RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DOROTHY DEMPSEY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

KASSANDRA KELLY
and
SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK

LYNDHURST, NEW JERSEY
MARCH 1, 2010

TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSICA ONDUSKO

Kassandra Kelley: This begins an interview with Mrs. Dorothy Dempsey on March 1, 2010, in Lyndhurst, New Jersey, with Kassandra Kelly and Sandra Stewart Holyoak. For the record, please tell me when and where you were born.

Dorothy Dempsey: I was born in July of 1922 in Fordham, not far from Fordham University. As they did in those days, I was born at home, and it was an apartment house, and we were there for, oh, quite a while, and eventually, my mother and father wanted to get us out of that area. I had a brother, or two brothers by then. It was becoming very congested. The trains came in from New York down, they were on the ground until they would get to about where we lived in Fordham, then they went into a tunnel, and came into Grand Central Station, and it was constant traffic, and I guess they were afraid of us getting hit, or something. In those days, you sat in front of your apartment houses on kitchen chairs, and everybody knew everybody, and they all talked, things, and it was a lot of memories, even though I was young when we left there. My father wanted to go to the "country" as he called it, so then we moved to Pelham Bay, and we lived at the very end of the railroad station, the Pelham Bay train, and we had an apartment there. The walk to school, I went to a Catholic school, and my brothers did too, it was almost three miles, but we did it, and I guess we were expected to do it. It was a different kind of a life, and my father then said that he wanted to get nearer to the school, and we were very fortunate that this priest that was up there, and, sometimes, people don't believe this story, but it did happen. He was a man with a lot of vision, and he had bought up a lot of land at Pelham Bay Park, and he built a church in the ground, underground, because he was going to eventually, when he got money, build a big church above. So when I tell people, like, they say, "Well, where were you married from?" and I said, "I was married under the ground at Our Lady of the Assumption." I said, "Everybody would come down the steps, and have rice thrown at them--I came up from the basement." [laughter] And I said, that's the story of my life, but this man was very, he was sharp, and he, all of the area around Pelham Bay, he was able to get builders to build houses, and he built up his parish through real estate, I guess. Before he built the underground church, we had a circus tent, a huge circus tent, and that was our church. I remember, one time, speaking at something at Seton Hall, and I said, "Yes, it was a circus tent." "They never did that." I said, "Well, yes, they did. This man was able to do it," and you gained courage from him because he would take chances and do things and our school, the Westchester Country Club was selling the mansion, and they were moving further up around White Plains or New Rochelle or something, which we were, Pelham Bay was here, then we came to New Rochelle and White Plains and all those little areas, but we were still the Bronx. He bought the big mansion and made it into a school and that was where we all went to school. The whole area was like one gigantic family, because they were now, it was after World War I, and people were able to, but then the Depression came along, and it was really very hard. I can remember a lot about that Depression, and fathers did begin to lose jobs, and my father worked in Fordham on the Grand Concourse, and he worked for the Buick Company, and he lost his job, and we had just bought our house, maybe about a year or two. I remember, and it's just a little thing that in school, the children would bring their little bag lunch and so on, but they tried to have a special area for those whose fathers were not working, and they would get a free lunch. I guess the start of free lunches and I didn't want to go there, didn't want my friends to know my father wasn't working, so I would still bring my lunch, and Sister come over one day, grabbed me by the back of my neck, and she said, "You know where you're supposed to be," and I cried, and I said, "I don't want them to know my father's not working." At the end of the day, she said, "and there's an extra little bag for you, take

it home," and it was peanut butter sandwiches, and I never had seen, it's silly to say, never had seen square bread, because people always made their own bread back then, but, now, suddenly, there was square bread, and I guess they had gotten machines to bake them that way or something, and I was so proud I could eat square bread peanut butter sandwiches. [laughter] Everybody helped everybody else during the Depression, and we were able to keep our house, which I thought we were going to lose. My father started to work for the city of New York then. He thought he would be better off in Civil Service, so he went to this Delehanty Institute as they called it in New York, which it trains you to take Civil Service tests, and he was a mechanic. He worked with motors and [was a] master mechanic, I guess, so, he turned out to be number one when they took the test, and when he went to work, reported for work the first day, there was a man sitting at my father's desk, and my father said, "You're in my seat." He said, "No," he said, "I got the job." My father said, "I'm number one, I got the job," but he was the political appointee. He was number three, so, my father, well, anyway a big thing occurred, which I never, I was young enough, but, I knew something was going on with politics, but, my father finally got his job, and he worked for Mayor [Fiorello] LaGuardia, "the Little Flower" they called him, for years and years. [Editor's Note: Fiorello LaGuardia served three terms as mayor of New York from 1934 to 1945.]

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: What was he doing for LaGuardia?

DD: Well, what he did was, he took care of all the cars that belonged to, like, the mayor, the fire chief, the cars that were not the regular run of the mill thing, and he travelled around. He made sure that when they were repaired, that they weren't, that they didn't charge them more than they did. He worked for Civil Service all those years. I went to the school in that area, and then, when we graduated, I went to the Cathedral in New York, St. Patrick's. Back then, it was the Cathedral for girls, and we had an annex that used to be in the Bronx that was easier for the Bronx girls to go, and that was fine, but, after two years, then you had to go down to St. Patrick's to the big cathedral, and I used to get carsick, and I still do. It's awful. Even seasick, and imagine being in the Coast Guard, [laughter] but, anyway, and I said to my mother, I said, "I'm so embarrassed," in the trains. Well, anyway, so, she took me out, and put me in a public school in the Bronx, James Monroe, and that was in the Bronx around Elder Avenue, in a real Jewish section, and I didn't know much about Jewish people, but, I got to love the way things were going. [laughter] I think my life changed then, because everybody I grew up with all went to the same church, the same school, we were all neighbors. I didn't know much about the outside life, none of us did, but we never looked beyond that. That was our life, and when I went to James Monroe, for the first time, I was able to do things in music, and we really, we just had a choir in the Catholic school I went to, but that's all and I was able to be in shows, and we were taught swimming, and I swam on the team, and my life suddenly changed, and I didn't realize that there were two worlds, and I was living in one and never knew about the other.

SH: Was James Monroe for just girls, or was it coeducational?

DD: The Catholic school, the Cathedral was girls, but James Monroe was boys and girls. My oldest brother went there, and he played in the orchestra. I sang with the various groups, but, while I was there, that would be the '30s, the late '30s, we were getting people that didn't speak English, and we had never met them before, and I didn't realize that they were trying to get out of

Germany, because this was '38, 1938, '39, and the families, they were Polish, they were German, whatever, and we didn't even have enough seats in a regular New York public school, because there were about three thousand students in that school. It was a big school, and we used to have to share seats with somebody, that's how busy it got. We never really understood why they were all coming to America, but, that was it. The war was starting in England and in Germany. In 1940, when I graduated, I thought, "Well, I know I'm never going to go to college," and my father was the old generation. The boys have to go to college, but not the girls, because they'll only come out of college, get married, and have wasted their education. I said, "Well, Daddy, I don't know what I'll do," but, anyway, they, when we graduated, I answered an ad for an art student. I loved to sketch, and paint, and it was in photography, and I was touching up negatives. You would have your portrait taken, and all the, those studios would send their work to this laboratory where we would retouch them, and I worked in the dark room, and worked on, the negatives were about that big, but, I learned how to use a scalpel that was so fine, like, I guess to remove, like, blemishes, or heavy scars, and then, with a pencil that was as pointy as a needle, I was able to fill in spots that would cover, like, heavy wrinkles and things like that, so, I learned something, and I thought it was fun, and I worked for about, not quite a year there, and then, I realized, "I'm going to be in the dark room all my life. What will it be like when I'm older?" or something, and I don't know whether I want to do this all my life. I quit the job, and my father was very, he was firmer with me than with my two brothers.

SH: Are the brothers older or younger?

DD: I had one brother two years older than me, and another brother five years younger than me, and the brother, the older brother, went to NYU [New York University], and he was an engineer. He's passed away two years ago, and the younger brother was kind of wild. [laughter] He didn't have to open a book he was so smart, he was able, but, he was always in some kind of trouble with the boys, the kids doing something, but, anyway. My father said, "Well, you're not going to sit around, and you'll never get a career as an artist," and, "That's a man's field," and stuff, but, that was the thinking back in those days. Girls had a stereotyped role they had to play, and that was it. So, I went to a business school, and I learned something called the comptometer, and it was like an adding machine, but you could multiply, and divide, and, so, when I finished the course, they sent me to Oscar Meyer, the meatpacking place, and it was in the Bronx then, and that was 1941, '42, around that area, and the war was beginning to build up, you heard about it in Europe, but, now I was working for a German firm, and all the people in the plant, like we worked on the top floor where the offices were, but, they were all people that were coming over from Germany that couldn't speak English. When I look back at the poor things were hiding, so that they wouldn't have to go back, but I worked there, and then the war started in England, we weren't in it yet. It was after Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941) anyway, that I decided I didn't want to stay in what I was doing, but my father said, "You have to get a job," and so on, "You've got to stay there." When Pearl Harbor came, and I recently gave a talk on that in Rutherford, they wanted to know something about Pearl Harbor, and I did the music from it, and took some people with me, and gave them the background. I said, the world, we were pulling out of the Depression, and so proud that everybody had survived no matter where they were. They were all working, and now people could buy houses, and people could, maybe, take a vacation or something, and all of a sudden Pearl Harbor hit. I remember the day distinctly, and my father had the radio on or something, and then, somebody ran up and down the street with newspapers

under his arm, "Extra, extra, Japan has attacked the United States," and I said to my mother and father, "How could a little place like Japan attack us? We're the strongest country in the world," and anyway, we had to get out a huge map. We never heard, we didn't know where Pearl Harbor was, to see where it was, and from that time on, life really changed, and we were all like, we wanted to do something, and in the places like Pelham Bay, somebody had started, they didn't have women in the military. They didn't even think about it, and they, what they did was, they started something called the American Women's Voluntary Services. I said to my mother, "I'm going to go and join this. I don't know what they do," but they met in a storefront in the shopping area where we were, and we learned how to do home nursing, and we were so sure at that point after Pearl Harbor, that we were going to be bombed, and that the target would be New York City, and we lived in New York. The idea was that we got home nursing. The Red Cross taught us, and then, we would go back to our neighborhoods, like, I would come here, and I'd have all the neighbors come in, and I'd teach them what I learned through that, and then we'd all be ready, and people literally started digging in their backyards, that they were going to build their shelters, and even my father who wouldn't disturb his garden for anything, he said, "We have to start planning, because if they're going to bomb us this is what it's going to be." I stayed at my job in Oscar Meyer, and by the way, when they had air raid drills, which they were doing then, these German people were so upset, and we would all have to go out in the street and I thought, "These poor things, whatever they went through in their country," "and that must have been really bad yet." I stayed there, and I finally decided, "Look, this isn't enough." They now, the Army was taking women, and we didn't have women in the military because we weren't even ready to have our own people in the military. We just were not prepared, so, we followed what Canada and England did. They took women in, and they trained them, but they had a draft, and in England when you were seventeen, you had to register. You were drafted, and the same in Canada. Well, anyway, we decided, and I met the woman who did that in Washington [D.C.] one time, fantastic woman. She said, "We looked at these countries that never had women in the military," and she said, "You think about it." She said, "Japan wouldn't think of women in uniform, Germany wouldn't think of women in uniform, and what happened to them? They lost. They didn't have enough people to keep it going." Anyway, the Army was the first one to come up with; nurses had always been in, but, they doubled their crews, too, so, the Army came in, and then the Navy. The Army came in in '42, and in the fall of '42, I think, the Navy came in, and then the Coast Guard and then the Marines. I thought about it, and my father said, "No way would you ever wear a uniform." "What would my neighbors say?" I said, "You should be proud of it, Dad," and my mother said, "You do what you want to do." Being I liked music, and I used music all the time for everything. In fact, I played with the jazz band. It was a seven piece band, and it was Matty James and his Country Club Orchestra, and my older brother played the sax and the clarinet, and I played the piano for them, and they used to rehearse in our living room where, in our house, because it didn't have, the ceiling went up to the peak of the house, so the sound went up, so I enjoyed playing with them. I really enjoyed it, but, the war came, this one got drafted, that one enlisted, this one got drafted. My brother, the older one, worked for Sperry Gyroscope they called it. They made the gyroscope, they had the only ones that, what was it now that he worked on, but it was very important and so he couldn't be drafted. He wanted to go in, he couldn't be, but he had to work on, it was the, some kind of a thing that had to do with lining up a gun's cross things. It was something that was put into a machine that would give you the accuracy that you couldn't ordinarily get, and what did they use, but, hair, blonde hair. They had a Swedish woman, I'm trying to think of the name of what it was, but,

anyway, the older brother couldn't go in, and the younger brother was too young, and I liked what I was doing then, but it wasn't enough, and I remember, when the first draft started after Pearl Harbor, that everybody went to the train station in Pelham Bay, and all of the neighbors were going. All the fellows, they were 1-A, they had all been called, and I was standing there, looking at our world is completely different, like, overnight everybody's going and, so, eventually then, I went to the USO, and I thought, "Well, maybe I can do something with music out in the field," so, I went with a friend of mine that was visiting from Upstate New York. She played an accordion, so, they took her, and they turned me down, and I said, "Why, what did I do?" They said, "You can't take a piano on the battlefield." [laughter] "Oh," I said, "that's right," so, they took her, and she went, and I didn't, and oh, that hurt. I thought, "Oh, I want to do something. I just, this isn't enough," so, my best friend and I went down, I told my mother what I was going to do. She said, "If this is what you want, you do it. Don't let Daddy slow you down," and, so anyway, we went to the Navy. I didn't want to go to the Army, and I wasn't sure about the Marines, and I just chatted, talked to somebody in the Coast Guard, and I liked what they had to offer, and I grew up on the water, because Pelham Bay was where we lived, and we swam two or three times a day and my brothers had boats, and I was used to them and I thought, "Well, maybe this would be what I need," so, anyway, Pat Moriarity, my best friend and I, went in. They took me in one side, they took Pat in the other, and when I came out, she was sitting there sobbing, and I said, "What happened to you?" She said, "They don't want me." I said, "Why not? You're healthy, you're young." She said, "I wasn't born here." I said, "Where were you born?" She said, "I was born in Ireland." I said, "Oh, that's right, you're an Irish family," but they didn't take you if you were born in a foreign country. So, I went up to the recruiter. I said, "She's normal. She's healthy. She was only two years old when she was brought to America. She didn't even know this." [laughter] They said, "We're sorry, that's how it goes," so she sobbed all the way home. She said, "Oh, you're going to leave me." I said, "Well, maybe they'll open it up later on, and you can go in," so, when I got home, my father wouldn't talk to me for anything. "I didn't want you to do that. You're not," what did he say? Something to the effect, "You're not worldly. You don't know how [to act] with all these men around," and he didn't know how to express himself, but to say, "You're the only girl. I can't imagine you going out in the world, and living like that." So, I said, "Well, Daddy, whatever happens, they'll be plenty of girls like me there," so, when I, my mother said, "It's up to you. You know how to take care of yourself." I said, "I do, Mom. I'll pick the girls that I can be with," so, I left New York City. There were fourteen of us that left on that troop train, and we had to go to our boot camp in Florida. Well, to me, that was the end of the world. [laughter] I had never been out of the Bronx, all of us, the girls from Long Island and all that went, so, there were fourteen of us on the troop train, and in those days, of course, they didn't have any air conditioning, or anything, so it was so hot. It took us three days to go to Florida, because we were sidelined as a troop train, put on, to let other things go through, and so we opened the windows. We had to get air, but we would be covered with soot, and we had to wash at a little sink, that was all we had, and we had never slept in a berth before and we'd hang out, and we'd say, "Is everybody all right?" Well, the fourteen of us got to know one another pretty well and when we got to Florida we said, "Well, we have to face whatever we have to face," and, so they didn't have, they were not ready for military women in our country yet. We didn't have barracks, so, what they did was, they took hotels, and they reorganized the hotels into billets, or into barracks, hotels and schools that they could afford to use the schools, so, of all places, I was in Palm Beach. I only read about that in the paper, in the Biltmore [Hotel]. It was the most beautiful exotic place, and I said, "Wait until

my father sees this." He must have thought I'd be in an old wooden shack. [laughter] So, we were in Florida in boot camp.

SH: Had you been issued your uniforms before you left?

DD: Not yet. No, and we had to bring with us, they gave us the list of clothing to bring and we were put in, well, this is something else, too, and when they ask me to talk about women going in, I usually tell them this, too. When we went to get our clothing, they would give you like a pillow and give you this and that, and the other thing and they'd say, "Second deck, port or starboard, billet so and so." We said, "What language is this?" We had to speak the Navy terms, but they didn't give us time to learn them, so we'd say, "Well, what do you think a billet is?" I said, "I think it's the bunk we sleep in." Within those six weeks, or was it eight weeks, boot camp, we were trained in military discipline and in military rank. You had to know who was a lieutenant and so on, and then we were given all sorts of tests to see where we would best fit in, because our objective, and I say this every time I speak, even in the classroom, was to release a man for duty. We were not to go on duty. That was not allowed, but these fellows that were at desks, and things like that, and in pharmacies, they could go then, and we'd take their places and it was funny, one time, we were talking at a dinner, and a woman said, one of the women said, she said, "I was stationed in New Orleans, and what you were saying how we released a man for duty, we did," and she said, "I was on a bus, and coming off duty," going to wherever she was going, and she said it was raining, and she said she got on the bus, and this woman stood up, and she had an umbrella, and she started to hit this SPAR [nickname for the women in the United States Coast Guard Women's Reserve]. She said, "Because of you, my son is overseas on a ship," and, which is what we did. We released them so they could go, but, we didn't. The girl said, she didn't know what [was happening], everybody on the bus got in on the fight and said, "She's just helping out." Our training in Florida, well, it was rigid. We had to speak their language, and we had, when we went to the mess hall, we had to walk around with a sheet in our hands, and, "Where's the mess hall?" [laughter] We didn't know where we were and we never had a cup without a handle, but, they were mugs, and we laughed because they had the fellows still working, like, in the, I guess, cooks and things, yet, until they figured out what we would do, and this black fellow put his thumb in the cup every time he'd go by to get the coffee, but we couldn't say anything, we would say, "Oh, look at that." We started classes, and we were, we had two or three days of testing, and when I went in, I went to see the pastor before I enlisted, and I told him I wanted to do this, and how my father was against it, and my father was very close to the pastor, so, he said, "Listen," he said, "you work with music, you've always worked with women, and you can be the chaplain's assistant. You can help him with everything, with the vestments, and wherever he has to go, and play the organ, and all this. If somebody's wounded, you write the letters, or, if somebody's killed, you do that," and so on. So, I said, "Yes, I'd like that," because I really didn't know what I could do. I thought I could do the photography, because I had learned it, which they would have liked, but, I didn't know the chemical end of it. I never had chemistry, and I had to know how to put those chemicals, those things together to do it, so I couldn't go into that. We had two or three days of all kinds of testing to see what we were best fitted for, and where they needed us, so the day of graduation, when we finished all of our courses, and everything, they, we were on what they called the quarterdeck, and 125 of us, and the officer came to the front, and she said, "Seaman Riley," which was my maiden name, Riley, "front and center. Commanding officer wants to see you immediately." I said, "Oh, my God, I

didn't even graduate. What did I do?" [laughter] I couldn't, and they were all looking at me, my friends, and, I said, "I don't know what I did." So, when I got in there, she said, "State your religion." I said, "Roman Catholic, sir," and she said, "Can you serve on the altar?" I said, "No, sir." "Can you do," whatever else she said, I couldn't do anything, because girls couldn't.

KK: Yes.

DD: She said, "Then, you can't be a chaplain's assistant." I said, "Well, sir, that's what I hoped I would do and I know the need was there," and she said, "If you can't serve the Catholic chaplain, you can't go." So, I said, "What will you do with me?" [laughter] She said, "Well, being you've always worked with women, and so on, we have areas that you would work in, so, we'll assign you for that." So, I said, "Where will I be assigned?" and she said, "Wherever the need is, we'll," whatever, but, anyway, so, when we had finished the graduation, I said to the girls, "It isn't anything I did, it's that I can't do it." So, one was going to be a truck driver in transportation, and another one was going to be something else, a cook, and they said, "Well, why don't you ask to do this?" I said, "I'm afraid to even ask anything, they might send me someplace else," but, then, so, I went from Florida in boot camp, and oh, the drill, the formations, and I think that was for publicity, too.

SH: Was your drill sergeant a male?

DD: A woman. She was what they called a master-at-arms, which is what I eventually ended up being, and which I loved the work that I had to do, and I could see where the need was there, too, but, we drilled on white little stones, and between the sun on, in Florida, the girls would faint all the time, and we would have to wear full dress uniforms which were wool, yet, although it was now May and June. They used to have an ambulance that would follow along the edge of the field, and, honestly, and the girls would, would fall down, and, but, anyway, when we left boot camp, I was assigned to Boston, and I thought, "Well, that's not too far from home. I could get home," Boston and New York and all that, and the barracks there had been an apartment hotel, and, like, would have been one apartment. It was like two bedrooms, and a kitchen, and a bathroom. Eight of us lived there, and you can imagine what the bathroom was like, so we had to make our little chart. "You get up first, you do that, and you do this, and that, and the other thing," and they made it. The discipline was so strict, today you wouldn't believe it, but I began to see why. You can't have women living together. Somebody's going to throw their stockings someplace. You've got to have a discipline to it in order to survive, and we had one that wasn't like that, and she used to drive us crazy because during inspection, which they did once a week, you had to stand straight, eyes straight ahead, and she'd always make faces at us so that we'd, this woman, so that we'd laugh, and then we'd get our liberty taken away. We couldn't go out to the movies that night, or something. One time, she put a, I think it was a banana peel under something in one of the waste paper baskets, and we used to clean everything out, and have it just so, and so the officer who was doing inspection said, "And what is this?" and held up the banana peel. We said, "Oh, look what she did." We didn't find it, but, anyway, the background of being in the military at that time, like just your own life, you learned to live with people, all kinds of people, and I find it comes in handy now that I'm a senior. [laughter] Women get so picky and I had five of them in here last night, and this one didn't like something the other one was doing. She said, "Well, you didn't have to take that," or something she cooked. I don't

know. I thought, "Boy, this is like the old days," but, eventually, I was trained to work with assignments, and, like, you would come to where our barracks was, and I was stationed at the barracks, master-at-arms as they called it, and I would have to see your background, and then, I would look, compare it to where the need, where the openings were, where they needed you, and then, I'd have to find you a place to stay, and all that. On a ship, like, when people ask me what I did, "What is a master-at-arms, or a boatswain's mate?" I said, "Well, on the ship, that's the person that's on the main deck, and must know where everybody on that ship is at all times. Like, maybe you're in sick bay, or maybe you're home, or maybe you're AWOL or something, but you're responsible for where they are, and for what they're doing," and I never knew how to explain that to people, and, when they'd say, "Well, what did you do?" Like, somebody said, like, "I was a cook in the galley, or so, or I did this," and, or, "I was a yeoman. I worked with the officers," and so on, but, I really saw the need when I was up there, and Boston was a huge port. I don't know, have you ever been there?

KK: No.

SH: Yes.

DD: Yes, and where "Old Ironsides" [USS *Constitution*] is today, our building was right there.

SH: Oh, really?

DD: So, people would say, "What ship were you on?" but, women were never allowed on ships. Back in the '40s, in World War II, it was considered bad luck. Going back to the sailing days, no women could ever go on board a ship because it was hard luck, but how that changed. Now they can, they're captains of the ships. I would have to, if I had papers to be signed, I would go into Boston, because our barracks was out in Brookline not far from where the Kennedys lived. It was a big beautiful, as I say, apartment hotel, and I have pictures of all of those things, yes, but, anyway, I would go into the harbor with the papers that had to be signed, and I'd stand at the foot of the gang plank, and I'd say, "I request permission to board ship, sir," and they'd let me on and they'd say, "If you want to go down and have coffee in the mess hall," so, the first time I went on board, I did, but, we didn't have slacks. We had skirts, and you got to go down into the hull of the ship and all of the guys were down there, and I didn't realize it, and all the way down, they're whistling and hooting and I said, "Cut it out." It didn't do any good. They were laughing, so I sat and had coffee with them, and I said, "The last time I'll ever come on ship and go down in the hold with the crew." I learned so much through being with people, and I really felt like I couldn't explain to, as I say people, exactly what I did, because it wasn't--I wasn't a parachute maker, I wasn't a pharmacist, I wasn't a radioman, but, we had 406 women in our barracks, and those are the ones that I was responsible to know where they were, and then, I trained the new ones coming in and they had no, what would you say? They had no way of relaxing. I mean, they would come off duty, they'd be tired during the day, and they'd be writing to their parents, or their boyfriend, or something, and sometimes they'd be crying, so, the commanding officer, at that time, was a different person than I had seen before, and she said, "Can you come up with any idea of what we can do to keep them busy?" I said, "Well, we have a recreation room, let's put a piano in, and we'll put a ping pong table in, and do things," like that, so, I would sit with them when I was off duty, and talk to them and things, and we'd get passes to the movies, and the

opera. I was in two operas. They paid five dollars to just walk across the [stage] in the mob scenes.

SH: Really?

DD: Yes, they'd post a sign that, and they'd say to the barracks, "If you have anybody that wants to be in," it was *Carmen* that I was in, "come down, it'll be five dollars to be in the scenes in the square," and all that, so a group of us went down. We each got five dollars. We were in *Carmen*, and what was the other one? I forget, but, anyway, it was then different, like, ships that would come in, they'd have a dance or something, and they'd call and say, "Can you get forty women?" People were nice up there. They'd say, "Can you, can we have three women for dinner," or something, but, before they'd go, I'd just go, and make sure it was all right, because you didn't know where they were going, but, we all adjusted to that military life, and I got to understand it and I think it was the best education in the world.

SH: Did you have to work shift work, such as watches?

DD: Yes.

SH: Is that how they assigned you?

DD: Yes, right.

SH: The women would go out of the barracks to their assignments at different hours of the day.

DD: No, we had to make sure that they all went at one time, so that you knew where, and the Coast Guard base, there were two parts of our base down in the harbor in Boston, and they worked in all those offices, and then, they all came back to the barracks at night and I'd have to take bed check, go around, and see that. One time there they did, I got in a lot of trouble, because I didn't, I thought it was a body, but, that girl sneaked out, and she made the pillows look like a body, like she was facing the walls. I checked her in like everybody else, but, and I got in trouble for it, but I didn't know, but it was, it was interesting, and I used to do some photography, because I'd learned there, so the Coast Guard made a little room for me, and I then learned how to develop the film, and had the women come down, and we did, so, I worked with them all the time, and it could be like, round the clock, but, it didn't bother me because I liked it, and then, some man in Boston, a Polish man, wanted to do his part in the war, and he said he would have a Glee Club of the women, so we had fifty voices, and we sang for the opening of the opera, and different things, and then they had try outs. The war, in 1944, or '43, '44, within that time, there was, we were losing the men in the South Pacific, and losing them in Europe, and the ships were, it was a disaster at the time, and things were not really going well at all and the, they came to, what was I just going to say, oh, three girls came in, and my message said, "Ask no questions, assign them a room, make sure they get food, and so on." So, I said, "What are these three girls?" They came from the very tip of Cape Cod. I figured they must have something to do with the ships, but, the Coast Guard had designed and made something called LORAN, Long Range [Aid to Navigation]. Do you have that?

KK: I was going to ask if you knew anybody that worked with LORAN.

DD: LORAN, yes, LORAN. They had to work, like, we'd be on duty, and every two minutes, one of us had to, you had no time to stop because it was the first thing. That area that we worked in covered all of the New England coast, and that's where all the subs were trying to get in and that we had this thing that the Germans knew we had it, they couldn't get it, they didn't know how it was done, but the women ran that all the way out on the tip of Cape Cod on the hook and all along our shore positions. They were in on that, too. [Editor's Note: LORAN was a highly classified scientific discovery during World War II that used radio signals and fixed locations to aid ships and planes in calculating their exact locations. In the summer of 1943, the United States Coast Guard Women's Reserve took over the operation of all LORAN Monitor Stations in the continental US, freeing the men who had worked there for overseas assignments.]

SH: These women were being housed in your barracks.

DD: They were the people that worked with LORAN. They were so afraid that somebody would get the idea of how it was done, or something, and, so, they couldn't talk to us.

SH: They would transport them out there every day?

DD: Well, no, they would give them a break because it was so hard.

SH: Oh, they were coming back, almost like a Rest and Relaxation.

DD: Yes, they would give them like two or three days on shore where we were, as compared to what they were doing. To get back to that man that had the music, our people, I mean, in our country, the funding was getting so low, and the munitions, they weren't able to keep up with everything, so somebody decided to sell war bonds. I don't know if you ever heard that or not, and you could buy a twenty-five dollar war bond, or fifty, or seventy-five, or a hundred, whatever, and, so, they came up with the idea that there were so many people, like, from Hollywood and Broadway that were in the service, and they didn't want anything to happen to them because they were big stars, like Jimmy [James] Stewart and all these people, and, so, they had a show called *Tars and Spars*. They had one on the West Coast, and one on the East Coast, and when they did the try outs on the East Coast, we went to auditions, myself and some friends, and they took six of us. So we were taken off duty where we'd been on all of our jobs, and sent to Boston where they had the girls from the Marines, the Navy, the Army, and the Coast Guard, and we were like the dancers and the singers for the show, and then, they had, I worked with, you probably wouldn't remember the name, Cesar Romero. [Editor's Note: Cesar Romero (1907-1994) was a Cuban American film and television star.]

SH: Oh, yes.

DD: Well, he and I worked together.

SH: Did you really?

DD: And I never told anybody, because people would say, "Oh, yes," but, one day, the mayor in town was, about, maybe twelve years ago or so, called. He said, "Did you work with Cesar Romero?" I said, "How did you know? I never told anybody." He said, "I got ways." I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, "Well, he's coming to Rutherford," the next town, and he said, "He's going to pioneer a new channel called AMC [American Movie Classics], and we want a human interest story, and somebody told me about you." I said, "I still can't figure out who would tell you about me, because I never said anything," so, anyway, he said, "And we want you to meet him." I said, "Go on, I was, what, twenty-one years old. I'm white-haired now. I don't want to meet him now," and he said, "No, no, you're going up, and I'm sending a limo for you." I said, "Oh, boy," so, all that night, I hardly slept. I thought, "I haven't seen him in," we were what, I don't know, but, anyway, he was always a terrific guy, handsome as all could be and there were other big name stars in the show, too, and, so, I went up to Rutherford, and when I got out of the, and he said, "Bring pictures that you have of the two of you." I said, "I don't even know where they are anymore." I said, "I got five kids," and I said, "and I'm just, that's so far behind me." So, anyway, he said, "You're doing it," so, anyway, I got out of the limo up at the, in Rutherford. Everybody's standing outside, and saying, "What are you doing there?" I said, "Well, you'll find out," so, anyway, he came out with all of these PR people, and as handsome as could be, white-haired, like I was, still as tall as he was, with his camel hair coat over his shoulder, and I said, he was the chief, and I said, "Listen, chief, can we fake this, because," I said, "you don't remember me from a hole in the wall." He said, "Yes, okay, what'll we do?" I said, "Well, we'll play along with them," so, we sat down, and we talked about, and I had a few pictures with me. He said, "You know what? I do remember you." I said, "Oh, come on," so, he said, "No." He was a chief boatswain's mate, and I was a boatswain, first class. I was three stripes. The next step would be for me to be a chief, but, because I was a woman, they wouldn't let me do it, so, and when we were in the show, when the show was closing, we had our farewell party, he said, "The next time I see you, you're going to be chief." I said, "You know I'll never make it," so, anyway, I didn't wear my uniform the day I saw him in Rutherford because I thought, "This is kind of silly. All these people that know me, these neighbors," but, anyway, so the thing came out, the AMC program and all the newspapers had this picture of him and I. I have the picture here for you to see, too.

SH: Oh, good.

KK: Neat.

DD: Yes, I got all these pictures of all the things I'm telling you about. We talked, and he explained to me that, he said people that were in Hollywood, and on Broadway, big paying stars, they did go in, they wanted to on their own, but, they had to protect them somehow, so, this way, he said, "I did go to the South Pacific with the Coast Guard. I was on a landing craft," and I said, "Well, what did they have you do?" He said, "I would sit with the wounded, and write to the families, and things," and, of course, they would get a letter from Cesar Romero, and, so, it was a morale thing, but, he said, "I did," he said, "we ducked the Japs [Japanese] a couple of times." I said, "Oh, you were lucky," so, since Cesar was in the Coast Guard, he was there, and who was the other one? There's one I keep forgetting, but, anyway, so, when we were on the road, we would do a show, and in a town, like, a Saturday matinee, and a Saturday night show, and then, Sunday we might have off, but, it was a, they were all good musicians though, but, we had to

learn how to do dance routines that were like, you might have seen them like in rows, shoulder to shoulder, very hard to do, because if you missed your one thing, you threw the whole thing off. We made thousands, and thousands of dollars doing that, so, for three, maybe four months, I was on this, on the road.

SH: Were you in your uniform?

DD: Yes, we always had to wear our uniforms, and we could never wear civilian clothes, because they wanted us to create an image, and, so we played through all, we started in Boston, and then we went to New England, we went to New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, all over, and it was quite a routine, but, what an education that was. [laughter] I'm telling you.

SH: Where would they house the women? Would you be billeted together?

DD: Yes, they were trying to get us in military bases, so that we'd be safe, but, with my father not wanting me in uniform, now, I'm on the road. He wrote to me, and I thought it was so embarrassing. I mean, he said, "You don't know how to handle people like this," he said, "And you take chances, and you're friendly to everybody, and," like, in other words, "You better be careful." "I can't watch out for you," my father. That's the kind of feeling I got, but, anyway, so, when the war bonds show was over, I came back on my regular job, back to the duty that I had and I made some wonderful friends, and they're all gone now, and I was up at New London, Connecticut, which is where the Coast Guard Academy is, about ten years ago, maybe twelve, I forget, and we were on this ship, the [United States Coast Guard Cutter] *Eagle,* which is, there were two big ships that belonged to the Germans, their government, and because they lost the war, they now became ours, so, one of them came to the Coast Guard. That's our training ship, the *Eagle*. The pictures at the foot of the stairs, I'll have to show you the artist gave me the original, when I spoke to them about what women did in the Coast Guard, and if you look closely in the water you'll see my name.

SH: Oh, really?

DD: I'm so thrilled with that picture, with all the things that I've ever had in my life too. They said, "We'll pay you to speak to these," I said, "No, you don't pay me," so, what they did was, this man, who was an artist, made me the painting, and that's the one I have there, but, anyway, we were on this ship in New London. One of the cadets, oh, this is strange, now they were, they had cadets in the Navy and the Coast Guard, all of them, and the woman that called me, this officer, and I said, "Well, why would you want us? We're the old timers." She said, "That's why we want, we called twenty-five of you. If you would come to New London, and spend the weekend, and visit with our women, our cadets, and so on, and we're going to have a display of your uniforms, and tell what you did, and so on." I went up with somebody that lived in, oh, she was out near Morristown, I guess, and she had been a cook in my building, so, I knew her, so, we went up there, and the reason that the girls were having a hard time was that, and nobody seems to understand this, of all the academies, Annapolis and all of them, Coast Guard is the only one that is not a political appointment. It's taken on your educational background, your academic background, so that the people who apply at the academy are chosen on their scholastic aptitude, and, of course, the fact that they want to be in the military. These women that were up there

were all top grade students, and they were having trouble competing with one another because they were all top grade, where in their own schools that they graduated from, they were the top of the line, the others were all sort of below them, so, they were getting very depressed. They thought if we could get the women that came back then to visit, and stay with them, and talk to them, so, anyway, that's what this friend did with me, and, so, we were on this ship, the *Eagle*, and there was a cadet, and she said, "Now this mast," which was seventy-five foot tall, "you have to climb the mast, and it doesn't matter. You've got to climb it." I said, "Wait a minute. Suppose it's wet, and you slip, and you don't want to go up." She said, "Ma'am, you know better than that. You don't say you don't want to go, you go." So, anyway, a woman standing near to me said, "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from New Jersey." She said, "So, am I." She says, "I'm from West Orange." I said, "Oh, my goodness, I'm from Lyndhurst," so, we got to talking to one another. She had been stationed in Charleston, so we've been friends ever since, and we've travelled to any Coast Guard function they've had, and everything, but, she's ninety-two, now.

SH: Oh, my.

DD: And she said, well, I think she's lying, but, anyway, and I try to get her to come to Lyndhurst, somebody brings her on Memorial Day and things, and now they show us off in the car, and we wear our uniforms and what not, and we did things together. At the academy, I often thought about, when I was in uniform, it would have been wonderful to go through the academy, because that's when they were starting, and then you could end up being an officer, but, I didn't.

SH: The women are kept separate from the men during training?

DD: Yes, I think so. It looked like it when we were up there. They were so neat and so pleasant, the girls, and everything. We told our little stories as things went on and that weekend, and I realized, but, none of my girls were ever interested, my own daughters. I have no sons, but I have five girls, but they were never interested. They went their own way. They were all, they've done a lot in their lives and I met my husband before I was in uniform. He was already in uniform.

SH: Oh, really?

DD: I was babysitting a neighbor, who had eight kids, and I was playing with them and everything. I answered the door and this Army officer was standing there, and I said, "Yes?" He said, "I came to visit my Aunt and my Uncle John." I said, "Oh, is your name Dempsey?" He said, "Yes." I said, "I know there's two boys, two Dempseys." He said, "I'm the younger one." So, I said, "Oh, come on in," and so, we talked, and everything. He was home on leave. He had just graduated from Officer Candidate School. He stayed with his aunt and uncle for two or three days, and then, he called, and he asked if I would like to go out, and I thought, "Wait until my father sees an Army soldier coming in now. He's going to say, 'Oh, what's she up to now?'" [laughter] Anyway, so we visited, we went to the movies, and we went to a party and things like that, and then he had to go back to Fort Hood, Texas, where he was training. I was a civilian at the time, so when we said goodbye at the subway station in New York, he said, "And I am coming back." He said, "I will see you again." I said, "I guess they're all saying that, but I wish

it were so." I never met anybody like him, and he was just the kind of guy I would like to go with, and so anyway, then as time went on, I went in, and my first weekend pass coming home from Boston, I got on the train in Back Bay, Boston, and it was my mother and father's twenty-fifth wedding anniversary and I was kind of excited because they'd never seen me in a uniform. They hadn't seen me since I left and we pulled into Providence, Rhode Island, and a mob of soldiers got on the train. My husband was one of them. Now, that can only happen in a book.

KK: Yes.

DD: And he walked down the aisle, and I looked at him. I said, "Jack." He said, "Yes," and I started to cry, and I only, we don't remember who was sitting with me, but, they got up, and gave him the seat. [laughter] And, so, I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Our ship," he said, "is being loaded up here in Boston to go overseas, but," he said, "I can't tell you where I am, but, I'm up here in New England," but, he said, "I was going to go home to your house, to see," "if your mother would ever see you." He said, "I'd stay with my aunt and uncle," and I said, "Wait until I come in the door with a soldier. My father will have fits," although he had met him, but he, I thought my father thinking the way he was, might think she's up to something, but, anyway, so, we, that was just before he, he stayed, he came in to Boston two or three times. He was in that area, but, I don't know where, but they were loading the *Aquitania*, which was a coal bearing ship, took three weeks to load that ship with, I guess, the fuel and the soldiers that were going overseas. He would come to visit me at the barracks, and when I was on night watch, I said, "You know I can't go out." I said, "I'm on duty," and I had to do bed check, and check the papers and so on. We did have some Coast Guard men who had been wounded, and they were back on shore. This was their job, to keep the furnaces going, and keep the things going for the women in that barracks, so when they would be coming around, I'd say, "Jack, I've got to hide you," because, I said, "Somebody will report you, and then, we'll both be in trouble." So, I went to sick bay. I said, "Listen, put him in sick bay. Pretend he's a patient," so they did. They said, "What happens if we get caught?" I said, "They never check sick bay. I'm the one that would check it, and I won't check sick bay," so, anyway, but, he was there for about three days or so, and I said, "Oh, the fact that we never got caught." Then, when he came home from overseas, I was still in. He was gone, I guess he was gone about two years. He went through the Battle of the Bulge, through everything. That's what happened to him. He was a quiet, gentle fellow, and the horror that he saw, I think, was, like, unbelievable. He very rarely talked about it until he began to slip when he got older, and I think it was very hard for him.

SH: Do you remember what unit he was with?

DD: He was with the Second Armored. They were called the "Hell on Wheels" Division, and he worked with [George S.] Patton, and that was at the time that, at the end of the war when they knew they had to get Hitler, or else, so, the way our government planned it, the Second Armored Division fought in North Africa, fought through Italy, up through the continent, but he didn't join them until later on. We were closing in from the south, and from the east, and from the north, and Hitler had no way to get out then, out of Germany. That's when he decided to kill himself, and so my husband was with the first group of tank destroyers that went into Berlin, and when they got there, and when he told me this, it took him a long while to even tell me any of the things, they got the message that they had to back up, and leave Berlin, and let the Russians

come in because [President Franklin D.] Roosevelt had made a pact with the Russians. "If you help us win the war, we'll let you get Hitler," so, of course, the men were, my husband was furious. They'd fought all through the Battle of the Bulge, and a lot of things happened to him that he never told me till he was just about dying. At one point, when we were in Berlin, because we got there first, they put the American flag up on the pole, and during the night, when they were all maneuvering around, the Russians took ours down, and put theirs up, so, our Americans climbed this huge pole in Berlin, and they took theirs down, they didn't destroy it, but they took it down, and they put theirs back up again. He was home, and discharged before I was. He was overseas about two-and-a-half years.

KK: Did you guys stay in contact while he was overseas through letters?

DD: Oh, yes, I did, and he censored the mail, too, like, with the groups that he was with, but, he never talked about what was going on over there, but I guess he couldn't and when he came home, he found it very hard to get used to civilian life, and he worked at DuPont in Kearny before he went into the service. He lived in north Newark, a placed called Forest Hill or something, but he was from a broken family to begin with. His father was an alcoholic, a severe one, and his stepmother was also an alcoholic, and they used to have fights and what not. He never told me that, but he would never take me to his home, and I said, "Are you ashamed of me, or what?" He said, "I wouldn't want you to see how I had to live." So he had a brother that lived in Lyndhurst and his own brother and when he couldn't get settled when he first came home, the brother said, "You come and live with me in Lyndhurst, and then we'll work things out." So, when we were married, he lived in Lyndhurst. We had to live here, because he worked in DuPont down in Kearny. I was always so proud of the fact that he was a quiet fellow. He went through all of that and things that happened to him, but then when he began to slip into these depressions, and as he got older, they got worse and sometimes, where he wouldn't get out of bed, and he wouldn't eat, and he wouldn't shave, and this just wasn't him at all.

SH: Was there help through the US Department of Veterans Affairs for him?

DD: I tried, and when I took him to East Orange, and all these places, they said, by the time he was really into the depressions, that was, they were getting the Vietnam people back now, and he said, "We can't put him in through the hospital, because it's rampant with drugs," and it's true. I did get him into Passaic at one time, into St. Mary's [Hospital], and they called me, and they said, "He's drug dealing." I says, "Not him, he doesn't even know how to deal," and I said, "It's not," and they said, "Oh, wait a minute. The guy that was his roommate was the dealer," and he kept putting the things on my husband. I couldn't really get any help through the VA, of all things, and he served almost five years, and I said, "Gosh," and I was in, we women only served about three years. That's all they, by the time they got us all in, but, and I'll be honest with you, I don't like what they're doing with the women today. I mean, if you have children, this is where you belong, but, now I understand what they're doing. This is not, you want to be of service to your country, like it was with us. This is a job, like you would go to a store and work, the Army is, and the kids, and it took me awhile to let that sink in. I thought, "No, I don't think that women would do that," but that is so, but, and what we followed, as I say, is what England did. They were able to work it out.

KK: Were you interested at all in staying in the Coast Guard at all, or did you want to get out?

DD: No, because I had met him, and I thought, well, now I couldn't go to college. I didn't have the money, but, now, I can, so I applied at Columbia, I applied at all the big places in New York, and they must have had nine thousand on these lists. I said, "I'll never get in," so, NYU had a, I wanted to do early childhood, work with early childhood, and use my music, and, so they had a division that was in New York City right next to where the mayor lives, and it was called the Early Childhood Foundation, but it was NYU. They accepted me there, and I started college there.

SH: This was on the GI Bill?

DD: Under the GI Bill, and it was wonderful, because we had wonderful teachers. The school was so small, 108, I think were in that college, all four years, and you either went down to NYU for some of your classes or the teachers came up to us in New York. We were in New York City, and I had gone there for the first year, and during that year, we were engaged, and oh, my father threw ten fits with that one.

SH: Did he really?

DD: "Here you can go to college now, and you're going to lose it. Get married later on." I said, "Well, he's been waiting so long," and I guess he wanted to get out of his situation with the father, and the stepmother and all that. I left after the first year, and we got married, and then when we moved to Lyndhurst. They were just opening a nursery school here, so I worked there, and then when I had the first child, I took her to school with me. Then, the local truant officer wanted to go back to school, and she said, "You didn't finish." I met her one day when I was pushing the baby carriage. I said, "No, I didn't finish. I always said I would, but, I don't know how I'm ever going to do it," but, anyway, so we both went down to Rutgers School of Education, and because I had the one year behind me, but, oddly enough, New Jersey wasn't yet into early childhood. New York was, but New Jersey wasn't ready yet, and, so they suggested that I take educational courses.

SH: Was this at Newark?

DD: In Newark, yes, in Rutgers, and I did, and then I was in class when I was expecting my second baby. That's why she went to Rutgers before she was born. [laughter] And we had those desks, with the big things. I couldn't get in this way, so I had to sit sideways and the teacher came down, she said to me one day, "I'm in the same position you're in." I said, "Not this one." [laughter] But, anyway, so, when Beth [Elizabeth Norman] was born then I figured I couldn't go back again, but, then, the following year I said, "Maybe I can get a few more courses." So, I went back again, and got pregnant again, so, during the three years that I went to Rutgers, I had one-and-a-half pregnancies. [laughter]

SH: Good for you.

KK: It is true, it can be done.

DD: I wanted to continue. When I finally, after I had the third girl, I thought I couldn't get anybody to babysit them, and I didn't think it was fair to them, so, eventually, I thought, "I'll never get my degree," so, after the third one was born, I guess I wasn't pregnant for a while. I met somebody in town, but she was going to Newark State Teachers [College], which was right in the same area as where Rutgers used to be, so I registered there, and went with her, and I was only there one year when they moved the whole thing down to Union. Remember, that's down where they are now, at the old Kean College there, and, so it took thirteen years to get my degree. Can you imagine?

SH: God bless you.

DD: And I graduated with the oldest girl, and she was graduating from the University of Kentucky, and I was graduating from, I think it was still Newark State Teachers, I don't know, but, anyway, so, we graduated the same month, and I said, "And I'm not wearing that cap and gown," and they said, "Yes, you are. You worked for it." I said, "But look, I'm getting grey hair." [laughter] Well, anyway, and it happened to be a beautiful day at graduation, so we had to march around the campus, and my father said, "I'm going to be there clapping for you." I said, "Daddy, I don't want them to see me like this," but, anyway, but, I finally got the degree, and then in the meantime, I substituted in school on and off, but, then I figured, "It's a good thing I got my degree then." I thought, "They got to know me when I was a substitute teacher," the Board of Education, so that, but, there were no openings in teaching, and people just weren't leaving teaching. I don't know what it was, or, so, it was quite a while until I got my full time [position]. I taught for twenty-six years, twenty-seven years, and, but, I loved to teach.

SH: Did you teach in same school district?

DD: In the same school district, Lyndhurst, but they had a program back then, and I think it was good. Every five years, you went to another school, and I think their objective was that you got to be too friendly with the parents in the school you were in, so you were shifted. I wasn't in there very long when they, I taught in the one on Ridge Road, and the one here on the corner where I retired from, and another one in this town. I taught mostly fourth grade New Jersey history and geography, and then I taught science and the upper grades, and social studies, and that was all changing at the time, but, when I was still at Newark State Teachers. I graduated from Newark State in 1969. My husband Jack and I had five daughters: Susan, Elizabeth (Beth), Dorothy, Joan and Maureen. My oldest girl Susan went to the University of Kentucky, and Beth went to Rutgers Nursing, and I thought I'd have to quit because my GI Bill was running out, but President [Lyndon B.] Johnson came out with a program that I thought was fantastic. If you're teaching in New Jersey, and you're going to school in New Jersey, if you would, when you graduated, if you would stay, we'll cancel out your bills, and they did, so, I said, "Oh, I'm too old. They'll never include me, and that's a new program to get students to come into teaching," but, they accepted me, so that I was able to finish and get my degree, but it was really something. The third daughter, Dorothy, said, "I'm not going to college, don't even try. I'm no good." [laughter] So, we sent her to Katharine Gibbs. We said, "You have to have some background," and then, the fourth girl, Joan, she went to Maryville College in Tennessee. She did music therapy, and then the fifth girl went to Penn State and she did agriculture like the first girl. The

first girl went to Africa when she was a junior at the university, and she went there to show them how to grow things, but, it was just some kind of a program. It didn't last very long, but she said, "I'm going back to Africa." She's been back five times. She met her husband in Africa, a fellow who came from England, and they were married in Africa, and they were married thirty-five years this past December, so they went back to the little village. She lives in England, because he's an English fellow, and she said it was fantastic, and this is something, I think people should know, like, she went to Africa on the program to help people grow things and she eventually ended up having a school. She had a school built. She helped build it with her own hands too, out of building blocks, and so on, and while she was there, this fellow came from England, and he was to build a technical school, and the English government gave him a truck. He was to teach the Africans mechanics, and that was a long while ago, and they were married there and everything, and, in fact, when they left teaching, they backpacked from South Africa. She was in a country called Lesotho, and they backpacked all the way through the continent, and you should hear the things that happened to them.

SH: Oh, my.

DD: They couldn't go through Rhodesia. They went back this December, and they showed me the pictures. They wanted to see how things had developed with the groups they started like John with just tools. Now, there's a building with machinery in it, and it all developed from just that little bit that he did with. I think he was down there with the Save the Children Fund. I don't even know who Susan was with. My daughter, where she had just, like, a small garden. Each child had to have a plot so she could teach them. She had to go to the chief of the tribe and get permission, because the chief owned all the land. She said, "As far as you could see, Mom, those are all my fields my students have." These programs could work, so, but, so, she's been back to Africa. She was down in Zambia in October and November working with a program helping them get grants to teach, to help with the AIDS children. These children don't have AIDS, but, their parents did, but nobody wants them and they walk the streets, so she was down there for about two or three months in the fall.
My fourth girl, Joan, went to the Sudan. The eldest girl, Susan, taught agriculture. She lives in Cambridgeshire. Beth teaches at NYU. Then the third girl, Dorothy, doesn't teach. She works with the mentally handicapped.

SH: Like a group home?

DD: A group home, yes, and, so, how she does it, I don't know, because some of these are, they have nobody, and she said, "Well, Mom, if I wasn't there, what would they do?"
Then, the fourth girl, Joan, she left music, and she did her graduate work at Syracuse University, and she tried to work with people that were emotionally disturbed. She teaches near Hershey, Pennsylvania, and she has a senior class of fourteen of these students that are like this, and so, last year, she thought she wanted them to do something with letter writing, and helping out, and so on, and the thing started to snowball, and they said they couldn't understand how kids in the world would never know what a book looked like or a pencil. Well, anyway, so they picked a village, and they had somebody in the village that could understand, like if letters came. The thing started to snowball, and the school took up the same idea, and some churches, and what not, so, she went down to the Sudan, and I didn't like her doing that at all because she has three

children of her own, and it was a tough deal, but she went to the Sudan with all this money on her that had to come through these groups, and she went to, I forget what, but, anyway, she was there in the spring. When she came here to the house to stay a little while before she went home, I said, "Joan, how could you get involved in that?" She said, "I couldn't turn my back on them once I got going." So, she's still teaching where she is.
Then, my fifth girl Maureen with her husband are vegetable and fruit farmers. She met her husband at Penn State when they were agricultural majors. They work a farm in Westhampton, Massachusetts. The thing is, my husband was only a mailman, only, I mean, he didn't make a very big salary and because I went in so late, my salary wasn't so good either, but, my daughters managed and they're all doing well.

SH: Did your father get to see these girls go on to college and their careers?

DD: Yes, he couldn't get over it, and the oldest girl going to Africa, "Oh, I wouldn't let her go to Africa." I said, "Yes, I know, Dad. You wouldn't." [laughter] She met such a wonderful fellow and that's the one thing I feel good about. All five girls are married to fellows long term. My friends, when we get together and do things here, they say, "Oh, this one's divorced, and that one's in court." I said, "I'm not opening my mouth," but, I mean, they just go and do their things, but, none of them ever wanted to go into the military, and I never pushed it. I figured it's their lives, but, it was the world I lived in. You wanted to do something. You just had to be part of something.

SH: You were telling a story about how you came on the train, and you were going to wear your uniform to show your father, and that is when you met your husband. What was your father's reaction when you did show up in uniform?

DD: Well, he wasn't sure, I looked neat, but I'll tell you, he did one thing that, oh, it burned me up, but I was the only girl in the family, the only girl in the whole generation.

SH: Oh, really?

DD: I had all boy cousins. My mother said, "Your father is disappointed that you're smoking." I said, "I don't smoke, Mom." She said, "Well, he looked in your pocketbook." I said, "What was he doing in my military pocketbook?" I still have it. I use it for parades and things, but, it was Navy blue leather, beautiful leather. You should see how good it is yet, and it had a dummy pack of Camels in there. It was, like, built into the thing. I said, "He opened it, and he saw a pack of cigarettes, of Camels." She said, "Yes." I said, "Did he open the box?" She said, "No." I said, "My rosary beads are in there." [laughter] I'm telling you so, when I think about it though, I guess because I was the only girl in the family, and when he saw me come home in uniform, that was all right, but, then the first Christmas that I came home, I was on duty.

[TAPE PAUSED]

DD: The first Christmas that I was away, the commanding officer called a muster, that means the whole four hundred. She said, "Now, you people that live near enough to visit your parents, would you please stay and take over the duties of the people that leave far away so they can go

home for Christmas?" They all agreed, so, I said, "Look," my friends, one lived in Alabama, and the other one, I don't know where she was exactly, and one in Delaware. Well, anyway, I said, "Look, I'll stay," and I said, "You people go home to my house." I wrote to my mother, and said, "Could the girls come home in my place?" My mother had, the way the house was arranged, there was one big, big bedroom up there, and she put up cots and what not. The girls left the barracks, and I was on duty, and about, oh, maybe three or four hours later, the commanding officer came in, and she said, "Do I hear right, that you had all these women go home to your house?" I said, "Yes, sir," and she said, "And why?" I said, "Well, because I can get home, but, they can't," and she said, "I don't like this," and she said, "I want you to go up and pack." She said, "You go home." She said, "Get a train, and go home, and I'll get somebody to cover for you," so, I did. I just took all my things, got all my notes together, and I went upstairs, and the cooks gave me, I must have gotten the midnight train out of Boston, and they gave me a bag with celery and sandwiches, and stuff in it, and I thought, "I can't even call my mother. Now, how am I going to work this out when I get home?" Anyway, it was a midnight train coming out of Boston, and all the guys that were going, all service people, the seats used to be this way, they were wicker in the trains, and you could do this, so, they made all the seats this way so they could lay in there, and they were snoring away. I'm eating my lunch, and somebody said, "Somebody's chewing something," and I said, it was black on the car, there were no lights. I said, "I have celery." They said, "Well, hurry up with it, will you?" [laughter] But, anyway, when I got home, it was now daylight. It was seven o'clock in the morning, and six o'clock, or whatever it was, so I went to the side door, and I didn't have a key to get in, so I knocked, and my mother almost fainted. She said, "What happened?" She thought they threw me out or something. [laughter] I said, "No." I said, "The commanding officer thought it was great that the girls were here." She said, "Well, they're all asleep upstairs," and, so, I went in, and I had breakfast with her and she said, "And your grandmother," my grandmother was alive. She said, "Your grandmother was so thrilled to go upstairs, and see all their caps hanging on the lamps, and everything." I said, "Well, how's Daddy taking it?" and she said, "Oh, he's surprised they're such nice girls." [laughter] I said, "Well, they are nice girls." There were four others, four of them, and so she said, "I got stockings to hang on the fireplace for them," and the neighbors gave them cold cream, and what not, and all this stuff, because it would be Christmas. She said, "We're all going to Midnight Mass, and your father, he's an usher at the mass, so he wants you to sit in the front pew," not meaning me, meaning the girls. He didn't know I was there, so when he came in he was shocked to see me. So, anyway, he said, "Now, I'm going to walk all you five girls up the middle aisle," and he said, "You stay in the front row," so, the one girl next to me says, "I'm not Catholic. What do I do?" I says, "Do whatever I do, but don't go to communion." But, anyway, so, the five of us sat there, and, oh, he was so thrilled to see that. He couldn't get over the type of girl. He said, "They're nothing of what I would have expected." I said, "Well, how would you know? You weren't there," and these are average families. These aren't people that ran in, like people used to say we joined so that we could find a husband, or something like that, or to get away from home, and all that stuff, and that wasn't so. I never found it that way, and I had to deal, personally, with all those women. That was not what, they were there for like myself, you wanted to help your country do something, so, but, anyway, as time went on, and I got my second stripe, and my third stripe. Most people, you would go to radio school, or cooks and bakers school, but, for my job there was no school. I had to study it on my own in the books, and then up at Harvard, they had a, somebody that would check on these things, so, anyway, when I got my third stripe, my mother said, "He's bragging to everybody." [laughter] She said,

"You should see him." So, I thought, "Well, I guess he figures I didn't run into," and he knew that Jack, my husband, was a nice guy, and was not out to do anything to me, but it was funny, though, when we went to Church, and all the women went up there, and my father leading us. [laughter]

KK: Were you in your uniforms?

DD: All of us, yes. I don't think we had anything but uniforms with us then and it was so nice for them. The girl from Alabama thought it was so nice. I mean, she maybe never saw a Christmas tree and we sang around the piano, we sang Christmas carols, and my mother had a big turkey for Christmas Day dinner and it was different, but …

SH: Did they talk about how the rationing and the war effort affected them during the war?

DD: We all felt the same thing. We were lost when we went home. Not that the homes had changed that much, but, we did. We were so used to sharing everything, and you always had somebody to talk to, and I think my friends that I had grown up with before I went in were still there, and they were still good friends, but I didn't feel the closeness to them. It took a long while for that to wear off that you'd live with these people, and, I don't know. It was just, it was, you learned about life.

SH: Did many of them have boyfriends in the military that they were writing to?

DD: No, they would write to, yes, but, they never came around. They were fellows from home that they had met, and not many of them met people in the military. I think we were afraid.

SH: Were you allowed to be married and be a SPAR?

DD: No, you had to be single to go in, and then, towards the end of the war they allowed you to marry, but you couldn't have children and with all of this talk of these girls meeting these guys, and getting pregnant, 406 women--[only] one. That poor girl, the officer that she was with, or that she was having this baby, he told her he was single, but he wasn't, so she got a room in Boston, and all the girls that were her friends kept her going, and they didn't want her parents to know that she was having this baby. I don't know whatever happened to the baby. They stuck by her through everything and I never saw, like rough girls, or tough, nasty girls. I really didn't. These girls, they were a cross country of America. I mean, farm girls, they lived in mountainous areas. My friend that I'm close to yet from South, West Orange, I said, "But, listen," I said, "Anne, you lived on a farm. You rode a horse in Fargo, North Dakota. You never saw the water. What made you go into the Coast Guard?" She said, "I think I wanted to see the water." She was stationed, and, oh, there's a third one, yes, that she's down in Cape May, and there's three of us, really, left of the group that we knew through the years, but I have all my uniforms and all these things that we had, and when I sometimes have a show or something, I pass out the hats to the women that are singing with me, the overseas hats and things. Through it all, I learned how to live, and how to get along with people, and to work for everything that you get, it wasn't anything really handed to you outside of the education, and that was just unbelievable to

think that I could get an education, but, it started me always wanting, and I've always taken courses, and tried to keep up with things.

SH: When you went on those war bond tours, did they transport you by bus?

DD: Military bus, yes. One bus would hold all the instruments. The band was composed of everybody from all the different services. Frankie [Frank] Fontaine, I don't think you'd remember him.

SH: The name is familiar.

DD: He was a comedian. He was in our show, too, and "Skitch" Henderson, he was our music arranger, and to me, I felt pretty humble being with them, because they were professionals.

SH: Did you ever get to play, or were you always dancing and singing?

DD: No, no, I never played, and the dancing, I'm telling you, when I think about it now, that was tough.

SH: Did you have a choreographer?

DD: Yes, we did. He was from Hollywood. He was in the Navy, yes, and he was good, and every time we'd play in a town, the, oh, the people would give us a dinner, like the Elks or somebody, would give us a dinner, and we'd have to go to the dinner every Saturday night or something, wherever we happened to be. We were so sick of chicken, peas, and mashed potatoes. [laughter] We said, "If we look at another chicken," and they all thought [we wanted it] because that was a good meal in those days, but, it was something to deal with some of those musicians and it was really good.

SH: All the musicians were in the military.

DD: Yes, every one of them, and what they did was, they wanted a "name" movie star to be a drawing card, and they couldn't find one that was in the military, so, they thought, all right, they'll use somebody, so, they had Veronica Lake. I don't know if you remember her at all. She had her hair, like this. [Editor's Note: Veronica Lake (1922-1973) was an American actress and pinup model known for her film noir rolls in the 1940s. She wore her hair in a signature peek-a-boo style that typically covered one side of her face.] She couldn't get along with anybody. She was typically a movie star. Not us, we were down to earth, so, that's when they decided on Cesar Romero. He had just come back from the South Pacific, and he was really very good. Like, people said, "Didn't he drink a lot?" I said, "No more than anybody else did that I know of," and he was never, he never cursed, or anything, and, so they said, "How come he never married?" I said, "Well, one time we were at a party that somebody gave for all of us, and he was hypnotized, and he said to the guy that was a hypnotist, "I've never been hypnotized, and I can't be. I just don't allow it to happen." So, as he's talking, he was being hypnotized. So, the fellow said to him, "Were you ever in love with another movie star?" and he said, "Yes." Virginia Bruce was her name or something, and he said, "I've loved her for years," and we were surprised

that he would even tell that much about his life, but during the war, she married somebody else, so he never married. So, they said, "Well, was he gay?" I said, "I wouldn't know the difference." [laughter] I didn't.

SH: Was that something that was talked about back then?

DD: What?

SH: Was there any talk of people being gay?

DD: There wasn't, and when I listen to all of this today about, in the military, say that you're gay, or whatever you are. I, with all those women, I never knew of one, but I don't think we thought about it. I don't think we emphasized those things and I never, as I say, I never knew of anybody that got in trouble outside of that poor girl that, and then, they all helped her out, but, it was an education. That was the education, just being in the military.

SH: Where did your officers come from?

DD: From those people that, when they enlisted, if they were college graduates, then they would be eligible for officers training, and that first started in Smith College, Smith College in Northampton, and all of these women, three hundred of them from all over the country, met up there, and they were all, it wasn't Army, though, it was just Navy, and they were trying to figure out what they could do with the ships, but, they wanted to let the men get on the ships and the women handle the bases, and in the meantime, the Coast Guard said, "We're in a predicament, too. We have all the landing craft. We take them in to all these islands, and all these places where they're fighting, and then, we take them out." Where the big ships would pull them in, the Coast Guard handles the small things, so, they decided they had to have a Coast Guard with women, and, so, the women who had already been appointed officers in the Navy had a choice, and they took the choice. They took the Coast Guard, and then, they had to have a place to train, before we went in and they used Hunter College in New York City. It was a training station, and then they had apartment houses near Hunter College and that's where the barracks were, and I figured, when I look back at it now, in the beginning, we had to do a lot of parades and things, but, I think they wanted the people to know that we were there, and that we were working and when they would see the amounts of people that were there, that's what it would be, so, but, it was, to me, it's something. I'm sorry the way that my girls never saw that kind of a life.

SH: You talked briefly about one servicewoman being attacked by a woman with an umbrella.

DD: Yes, yes, yes.

SH: Were there other prejudices? You talked about your father being afraid that something bad might happen to you.

DD: Yes.

SH: Were there other instances of prejudice that you ran into?

DD: Well, yes, I think, yes, even amongst neighbors, back then, until they knew us. Like my father, until he knew the women, because women's roles were not like that. They had to be the stereotype, the woman who got married, and had a family, and stayed home, didn't even work and now, suddenly, these were people out in a "man's world," and it took a long while for that to settle in.

SH: I wonder why that was considering the idea of women serving was relatively new.

DD: Because home life was different, then. Family life was very important, and when I look back at it now, even, like, when I lived in Fordham when I was little and things, everything was done in families with grandmas, and aunts, and uncles, not even outside friends or anything, so that it was a tight knit society in this country, and then struggling through the Depression, people began to help one another, and maybe came out a little bit more than what they were used to away from their family. When I look back at the war, my father was an air raid warden. When there was an air raid drill, my father would grab his bell and cap and go out to where he was assigned to stand. My mother would go to the school where they were rolling bandages, that was the Red Cross, and getting supplies together. I don't know where they sent them, and then my brother that worked for the Sperry Gyroscope. I'm still trying to think of the name of the thing that he worked with, but it was so valuable, and so new to us that he couldn't talk about it.

[TAPE PAUSED]

DD: In New Jersey, when I belonged to the state group, they were giving out the Minuteman from Concord and Lexington as a statue for people that did things to help veterans, and when somebody from Kean had written the background of women in the military, and she put it on tape, and so on, I think she got her doctorate, I think that's how she got it. Well, anyway, they wanted to give her a thing, but, she said, "I can't. This is a man's prize. You can't get the Minuteman." She said, "Where's the Minutewoman?" She said, "We don't have anything like that." He said, "New Jersey's got to have something to honor women," so when they came back to the meeting the next month, they said, "You like to sketch. Can you sketch a woman that would represent us?" So, in the meantime, I checked with all these different states. Only five states ever honored women with their own statue. You go to a park, and you see a statue of a guy on a horse, a woman standing next to him, but, you never see a woman, so only five states had something, so I sketched. I said, "Well, we can't make a World War II uniform, or World War I. We better go back to the early days," so, remembering my little lamp in my living room, I sketched Revolutionary War women to represent all women in all wars, and it was sculpted in the pewter. I have it here, and, but, it's in the military cemetery--that's Arneytown. Did you ever hear of Arneytown?

SH: Yes.

DD: My husband is buried there. My grave is there, too. Anyway, they never would allow statues, monuments, but they did let this one go in.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Can you describe the monument that was put there?

DD: What I did was, I had three purposes. While her husband was fighting in the early days of the [American] Revolution (1775-1783), she would take care of the home. That was the light, that she would light the light, and that she would take care of the children, take care of the family, and, if necessary, she could fight. She could use a musket. So, these three things were in it, and then, I had a little fence around it. When the State accepted the design, they took the sketch to a sculptor down in Toms River I think it was. Yes, and when I went into his place in the woods, his little studio, I couldn't believe it. Here was this big thing of clay standing in front of me that I had sketched just on the back of an envelope.

SH: Oh, my.

DD: He said, "I wanted your approval on it." I said, "It's unbelievable." My heart was beating so fast it was up in here someplace, and I couldn't breathe, and I thought, "I can't believe that's what I had on a piece of paper."

SH: That is incredible.

DD: Anyway, yes, so, that's what it looks like. So, he made the big monument that's in the park.

SH: Thank you very much.

DD: Who will remember who we were? The world itself is going to forget us.

SH: We can just have it in your file if we just have one.

DD: Yes, I do, yes. Beth is going to be on some radio program that's on, 7:30, talking about the new book.

SH: *The Tears of Darkness*: *The Story of the Bataan Death March and Its Aftermath* (2009)?

DD: I don't know whether it's that one, or the new one that they're working on, and this is the story of Bellevue. I hardly get to see her. She's the only daughter that lives nearby. [laughter] I mean, one is in England, one's in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, but, anyway, she tries to get over on Sunday afternoon, and I don't have a car anymore because my legs are getting so stiff, and she takes me for my groceries.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: You were telling me that you had been a recruiter as well.

DD: Yes, because of the singing, I used to sing with the group in Boston, on Boston radio, and we would recruit, tell them about women in the military, and then, Margaret Chase Smith (1897-1995), who was the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress. Well, she was the one

responsible for all of us being in uniform, and people never knew that, but because she was the senator, she had to have people on the side push to get women in the military in this country, how badly we needed them. She lived in Skowhegan, Maine, and she asked, in Boston, if they could send a group up that could recruit, and also entertain. The five of us that had been singing together, they said we would go, so we went up to Skowhegan, Maine, and all through, oh, this old train that went up to Skowhegan, we never knew where that was, and we had an officer with us, and he was to watch all the things that we did, and boy did they, when you recruit, they tell you exactly what you do, and what you say. We got off at the station in Skowhegan, Maine, and there was a big hotel on this side of the street, and people standing on this side, mobs of people, and a brass band for five of us. The officer says, "You're going to have to march down the street." I said, "A parade? There's only five of us." "You have to do it." So, here goes the brass band, and the five of us. I said, "Oh, Lord," and I said, "Swing your arms," because I used to have to call cadence, and as we went by, everybody cheered. We were told that night, we had to stay in our uniforms for supper, but, then we could get out of the uniform because they were going to have a sing-along downstairs, and, so we were there. You had to go to the Methodist church, you had to go to the Catholic, you had to go to this one, and you had to speak to everyone. They forgot to tell us nobody spoke English. They were all French, so, anyway, because it was that far up in Maine. Anyway, the next day we went to Margaret Chase Smith's. We had to wear our uniforms, and we showed slides, and we sang our songs, and we told them what life was like, and she had personally written to everybody that was of eligible age in Maine to invite them to her home to tea so that she could recruit. That was early on. I forgot to tell you that.

SH: That is amazing. You were chaperoned?

DD: Oh, we were chaperoned. That was funny, oh, and to think that nobody spoke English. Then, we were told to stand outside of each church, each one of us that we were assigned to, and shake hands, and talk to [them], but, we couldn't talk.

SH: Did you recruit anyone that you know of?

DD: Well, according to what they said, Margaret Chase Smith was very happy with what we did.

KK: Music sounds beautiful in any language.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: This concludes our interview. Thank you.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Jessica Ondusko 5/27/2012
Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 11/6/2012