

Edited transcription of Loretta Rayno interview, June of 2014.

Interviewer — Lindy Heim.

On June 24, 2014, the Wilmot Historical Society interviewed Loretta Rayno, age 79, who shared stories of her childhood, her experiences in the United States Women's Army Corps (WAC) after World War II, and her return to Wilmot to work for Freedom Acres.

Lindy: I am Lindy Heim from the Wilmot Historical Society, here today on Wednesday, June twenty-fourth, to interview Loretta Rayno at her home at the base of Old Winslow Road in Wilmot Flat, New Hampshire. With me are Mary Fanelli from the Wilmot Historical Society, Judy Hauck behind the camera, also from the Wilmot Historical Society, and Kathy Neustadt from Danbury, who is an oral historian.

Loretta: I was born in Orange Massachusetts. I didn't come to New Hampshire until I was in the sixth grade. I lived in Hancock, went to school in Hancock, and graduated from high school in Hancock.

I was brought up on a farm and I loved the farm. I loved all the animals, and I had horses and all of that, but farming is a lot of work. And when I was in high school, I thought to myself "I really don't want to be a farmer's wife."

There was a young man I went to school with, and he was older than I was, and he went in the service. This is when we lived in Hancock, and I remember getting a postcard from him, and I can't remember now where he was stationed. He said he hoped that I would like farming and that when he came out of the service...and I thought to myself "hmmm, no way am I ever going to be a farmer's wife."

I enjoyed farming, and I learned so much from my stepdad about how to do things, and how to get along, and I think I was better off than a lot of the women that took their WAC (Women's Army Corps) training, because I think they didn't have the experience I had. So, in training, when I started having to make my own little shelter thing to sleep in at night, and deal with the rain.....I never liked snakes either, but you know, I used to see them.

So I think that my farm experience was good for me. In going further into it, I think that I felt very self-sufficient, because I felt I could take care of myself or my family, and I wasn't worried about anything. So it was good.

Lindy: I didn't get your mom and dad's names.

Loretta: Okay. My mom was Malvina Trombly. She was Malvina Forrest. My birth father was Henry Forrest. They separated when I was little girl and my mom remarried. She married Leroy Trombly. Leroy was my stepdad, and he is who I lived with.

My sister (Blanche) stayed with my birth father, and she grew up with him. And we would visit back and forth. When I would go visit her, and I was just a little girl, and she was at the point where she could date, I knew that I was in her way. It wasn't until I came back from the service and we were both living in Wilmot, that we really became close.

My stepdad was a logger, so he would drive around, and when I was in high school I came into Wilmot with him one time because he was looking for property where he could cut wood. One of the properties was May Jones' place (on route 11). I remember coming into town with him. I remember seeing the house that they eventually bought. It was sort of a tumbledown place right next to the Community center. There was a little village restaurant, and we had lunch there. That was just a month before I graduated (from high school).

In order to go into the Army, I had to have my mom sign for me. I was 17 but I couldn't go in because I had to finish school. They allowed you to sign up at that age, so my mother signed for me.

When I graduated, I went into my training. I left for Manchester with three other women, and we headed south and went down into Alabama where we had to take the training.

I went from Alabama into Georgia and while I was in that area I got word that my parents had moved, and I was very, very upset, because I wasn't sure what would happen to me.

My mom did say they were living in Wilmot, not too much more about it, but when she described the place, I realized it was the rundown house that I had seen, and I was little disappointed, but I was busy trying to just get myself through the first few months of training.

We trained for bivouacs [temporary camping] but most of the time what it was even in those days, if you weren't going to off on duty some place they had us do secretarial stuff, and they also has us do marching. We did all sorts of things. We slept in tents and the temperature was up in the hundreds and there were a lot of bugs.

When I left there I went into Georgia, and Georgia was where I took my training for what I could do. In other words they had to put you someplace. You trained to go this or that place and one of the things that was good is that they checked you out on everything.

I was a good typist I guess, so I got into Teletype. Of course at that time there weren't computers, so as a Teletype operator I was put into the Signal Corps. The Signal Corps was what they used to call the "spy" thing. The Signal Corps is where they collect information, use Teletype, and process all sorts of information that they (the Army) would use.

Teletype is the little paper, Teletyping paper. They were like typewriters, regular typewriters, that they would type, but it would send messages into my areas.

In Chicago I was stationed at 5th Army headquarters. And that was exciting. Actually, the whole thing was exciting from the time I left Georgia all the way through because the only other place I

had been was in New Hampshire. I had been up in New York State with my stepdad. That's where his parents lived. I don't think I had been in any other states.

So by the time I got to 5th Army headquarters I felt that I was really seasoned. I had never seen black people before. I was stationed with them. I had all kinds of things that were all new to me, and it was just a different life. And I loved it. I loved them all, and it was really great.

When I went into Georgia, all the women there in the WAC'S were Spanish, Black, and White. They're all training together. It was in the fifties, and there was still segregation. By the last week and a half they allowed us to go off from base. We to go out to eat. And one of the women was black. Her last name was Combs, Louise Combs, and because she was black we couldn't go into the White places to eat.

But she took us down around the corner where there were some black restaurants, and we went in and we ate. It was the first time I ever had grits or any of the barbecued stuff. It was all so tasty.

After we left the area we all separated, and I never saw them again.

I went back to Georgia one more time. Georgia was where the MP's were stationed, and that's where they did their training. There were only, in all that area, there were just 22 WAC's, and we had our own billets to live in. But it was testy. It was very hard with that many men that were there, and it was a hard time sometimes getting along, but you learn.

When I went to 5th Army headquarters after that, and this is all within just a year's time, we lived in a hotel. After going through what I'd gone through before, it was boring, and we had a chance to sign up to go someplace else. So I signed up for Europe. That was at the end of 1954.

When I knew we were going to be shipping out, they gave us time off, and I came back to Wilmot for probably about a week and a half. My dad rented a place on Baptist pond, and we went fishing and we did all sorts of stuff like that.

And then, when it was time to head out, one of my aunts took me down to where we had to leave from. My birth father, he was so excited. He always kept track of me, even though I didn't see him that much.

But I did send him cards and pictures and everything. When he passed away, they sent me, my sister and I, some of his stuff, and he had saved all of the pictures and all the notes I wrote. He had been in the first World War in the Canadian (army), because he was not an American citizen; he was a Canadian citizen.

I know my mother was worried about me, and there were times I wrote home and I remember writing my letters home saying "I hate it here. It's so hot. I wish I never had got in the service. I want to come home" and I'm sure she probably cried every time she saw that. But joining the army was the best thing that ever happened.

I went to Newfoundland first and stayed overnight, and then we actually flew into Germany. There was still a lot of bombed out buildings, because between the Second World War and when I got there, not much time had passed. So nothing had really been done with a lot of the buildings.

And there was the Autobahn, which was fast, and it got me to where I was going. I was stationed in Heidelberg, but I worked in Mannheim. Mannheim was about 15 to 20 miles away from Heidelberg, and there again there were buses that took us that way. We worked in the underground in security places that had been used by the Germans.

The barracks that I lived in were these beautiful stone barracks, and they were where the German soldiers had lived. It was a three-floor building, and on the outside of each of the doors in the building, each room, there was an indented area where they kept their rifles, because they were ready to go when they were called, that's where they would come out. It was different. It was a nice spot to be in.

The Korean War was ending, but they were still having problems. All these Teletypes would come in from different places, we were in Heidelberg, so they were coming from different sources.

Each one, each strip as it came through, you read it and know which officer was in charge of that particular department, and you would have to separate them and keep them in order.

After the Korean War they took all those tapes and printed them out and now they are in storage. The government kept all of the Teletypes from the Korean War. I thought that was kind of neat.

One of the things when we were coming into Heidelberg is that I saw a lot of men, not the women, because the women there weren't working in places where I was. They all carried briefcases, and it wasn't until probably about three weeks into going to work into Mannheim that there was this very tall handsome older man who was working with me, and I noticed he had a briefcase all the time.

I finally found out one day, when he and I were the only ones there, this was what they carried their lunch in. It wasn't anything really important after all. All the Germans carried their lunch in these little travel things.

We had lunch together. He had been in the German Army. Actually, he was forced to go into the German Army. He was married and had a little girl, and he knew so much more about everything than I did, and a lot of people I've worked with, because he was a German. But there are certain things that he was not allowed to do.

He lived outside of Heidelberg, and there were times when the bus was going back to Heidelberg, and he and I were traveling back together, I would get off with him and I'd go in and have dinner with him and his wife.

They had this little tiny apartment. It was just before you got into Heidelberg, and he had a little baby girl. One night I stayed overnight because there was a bad storm. I couldn't believe the beds. The beds had these big huge comforters. When I grew up we just had a little sheet. All this German stuff was different. The food was good, too. So we became very good friends. He had left before I did. He went on to another job, but I do remember him quite well.

There was the officer's club and the enlisted men's club. Of course as an enlisted man you're not supposed to go into the officer's club. And so we'd go dancing; there were quite a few WAC's that worked around in that area. It was a big, big base, so we had a lot of dancing and a lot of good times.

One night I was dancing with this young man, and we were dancing around. and, he said "where are you from?" I never usually said "well I'm from Wilmot, New Hampshire," because nobody, of course, would know where Wilmot was. I was embarrassed, because maybe if I had said Hancock or Peterborough, they would have known where I was from.

So the one night I was dancing with someone and he said, "Where are you from? and I said "New London."

He said "no kidding, I'm from Sunapee" and he was the grandson of the people that owned the big inn in Sunapee.

I did meet up with this one person who said that he was an MP and he was going home on an emergency and had to sell his car. So I bought his car, and I think I was probably the fourth one to be driving that car, and I drove it all over. I went to Austria, and I went to lots of other places. We worked three days on and two days off or vice versa. My girlfriends and I, whoever was off, we'd take off up into the hills. We went all over the place. France...the Eiffel Tower. When I think of it now, my God – I don't even know how I did that.

Then my stepdad became very ill. They didn't think he was going to live. My mother would go down to May's [Jones] house, and she would wait there for me when she knew I was going to call. My dad was doing some logging at May's at that time.

My mom was working for Donna and Kay in their jelly business. She told them they wouldn't let me come home, supposedly because it was my stepdad, not my real dad. I was never adopted, and you had to have been adopted to be allowed to come home on an emergency.

I was working that night when the Teletype came through, and it said that my father was sick, and he was dying.

When I picked up the tape, I couldn't believe it. At first I thought it was my birth father because my birth father was still alive. By the time I got through to my superior officer there, and we talked and everything, and we checked it out and come to find out it wasn't my real father, it was my stepdad Roy.

So I got back to my mom and said that I couldn't come home, because he was not legally my father. Donna and Kay (who had both been in the service) were upset about this. Donna said, "I'll take care of that."

At that time Donna was one of six women to have been commissioned as an officer. I think she was number six. So she said to my mom, "let me check around."

Come to find out that the woman who was in charge of all of the WAC's, whether you were in the states, or in France, or anywhere else, she was in charge of them all. She had graduated with Donna in the same class. It was the very first class. So Donna got hold of her. Before you knew it, I was on the plane coming home. That was actually how I left the service at that time.

I came home on an Air Force plane, and it was very, very, bumpy. The men on the plane had been stationed all over, and they had been fighting. It had had been a year and a half since they had been back to the states and they were coming home. I bumped one of them off the flight, and I really felt bad about that.

But on the way home the weather was so bad that we had to put on parachutes and of course we're talking about plain old work planes not jets. I was dressed in my uniform; so I had to try and squeeze into parachute pants.

All the way through that storm, all I could think of was "oh, boy, I bet that guy's going to be happy that he wasn't on this plane." Everybody was afraid, but we landed fine.

I remember thinking "dear God I'll never fly again," but of course I did.

Lindy: Did you have an opportunity to jump out of a plane before? Was that part of your training?

Loretta: One time when we were in Alabama, but I mean it was just a one-time thing. I don't think they expected us ever having to do anything like that, but it was an experience.

When I got back home, my dad was ok. I ended up going with Donna and Kay for a lot of the time. But I needed to do something so I went to Business College in Manchester, and I went under the GI bill, which paid for part of it, but not all of it.

That's when I got a job working for Donna and Kay and I would work for them on weekends. They had this old model A Ford, and I would take the rubbish to the dump and do odds and ends for them.

One of the times I went to the dump Stanley Rayno was at the dump with Frannie Heath. They had been in the service together, and they had just gotten out. They were shooting rats at the Wilmot dump.

I kind of knew who Stanley was because John Rayno was his father and my mom had told me that they had met met John and Lib Rayno when they moved into town, and that they were so

nice. They went to some dances with them up in Wilmot at the Grange, and they were really nice people.

I had met John when I came home also, because I had met somebody when I went into the reserves. There was somebody that lived in Manchester and he came to Wilmot, and we went dancing up at the Grange. So I met John and Liv then. John told me he had a son in the service and his son was also stationed in Germany.

So that day when I was at the dump, these two guys came up to me and “hi” and I said “what are you guys doing”? And he said, “we’re shooting rats, do you think you'd like to shoot one?” or something like that. They must have thought “Yeah, she’ just a girl.” So I said “sure, I’ll try it.” They didn't realize that this was one thing that we did learn in the service.

Plus when I was about 14 or 15, (I was my grandson Stanley's age) I bought my first rifle. Of course you had to train for that in the service too. So I did. I got up there, and I shot a rat. Well, they were just they were flabbergasted. So I went back up to Freedom Acres, and when I got done my work I went home. When I drove in the yard, that's where Darlene and Denise (Loretta’s nieces) live now, I drove in the yard and there was Stanley Rayno with his car, and he wanted to know if I wanted to go to the movies with him that night. So that's how I met my husband, through Freedom Acres and the dump.

My stepdad’s brother had a business in Montreal, right in the center of Montreal. My roommate at the YWCA there, she was from Rochester, and my uncle said he was looking for workers so he gave us work. The two of us lugged all of our stuff up to Montreal, and we worked there.

I still kept connected with Donna and Kay, and my parents and Donna and Kay would come up there to visit. It was a few years after that that when I got married (Loretta and Stanley were married September 24, 1960) and I settled down and we bought a house, and I started working for Freedom Acres. They would reminisce with me and I would get some of the stories of how they started.

That's when I started meeting a lot of Donna and Kay’s friends that were from New York and from all over the place. I worked doing everything; selling, secretarial work, and ordering for the different gifts and things.

They were very, very, good people to work for. They were really business people. I can't say enough about them. They were good for the town. They weren't selfish. They thought about everybody and they loved the customers.

Loretta’s story will continue in the Freedom Acres segment of “Memories of Wilmot.”

This transcription of the video made in June of 2014, has been copied from the video and edited to read smoothly. Any errors are the fault of the transcriptionist.

Mary Fanelli, January 15, 2017