

**Catherine C. Boyagian
Veteran**

**Division of Military Affairs Headquarters
Wayne Clark and Mike Russet**

**Latham, New York
August 31, 2004**

WC/MR: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?

CB: My name is Catherine Boyagian, I was born in Albany on August 8, 1923.

WC/MR: What was your educational background prior to entering the service?

CB: Second year high.

WC/MR: Do you remember where you were and your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

CB: Yes. It was in Palace Theater and I was coming out and they had an excerpt in the paper that said that Pearl Harbor had been bombed late at night.

WC/MR: Do you remember your reaction to that?

CB: No, it was stunning. We were stunned.

WC/MR: Now you of course enlisted. Why did you enlist at all?

CB: Well, my two brothers went and then my sister went and then my boyfriend went and so I went. Every body goes (unclear) together.

WC/MR: Why did you pick the army?

CB: Well, every body in my family was in the army.

WC/MR: When did you enlist?

CB: I enlisted in November 1944.

WC/MR: Where did you go for basic training and can you tell us about it?

CB: I went to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia and that's where I had my basic.

WC/MR: How long was your basic training?

CB: I don't remember. I don't remember now, that was sixty years ago.

WC/MR: They didn't teach you how to fire a rifle or anything, did they?

CB: No, they didn't have any guns. Women didn't have guns then.

WC/MR: How was the training? Was it hard?

CB: No, I enjoyed it. I liked it. I wasn't crazy about my sergeant.

WC/MR: Did you get homesick at all?

CB: No. It was the first time I was away from home. Never left New York until I went to the army.

WC/MR: How was the food in basic training?

CB: It was good. Well, the first meal I didn't like. It was some kind of steak or something. I was used to whatever food. I grew up in the Depression so we weren't used to anything.

WC/MR: Did they issue you some kind of fatigue uniform?

CB: Yes. We had the green (unclear) pants and we had a shirt and we had a (unclear) dress but that was for working or exercising and then we had a summer uniform, khaki and a olive drape (unclear).

WC/MR: When you were wearing your fatigue uniform, what kind of hat would they give you?

CB: We had a cap. I think they called it a gulf cap.

WC/MR: It wasn't like a baseball cap?

CB: No, it wasn't. And we had boots. We called them little (unclear). We call them combat boots now.

WC/MR: Now what kind of living quarters were you in? Was it huts?

CB: No, we had big barracks. We had a lot of girls in one room. We were all together.

WC/MR: Did you have bunks beds?

CB: Yes. I always got the top.

WC/MR: Was that by choice?

CB: No. I'm congenial. Whatever I had, I had. I had a lot of brothers and sisters until I went so I had whatever bed I had.

WC/MR: After you were at Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia, where did you go?

CB: After that we went to Des Moines, Iowa and I had schooling there for office skills.

WC/MR: Did you have that type of training in high school also?

CB: Yes, I did. But I didn't work at that. I worked in a department store because I liked sales. That's what I liked.

WC/MR: Do you remember how long you were in Iowa?

CB: No, I don't. I don't remember any of the (unclear).

WC/MR: Where did you go after that?

CB: Well after we were done with Iowa, we got our orders, which were supposed to be secret. No body could tell where they were going and because every body knew where I was going because I wanted to go back to New York because I had a smile on my face.

WC/MR: Now where about in New York did you go?

CB: We took the train back, which had both service men and women on the train coming back because they always travelled by train and when you got where you were going, you always travelled by truck. I went to the Brooklyn Navy Yard to get my assignment. Then they assigned me to Fort Hamilton, fort of embarkation. The chief took us there and then they put me in the commissary because I worked in sales. The officers bought all their supplies there and they had to have ration stamps for anything. Gas or food, you had to have ration stamps.

WC/MR: Could you explain some of your duties you had while you were there?

CB: It was a store so I was a cashier and stocked and that's what I did in the commissary.

WC/MR: You mentioned that you became ill from some of the shots you had?

CB: Yes. There were ships coming in and they would bring soldiers back that were ill and wounded. They'd bring sickness back and we'd have to get a shot for that sickness. One time I got very ill from that shot and they didn't know what it was so I was in the hospital for three days. But that was at another camp. That was at Camp Shanks. At Hamilton, we had ships coming in the narrows and they were the wounded coming back. They came in the narrows at Brooklyn and we'd go down and watch them come off and greet them and some of the wounds were really serious wounds. This one ship that came in, they took the soldiers and they put them on a bus in their pajamas and in their robes. They thought they were going to the hospital. They took them into New York City, to a nightclub and we met them there. Then we paired off with a wounded soldier and we had dinner and cocktails and lots of stars were there. Then they put them back on the bus and they went back to the hospital.

WC/MR: Do you remember who some of the stars were?

CB: Yes. Eddie Cantor, Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey, Milton Pearl, he was our waiter and he didn't like the way we tapped the liquor. The man who discovered penicillin was there. Fleming. I think at that time the services only had penicillin. The needles were huge and they were painful. If you had them for three days and three nights, you had to find another spot. So that was a good homecoming for those boys, I thought.

WC/MR: You mentioned in this form you worked with Italian POW's and German POW's.

CB: No, I didn't work with Germans. We weren't allowed to fraternize or talk to the Germans. But I did work with Italians in the commissary and they would do the bags and just whatever you would do in the store. Then they would go in the back and play their little mandolin and sing their Italian songs. They were all

young too. But the German's that worked on the grounds, you couldn't have anything to do with them. They had big barrack just like we did. They would bring them into the movies and the boxing matches and they would bring them in first and then the guards and then we would sit in the back. So they were treated very well, I thought.

WC/MR: Was the area where they were fenced in at all?

CB: No, because I rode through it on a bike once down to the bank. I was told not to but it was a shortcut. I rode down and it wasn't fenced in. But the fort was fenced in with the guards, where would they go?

WC/MR: Now I noticed you said that with the girls you served with that you became close, that one of them was an artist.

CB: Yes. Dorothy Norman. She was an artist and she would draw cartoons for the paper. It was for our post paper. Sometimes she would say, "stick your leg out" or "stick your arm out" and I'd put my leg or arm out and that was some of the cartoons she drew. She was pretty good. And while I was there, we would also get telegrams. The girls would get telegrams about their husbands and their boyfriends and their brothers that were killed. They were broken up but they stayed on duty. I had gotten two telegrams. My brother was wounded twice. At least he got home. But my boyfriend was fatally wounded so I went home to him. His wake, his funeral, he was wounded in (unclear), the last battle of the war. I took overseas training so I was flown overseas. We were going to go to France and some of the (unclear) were coming back from France and they had been shot by snipers.

WC/MR: Really?

CB: Yeah, the war was over then but they had the snipers and they would shoot the Americans to stop them from coming back. But they had lace and perfumes to ease their pain.

WC/MR: You also said one of the things that left an impression on you was the reception at the Gracie Mansion.

CB: Yes, for General Jonathan Wainwright. He was in the (unclear) death march. He was very skinny. They called him skinny (unclear) and two of us were given invitations to it. We just went and greeted him and saw him talk. It's big, that's all I remember about that.

WC/MR: You mentioned you were at Camp Shanks. How long were you there?

CB: Well when I came back from the funeral for my boyfriend, I was supposed to go overseas but when I got back, they transferred me to Shanks. That was outside of New York, (unclear), I'm not sure what is near the woods. They transferred me there.

WC/MR: And what did you do there?

CB: There I worked in the special (unclear), the (unclear) Division and we did typing. We did the orders and promotions, awards, transfers. We typed them,

proof read them and we monographed them. Sometimes I went on a night shift. That's what I did there. Then we had the American soldiers coming back, American prisoners of war coming back so we had to do their papers to get them to separation centers. I talked to a lot of those men that came back and some needed plastic surgery because they were prisoners and they had internal wounds that you couldn't see and lots of (unclear). So I talked to some of them. While I was there, they sent me to one of the piers in New York City because the Queen was coming in, the Queen Mary. It was bringing a lot of the GI's back and so two of us went from camp on a little tug as one of the escort ships for the Queen Mary. It was lined with soldiers and they were waving little flags, captured flags. We were little, they were big. I always remember that sight. It was beautiful.

WC/MR: Now what rank were you at that point?

CB: I was a PFC. I never got higher. I also met my mother. I went to meet her at Grand Central Station and while I was there, there was a big crowd and a lot of roaring. So I was waiting with my mother in the crowd and the crowd pushed me and pushed me until I was at the head of the crowd and into Commander Eisenhower. I just looked and he just looked at that was it.

WC/MR: Were you in uniform?

CB: Yes, I was in uniform. I recognized him because he had his little Eisenhower jacket on. So I saw him but I didn't really meet him.

WC/MR: Did you salute him?

CB: No, I was so amazed to see the supreme commander. That was pretty good. When I was at Camp Shank, that was when I got ill from the shots because the ships would come in and some of the soldiers would have diseases they brought back from Europe and so we got shots. I got very sick. I got black here and they didn't know what it was. The Army had taken over a wing of Brooklyn State Psychiatric Hospital and that's where we went. There were bars on the windows and buttons for the faucets and everything. I have three days of penicillin and three nights of that. That was an experience too. Then I was back on duty and I talked to a lot of the prisoners that came back. There was one prisoner I went out with a few times and I eventually married him. He had a lot of problems, which I didn't know at the time. Another thing is we had a lot of troops coming in (unclear) and they could come into our barracks and we couldn't lock our doors. They issued us baseball bats for protection. That was our weapon.

WC/MR: Did you ever have to use it?

CB: No. Our cooks were pretty tough. They would get after them. But you couldn't lock the doors and they could come in the back and they spent a long time in Europe.

WC/MR: You stayed in the service until May?

CB: February of 1946. Well I married and then he got out.

WC/MR: You married while you were in service?

CB: Yeah. Well, I married when the (unclear) war ended. He got out first and he was sent to a separation center. Then he came back and he worked in one of the shops there. Eventually we got married and then got discharged. Put in for the discharge.

WC/MR: Where were you discharged?

CB: Fort Dix. That's the first time I got a plate of beans. They always said "you're going to get beans in the army" and I never got any until I went to Fort Dix.

WC/MR: Were you eligible at all for the G.I. Bill?

CB: Yes, but I didn't. I went back to my job in the department store, which I liked.

WC/MR: So you started back right away?

CB: Not right away because I had some children and once they started school, I went back part-time.

WC/MR: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?

CB: I got letters from girls and some of the men, saying what they were doing. Then they dropped off after a while.

WC/MR: When you were able to, did you ever join any veteran organizations?

CB: I never did. I did go once to the thing in Washington. The memorial, dedication to that. I brought picture of my husband, of my brothers and put them up because they couldn't because they're all ill now so they can't go.

WC/MR: How do you think your time in service effected/changed your life?

CB: I was young. Used to having fun and stuff like that and you go into the service and see all these things that happened to other people. The guys' coming back all wounded and no limbs some of them. It kind of shook you up. I never forgot that hospital shift. I always think of that and I never forgot the Queen Mary. Those two ships stay in my mind.

WC/MR: You sent these to us. If you could just tell us when and where these were taken?

CB: This one was taken in Georgia. Probably 1945. And then this one was taken in New York up in Bear Mountain when I had some time off.

WC/MR: Thank you very much for your interview.

CB: Thank you, and I didn't cough.