

My Mother, the Marine

Phyllis Wood's World War II service

By Tim Wood

"We typed a little, then we cried a little."

That's Phyllis Wood's description of the toughest part of the two years she spent in the United States Marines in World War II. It refers to her toughest job - managing a section of 6 to 8 typists who typed form letters to the families of Marines who died in the fighting at Iwo Jima.

"It wasn't much fun," Mrs. Wood said.

But her overall feelings about her service to her country in World War II are very positive. Mrs. Wood called the experience one of the best periods of her life.

On the positive side were benefits such as travel and living near Arlington Cemetery. And the pay wasn't bad - for the time. It was \$78 a week.

She was born Phyllis Ruth Griffin Aug. 11, 1921 in a Salt Lake City, Utah, hospital. She was one of five children and had one brother and three sisters. Her brother, the late Arthur Griffin, was an officer in the infantry in Germany.

After high school graduation in 1937, Mrs. Wood attended Westminster Junior College for two years and earned a two-year degree. She then attended business college and then got a job with a paper company. In 1941, she got a job with the Department of Transportation at the now-defunct Fort Douglas, Utah.

She got married in November of 1942, but the marriage ended in divorce in June of 1943. That event led to her enlistment in the Marines.

She had a friend, Jack Westfall - "not a boyfriend," she said - from whom she sought advice.

"I wrote him after my divorce and he said the Marines were the best service to join. My parents both favored it. My married girlfriends were jealous because they were not free to do it," she said.

"I wanted to join the military to get away - I didn't want to hang around home."

She knew she had skills to offer the Marines. "I was a pretty fast typist," she said.

So, on Aug. 1, 1943, one week after quitting her job at Fort Douglas, Phyllis Griffin became a Marine.

Mrs. Wood was one of the first women from Salt Lake to join the military. Her first job was to get on a train Aug. 1. The train took her to Chicago, where she changed to a troop train, the passengers of which were all Marines. The train consisted of "a bunch of cars," Mrs. Wood recalls. This train took her to Camp LeJeune,

where she would undergo basic training. En route to Camp LeJeune, the train would stop in various towns. Different women, including Mrs. Wood, would leave the train to run errands, buying items the women wanted, such as ice cream, cake, etc. The train stopped one to two times a day. On the train trip, she learned Marine songs and about the Corps.

"We were the first group to start training at Camp LeJeune," Mrs. Wood said. Her memories of the time are brief: "Get up when the whistle blew, go to bed when the lights went out. It was hot," she recalls.

It was also an introduction to the world outside of Salt Lake City. "You cannot believe what some of the people in boot camp knew," she said.

From Camp LeJeune, she went by train to Washington, D.C., then by bus to Henderson hall, across from the Navy Annex. Mrs. Wood lived in Barracks 5, with the mess hall in the middle of the barracks complex. Except for the mess hall workers, all of the barracks occupants worked in the Navy Annex.

She was a typist and in charge of a section of 5 women, whose job was to keep track of the location of officers. She was temporarily transferred to another section during the Iwo Jima conflict to help type the next-of-kin letters for the Iwo Jima fatalities. But while the job was sometimes unpleasant, the time off was well spent.

"Three or four of us spent many Sunday afternoons walking around Washington, D.C. seeing the many historical places, along with the Library of Congress," she said.

She took many long walks in Arlington Cemetery and read the tombstones. She sometimes watched the ceremonial changing of the guard and sometimes just sat in the natural amphitheater.

As it turned out, all of Mrs. Wood's time in the Marines was spent in Washington, D.C. She left the Marines on Sept. 26, 1945, receiving an honorable discharge. Her final rank was sergeant first class and she received \$173.52 on her date of discharge.

Summing up her military experience, Mrs. Wood said, "I am very proud of being able to have been a member of the U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve. It was a wonderful experience."

Postscript

After her discharge, Mrs. Wood studied at the University of Utah for two years. She eventually married Orville Harold Wood, an Army sergeant. They had four children: Joseph Roy Wood, Jonathan Carl Wood, Ann Elizabeth Wood and Timothy Michael Wood. Orville Wood and Ann Wood are deceased. Mrs. Wood had eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. She died in 2003 of complications from Alzheimers Disease.

Summary

Phyllis Ruth G. Wood

Rank: Sergeant First Class

Address in service: Second Headquarters Battalion HQMC

Henderson Hall, Arlington, Va.

Women's Reserves

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Dates of service: Aug. 1, 1943 to Sept. 26, 1945