

Berneice B. Seiferth

Born May 25, 1917 in Kansas City, MO

Died March 16, 2007

Missouri State Veterans Cemetery

Higginsville, Missouri

Plot Number: Sec B, #226

World War II

United States Marine Corps Women's Reserves (MCWR)

2nd Lieutenant

Early Life

Berneice "Bee" Ellen Berry¹ was born in Kansas City, Missouri to William F. and Sena Harms Berry on May 25, 1917.² She had one older brother, Will, Jr.³ By 1920 the family had moved to Haw Creek in Morgan County Missouri where she grew up and in 1930 the census noted the family lived in Moreau, also located in Morgan County. Berry attended Missouri Valley College in Marshall, Missouri, in 1933 and 1934 and in 1936 and 1938 she was teaching grade school in Versailles, Missouri. In 1940 she attended the summer term at the University of Missouri in Columbia, and she graduated from the University of Missouri. She remained in Versailles until she applied for acceptance to the Candidate Officers Training for the United States Marine Corps Women's Reserves (MCWR).⁴

Military Career

On July 30, 1942, Franklin Roosevelt signed Public Law 689 that authorized the creation of the Marine Corps Women's Reserves (MCWR). In November of 1942 Marine Corps Commandant Lt. General Thomas Holcomb agreed to create the MCWR and on February 13, 1943, enlistments opened.⁵ According to a newspaper interview conducted with Berniece in 2001, she applied for acceptance to the Marine Corps Women's Reserves candidate officers training school

¹Records show different spellings for "Berniece" including "Bernice" and more frequently "Berniece. The social security listing uses "Berniece" as does the marriage license. The Marine Corps enlistment/muster records use "Berneice." The Missouri State Veterans Cemetery headstone in Higginsville notes the middle initial of "B," but marriage records record her middle name was "Ellen."

²*Southern Illinoisan*; Publication Date: 18 Mar 2007; Publication Place: Carbondale, Illinois, USA; URL: <https://www.newspapers.com/image/83433909/?article=0d822f0b-d6ad-420f-a0f9-81c1de1304cc&focus=0.3308969,0.072548196,0.481667,0.56157976&xid=3355>.

³Year: 1920; Census Place: Haw Creek, Morgan, Missouri; Roll: T625_935; Page: 3A; Enumeration District: 121

⁴See *Sedalia Democrat*, September 28, 1933, p. 7; *Sedalia Weekly Democrat*, March 23, 1934, p.4; *Sedalia Weekly Democrat*, March 6, 1936, p. 3; *Sedalia Democrat*, November 20, 1938, p. 9; *Sedalia Democrat*, August 11, 1940, p. 7, *Sedalia Weekly Democrat*, July 30, 1943, p. 3.

⁵<https://www.womenmarines.org/united-states-marine-corps-women-reserves-usmcwr/>. Also see <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/695610>.

at the suggestion of her brother.⁶ Berniece was one of approximately 23,000 women who served in the MCWR during World War II.⁷ The Marines notified her in July of 1943 that she had been accepted and in September 1943 she reported to officer candidate training school at Camp Lejeune, New River, North Carolina.⁸

She graduated from officers training school by the end of 1943 at the rank of 2nd Lieutenant and in January 1944 she became commander of Company H, 2nd Headquarters Battalion, Henderson Hall, in Arlington, Virginia. She noted that the all-female Marine base was composed of four barracks with about 400 MCWR living in each barrack. She noted that her company was responsible for putting on performances for their fellow Marines and for nearby bases to keep morale up. She also remembered: “I felt a real calling to make sure that the girls were kept busy...Most of them were from really small towns and had never been away from home before. Some of them either had husbands or boyfriends who were also in the service, and we had to deal with the associated problems that came when one of them were reported killed or missing.”⁹

Berniece married Walter Lewis Handley on February 20, 1944, and she continued her service in the Marines until July 1945.¹⁰ She served two years in the Marine Corps and she said that she “...loved every minute of it” and “wouldn’t trade those years for anything.”¹¹

Life after service

Berniece and Walter moved to Versailles, Missouri after the war and the couple had one daughter, Cynthia, who was born on August 2, 1946.¹² The marriage did not last and in 1950 Berniece and Cynthia were living in Kansas City, Missouri where Berniece used her educational benefits from the G.I. Bill to pursue an MA in English degree from Kansas City University now known as the University of Missouri—Kansas City. She then pursued her Doctorate in Education specializing in administration from the University of Missouri Columbia from 1953 to 1955 and after earning her doctorate she accepted an academic appointment at Southern Illinois University (SIU) at Carbondale in 1956. She married Herbert E. Seiferth in 1956. Seiferth, from St. Louis, Missouri, was also a World War II veteran, who had also graduated from the University of Missouri Columbia with a master’s degree in education in 1956 and he accepted a position as a science teacher at Lincoln Junior High in Carbondale in 1956.¹³

⁶Linda A. Krutsinger, “Carbondale Woman Went from the Classroom to the Marines Corps,” *Southern Illinoisian*, December 7, 2001, p. 26.

⁷<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/united-states-marine-corps-women-s-reserve.htm>.

⁸National Archives in Washington DC; Washington, DC, USA; NAI Title: *U.S. Marine Corps Muster Rolls, 1893-1958*; NAI Number: *Nara Microform Publication T977*; Record Group Number: *Record Group 127*; Record Group Title: *Records of the U.S. Marine Corps*.

⁹Linda A. Krutsinger, “Carbondale Woman Went from the Classroom to the Marines Corps,” *Southern Illinoisian*, December 7, 2001, p. 26.

¹⁰Missouri State Archives; Jefferson City, MO, USA; *Missouri Marriage Records [Microfilm]*.

¹¹Linda A. Krutsinger, “Carbondale Woman Went from the Classroom to the Marines Corps,” *Southern Illinoisian*, December 7, 2001, p. 26.

¹²“Hospital Notes,” *Moniteau County Herald* (California, Missouri), August 8, 1946, p. 4.

¹³For information about living in Kansas City, Missouri see National Archives at Washington, DC; Washington, D.C.; *Seventeenth Census of the United States, 1950*; Year: 1950; Census Place: *Kansas City, Jackson, Missouri*;

Berniece was active in the community and supported organizations that her daughter, Cynthia, had joined and Berniece served as leader of Girl Scout troop 206 and President of the Carbondale Grade School Parents Association in the 1950s. In the 1960s she served as an officer in the Carbondale Alumnae Chapter of Delta Zeta. In 1972 she attended the 7th Biennial Convention of the Women Marines Association to reconnect with her colleagues that she had served with when she was in the U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserves from 1943-1945. At the time of her passing in 2007 she was a member of the University Baptist Church in Carbondale for more than fifty years.¹⁴

As a professor at SIU Berniece was a scholar, faculty advisor for education related student organizations, and was active in education professional organizations. In 1960 the *Illinois Education* magazine published her article, "A Class Newspaper," while she served as assistant professor of education and sixth-grade supervisor at the SIU school. In the 1960s she served as faculty advisor for the Alpha Upsilon chapter of Pi Lambda Theta, the honorary fraternity for women in education. In 1966 she served as faculty advisor for the "Student Historians of University School, Carbondale and secretary of SIU's Illinois Association for Higher Education organization. In 1967-1968 Seiferth became the coordinator for the student teaching center at SIU in Murphysboro, which was a position she held until her retirement. She published "Problems of Delinquency" in the May 1970 issue of the *The Councilor* and in 1971 she was promoted to associate professor. She published "How Do Elementary and Secondary Student Teachers Spend Their Time" in the fall 1972 issue of *Illinois School Research* and in 1979 she was promoted to full professor. She retired from SIU in 1987.¹⁵

Berniece was active in her community during her retirement years as she published letters to the editor that appeared in the *Southern Illinoian* and volunteered at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Marion, Illinois where she received her 2,500-hour pin in 1999. She also took time to share with others the experiences she had while serving as a Marine in World War II by participating in a public presentation at the First United Methodist church in Carbondale and by agreeing to be interviewed by Linda A. Krutsinger, reporter for the *Southern Illinoian* in 2001. Herbert passed away on March 5, 2001.¹⁶

Roll: 5481; Page: 34; Enumeration District: 116-605. For information about Berniece and Herbert see "Berneice B. Seiferth," obituary, *Southern Illinoian*, March 18, 2007, and "Herbert E. Seiferth," obituary, *Southern Illinoian*, March 7, 2001, p. 15.

¹⁴*Southern Illinoian*, November 4, 1958 p. 2; *Southern Illinoian*, September 9, 1959, p. 6; "New Officers of Delta Zeta alums installed, *Southern Illinoian*, April 25, 1968, p. 6; "Attends Womens' Meet," *Southern Illinoian*, August 9, 1972, p. 6; and "Berneice B. Seiferth," obituary, *Southern Illinoian*, March 18, 2007.

¹⁵*Southern Illinoian*, January 19, 1960, p 5; *Southern Illinoian*, November 21, 1965, p. 2; *Southern Illinoian*, April 26, 1966, p. 5; "University School Opens September 11," *Southern Illinoian*, August 28, 1967, p. 2; "Delinquency," *Southern Illinoian*, June 28, 1970, p. 30; *Southern Illinoian*, March 19, 1971, p. 3; "Berniece Seiferth Article Appears," *Southern Illinoian*, January 10, 1973, p. 6; "SIU-C promotes 19 to Full Professors," *Southern Illinoian*, April 12, 1979, p.24; *Southern Illinoian*, September 16, 1987, p. 34; and "Berneice B. Seiferth," obituary, *Southern Illinoian*, March 18, 2007.

¹⁶*Southern Illinoian*, June 18, 1993, p. 14; "VA Medical Center Honors Community Volunteers for Work, *Southern Illinoian*, May 13, 1999, p. 11; "Program Honors Veterans of World War II, *Southern Illinoian*, November 7, 1998,

Berniece moved to Columbia, Missouri, to be with her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren and she passed away on March 16, 2007, while living in South Hampton Place in Columbia. A memorial service was held at University Baptist Church in Carbondale, Illinois, on March 24, 2007. She was interred in the Missouri State Veterans Cemetery in Higginsville.¹⁷

This biography was researched and written by Dr. Jon E. Taylor, Professor of History, University of Central Missouri, with research support by MA in History student Joey Lake, and funded by a 2023-2024 Veterans Legacy Memorial Grant.

Photos:

p. 17; Linda A. Krutsinger, "Carbondale Woman Went from the Classroom to the Marines Corps," *Southern Illinoisan*, December 7, 2001, p. 26; and "Berneice B. Seiferth," obituary, *Southern Illinoisan*, March 18, 2007.

¹⁷"Berneice B. Seiferth," obituary, *Southern Illinoisan*, March 18, 2007.





BERNIECE B
SEIFERTH

1STLT

US MARINE CORPS

WORLD WAR II

MAY 25 1917

MAR 16 2007

SEMPER FIDELIS
WITH THE LORD

B 226

| NO. | NAME AND RANK | ENLISTED | REMARKS | 100 |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|----------|--|-----|
| MARINE CORPS WOMEN'S RESERVE | | | | |
| CLASS VI (a) | | | | |
| SECOND LIEUTENANTS | | | | |
| 1 | BERRY, Berneice | | 1-31, CoO; 15-31, Bn PoliceO; | |
| 2 | STUART, Rilda M. | | 1-17, 21-31, CO; 18-20, sk qtrs; Member PE Council. | |
| CLASS VI (b) | | | | |
| MASTER TECHNICAL SERGEANT | | | | |
| 1 | NEWMAN, Ann S. | | 1-2, fur; 3-31, PersD. | |
| TECHNICAL SERGEANTS | | | | |