

NARRATOR: Keeney, Jennette

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: August 5, 2004

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Women in WWII/Veteran's History Project

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TAPE ONE

00:00	1	Introduction.
00:25	1	Keeney had four or five recruitment pamphlets about the WACs out when the interview began. The interviewer and Keeney described them for the tape. Keeney also talked of the recruiters that came to the school while she was teaching to talk to her about joining the WACs. She mentioned how she felt like the war was going to go on forever, so she had no idea that it was about to end when she joined the WACs.
03:30	2	Keeney explained that growing up during the Depression influenced the way she lived after it. Since things were scarce when she was a teenager, she learned to save everything in case she might need it some day. Keeney was 10 years old when her younger sister Kathleen was born. She had prayed for a little brother and was disappointed and resentful when the baby arrived as another girl. Growing up so far apart in age meant that Keeney and her sister had little in common, and therefore, did not become close until they were both adults. Her older sister was 16 when the baby came. While she was upset when she first heard that another child was on the way, she quickly accepted it and began to help her mother prepare for the arrival by sewing baby clothes and making diapers.
07:00	4	Keeney recalled some of the home front measures in place before she left Nebraska and how these impacted her family. The gasoline ration affected them some, but her father was allowed more gas than others because he was a farmer. They raised their own pork, beef, and chickens, so the rationing of meat did not inconvenience them. Shoes were rationed because of the need for leather, so people began using other materials to make shoes. However, these shoes wore out more quickly than those made of leather. The sugar ration changed the way her family baked, forcing them to substitute honey into the recipe or use less sugar. Keeney heard of others hoarding rationed items, but her family had just enough to last until the government issued them the next ration book. They had always grown much of

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		<p>their own food, so they didn't refer to their garden as a Victory Garden. Keeney also discussed how the American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary gave a big dinner to honor each soldier that came home on furlough. At these dinners, all of the area families brought potluck dishes, and the soldier would stand up to tell about his service. While Keeney attended school in Lincoln, she went every weekend to dances at Lincoln air base. All the high school and college-aged girls went to dance with the soldiers to the live big band music.</p>
13:45	7	<p>Keeney talked about why she joined the WACs. She was patriotic and saw that most of the young men from area farms were being drafted into service. Since her family had no young man to go to war, and neither of her sisters could join the service, she felt like it was her place to serve the country. Additionally, she loved to travel and thought the Army would give her the opportunity to see the world. She also learned about the GI Bill of Rights and thought that it could allow her to finish her college education when she returned from the service. Keeney explained that, while many of the girls she knew were getting married right out of high school, she wanted to travel and have some life experiences before she settled down. She knew she didn't want to marry a farmer, and she hoped that getting a college education would allow her to escape the life of a farm wife.</p>
19:15	10	<p>Keeney described what patriotism meant to her. She did not have much of a concept of Germany or Japan, so she only thought of the US and her desire to back her country in the conflict. Keeney related what happened in the weeks leading up to her joining the WACs. She and her father traveled by train to Omaha, Nebraska, where she stayed for two days at the air base going through the physical and mental examinations required for enlisting in the army. She went back home for two weeks before she had to report to Fort Des Moines, Iowa, for basic training. It was the late spring to early summer of 1945 that she left by train from Haigler, Nebraska. Keeney remembered feeling lost when she first arrived at the train station in Des Moines. She waited with several other girls until a truck arrived for them. They only brought with them enough clothes to wear for a couple of days and a few toiletries. Once they were issued their uniforms, they shipped all of their personal possessions back home in their suitcases.</p>
25:30	11	<p>Keeney related what her six weeks of basic training was like. For her, the beginning of it felt like a lot of hurry up and wait. Friday nights were called GI [Government Issue] nights and meant that they spent the evening cleaning their assigned areas. Each Saturday</p>

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31:45	15	<p>morning the head of Fort Des Moines came through for a white glove inspection. If he found any dirt, he listed gigs on the bulletin board that the women then had to work off. Keeney explained that a normal day for them always started very early. After falling out and checking that everyone was there they marched in formation to the mess hall for breakfast. Each woman had to eat everything they let the servers put on their plate before they were allowed to leave. Keeney thought GI food was wonderful, especially since she did not have to cook it. [At 31:15 side one ends and side two begins.]</p>
36:15	17	<p>Keeney talked some about the instructors they had in basic training. Their lieutenant was very pretty and an attorney in civilian life. One sergeant was really strict and some girls gave her problems. They were at Fort Des Moines six to eight weeks before they were sent to wait for their assignments, not knowing when they would leave or where they were going. Keeney waited about a week before she was finally told that she would be going to a place away from a city but near a place to ski. Finally, about thirty of the women were sent by train to Oakridge, Tennessee. They stayed there for ten days while they waited to get the necessary clearance for their new assignment. Then they went on a troop train for four days finally arriving in Lamy, New Mexico.</p>
42:00	18	<p>On the train they were told that they were assigned to Los Alamos, New Mexico. They were taken up to the base in buses. Garnet Hines was one of the women that went with Keeney. While they were at Oak Ridge, America dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. The people working at the base celebrated all night. She knew she would</p>

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not be going home because when she signed on it was for the duration of the War plus six months. Her initial impression of Los Alamos was that it was beautiful and covered with pine trees. There were short afternoon rain showers every day. Keeney was assigned to the office of the hospital where she kept track of how many patients were in the hospital and what problems they had. She got to eat in the hospital mess hall, which had better food than the general mess hall. Once in Los Alamos, her work was more like a job than being in the Army. There were no more calisthenics or marching.

48:15	22	<p>In December of 1945, Keeney was able to go on furlough. Her father was in the veteran's hospital in Lincoln, Nebraska because of a nervous breakdown, so she traveled there to visit her parents. Then she and her mother took the bus 460 miles home to Haigler to spend Christmas with her sisters. After this, they drove to Lincoln in a Ford V8, a journey complicated because they couldn't buy radiator fluid and had to empty the radiator each night and fill it up the next morning. In Lincoln she got an extension on her furlough due to her father's illness, so she ended up being gone from Los Alamos for four weeks. When she got back she was moved to work as the company clerk in the orderly room, which was the office for the WACs. She typed furloughs, passes, and morning reports tracking where each person was each day. When at home she was sad over her father's situation, but glad to see her family. Everyone respected her for her uniform and everyone treated her very well.</p>
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54:15	24	<p>Keeney continued by discussing what they did in their free time at Los Alamos. She often went dancing at the PX, especially on Saturday nights. They sometimes had live music but often just danced to music from the nickelodeon. Sundays they had church, and they often took the bus into Sante Fe for the day on Saturday. Keeney often spent her free time writing letters. Some of the girls went on hikes or went skiing. She dated some but did not see anyone seriously. [At 58:50 tape one ends and tape two begins.]</p>
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59:00	26	<p>Keeney recalled that she was stationed in Los Alamos for about a year before she put in for overseas duty in August of '46. She requested Europe first and Japan second. Before she went overseas, she got engaged to Lieutenant Phil Freemeyer, who she had grown up with in Haigler and had been dating since he was stationed in Albuquerque, NM. When he was reassigned to Japan, Keeney sent a post card to her captain in Oakridge, Tennessee, to change her request to Japan. Both she and Garnet received orders sending them to Tokyo, Japan. They left Los Alamos and traveled to Camp Stoneman in Pittsburgh, California, where they stayed until their ship</p>
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		<p>came in. They were there for two weekends and were able to visit San Francisco. It was the first time she had seen the ocean and the Golden Gate Bridge. They were bused to where they were to board their ship. She bought a movie camera before they left. She spent three days combating seasickness. After that she was fine for the rest of the seventeen-day trip. They did some calisthenics and each girl had to spend one day assigned to the desk, but other than that they could just enjoy themselves. They had movies and church services; when they crossed the International Date Line, they had a ceremony.</p>
1:07:00	29	<p>They docked in Yokohama, Japan. The ship they crossed the Pacific on was a hospital ship called <i>The Comfort</i>. They were bused into Tokyo, Japan, and taken to the Mitsubishi Main building where they were going to stay on the second floor. Keeney was assigned to the second floor office of the Dai Ichi Building, which was the general headquarters for General MacArthur. She received radiograms at first but then she was sent to teach the first grade at the Tokyo American School with the children of the Allied soldiers stationed in Japan.</p>
1:12:45	32	<p>This teaching experience was difficult because they did not have enough supplies. She taught there for about a year. Garnet continued to do intelligence work in the Dai Ichi building. Keeney's fiancé was stationed on the northern island of Hokkaido. He sometimes flew down to Tokyo, which was on the island of Honshu. The school had a fundraiser raffling off a 1947 Studebaker that her fiancé ended up winning. He went on temporary duty in Korea for a while and left the car with Keeney.</p>
1:18:00	34	<p>Keeney explained that, after being engaged for some time, she decided that she was not ready for marriage, so she broke off her relationship with Lieutenant Freemeyer. The Red Cross gave tours to other parts of Japan, so Keeney went on several trips and saw much of the country. She went home in June of 1948 to go back to college. She made the twelve-day journey back on the troop ship <i>The Republic</i>. They docked in Seattle, Washington where they spent several days. While there she and Garnet flew to Victoria, British Columbia, Canada and spent a weekend at the Empress Hotel. Keeney had to take a bus from Seattle to San Francisco where she stayed with a cousin for a few days before she took a train to Nebraska.</p>

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1:24:30	36	The interview finished with discussion of the memorabilia that Keeney brought out to show the interviewer. One scrapbook contained pictures of San Francisco, her ship <i>The Comfort</i> , and her time in Japan. Some of the pictures show the buildings that had been bombed in Tokyo, and others show the children she worked with at the school. [At 1:28:30 tape two side one ends and side two begins.]
1:29:00	38	Keeney's second scrapbook showed more pictures of Japan including photographs of the Emperor's palace, some Japanese dancers, and other images of Japanese culture and local life. While looking at the scrapbooks Keeney, described some of her experiences and some of the things she saw while staying in Japan. She mentioned that she moved back to working at the general headquarters in the Fall of 1947 and stayed there until she came home.
1:35:00	42	The interviewer and Keeney continued discussing photographs until the end of the interview. They also talked about the plays and musicals Keeney took part in, including a play about Ernie Pyle, in which she played a nightclub singer. These plays were performed at the Ernie Pyle Theater in Tokyo. Keeney also took dance classes and she started dating her instructor, Gus Andros. Additionally, She talked about the bathhouses in Japan. Keeney also had her medals and some Japanese umbrellas out to show the interviewer.
1:41:30	44	END OF RECORDING

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

American Legion
American Legion Auxiliary
Andros, Gus
Camp Stoneman (Pittsburgh, California)
Comfort, The (Ship)
Dai Ichi Building (Tokyo, Japan)
Des Moines, Iowa
Empress Hotel, The (Victoria, Canada)
Ernie Pyle Theater, The
Fort Des Moines, Iowa
Haigler, Nebraska
Havlik, Kathleen
Hines, Garnet
Hokkaido, Japan
Honshu, Japan
Lamy, New Mexico
Lincoln Air Base (Nebraska)
Lincoln, Nebraska
Los Alamos, New Mexico
MacArthur, General Douglas
Oakridge, Tennessee
Omaha, Nebraska
Pittsburgh, California
Republic, The (Ship)
San Francisco, California
Sante Fe, New Mexico
Seattle, Washington
Tokyo American School (Tokyo, Japan)
Tokyo, Japan
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
Yokohama, Japan