



Hilda Sara Van Winkle
Sando

US Coast Guard Women's Reserve
Apprentice Seaman

Served: Palm Beach, FL; Indiana;
Star Barracks, Brookline, MA;
Rockland, ME; Boston, MA

Interviewed by Jo Ellen Litz, February
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Hilda Sara Van Winkle was among the first women from Lebanon County known to serve in the United States military. She passed away in 1983. This interview is a recounting of her life and service as shared by her daughter, Shirley Folmer.

Born September 18, 1922, Hilda Sara Van Winkle Sando was the oldest of six children. At 41, her mother died and Hilda's dad wanted her to quit school to raise her siblings. Hilda refused and went on to earn her high school diploma. This strength of spirit eventually spurred Hilda on to join the United States military.

On several occasions, Shirley remembers unsuccessfully questioning her mother about her service, and came away with few answers. After talking with her aunt, Dolly Saltzer (Hilda's sister), Shirley learned that women who served in the military were sometimes looked down upon. Although this choice of profession may not always have been viewed admirably, Shirley has great respect and pride for her mother and her service to our country.

Three decades after her death at age 61(1983), Hilda Sara Van Winkle Sando's daughters discovered, by chance, a photo of their mother in a Coast Guard uniform. This is one of several treasures that would be uncovered by her daughters. The collection eventually included a white uniform and official discharge papers. According to the papers, at 5' 2 ¼" with auburn hair and an apparent strength and independence, Hilda enlisted in the United States Coast Guard Women's Reserve as an Apprentice Seaman.

The discharge papers are the only detailed window into Hilda's service. Presumably under Captain Dorothy C. Stratton, Hilda trained in Palm Beach Florida where a "ritzy hotel" promised "basic training under glamorous Florida seaside conditions."

Women in the Coast Guard were known as Semper Paratus Always Ready, SPARs. The purpose of this program was to train women to take over jobs so that men could be sent to fight overseas. SPARs were created on November 23, 1942 with the signing of Public Law 773 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. After WWII, SPARs were no longer needed but they did create a path for women serving in the military today.

In addition to her training in Florida, Hilda was also stationed in Indiana; the Star Barracks in Brookline, Massachusetts; Rockland, Maine; Illinois; and Boston, Massachusetts. She received an honorable discharge on March 16, 1945.

While the specific work Hilda performed in the service is not known, a search suggests Seaman duties could have been clerical in nature. They could have also included duties as a driver or telephone or a radio operator so that they 'could release a man to sea.' Since Hilda never drove, Shirley eliminated driving from her mother's possible service. Whatever her duties, Hilda earned \$66 per month and five cents a mile for travel.

After the service, Hilda married Charles Sando, a marine, and raised her two daughters and two sons in the City of Lebanon. Hilda is buried at Grand View Memorial Cemetery.

The interview with Shirley Folmer is available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH0QvFSWk0c>.

