

**Interview of Irene Petrie on her WWII
as a mess sergeant in the U.S. Women's Army Corps**

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5Interviewer: [0:02] This is the third interview on this tape for Women's Overseas Service
6League – Orange County. Um, this interview is with Irene Petrie, and I'm gonna
7let her tell you who she is and what she did.
8
9Irene Petrie: I, I'm an ex-WAAC (and WAC); I was signed into the regular army in England
10during my tour of duty. I, uh, was one of the first WAACs to leave, uh, the Los
11Angeles area, being number 87 – A900087 – and found myself at Fort Des
12Moines, Iowa where the men had just abandoned the post and turned it over to the
13women to occupy it at that time. My, uh, captain there was my, we had, uh, all
14men [inaudible 0:55]. My captain was Captain [Dara 0:58], and, those who were
15there remember the man who walked around with riding breeches on and boots
16and a riding crop and slapping his hip with that riding crop. His name was Don,
17Colonel Don C. [Fay 1:14]. I remember clearly because one time, not knowing
18who the man was, I got into a little bit of a discussion with him in the mess hall
19until somebody got behind him and let me know who I was arguing with and I
20quit. [laughter]
21
22Interviewer: [1:31] Um, did he do the British thing of a mustache that twirled at the ends, too?
23
24Irene Petrie: I don't recall any mustache. If he had one, his riding crop was too important.
25
26Interviewer: [1:41] When did you go on active duty?
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28Irene Petrie: In, uh, July of 1942, with basic training.
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30Interviewer: [1:50] Mm-hm. And, how long did you stay in?
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32Irene Petrie: I stayed in until, uh, September of '45.
33
34Interviewer: [1:55] What had you been doing prior to going on active duty?
35
36Irene Petrie: I was, uh, I had worked at, uh, I was working at that time at Sears Roebuck in
37Long Beach when I went in.
38
39Interviewer: [2:13] Uh, did you go in as a, uh, basic recruit or did you go in with an officer
40status or did you go to OCS?
41
42Irene Petrie: Basic recruit and I ended up the whole time, most all the time, as a staff sergeant.
43
44Interviewer: [2:30] Mm-hm. You did not go to OCS or...

1
2Irene Petrie: No.
3
4Interviewer: [2:35] And, uh, what, what influenced you to become a military person?
5
6Irene Petrie: I think there were several reasons. One was that it seemed a good way to do
7 something active for my country; and, as youngsters, we had been instilled with
8 the fact that we were in a great country. My mother and father both believed this
9 and so did 7 of us kids. Two of my brothers at that time were going into the Air
10 Corps and I decided to go into the Women's Army Corps the moment that I heard
11 of it. And, uh, while I was in basic training, it left a lit-, a little bit of time – not
12 very much energy, but a little bit – to let me decide what I wanted to do for the
13 duration plus. And, when I came up with what my qualifications were, I was a
14 good cook, being... [inaudible 3:36] good cooks and bakers and I let people
15 around me know that I cared to go overseas and cook for the personnel who are
16 flying sorties over ene-, enemy territory. With 2 brothers in the service in the Air
17 Corps, it seemed likely that they would go over and I certainly didn't want to get
18 left behind. Anyway, an experience at this time, preparing me for overseas duty,
19 was, out in the field, in the cold and rain and misery of about a November time,
20 uh, was to set up a field range. I'd never seen a field range, but I'd read a lot about
21 them. Well, we finally managed to get something to cook on that experience and
22 that was my first experience with a field range.
23
24 The next thing I did was set up a mess car to feed the troops as they were going
25 down to a southern location. So, two things I learned there – one was that a stove
26 pipe in a mess car must be arranged so that the smoke will not go back into the
27 mess car, especially when you're using coal in the range; the second thing was it's
28 not a wise plan to use, uh, to use-, to plan to have boiled eggs for breakfast when
29 you're going through the mountains of Tennessee. Water spilled, and we had a
30 miserable time.
31
32Interviewer: [4:59] What was the altitude of the mountains in Tennessee?
33
34Irene Petrie: I have no idea.
35
36Interviewer: [5:02] It didn't take longer to boil'm or anything like that? It was just the...
37
38Irene Petrie: No. It was just the fact that we went around all the curves.
39
40Interviewer: [5:09] [laughter] And, had any of the work experience that you had in the military
41 prepare you for a career after you got out, or...?
42
43Irene Petrie: After I got out, I used, uh, the information and practice that I'd had and went back
44 to, uh, college. My, my situation now is that I, I'm prepared to go to dietetic, uh,

1 work dietetic – uh, complete a dietetic course. But, um, I would have to go and
2 stay and work for a year with no pay. But I've had those qualifications for a long
3 time.
4

5Interviewer: [5:48] What was your pay level when you went on active duty?
6

7Irene Petrie: \$21 a month.
8

9Interviewer: [5:54] Did it, uh, when did it go up? Well, of course, with your rank
10 advancements...
11

12Irene Petrie: Yes.
13

14Interviewer: ...while you [inaudible 6:00].
15

16Irene Petrie: It went up a little bit. Uh, I, I went from corporal, while I was still at Fort Des
17 Moines, and went down to Daytona Beach, Florida and was an MP as a corporal.
18 Then I went up to Fort Washington, Maryland and it was there that I met Captain
19 Robertson and she and I were together most of the time that I was in the service.
20 We went overseas together and did our things there all together – but, uh, as a
21 staff sergeant. But, I held the staff sergeant rank until I got out of the service.
22

23Interviewer: [6:31] Did you find any, uh, discrimination evident between the officers and
24 enlisted personnel and the WAAC?
25

26Irene Petrie: No. No discrimination that bothered me at all. We knew the rules and regulations
27 and those didn't bother me, either. But, I felt that I was happier being in the-, an
28 enlisted person, because I could serve the people that I cared to serve.
29

30Interviewer: [6:55] Was there a, uh, rule or regulation regarding, uh, socialization with the...
31

32Irene Petrie: Oh, yes.
33

34Interviewer: [7:02] ...officers?
35

36Irene Petrie: Oh, yes. And I did, uh, a time or two on our sp-, when we were on special duty,
37 go out with a mal-, male officer but always with a written permit from my
38 commanding colonel.
39

40Interviewer: [7:18] Did you have any opportunities for education in the military?
41

42Irene Petrie: No. The only top, no, I think the whole military plan was a very good training
43 session for me. Uh, all the time, I was learning. From the time we went into, uh,
44 Fort Washington, Maryland, where I was put in charge of the mess there, uh, how

1 to come by supplies, how to set up, uh, menus that were suitable – my WAAC
2 officer was a dietitian – how to, uh, plan ahead and to distribute work between
3 cooks and KPs. All of this was a training session for me, and one that I've used all
4 my life, really. And enjoyed. I enjoyed the background.
5

6Interviewer: [8:10] Yes. Um, the assignment that you had was not necessarily allocated as
7 strictly a woman's job, though; there were men that were doing cooking as well
8 as...
9

10Irene Petrie: Oh yes...

11

12Interviewer: [8:22] ...as women...

13

14Irene Petrie: Oh, yes. Uh-huh, always, always – except at Fort [inaudible 8:25].
15

16Interviewer: [8:26] And you felt that, at any place that you were in the service, the, uh, position
17 you held was not discriminated by the fact that you were a woman?
18

19Irene Petrie: Uh, the only thing I could think is, at-, when it came time to hand out the stripes,
20 especially when we were in England at Fort-, uh, at Headquarters 8th Fighter
21 Command at Watford. Uh, we had 3 men's companies and the WAAC company,
22 and I think that the men's company received first stripes because I think that I
23 earned the stripes that I did not get, probably. But, uh, eh – I had fun anyway.
24

25Interviewer: [9:09] Well, at time did the, uh, did you get the feeling that, uh, the male members
26 of the military service did not consider you military?
27

28Irene Petrie: No.
29

30Interviewer: [9:22] And you nev-...

31

32Irene Petrie: Because I was military, and I let them know it. And if I had the say-so, I insisted
33 that this is the way it's gonna be.
34

35Interviewer: [9:29] You didn't get any, uh, backlash on that when you got out, in regard to
36 joining service organizations or anything of the sort – or, didn't you join them?
37

38Irene Petrie: Let me, let me tell you about backlash, and it's a very painful situation for me.
39 When I got out of the service, uh, a very fine fellow that I'd gone with before I
40 went into the service, uh, took me out. I was delighted. He'd been stateside in the
41 Air Corps. Well, all he thought was he was gonna haul me off to bed. And what I
42 thought was absolutely damned different!
43

44Interviewer: [10:04] [laughter]

1
2Irene Petrie: And I finally got out of the car down in, uh, Long Beach and said, you know,
3 "Go!" and called my father to come pick me up. I was 24 or 25 years old then.
4
5Interviewer: [10:15] But this was one of the, the, uh, impressions that, for some reason or
6 another...
7
8Irene Petrie: ...that we were some kind of whores.
9
10Interviewer: [10:25] Yeah.
11
12Irene Petrie: If you were a whore stateside prior to going into service, that's what you were in
13 the service...
14
15Interviewer: [10:30] ...you were in the service.
16
17Irene Petrie: Otherwise, you were the same as you were then.
18
19Interviewer: [10:34] And I always felt that the men's attitude toward women in the service, in
20 this particular area, was based on stories that they had made up in their barracks.
21 None of them were based on personal experience, because if they had been, they
22 wouldn't have talked about it. [laughter]
23
24Irene Petrie: That's right. And, you know, I was ready to get, to go back into the service and go
25 back overseas where they treated me like a lady. When you were overseas, and
26 you were out among the men like we were – I was in a mobile unit, traveling all
27 over France – those fellas held you so high on a pedestal, don't fall off.
28
29Interviewer: [11:11] Right.
30
31Irene Petrie: And we didn't. We didn't dare.
32
33Interviewer: [11:15] Um, what kind of housing did you have in the States?
34
35Irene Petrie: In the States?
36
37Interviewer: [11:20] Yeah.
38
39Irene Petrie: We had, we had, we had hotel housing down at, uh, Daytona Beach, Florida. We
40 had, uh, post housing at Fort Washington, Maryland and where we, we had post
41 housing just prior to going overseas.
42
43Interviewer: [11:35] Was post housing a big, open-bay barracks type of thing, or did you have,
44 uh, rooms, or...

1
2Irene Petrie: Um, we had both.
3
4Interviewer: [11:43] You had both.
5
6Irene Petrie: We had both. But, as mess sergeant, I usually got an area to myself.
7
8Interviewer: [11:50] You had a, sort of a private quarters [laughter], or a private room in a big
9 dormitory?
10
11Irene Petrie: That's right.
12
13Interviewer: [11:56] Did, uh, what kind of rooms did you have overseas?
14
15Irene Petrie: Uh, it's [inaudible 12:01]-type, uh, with all of us right in the same barracks. Right
16 in the same building.
17
18Interviewer: [12:06] Right.
19
20Irene Petrie: And, we had different buildings. We had barracks 1, 2, 3, and 4 at Watford at
21 Bushey Hall and, when we went over to France, we had, uh, I had hotel housing.
22 We usually had hotel housing at our base but, when we were out, we scrambled
23 for any kind of housing we could find.
24
25Interviewer: [12:32] And, uh, what was your opinion of the medical care you received?
26
27Irene Petrie: Well, while I was in France, uh, we, when we first – I landed on Omaha Beach
28 with, with the group I assigned to with my WAAC officer and 6 officers and 12
29 enlisted men. We went from there up to, um, Valognes woods and we spent some
30 time there where the food, there was ver-, not very much food. But, we did get
31 regular meals. Then we went on up into Paris. I went up with the first group that
32 went into Paris after the Germans had left for the second time. And, after we got
33 there, they were using the food as fast as it would come in to feed the troops and,
34 as the troops went on passed Paris, then we didn't get much food and what we
35 could scrounge, we did, and what we could go down to the beach and pick up, we
36 did. But, my biggest medical problem was from not having enough food, not
37 having enough calcium and vitamin C, and I, I had a really bad case of – what did
38 they call it? – Raynaud's disease.
39
40Interviewer: [13:45] Mm-hm.
41
42Irene Petrie: And, I also did not have periods for several months because of the lack of food.
43
44Interviewer: [13:55] And, when were you issued uniforms?

1
2Irene Petrie: At Fort Des Moines.
3
4Interviewer: [14:01] As soon as you went in the service?
5
6Irene Petrie: Yeah. Some of them were those great coats that were clear down to the ground,
7 but we were issued uniforms then.
8
9Interviewer: [14:12] Uh, how long, uh – did, did you have to wear uniforms all the time or
10 were you allowed to wear civilian clothes?
11
12Irene Petrie: No. We wore uniforms all the time. Uh, we wore our stripes and our bars and all
13 our hash and stuff while we were still in England. The third year I was in, I spent
14 in France and there, because of the war situation, we wore none of our trappings.
15
16Interviewer: [14:35] Yeah. Uh, did you use any of the benefits of the GI Bill after you got out?
17
18Irene Petrie: No. I didn't need to.
19
20Interviewer: [14:42] Did you receive any type of veteran's, uh, pension or, uh, medical
21 disability pay or anything of the sort?
22
23Irene Petrie: No. I didn't but I have taken advantage, psychologically, uh, from the Veteran's
24 Administration, uh, and I've also taken advantage – I had some teeth worked on
25 and a kidney problem, so I do have a C-number.
26
27Interviewer: [15:06] And, what was the most unpopular regulation that, that you encountered?
28 Or, did you just accept them as they were?
29
30Irene Petrie: I just accepted them as they were. And, being a mess sergeant, uh, gave me a
31 status somewhat different than just the, the private because you could pretty well
32 – I could pretty well state what I wanted and what I cared about and I was in
33 charge of a, uh, barracks, keeping it clean, and I was also in charge of a parade,
34 parading activities and stuff like that.
35
36Interviewer: [15:42] Now, um, what were your memorable experiences during your years in
37 the service? Now, I'm gonna let you go on on your own.
38
39Irene Petrie: All right.
40
41Interviewer: [15:49] [laughter]
42
43Irene Petrie: Well, after we had worked for about a year at, uh, Watford in England, Edith and
44 I were assigned to this troop, a, a special group of 12 enlisted men and myself,

1 sev-, 6 officers, and my WAAC officer. And then, it was our job to go down to
2 South Hampton, where the troops were departing, it was right after D-Day, and
3 where troops were departing to go over to the shores of France and to prepare
4 food for the fellows that were boarding ships. And, for that, I had 120 field
5 ranges, back to back, with the tr-, with the head cook in charge of, of all of the
6 field ranges. The things that I had to do was to see if the field ranges were kept in
7 repair, which I set up a huge reefer and scheduled men to work on the field
8 ranges. And then whenever the head cooks had gotta have some food, go find a
9 GI in the 6x6 and go pick the food up and there was such a press-, pressu-,
10 pressure of humanity down there. At that time, we were dealing with V1s and
11 V2s, too, and I was actually had been accustomed to the aircraft coming over. We
12 went through about, uh, a year of that in England because we weren't that far out
13 of London. So that was one of the difficult things to deal with [inaudible 17:13].
14

15Interviewer: [17:14] If it was a V1 or 2, as long as you could hear it, wasn't any danger.
16

17Irene Petrie: That's right! [laughter] As long as the thing was right up here – if, if it kept going
18 right straight above you, then you were all right. Then they'd land beyond you.
19

20Interviewer: [17:27] If they kicked that after they got passed you, you didn't worry about it.
21

22Irene Petrie: That's right. That's right. Anyway, and then, uh, uh, from there, one of the things I
23 think impor-, that I think was important to me down on the bea-, on the coast
24 there was that, uh, I felt it was terribly important when some of these young men
25 who were 19, 20, maybe even 18...
26

27Interviewer: [17:51] ...17.
28

29Irene Petrie: ...uh, would need to talk to somebody, I'd take the time and let them talk, no
30 matter what, people could just wait, and I listened to them because they needed to
31 talk, they were going, and they knew they were [fathers 18:06]. So I did that.
32 Anyway, pretty soon, it was Edith's and my turn to put on our ski pants and wait
33 our turn to board the LST, which was up, one of these rope red ladders up the side
34 of the ship with our rope red ladders up the side of the ship with our [inaudible
35 18:25] bags on and our red belts on and all this kind of garbage and there was no
36 place to keep 2 women on that boat so they gave us some of the officer's quarters.
37 It was during that night I went down and found the cooks in this place and I
38 walked around and checked to see what all was going on and they allowed me to
39 help make some light rolls, so I had fun doing that. Then I went back up to find
40 my bunk and it-, I was going to sleep on the top bunk and my captain was
41 sleeping on the bottom bunk. She didn't feel very good, but she wanted a shower.
42 Last shower, we didn't know when, so she went and took her shower then I got
43 into the shower. She was to stand guard – I was to guard for her, but she was
44 feeling pretty puny, so she says, "Lieutenant [Bruner 19:17], will you watch this

1 door, please?" and off she went and crawled in her bunk. About that time, there
2 was a big crash. Our LST had hit an LCI in the fog and the dark of crossing the
3 channel, so, uh, we just waited to see what would happen. Pretty soon,
4 information filtered back that, yes, uh, there was a bash in the landing door. Our
5 group was right by the door. They were fine, and it was above water line, so we
6 proceeded on and landed on Omaha Beach then next afternoon.
7
8Interviewer: [19:52] What day was that?
9
10Irene Petrie: I have no idea.
11
12Interviewer: [19:55] I mean what date?
13
14Irene Petrie: I do not know the date.
15
16Interviewer: [19:57] You don't know? [laughter]
17
18Irene Petrie: Uh, it was, it was probably the first part of August, uh, after the D-Day.
19
20Interviewer: [20:06] Of '44?
21
22Irene Petrie: Uh-huh, of '44. It was the first part of August but, what date, I don't remember. I
23 may have a record of it someplace, I don't know. So then, uh, we went up to
24 Valognes and spent a little bit of time there and, there, I had my own tent, but we
25 were mixed with the men all the time. And, to get to the chow tent, we had to
26 meet in groups and go across the commanding officer's grounds, supposedly.
27 And, uh, so you'd go and wait by the fence until there was 4 or 5 of you
28 somebody could march you across to eat. The food was just as tacky there as it
29 was anywhere because they had powdered eggs and powdered milk and all of this
30 powdered stuff that we'd been dealing with in England, anyway. We'd done pretty
31 good, but I think I ought to go back to England for a minute. Edith and I were
32 asked to by, uh, the war department to evaluate the foods as they ca-, or were
33 arriving and as they were being dispensed and utilized. We came up with a couple
34 of ideas that we thought were pretty good ones. One was to have the fowl, uh, uh,
35 take, take the viscera out of the fowl before they mail-, froze them and sent them
36 over because that would lighten the load and then keep them from spoiling so
37 rapidly when we were defrosting them. The second one was to load the ships with
38 a balanced diet at New York so that those that came through would have a
39 balanced diet and not be a whole shipload of pork. Like one time, we got – for 3
40 or 4 weeks – we had nothing but pork. Everybody got sick. You can't do that!
41
42Interviewer: [21:52] Of course they did!
43

1Irene Petrie: Anyway, uh, from Valognes, uh, our orders came and our, all of our group got
2 into their, the command car and our Jeep and Edith and I were in the Jeep. We
3 had been issued rifles, for what purpose, we didn't know but we hid'm. Because
4 we figured if the Germans got us, we were gonna battle our way through that
5 when it got there, not with a gun. So anyway, we, that day, we went up into Paris
6 and that was the day that the Germans had left for the second time. And we, by
7 the time we got there, there was quite a convoy of GIs, both ahead of us and
8 behind us. We went up to the Arc de Triomphe and then we went right on down
9 the street and, not very far down one of those streets was the Grand Hotel where
10 we were going to be staying. One of my memories there is of seeing a French
11 woman riding a bicycle, beautifully coiffed, a hat, gloves, high-heeled shoes –
12 riding a bicycle to wherever she was going but she was just so dressed up, riding a
13 bicycle. I couldn't believe it.

14
15 We did have experiences there, too. Our problem there – my problem there – was
16 to prepare the kitchen to take care of 1,000 GIs as they came back from the
17 frontlines on a rest leave. To do that, my WAAC officer and I and several others
18 who were doing other kinds of jobs in the Grand Hotel went out to a German
19 warehouse and we appropriated, uh, sheets and bedding, some other things – a
20 few things that we wanted to try to ship home, which we did – some of us. Uh,
21 but it was, we got into the warehouse before – and the big pots and pans – but we
22 got into the German warehouse before, uh, supply came along. Because when
23 they came in, then they inventoried everything, and we couldn't get to it, so we
24 took care of that. My job then was to clean up the kitchen. If you've ever seen a
25 filthy kitchen, it was that kitchen. The-, where they kept their meats was really
26 one of the most stinkin' places I ever got into and it took days to clean it up – 'til
27 it would stand an inspection.

28
29Interviewer: [24:08] I can imagine it would have been bad because the Germans were back and
30 forth, they didn't know if they were there or leaving and, uh, they didn't have time
31 to worry about their kitchens.

32
33Irene Petrie: No, they really, they really didn't.

34
35Interviewer: [24:20] No.

36
37Irene Petrie: They did not, and, and lots of times, they shut their eyes to things. Actually, one
38 of the places that we got into, uh, there was still equipment laying, they had been
39 doing surgical things, and there was still some of their equipment laying out on
40 the tables because they had just taken their people and gone. Anyway, uh...

41
42Interviewer: [24:42] Because basically they were a very clean people...

43
44Irene Petrie: They were clean, but the French are not clean.

1
2Interviewer: [24:47] The French are not... [laughter]
3
4Irene Petrie: No. But, and I didn't speak a bit of French and the French didn't speak a bit of
5 English, but we did finally learn to work together and understand each other.
6 They called me Mademoiselle Sergante, and, uh, as, uh, time went on, why – as
7 time went on, um, uh, they learned that I had the power to fire them, so this made
8 some, some difference. And, my little chef was Chef [Pramo 25:24] and he had a
9 little round stomach – he wasn't as tall as I – and he had one of these huge
10 handlebar mustache, dancing eyes, he looked like a miniature Santa Claus in his
11 tall cap. He was a character, but he was really, I, a, a, he was a treasure to me in a
12 memory.
13
14Interviewer: [25:43] How long did you stay – when did you get out of the service?
15
16Irene Petrie: When did I get out of the service?
17
18Interviewer: [25:46] Yes.
19
20Irene Petrie: In, uh, September of 1945.
21
22Interviewer: [25:51] Uh, you left Europe then shortly after the war ended?
23
24Irene Petrie: Yes. Yes. The war was not over with yet when I was in the staging area, uh, with
25 Japan. I think it was while I was in the staging area to come home.
26
27Interviewer: [26:06] Yeah. It was August.
28
29Irene Petrie: Uh-huh. Then, I do have some other experiences.
30
31Interviewer: [26:12] Go ahead with them.
32
33Irene Petrie: All right.
34
35Interviewer: [26:14] I just didn't know where you were and then, I thought, well, I'd get that
36 part in now [laughter].
37
38Irene Petrie: Okay.
39
40Interviewer: [26:19] Go ahead.
41
42Irene Petrie: Um, act-, Edith and I were, uh, then put – all of our unit was called back together
43 then and we had a test kitchen on the Isle of Saint Germain in Paris. And, we were
44 all – each of us – she and I and other men and so forth, were put in charge of

1 groups and we were called mess teams. We were a WAAC mess team. And, uh,
2 we had a man officer and we had Edith and then, uh, our Jeep, and our 6x6. It was
3 our purpose to go out into the field after we'd been, uh, requisitioned by some
4 field commander and help the men doing the cooking to know where their supply
5 source was, for both food and repairs. And, they gave this information to us
6 verbally because it was, at the time, the Belgian Bulge and that was a cold,
7 miserable job. But, one of the things we learned was to always set up a control by
8 a running inventory so that people will, so those who are working with the food,
9 will know where it is and so it won't be going out on the black market, one way or
10 the other. And, people can steal in the strangest ways! This was an exc-
11 experience, believe me, but if we put up a running inventory then they could do
12 their menus and they could carry on from there.

13
14 But, many of the men who had come over to the continent, uh, as cooks had been
15 hauled out and gone up to the frontlines. They would pull numbers out of a hat
16 and say, "You're going," "You're going," "You're going," "Here's your rifle, go!"
17 And so the new, new kids coming in didn't know how to handle field ranges,
18 didn't know how to repair them, didn't know how to cook! So, this was our job.
19 We did that – we also set up, uh, sandwich stops for the GIs as they came back
20 from the frontlines. And, uh, uh, one of the tasks that, to me, was a really unusual
21 one was I was called down to [inaudible 28:25] one time. They had a POW, uh,
22 encampment down there of Germans and the Germans were squawking and
23 making a terrible fuss about they didn't like the food, so I went down, I was sent
24 down to find out what was wrong. Well, they were squawking because they didn't
25 get their soup. They, they were having the very same diet that the American GI
26 was getting out in the field. They had a piano to play. They didn't have anything
27 they had to do all day long. So they squawked. I got mad. [laughter] That was one
28 time when I really went back and said, you know, "Put those guys to work."

29
30 Another time was up at, uh, the northern coast of France, we had, uh, the staging
31 areas for the men – we called them Philip Morris and Chester Field and Lucky
32 Strike and all this kind of stuff. So, uh, one of the tasks that fell to my-, me was to
33 have the, some of those POWs work. So, when I told them to work, they were
34 supposed to work, you know? When I saw'm not working, I'd just go and tell'm, in
35 English, "If you want to hear me, fine, and if you don't, that's your problem. If
36 you don't wanna work, we'll ship you right down to the coast and you can just
37 remove all those – what do they call those things? – mines! Mines, landmines, but
38 they were-, there was a bunch of water, too. Yeah, and there were a lot of
39 landmines up there.

40
41 Interviewer: [30:06] Shoe mines [laughter]

42
43 Irene Petrie: Yeah, antipersonnel, and all that kind of stuff.
44

1Interviewer: [30:13] Well, you were a busy gal while you were over there!
2
3Irene Petrie: Well, I have a claim to fame, as well. Uh, during the time I was working at the
4Grand Hotel, we had to work with the, uh, food administrator of Paris with some
5very interesting people. His wife had been in the First World War and she had
6been a, uh, woman on the news-, a women's news-, a, a women's magazine. I
7think it was the Women's Home Journal. Lovely lady! But, through them, my
8WAAC officer and I were invited to General de Gaulle's home for Sunday
9afternoon dinner. We went about 3:00, dressed up, I tell you! Just, really spit &
10polished. We walked into a place they called their library – it was dank and cold
11and miserable, and we waited and waited – nobody was around. But, when they
12finally op-, slid open the door, uh, it was a beautiful table – the most beautiful
13table I'd ever seen – with 3 different colored wine glasses and crystal and all this
14stuff, the silverware and, little Madame de Gaulle, who was the mother of General
15de Gaulle – General was in London at this time but this was little Madame de
16Gaulle and she was having this, uh, Sunday dinner. That dinner lasted for,
17probably until 8:00. But, it was terribly interesting to me, every time I – I stood up
18to make a toast and some kooky character on my right stood up, too, and I
19thought, well what's wrong with him? So, anyway, I finally found out by the
20interpre-, the priest across the table that he had been in the First World War and
21he was a corporal and I outranked him, everything I did, he had to do.
22
23Interviewer: [32:03] Oh! [laughter]
24
25Irene Petrie: Drive me crazy. But, uh, Madame de Gaulle, Mama, was there and she was in
26charge of everything. And then, the 2 daughters were there and 2 of the 4
27granddaughters were there. And, that pleased me – that was great fun.
28
29Interviewer: [32:21] That would have been!
30
31Irene Petrie: But, uh, every time you ate a little bit of something, there were bottles of wine
32and people were always pouring wine. And, uh, so finally I said to my WAAC
33officer, who was sitting across the table, "Edith, I cannot handle any more wine."
34So, she pulls herself up and she says, "I want you to know, my WAAC is not
35accustomed to drinking wine at home for dinner and she can't have any more."
36[laughter] Good thing she did!
37
38Interviewer: [32:50] It was! [laughter] You went home sober. [laughter]
39
40Irene Petrie: Not quite sober but, but, nevertheless.
41
42Interviewer: [32:59] Did you have any further experiences you wanted to relay?
43
44Irene Petrie: I think that's enough.

1
2Interviewer: [33:04] Uh, what did you do after you got out of the service?
3
4Irene Petrie: Uh, the first thing I did was go, uh, back dow-, I went into Fort MacArthur and
5 worked in the financial, finances there for a while.
6
7Interviewer: [33:23] As a military perso-, no...
8
9Irene Petrie: Not as a military...
10
11Interviewer: [33:26] As a civilian?
12
13Irene Petrie: As a civilian. Uh-huh. And, then, later on, uh, I met my husband through a
14 woman who had been driver of the 6x6 that we traveled throughout France and
15 Belgium and Luxembourg in as a WAAC mess team. Edith and I had selected our
16 people, anyway, so we knew who these people were and we knew a little bit about
17 them before they joined our group to be 8 enlisted women and our officers. And,
18 uh, she lived in Glendora, so I had visited her and, after she got home, and she
19 knew my husband. She and her husband knew him for years before and so they
20 finally introduced me to him. He also was an ETO, one of a group of select MPs,
21 over 6 feet tall, and you see him in film frequently. And, uh, then, uh, we were
22 married and have a daughter and now we have a, 2 granddaughters and a lovely
23 son-in-law and they live in Glendora.
24
25Interviewer: [34:29] And I don't imagine your cooking experience in the military has hurt you
26 a bit.
27
28Irene Petrie: It, it hasn't hurt me a bit. People think sometimes that something is a big project
29 and I think, "Well...it's not that big." [laughter]
30
31Interviewer: [34:42] Of course, I suppose it got, uh, was a little difficult at first to scale down
32 your measurements on what you were cooking.
33
34Irene Petrie: [laughter] The hardest part was scaling it up and not getting involved in a great
35 quantity of something that I couldn't use. [laughter]
36
37Interviewer: [34:57] Right! [laughter] Thank you very much, Irene!
38
39
40/ab