

**Interview of Marcia Larsen on her experience
working as a civilian employee in Army Special Services in Asia**

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5Ruth Stewart: [0:02] Marcia Baer Larsen is being interviewed today in San Antonio,
6 Texas, uh, as a member of the Women's Overseas Service League - San
7 Antonio Unit. This is February the 6th, 2007. Interviewed by Ruth Stewart
8 and Trish Martin.

9

10 [0:23] Marcie, how about starting out by telling us about where you grew
11 up and what kind of a childhood you had, briefly, before you went into
12 your...

13

14Marcia Larsen: Grew up in Long Island. Uh, my daddy was a baker and my mother was a
15 homemaker. And went to college in Rhode Island, Rhode Island School of
16 Design. Graduated in 1964 with a degree in, uh, ceramics with a minor in
17 art history. My first job I applied for was with the Peace Corps and I was
18 accepted and I was supposed to go to Peru when, uh, I heard from the
19 Department of Defense that I had been selected to go overseas to work in
20 Korea. And so I took that one instead. ...college in those days.

21

22Patrician Martin: [1:15] Yeah, but you were a 20-year-old but you were already a college
23 graduate.

24

25Marcia Larsen: Yes.

26

27Patricia Martin: [1:20] And you were going in for Special Services?

28

29Marcia Larsen: Yes.

30

31Patricia Martin: [1:22] Okay.

32

33Ruth Stewart: [1:29] And you said you went to Korea first thing?

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35Marcia Larsen: Mm-hm.

36

37Ruth Stewart: [1:31] With the Special Services?

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39Marcia Larsen: Right.

40

41Ruth Stewart: [1:34] And that was when, then?

42

43Marcia Larsen: 1964.

44

1 Ruth Stewart: [1:38] 1964.
2

3 Marcia Larsen: Wanna know when?
4

5 Ruth Stewart: [1:42] That's okay. 1964 will, will do it. And then what were you doing
6 when you got there?
7

8 Marcia Larsen: Um, I was, uh, a crafts director. I ran a Special Services Recreational
9 Crafts facility.
10

11 Ruth Stewart: [1:58] What?
12

13 Marcia Larsen: C-R-A-F-T-S, crafts facility, recreational. I was a Supervisory Recreation
14 Specialist.
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16 Ruth Stewart: [2:08] Please say that again. You were a supervis-...
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18 Marcia Larsen: Supervisory Recreation Specialist. And apparently that was in November
19 of 1964. Would you like to keep this? It describes all the jobs.
20

21 Ruth Stewart: [2:29] And so then you, you were working with the, uh, troops when they
22 were off-duty, was that it? And providing [inaudible 2:39]?
23

24 Marcia Larsen: Yes, providing recreation. Yeah, we had a wood shop, we had a photo
25 shop, we taught them pottery, we taught them anything they wanted to
26 learn.
27

28 Ruth Stewart: [2:53] And how did you relate to the troops when they came in?
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30 Marcia Larsen: I had a wonderful time with them. 'Cause I was pretty close to their age.
31 And I was cute!
32

33 Ruth Stewart: [3:04] [laughter] Go on, describe a little bit about that.
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35 Marcia Larsen: [coughing]
36

37 Ruth Stewart: [3:09] Your role there.
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39 Marcia Larsen: Well, since my, my major in college was ceramics and I was in Korea, we
40 did a lot of tours to old, um, Korean pottery sites and kiln sites and we
41 built kilns and, uh, made pottery in the [inaudible 3:34] Korean way and
42 the guys really enjoyed it. I also learned photography because I had the, I
43 had the best equipment and we had wonderful photo labs. And I took
44 photo tours. I took the guys over to Japan and, and around the temple sites

1 in Korea and did lots of photo tours. Best job a person coulda had in the
2 world.
3
4 Ruth Stewart: [4:03] What were your living conditions there?
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6 Marcia Larsen: Well, when I first, uh, went overseas, I was living in a room in a Quonset
7 hut. No portable water. Uh, my first mamasan and, uh, I thought it was
8 great! [coughing] Actually, in Korea I think it was all Quonset huts.
9
10 Ruth Stewart: [4:28] Mm-hm. But with those caring for you then, the whole time, doing
11 your cooking and laundry and that sort of thing?
12
13 Marcia Larsen: Well, we, we ate in the mess halls.
14
15 Ruth Stewart: [4:37] Mm. Okay.
16
17 Marcia Larsen: Yeah, but they insisted upon doing our laundry. I had to learn that I
18 couldn't, I couldn't wash out my own things and I couldn't pick up my
19 own clothes because that was taking their job away from them. They
20 explained to me...
21
22 Ruth Stewart: [4:52] Mm-hm.
23
24 Marcia Larsen: ...very, very soon when I got there. They said, "You can't do that. This is
25 what we do."
26
27 Ruth Stewart: [4:57] Mm-hm.
28
29 Marcia Larsen: But there was also a beauty shop right in the Quonset huts so we could
30 have our hair done every day.
31
32 Ruth Stewart: [5:03] Mm-hm. Good living.
33
34 Marcia Larsen: Yeah! Yeah! Now, I think we didn't appreciate it then. I think we
35 complained a lot, particularly when they had the toilet paper shortages.
36 We were limited to 3 sheets per person per day.
37
38 Ruth Stewart: [5:18] Oh wow!
39
40 Marcia Larsen: 3 little squares. And, uh, so some of the guys used to save their ration and
41 give it to the girls.
42
43 Ruth Stewart: [5:28] What did you do for recreation there?
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1 Marcia Larsen: My job was recreation.
2

3 Ruth Stewart: [5:30] For your personal. How personal change from that?
4

5 Marcia Larsen: Everything I did was recreation, 'cause we, we took a lot of tours. A lot of
6 shopping and I took the guys on, on shopping tours so they could buy
7 beautiful silk fabrics they had in Korea and they'd send'm home to their
8 families. And I did a lot of travel. I did a lot of trips to Japan and a lot of
9 trips to Hong Kong.
10

11 Ruth Stewart: [6:00] And how long were you there?
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13 Marcia Larsen: 4 years. 1964 to 1968. Then I came back.
14

15 Ruth Stewart: [6:07] In the same location the whole time?
16

17 Marcia Larsen: No, I was in, uh, southern Korea in Daegu for 2 years and then I moved up
18 to the 7th Infantry Division, Camp Casey, for 2 years.
19

20 Ruth Stewart: [6:23] Okay.
21

22 Marcia Larsen: I supervised, uh, Korean employees, taught them English. They taught me
23 Korean.
24

25 Ruth Stewart: [6:35] You taught English to the...?
26

27 Marcia Larsen: Korean employees, so they'd know the names of the tools and how, 'cause
28 they had to teach the GIs that, the craft. They all [inaudible 6:49] the, the
29 people I had working for me, the Korean, uh, employees were just
30 fantastic craftsmen. [coughing] It was unbelievable. [coughing] They,
31 they, there wasn't anything they couldn't do or built with their hands. And
32 they taught this to the GIs.
33

34 Ruth Stewart: [7:05] Do you know if any of the GIs then were ever able to continue that
35 in their future lives, or...?
36

37 Marcia Larsen: Honestly, I don't. I still am in touch with a number of them but they went
38 on to their, their careers.
39

40 Ruth Stewart: [7:23] Mm-hm.
41

42 Marcia Larsen: One was the, uh, regular, the town veterinarian, he just retired as a
43 veterinarian in California. His assistant was with the San Francisco Fire

1 Department and he just retired and I still am in touch with a lot of the
2 librarians and service club girls that I worked with. [coughing]
3
4 Ruth Stewart: [7:50] What were your most memorable experiences there?
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6 Marcia Larsen: Probably going into the, uh, into the Infantry Division areas and, uh, these
7 guys were by themselves. They were up there and there were ANC women
8 and, uh, they had the, uh, the Red Cross gals came in, of course, but they,
9 they, they played games and, and did, you know, the donut kind of thing
10 but I helped provide them with, uh, library services and, and things that
11 they could actually continue doing on when the girls were gone. I did a lot
12 more of that in Thailand.
13
14 Ruth Stewart: [8:41] And it was in Thailand that you went next, then? After the 4 years?
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16 Marcia Larsen: Well, after, um, after Fort Sam Houston and Fort Gordon, Georgia.
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18 Ruth Stewart: [8:48] In between?
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20 Marcia Larsen: Yeah.
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22 Ruth Stewart: [8:50] What were you doing there, then, in, back in the States?
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24 Marcia Larsen: Same thing. [inaudible 8:56] craft, running craft shops.
25
26 Ruth Stewart: [8:56] But on a base?
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28 Marcia Larsen: I was a what they called a Post Crafts Director.
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30 Ruth Stewart: [9:03] And that was where, now?
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32 Marcia Larsen: Fort Gordon, Georgia and Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Is your machine not
33 working?
34
35 Ruth Stewart: [9:14] Yeah, it's working.
36
37 Marcia Larsen: Okay.
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39 Ruth Stewart: [9:16] I mean, it's running. [laughter]
40
41 Marcia Larsen: Oh, okay. [inaudible 9:18]
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43 Ruth Stewart: [9:20] I should've, should be, well, anyway...Fort Sam. The notes are just
44 so, in the research that's being done, I just put a few notes so that...

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2 Marcia Larsen: ...when I was in Thailand, uh, my husband was in the Entertainment
3 Division. We weren't married then but he took care of all the USO shows
4 and so I got to cohost all of the USO shows that came into country for 2
5 years, including a lot of, a lot of work with the Bob Hope Show. I, I
6 provided hospitality to the Bob Hope Troupe and they, uh, that was real
7 enjoyable.
8
9 Ruth Stewart: [10:02] And when did you – let me see, your post, Post Crafts Director at
10 Fort Gordon, Georgia was, when was that?
11
12 Marcia Larsen: Whenever she says.
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14 Ruth Stewart: [10:11] Okay. [coughing] And for Fort Sam...and then you went to
15 Thailand in '69?
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17 Marcia Larsen: Mm-hm.
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19 Patricia Martin: '70.
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21 Ruth Stewart: [10:30] '70. Okay. And...
22
23 Marcia Larsen: I was with [inaudible 10:37] Headquarters. We were, uh, we were
24 stationed in Bangkok and then we moved down to the southern command
25 in, uh, [inaudible 10:47], right on the coast, beautiful country.
26
27 Ruth Stewart: [10:56] In the southern command, okay. And your role in, in all of these
28 situations...
29
30 Marcia Larsen: At this point, I was with the administrative staff so that, instead of just
31 taking care of crafts programs, I worked with all of the recreational
32 facilities. I got to, uh, design golf courses, which was interesting 'cause I
33 still have never played golf. And, uh, gymnasiums and we just, we built a
34 lot of facilities. We also closed down Vietnam. Went in-country and
35 [coughing] inventoried equipment and turned it all over to the Vietnamese
36 and closed down big warehouses full of stuff.
37
38 Ruth Stewart: [11:44] But that was while you were stationed in Thailand?
39
40 Marcia Larsen: I was stationed in Thailand but did a lot of in-country in Vietnam and, uh,
41 and then we'd close out Thailand so I had travel to all the, to the air bases
42 and, uh, give the Thai Army the libraries and, um, turn over all the
43 facilities to, to them and as we turned over the posts. I traveled with the

1 Bob Hope Show whenever he went into, in-country, which was probably
2 one of the most exciting things I think I've ever done.
3
4 Ruth Stewart: [12:26] And how many trips do you remember that [inaudible 12:29]?
5
6 Marcia Larsen: [inaudible 12:29] Vietnam?
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8 Ruth Stewart: [12:30] Mm-hm.
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10 Marcia Larsen: No idea. A lot.
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12 Ruth Stewart: [12:32] Numerous.
13
14 Marcia Larsen: Lots.
15
16 Ruth Stewart: [12:34] Okay.
17
18 Marcia Larsen: And all over country.
19
20 Ruth Stewart: [12:38] Did you have any interaction with the, uh, local people when you
21 were in Thailand?
22
23 Marcia Larsen: Oh, sure. All of our employees were, were, uh, indigenous. And, uh, for
24 years afterward, kept writing letters to them but I guess it's been too many
25 years now. They were, they were fine people. Just very hardworking.
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