

LORRAINE “CONNIE” ALLORD: FROM “JUST A FARM GIRL” TO MARINE



Lorraine Conley was born in January of 1920, six months before women were granted the right to vote, in Tomahawk, Wis. Now, after celebrating her 100th birthday, she reflects on her century-long life and the history she has been a part of.

Her father George Conley served in the U.S. Army as a machine gunner during WWI and married her mother Ruth Riebl in 1919.

As an only child growing up on a farm, Lorraine spent much of her early years as her father's hunting and fishing buddy. She knew hunting and fishing weren't typically "girls' activities," especially at the time, but her family never limited her, setting the expectation that she could do whatever she put her mind to. That mindset is likely what led her to military service.

In 1941, Lorraine married Lawrence Allord and following the attack on Pearl Harbor, they were both motivated to join the military. Lorraine's husband joined the U.S. Navy, while she joined the U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve as one of the thousands of women who stepped into roles to support the war effort. During the war, she recalls,

women were responsible for over eighty percent of the positions previously held by men.

Lorraine was twenty-three years old when she went to Camp LeJeune for boot camp. Following basic training, she submitted her name for the rigorous training to become an air traffic controller. She was accepted and spent six weeks training before returning to Cherry Point, N.C., where she would eventually become a staff sergeant.

Allord often reflects on her time in the military as an air traffic controller. She was one of the first women in the air traffic control room and supervised a group of men who respected her and followed her lead. Every plane in and out of Cherry Point had to be cleared through her department. She recalls it being a tremendous responsibility and very stressful at times. After the long days at work, Lorraine would often write to her husband, stationed in the South Pacific. After a year and a half apart, they requested leave together and met in Chicago for her twenty-fifth birthday, a day Lorraine describes as "one of her best."

Following their service, the Allords moved back to Madison, where they raised their three children and she sought to resume her work as an air traffic controller. Unlike what she experienced in the military, not everyone was ready to work side by side with a woman. To this day she still expresses disappointment that she could not continue to work in a field she had grown to love. Later Allord earned her commercial pilot license, but decided that as a mother, she "could not see herself buzzing around the air much," and taking the risks that flying brought.

In her living room Allord proudly displays the Joan of Arc, a favorite of the pieces she has painted. Joan of Arc is famously remembered as a female heroine who led the French army's victory over the English at Orléans and was burned at the stake as a nonconformist of her day.

Allord says "she was just a farm girl who grew up to be a Marine," but others may call her a trailblazer or hero, much like Joan of Arc, for her accomplishments.