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## Capture Living History - Vivian Reese-Harned, shopkeeper and proud of it

By Carl Kelly



Capt. Vivian Reese-Harned, USMC Ret. remembers her financial and secretarial work in the Coast Guard during World War II as vital and fulfilling.

*Part four of a continuing series.*

**Vivian Reese-Harned served as a storekeeper in the U. S. Coast Guard during World War II (WWII) on 42nd Street in New York. Some may scoff, but Capt. Reese-Harned would be the first to remind us that the military not only runs on its belly but also depends on its support and supply.**

She had been a schoolteacher in Pennsylvania before the war. "It was sort of a dead end street," she remembered. "I knew the second day I was there it was not for me. But, our opportunities were limited and this was Depression days. So, I stuck it out." She continued teaching. But, war was declared in December of 1941 and soon Army, Navy, and Coast Guard were accepting women enlistees.

"When you teach school," she noted, "you have to tell them whether you're coming back next year. In May of 1943 I knew I didn't want to come back, so I went and enlisted."

Her parents were divided regarding her enlistment, but Vivian was firm. "I said, 'That's where all the men are. That's where I want to be. I want to do what they're doing.' I went in because I could not see sitting at home and doing nothing when I knew there were things to be done. I wanted to go, to do what I could do.

"Since I had a college degree I went into OCS. We were trained by the boatswain's mates, and they were pretty rough. 'Snap them eyes. Turn them heads.' They were pretty strict, so we turned out to be pretty good."

At the end of boot camp she was sent to storekeeper's school and became a storekeeper 3rd class. "That's about supply and pay and dispersing and things like that," she explained. "I was transferred to the Coast Guard District, New York City at 42nd and Broadway. Our barracks was a hotel at Broadway and 70th Street. I took the subway into work every day and back."

Speaking about her Coast Guard job as a storekeeper she said, "Someone had to do the jobs that supported the fighting men. We women were treated a lot differently then. I talked to some WACs who had been in Japan. They were into trucks and hauling stuff, that's what I'd call hard labor. We were not. We had secretarial duties, financial duties."

"It was a wonderful, wonderful assignment. I was very happy there," she remembered. "We worked long hours. We worked from 8 till 5:30 as I recall. In those days all the checks were typed, so when payday came every other week we all typed checks. We worked till 11 o'clock at night every night until all those checks were typed. So, it was hard work. But, everybody knew what had to be done, and everybody worked together. It wasn't a pleasure, but it wasn't a hardship either. We were tired, but nobody objected.

"Women were not allowed on ships. The only time that we even put our foot on a ship was when we went there with the payroll. That would be every two weeks. The cook would always have cookies for us when we got there."

She remembered victory in Europe as, "a wonderful, wonderful time in New York. All the ships that were in harbor, all blew their horns, and the people just started flocking onto Broadway. We had to be part of it, so we all went downtown, and milled around there. Later, when Eisenhower came back we had a big parade for him, ticker tape. It was wonderful working there at 42rd and Broadway because we could meet all the men coming back in ships."

After the war, Vivian Reese-Harned went into the Coast Guard reserves and retired as a Captain with 37 years service.

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