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Corporal Catherine Kaufmann, U.S.M.C.

Catherine Kaufmann Harwood White

In 1940, I was Catherine Kaufmann from Cornell Road, living and working in Stamford as a sitter for the Harold Rushmore family while finishing my senior year at Stamford Central School.

Upon graduation, I moved to Albany to learn “comptometry,” a forerunner of today’s business data processing curricula. I then went to work for New York Telephone in Albany, and was on my way to being a very traditional woman of my time—I worked to support myself but I was social, outgoing, and popular. In 1940, I considered war possible and voted for Roosevelt—he had gotten us on the road to recovery from the depression and seemed the best choice to be president if war did break out. I believe I was leading a normal life for a woman of that time: I voted on the basis of consideration, held a responsible job, and wanted a good life with marriage and family in the future.

December 7, 1941 changed that situation. By the early part of 1942, many of my male counterparts were entering the military and job opportunities were expanding geometrically by the middle of 1942. One of my friends was working at the Watervliet Arsenal, but all production of war goods—including food and clothing—started to boom. For instance, people were working around the clock at the Cargill grain elevator in the port of Albany, and a classmate of mine was at the Arrow Shirt plant in Troy. And my brothers Bud and Bill were entering the military: Bud was learning to be a Navy flier, and Bill became an electronics technician on destroyers.

The life of this “normal” woman was in turmoil and I thought long and hard on what these changes and opportunities would mean to me.

“Free a Marine to Fight”

This was a call for women to serve in the Marine Corps Reserve during two world wars. Although 305 women served in the Marine Corps Reserve during World War I, all were separated from service after the war ended, and there were no women in the Corps. On February 13, 1943, the Commandant of the Marine Corps announced the formation of the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve.

I joined the Marines nine days later, on Washington’s birthday, 1943. Just like any other grunt, I traveled

down to New York City, enlisted, and was shipped out to Camp LeJeune in North Carolina for boot camp. The facilities of the women's program were separate from the men's, and the regimen may have been less intense—we had weapons training, physical training, and mess duty just like the guys, but they told us that our boot camp was easier than theirs as shown by a higher attrition rate for the males—but maybe we were just better . . .



Corporal Catherine Kaufmann, 1944

In any event, I graduated from boot camp, and with the Bulldog Award, no less! (During World War I, the Germans called the Marines “teufel-hunden,” meaning Devil-Dogs. Soon after, a U.S. Marine recruiting poster depicted a snarling English bulldog wearing a Marine Corps helmet, and the image took root with both the Marines and the public. The Marines adopted an English bulldog named Jiggs as a mascot, and the top recruit in each class was given the “Bulldog” award.)

The troops of the Marine Corps Women's Reserve were not assigned outside the continental United States until late in 1944, and I had the opportunity to be assigned to Oahu, Hawaii only as my time was just about up and the war was winding down. The main purpose of this force was to man (woman?) the Marine support infrastructure in this country, so when this bulldog graduated from Marine training, she was assigned to the motor pool of the Philadelphia Supply Depot.

There, I walked guard duty, drove a truck, operated a mobile cafeteria in the port, chauffeured visitors, and worked in the dispatcher's office. Later, I was assistant to the general commanding the depot.

There were no women's barracks for the MCWR: instead, we bunked in a Philadelphia hotel with several women to a room and with only one real bed. There were a few Murphy beds that pulled down from the wall, and when one Marine went on duty, another coming off duty would take over her bed.

I met my future husband during this Philadelphia tour, and we married on June 23. Two and a half months later, September 2, 1945, was V-J Day—Victory over Japan! And on October 28, 1945, the two of us were released from the Corps.

TWO CORPORALS WED IN PHILADELPHIA



CPL. H. A. HARWOOD AND CPL. C. L. HARWOOD

Back in 1940, I was a gregarious (some might say flirtatious) girl with a desire both for the good life and with a need to make my life count. The Marines helped me with both of these goals. I remember my friends, colleagues, and commanders from Marine days with affection. But most of all, I remember visiting the men in the Veteran's Hospital at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, bringing them newspapers, and talking with them in my off hours. These wounded men were still far from their homes, scared, still living the hell of combat, and fearful about the recovery from their grievous injuries. I can still remember the horror I felt after each visit, the dreams I had those nights, and my compulsion to go visit the hospital the next day.

And so I returned to my life in the Catskills two-and-a-half years later, a very fortunate person. I was still a gregarious (and some might still say flirtatious) woman with that same desire for the good life, but now with a feeling that I had indeed made my life count.

Update to the Previous Newsletter

The story of Catherine Kaufmann Harwood White and her enlistment in the Marine Corps was published in the last Newsletter. However, she was not the only Kaufmann enlisted at that time.

After graduation in 1940, Catherine spent the summer working as a nanny before going to school in the fall. She worked for a family who had just adopted a German Shepherd pup, which they called "Shep." Well, Shep bonded with Catherine and refused to eat after she went back to school in Albany. It became so bad that her summer family called and asked if she would please keep the dog, as they were afraid for his health. Naturally, Catherine agreed.

Later, when Catherine wanted to enlist in the Corps, she had to decide what to do with Shep, and again the Marines came to the rescue: Shep enlisted with Catherine, and joined the War Dogs for the duration.



As far as Catherine is concerned, she didn't free a Marine to fight—she freed two Marines.

There is a web site with information at www.qmfound.com/War_Dogs.htm, and Representative Mike McNulty's office reports that the Department of Defense has recently rediscovered this program, and is writing its history.

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