



Marion Grace Colvin

US Navy 1943-1946
Pharmacist's Mate Third
Class
Served: US Naval Hosp.
Phila., PA
Submarine Base New London,
CN
Interviewed by Jo Ellen Litz,
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Living in Annville in the early 1970s, I remember seeing Marion Colvin at community events. She always carried herself well--good posture, not loud, always a lady. I knew her boys from Church Camp and at the Annville Cleona Swimming Pool. I didn't know Marion served in the military until attending the opening of baseball season at the Neversink Fire Company in Pleasant Hill. But there she was, in a wheel chair. She may have been the only

woman among World War II honorees. Even in her wheel chair, she held her head high. I wanted to know more, and because of the Women's Commission project to research and write articles for Women's History month, I had the opportunity to interview Marion concerning her service to the United States of America.

I met Marion at her residence at the Lebanon Valley Home on Main Street in Annville. She sat quietly in the shade of a tall tree. She spends a lot of time there; enjoying the outdoors, reading, and watching the cars go by.

Marion was born December 16, 1923. She grew up in Annville. Her mother was an Ensminger from Pine Grove, and worked in the Kreider Shoe Factory. Her father was from York, and worked at the PennWay Bakery, delivering baked goods with a horse and wagon. Her grandparents raised race horses.

One day, Marion and her friend, Pearl Nicholas, were riding their bicycles in the country when they saw signs that said *Join the Navy, See the World*. Marion said, 'You know Pearl, if I had someone to join the Navy with me, I'd join.' Pearl said, 'I'll join.'

Marion rushed home to ask her mother for bus money to ride to Harrisburg. When she arrived at the recruiting center she discovered she had to be 21 to join the Navy. Soon after her 21st birthday, Marion and Pearl joined the Navy where they eventually attended nurses training in Bethesda, Maryland. At that time women weren't allowed to serve overseas so they were stationed at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital. They spent their days caring for soldiers receiving physical therapy and rehabilitation. The hospital was housed in Swarthmore College. Ironically, it was the same building her son stayed in during college many years later. Following her time in Philadelphia, Marion was sent to a sub base in Connecticut where she worked until she was discharged after 2 ½ years of service.

As Marion sat with the locusts' song in the background reliving those days she said, "I gave a lot of shots and bandaged a lot of wounds. War is hell. At one point, we had a lot come from Africa. They had malaria. It was bad. Some of them lost their limbs.... There were many sad, sad faces. It was horrible." As she cared for the men Marion would try to encourage the men, get them to talk about family or their children, or whatever interested them. Despite all of the pain she witnessed, Marion shared that she would make the same choice again.

After her service in the Navy, Marion returned to Lebanon County where she married, had a family, and spent 35 years working at Unger Brothers and Henise Tire Service.

Her advice to women looking to join the military: "Go and make the best of it.... Think positive, and do the best you can to do the job that you're required to do." Marion says she had a good life; she still has a good life.

Thank you for your service to our country, your positive attitude, and for being so gracious to share your story with us. God bless you, Marion.

Portions of Marion's interview are posted on YouTube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKFvNWFhf9g> .