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U.S. Army Veteran



Some people wonder what it would be like to live to 100, well I'll be there in a year. After nearly 10 decades I have seen a lot of changes in the world some good, some bad, but I try to keep a sense of humor through it all. We have nothing to do with the day we come into the world or the day we leave but it's what we do while we're here that counts. I don't care what color you are, what nationality you are, what language you speak, I love everybody that is willing to be loved. If you are lucky, I'll even make you a pair of my special peanut shell earrings!

I was born in 1919 in Raleigh, North Carolina. In addition to watching over me and my three siblings, my parents watched over the state's prisoners. My mother was the matron at the Governor's mansion in charge of the house staff, which was (and is) comprised of people serving long-term sentences. I got to go to the Governor's mansion every day after school. I was shy back then, but I had a brain. In high school, I would leave at 2pm to go work as an operator at the Southern Bell telephone company- those were the days of the switch board of course. I wound up getting a hydraulic engineering degree in Akron, Ohio before landing in Baltimore, MD. That is when the world started to churn.

On December 7th, 1941, I was heading out the door to my job installing the hydraulics on aircrafts for the Glen L. Martin company when I heard the radio crackle out "ATTENTION PEARL HARBOR HAS BEEN BOMBED." I was living in a trailer right across the street from work so I was the first to learn the news and nobody believed me when I told them. Glen L. Martin himself said "little lady, rumors like that can cause a lot of problems!" I said, "you better call Washington because the President just announced it!" The next thing you know, the plant was filled with Soldiers. After apologizing to me, Mr. Martin got up in front everyone and told them "it's true what the little lady said, we are at war." From then on, we worked 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. I helped put the hydraulic system in the first B-26 that went into battle.

Soon after, I enlisted in the women's auxiliary corps. Later my older brother would join the Marines and my other older brother joined the Air force, but I was the first in my family to enlist. The Women's Auxiliary Corps were to come in and do the men's job so they could go into battle. I drove an 18-wheeler in the motor pool for a short while until I took down a flag pool with it. At that time, I only weighed 99 lbs. I was transferred to the MP's. I did

patrol duty with a Soldier, a marine, a sailor, and a coast guardsman – each looked after their own. There weren't a lot but I was to look after the women. After the sailor pointed it out, I had to notify one young lady that her stockings were inside out. In those days, women flipped their stockings to accent the seam and make their legs more attractive. Well, she stuck her foot right out in the air, unhooked her garter belt, and switched both stockings right there in the street while a crowd of 500 people stared with shock. The next day, I walked straight into the MP's office and told them they could court martial me if they had to, but I didn't want any more of the MP business. It was embarrassing for us women.

They made me a cadre, which meant I did whatever was needed at the time. They sent me to work at the VD clinic in Daytona Beach, Florida. These boys were 18 and 19 years-old and about to head overseas. They figured "devil take the hindmost!" VD was rampant, so every month they would line these boys up, stripped down, wearing only their raincoats while they were examined for VD. Well that was the men, now all of a sudden, they had all these women coming into the Army. We were issued fatigues which were seer sucker dresses that buttoned up the front and tied in the back. They had no idea how to handle examination, but they did record our periods every month to make sure we weren't pregnant. The whole thing was an indignity but it was a necessity.

I met an officer and we began courting on the day room steps. Winter came in August, and the weather got bad, it was raining all the time, and there was nothing to do, so we got married. In those days, officers and enlisted did not fraternize, so we started our marriage living in separate quarters. My husband was a warrant officer and became aide to General Omar Bradley. All the time we were in the Army we were never separated because we went wherever General Bradley went. Once we were on a ship near the coast of France and all the Generals were meeting because the next day they were going to attack a German occupied city called St. Lo. as part of the Invasion of Normandy. My husband was the first Officer in the U.S. Army to earn a silver star for his valor during that battle for protecting a bunker where General Eisenhower and General Bradley were meeting. It was a horrific time. Nobody could understand why Hitler would inflict this awful war on his own people.

After the war, we lived in Washington D.C. for many years while my husband was adjutant general of Washington. One rainy day, I dropped him off for his American Legion meeting and Vice President Truman, who started the American Legion, walked up to the car. He said "Little lady it's raining! Why don't you come inside the building?" I told him "if they can't except my veteran status then I'd rather not." He said, "You're a veteran?" and I said, "I certainly am!" He opened the car door for me and we walked into the building. All the men were sitting there with their mouths open. Mr. Truman said, "I think I've got a new member for you if she is dane to stoop to that level" and at the time, I didn't know what the word dane meant. He continued "Have you served with

women? Didn't they get paid the same? Do the same duty? Live by the same rules and regulations? If you want me as a member you're going to have to take this lady if she wants to be a member!" I thanked Mr. Truman and said I would discuss it with my husband who was sitting there with his eyes wide open. I believe I may be the first female member of the American Legion.

We had a great life, but it was hard at times. I had my first child nine months and 15 minutes after we were married and had another one every year for the next nine years. 3 of them were still born and 2 made it for 3 days but that was all. The four others were born in perfect health. The problem with living to 99 is that you outlive so many of your loved ones. I still have one living son, two granddaughters, and three great granddaughters. I have my own apartment and my son and his German wife watch over me like a hen with one chick.

The Army was good to us. It was an honorable life. People had a different attitude then, maybe because something was done to us and we were fighting back. No Soldier ever had to walk down the street or go hungry or ever be needy. People went out of their way to do good things- to be good citizens. Maybe that's why I like being around the VA…the people remind me of those days.