

Hillary Clinton's claim that she tried to join the Marines

By **Glenn Kessler** November 12 at 3:00 AM

"He looks at me and goes, 'Um, how old are you. And I said, 'Well I am 26, I will be 27.' And he goes, 'Well, that is kind of old for us.' And then he says to me, and this is what gets me, 'Maybe the dogs will take you,' meaning the Army."

—Former secretary of state **Hillary Rodham Clinton**, [speaking at a breakfast](#), Manchester, N.H., Nov. 10, 2015

One Clinton story that has often been greeted with skepticism is her claim, first made in 1994, that she once tried to join the Marines in 1975. On the campaign trail, she brought up the story again. (Go to the [1:35 mark](#).)

Can this story be confirmed?

The Facts

Clinton first told this story while addressing a lunch on Capitol Hill honoring military women, about 17 months after becoming first lady:

"You're too old, you can't see and you're a woman," Mrs. Clinton said she was told. "Maybe the dogs would take you," she recalled the recruiter saying. (Actually the military slang is "dogfaces.")

"It was not a very encouraging conversation," she said. "I decided maybe I'll look for another way to serve my country."

It's fair to say [The New York Times account](#), written by then-reporter Maureen Dowd, was highly skeptical. Dowd noted:

- "At the time, Hillary Rodham was an up-and-coming legal star involved with an up-and-coming political star."
- "She had made a celebrated appearance in Life magazine as an anti-establishment commencement speaker at Wellesley College, where, as president of the student government, she had organized teach-ins on her opposition to the Vietnam War."
- "She was a Yale law school graduate who had worked on the anti-war Presidential campaigns of Eugene J. McCarthy and George McGovern."

- “Mrs. Clinton told friends that she had moved to Arkansas for only one reason: to be with Bill Clinton.”
- The Clintons married on Oct. 11, 1975, in Fayetteville.

Dowd asked: “So, if she was talking to a Marine recruiter in 1975 before the marriage, was she briefly considering joining the few, the proud and the brave of the corps as an alternative to life with Mr. Clinton, who was already being widely touted as a sure thing for Arkansas Attorney General?”

Clinton’s spokesman at the time, Neal Lattimore, speculated (without any apparent evidence) that perhaps the law school graduate was thinking of joining the Judge Advocate General’s Corps.

Tony Kornheiser, then a Washington Post columnist, [was equally skeptical](#):

Last week, I was stunned to learn that in 1975 Hillary tried to enlist in the Marines. (Possibly she was looking for a few good men, as she was about to marry a man who was looking for a few good women.)

My first reaction was that it sounded like something that arose out of a drunken bar bet. You know, like when guys dare each other to do something stupid — say, take off their trousers, pull their underpants over their head and whistle the theme to “Gilligan’s Island” — except this must have been a group of female lawyers. Imagine it. A bar scene. Hillary Rodham Clinton-to-be says, “Yeah, well, if you’re so smart, I dare you to argue the pro-life position, that the state has the right to force women to carry unwanted pregnancies to term.” And Camille O’Rourke-Lefkowitz responds, “Oh, yeah? Well, I dare you to shave your legs and join the Marines.”

Yet our former colleague David von Drehle [reported](#) that Clinton’s friends at the time “confirmed the story, though they were hazy on the details.” Diane Blair, [who passed away in 2000](#), told von Drehle, “All I can remember is that she looked into it.”

Another friend, then University of Arkansas professor Ann Henry, said she recalled the incident happened in the context of the lack of opportunity for women. Sometimes female faculty members went out to conduct “tests” of access to various careers seemingly closed to women, Henry told von Drehle.

Reached by phone after Clinton’s latest remarks, the now-retired Henry said that she still recalls the discussion about testing the limits. She said conversations grew out of the state’s Commission on the Status of Women, which was created in 1971 and chaired by Blair, then known as Diane Kincaid. Henry said there were Marine recruiting offices on campus, and so Clinton could have easily stopped by one to conduct such a test.

But would women at the time need to test the Marines? Women have been part of the Marines since 1918, and were deployed to Korea in the 1950s. “By the height of the Vietnam war, there were about 2,700 women Marines served [*sic*.] both stateside and overseas,” [according to the Women Marines Association](#). “By 1975, the Corps approved the assignment of women to all

occupational fields except infantry, artillery, armor and pilot/air crew.”

In fact, when Clinton first told this story in 1994, a Marine spokesman felt compelled to issue this statement: “We won’t attempt to dispute the first lady’s recollection, but if she was ill-treated by a Marine recruiter in 1975, it certainly is unfortunate, unprofessional and a mistake we regret.”

Complicating matters is that in 2008, Bill Clinton [told an audience](#) that his future wife tried to join the Army. “I remember when we were young, right out of law school, she went down and tried to join the Army and they said ‘Your eyes are so bad, nobody will take you,’” he said.

Of course, this leaves open the possibility that she did try to join the “dogs” after the Marine Corps brush-off.

A campaign spokesman declined to comment.

The Pinocchio Test

At first glance, this story doesn’t really add up, for the reasons that Dowd initially outlined. But as we noted The Post did locate friends who recalled she had tried to join the Marines, though the circumstances are fuzzy.

Clinton suggests she simply decided to join the Marines, as part of way to serve the country. But it makes more sense that she approached the Marines as part of a deliberate effort to test the boundaries available to women.

As Ben Carson can attest, memories can get hazy after 40 years (or even 21 years). There are enough holes here that Clinton has an obligation to address the circumstances under which she approached the Marines, now that she had once again raised it in a campaign context.

So far, we do not have enough documentary proof to say the incident never happened, such as supposedly [landing under sniper fire in Bosnia](#) or getting the [date wrong for hearing a speech by Martin Luther King Jr.](#) (Both of these were written by [Michael Dobbs](#), who originated The Fact Checker during the 2008 campaign, though for some reason his byline is now missing.) This is simply a personal recollection — one that at least two friends have confirmed they had been told about at the time.

But the circumstances are in question. She pitches it as a matter of public service, but her friends suggest it was something different. So at this point Clinton’s story is worthy of Two Pinocchios, subject to change if more information becomes available.

Two Pinocchios

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