

HELEN V. KENNARD

Denver, Colorado Unit

Transcript of an Oral History Interview

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Helen V. Kennard

PREFACE

This transcript is the product of a tape-recorded interview conducted on 13 February, 1986, for the Women's Overseas Service League.

Signed, dated agreements of release and biographical information accompany the original cassette.

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers
Lansing, Michigan

10 July, 1988

HELEN V. KENNARD

2 Denver Unit

MB: What is your name?

4 HK: My name is Helen V. Kennard

MB: When did you join the Denver Unit of WOSL?

6 HK: In April, 1979.

MB: Were you in the service?

8 HK: Yes, I was in the service.

MB: What branch?

10 HK: I was in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women's
Army Corps.

12 MB: What influenced you to come into the service?

HK: The spirit of patriotism was the motivating factor that
14 influenced my decision to volunteer. Other factors were
the opportunity to see places and meet people from other
16 parts of the United States. That was not possible while
living in a small town in the midwest in Malden,
18 Missouri.

MB: What did you do prior to enlistment?

20 HK: Prior to enlistment I was employed in the local agency of
the Chevrolet dealership. I was manager of the parts
22 department and General Motors accountant.

MB: What year did you come into the service?

24 HK: September, 1942.

MB: What were your jobs while you were in the service?

26 HK: In the first permanent station I had, I was a typist in a
typing pool. My first love was automobiles so I contin-
28 ued to try to get reassigned to the motor pool, which I
finally did; stayed in the motor pool and loved it all
30 the time until I decided that my next priority was going
overseas. At that point, there were no WAC drivers being
32 sent overseas, and I wanted it so badly that I switched
back to being a typist.

34 While I was overseas, I worked as a statistical typist
until I finished my enlistment.

36 MB: How long were you in the WAC?

HK: From September, 1942, until September, 1945.

38 MB: Where did your travels take you?

HK: In the United States, I was stationed in Florida;
40 Washington, D.C. (Fort Washington, Maryland, which is a
suburb of Washington, D.C.); in Georgia; in California.

42 The only permanent station was in Washington, D.C., Fort
Washington, Maryland, to the adjutant generals' school.

44 The others were training centers.

 When I went overseas, I went directly to Hollandia, New
46 Guinea, and from there to Leyte and Luzon in the
Philippines. I was in Manila at the time Japan
48 surrendered. I came home and was discharged at that
point.

50 MB: What kind of housing did you have when you were in the
service?

52 HK: Housing varied from the training center in Florida, where
we were in hotels; then into a permanent barracks in Fort
54 Washington, Maryland, that was an old Army post. From
there, overseas: It was primarily tent arrangements; and
56 then in Manila, we were billeted in a boys' school.

 MB: When you were living in tents, how many women were there
58 to a tent?

 HK: Oh, I'd say varying from four to six.

60 MB: What were the uniforms that you wore when you were in the
service?

62 HK: The uniforms that we wore when we were in the service--
this was early on, as you recall, because WAAC was formed
64 in May of 1942, and I went in in September--it was all

khaki from the skin up and created a lot of conversation;
66 a lot of queries: And sometimes when people said, "Could
I see your underwear?" they weren't really interested in
68 your skin or what was there. They wanted to see this
khaki underwear that they had heard so much about. It
70 was loads of fun.

Then as things progressed and we got the dress uniform of
72 worsted wool, we felt pretty smart because that was a
sharp-looking outfit.

74 MB: Can you relate a couple of your more exciting experiences
when you were in the service?

76 HK: Well, all experiences are exciting as you go through
them. My most exciting one was because we were treated
78 more like VIP's than any place I had ever been. In going
from New Guinea, being transferred to Leyte when the
80 general headquarters were changed, the plane that I was
on developed an oil leak. We had a planeload, but there
82 were only ten WAC's. The others were GI's and male
officers. We had to go down because the oil leakage was
84 so great, and the men--they had seen both officers and
enlisted men--but the fellows on this island of Palilau,
86 which is a little man-made island in the Pacific, had
never seen any women in uniform.

88 We stood out on an incomplete airlift until they had a
council meeting of the officers of the island as to what

90 to do with us because they just had no experience; so we
stood out there for about an hour, and after their
92 pow-wow they took us to the nurses' quarters which had
been made, but no nurses had arrived.

94 We were literally under guard because when they took us
over there, they said, "We'll come for you, wherever we
96 want you to go, and don't go out by yourself." We were
there for a little over twenty-four hours because we had
98 to wait until one of the other planes came back from
Leyte to pick us up. We ate in the officers' mess and
100 were served. It was a long time since we had been
served. Then we got up and left our dishes.

102 That, actually, is the most unusual and the biggest
thrill because anytime you feel important (laughter) it
104 makes you a thrilling experience. All of the experiences
were good. I enjoyed the whole bit.

106 MB: What was the biggest adjustment you had to make when you
went into the service?

108 HK: I think the biggest adjustment that I had to make (and
many of the people that went in at that time, because we
110 had mostly been people that had worked quite awhile with
responsible jobs) was the fact that you didn't make any
112 decisions. You did what you were told and you thought,
Oh, my, am I so stupid that I have to be told everything?
114 but you learn to swing with the tide and then it's not so

116 bad to have somebody else tell you what to do; but I
would say the regulations.

118 MB: Did you expect your experience in the service to prepare
you for a career? And if you did, did it?

120 HK: No, I did not expect my career to be changed--maybe
benefited, but not changed--because I had worked for a
122 long time, and I was in a position to know that I could
make my own living; make my own career.

MB: After you left the service, what did you do?

124 HK: After I left the service, I went down to Greenville,
Mississippi, and worked as a General Motors accountant;
126 but after being down there for two-and-a-half years, I
decided that Mississippi was hotter than the South
128 Pacific--so I should go someplace where it was a little
bit cooler. I left there not knowing where I was going.
130 My only aim was someplace cooler than Mississippi. I
finally landed in Denver, Colorado, the latter part of
132 October, 1948, and that was the nicest thing that ever
happened to me.
134 I had been planning on pursuing my education ever since I
had graduated from high school, but economics didn't
136 permit it. I enrolled in the University of Denver;
getting a degree in Business with a major in Accounting
138 in June of 1952. After that, I continued the accounting

140 business, but on a broader scale than the General Motors
system that I had been used to working with. From then
142 until the time I decided to retire, I worked in private
accounting, public accounting, and self-employed for the
last ten years of my working career.

144 MB: What does being a member of WOSL mean to you?

146 HK: Being a member of WOSL means to me the same thing that
any other experience has meant. It's a broadening of
148 your friendships; it's the learning of other rules of the
club, the organization; and the benefits that are to be
150 gained by membership with it, whether you are gaining the
benefits or whether you are giving the benefits to
someone else.

152 MB: Thank you very much.

154 Transcribed by Patricia Siggers
Lansing, Michigan