

War Era Story Project 2012

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When I was 20 years old in the spring of 1944 and had completed a rather intense year of schooling in New York City, I enlisted there in the United States Army. My father had to sign permission, because of our government's requirement if you were a female under 21 years of age. My motivation was partially that my father and I would have been dead if he had not immigrated to the United States in his youth, and secondly I believed very strongly that we were fighting a just war and that every person should contribute something to the effort. This was my way of doing my share.

My basic training was at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia in late May - much heat and humidity. We were introduced to the meaning of raising the flag, which is intensely emotional to me still. We were of course issued uniforms, given shots, and as much short-order drill and training as six weeks would allow. When our captain announced that we could go into town, which was Chattanooga, Tennessee, she informed us that we had to ride in the "front of the bus," since there were no African American WACS in our group. This was not acceptable to me; therefore, I stayed on base. At the conclusion of our training and my first introduction to K.P., (Kitchen Police), to cleaning latrines, to inspection of barracks and footlockers, as well as lengthy marches in the heat, we were given our assignments. Mine was to the Air Corps, Air Transport Command, which would be in Wilmington, Delaware.

I thoroughly enjoyed doing clerical work for the Operations Squadron, as well as the WAC squadron, developing friendships with both women and men from diverse backgrounds, and adapted well to army life - because it seemed purposeful as well as fair. I liked being able to go to the P.X. (Post Exchange) to



make purchases and to go into Wilmington, hitchhiking from the base, for submarine Sandwiches and for relaxation. In addition, I became a member of an off-duty discussion group, which paid attention to international affairs and how the war was going - both of which were important to me.

When I had the opportunity to go to Karachi, then India, I was thrilled. Overseas training and more shots were given to us in New Hampshire, where I had my first taste of lobster. It took three days to get to Karachi, stopping at various air bases en route. These were troop transport planes, and we used "bucket" seats, and often slept on the floor. We were exhausted on arrival; however, the WAC barracks was fine. We had mosquito netting, which was a "must," and there were only two double-bunks to a room, with an Indian servant assigned to clean - an immense luxury. There were four of us assigned to the Navigation and Briefing Office on the airstrip, and we competed for the Chief Clerk's job for two weeks. Since I really did not want to work "shifts," I made a real effort and succeeded in becoming Chief Clerk. It was really interesting work; giving pilots needed information to go to the foot of the Hump, meaning the foot of the Himalayan Mountains.

When we had time off, we could go into Karachi, which was an entirely new world to us - people, food, smells, cows loose in the streets, and travel by "gari," which were horse-drawn carriages. The Indian people I met at the local Jewish synagogue were very welcoming, and I dated an RAF NCO. By that time, I had my corporal's stripes. We went to Karachi Bay to swim and picnic and saw the gardens, which had peacocks in them. Shopping for souvenirs was not only fun but also relatively inexpensive. If one fell down, as I did, infection was sure to ensue, so I was hospitalized - just in time for V-J Day, thus missing all of the wild celebration.

Within a relatively short period at the end of the war, we were sent home, and I had great pleasure in shopping for civilian clothing in New York, prior to being sent to Chicago, then home to Kansas City, Mo. It was unbelievable that the G.I. Bill enabled me to obtain secretarial training, which has been a huge gift in my personal life.

What is totally amazing to me now is that we are allowed to go to the VA Medical Center, with good doctors and excellent care. In addition, depending on one's financial situation, one has other benefits available. Recently I was given the privilege of Honor Flight, which gratuitously takes WW II veterans to our memorial in Washington, and to other monuments, as well as Arlington National Cemetery. All in my group were emotional, as we were greeted and cheered by civilians and service people at the airports, as we were wheeled through, two-by-two. It was a memorable day and a great opportunity.