

Dorothy McMahon



I am proud to be a member of WAVES National, Volunteer Unit #94 in Nashville TN. I served with the Army Air Force enlisting in 1943, the day the news came out that I could enlist at the age of 20 instead of the required age of 21. I had to have a stiff physical and three letters attesting to my character. I was so excited and started giving away my clothes and other things I would not need.

I was sworn into the army on the steps of the War Memorial Building in Nashville. We were called the Sgt. York Platoon and World War I hero Alvin C. York attended our swearing in. What a thrill it was to meet him.

After the ceremony, we were marched to the Union Depot (in high heels, hats and all) and put on a train to Fort Oglethorpe, GA for basic training. Along with the marching and classes, we learned to clean the latrine and scrub the mess hall floors. Training was pretty tough because they were still determining just how much women could take. Two girls from Alabama and I were put on the same orders when we completed our training. We were not allowed to read the orders until the train was out of town. Imagine our surprise when we read that we were to report to Presque Isle, ME. We had never heard of Presque Isle and had no idea what were heading for.

After riding troop trains for more than a week we finally arrived. It was late at night and we were greeted by a sergeant whose first words were "Don't let any part of your skin be exposed for more than five minutes or you will be frostbitten". It was 40 degrees below zero! Our barracks were Quonset huts, heated by potbellied stoves. I was assigned to the Base Technical Inspectors office, which was in the balcony part of a hangar. Needless to say, it wasn't the warmest spot to be found.

At that time all overseas service was on a volunteer basis. I immediately volunteered and was told it would be several weeks before the shipment was put together. In the meantime a very handsome Lieutenant began flirting with me outrageously. He was a Navigator with a weather reconnaissance outfit, and frequently flew out of the base to scout the weather to see if it was safe for the combat planes to take off. Presque Isle was the last stop for all planes flying over the Atlantic to Europe. As we all know, officers and enlisted personnel were not allowed to fraternize. This was particularly true with WACs and officers. To make a long story short, we survived all the hurdles and were married on the base.

Two days after our marriage, I was notified that the overseas shipment was ready and was given two weeks furlough. I reported back to Grenier Field for overseas training. We were to be the first Air Transport Command girls to go over. Volunteers from all over the states were reporting for this assignment and when we were all assembled they had ten girls too many. The Personnel Officer had the task of getting ten girls to volunteer to stay. He really worked on me, noting that I had just gotten married and they needed someone with my shorthand and typing skills at that base. After much

persuasion from him and the fact that my husband's outfit was being transferred to Grenier Field I agreed to stay.

I became a payroll clerk, actually relieving three sergeants for active duty. I also marched with a Precision Drill Team and worked on some recruiting shows. Since WACs seldom got rank in our area, I became a Private First Class. Just before my discharge I was to be jumped to Sergeant. However, I turned it down so some other WAC could get the promotion because I knew I was getting out. You see, my husband DID get transferred to my base, and I learned I was expecting.

I still have the notice from the Provost Marshal that states I have permission to be seen in the company of my husband. I had to carry it with me at all times. I have never regretted my time in service and would do it again!