [Black and white photographs, hard to distinguish details]. There is a note on the back of this one to my mother that says "Hi Dolly, save these for my old age!" [Laughs]. There is the Times/Hearld newspaper headlines the day of the parade which read CAPITAL ACCLAIMS NIMITZ.

MR: What we will do is make a copy of everything.

ML: Sure, sure. Well, you can keep the photographs if you think they will be of any use to the museum.

MR: Are you sure? Have you talked to your sons about this?

ML: Yes, I did. I told them I would give up those. That is history, I think you should have it. Sometimes when people die, they just throw everything in a box.

MR: Who is that good-looking lady? [Laughs]

ML: That was my picture after Boot Training. [Black and white photo of Margaret smiling in her uniform].

This is a picture of some of the girls that were in training with me. [black and white photo of four ladies] One is from Watervliet, NY now, she is still around.

This is Hunter College [b/w photo of campus]. I have all these pictures of Hunter College, which is called Lehman College now. These are very good pictures to keep.

This is the training in the Bronx. [Margaret holds up larger b/w photo of marching W.A.V.E.S.] This booklet has all sorts of pictures. Many pictures of the girls doing various things like marching. Believe me, we marched a lot!

This is my class at Hunter College. [Margaret holds up a large black and white group shot.] There is a little arrow showing where I am. [The camera takes a close up of Margaret's photo]. It is hard to see such a small shot you know. I have so much shoved in there.

These are rather interesting, we had paper bulletins that had the current events of the time. All the news for the girls, to keep them up with what was going on. There were bulletins I had to make which had the Chaplain's comments.[Margaret flips through the pages of the bulletin]. That is the Chicago one, the paper is sixty years old.

MR: So you recall when Judy Garland and Eddie Cantor were there?

ML: Yes, they were all there. Everybody who was anybody was there. That is the only way you can say that.

Mike holds up *The Chicago Sun* newspaper with the headline "Navy Bond Show Attracts 500,000". Several photos are seen on the front page.

This photo was taken at the Hotel Bismarck, one of the places there in Chicago. [Margaret shows a black and white photo with three ladies and points out she is the one on the left.]

That was W.A.V.E. Quarters D. That was a big station, it had five thousand W.A.V.E.s on it. [This comment refers to a black and white photo she holds to camera of an overhead shot of the facility.] Now I had a picture in here, I think this is the one...no this is the Havelock Paper with the whole write up about the Pacific Theater.

That is a copy of my discharge paper. The Navy has to have it a little different, it has a ship.[Margaret holds up a large black and white document with text Honorable Discharge/ United States Navy and an image of a ship]

This is my husband and I in our wedding picture. [It is a lovely black and white pose of Margaret and her husband in uniform from their waist up]

MR: Where did he serve?

ML: He served in Germany, he was in Ireland for a while, he was in the Battle of the Bulge.

This is the whole picture of the people that were in my wedding. [Black and white photo with an additional gentleman and woman standing behind Margaret and her husband ... all are in uniforms]

This picture shows me sitting outside the barracks outside of W.A.V.E. Quarters D. I'm on the

little stairs where you could go outside and sit.

I brought this photo showing some women Marines. They had lovely hats. We are in our summer uniforms here [Margaret holds up a black and white picture of four ladies. Two with brimmed caps on left, two with the W.A.V.E. summer uniforms].

My mother loved this picture. It is when I went to New York and they took a picture of me. [A lovely full-length pose of Margaret in her uniform and cap.]

This photo includes my brothers, that I loved so much. My mother had all three of us gone at the same time. [This image appears to be a newspaper article showing the three siblings in their uniforms]

This is a photo of the young man who had lost he leg, he was so handsome. The girl here was in my wedding. [Margaret holds up a black and white picture of folks at a dinner table at a restaurant.]

This is a photo of Chaplain Fallon. [A black and white photo of the Chaplain shaking some gentleman's hand].

This one gives you an idea of what my W.A.V.E. Quarters D looked like. You can see the parade at eight o'clock in the morning where all those women were marching and coming to see the flag raised. [Margaret holds up a black and white overhead shot of that activity. You can see many women saluting]

MR: Okay, we do want to copy these also to put in your files. Well thank you very much, were there any questions you wanted to ask?

[Margaret just smiles and interview ends.]