

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
Oral History Interview with Margaret McCausland
Post Commissary Civilian, 1941 – 1945
Interviewed by Mary Rasa, NPS 6/21/04
Transcribed by Laura Bruzek, March 2009

MR: This is Mary Rasa, I'm the Sandy Hook Museum Curator. Today is June 21, 2004, and I'm doing an interview with Margaret McCausland, and the first thing I'd like to say is when and where were you born?

MM: I was born in Asbury Park, New Jersey, in 1920.

MR: Did you graduate from Asbury Park High School?

MM: Yes, I did.

MR: Did any of your family members, were they also in the military?

MM: Oh, yes! I had a brother, who was in the Air Force.

MR: In World War II?

MM: Uh huh.

MR: Did your father serve?

MM: No.

MR: And what years were you out at Fort Hancock?

MM: I was out at Fort Hancock from about, I can't remember whether it was August or September but it was in the fall of 1941.

MR: Before Pearl Harbor?

MM: Yeah.

MR: And how long did you stay there?

MM: 'til, June of 1945.

MR: So almost the entire war.

MM: That's right.

MR: How did you become involved at Fort Hancock?

MM: Well, I worked for the Quartermaster Corps at the Commissary.

MR: And how did you get that job?

MM: The civil service exam.

MR: Okay, now that was kind of a long commute. How did you get to work every day?

MM: Well, I lived in, I didn't live in Asbury Park. I lived in Avon-by-the-Sea, which is about 2 miles further down and I drive, drove with a woman from oh, Spring Lake.

MR: Did you get extra ration coupons because you were doing war work?

MM: No, no, no, no, none of that. The only thing we got was after the war was declared, then they would let us purchase food at the Commissary because the stores would be closed by the time we got back to where we lived.

MR: Did you know anything about Fort Hancock before you came out here?

MM: Oh I knew it was there, but that was about it. Fort Monmouth was much closer. That was in Red Bank.

MR: Right, uh, did you know – you took the civil service exam. What was it in? Was it like, clerk typist?

MM: What was it like?

MR: Was it a clerk typist exam that you took or...?

MM: It was a typing exam.

MR: Okay, so did you know that, so basically you knew the type of work you'd be performing?

MM: No, no, no. They trained us.

MR: And so your title was clerk?

MM: Yeah, uh huh.

MR: And who trained you? - The people in charge of the commissary?

MM: Yeah, those, well they had all military, see, 'til the civil service employees came in onto the post. There was a few civil service employees but nothing like it was after, ya know, at this time just before World War II.

MR: So, what was like the makeup of your office? How many people worked there?

MM: Seven of us. But we weren't all, civil employees - there was Army personnel, too, and of course we had an officer in charge of the Commissary.

MR: Do you remember his name?

MM: Yeah, well, one of their names was George - Captain George White.

MR: So he was in charge of the entire Commissary?

MM: Yeah, uh-huh.

MR: And how many were civilians that you worked with?

MM: Four, the other, the head, the one that was mostly in charge of the Commissary was a Sergeant by the name of Crawford. And, but we issued the rations to the troops is what we mainly did.

MR: And did you ever have any alerts that you had to go for shelter?

MM: Oh, yeah!

MR: Now what would you do?

MM: Well, when it first started, we would have to run from the Commissary. Now you know where that is?

MR: Yeah.

MM: To those bunkers where they had the artillery guns, ya know? Now that's quite...

MR: That's a long walk!

MM: Quite a run!

MR: Run, yeah.

MM: So finally, one day I said to them, now this is crazy. I could be killed going there, I said I'd be better off right where I'm not - I'm not doing this no more. 'Cause I figured I could get under sacks of potatoes or sugar or something. But it was, ya know, it just like everything else when it first starts, and they get it ironed down to, ya know, where it's much better but at first it was really something 'cause we had to run there.

MR: So you worked at the Commissary, is in Building 47. I just wanna point that out. Now did you ever work with, were the other civilians you worked with women?

MM: Yeah. And it was mostly women because at that time, of course, if they hadn't enlisted in the Army most of them (men) were being drafted. So they were, at first there was one man but then he went into the service. Then after that, it was just a military male personnel until the WACs come on the post. Then we had one WAC that worked in the office with us.

MR: Do you remember her name?

MM: No, I can't remember. I can see her just as plain as day; she was a blonde-headed girl, and Sergeant Crawford, who was the first sergeant I worked with there, was transferred out. We had Sergeant Kutz; K-u-t-z, and he married this girl.

MR: Well, did she like being in the WAC?

MM: Pardon?

MR: Did she enjoy being a WAC?

MM: She seemed to, seemed to like it real well.

MR: Did she say anything unusual about it?

MM: No, other than the fact that, ya know, it was her job and I never really heard any complaints out of those - I mean, I knew quite a few of the WAC's that were on the post ... when they finally sent them there, but I never heard of them complain about it. 'Cause they had a building of their own, ya know, they gave them a building and of course they had all kinds of restrictions on to who could go in there and whatever. But I never heard no WAC complain about it being in the service.

MR: That's interesting. Were you able to eat on Post?

MM: Oh yeah, we could eat. Well...

MR: Did they have a little facility - a cafeteria?

MM: Well, most of us brought our lunch 'cause the first time we came on there wouldn't be women employees. They really didn't really have any facilities there for women. And they didn't even have a bathroom. We had to use, ya know, the man's - men's restroom and finally - now this is really funny - they, it was upstairs, and they built one for the women. And while they were connecting all the pipes and everything, one of the soldiers went up to use the men's restroom and when he flushed the uh, toilet, it'd come down on the sergeant's head and desk. And I'll tell you, you thought World War Three was declared at that time 'cause he took off ... I heard more than one soldier say that day I would have gone AWOL.

MR: So there ended up being two in the second floor of the building?

MM: Uh-huh, yup. They finally put two in there.

MR: What did they use the second floor of the building for? Was that more storage up there?

MM: Yeah, uh-huh. That, it would store, well ya know, we had not only, canned goods we had all kinds of fresh fruit, meat. You know, just anything you would need, we had it.

MR: Where would you store the meat? - In the basement?

MM: Well, they had refrigerators there at that time, and then they would bring a lot of the food it was brought in daily, you know.

MR: Mmhmm.

MM: And these trucks would come in and deliver and then of course we and the officers would set up the rations for the different organizations.

MR: Mmhmm.

MM: We would turn the sheets over so those who would work in the back and fill the orders and then the different companies would send the trucks in and pick up whatever rations that were due for the day.

MR: So you would actually meet with the, the people from the barracks?

MM: Yes.

MR: And was your office near the far end of the building?

MM: It was in the front. Well, to me it was the front.

MR: The front of the building, okay. 'Cause that building is currently used for museum storage, so I'm just trying to figure out where these things were. So, the delivery would come probably around back

MM: Back, it did.

MR: And then, you would speak with them in the front.

MM: Yeah, they would come in the front to get their ration sheets, ya know. And then a lot of the time they'd have complaints, like they didn't get enough of this or that. Mostly it was vanilla. And of course we found out they would drink the vanilla. That was stopped. It's just like any business, ya know? Things happen, and then you find out why and you work accordingly to, but that's what we did.

MR: So everyday trucks would come in, no trains were coming to the buildings.

MM: No, trucks all the time.

MR: Say you didn't bring your lunch, where would you be allowed to buy some food?

MM: Well, we could go to the Post Exchange, and, you know, buy things there. We could buy food right there at the Commissary.

MR: Oh, sure.

MM: See, they - not only did we have the rations for the troops we also - all the people, you know, the officers, enlisted men who had homes there - their families came and bought food from the commissary each day, so we could even just get it right there at the commissary.

MR: Now in the Post Exchange was there like a lunch counter there?

MM: No, it was - as I recall it was just you could just buy a sandwich and a drink, you know.

MR: But there wasn't like a soda fountain or anything?

MM: Yeah there was. It was something like that. But not like you'd visualize it.

MR: Right. Did you ever take part in any social activities while you were at the fort? Did you ever go to a dance or anything like that?

MM: No. We would come in every morning and we went home every night.

MR: What were your hours?

MM: Well, I'd come in at eight o'clock in the morning 'til five. And then of course when war was declared, we'd work seven days a week. Say, we even had to come in on Saturday and Sunday's.

MR: For full days too?

MM: Pardon?

MR: Were they full days on Saturday and Sunday?

MM: Oh, yeah.

MR: That could get you pretty tired.

MM: Oh yeah. And that long ride. I remember lots of times, a lot of them, well there was four of us that rode in the car, and they would sleep, ya know? And I'd often wonder, Lord, if the driver goes, we're done for. And ya know what, that little road coming in to Fort Hancock?

MR: Yeah.

MM: When we'd have a hurricane or something, oh...

MR: Oh!

MM: Or when it snowed real hard. And there were sometimes when we stayed at, the housing for ya know, people visiting there...

MR: Oh, you'd have to spend the night?

MM: Yeah, we did spend the night there, so you could get through because the storms sometimes were so bad they'd just go right over that road

MR: Well the wind is horrible.

MM: Oh yeah. The wind can be bad, too. And the heating sometimes was awful.

MR: It still is.

MM: It must be very cold.

MR: Yes, it is. Let's see. Now, did you find this a fun or boring place to be working?

MM: Oh no, we all enjoyed it. I think because most of us had just came out of the Depression and we were so thankful for those jobs that we didn't find it depressing or anything. The only thing that was bad was when they started taking the different troops out and marching to the boat landing.

MR: Oh, okay.

MM: And they would get on the ships there, and then they would go overseas, or if there was a funeral on the post. Those would be the only sad things that I could remember.

MR: Now the funeral, would that be because there was an accident of some sort?

MM: Well yeah, sometimes. Or, ya know, a person just died of natural cause, ya know? 'Cause some of those officers were older, but ya know, they weren't real young men. And when I started working there, the only General that I ever - that was ever there the whole time I was there was General Gage. And then when he was transferred, it would be a, it was a Colonel who had charge over, but I don't remember what his name was.

MR: Now you met your husband here.

MM: Yes.

MR: Can you tell me a little about that?

MM: It was in December after World War II was declared. He was in the 61st Coast Artillery that was stationed at Ft. Sheridan, Illinois, and they was transferred out to Fort Hancock. Well, it was a very large unit and they didn't even really have the housing to take care of this unit, and they built what they called Tent City. Of course, now, this was in December and it was really, really cold and a lot of them were lodged there in Tent City until they could get facilities, ya know, better facilities, for them and then they left from Fort Hancock for overseas. Not, ya know, over a space of time. But my husband, he was, the day before they went out, was sent overseas, he had coffee spilt on him and was burnt and he was in the hospital. So, they went and they left him while he was transferred into the MPs. He was 6 feet, 2 inches tall. He was quite a tall man and that's when I met him. Well, I had met him first when he was with the 61st Coast Artillery 'cause he'd come pick up the rations. And we got married on the 2nd of April in 1944. And then, he like I say, he was in the MPs. Well, he was transferred to, we had a small, well it was kinda like a yacht (Fort Hancock's boat), I guess. And it would transfer personnel from Fort Hancock over to the, New York. And then they'd bring whoever was in New York that needed to come back to Fort Hancock back. And then, he decided that he would like to be able to go overseas. So he was, joined the Merchant Marines and he left the Army and was able, and went overseas. And he was over there.

MR: From like, '44 to '45, something like that?

MM: Yeah, uh-huh.

MR: And what was his name?

MM: His name was Joseph D. McCausland.

MR: And what was your maiden name?

MM: Wright. W-r-i-g-h-t.

MR: Okay.

MM: And I was known as Peg, not Margaret. Although on all my paychecks I'm Margaret.

MR: Do you remember what you got paid an hour?

MM: I don't. It was something like \$50 a week, around that. But it was, I had been working for a firm of lawyers and when I took the civil service exam and I was only making \$10 a week, so you know that was a lot more money.

MR: Yeah, that's a pretty good pay increase. Now, when you were courting with your husband, was he able to come visit you? Did he have a car?

MM: No, no, no. He would, this person that I rode back and forth with on, like, on the weekends, he would drive home with me to my house where I lived with my mother and sister and would stay over the weekend.

MR: Oh, so he had off on the weekends?

MM: Yeah.

MR: Well, he was lucky.

MM: Well, he wasn't off every weekend.

MR: Right.

MM: No, no, no. When he would get a leave, ya know, if he got a leave and then he only like ten days or something, he would go to, come out here to Illinois where his family lived.

MR: So, when, after Tent City was made into was made into barracks, was that the wooden barracks, was that where he then lived? Or did he go into another area?

MM: When it, like I told you, they transferred him into the Military Police so he lived in their quarters.

MR: Do you remember if that was a wooden building or a brick building?

MM: Well, most of them were all wooden. I'm sure it was just a wooden building.

MR: Okay.

MM: I don't remember any brick barracks out there.

MR: Well, there were some like where the WACs lived and then I think a lot of them...

MM: Oh, yeah!

MR: They moved the, men out of them and made them in to administrative but I think there was still two of them that were being used as housing. I was just curious.

MM: Yes, I know the WACs were in one brick building because, well, they had real strict rules for the WACs. I'll tell ya. That was about it.

MR: Okay. Do you ever keep in touch with anyone else that you met out here?

MM: No, not through the years. I did, we did at first. But, ya know, most of us, if we weren't already married, we had gotten married. And of course with the families what we didn't anymore. I don't know whether any of them that are alive 'cause I'll be 84 years old this year.

MR: So when you got married and your husband went overseas, I guess you stayed with your family?

MM: Yeah, I just stayed with my family.

MR: And then I guess you moved to Illinois when he came back?

MM: When he got out from...

MR: Okay. You have anything else you would like to say?

MM: No, I think that about covers it.

MR: Ok, well thank you very much. This has been very helpful.

END OF INTERVIEW