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Roberta Tidmore

Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by  
David Dunham  
in 2011

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Roberta Tidmore

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Interview 1: December 30, 2011

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Dunham: Today is December 30, 2011, and this is David Dunham with the Rosie the Riveter, World War Two American Homefront Oral History Project. I'm here with Roberta Tidmore in her lovely home in La Mesa, California. Thank you so much for inviting me here today. I'm really looking forward to speaking with you and learning about your story. We usually start at the very beginning, so can you tell me your full name and date of birth?

1-00:00:27

Tidmore: Roberta Jane Randolph Tidmore, and I was born on March 19, 1922 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Dunham: Can you tell me about your family, some of your family background?

1-00:00:49

Tidmore: I have one sister, or I had one sister. All my family is gone, except two nieces. My sister was eleven years older than I. My mother died when I was nine, and my father finally remarried when I was eleven. That's about it.

Dunham: What was your mother's and father's background? Where did they come from?

1-00:01:18

Tidmore: Miles, Iowa. Have you ever heard of it?

Dunham: No.

1-00:01:22

Tidmore: I doubt it because there were only 400 people in Miles, so it wasn't a very big town; it was a farming town. And my grandmother on my mother's side was from Germany. And my father's side I don't really know. I know the Randolphs came from Pennsylvania. I think they were Pennsylvania Dutch and German. That's about all I know.

Dunham: What did your father do when you were growing up?

1-00:01:57

Tidmore: He was a salesman, a produce salesman. He traveled around Iowa selling groceries to the little farming grocery stores because that's all we had. Then in his later years he went into real estate. He was in World War II, very patriotic man. He's probably why I joined the Marine Corps. Not that he pushed me, but he was happy. He thought it was great.

Dunham: Where did he serve?

1-00:02:36

Tidmore: He served in Europe. Alsace-Lorraine was where he was. He was in a haystack sleeping, and a piece of hay stuck him in the eye, and he lost the sight of one eye.

Dunham: Oh, wow. That's not the most common injury.

1-00:03:05

Tidmore: No. It wasn't for a war injury, was it?

Dunham: How did his business do during the Depression?

1-00:03:13

Tidmore: He didn't do well at all. He did real estate, and that wasn't any good. And he had a grocery store, and he didn't make it there. Luckily, my step-mother had a job in Iowa City, at the University golf course, so that kind of helped pave the way.

Dunham: And how did your mother pass, if you don't mind my asking.

1-00:03:44

Tidmore: Pneumonia. She caught cold. That was in the thirties, and they didn't have any way of doing anything but giving her oxygen.

Dunham: Did you grow up all through your childhood in Cedar Rapids?

1-00:03:57

Tidmore: Yes, I did. I went to Franklin High School, and that's where I graduated. Then I went to the University of Iowa, and I decided I was going to be a nurse. I took a five-year nursing course at the University, so I had two years toward a Bachelor of Science, and then three years of nursing. I was in nursing for a year when the war broke out. And I didn't exactly like it. I was not doing well, very badly, in fact. And they said, "You have six months to bring up your grades, or you're out." So I decided that I'd better get out. That's when I went to Rockford, Illinois.

Dunham: Do you remember where you were when you heard the attack on Pearl Harbor?

1-00:04:56

Tidmore: Oh, yes. I was walking down the road to go to a place that was called "The D and L." It was a restaurant with a dance floor on the second floor. I was on my way down there, and my roommate yelled out the window and said, "You'd better come back here. We're going to war!" And the boy that I was dating at the time was in ROTC, so I kind of knew that he would be going, doing something. And he did. He left.

Dunham: This was while you were in college?

1-00:05:39

Tidmore: Yes, at the University of Iowa.

Dunham: So how long was it after the war started that you left nursing school?

1-00:05:52

Tidmore: Let's see. The war started in—

Dunham: Late '41.

Tidmore: '41. I think I left in 1943 and went to Rockford in the summer of '43, I think it was.

Dunham: And how did you hear about the opportunity at Rockford?

1-00:06:08

Tidmore: I didn't hear about it. Three of the girls in the dorm where I lived—I was at nursing school, so I wasn't in the same dorm that they were, but I had lived with them during my two years of college. They decided that they were going to quit school and go to Rockford. How they heard about it, I have no idea. But they did. Four of us, actually, quit, and we all went to Rockford.

Dunham: How far is Rockford—?

1-00:06:46

Tidmore: I don't know, really.

Dunham: How did you get there?

1-00:06:55

Tidmore: I took a train. Actually, I think I took a bus, because I didn't have much money at the time; none of us did. I know I got there late because they got jobs for day work in the supply room. The three of them had found a home that they were living in. The three of them had one bedroom. And I came later. The woman that owned the house put a cot in the hall outside their bedroom door, and that was my room. And then I went down to the J.I. Case Company, and they didn't have any more day jobs, so I worked the night shift. That's when I was doing gap covers.

Dunham: What kind of training did you get?

1-00:07:53

Tidmore: I didn't have any training. They showed me how to drill a hole and countersink it so that the screw wouldn't go through. Then they gave me these strips of metal and said, "Okay, you fit these over the leading edge of the wing." And that was it.

Dunham: This is working on wings for the B-26?

1-00:08:20

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: So, same day, they said, “Here’s how to do it,” and you just started doing it?

1-00:08:24

Tidmore: Yes, that night I started doing it. And that night I went home and slept on the cot until we found an apartment above a bar in Rockford. The four of us moved into that.

Dunham: A little nicer accommodation?

1-00:08:44

Tidmore: A little better.

Dunham: Was it a bar you frequented?

1-00:08:50

Tidmore: No, we didn’t, actually. None of us drank that much, I don’t think. I’m sure we didn’t because I know we didn’t go to that bar. We were pretty comfortable there, if I remember correctly.

Dunham: Do you remember what kind of money you were making?

1-00:09:17

Tidmore: No, I don’t. Probably if I looked—no, I don’t think so. I think the only receipts I have are from United. I don’t have anything else. I don’t know what I had then. But I don’t think I made very much money. I know that at one point I went to see my sister in Flint, Michigan, to visit her—I think it was around Thanksgiving time—and I think I took the bus. She wanted me to stay there and work at Chevrolet because that’s where her husband was working. I didn’t want to do that, didn’t want to leave the girls.

Dunham: Your friends, yes. Were a lot of people coming to Rockford?

1-00:10:02

Tidmore: Not that I know of. The plant was busy.

Dunham: But mostly with locals?

1-00:10:11

Tidmore: Locals, mostly, I think. Most of them had been working, of course, on farm equipment because that’s what it was.

Dunham: Were they doing other things besides the B-26 wings?

1-00:10:25

Tidmore: No, that was all they did. But you know what I heard afterwards? The B-26 was known for losing their wings.

Dunham: Oh. I didn't read that; I did a little research, but—

1-00:10:38

Tidmore: I don't know whether that's true or not. I hope not. At least I didn't have any part in attaching it to the fuselage. I just made the gap covers.

Dunham: Was it hard, or did you take to it easily?

1-00:10:50

Tidmore: No, it wasn't hard. They teased the girls. There were about four of us on the line. It was a line of people working on the leading edge of the wing. That's where all the electrical equipment was in those days, so there were a number of people working close by, and they teased us a lot.

Dunham: "Teased us" because you were young women?

1-00:11:18

Tidmore: Yes. We were young women.

Dunham: So what was—?

Tidmore: Oh, things like I went to my tool box one day, and there was an artificial snake in it, which didn't make me very happy.

Dunham: Did it ever get a little more serious?

1-00:11:35

Tidmore: No. There wasn't anything.

Dunham: Sometimes we've heard, in the shipyards and elsewhere, particularly on the night shift, sometimes we've heard that things could get a little more "hanky-panky" or—

1-00:11:55

Tidmore: Well, I guess I didn't attract any of them. [laughs]

Dunham: I doubt that was it.

1-00:11:59

Tidmore: Well, I don't know, or else they were scared of me. Maybe that was it. But no. I didn't have any problem there or in the Marine Corps.

Dunham: Were you wearing work clothes, and pants?

1-00:12:10

Tidmore: Oh, yes.

Dunham: So was that kind of a big transition?

1-00:12:11  
Tidmore: No. That didn't bother me too much. I guess I missed dancing. I did used to go dancing a lot.

Dunham: And there weren't any dances around?

1-00:12:25  
Tidmore: No. And I didn't have any boyfriends around there to take me dancing.

Dunham: So what did you do for fun while you were there?

1-00:12:31  
Tidmore: We went to movies, I believe. That was about it. And then both of my girlfriends found boyfriends. I didn't. One of them—there were four of us, so the one went into the Marine Corps with me. And the other two got married.

Dunham: During the war.

1-00:12:54  
Tidmore: Mm-hmm.

Dunham: To soldiers?

1-00:12:54  
Tidmore: To soldiers. Yes, they were Army.

Dunham: There was an Army base there?

1-00:12:59  
Tidmore: Yes, close by. I don't know where it was.

Dunham: But they didn't have dances? USO-type—

1-00:13:04  
Tidmore: No. Well, if they did, we weren't invited.

Dunham: Well, you were working the night shift. That's probably the problem.

1-00:13:12  
Tidmore: I missed everything. I really don't know what they did.

Dunham: Did they have three shifts, a day shift, swing, and graveyard?

1-00:13:32  
Tidmore: I worked 3:00 to 11:00.

Dunham: 3:00 to 11:00, swing shift. And your girlfriends all worked the day shift.

1-00:13:34  
Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: But they were doing a different kind of work.

1-00:13:39

Tidmore: They were in a different area anyway. They were in the storage and supply area so that I really didn't ever see them

Dunham: What was their experience like, do you know?

1-00:13:51

Tidmore: Yes, seems to me they had a good time. After I left, two of them got married and went back to Iowa. So, of course, I didn't see much of them.

Dunham: What was the make-up of the work force, gender or race?

1-00:14:13

Tidmore: It was mostly men. Mostly white, I think.

Dunham: Do you remember any non-whites, and did you grow up with it almost all white too?

1-00:14:27

Tidmore: You know, I didn't grow up with any colored at all, any black—well, I think there was one black person in Cedar Rapids. But there were plenty at the University of Iowa. I guess I never paid much attention to what color they were; I really didn't—

Dunham: Do you remember any Asians or Latinos either anywhere along the way up to this point?

1-00:14:57

Tidmore: No. They might have been. I don't really know.

Dunham: I didn't ask; did you join a union?

1-00:15:03

Tidmore: No.

Dunham: You talked about the minimum training you got and "just doing it." Is there anything else you remember about just your first day on the job?

1-00:15:17

Tidmore: No. I don't. All I remember was I had to climb up on the wing. I always had a ladder that I—I worked from the top of the wing down. And I remember that a lot of times I would countersink the hole too deep, and the screw would go all the way through. There must have been quality control, but I don't think they were doing very much.

Dunham: You don't remember a supervisor kind of checking?

1-00:15:52  
Tidmore: I'm sure they did because I had to do some over again. I do remember that.

Dunham: Do you remember any kind of evaluations?

1-00:16:05  
Tidmore: No. I really wasn't there that long.

Dunham: About how long were you there?

1-00:16:12  
Tidmore: Well, let's see. I think I went in August, and January, then, I left.

Dunham: Okay, so about a half a year or a little less.

1-00:16:19  
Tidmore: Yes, about six months.

Dunham: Was there anything else? What about injuries, because sometimes new workers—?

1-00:16:31  
Tidmore: No. I don't recall anybody being injured. I certainly wasn't, not on the job. It was such a short time.

Dunham: Was Rockford much bigger than Cedar Rapids?

1-00:16:42  
Tidmore: Oh, yes. Well, ooh, I don't know that either.

Dunham: It didn't feel like having gone to a—

1-00:16:49  
Tidmore: No. I don't think it probably was much bigger.

Dunham: You mentioned the movies. Do you remember the movie newsreels? Was that a source of info about the war?

1-00:17:05  
Tidmore: Yes, we were always going for the newsreels. I remember seeing those and always—ooh, it looked like we weren't going to get through the war, that we weren't going to win. It really looked bad. It was kind of scary.

Dunham: How else did you get information about the war? Radio?

1-00:17:27  
Tidmore: That was the only way. Just through newsreels. We didn't have any paper. I suppose there was one, but we didn't take one. And people would talk about what was happening. But I don't remember that much about it.

Dunham: Was religion a part of your life growing up and through this period?

1-00:17:54

Tidmore: Yes. I went to all kinds of churches. Whatever friend I had at that time, I'd go to their church. So I was indoctrinated in both the Catholic and the Protestant churches. And we had quite a few in Cedar Rapids. Presbyterian, Methodist.

Dunham: During the war years did you go to services?

1-00:18:20

Tidmore: No, I didn't. I didn't in college. I did up until I went to college. I don't think I did after I started college, and I didn't get involved with any of the churches in colleges or in the Marine Corps, I don't believe.

Dunham: I know you did it for a short period of time. Did you enjoy your work while you did it?

1-00:18:53

Tidmore: Oh, yes. It was fun.

Dunham: Did you have a sense of patriotism relative to working on these planes?

1-00:19:00

Tidmore: Yes. That's why I left, because I thought that everybody needed to do something. We all thought that way then. Everybody.

Dunham: Was there a strong sense of that in the office? Did they do things to commemorate like number of wings, or things about the planes?

1-00:19:26

Tidmore: Nothing like that. If they did, it must have been the day shift because it wasn't on my shift. I guess they did, probably.

Dunham: The war had started when you were in college. Do remember other things that changed, like around rationing, recycling, things you had access to or didn't?

1-00:19:47

Tidmore: No. I don't think I noticed that at all because it was a short time, and I was in nursing. I didn't notice any rationing. I didn't have a car, of course, so that was all right. My father, I remember him saving the silver and making a ball out of the silver from cigarette packages. And he was rolling his own cigarettes And saving twine. I would go home on weekends, and I remember him having problems with rationing. And he was a—what did they call them—he was a night guard that walked around the neighborhood to make sure that everybody had their windows—their blackout curtains down, even in Iowa. At the end, he tried to get back in the service. He was too old of course. That's all I remember about that.

Dunham: I hadn't asked about health care growing up. I know you lost your mom young. I know you left nursing, but what changes did you see in health care, maybe, from growing up and through the war? Did you notice anything?

1-00:21:23

Tidmore: No. I saw a lot of changes in nursing after I got out.

Dunham: What kind of changes?

1-00:21:35

Tidmore: Well, at the time I went into nursing the nurses were supposed to be so protected, and they were supposed to have male orderlies. They didn't have any male nurses. And we weren't supposed to be taking care of the male patient. The orderlies were doing all the care for—but it didn't turn out that way. All of a sudden, all the men were gone. And so that changed. The nurses had to start taking care of everybody. Had to do a little more work. And then I had gone into this five-year nursing course which would have put me into administration rather than on the ward. I liked being on the ward better than I liked being in the office.

Dunham: If you could have stayed on a path where you could have been on the ward, do you think you might have continued in it?

1-00:22:52

Tidmore: No.

Dunham: What else did you not care for about it?

1-00:22:56

Tidmore: There were other things I wanted to do. I didn't really want to be a nurse.

Dunham: And what did you at that time feel like you wanted to do? I know you went and worked at Rockford, but did you have an idea of a dream job?

1-00:23:10

Tidmore: No. I don't think I thought one day ahead. I was pretty spoiled. My father spoiled me.

Dunham: Even though it was a struggle through the Depression, he made sure to—

1-00:23:21

Tidmore: Oh, yes. He made sure I had everything I needed, and I was pretty spoiled.

Dunham: I guess, before I ask about joining the Marine Corps, or maybe it's simultaneous, but how did you end your time at Rockford? Had you already signed up for the Marine Corps?

1-00:23:41

Tidmore: I took a bus trip one weekend. The girls, I think they all had dates or something. I didn't have a date, and I had the weekend off. I don't remember

what weekend it was. I like to watch people, so I got on a bus, and I rode the bus into Chicago. I was just sitting in the bus depot watching everybody, and all these uniforms were coming by, and I thought, “Maybe that’s what I should do.” I know I joined the Marine Corps in Chicago, but I don’t know where I found out about the Marine Corps.

Dunham: When you were observing these people and getting kind of inspired, did you see women in uniform?

1-00:24:36

Tidmore: I did. They were in the Army. I thought, “Well, that looks good.” But then when I started looking into it, and found out that they had Army medical corps and a Navy medical corps, then I decided that’s where they’d put me because I had enough science in college and then nursing that that’s what I’d be going into. I didn’t think I wanted to do that. I thought there would be other things that would be more fun to do, so that’s how come I joined the Marine Corps.

Dunham: Had you already signed up when you went back and resigned from—?

1-00:25:21

Tidmore: No, I went back, and I talked my one roommate into going in with me. The two of us decided—she was agreeable to going into the Marine Corps. She called her father. Her mother had died, and her father was agreeable. I called mine, and he was agreeable. So we went into Chicago, had our physicals, and signed up. January 4.

Dunham: Was your father enthusiastic from the start?

1-00:26:01

Tidmore: Yes, he was. From the start. He thought that was great.

Dunham: So you got your physicals there in Chicago, and then what happened?

1-00:26:05

Tidmore: Then we had to wait until March to go. Then we went into Chicago and had a troop train to—

Dunham: What did you do from January to March? You’d already resigned back in—

1-00:26:20

Tidmore: No. No, I hadn’t. I went back and worked. No, come to think of it, I didn’t because I went home. I think we both went home. She went to—where did she live? She lived in a small town. I don’t know.

Dunham: You both went to stay with family?

1-00:26:43

Tidmore: Yes. We did. We left. Then the other two girls stayed, I think, just a short while, and then they got married.

Dunham: And where was your training, your boot camp?

1-00:26:55

Tidmore: At Camp Lejeune. We took a troop train to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and I think it was six weeks. Four weeks?

Dunham: Can you describe what it was like?

1-00:27:13

Tidmore: Yes. They were very strict. [laughs]

Dunham: You said you were a little spoiled. Was that a shock to the system?

1-00:27:18

Tidmore: Well, yes. I didn't pick up my clothes, [laughs] and I just wanted to be waited on, I guess. I'll tell you, I decided after boot camp that that's what everybody should do, all girls out of college should go join some military organization 'cause they would shape up in a hurry. And they did. They shaped me up. [laughs]

Dunham: Was it a challenge for your girlfriend too?

1-00:27:52

Tidmore: Yes, it was, although she was a little more disciplined than I was, I think.

Dunham: Were there any things that were particularly hard?

1-00:28:05

Tidmore: No, actually it was a lot easier than college had been for some reason. I guess I was more interested in what they were saying. I really did well. I never did very well in school, but I did well on grades in boot camp.

Dunham: Was it more physical, or what types of things were you doing?

1-00:28:24

Tidmore: There was both. Yes, we went through the gas chamber, and we climbed ropes and—

Dunham: What's the gas chamber?

1-00:28:33

Tidmore: They put gas masks on us and put us in a room with gas. And then just all calisthenics, and marching, and—it was fun. It was really interesting, and I enjoyed it.

Dunham: It was all women in your basic training?

1-00:28:57

Tidmore: Yes. The barracks were separated into the men's barracks and the women's barracks. So we didn't see any men around during training, only at work or on dates.

Dunham: Were the women coming from all over?

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: Do you remember any ethnic variety then?

1-00:29:11

Tidmore: No. I don't. I don't remember any blacks, and I did not realize—I know that when the boyfriend I was dating went to the Army, he was sent to Fort Huachuca, which was a black Army base, and only white officers. It didn't even dawn on me that there was so much racial prejudice. I was never involved with any in college. If there was, it didn't seem to make a difference. I didn't notice it until I went to work for United Air Lines. I realize now that I didn't notice it because I was never around black people

Dunham: Had your boyfriend written to tell you about his experiences there?

1-00:30:03

Tidmore: Yes. I don't recall him writing anything about the troops.

Dunham: But did you have chances to see him?

1-00:30:12

Tidmore: No. He went to Italy. He was a paratrooper and went over to the European theater. Then he met a girl in Italy, and he wrote and told me he was going to marry her. So that was the end of him.

Dunham: Was that maybe part of why you didn't have a boyfriend too? Were you sort of yourself being faithful to him for a time?

1-00:30:41

Tidmore: Yes. I thought we were going to get married. But that didn't work out. And it was just as well.

Dunham: Certainly. So what happened from boot camp?

1-00:30:55

Tidmore: Well, then I went to motor transport school. My friend that came with me, Mo, decided she'd do that too. She really kind of wanted to get into OCS, but she didn't quite make it.

Dunham: And OCS is?

Tidmore: Officers' Training School. I don't know why I say that; it is, though. So she went into Motor Transport too. I think we were there another month at North Carolina. Then she was sent to San Diego, and I was sent to Quantico. In Quantico I drove a staff car, officers to Washington or to wherever they wanted to go. I didn't like that very well.

Dunham: What did you not care for?

1-00:32:02

Tidmore: Well, the problem was—like driving them up to Washington I'd get two lieutenants in the back in a station wagon, and I'd drive them to Washington from Quantico, and they'd decide they wanted to go eat somewhere. So I had to sit in the car while they went in to eat. I couldn't go in and eat. Enlisted was bad enough, but being a woman too was worse. So then I decided, "I don't like that," and I asked for a truck.

Dunham: How else did you feel that kind of discrimination?

1-00:32:45

Tidmore: I don't know whether it was true or not, but the rumor was that the general, the commandant of Quantico, had said he would never have women or dogs on his base. And he got both of them. He was assigned women at the air station and at Quantico. And I guess he got dogs too; I don't know. But I know that a lot of the old Marines did not exactly want women in.

Dunham: And that attitude just filtered down, so—

1-00:33:30

Tidmore: And that attitude even to this day has shown up a bit now and then.

Dunham: How else did it play out? Did you experience other things first hand?

1-00:33:40

Tidmore: Yes, I did. I did because I think I was made an example of what you shouldn't do. You were not supposed to cross in front of the general's car if the star on the front of the car was uncovered. I had asked for a garbage truck, and I was picking up the garbage around the officers' hill. It was one way up and one way down, just a circle to pick up the trash. I had two men in the back, and they were black, by the way. They were picking up the trash, and I was driving the truck. I couldn't pick up the GI cans anyway. They were too heavy. They said they were too big for a woman.

Dunham: Do you not agree?

1-00:34:43

Tidmore: Well, yes. I don't know that I could have; maybe I could have. I'm pretty strong, but at any rate—

Dunham: You didn't like the presumption.

1-00:34:47

Tidmore: No. We weren't doing that; the boys were. So I was on my way down the hill with the trash, and there was a street coming into where you exited the hill. And I looked, and it was the general's car. And the star was uncovered. I was supposed to stop. I was in the middle of the intersection before I saw it, so I just kept going. And the chauffeur for the general got back to the base before I did, back to Motor Transport, and reported me. And I lost my license. They took my license. And I had one stripe, and they took my stripe. Then they gave me a push broom and a stick to pick up cigarette butts. And that's what I did for nine months, swept the streets around the Motor Transport garage, and picked up cigarette butts. Finally, after nine months I got a transfer. But they wouldn't let me transfer for nine months. So I know I was an example.

Dunham: Aside from the reality of having to do that for nine months, were people mocking you during that time, so to speak, or—

1-00:36:23

Tidmore: No. They had a recreation room upstairs at Motor Transport, and that's where the women's recreation room was. And then they had the men's recreation room and the pool hall downstairs for the guys.

Dunham: What was the dating scene, if you will, like, or you didn't have a chance to interact?

1-00:36:47

Tidmore: I didn't. I met a fellow in Washington because my bunkies and I would go up to Washington on weekends, and I met somebody that I started dating and I thought I was going to marry. He ended up being shot down the day before the atomic bomb was dropped at Nagasaki, so he didn't come back. But I thought the rest of the time that I was going to marry him. So that was my love life for most of Quantico.

Dunham: When you did have the opportunity to date him, what were you guys doing for fun; where did you go?

1-00:37:38

Tidmore: Up in Washington? We'd go to the Shoreland Hotel—was it the Shoreland; I can't remember—one of the hotels and dance. They had dances all over. He was an officer, and I was an enlisted. And I was not supposed to be seen with him, especially in uniform. So I had a uniform made without any stripes, and I wore that without any insignia. Nobody knew what I was, I guess. No one said anything. But otherwise I couldn't have gone into a restaurant or anyplace with him. There were lines everywhere. No matter where you went in Washington you had to stand in line to get into a grocery store, a bar, a grill, any place.

So most all of the bars would take all of the officers first, and then if there was still room and there were enlisted in line, they'd let us in. And I know—I can't remember the name of the bar now; it was on Geary, I think—and three of us were going to go in and have a drink one hot, hot afternoon. We'd been shopping, and we were all in uniform. I didn't have any stripes on anything at that point because I was still sweeping streets. We got up to the door where maître d' stood, and there was a nice booth, cool, dark, looked great, and we were going to go in and have a drink. We waited and waited, and he said no, we couldn't go in. And he took the officer and his girlfriend behind us and let them in. So we left. [laughs] I don't remember where we went. But there was discrimination against women, and enlisted, in Washington.

Dunham: How did your boyfriend at the time deal with that? Just the way it was?

1-00:40:23

Tidmore: That's just the way it was. You knew that, and I knew I wasn't supposed to be dating him. Probably they wouldn't have killed me, but they would have taken me up for office hours for dating an officer.

Dunham: "Office hours" meaning?

1-00:40:39

Tidmore: See the captain. And then I did go AWOL once. When he was leaving, I went out to Richmond, and I was a day late getting back. I got leave to go, but I was a day late getting back. I got two weeks of mess duty. That was my second tour. First, when I crossed in front of the general, I got two weeks too before they decided what I was going to do. [The] first time I washed dishes, and the second time I peeled potatoes.

Dunham: At this point in time how are you feeling about the military? You'd joined in a very patriotic way—

1-00:41:33

Tidmore: I was very unhappy about it at that point. Yes, I was pretty unhappy at Quantico.

Dunham: Had you talked to your father at all about the challenges you were having?

1-00:41:42

Tidmore: No. No, I didn't want him to—no, I didn't.

Dunham: Were you still feeling partly patriotic, or did you want out, or—

1-00:41:49

Tidmore: Yes, I was. Really, I was worried about it because we'd get all these reports of so many men being killed and the horrible things that were happening to the boys in the Philippines. It was awful. It really was. It was scary.

Dunham: While in the Marine Corps, how were you getting your information about the war?

1-00:42:24

Tidmore: We still had movies. We'd go to the movies.

Dunham: So that was still a big source, the newsreels?

1-00:42:28

Tidmore: Oh, newsreels were *it*, as far as I was concerned. They'd have some information on radios, but mostly it was newsreels, I think, that showed the horrible parts of it. Till I got transferred, I wasn't very happy. And then I came out here.

Dunham: Let me ask, first, you were with other women right there. What kinds of roles were the other women doing?

1-00:43:02

Tidmore: The barracks where we lived, they were all Motor Transport girls. Some of them were mechanics, and most of them were driving.

Dunham: Did you commiserate about—

1-00:43:25

Tidmore: Yes. We did.

Dunham: Were there other stories of even worse experiences?

1-00:43:28

Tidmore: No, I don't recall any.

Dunham: Nothing like around sexual—it wouldn't be called that at the time—but sexual harassment or that kind of thing?

1-00:43:39

Tidmore: I don't think so. I do remember, when I was driving staff car, I had to pick up two girls that were gay. I was so naïve; I didn't have any idea what was going on. But they were being discharged. They found out they were gay, and they were being discharged. They were in the back of the station wagon, and I had to take them over to the captain's office.

Dunham: How did you find out that they were gay?

1-00:44:25

Tidmore: Well, they told me. They told me that's what was happening to them, that they were gay and they were being discharged. And I don't have any idea who they were or anything. I was just shocked.

Dunham: Had you known of any other gays or lesbians growing up?

1-00:44:43

Tidmore: No. I don't think I knew any of—I did think, now as I think back, that there probably were a number of them, you know. But in the group that I ran around with there weren't any. And none of my group ever got harassed, sexually harassed or anything. So, I don't know.

Dunham: Did any of the women get pregnant while they were in—?

1-00:45:14

Tidmore: Yes, two. But they were married. Both of them had been married and not told anyone because if you were married you had to get out of the service. So they didn't tell anyone. And they got pregnant, and then they had to leave.

Dunham: They were discharged.

1-00:45:33

Tidmore: Yes. But two of the girls in my section that I ran around with got pregnant and left.

Dunham: Anything else about Quantico or Washington before you tell me about your transfer to—

1-00:45:52

Tidmore: No.

Dunham: You'd been requesting a transfer, and finally it came through?

1-00:46:00

Tidmore: Finally it came through. How did I get from Quantico to San Diego?

Dunham: Sure.

1-00:46:07

Tidmore: On a troop train. It was, I think, three days. I think I left shortly before Christmas. I did. I had two weeks leave, and I went home for Christmas. Then I got on another troop train and came out here to Los Angeles and then down to San Diego.

Dunham: What's a troop train like, for someone who's never ridden one?

1-00:46:41

Tidmore: Just full of military, some Army, Navy, Marines. I think most of them, though, were Marines when I came from Quantico home to Iowa. I think that was mostly—and that wasn't real long. Did you ever hear about—every place that the train would go through in a small town, the people would come out when the train would come through and have cookies and sandwiches. And the train would slow down at these places and stop if there were a lot of people out with food. And we'd all get out and get our sandwiches and take

them back to the train. And that happened all the way from Cedar Rapids to San Diego too. I remember, I think we got the best food in Salt Lake City.

Dunham: Do you remember what it was?

1-00:47:53

Tidmore: No. It was sandwiches, I remember. I was thinking how I really felt good about that. We were up all day and all night sitting in the chair.

Dunham: You couldn't sleep.

1-00:48:11

Tidmore: No. No place to even wash up. There were lavatories on the train, but—

Dunham: It was predominantly men?

1-00:48:22

Tidmore: Predominantly men. But they were all good. They never—I don't know. Never, ever did I feel harassed in any way. Isn't that amazing? I guess I must have scared them. [laughs]

Dunham: Well, it could be how you carried yourself, that they knew, maybe, not to mess with you.

1-00:48:48

Tidmore: Maybe, Never thought of it. Don't know.

Dunham: So you arrive in Los Angeles or San Diego exhausted—

1-00:48:52

Tidmore: San Diego.

Dunham: —after this three-day sleepless journey.

1-00:48:58

Tidmore: Oh, yes. And the girl that I had gone in with—her name was Imogene—she was in San Diego, and I had requested to be in her barracks, so we became bunkies. She was in the lower bunk, and I was in the upper bunk. I got a truck, and my run was going down to the docks and picking up the baggage from the boys that were coming in and then taking them to either Camp Pendleton or Camp Matthews or wherever they were going. And I don't remember what she was driving.

Dunham: But that was nothing like when you had to drive folks back east. There wasn't the—

1-00:49:56

Tidmore: No. It was really different. And it was fun. We'd go out—they'd take us out someplace around Pendleton, I think, or out in the hills someplace. I can't remember whether we were practicing or what I was doing.

Dunham: Practicing driving?

1-00:50:21

Tidmore: Driving or backing up or what. But we'd go out on training—

Dunham: And what are you driving now? You talked about a station wagon, the garbage truck, now what—

1-00:50:29

Tidmore: This was a four-wheel—I think it was a two-and-a-half ton. I could look it up.

Dunham: If you want to, feel free to browse through. You have your album here.

1-00:50:47

Tidmore: To remember things?

Dunham: Yes. That's fine. That's great if you want to do that. I'll continue; did you have an impression of—had you been to California before?

1-00:50:57

Tidmore: No.

Dunham: So were you excited? Did have an idea of what it was?

1-00:51:02

Tidmore: Oh, yes, I was really excited. My grade-school neighbor-friend had moved to Los Angeles, and I felt my life was going to end when she left, when she and her family moved out. And I was really happy because I had heard all about Hollywood. It was so intriguing, and I was going to be close to Hollywood.

Dunham: So how did the reality match up with the vision?

1-00:51:34

Tidmore: Well, actually I didn't go up to L.A. for quite a while, I don't think. I just had a good time here. The women in the barracks were great. We went to the beach a lot. We had single bunks, and there was a mattress cover on our bunk. And if we took the mattress cover, and went to the beach, and would open up one end of it, and run down the beach, and fill it up with air and tie it off, we could use it for water wings out in the ocean. [laughs] When you don't have anything you manage—

Dunham: Yes, that's neat.

1-00:52:30

Tidmore: I forgot about that.

Dunham: So the attitude of the officers and the generals out here was much more tolerant ?

1-00:52:37

Tidmore: Well, it seemed like it because—well, I didn't get into any trouble. [laughs] It seemed like I didn't have a great deal to do with any of the officers. And I was still thinking I was going to marry Kemp because he hadn't been killed yet, so I didn't date. Imogene did, and her boyfriend was in Iowa. And he came out to visit, I remember. I think we went to Long Beach, and that's when I ran into—I met my grade-school friend that lived in LA.

Dunham: Had you still been in contact with her?

1-00:53:25

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: What was that like, reconnecting?

1-00:53:32

Tidmore: She was divorced by that time, living alone.

Dunham: This is still during the war, so she had gotten married and divorced pretty quickly. What had she been doing during the war years, then? Did she have children?

1-00:53:49

Tidmore: No, she didn't. And I don't know what happened to her after that because I never saw her again. So, that was funny. But the experience here, and I have pictures to show of San Diego.

Dunham: Yes. There are a few minutes left on this tape. Maybe I'll—

1-00:54:23

Tidmore: And then the war ended. V-J Day.

Dunham: I want to talk a little bit more about that, but let me—

1-00:54:33

Tidmore: [shows photos] This is San Diego. That's the guy that was killed.

Dunham: What was his name?

1-00:54:35

Tidmore: Harley Kempter, Jr. He was an RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force] before he was in the service.

Dunham: You said you saw the water wings that you were describing a moment ago? Where are they?

1-00:54:54

Tidmore: Yes. [shows photo] There.

Dunham: And what beaches would you go to?

1-00:54:59  
Tidmore: Ocean Beach. I think it was usually Ocean Beach.

Dunham: And is that you?

1-00:55:04  
Tidmore: This is me. And this is me. And that's Pat.

Dunham: Where's Pat?

1-00:55:12  
Tidmore: Pat, Here's Pat.

Dunham: This is the friend who was out here originally?

Tidmore: No. That isn't the one. [Shows another photo] This is me. This is another bunkie. The other one is here someplace. Where is it? See, we were playing most of the time out here.

Dunham: Do you have some photos of Quantico too?

1-00:55:40  
Tidmore: Yes, that's Quantico. And that's Washington, D. C., and these were the girls I was with there. [looks at more photos] Well, we played there too.

Dunham: Yes, what kind of playing?

1-00:56:01  
Tidmore: Swimming.

Dunham: What kind of memories does that bring back?

1-00:56:03  
Tidmore: A lot.

Dunham: Where would you swim?

1-00:56:05  
Tidmore: I don't remember where that was. "The old swimming hole," it says. And these were all Marines. And that was my bunkie. [looks at more photos] And those were my orders, leaving the post; that's when I had to have an order to go to—

Dunham: Each trip you made [had] specific [orders] that were written, so you kept one?

1-00:56:39  
Tidmore: Yes. [looks at another photo] Looks like we just played. This is Imogene. This was in Quantico.

Dunham: But she wasn't at Quantico, right?

1-00:56:58

Tidmore: She wasn't, no.

Dunham: She was at Lejeune with you?

Tidmore: Oh, this must have been Lejeune, I'll bet. Yes, it was. "Motor Transport. May '44." That was at Lejeune. [shows another photo] This was at Quantico. "June '44."

Dunham: The shot in the upper left; was that—on the Quantico page

1-00:57:33

Tidmore: No, that's Lorraine. That's one of my bunkies.

Dunham: Are there things that come back to you as you look at these? Experiences?

1-00:57:48

Tidmore: No, I can't remember—[looks at another photo] That's when we got to boot camp, and they lined us up right away. Oh, and then they gave us our uniforms. And, see this suit? It looks like a bathing suit.

Dunham: Yes, it does.

1-00:58:12

Tidmore: Well, that was what we were supposed to wear for underwear, only there was no drop seat, and we had to wear full uniform, shirts and ties in the winter time, and if we had to go to the bathroom you had to take everything off to get these off. I don't know why they gave them to us because nobody wore them. I think they must have stopped it later, but I don't know.

Dunham: What was the notion there? That's ridiculous.

1-00:58:42

Tidmore: It was. It was kind of stupid. [shows another photo] There's some more Marines. That was boot camp too. [Shows another photo] The Marine base in San Diego.

Dunham: Is this Pendleton or—

1-00:59:06

Tidmore: [shows another photo] There's my dad. [referring to David Dunham's question] No, this was the base. No, it wasn't. This is the mess hall. And the commissary. [looks at another photo] I don't remember that.

Dunham: Are any of those you, there?

2-00:59:34

Tidmore: This is me. That was in San Diego, and I had two stripes, I want you to know.

Dunham: Oh, I see. So how did you get the stripes? I heard how you lost one?

1-00:59:45

Tidmore: I went to San Diego. [laughs] Coming to San Diego, and I got my license, and I got my stripe.

Dunham: Did you have to do anything to get your license back?

1-00:59:58

Tidmore: No. They just automatically gave it when I transferred out. I had a license from here. [looks at photo] That isn't two stripes; it's one. I didn't get my other stripe until I went to San Francisco.

Dunham: [looks at photo] What's The Little Club and the U.S. Grant Hotel? Is that down here? In San Diego?

1-01:00:19

Tidmore: Down here. Yes. I did mess duty down here evidently. Because I was in trouble.

Dunham: Maybe it just was rotating?

1-01:00:24

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: There wasn't as much trouble?

Tidmore: I didn't get in much trouble down here.

Dunham: Was The Little Club dance and live music?

Tidmore: Dance, yes. We danced.

Dunham: What kind of musicians would there be?

1-01:00:38

Tidmore: Oh, big bands. Always big bands. [looks at another photo] That's our Motor Transport group. See, I cut all my pictures up, which was too bad.

Dunham: Well, but it's wonderful that you kept them. Maybe you wouldn't have kept them if you hadn't—

1-01:00:58

Tidmore: I wouldn't have known the dates. [looks at another photo] I went to San Francisco. [shows photo] And look. I got my stripes. I became a sergeant.

Dunham: This tape is just about to end, so let me just take a few more shots, and then we'll take a break and do a second tape. Let's go ahead and flip through and then we can—

1-01:01:38

Tidmore: Okay. [looks at photo] This was in San Francisco. And I'll tell you about that when we get to it.

Dunham: The Fairmont, okay.

1-01:01:45

Tidmore: All of the hotels. And this was when I got out, my first civilian outfit. It was a black suit. [shows photo] This was Imogene because she went to San Francisco.

Dunham: Did you not have any civilian clothes?

1-01:02:02

Tidmore: Not until then. That was it. [looks at a photo] That was fun. This was in San Francisco.

Dunham: We'll take a short break. Is that a portrait of you?

1-01:02:23

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: Where did you get that done?

1-01:02:26

Tidmore: I don't remember who did that? San Francisco.

[end of Tape 1]

[start of Tape 2]

2-00:00:01

Tidmore: —Quantico.

Dunham: You want to hold that up my way for a second? I'll take it.

2-00:00:03

Tidmore: You don't want to see that.

Dunham: No, that's nice.

2-00:00:12

Tidmore: Close. Really?

[Tape stopped]

[reads from document] “—in the U.S. Marine Corps Women Reserve. Minimum requirement: age twenty to thirty-six. At least two years high school or business school. Cut this coupon and mail to ‘US Marine Corps Procurement District, Board of Trade Building, Chicago.’” So I must have sent one of these in.

Dunham: Oh, when you were interested. So that was a card of inquiry.

2-00:00:42

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: But it doesn’t remind you of where you first heard about—well, you know you saw those uniforms—

2-00:00:57

Tidmore: Yes, I saw the uniforms, and that was it, yes. Oh, I went to a New York Yankee game in L.A.

Dunham: What year was that?

Tidmore: 1946. [Reads] “New York Yankees, Los Angeles Coliseum, Sunday, October 27, 1946.”

Dunham: Let’s resume with your chronological narrative. It’s fine to refer to anything you want there, as you look through it, that might stimulate some memories. You were in San Diego. You had a glorious time.

2-00:01:28

Tidmore: I did.

Dunham: How long were you in San Diego?

2-00:01:34

Tidmore: Let me see. It was about six months.

Dunham: This is from about when to when?

2-00:01:35

Tidmore: About August, the summer, some time in August.

Dunham: ‘44?

2-00:01:41

Tidmore: No, '45. I have to look. I left here, I think, around January of '46. So it was '45 that I came out, middle of the year. And then stayed until December, I think it was. And then went up to San Francisco.

Dunham: So it was shortly after you got here that you lost your—that your boyfriend was killed?

2-00:02:20

Tidmore: Yes, well, the day before Nagasaki, so that was what? December—

Dunham: Early August of '45. It was the sixth and the ninth, I believe.

2-00:02:30

Tidmore: Yes, The sixth and the ninth, that's right. And then I was here until December 1945. Then they decided they needed a military person to make train reservations for service personnel after discharge.

Dunham: How did that come about? Did you know that was the job in San Francisco?

2-00:03:00

Tidmore: Yes. They asked for anyone that would stay in as long as they were needed. So Mo and I decided that we didn't mind staying in as long as they needed us.

Dunham: Do you remember where you were V-E Day and V-J Day and what that was like?

2-00:03:25

Tidmore: V-E Day I don't. V-J Day I remember being in the barracks in San Diego. Everybody was going wild. So they said, "Be careful. Don't go downtown." There was a pie place, a place that made pies across the street from the Marine Corps base. So I went over to the pie shop and got a banana cream pie and came back. I don't remember how many, but there weren't very many of us that didn't go out. We stayed in the barracks and ate banana cream pie on V-J Day. Then they came out with the orders that they were going to send two women to San Francisco, so Imogene and I applied for it and got it. I think we went up there the middle of December of 1945. That was really nice because we were on subsistence. They paid for our apartment and gave us money for food.

Dunham: Where was your apartment?

2-00:04:51

Tidmore: On California Street in San Francisco, downtown. We worked at the Third and Townsend depot. They had a little booth inside the depot. Military fellas would come in when they come back from overseas and received their discharge papers.

Dunham: Right off the train there?

2-00:05:10

Tidmore: We'd be able to route them home, by train.

Dunham: So you were setting up their tickets.

Tidmore: Yes, for them to go home. We only worked four hours a day. That wasn't enough to stay busy. So I decided that I would get a civilian job. And I did. That was my first time at getting civilian clothes. At that time we could wear them. It was okay. Other than that we could never wear civilian clothes out. Until after we were discharged. Anyway, I got a black suit, and I applied for a job as a photographer in night clubs. Did you ever know they had that?

Dunham: Absolutely, sure.

2-00:06:16

Tidmore: I took pictures at all three hotels, at the St. Francis, the Sir Francis Drake, and the Fairmont, in their cocktail lounges at night .

Dunham: Did you have experience in photography?

2-00:06:35

Tidmore: No. For heaven's sakes, no.

Dunham: Did somebody give you any training for that?

2-00:06:38

Tidmore: Yes, one of the girls that was there and doing it—I was relieving her—showed me how to take the picture. And I had to be very careful. If a man was with a woman you had to make sure that he wanted his picture taken before you took it.

Dunham: How did you ascertain that? Did you ask them?

2-00:07:07

Tidmore: You'd ask them. A man alone we didn't have to ask. But you had to ask because it might not have been his wife. But that was fun. We'd have a few slides that we carried, and we'd take all those and run them down the street to have them developed quickly and run them back and sell them back to them.

Dunham: And did they always buy them?

2-00:07:41

Tidmore: Not always, no. Sometimes they'd buy them, and sometimes they didn't.

Dunham: Do remember what you made doing that?

2-00:07:50

Tidmore: I don't remember what I made. I have no idea.

Dunham: Was it based on how many photographs you sold?

2-00:07:54

Tidmore: No, I don't think so. I think it was a salary.

Dunham: But it was fun.

2-00:08:06

Tidmore: It was fun. So I did that, and then I went to modeling school.

Dunham: Oh. Where'd you do that?

2-00:08:15

Tidmore: In San Francisco. And then I decided that was not for me.

Dunham: How long did you do that for?

2-00:08:18

Tidmore: [laughs] I think one job. I went to school for three weeks, I think. I have a picture here of learning to walk with a book on my head.

Dunham: We'll definitely take a shot of that.

2-00:08:46

Tidmore: Here's my picture. It was called "Mademoiselle Academy."

Dunham: Does it have an address?

2-00:08:50

Tidmore: [checks] No.

Dunham: Is that your graduation certificate?

2-00:08:53

Tidmore: That's my graduation certificate. [reads] "Has completed our course of fashion model." [laughs]

Dunham: You did that on your own?

2-00:09:00

Tidmore: Yes, at night.

Dunham: Do you remember what inspired you to do that?

2-00:09:08

Tidmore: To do that? No. I have no idea.

Dunham: Does it have a date on there?

2-00:09:11

Tidmore: Yes, it has July. I did that in July of '46. I started in June of '46. I guess it was a month.

Dunham: You did the one assignment and—

2-00:09:28

Tidmore: Yes, I did the one assignment

Dunham: —do you remember what you didn't care for about it?

2-00:09:30

Tidmore: Yes, I do. I was modeling coats, and you couldn't wear anything under the coats except a bra and panties. And this was in a hotel room. I didn't think I liked that. So I decided I didn't want their job.

Dunham: That's sort of the opposite extreme of the outfit you had to wear back in Quantico, or were supposed to wear. [laughs]

2-00:09:55

Tidmore: [laughs] Yes. Anyway, then I decided that wasn't for me. We worked until August of '46. And then August—I don't know what the date was—but we were discharged, both of us.

Dunham: By then almost all the soldiers had come back through? Had it been dwindling down?

2-00:10:29

Tidmore: Yes, we didn't have that many coming through any more.

Dunham: So you had your three stripes?

2-00:10:36

Tidmore: I had my three stripes, and we were discharged. The two of us went to Los Angeles.

Dunham: Was she single at the time?

2-00:10:48

Tidmore: She was still single.

Dunham: Now, after you got to San Francisco, were you doing any dating then?

2-00:10:54

Tidmore: No. I kept thinking he was going to come back. And I didn't find, you know, anyone of interest.

Dunham: How did you find out that he had passed? Because he was killed in Japan, right?

2-00:11:08

Tidmore:

I think his brother told me that the family had gotten word that he been shot down. And he had been reported missing for a long time. It was about a year. It was February of the next year that I finally found out that they reported him dead. I think it was in February, yes, because all the time I was in San Francisco I was still thinking he was going to come back. Then we went to L.A., and we were living on 52/20.

Dunham:

5220 what?

2-00:12:17

Tidmore:

That was fifty-two weeks at twenty dollars a week the government paid us.

Dunham:

That was your military benefit?

2-00:12:18

Tidmore:

Well, that was our unemployment, our discharge benefit. We got a little house off of Western in Los Angeles, and I remember I took care of the kids next door for money and did her ironing for money. And then finally we decided that we would join an airline. And I wanted to go with Pan American. She wanted to go with United, Imogene. I'm not too bright, so I decided that I would go with her to United and take their test because it would give me a "heads up" for when I took Pan Am's test. So we went to United and took their test. They had two tests; they had a personality test and an IQ test. I passed them both, which really surprised me. So I thought, "I better not take a chance. I better go with United because I might flunk [laughs] the Pan Am one, and then I'd be out completely."

Dunham:

Do you remember why you wanted Pan Am over United to begin with?

2-00:13:51

Tidmore:

Yes. They were flying out of the country. It was much more romantic to fly. And I thought United was a stuffy airline. I really didn't think it was that good.

Dunham:

Had you flown on either of them at this point?

2-00:14:10

Tidmore:

Uh-uh. I had never flown. So I went with United, and I became a stewardess. I went to Chicago. I trained at the old Studebaker plant in Chicago. That's where they had their training. I think that was six weeks. Then United was on strike when I graduated; I graduated in November. They sent me back to Salt Lake City on the train. There were four of us on the train, and one of the girls was from Salt Lake City. And I said, "I don't want to go to Salt Lake City; there are all those Mormons out there." She was Mormon, and she didn't speak to me the rest of the time on the train. We got to Salt Lake City, and the chief stewardess at the time—her name was Mary Maloney—had rented this apartment for the four of us to live together. Elaine didn't speak to me all the

way out, but she had to once we started living together. [laughs] And we became very close friends.

Dunham: Did you know she was Mormon when you made the comment?

2-00:15:41

Tidmore: No. I didn't know what a Mormon was. I hadn't been around Mormons. The only people I had been around were the Amish in Iowa. I assumed that the Mormons were like the Amish and that we were going to be seeing horse and buggies and—that's why I said what I did. But she became a good friend, and we flew out of Salt Lake together for a long time. Well, not for a long time, for a year.

Dunham: Now did you use the GI bill at all?

2-00:16:12

Tidmore: I used the GI bill in Salt Lake City. I thought I might like to learn to fly. I took enough flying lessons, to take the test for a private pilot's license. I was in a Piper Cub, and you had to solo. And when you soloed, you had to do eights around a pylon, and a stall, and a spin. And I got through those three things, and then I was going to come in for my landing and would have my private pilot's license. The tower said there was a crosswind, a five-mile crosswind. I flew up and down the downwind leg and—well, I was out for over an hour, waiting for that five-mile crosswind to go away. I finally landed and decided, "I can't do this. I just barely made it through the spin and pulled out. I just barely made it through the stall. I'll never make it." I never went back. So I had a private pilot's license, but I didn't ever do anything else.

Dunham: You did get the license.

2-00:17:39

Tidmore: I did get it, but I couldn't do anything with it. I could fly a Piper Cub, but what's that good for, you know?

Dunham: Did you have ambition of becoming a commercial pilot?

2-00:17:51

Tidmore: No, I sure didn't. I just thought it would be fun to learn to fly. I really liked being a stewardess in Salt Lake. It was fun, and I was enjoying it.

Dunham: How long did the strike last?

2-00:18:04

Tidmore: Oh, it was over by the time we got to Salt Lake, so we started flying right away. We flew to Denver and to San Francisco and Spokane. I think there may have been fifteen girls, stewardesses, in Salt Lake at the time. It was fun. We flew DC-3s, and I don't know that anybody should know this. In those days it was very open. And the cockpit was always open. Anybody could go to the cockpit. At one point this pilot said, "You're learning to fly; you come

up here.” So I went up. He got out of the seat. He said, “Sit down.” So I sat down in his seat. “Okay, you fly it in.” We were on our way from Denver to Salt Lake, and we were over the clouds. And of course he had it on automatic pilot, and the co-pilot was sitting right beside me. But I thought I was flying the airplane. All of a sudden, the clouds broke, and I looked down—Salt Lake has a rim of mountains around it—and there we were just coming over the mountains, and there was Salt Lake down below. And I got out of the seat and said, “No. I don’t want to do this. I quit flying. I don’t want any part of this.” So, that was it.

Dunham: So this was after you’d already quit your lessons? This was another confirmation for you that—

2-00:19:55

Tidmore: —that I didn’t want to fly. And after I got married we had a plane because we had a farm down in Baja California; we grew tomatoes. So we flew down, my husband flew down to the farm and back, two hundred miles south of here rather than drive all of the time. But I never tried. Never even interested.

Dunham: Was he a commercial pilot?

2-00:20:32

Tidmore: No. He was a Navy pilot, but he didn’t have a license either, so we had to hire somebody. And I wouldn’t let him get a license [laughs] because I didn’t trust him. I didn’t trust him to fly without drinking.

Dunham: Okay, well, that’s a significant concern. Was there ever any issue with that with the pilots in United?

2-00:20:57

Tidmore: I guess there were, plenty. But, you know, I must have gone through life kind of in a daze because— [laughs]

Dunham: Well, I’m not looking for the negative—since you mentioned that I thought, “Oh, well, working in the professional—”

2-00:21:12

Tidmore: I heard about it afterwards.

Dunham: I think nowadays they have lots of testing, I think, for stuff like that.

2-00:21:19

Tidmore: Right. Well, they had it then. We had a twenty-four hour rule. Nobody could ever have a drink in your uniform. You couldn’t smoke a cigarette in uniform. You couldn’t drink twenty-four hours before a flight, so if you took a flight to Hawaii—and in those days it would take five and six hours to get to Hawaii—they couldn’t have a drink because they didn’t have twenty-four hours before they had to come home.

Dunham: Did they have a test for that, or it was just based on—

Tidmore: No tests. No tests; it was just based on the fact that they trusted them. Well, some people you can trust, and some people you can't. But they would never do it in public because in those days they knew they would get—

Dunham: —reported?

2-00:22:18

Tidmore: Reported right away, and the union wouldn't even back them then.

Dunham: But you never had to report anybody or anything like that?

2-00:22:23

Tidmore: No. I did have to fire a few girls because—I flew for four years, actually. One in Salt Lake and three in LA. Then I went in the office in '51, I guess. And I was chief stewardess. That was hiring and firing and making out schedules and stuff like that. Check kiting. And I did fire a couple for drinking.

Dunham: Stewardesses.

2-00:23:02

Tidmore: Stewardesses, not pilots.

Dunham: So that was hard.

2-00:23:10

Tidmore: And I also fired them for getting married, because they weren't supposed to. But then I also found out after I quit that there were quite a few that were married. [laughs] I didn't know it.

Dunham: Same as in the Marine Corps.

2-00:23:23

Tidmore: Yes, it was the same thing.

Dunham: They didn't acknowledge it. At some point that must have changed where that was against the law.

2-00:23:29

Tidmore: It did. I think it changed in '64 or '65.

Dunham: Were you still in that role when it changed?

2-00:23:39

Tidmore: No. I quit in '60. I got married in '60, so I had to quit.

Dunham: Even though you weren't an active stewardess, the rule applied to you?

2-00:23:52

Tidmore: I was still on the seniority list. I was still an active stewardess, but I was in management. And yes, the rule applied to me. So that was it. And we knew it when we hired on. We all knew we couldn't fly after we got married.

Dunham: Were there any where you found out they were married years later and had to fire them then?

2-00:24:21

Tidmore: A couple of them I found out that they were married and fired then. And then after I quit—like I was out to dinner last night with three girls that retired, and they were telling me stories I couldn't even believe. [laughs] I didn't know half the things that they were telling me were going on. And I just maintained that they didn't happen while I was there. [laughs]

Dunham: What kind of things were those?

2-00:25:04

Tidmore: Well, who was married, you know. This one couple, she was married to a pilot, and they had apartments upstairs and downstairs, and they had a phone that hung out the window when she was downstairs at night in his apartment. I didn't know about that. I didn't know that some of the girls were lesbians, had no idea. Because they would have fired them. They would have in those days. That was a no-no. And race at that time. I *am* stupid, you know, because it didn't dawn on me that there was that much prejudice. Yet now I think back, and the girl that was the chief stewardess before me—at one point, she was telling me, she had to go to Burbank for something, the flight was coming in, and she had to go over to Burbank. She didn't have a car, so United was going to send her over. They had one of the porters—the porters were black—and they had one of the porters drive her over. He wouldn't—and this was Gene's own idea—he wouldn't let her sit in the front seat with him, and he kept his cap on all the way over to Burbank. I mean, that wasn't anything she said or did, or United said, but it was Gene. And he was a real nice guy.

Dunham: You mentioned the race; so hiring, in other words, people of certain races were just ruled out?

2-00:27:10

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: Did you get many applications from blacks or others?

2-00:27:14

Tidmore: No. See, they started hiring black women in 1960. And I think the first one was out of Chicago, I'm not sure. Or it might have been New York. But it wasn't here.

Dunham: Would you get applications?

2-00:27:32

Tidmore: No, because they'd screen them in personnel before I'd get them. If they did, I don't know. But I know that they were on a witch hunt for gays and lesbians, and that was in the early sixties.

Dunham: How did the witch hunt take place?

2-00:27:57

Tidmore: The reason I say that is because one girl that did quit—well, I fired her because she threw a spoon at a passenger on a Hawaiian flight, and he reported it. She was nasty. So I fired her. And then she called me up and thought that I had fired her because I had found out she was a lesbian. I didn't know it, and I said, "No, I didn't." So then my boss decided, and the personnel director decided, that I should become more friendly and find out who else was. And I said, "No, I wouldn't do that." So I didn't. So I don't know who else was, and I didn't ever want to know.

Dunham: That was right around the time you left anyway.

2-00:28:49

Tidmore: That was probably in January 1959, and I left in November 1960.

Dunham: Did they proceed to try to investigate that?

2-00:28:59

Tidmore: I think they did. What they were looking for was—evidently they thought there were some on the ticket counter, not flight attendants but on the ticket counter. I don't know whether they found them or not. They never told me. Funny world.

Dunham: There wasn't an official policy on race or gay/lesbian—

Tidmore: Oh no. Absolutely not. No.

Dunham: I was thinking back, when you were doing the job in San Francisco with the soldiers all coming through. Were they all returning home? Or did they know exactly where they wanted to go in every case?

2-00:29:42

Tidmore: Yes. Well, they could get their transportation home wherever they enlisted. Like I enlisted in Chicago, so I could have gotten a ticket to Chicago.

Dunham: So you couldn't just pick where you wanted to go; it had to be your home address.

2-00:29:55

Tidmore: No, it had to be home or where you enlisted.

Dunham: Okay, so it was pretty straightforward. I was just thinking maybe some of them when they were coming home had other places to go or something.

2-00:30:05

Tidmore: Well, if they did they didn't get a ticket unless they had enlisted there. And I just thought, I got \$300 from the State of Iowa.

Dunham: What was that for?

2-00:30:18

Tidmore: For being in the service. I think—I can't remember—Texas gave a bonus, and I believe California did too.

Dunham: For serving during World War II.

2-00:30:32

Tidmore: For serving during the war.

Dunham: And you received that shortly after the war.

2-00:30:35

Tidmore: Shortly after, mm-hmm. I forgot about that.

Dunham: That's nice.

2-00:30:40

Tidmore: That was nice, mm-hmm.

Dunham: So you used the GI bill for your flight lessons. Were you able to use it for anything else?

2-00:30:45

Tidmore: Yes. I used the GI bill to buy a house in Encino.

Dunham: When did you do that?

2-00:30:56

Tidmore: Let's see, when did I do that?

Dunham: Was it on your own?

2-00:30:57

Tidmore: I did that when I came to L.A. My sister's husband had died, and she had two girls. She was living in Flint, and she wanted to move to L.A. So I bought this house on Texhoma in Encino. It was a tract house, and she came out to live. She lived there for about a year, and then she decided she wanted to move to Glendale. She had gone to school and gotten her California teaching credential; she was a teacher. So she got a job in Glendale in the music department, so she was going to move to Glendale. So we sold the house, and

I lived in different places around LA. I lived on Eighth behind the Ambassador Hotel. Then I moved out to Airport Marina.

Dunham: Anything else today, particularly looking back and reflecting on the war and both working at the plant briefly and the wings, but also especially your time in the Marine Corps? And just kind of how it fits in with the story of your life? Is there anything else you'd like to share today?

2-00:32:45

Tidmore: No, I don't think so. I met my husband and got married in 1960. So that's when that era left. As I said, he wanted to be a farmer. We couldn't afford farming here, so he kept looking down in Mexico for good water and finally found [a farm] in Camalú about two hundred miles south. Most people have heard of San Quintín, which is a bay down there. And he started farming down there. He died in '79, and I continued to farm until '85. Then they learned to steal; I couldn't be in both places at once. So I decided to get out before they broke me.

Dunham: What were you farming?

2-00:34:04

Tidmore: Tomatoes. He tried other things, wheat and corn and celery and all kinds of stuff. But mainly we grew tomatoes. And when we quit, my last crop of tomatoes was 200 acres. We packed them down there and then shipped them up, by truck, and sold them in the United States. That was under the Diamond T brand. We had cherry tomatoes and regular tomatoes. Then I quit in '86.

Dunham: You retired?

2-00:34:46

Tidmore: I retired.

Dunham: Did your time as a stewardess allow you to have flying discount?

2-00:34:53

Tidmore: No.

Dunham: No? Because you have done quite a lot of traveling, I take it.

2-00:34:55

Tidmore: Fifteen years with the airline. And I was two and a half years in the Marine Corps, and I can't even get on the base now. And I was fifteen years with United, and I don't have any privileges. I just missed everything. [laughs]

Dunham: Well, I think you have this beautiful home; I think things have gone all right. [laughs]

2-00:35:21

Tidmore: Things went all right with the tomatoes, yes. They did.

Dunham: You have done a lot of traveling and flying, I take it.

2-00:35:30

Tidmore: Well, not a lot of flying. I've gone around South America on a cruise. And I did take one big trip to Europe and Africa and drove around North Africa, Tunisia. The rest of my traveling has been by car. Ever since I retired I've been driving around this country. I've driven this country and Canada. That's how I like to travel, by car. I still like to drive. [laughs]

Dunham: Have you been back to visit your wartime stops?

2-00:36:11

Tidmore: Well, I've been back to Washington, yes. I haven't been back to Quantico to see the museum, and I want to see that. I belong to an organization called The Women Marines Association. They're all across the country, and I've gone to their conventions.

Dunham: You mentioned when we were talking about discrimination against women back at Quantico that—you hinted that there are still struggles. What's your perspective on that today?

Tidmore: There's still a lot of discrimination against the girls. And it's too bad. They're really good. Now they have to be as good as the men. And in most cases, I think—the ones that I know are. And they don't always get a fair shake. They make it up to colonel, like in the Marine Corps. But that's just about as far as they get. There are some generals; there are a few but not a lot. I just think that they have a hard time. And I know that the girls that are out in Iraq and Afghanistan, I know that there's a lot of sexual harassment, should we say? I guess that's what it's going to be. I don't know that they're ever going to be able to change that. But I think the men nowadays respect the women that they're fighting with more in most cases, even though there is a lot of sexual harassment. I think that they probably respect them more than they did when I was in. They just didn't want women in. I mean it was too fast for them.

Dunham: There's a certain nature, because of the environment you're in, where sexuality is bound to come up in ways. But in terms of the harassment do you think there are things the military can do to be more proactive in addressing it and then also in dealing with it after the fact?

2-00:38:51

Tidmore: I think they're starting to deal with it now after the fact. I think now they're really beginning to do a pretty good job of it. But I really don't know what there is that they can do. I just don't know what would make it easier, or less prevalent.

Dunham: To me, when you have the top-down of the general during World War II in Quantico who was so intolerant, that filters down. To me, if they had more sensitivity training, or whatever you want to call it, but really to be proactive and have zero tolerance for that time of abuse and harassment, I'm not sure they've come near to that.

2-00:39:54

Tidmore: No, they haven't. I think you're right. I think that would probably help a lot if they would start there.

Dunham: But it's certainly a challenge anyway.

2-00:40:06

Tidmore: I feel sorry, really feel sorry—I know two of the girls that have been in for twenty-one years, and they're out, and they haven't until just recently given the women any training about getting out. Well, if you went into the service at eighteen, or sixteen even—and this one did—and then got out in twenty-some years, you don't know anything else. And that's a very regimented life. To just get out and not have any training, even the boys need it because it's an adjustment that they don't realize they're going to have. I think they're doing that now. I think they're beginning to do that with women too.

Dunham: As you said, the discipline that's so valuable—you mentioned every woman maybe should have that—and certainly men, I know, can benefit from it. But at the same time if that's your whole life for twenty-plus years, the transition—

2-00:41:24

Tidmore: That's a different thing

Dunham: —to not having all of that forced upon you can be challenging. And then but just re-entry, I think it *is* a big question; we have so many soldiers now coming back, and they've had always such challenging circumstances—

Tidmore: And no jobs. I worked down on this Stand Down.

Dunham: What is that?

2-00:41:53

Tidmore: Well, there's a veteran's village down here, and they put on Stand Down every year. The whole community comes together, and they have dentists that will look at your teeth, and they have it in a school yard where there is a gym—there's a boys' shower room and a girls' shower room, and so the homeless veterans can come and take showers. I worked in the shower the first day, and they had a whole room full of soaps and lotions and things, towels and washcloths to give to the homeless. They'd come in, and they'd wash their hair and take a shower. Everybody had to do that before they could see a doctor or see a dentist or have their hair cut or have it curled. Lawyers

will come and give their time It's a weekend. They set it up Friday night, and it's Saturday and Sunday; then they take it down Monday. They can only take a thousand veterans, homeless, in the facility to take care of them because they house them. They come in that night, like they come in on Saturday morning. They can't come in with alcohol or drugs. They come in, they get their showers, and they get food and all kinds of things that the merchants from the area give for them. Then they can go, if they've gotten a ticket for being drunk, or on the street, or sleeping someplace or something, they can go to the court; they have a court for them. It's just unbelievable what the community does.

Dunham: Yes. That's great.

2-00:44:01

Tidmore: But they can only take so many, you know?

Dunham: It's sad that there's such a tremendous need to have those donations.

2-00:44:07

Tidmore: And they have places that they can apply for jobs if there are any available.

Dunham: It's very challenging. I forgot to ask on another track about your friend, not Emmajean, but—

2-00:44:20

Tidmore: Imogene.

Dunham: Did she continue with United?

2-00:44:25

Tidmore: No, no. She didn't ever go with United. Her husband—well, her husband later—her father decided that she should come back and go back to school. Her husband was at the University of Iowa, so she went there, and they got married. She went to Maryland. But she's gone now too.

Dunham: Did you stay in touch over the years?

2-00:44:50

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: That's nice. Did you have any other thing from your photos or badges there that you wanted to share? Last thoughts?

2-00:44:58

Tidmore: Here are some orders. No, I don't know what's in here. What is this? This is my vehicle operating permit.

Dunham: Maybe I'll take a couple of shots.

2-00:45:13  
Tidmore: [looks at other documents] That's from San Francisco, and Camp Lejeune. I don't have San Diego. What else do I have here; I don't know. [Pause tape] Chemical warfare agents. That's what they trained us on.

Dunham: That's where you had to wear the gas masks?

2-00:45:38  
Tidmore: To wear the gas mask, mm-hmm.

Dunham: So this is your permit for just being able to drive the vehicle?

2-00:45:57  
Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: And then you had individual orders for each?

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: And these are your—oh, chemical warfare.

2-00:46:09  
Tidmore: Chemical warfare.

Dunham: That's when you did the gas mask training.

Tidmore: Yes.

Dunham: Did you ever have to do that again after your initial training?

Tidmore: No. [looks further] I don't know what all this is. Oh, this is what we were issued, it looks like.

Dunham: Your clothes, equipment, supplies?

2-00:46:39  
Tidmore: Yes. I should give that to the museum. I should look at this, shouldn't I, some time. Well, when I have time. But you see, I'm kind of busy.

Dunham: Sure. Well, I appreciate you taking the time this holiday week especially. Thank you again, and thanks for your contribution during the war.

[End of Interview]