

Oral Memoirs
of
Doris “Dee” McClendon

An Interview Conducted by

Andrew Glen Weeks

April 11, 2014

Community Veterans History Project

Lone Sailor Memorial Project

University of Central Florida RICHES of Central Florida

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Interview Histories

Interviewers: Andrew Glen Weeks

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

The Community Veterans History Project, a RICHES of Central Florida Project at the University of Central Florida, includes interviews with Central Florida veterans from all branches of the United States military. Beginning in 2010, the UCF Community Veterans History Project is collecting, preserving, and making accessible to the public the experiences of Central Florida's veterans so that future generations will better understand the realities of conflict. It is a collaborative endeavor supported by multiple departments and offices at UCF. The histories, which are collected by students and faculty, are archived and made digitally available through the UCF library. The UCF Community Veterans History Project will also contribute selected veterans' histories to the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Doris "Dee" McClendon is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on April 11, 2014.

Abstract

Oral history of Doris "Dee" McClendon, former member of the United States Navy. This interview was conducted by Andrew Glen Weeks at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida, on April 11, 2014. The interview was conducted as part of the Community Veteran's History Project and background research for a memorial honoring the for Naval Training Center (NTC) Orlando.

NTC Orlando was in operation from 1968 to 1998 and was one of three recruit training centers used by the U.S. Navy. It resided in the area that is now the community of Baldwin Park. During the 30 years that NTC Orlando was operational, more than 650,000 men and women were transformed from civilians to sailors.

McClendon attended recruit training at the Orlando Naval Training Center in 1976. At that time, NTC Orlando was the only naval facility to train both male and female recruits. In this oral history, McClendon describes her experience as a female recruit at NTC Orlando. She also talks about her role as a legalmen in the Navy. McClendon left the Navy in 1995 with the rank of E-7.

Doris “Dee” McClendon

Oral History Memoir

Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Andrew Glen Weeks

April 11, 2014

Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Weeks Alright. Today is April 11th, 2014. I am interviewing Doris [“Dee”] McClendon who served in the U. S. Navy. We are interviewing Mrs. McClendon as part of the UCF [University of Central Florida] Community Veterans’ History Project and as research for the creation of the Lone Sailor Memorial Project. We are recording this interview at UCF.

0:00:26

Biographical information

Weeks Will you please start off by telling us where you were born?

McClendon I was born in Miami, Florida, Andrew.

Weeks And what year was that?

McClendon I was born in 1958.

Weeks What did your parents do for a living?

McClendon My dad was a laborer and my mom didn’t work so she was kind of like a stay at home mom. She did kind of odd and in things. Clean houses or you know [inaudible]. It was kind of like a – I guess you would say like a cleaning lady type of thing – but yeah. As far as a full-time job, no, she didn’t work. She stayed at home.

Weeks Do you have any siblings?

McClendon Yes. Three brothers and three sisters. I am the second oldest of seven children. There are six of us now. I have a sister that passed away in 2009.

Weeks And where did you go to school?

McClendon I went to school. Elementary school – Pine Villa Elementary School. I went to Mays Junior High School and South Dade Senior High School. All in Miami, Florida.

Weeks Did you do anything in between school and joining the Navy?

McClendon Just a summer job I worked. Obviously I was a full-time student and then for the summer, I would do odds and in things. Summer jobs, [inaudible] type of things, but my first real job was of course the military.

Weeks And when was that?

McClendon In [19]76.

Weeks '76. Why did you choose the Navy specifically?

0:02:00 **Decision to join the Navy**

McClendon I chose the Navy, because – and I'll tell you the story of how I actually joined the military and I'll never forget it. We were – I was at a high school pep rally. We actually had a Navy recruiter come to the pep rally and of course a recruiter's job is to recruit. So he came and we were all sitting there and kind of just talking – all the kids and stuff – and he actually just walked across the stage to the podium and there was something about him that really struck me. I liked the way he presented himself. I loved the uniform. The ribbons stood out and he was selling and I bought it. I was really impressed. Of course, obviously – and I guess by the same token, it could have been the [United States] Army. But there was something about him and at that point I made the decision then to join the military. Of course, my parents supported that and that's really how I got there.

Weeks Do you have any other family members in the service?

McClendon Yes. My brother, Michael. United States Army. My son actually is [in the] United States Army and my daughter is [in the] United States Air Force, and of course my husband United States Navy.

Weeks All around. So, I take it your family was pretty supportive.

McClendon Absolutely. Absolutely, they were. And actually, my plan was, after I graduated high school – South Dade Senior High – my plan was to go to the University of Miami. That's where I was actually slated to go, but that recruiter really changed my mind. I remember after his spiel, I went up to talk to him and said, "You know what? If I didn't have plans to go to college, I would join the Navy." And he says[sic], "Well, you have the best of both worlds. You can still do the military and still get your college degree." And I said, "Wow. The best of both worlds." And he said, "How would you like to go to college in Hawaii or wherever the military may send you?"

And I tell you what, it really came full circle. My very first assignment after basic training was Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. I know. Everything just fell in place. It was meant to be. Best decision. Best decision I ever made. I ever made. So – and of course, I was still able to go to school. I worked. And of course, when military

didn't call, when I didn't have duties or assignments there, I would go to school at night. I did have the best of both worlds.

Weeks Where did you attend basic training?

0:07:59

First impressions of basic training

McClendon Basic training was right here at Recruit Training Command in Orlando, Florida.

Weeks And what were you trained to do for your career in the Navy?

McClendon I made it known in the beginning, because I was always was fascinated with law. I grew up watching Perry Mason. So I grew up in shows about law and order and jag. All this stuff really fascinated me. So my plan was to go to college, get a college degree, and go to law school. So that was my plan. But since my plan was changed, I went into the military. Of course, I went in without a college degree so I started as an E[nlisted Rank]-1, but I made it known – my very first assignment – I made it known that that's what I wanted to do after basic training and then what I did was – when I enlisted – I enlisted with guaranteed school. So I just made it known early on that that's what I wanted.

It was actually after basic training – of course I went to administrative school, because you have to start there – but from there, I went to my very first assignment. Made it known that I wanted to be a paralegal or the military – they're called legalmen. I was sent to school there. After school, that's the career I followed and to this day, I am still doing the same thing, although retired from the military. I'm at the courthouse and I'm doing the exact same thing. Working on the second retirement so to speak.

Weeks Did you have any experiences here in Orlando before you came for training?

McClendon No. Did I have any experiences in Orlando before I came? No. But you know what? Growing up in my household, obviously chores was[sic] not unique to me. Getting up in the morning and making my bed – that was a requirement in my household. Washing dishes, mopping the floor, all of that, none of that.

And of course, coming from Florida, the weather didn't bother me, because – I know to some of the recruits, especially coming from cold climates, to come to Florida in the heat, none of that bothered me. I didn't have any problems with recruit training. Didn't have any problems taking orders or any of that. And that was instilled just as a child.

My parents, you know – they were parents. We were just taught early on to do what you're told. Be respectful. You don't work, you don't eat. Obviously those types of things. Again, chores were not foreign to me. So in the military, first thing you did when you get up, you get that bunk made up and those corners better be tight. Obviously, they had to teach me how to make the corners tight. But making up my bed, I was used to doing that. To this day, I get up out of the

bed, first thing I do. I made it up. It's just instilled in me. Wonderful experience, the military was.

Weeks Tell me about your first impression arriving at training.

McClendon My first impression of course – it was very scary. It was very scary, because here I am – I'm not under my parents' roof. I'm under Uncle Sam's roof. And I get off the bus, and oh my gosh – company commanders. They were just that. Company Commanders.

So it was a scary situation, because I arrived here, it was late, late, late in the evening and I guess just the fear of the unknown. I was scared. I was scared. But at the end of the day when it all washed up, it was all for nothing. It was all for nothing. Then, of course, lonely. Here I am, I left my mom and dad back in Miami, all my sisters and brothers. Now I'm on this bus. I just got on this bus and there's[sic] 80 women. We're all scared. You could tell we're all scared. Some of them crying, some of them not. But it really worked out. It worked out. Yeah.

Weeks What were your primary responsibilities?

McClendon At basic training?

Weeks Yeah.

McClendon Do whatever they say do. That was my primary responsibility. And of course, obviously it was very structured. We had PT – physical fitness. We had studies. So we had training time physically and we had training time mentally. So we were taught what the standing orders were. We were taught the chain of command structure. So we were taught all of that and that's the purpose of it to prepare you for the fleet. To prepare you to walk outside the gate and be prepared to defend your country, but all along, obviously it's a learning process.

You don't learn everything in basic training. You don't learn everything. So because basic training was six and a half to eight weeks. There is no way you're going to learn about any military in six to eight weeks, but it was all a learning process. It's just like with your job. You're not going to start a job, and in six weeks, know everything there is to know. I guess some people may do that, but I didn't pick up that quick. But it was a learning process but you're equipped with the basics for sure.

Weeks What was your impression of other recruits?

McClendon You know what, Andrew? At first, I would look at them and my heart would go out to a lot of them, but we were all in the same boat. We were all scared. We all didn't know what was going to happen. Of course, my recruiter prepared me. My recruiter didn't tell me that, "Okay, Dee. When you get off the bus, there will be a red carpet there and they're going to walk you down the carpet. They're

gonna lead you to the..." So my recruiter didn't tell me that. I was prepared to be broken down individually and be raised up with the team, with the unit.

So when I got off that bus, it was all about Dee, but when I left, I wasn't that way. It was about that person in that bunk next to me who would probably have to defend my back one day. So it was all about that. So I realized the purpose was to break you down individually so it's not about self. A lot of soldiers and sailors are depending on you to know your job and they're depending on you. You know, as far as support goes. So I did take a look at a lot of the recruits and we were all scared but, by the end of that basic training, who would have known? Who would have known? Yeah and a lot of those – we're best friends today. A lot of those contacts, I still have them in my address book and we're very good friends to this day. We just kept in contact.

Weeks Wow. Was there any kind of social life on base then?

McClendon Yes. There was. Now, in basic training, there was no social life. You didn't have any time for anything. So, no. No social life in basic training, because it was all about preparation, preparation, preparation. You lived for mail call – to get a letter from home. You lived for that. But no there was no social life whatsoever. That didn't begin.

Actually for me, there was no social life actually as I got more acclimated and knowing my duties. Of course, every duty station was a different assignment. It was a different location, different people, different bosses, different staff, but eventually, as you get more comfortable – I started to get more comfortable as years progressed, of course. After basic training, my very first duty station as an E-1. I made number one and I'm looking at my boss who has all these stripes on his arm. I'm scared half to death. I'm scared half to death. But all of that was for nothing. Met the best people and the support that you get is just – I can't even begin to explain it.

But yeah. social life didn't begin until after I had had some years under my belt, because I spent all my time studying, because my goal was – and I knew in basic training that I was going to retire. I just knew it and my goal was, *Dee, while you're here, we should make this work for you. You wanted to go to school. You're gonna go to school.* And I was able to do everything. All my goals. I was able to do everything that I had on my list. I knew I was gonna retire day one. I was scared to death, but I knew. I woke up that next morning and said, you know what, I'll be here for 20 years. I will.

Weeks Wow.

McClendon Mmhmm. I was just that comfortable with that. I've never regretted the decision. I've never woken up and said, *Oh my gosh. Why did I do this?*

0:14:10

Family life in the Navy

McClendon And there have been times where, you know, I've had to leave my kids and when what I was saying—I was just so fortunate that—I mean, I eventually married the love of my life who's also in the military. And back then, we were just fortunate enough that we were never ever away at the same time. So it was always one of us home. Either he was TAD—temporary additional duty—or I was. It just worked out that we were never gone at the same time. I know it's not like that anymore, but it was when I was there. We were just blessed and fortunate that there was always one of us there, because eventually—my kids who are now in the military.

Weeks When did you meet your husband?

0:18:24

Recruit training at NTC Orlando

McClendon I met my husband in '78. And I met my husband at the very first duty station, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. I was in Hawaii. Met him in Hawaii and it's what? Thirty something years later?

Weeks Did you know?

McClendon No. No. *[laughs]* No. No. No, I didn't know that. I was saying—no. I didn't know that. But anyway—but yeah I met him and we've been together ever since. That I didn't know. But, yeah everything was further down. I've been truly blessed.

Weeks Tell me what your instructors were like during basic training.

McClendon We had, of course—I had female instructors, but we trained together. We trained—I was in an integrated company so males and females—we trained together. Although their job was to be rough and tough, which they fulfilled. And I think they went a little overboard, which they fulfilled, but of course their job wasn't for me to like them. wasn't for any of us to like them. Their job was to give us orders and for us to make sure that we carry them around and they are the ones that prepared me. That's the only contact that you have—your company commander.

So a lot of responsibilities are placed on that person and their job is to prepare you for the fleet. Obviously, when we screwed up—you betcha. But when once a person screwed up, "Oh, it wasn't Dee." It wasn't one person screwin' up. It was the entire company. If one failed, you all failed. So, no. It's not one person, it's the company. So it behooved you to get it right or, if you messed it up the first time, trust me, you won't make that same mistake again. You won't make that same mistake again. It was never one person and my company commanders.

And of course, at the time I would say no. I didn't like them. Didn't care for them. Of course, obviously, orders were barked at you. That didn't bother me, because I told you, my household—my parents didn't, as they say, play the

radio. But I realized early on what the big plan was. I realized early on what the goal was. what their job was. I never took any of it personally, because you could – oh my gosh – because again, and I say I think the purpose was to tear you down individually so you're not thinking about yourself and you'll get back up as a unit. There were 80 females in my unit. Can you imagine what we all thought of ourselves? Oh my gosh. Can you imagine that would have been? Mmm mmm. Before it was over, I thought of my shipmates. I put them first even before me. I'll tell you what. We got there, we would eye each other and kind of size each other up. On day one, you're talking about some crying. When that was over, when basic training was over and we each parted our ways, some of us met again in another place. Some of them, I've never seen since, but I always remembered them

Weeks What was a basic day like?

McClendon A basic day was like – obviously we would have – we would get up early in the morning, and when I say early, I'm talkin' four o'clock. It would be like four o'clock in the morning to get up, because obviously we have to be prepared and be standing at attention in line ready for inspection when our company commanders got there. So you figure that's a company of 80 girls. So we all got in, got showered, got to change. When they say "military showered" – got to change. When they say "military showers" – two-three minutes. Because there's[sic] 80 girls that got to get in and get ready. And then get ready, stand in line. If we know the company commander's gonna be there at eight o'clock, you best be there standing in that line in front of your bunk ready for personal inspection. Ready for your bunk inspection and that was first thing in the morning.

Obviously everyday consisted of PT [physical fitness] on the grinder, which they called "the field." Every morning consisted of calisthenics PT. After PT, there would be breakfast and it just depends on which week we were in, because – believe it or not – there was week one. There was a schedule. Week one, week two, three, four. Of course, obviously, early on, we would see company commanders on the weekend, but as you got more – as the weeks went by, you would start to see them less and less, because then at that point, we didn't need them as much as we did in the beginning.

But of course, weekends – normally Saturdays – we would have to ourselves. Later on, not in the beginning – Sundays – it was up to you. There was[sic] church services. You could pick what church service you want to go to. Go to church services. I think everybody went to church. Everybody would be there. We'd would be huggin' and cryin' and – "Lord, when is this gonna be over? When is this gonna be over?" And then, what I loved about it is the company that sat in front, that was your last week. So your goal was to make it to the very front of that church, because you know that that's the company that's gonna be graduating that weekend. So that was your last week.

And so there was a schedule and company commanders set a schedule—week one through week eight. But it was definitely calisthenics every day. Definitely there were studies every day. Then of course, we did have time for ourselves. Not a lot. Not a lot in the beginning, but like I said, you live to get that letter from home. We had time to write letters and then normally that would be on your downtime. And again, in the beginning, there wasn't a lot of downtime, because the object is to get that mind trained while it's fresh. But toward the end, there was a lot of downtime.

As you got closer to graduating, you would have a weekend where you could do whatever you want. I remember going to [Walt] Disney [World] and all of that. I wish I had been to Disney before, because I was born and raised in Florida—in Miami. So I had gone to Universal [Studios Orlando]. I had gone to Disney. And actually, we did that on our senior trip—on our senior trip in high school. By the time you get to week five, you're—oh, like it's pretty much downhill now. *Oh, I got this. I got this. Yeah.* You know how you're doing academically and obviously you have to pass tests.

And even today, there's physical fitness tests. You gotta be—I'm not sure what the standards are now. It's your different age group. Obviously a 19-year-old should be able to run a mile in less time than a 40-year-old so depending on your age, the standards were different, but there is a physical fitness standard in the military. All branches. You gotta be physically fit. I mean, you know, you can't be tryin' to get up a hill carrying whatever you need to carry and be all out of breath. That's not gonna work. So, that's not gonna work. Even today, you gotta look sharp in that uniform.

Weeks Was it difficult for you at all?

McClendon No.

Weeks No?

McClendon Not at all. No. I had no problem with the physical fitness portion. Now, I will admit I wasn't used to getting up at three-four o'clock in the morning going out there doing—on the grinder doing military sit-ups and mountain climbers and all of that. So I wasn't used to doing that, but you conform. But no, it wasn't a problem. No. It wasn't a problem, because I was very—even in high school—I was very athletic and so that didn't bother me. None of that did.

Weeks You mention that you lived for the letters—letter day.

McClendon Oh, letter day. yes.

Weeks Who would you write letters to and who would you get letters from?

McClendon I'd get letters of course from my parents, my sisters and brothers. "Oh, I miss you guys. I miss you." And I'm like, "Well, you weren't telling me that when I

was there." Then of course, I was the oldest girl. My siblings looked up to me. I had one brother older than I am, but I think there is something special about being the oldest daughter. Of course, when I left—and I say even my baby brother—I just think, *Oh my gosh*. I think he thought I was his mom for a little while, because he's a lot younger than I am. But it was like, "Oh my gosh. Our sister is gone." That was the first time that family was detached.

So I was the first one to leave home. And I'll tell you what, when that recruiter came to pick me up to take me to the train station, and—from my parents' house to the end of the walkway to the car was his car—the recruiting car—that was the longest step. Oh my gosh. I thought I would never—and maybe I was just walking real slow[sic]. I don't know what it was. I said that was the longest driveway. I just looked at the car like I was gonna never get there. And obviously I know it was all mentally now. Just the fear of—was all ready to go, ready to go, ready to go. But when the day actually came—because I looked back, my mom was crying. I said I can't look back, because if she's crying, she's gonna start me. Because obviously, I was going to miss my family. That's with anything. That's with anything. Even if I had gone off to college, I would have still had the same feeling, because I'm gonna miss them. I'm gonna miss them. I didn't tell my siblings that often, but yeah. I was gonna miss them.

But yeah. We lived for letter day. We had time to write letters so I would just catch up, see how things were going, and we would just do it through letters. There were opportunities that we would do phone calls and when I went in—I mean, I was able to call my parents. I don't know whether it's like that anymore, but I was able to call just to let them know—do what we call a "well visit" or a "well phone call" or whatever they call it today, just to let your loved ones know that you made it safely and you're here. And to tell them that, "Okay. now just so you know, don't be expecting letters every day. Don't be expecting phone calls, because we're here now and I just wanted to let you know that we are safe and we made it safely. Now, the fun begins." So yeah.

0:26:03

Having children in the Navy

McClendon But anyways—and I am hopeful they still do that, but I don't know. Well, yeah. Because I know my son called me. My son—my older son grew up and went into the Army. It was a couple days later, but he did call me to let me know that he was there. So I understood all of that, because I lived it. Because I know one of the questions—a friend of mine—"Oh my gosh. Your children are going into the military. How can you stand it? Oh my gosh. You're gonna let him go?" And I say, "Well, it's going to be his decision just like it was mine. My parents supported me and I'm going to support him." I mean I lived it so I know.

When my daughter, who is stationed in San Antonio, Texas—United States Air Force—when she calls, I can relate. You know, my son, who is in the Army stationed in Germany—I can relate. Me and my husband—we can relate, because we've lived it. I supported their decision. Didn't realize they were going in the

military though. Being raised in the military though. Being raised in the military, I thought, *Oh my gosh. That's they last thing that they would do.* But they went in. Out of three children, two of them went into the military.

Weeks You mentioned the grinder earlier. Tell me about the grinder.

0:27:40

Memories of boot camp

McClendon Alright. the grinder is just a field. Imagine – all it is – that's what they call it in the military. The grinder is just a – it's similar to – just imagine a basketball court with no goals. All it is just a slate of concrete. It's all mapped out, because a lot of the time you're doing different exercises on there but the grinder – you do your calisthenics on there. As you start getting closer to graduation, you do your formations on there. You have to practice different formations. It's really big. Each company – you could have – oh my gosh – quite a few companies out there practicing formations and the formations they issue, you gotta be able to line up properly. There's a flag bearer in the front with the flag and you got to be able to position that right, carry that right, you got to be able to line up and there was a whole bunch of different things we used to and that's all that is. It's just a big field with no grass. All I guess concrete. In the military, they called it a "grinder". So what that came from, what that name comes from, I don't know. I'm sure there's a reason.

Weeks So what did it feel like to finally graduate?

McClendon Mixed feelings. Believe it or not, I cried. I really did. I cried. Because I knew there was going to be some relationships that would probably – some of my friends that I would probably never see again. I was definitely ecstatic. Definitely happy that it was over. Then – *Oh my gosh. I did it. Oh, I did it. I did it. I did it.* Then, at the same time, I was sad, because, believe it or not, those company commanders who got on my last nerve – I was gonna miss them, because that was it. That was your family. You'd be surprised how closely you could bond. So our company commanders, boy, were we gonna miss them. I think everybody cried. Even our company commanders. Those two harsh, tough company commanders – you just saw a different side of them. You saw a different side of them. So yeah. it was happiness and sadness. When they put the orders in your hand for that next assignment, and you're like, I'm never gonna see them again. We're never gonna wake up together again. we're never gonna sit there. Because, believe it or not, I had 80 sisters. And although that sounds – oh my gosh – 80 sisters? How'd I even deal with three? Now I've got 80. So it was like leaving 80 of my family members.

Weeks Tell me about your first assignment.

0:30:10

Assignments following graduation

McClendon My very first assignment – after basic training, I went to school. And my very first assignment was Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. I think I told you that. That was my

very first assignment. I worked in a legal office. I was at Fleet Training Group in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. So what I used to do is—I had to take a little small boat—that’s what they called it—similar to like a little dinky, I guess—little small boat. And every morning, because I worked on an island, a little boat would take me to [inaudible] island. And every morning I would pass the [U.S.S.] *Arizona* Memorial. We would pass it every morning and I would look down and it seemed like I could see the bubbles. You could still see down there. I took that little boat to work every morning and I was there for three years I think.

Weeks What did you do?

McClendon I worked in the administrative field and they put me in a law office, because I made it known in the beginning that that’s what I wanted to do. Remember the female Perry Mason part? Yeah. So I made it known early on that’s what I wanted to do. but being a legalman or a paralegal, you had to be an E-5 in order to be able to convert to that rank. But one of the requirements before you could do this—you had to have an administrative background.

So after basic training I actually went to school in Meridian, Mississippi—Yeoman A School. And from there, I went to my very first assignment, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. And I made it known then that that’s what I wanted to be. You know what? Every assignment that I had was always in a law office. I mean, you hear stories—you got to do your duties and work in the galley, peel potatoes, and swab the decks—and I guess I was put in a position where I was always needed—the services were always needed. They were always shorthanded so even as an E-1, I was in a legal office. So I never got a chance to enjoy that—the swabbing the deck and peeling the potatoes and the galley and all the other stuff you hear. I never did any of that but it all worked out just the same. Always in a law office, every duty station, every assignment.

Weeks Where did you go from Hawaii?

McClendon From Pearl Harbor, Hawaii—I’m trying to think here. I left Hawaii and I went to Jacksonville. I went to AIMD—Aircraft Intermediate Makers Department—in Jacksonville, Florida. There I worked in an administrative office, as well. I worked in the admin office there as well. Of course, it was an aircraft intermediate maintenance department, so I worked in an admin office where there was nothing but hangars with planes. That’s what they did—kind of just fix the planes. My job was, of course, obviously to process paperwork, make sure the records are processed, those types of things.

From Jacksonville, Florida, I went to—because like I said, you had to be in an administrative field, you had to be an E-5. So as soon as I made E-5, I went to legalman school or paralegal school. and, from that point on, my rate changed, because I was an administrative yeoman and my rate changed to legalmen. All along, even as a yeoman, I was always in an office. So I went to Legalmen A

School in Newport, Rhode Island. I left there gone to my first assignment as a paralegal.

Weeks How long were you there?

McClendon My school in Newport, Rhode Island?

Weeks Mmhmm.

McClendon My school was four or five months. Four or five intense months. One thing too, –it's like any other specialty or any other job, even in the military, you're constantly training, because the law changes all the time and a lot of your opinion on what you're doing, even as a civilian – a lot of times you're required to, even as a civilian, you are – a lot of times you're required to maintain your certification so you're required to – as things change, you go to different schools to learn what the new changes are. That's the same in the military no matter what your job is. Every time there's a change, there's[sic] different schools you go to, to learn the new equipment or learn the new structure or what.

So after [inaudible] school in Newport, Rhode Island – then, I left Newport, Rhode Island and I went to my very first assignment as a paralegal. I think that was in Norfolk, Virginia. So from then on – that was all in Norfolk, Virginia. Of course, I worked for the Navy Marine Corps Trial Judiciary. It was myself and another senior chief. We were staffed for at that time eight JAGs [Judge Advocate Generals] – eight judges – military judges. Our job was to do their scheduling. Get their scheduling done, set hearings. Whatever it was that day. And that's what we did. Hearings, hearings, courts, trials. It was actually trials. At that time, I was there, there were eight jags.

Weeks Did you enjoy that?

McClendon Oh, yes. I did. I did. I did. I've always been fortunate enough to be around good people. In the military and outside the military, and even now, I work for a good group of people.

0:36:27 **Fondest memories of the Navy**

Weeks When you think about your experiences, what would you say, if you could, your fondest memory of your time in the Navy?

McClendon My fondest memory of my time in the Navy – of course, obviously graduation. Graduation from boot camp is one of them. Actually, you know what? I really can't pinpoint any one thing. I loved all my assignments. I enjoyed it. I made every assignment work. Obviously, I been[sic] – early on, you go where the needs of the military are. You don't have a choice of where you go, so you go where they send you and I look at it this way: Had it not been for the military, I probably never would have saw[sic] Hawaii. Absolutely. I probably wouldn't have saw[sic] it. All the places that I've traveled – had it not been for the military,

I probably never would have had the opportunity to see that. So I loved all the travels. I enjoyed all the people that I met. My assignments—I loved that. I would think that to come full circle, graduating from basic training and then retiring. All the stuff in between was just gravy, I think. I think that was my—the very first fond memory definitely was graduating basic training. *Dee, you made it. You made it.*

Weeks I want to ask you about the Naval Training Center [Orlando] a little bit. Were there ever business that would come there—family members, outsiders?

McClendon At the Naval Training Center?

Weeks Yes.

McClendon I'm sure there was. Now, I was here in Orlando at the Naval Training Center, but I worked at recruit training command. The base was broken up into two sections. On one side of the base was recruit training command where the recruits trained. Then the other side was the actual training center, which obviously, you didn't have recruits on that side. I'm sure there was[sic] over where I was and I was on the recruit training side. The only time visitors were there was when you were close to graduating and you could have your family members—you know, you're getting ready to pass—review for your graduation. You could have visitors. I remember when I was in, I never saw any visitors. Half the time I was scared to death anyway. On the recruit training side, no. There was[sic] no family member visitors if that's what you're saying, but once you're graduated—and that's the thing—two totally separate things: basic training is one thing.

But once you graduate, to me, it was a regular job. Obviously there were restrictions and there were extra things. In other words, I was required to stay on duty. I was required—if they needed me to go on assignment, I was there. Other than that, when I wasn't working, that was my free time. So it's that the military had hostage over me. It wasn't anything like that. It was a regular assignment. Whatever my work schedule was, I would do my work schedule. When I'm off work, I'm off work. Obviously though, you're in the military 24 hours a day. And you should carry yourself that way, because when you're out there, people don't say, "Oh, look at Dee." They say, "Oh my gosh. She's in the Navy? She's out there doing that." So, they don't see that. They don't see you. They see the military. "That's how they act in the military?" So you're always in the military, 24 hours a day while you're in it and you're representing your country the entire time that you're in, but your free time is your free time. It was just like a regular job to me.

Weeks So did you travel off base a lot?

McClendon Yes I did. I traveled off base a lot. For my first years, I lived on base. The weekends was[sic] mine. Pearl Harbor, Hawaii—that was my very first assignment. When I wasn't working, I was out at the beach at [inaudible] and all

those other ones. And I would see things, go to the beach. Oh, yeah. I used that opportunity to see things, because I probably would have never saw it but you know what, you never know. But I couldn't imagine I'd be going to Hawaii had it not been for the military. Only because that probably been the furthest thing—that wouldn't have been on my bucket list. Let me put it that way. Probably wouldn't have been on my bucket list, so I probably wouldn't have made it there. But yes. My free time—I would do traveling.

Then, we were in Iceland and my free time—of course, we had a few Icelandic friends who would take us to see Blue Lagoon and here it is. it's freezing. Snow is on the ground, but you're in the water and it's just this warm and the vapors are coming up. Different things—I wouldn't have had any thoughts of going to Iceland. See, I would never think of going to Iceland, but I was there two—for another year. My husband and I—our child. We had a son born there.

Weeks In Iceland?

McClendon In Iceland. yeah. I had a son born in Iceland who has dual citizenship, but I never would have saw Iceland had it not been for the military. Never would have saw Germany had it not been for the military. I mean it wasn't on my list. *Okay, Dee, you must go to Iceland. You must go to Germany.* That would have never been on my list. I don't think.

Weeks What was your favorite place that you traveled?

McClendon I loved Germany. I loved Germany. I think at the time I traveled there, I had a brother stationed there. so I was able to see some things. He took us on tours. We were able to see the castles and all the old artifacts. So I loved Germany. Germany and Iceland was[sic] my favorite. Germany and Iceland was[sic] my favorite.

Even though I wouldn't say that when I first got to Iceland. I tell you, it's so cold there you can barely see your hand in front of your face. I mean they have what they call "white outs." It is so—I mean, the snow and everything and the wind is blowing. You can't even see your hand in front of your face. That's how cold it is. I got off the plane and my sponsor was waiting there for me with a big parka. It looked like an Eskimo parka with a hood and the fur. That thing must have weighed ten pounds. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed Iceland, as well. And I enjoyed Germany. But you know what? I just enjoyed—I made the best of every place that I was at.

We did a tour in Key West[, Florida]. I hated to go there, but somebody had to do it. We did a tour in Key West, but you know what? When the military said, "This is where you're going." The first thing I do is—*Okay, Dee. What's unique about this place? That's what you want to see. You're gonna be there. Make it work for you.* So that's what I did. Well, just in case I never get back again, I'm gonna make sure I see this, this, this, this, when I can. So that's what I did. I just viewed it

differently. I didn't view it like, Oh gosh, I don't want to go there. No. I didn't view it that way. I said, *You know what?* I just view it as another opportunity that I probably wouldn't have otherwise.

Weeks Did other people have that same kind of mindset?

McClendon And you know what? I don't think so. You talk to people and I just believe that you like it or you don't. It's probably not appealing to a lot of people. Every two or three years you're picking up. I mean every two-three years you're just getting settled. Now you're picking up and moving to another assignment. Oh my gosh. Now you're going to some place where perhaps you may not even speak the language. It could be a country – a foreign country in Italy or some place. Or it could be a place they're sending you where your language is not the dominant language. Now, if you have a family – oh my gosh. I just got my kids settled or now. I'm just in school myself. Now it's time for me to transfer.

I just believe that you either like it or you don't. For some people it works. For some people it's not their cup of tea. Some people say, "You know what? Let me just try it." At the end of that term, "You know, I don't think that was for me, but I wanted to just give it a shot." It just depends. I think that's the main thing. Even in the civilian sector – I mean, you walk into a job now, either you like it or you don't. *You know what? Let me just stay here until something else better comes along.* You either like it or you don't or you make it work for you. *You know what? I like it. My job is to be there. Whatever I'm gonna do is whatever I need to do. If I need more schooling, if I need community service, I'm going to walk in with where I want to be in that company and you just start and you work toward a better [inaudible].* Again, like I said, you talk to some people and they don't like it. I just think it's different for everybody.

Weeks You mentioned that your son was born in Iceland. How did the birth of your son change your time in the military?

McClendon You know what? It didn't. When we got there – actually, I was pregnant with the child when we got there. My son was born probably about maybe three-four months after I had gotten there. We enjoyed Iceland. Our original tour was only for two years and we enjoyed it so we asked for a year extension. I enjoyed Iceland, in addition to seeing some of the other countries. You know, I like the Naval Air Station Keflavik, Iceland.

At the time when I was in, you lived aboard what they call the greeting area. Everybody lived on base. You're not allowed to live off base. Of course, just the closeness and the comradery between the sailors was very good, because we were all there together. For me, we had an added benefit, because my boss at the time working at the Naval Legal Services Detachment at the time. His wife was Icelandic, so we got to go to places that we probably would never have gotten to go, because we just don't know the country. We just don't know the country, so I really enjoyed that. We just wanted to stay an additional year and it would have

been nice and I probably would have stayed a little longer, but, I mean, career-wise, I think it was just time to move. I didn't want to stay dormant in one place too long.

0:48:35

Legacy of NTC Orlando

Weeks One thing that we ask everyone who has been to the Naval Training Center is what do you think its lasting legacy in Central Florida is?

McClendon I think the lasting legacy is – and I'm just going to speak toward when I was there. I think one of legacies is going to be – that's the only facility where men and women train together. That's what I remember. The men and the women trained together – one of the first bases to have integrated companies. Nowhere else did they ever do that. They didn't do it in California. They didn't do it in Great Lakes. We trained together, which made sense to me. We're going to fight together, so why can't we train together? I think that's one of the lasting legacies.

Weeks Why do you think other training centers didn't allow women?

McClendon You know what? That's a good question. I don't know, because the only other centers were out in California and Great Lakes. Maybe harassment? "Oh my gosh. Men and women can't train together. Oh, what would that do?" I never knew the reasoning behind that. If a war broke out, men are not going to be on this side and women on this side. We're all going to be together. That's the legacy that I remember.

Weeks What do you think visitors would like to see or be reminded of when they visit the site of the base?

McClendon What they would like to see?

Weeks Yeah.

McClendon When they revisit the base here? You know what? What I miss is the [USS] *Blue Jacket*. I miss the *Blue Jacket*. I really do miss the *Blue Jacket*. Of course, we got a tour there. I missed the bear. We had some beautiful compounds, but I really do miss the *Blue Jacket*. Even now, when I go down that street – there's a park down there – when I go down that street to go to the VA [Veterans Health Administration] hospital for my appointments, I always look over there. I look over there and I'm like, *Oh my gosh. I remember that. I remember the tour.*

Everybody gets the tour that comes at basic training, because obviously – Navy – you go to sea. You're on the boat and it's a replica. It's exactly how it looks. It's exactly how it looks. So you get to go down those hatches – those itty bitty small hatches that you can barely fit in. You go down those hatches – the bells. Permission to come ashore. permission to come aboard. You do all of that. It's a true replica. They train you exactly the way it is in the military. The way it is once you leave those gates. They really prepare you for the outside. Now

whether you chose to use that or not it's really up to you but they prepare you. They really do. I can only speak for my two company commanders. They do an excellent job at preparing us for the fleet.

Weeks Tell me about when you were getting ready to leave the Navy.

McClendon When I was getting ready to leave the Navy, of course – mixed emotions. Of course, it was the only thing I knew and actually even after I retired, I was looking at different high schools trying to get on as NJROTC [Navy Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps] instructors. It was a really big adjustment for me, because that was the only thing that I knew and it was so totally different in the civilian world.

Number one: now there's no uniform now. Just to hang the uniform up was a big adjustment for me, because for years, every morning I didn't have to decide what shoes go with what. I knew it was going to be the black boondockers. Okay. you're going to put on your whites or your blues. So just to not get up to put the uniform on was a big adjustment. It was really an adjustment period for me.

I tried for years to get back on. Obviously, on retirement, I couldn't come back in. Even now – I'm too old now – but if they called me and said, "Dee, we need you." I'd be just – "Let me get my sea bag ready. I'm ready." They wouldn't do that now. I'm just too old now to go back in.

But yeah. it was a big adjustment. Retirement was bittersweet. It really was bittersweet. Number one – *Oh, Dee. what are you going to do? Put us under – put to the side everything that you've known for all these years. Now you're going to embark on something different. Just the thought of, Oh my gosh. Now I have to go on an interview. How do I interview? What do you wear to an interview? What do you wear to an interview?* Just the thought of having to look for a job, that was kind of scary. Once you get through all of that, it all worked out. Walked into a job and it's been there ever since. It was bittersweet. Bitter, because it kind of left a bitter taste in my mouth, because I was walking away from everything that I knew. And sweet, because now you get a chance to live the rest of your life. You dedicated the first portion to the military. Now you get a chance to build the rest of your life. Whatever that entailed. I knew I'm going to work in somebody's legal office, because that's all I knew how to do and that's what I enjoy. So why change what works for you?

Weeks If it ain't broke...

McClendon Absolutely. *[laughs]* Absolutely. It was just bittersweet and to this day, do I miss it? Yeah. I still do and I've been retired for a while and I still miss it.

Weeks What's the most valuable thing the Navy taught you?

McClendon That I can do whatever I set my mind to do. That I can do whatever I set my mind to do. It's pretty much – and I will say military – although the military has

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taught me that, I think that really stems back just from my parents, my childhood. They encouraged all of their kids. You know what? If you can see it, you can do it. You can see it, you can do it. You can dream it, you can do it. That's what I try to do to my children. Now, if you see that right there, that means you can aim for it. It's right in your path. go for it. If you can see it, you can do it. I believe that.

Weeks Is there anything else you would like to add that I didn't ask you about?

McClendon No. I think we pretty much covered everything. Such a wonderful interviewer and you did a wonderful job. No. There's nothing I would like to add.

Weeks Well, thank you so much.

McClendon You're very welcome.

End of Interview