ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

GROUP INTERVIEW OF THE WASP
WOMEN AIR FORCE SERVICE PILOTS
INTERVIEWED BY REBECCA WRIGHT
COCOA BEACH, FLORIDA – 18 JULY 1999

FEATURING
HELEN WYATT SNAPP, 43-W-4
MARJORIE POPELL SIZEMORE, 43-W-5
DORIS ELKINGTON HAMAKER, 44-W-2
MARY ANN BALDNER GORDON, 44-W-9
MARY ANNA "MARTY" MARTIN WYALL, 44-W-10
TERESA D. JAMES, WAFS

WRIGHT: In 1942, the Army Air Forces created the WASP, the Women Air Force Service Pilots. Twenty-five thousand women offered their services for this program. Of this amount, 1,830 were accepted, with 1,074 graduated with training. Today, on July 18, 1999, we are honored to have five WASPs and one member of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, the WAFS, gathered today to share some of their experiences. This is part of the NASA oral history efforts. We are in Cocoa Beach, Florida. I'm Rebecca Wright, and interviewing with me today is Carol Butler.

We welcome all of you here, and thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedules to share your experiences with us and those who will very much welcome your stories for many years to come. We'd like to start today by asking each of you to introduce yourself, and if you're a WASP, tell us which class you were in, and to just give us a brief synopsis of how you found out about the WASP and how much you enjoyed doing that. So we'd like to start with Helen. Would you please start?

SNAPP: My name is Helen Snapp, and I'm one of the few WASPs that was married at the time, so I tried to keep my maiden name so people knew who I am. So I go by Helen Wyatt-Snapp. I started in the WASP after I heard about—well, I didn't think I would be eligible because I didn't have as much flying time as was required in the beginning, but they lowered the requirements, and when they did, I was eligible.

I was interviewed by Jacqueline Cochran at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington [D.C.]. Of course, I was delighted. My husband, meanwhile, had been sent overseas, so it was timely as far as my being able to enter the group. But anyway, we were one of the first class that went to Avenger Field. We were the first class, rather, and that was considered the all-woman flying field. From there, of course, I took my training and then ended up towing targets.

WRIGHT: That's fine. Thanks. Teresa, would you share with us?

JAMES: I was instructing in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, when I got a telegram from Nancy Love. Now, I couldn't figure out the telegram; I couldn't figure out the signature. It was a request that they were going to use women pilots in the Army Air Force. This is September of 1942 that I was requested to proceed to New Castle Army Air Base for a flight check if you had the following. [Pauses] There goes the cells again. [Laughter]

HAMAKER: How about "requirements."

JAMES: Yes. So then you had to have 500 hours' flying time, 200 hours of cross country, 200-horsepower rating. There was 28 gals who had those qualifications that arrived during the

month of September. I was number nine to arrive. Most of those girls—well, they were all commercial pilots, and maybe 12 were flight instructors, of which I was one. The signature, the "Love Baker-End," was under the command of Nancy Love of the Ferrying Division of the Air Transport Command, and she was our commanding officer. This is before the WASP was even—Cochran was in England at the time the WASP was—

SNAPP: Formed.

JAMES: Right. [Laughter] We started ferrying immediately after a short term of how to learn to fly the Army way, and the Army way was, we had to fly a flight pattern, a definite flight pattern, around all the Army bases. They checked us out on navigation. The first airplane we checked out in was a Piper Cub, a small 65-horsepower. And they checked us out in the PT-19, which is more horsepower, 85-horsepower rating, and we started ferrying airplanes immediately. We continued on until, as Helen said, they started the Houston thing by Jackie Cochran, the WASP program. When did you come in? In '43.

SNAPP: It was in February, but they had been flying in Houston for several months.

JAMES: Yes. You mean while we went?

SNAPP: The first class. One. Class one.

WYALL: It was November when we first started in Houston.

HAMAKER: What class were you in, Helen?

SNAPP: I was in the third class, but the third class they opened up an Army Air base and phased out all the men pilots there. And as they phased out, they moved more women in, so I was in the first class there. As a matter of fact, when I left Washington, I thought I was in Houston. [Laughter] I thought I was where all the other women were, and I kept looking for some friends and they weren't there. Then I realized that it was a different training place.

(To James) Finish up.

JAMES: Nancy Love, we had been flying, I think, for about nine months to a year, and there was some—I don't know how to put this. Jackie Cochran and Nancy Love, they never—

HAMAKER: Did not get along.

JAMES: Say again?

HAMAKER: Did not get along.

SNAPP: They were not great friends.

JAMES: Right. So although Nancy Love still remained the commanding officer of the Air Transport Command, that's historical, but it's not written down in anyplace at all, so I thought I'd

better tell you about that before—but she remained as the commanding officer in the Ferrying Division, and Cochran ran the school, but she had nothing to do with the Ferrying Division, although we became WASP. We were integrated into the WASP program. But the WASP program was different from ours. We started ferrying immediately. We didn't go through any training at all, because they were all commercial licensed pilots.

WRIGHT: Mary Ann?

GORDON: Oh, yes. Well, I was in the next to last class that graduated from Sweetwater [Texas], 44-W-9. My father was an Air Force officer, and he was stationed at Scott Field, Illinois, and that's where I decided I wanted to learn to fly. So I went to a local flying field and got my 35 hours, and applied for the WASP program. So it was a great experience, and I was very crushed when it was all over after only six weeks of actual duty.

My father was a pilot in World War I.

WYALL: Oh, wonderful.

GORDON: And that is probably why I got interested and thought I could do it, too. He stayed in service in the National Guard [an infantry company], and then when World War II came along, he was…[transferred to the Air Force]. That's why we were at Scott Field, the whole family, and that's when I decided to do that. I can't imagine why I was selected, when there were so many girls that weren't, but it might have been my military background.

WRIGHT: Marty?

WYALL: I'm Marty Wyall. I was in the very last class, 44-W-10, but I was first assigned to W-9, but because the flight surgeon didn't send in my medical, and I'd already left Indianapolis to spend Easter weekend with a boyfriend in Bartlesville, because he was in the Air Force, I got the telegram that my papers were not in order and that I would not be accepted in the 4-49, which just crushed me, because I thought, you know, "What in the world is wrong? I've got everything together."

I got back to Indianapolis and I called up the flight surgeon, because they had since sent a letter and said what was missing. I said, "I took this test, and there's no reason why it shouldn't have been sent in."

He said, "I don't believe that women should be in the military, so therefore I just let it sit on my desk."

And that just blew my top. I was so furious. I wasn't screaming; I was being very calm, but I said, "You just ruined my whole life. I had to quit my job and now I have no job and no money because I spent my money on the train ticket. Then I had to come back."

And he said, "Young lady, you don't speak to colonels like this." And I apologized. He said, "But I will send in your papers." So I'm very fortunate that I got in the last class, because at the time it didn't look like it was going to end so soon.

But as a result, I feel like I had just as good a training as the early girls. In fact, I think they kept improving on the program, and we each got 210 [hours] in…trainers [40 hours in each phase]. At that time we were flying the Stearman and then the basic trainers, which was our instrument training, on the BT-13s. Then we went to advanced training on the AT-6s, and we

got lots of aerobatics in the Stearman, which was the primary trainer, and quite a bit of aerobatics, maybe 10 or 20 hours, in the AT-6, which was more fun than the Stearman.

But we had lots of cross-country, because we were not given gunnery or any kind of formation flying… So they concentrated our training on cross-country delivering of airplanes. Not only did they deliver airplanes, but they carried personnel. And then they did a lot of other kind of training, such as towing targets and things that you needed to have a lot of precision flying. So they more or less honed in on our training to be precision pilots, and we were very, very well trained when we graduated.

HAMAKER: My name is Doris Hamaker, and I was in class of 44-W-2, which was really just about the middle class. I became interested in airplanes at an early age when my father took the family down to Dearborn, Michigan, to see the Ford Trimotor. I thought that was a fantastic airplane, and I still do. There's one in Pensacola, Florida, at the museum there.

I was in junior college, and I learned that they were having a program called Civilian Pilot Training, CPT, and that I was eligible to take it if I could get my parents to sign. Well, I took the chit home to my mother at noon one day and told her how wonderful it was going to be, and thinking she would immediately sign it. Well, she didn't. I begged and pleaded, and finally she said, "All right, but your dad's going to give me a fit."

Well, I took it back that afternoon and was enrolled. When my dad came home, he had a fit, but afterwards he was very, very proud of me. We had at least 35 hours of flying in CPT, in the ground school.

Then when Jacqueline Cochran started the WASPs, I was informed, and I was a little like Marty. I went out to Selfridge Field for my physical, and I kept calling Washington [D.C.]

and saying, "Do you have my physical yet?" And they didn't. So I finally went out to Selfridge and picked it up, and went on the train from Detroit to Washington, to the Pentagon, and handed it to them, and they handed me my orders.

WYALL: Isn't that wonderful.

HAMAKER: So, I don't know, maybe it was another colonel that didn't like women.

WYALL: I guess.

HAMAKER: Anyway, there were three of us that left from Detroit to go on to class 44-W-2, and unfortunately—well, one of them resigned because she was married and didn't want to be away from her husband that much, and the other one washed out, which crushed me. In our class we had 112 enroll, and we graduated 49, which was really cutting.

When we were in instruments, we were all sure we were going to be washed out. I remember one night in the bay where six of us were sleeping, so-called sleeping, one of them started to cry, then another one, another one, said, "I know I'm going to wash out tomorrow. I know I'm going to wash out tomorrow." We all passed, which was wonderful.

But after we graduated, I went to Stockton, California, to an advanced training base, where I tested the airplanes after they came out of the maintenance, and flew them before the cadets could fly them. I enjoyed it very much, loved the flying. I still do.

WRIGHT: Marjorie.

SIZEMORE: My name is Marjorie Sizemore. I was in class 43-5, and I first got the inspiration to fly, I think, when I lived in Miami at the time and worked for Pan American Air Ferries, which was a wartime division that Pan Am had set up to ferry lend-lease aircraft to South American and then over to Africa and from there on someplace, finally to the Russians. So being a brand-new division, I mean, they didn't hire me as a pilot at that time, even though I thought I had the potential. I was secretary.

But they had really scraped the bottom of the barrel as far as men pilots were concerned, because, of course, if they weren't in the military, if they weren't a civilian instructor for the military, they were mostly—I don't know, barnstormers, you know, and so on. They had a hired corps of good, older pilots, but a lot of them were kind of crazy. [General laughter] Don't you think so, Teresa?

JAMES: Yes.

SIZEMORE: Anyway, I, of course, had a ball. This was the most fun I had in my life. But after seeing them flying and being around in that close a contact with them, it's not like an office in an airline now, you're here and the pilots are someplace else and so on. Everybody was around in one office.

So I never had been up before. I always thought I'd like to go up, but I never had. So I decided one day, "I think I'll go take a ride," which I did, and I got down, I thought, "Gee, that really is fun," but I can't say that looking back on my life to when I was a young teenager, that I

saw the airplanes flying overhead and I thought, "Oh, I have got to do this." I mean, it wasn't that type of inspiration.

So anyway, I finally quit my job so I could get more time in, and got my 30—well, I had 70 hours, I think, and got my license. Then after graduating from Sweetwater, we were sent to Dallas, to the Ferry Command. Well, then we had quite a lot of problems there at the time. I didn't realize these problems had been going on before we ever got there, of instructors, of check pilots, you know, washing girls out. But anyway, so when it happened to me, this friend, I said, "There's something wrong here," because you know if you've done something well or if you've screwed up, you know. I definitely felt we hadn't—at least I felt I hadn't.

So I called Jacqueline Cochran, and within days there was somebody there from the IG [Inspector General] office looking into this, and I thought, man, she really paid attention to me, you know. For years, all these years, I thought that till Byrd Granger's book came out. I was in contact with her about this, and come to find out, this had been in the works, this getting somebody to investigate what was going on. It had been going on for months and months, I guess, before I got there. And all those years I thought, gee, I really did something. [General laughter] But anyway, it all worked out for the best.

Then we went to the Training Command, and that's when we got to go through Randolph flight instructor school, and I instructed basic training for the cadets. That was really the high point, as far as I was concerned, because we had terrific training and so advanced from anything we'd had before. I mean, it wasn't even like we knew how to fly before that, you know, even though we were pretty sure we were—

HAMAKER: Hot pilots. [General laughter]

SIZEMORE: Really hot, yes. So that's about it. I sat out the rest of the war.

WRIGHT: Let me ask most of you, and all of you, Doris had mentioned that her mother knew her dad was going to have a fit, so that was one reaction. Share with us some of the reactions from your friends and family when you told them that you were stopping your life and whatever you were doing, or the plans that you had made now, and you were going off to war.

SNAPP: Disbelief. Women weren't supposed to do that. We had all kinds of reactions, I think. I never even told my family I was learning to fly, when my sister and I both started. We all had experiences along the way that were negative, but most of them, I think, were positive.

WYALL: My mother was very much against it. In fact, she said, "It's not ladylike to do what you're doing," and she didn't even want me to wear slacks, you know. She was very, very quiet when I mentioned anything. I was talking to my dad. My dad was a World War I veteran. He said, "There's nothing better than serving your country," and he was really backing me all the way, but when it came time for me to leave, Mother stayed home and Dad took me to the train, and she never wanted to say goodbye, because she said, "You're not coming home." And that was kind of hard for me to understand why she was so negative, but I think that the way the older generation thought of women, this was not our cup of tea, that we shouldn't be doing this, and that was her attitude. My dad wrote me every day, and my mother maybe wrote me two letters.

She still, even after I got home and had my own airplane, she went up with me twice, and she's like this, holding on to both sides. She didn't want to see or hear or anything. So she just never did get into flying or could understand why I was.

WRIGHT: Mary Ann, you had the World War I dad that was a pilot.

GORDON: He was. He was stationed in France. I think he flew reconnaissance and was always very disappointed he didn't get in combat. Then he joined the National Guard. I think it was during the Depression so he could get some extra money. But when the Guard was called out in 1941, and then war was declared, he was transferred back to the Air Force, and it was at Scott Field, where I learned to fly. There was no objection from my folks. I don't remember that they thought it was a little mad or anything; they just knew I wanted to serve.

I'd been working in Civil Service as a secretary, and I managed to get my flying time in and applied for the WASP, and I can't imagine why they took me, but they did, with 35 hours.

WYALL: That's all I had.

SNAPP: I think in those days there were so few pilots anyway, and when a woman was flying, most people just didn't—it was just inconceivable. I know I was working for the government, and I had gone flying with a friend that had just gotten his license. Of course, it wasn't very bright of me to have done that, but he invited me to his home for lunch, which was in Virginia, and I was working in D.C. at that time. On takeoff, he crashed the plane. Well, I called work and said, "I'm sorry I'll be late." I was on an evening shift, working for the Census Bureau.

"I've been in a plane crash." I think they thought I was a liar. No one ever believed that I was in a plane crash. [General laughter] But, see, I walked away from it. You could do that in a small plane.

SIZEMORE: I don't recall anybody in the family, any reaction from them particularly, other than they thought it was all right and so on, but I think probably it was because I was the oldest girl. There was seven children in our family. I had two older brothers and I was the oldest girl. I was used to telling them what they should do and what I was going to do, so I don't think it occurred to any of them to question the fact that Marjorie is flying an airplane, you know. [General laughter] They probably thought they'd be whacked beside the head or something.

WRIGHT: How did many of you learn about the WASP? Was there a global announcement somehow throughout the country? How did you find out that this program was being started and that you could become a part of it?

JAMES: I knew that the program was going to start because Betty Gillies—I belong to the "99's"—Women Pilots Association—and in one of their publications, Betty Gillies and Nancy Love had gone to Washington, D.C., to find out how many pilots there were with commercial licenses. That is how this thing started. They sent telegrams to the girls that held licenses, and the 29 responded that met the qualifications and requirements. That's how the WAFs program started.

HAMAKER: I think the WASP did the same thing. They found out who had licenses and contacted them.

SNAPP: Or else they individually would call her or contact her. There wasn't a lot of publicity about it.

JAMES: No, because they didn't want any publicity about this thing.

SNAPP: We were contacted through the CAA, I guess, license.

SIZEMORE: Yes, you might have been, the ones who had their license, but those that didn't, like myself, the only reason I started flying—not the only reason I started flying, but the only reason I could see any future in it was the fact that I could earn some money, because I didn't have enough money to have an airplane, and I knew that there w[ere] some women instructors and so on.

But I found out through pilots at Pan American that had heard about this program possibly coming up. It wasn't a sure thing at that time. They said, "Even if you don't, you can always get a job instructing." In fact, then my instructor, my first instructor in Miami was a woman who went in just a class ahead of me. So once I found that out—

WYALL: Was that Dottie Lewis?

SIZEMORE: —I took a chance. Yes.

SNAPP: But there was a Civilian Pilot Training program, which was actually started to train men pilots. I think a lot of us were able to take that. My sister and I both took that, and you had to be enrolled in a college before you could—in a particular college, it didn't matter, and I enrolled in two, to be sure I got in the program.

Then after I finished the program and I did real well, and my sister did, too, the head of the engineering at George Washington University, he was in charge of the whole pilot training program for the Washington area, and he would not assign women. They were supposed to assign one woman for so many pilots.

HAMAKER: Ten.

SNAPP: Something like that.

WYALL: Nine men and one woman.

SNAPP: He wouldn't assign a woman pilot. My sister and I both tried to talk to him, but he just said that women had no business learning to fly, and what would you do with it anyway.

JAMES: There was a lot of prejudice.

SNAPP: So I was sort of a cute kid in those days, and he said, "Look at you. What business do you have?" I said, "Well, maybe I could instruct." And he said, "No. What man is going to be

paying attention to the controls and not look at you?" [General laughter] So the next time I went for an interview, I put my hair in a bun and I wore a baggy dress, no makeup, and even went to see Cochran that way.

So anyway, when he was forced to do it again, I had to take the ground program all over again. So I took it twice, and the next time I was assigned a slot to learn to fly, and my sister also.

JAMES: From college?

SNAPP: In college.

JAMES: They took one woman for every ten men they took in, in the college program.

SNAPP: I don't know what the ratio was.

HAMAKER: In every class.

WYALL: I just wanted to say that actually the WASP program was an experiment, and it was an experiment that nobody knew whether it was going to be successful or not, so they did not hope to have a lot of publicity, because then it would just turn into a circus. so they decided, "We'll keep this down low key as much as we can. There will be no advertising." I think, as a result, people didn't even realize, even twenty years later, that there was a program where women were flying military airplanes.

But I learned about it when I was in my senior year in college, and it was only just a little squib in a magazine. We were having a spread one evening, and I was going through the magazines because I didn't take any, and I noticed. So I wrote down the address. You write to this address in Washington, D.C., Jacqueline Cochran, attention," and that's how I found out about it. She immediately sent me all the information of what I needed. I needed 35 hours of solo. I had to be 18—it was 18 ½ then. They had reduced it from 21 years. Then I immediately told my dad I wanted to quit school and start flying, and he said, "No, you're going to finish school." So I had to wait until the next summer before I could start in. But I did get my 35 hours, barely.

WRIGHT: Apparently it was good enough to move on. You were accepted and went on to the greater town of Sweetwater, Texas, Avenger Field. I'm sure many of you have memories from those times that you spent together out there. Would anyone like to start and tell us what your first reaction was to arriving in Sweetwater?

WYALL: A shock. [General laughter]

SNAPP: Well, we were the first ones to arrive, and actually they didn't even have a barracks for us, so we stayed in town at the old Blue Bonnet Hotel, which I think burned down, has burned down since then. Then to move us back and forth, they used what they called cattle cars, and they were these long—it was almost like a trailer attached to a cab, with just long seats on the side. I don't think it even had windows.

WYALL: The back end had windows.

SNAPP: The back end had a window. It was very interesting at that time because we had so many restrictions. Unbelievable. It would be unbelievable in this day, these days. We were told we were not supposed to talk to any of the media at all. When we went into town, we were told to dress properly and to—

HAMAKER: Behave properly.

SNAPP: Be very good. In those days it meant—actually, I think Texas was "dry," so there was no problem. The first groups were older, probably, than the group that Marty was talking about. They were younger, actually a couple of years younger. We started out requiring about 500 hours, plus you had to be—well, it was over 21. Between 21 and 35, I think it was. So there were some women that were older. I had a woman in my bay who was in her early thirties. I think the youngest one was 21, and I was somewhere in between.

As the men phased out, we were not even supposed to sit with them. They had what they called a little lounge, like a little cafeteria. Not cafeteria. Almost like a little coffee shop. But we were not supposed to sit with a man. We were not even supposed to have any contact with them, but, of course, women and men always find ways.

So the barracks were back to back, a few feet apart, and at night when we get in the rooms, all the windows would be down, and the men and women were talking back and forth. To this day, I don't know how, some of these women managed to have boyfriends. But they did. I know that one of my friends actually married one of these cadets, and I thought, "Well,

how did she ever get close enough to him or even able to talk to him too much?" But eventually they kept in touch, and she married one of the cadets later on.

WYALL: I've got a funny story to follow up on that. I was giving a talk in Chicago at an organization of the Retired Officers Association, and I was saying that I was in Sweetwater. He interrupted everything. He said, "Well, I was one of those cadets when you girls were sent in," and he said that, "We also had blinds, but we were surprised because the girls were always the ones that wanted to come over and get acquainted. They were the ones that were the aggressors, and we were trying to stay where we were supposed to be." So it wasn't always the guys' fault.

SIZEMORE: Well, to hear them tell it, anyway. [General laughter]

WRIGHT: Mary Ann, you were from Ohio. What was your reaction, going to Texas for training?

GORDON: When I went to Texas, that was from Scott Field, when my father was stationed there. But the town I grew up in, Xenia, Ohio, was very close to Wright Patterson Air Force Base, which I think probably stirred our interest in planes, and the fact that my father had been a pilot and he was always interested.

WYALL: But Texas didn't scare you, with all the horned toads and the rattlesnakes?

GORDON: I don't remember all the horned toads and rattlesnakes. I remember the storms we had, and we'd all have to rush out and hold down the planes.

WRIGHT: Oh, my.

GORDON: Yes, they'd sound the alarm and we'd rush out and hold down the Stearmans while we were pelted with sand from the runway.

SNAPP: I might say that the townspeople were just wonderful to us. They just invited us for a weekend, invited us for lunch or dinner, and—

SIZEMORE: Barbecues.

SNAPP: Yes. They were just happy with us. I don't know whether they were happier with us than they were with the men, but they were very gracious.

HAMAKER: One lady adopted several of us, and they had a ranch, so they took us out at the ranch and we rode horses. We'd borrow cowboy boots. I think I mentioned that my husband and I were married in Sweetwater, Texas, while I was in training.

JAMES: Is that where you met him?

HAMAKER: No. We knew each other at college, and he went into the Navy and had been in the Atlantic. He was being transferred to the Pacific, so he stopped in Sweetwater on his way. He had three days' travel time! And at 6:30 in the evening he said, "Let's get married tonight." So this kind lady, townslady, arranged the whole thing. We went to the courthouse. She called the lady to come and get us a license, and she called the church. The church people were having a duck dinner in the basement, and they asked if they could come up. So my flight was able to come, and we had all the congregation there also. So we were married in the church at nine o'clock that evening. So he was there for three days while I flew and went to ground school, and then—

GORDON: That would be hard to do.

HAMAKER: —I was able to spend the nights with him. Then he went on to the Pacific, where he went out to a carrier which was sunk off the Philippines. But he came back to flight training just after I got out of the WASP, and every night he'd come home and I'd say, "What did you do today?" At first he'd tell me, but then he got a little tired of it and he said, "I've been having it all day. I don't need it all night." [General laughter]

WYALL: And you're still married?

HAMAKER: We're still married.

WYALL: Wonderful.

Hamaker: We've been married 55 years.

Wyall: Great.

Snapp: The Air Force had to make our base off limits because they had too many forced landings from somebody, some of the cadets in there. There were air fields all over, and there were a lot of forced landings. Of course, they'd come and buzz the field whenever they could.

JAMES: Cochran's Convent. [General laughter]

SNAPP: Yes. In the bay next to mine there was a former stunt pilot, and our class also had a Powers model in the group, so we had all kinds of interesting people. Then there was one woman who had been a dancer, a child dancer in film. Of course, she'd grown up since then, but had become a pilot. We had a lot of movie stars that—I'm trying to think who landed there. I don't know whether it was Bill Holden or—but anyway, there were a couple of them that landed there to see these people. So we had some interesting times and days, little breaks in our—

WYALL: Routine.

SNAPP: Routine. Right.

JAMES: You had all the fun out there all the time.

Wyall: I had one naval cadet that was in college with me, and we were writing back and forth, and he couldn't land at Sweetwater, but he was ferrying Grummans from the East Coast to the West Coast. The closest he could get to me was to stop at Love Field [Dallas, Texas] and go to the Red Cross shack. They had a great big wall that was a fireplace. He'd stick notes in between the stones and write notes to me. I was going into Love Field one time, and he kept saying, "If you ever get to Love Field, go to the Red Cross shack. I've left you lots of notes." Sure enough, I got to the Red Cross shack one day, went in there, and there were three notes. It's just like finding a treasure.

JAMES: How romantic.

WYALL: By this time he was in the Pacific, so I couldn't return any notes to him.

SIZEMORE: Well, I was sort of a city girl. I never lived in a small town or anything, so it was a little bit of a shock. But ever since then I've always loved small towns. I've tried to stay in them as much as possible.

When I went out, I took the train from—funny thing, I don't even remember getting to Texas. All I remember is I took the train from Dallas to Sweetwater, and I mean it was really Wild West then.

JAMES: You mean when you arrived. [Laughter]

SIZEMORE: It was. But, I mean, you'd see cowboys all over the place, with cattle, running them and so on. So that was really intriguing to me, because I had never seen anything like that before. In fact, I'd been a lot of places in the East, but I'd never been west of the Mississippi. In fact, I didn't hardly know where the Mississippi was.

But what struck me about Sweetwater, whenever I've traveled, food always is one of my mainstays. I'm always very interested in anything that goes on, a restaurant or the food they serve or anything. And something that I learned then that I just thought was the most gross thing I ever saw, but I still do it today, a stack of pancakes and fried eggs on the top, and a lot of butter and syrup and everything, and then they'd take and they'd cut it all up like this, until it was all a mess. [General laughter] I can still—I know I sat there just bug-eyed, watching it. But what I do, I go so far as the pancakes with an egg on top, and a little syrup on the side, and I carefully cut it up as I eat it, you know, and it's delicious like that.

WYALL: We'll come for breakfast some morning.

SNAPP: They did serve us wonderful food there. At least I thought it was great.

WYALL: It was.

SNAPP: And they kind of—the cooks there were very solicitous. They loved us and they treated us very nicely. They had wonderful food. We all gained a few pounds, I think. We worked it off.

HAMAKER: We worked it off.

WYALL: We had carrots every day because of the night flying. Raw carrots every day in some form or other.

SNAPP: And we hated night flying. At least I did.

WYALL: I loved it. You'd get the Mexican music on the ADF.

SNAPP: After a girl in our class got killed at night flying, none of us cared much for it after that.

HAMAKER: I don't know what cooks you had, but in our class we all hated the food. It seemed to me that they would open up these huge cans of lima beans in water, and heat it and put it out there. I remember our flight, which was half of the class, went to lunch one day, and we marched in, and a gal who was leading us said, "Lima beans again," and we all did an about-face and walked out and went into the little cafe there. So after that, they closed the cafe when there were meals. [General laughter]

WYALL: They lost a lot of money that day.

WRIGHT: They caught on to you, that's what they did.

HAMAKER: The food, I don't remember it as being—

SNAPP: Probably food got scarce.

HAMAKER: Well, that's possible.

SNAPP: Food was scarce. I mean, everything was scarce in those days. We had all the goodies. We had fried chicken.

WYALL: I know. I can remember, though, they served us beef, cut. It was supposed to be KC beef, steak, and it was so hard that I would wrap it up and put it in my pocket, and then when I got in the plane, I'd gnaw on it. [General laughter]

WRIGHT: An in-flight snack.

WYALL: Didn't want to give it back, you know. Wanted to keep it. Couldn't eat it all.

WRIGHT: We know your days were full, because you were there to train. Tell us about the parts that you enjoyed with the training, and then, of course, I'm sure there were areas which you didn't enjoy. Would somebody like to start with giving us examples of what a day was like in training?

WYALL: Well, it was hot in the summertime, and we had to wear these—what are they called?

GORDON: G.I. coveralls.

WYALL: And they were always size 44 to 46.

JAMES: They looked like it in the pictures, too.

WYALL: So they looked really wonderful, and so you'd roll your sleeves up, but we had to button it up to the top. We could roll our sleeves up to our elbows, but we could not roll our pant legs up because that would be "unladylike." But we never wore anything under it, so the breeze would go through. [General laughter] It was wonderful. After all, it wasn't really that hot.

But I can remember one time when we were at the little auxiliary field in our Stearman, and a blue norther came in, which was a terrible storm, and it just stirred up all the sand, so it was impossible to fly. So we were stuck out there. It divided it up into three, and the ones that went home had already gone. We were supposed to bring the planes home. The cattle truck took the rest of them. So there was just a third of our group that had the planes with our instructor to take back for the last of this day.

We were stuck out there, and it got dark because the storm was still blowing. So one of the instructors said, "Well, let's go over in the corn field and have a corn roast." So we went over and got some corn and started a fire, and finally—we had to ditch the planes because it was a little Stearman and there's no way you can fly at night. So the cattle truck, finally, about 10:00

or 10:30, came over and picked us up. They figured we weren't coming in. But that was a fun night. The wind always blew. It was always windy.

SNAPP: The barracks were hot, and the wind seemed to blow the wrong direction. So we would pull our cots out at night and it would be so unbearably hot in the barracks. You'd pull your cot outside and you'd have to have blankets over you, and then you'd sleep and then pull them back in the morning.

WYALL: Covered with sand.

SNAPP: Yes. No air-conditioning in those days, among other things.

WYALL: No fans, either.

SNAPP: And we had one bathroom that had eight—six?

WYALL: Six.

SNAPP: Six on either side, and 12 people to one bathroom. The bathroom was in between. And in shifts. Sometimes you might get your shower very late at night or not at all. They didn't have any curtains.

HAMAKER: But it had two showers and two johns and two wash basins.

SNAPP: Most women are pretty modest. No curtains or anything. So this was built for men, not for women. We made do.

All we had for heat was a little gas furnace in each room, a little tiny thing that you lit, and everyone stayed in bed as long as they could, hoping someone else would get up and light the fire. But we had to get up and be out of there at a certain time.

GORDON: Six-thirty.

SNAPP: We had to march every place we went.

GORDON: And sing.

SNAPP: Yes. [Laughter]

SIZEMORE: But I want to tell you something, though, girls. We never had it so good. When you think about the magnificent money that we made.

SNAPP: You know she's kidding.

SIZEMORE: And the flying.

WYALL: We got to fly.

SIZEMORE: And so on, I mean, we made $1,500 a year.

SNAPP: A year.

SIZEMORE: Fifteen hundred dollars a year?

SNAPP: It was something like $100 a month.

WYALL: A hundred dollars a month, and they took out our board and room, which we had to pay for, and also we had to buy war bonds.

SIZEMORE: Fifteen hundred dollars a year? I think that must be wrong.

WYALL: So we got about $37, maybe.

SNAPP: We had to pay our own way out there.

HAMAKER: Oh, you're lucky. We always averaged about 9 to 11 dollars a month.

WYALL: Well, you probably had laundry service.

SIZEMORE: But then when we hit the big time, you know, after we graduated, why, then we got 3,000.

WYALL: Three thousand dollars a year.

WRIGHT: Did you still have to pay for your room and board as well?

SNAPP: Our room and board came out of that. But we were delighted. We would have done it for nothing. How else would we have flown those wonderful airplanes?

HAMAKER: We did not have any insurance, either.

SNAPP: No.

HAMAKER: We had no insurance whatsoever.

WYALL: That worried my mother terribly.

WRIGHT: From what I understand, no uniforms? What was issued to you for uniforms while you were there?

WYALL: Miss Cochran designed our uniforms, and she paid for them.

SNAPP: We wore regular men's uniforms in the beginning. After we finished our training, we wore—they called them pinks and greens. I think that they were sort of a pinkish slack and the green top. We cut them down to fit us. We went to the post exchange, I guess, to buy them, and put our chicken feed on there. We wore those until the uniforms were designed. But we paid for them.

SIZEMORE: Did we pay for our uniforms?

SNAPP: Yes.

SIZEMORE: Or were the uniforms issued?

SNAPP: No, we were issued a certain—I think one of each or something. If we wanted more, we bought more.

SIZEMORE: That was our formal uniform.

SNAPP: The men, the same way. I think in the beginning they were issued a certain amount, and then after that they bought them. At least the officers did.

JAMES: The WAFs had their own uniforms, gray greens. They were beautiful. And we had overseas caps. But a tailor did ours. Of course, the first 28 women, they called the tailor from downtown New Castle in Wilmington, Delaware, and he come out to measure us. You ought to

[have] seen the in-seam measurement on the girls. He'd go so far up there, and he guessed. [General laughter] And the result was, we had to take the trousers back about three or four times. Some of them hung—you could put watermelons in there. But we paid $300 for our topcoat, our two gray-green uniforms, and that was a lot of money back then.

SNAPP: Most people didn't make that much in a month.

JAMES: Right. We made per diem, but, see, we started ferrying right away, so we were big time. We got $260 a month and $6 a day per diem when we were out.

SNAPP: But we were considered officers at that time. We went under all officers' rules and regulations, and we were not supposed to fraternize with the enlisted personnel. A good friend of mine, she was a sergeant there, and she managed to go out at night. Three of us had a car we bought together. So if they wanted to go anyplace, they had to be very quiet about it and go off. So they ended up getting married, and she was dismissed right away.

WYALL: She married an enlisted man?

SNAPP: Yes.

WYALL: Oh.

SNAPP: A friend sergeant.

JAMES: Oh, I didn't know that story. When I married Dick, he was a—

SNAPP: My husband was an officer, too, so I didn't have any problem. That happened all the time.

JAMES: Before Dick went overseas, he stopped at Wilmington, Delaware, and God bless Betty Gillies, she gave me a two-day pass to spend my honeymoon in the Passion Pit in Wilmington, Delaware, in a hotel. [Unclear] Wilmington. See, these girls had a great time, because they were in the train doing all this stuff, and I got stuck in Wilmington, Delaware, for 27 months. So they had all the fun going through all this, when we were out sweating you know what.

SNAPP: What happened, wherever you based, they had different duties. She's talking about Wilmington. I think she was stuck, even though she was a more accomplished pilot than us, she was stuck with flying these small planes, which were the PTs [primary trainers] and the [Piper] Cubs. Is that correct?

JAMES: Yes, for four months, and then we went on to the big stuff.

SNAPP: Then they were transferred out for more training.

JAMES: I didn't go to training. I checked out myself in pursuit aircraft.

WYALL: All by yourself?

JAMES: Yes.

WYALL: With just a book?

JAMES: Just a single. That's it.

SNAPP: They put you in a plane in those days and tell you to read the manual and take off. You weren't even supposed to fly a twin-engine airplane without a co-pilot, but that happened, too. They said, "If you can find a plane, go ahead."

JAMES: Well, that's true. Should I tell them that story about my C-60?

WYALL: Sure.

JAMES: About the co-pilot thing?

WYALL: Why not. Yes.

JAMES: Okay.

SNAPP: Clean it up a little. [General laughter]

WYALL: Yeah, you don't have to tell everything.

JAMES: Talking about a transition, two other gals and I flew C-60s and became known as the "snafu airlines," where we used to pick up pilots. But I got orders to pick up a C-60 and take it to a naval station, Patuxent Naval Air Station. I'm thinking, why am I taking an Army airplane down to a Navy base? It was in Baltimore, Maryland, surrounded by five airports. We just had radios at that time. We didn't have all that high-tech equipment except the one little radio.

We left Wilmington, Delaware, and went up to Mitchell Field in New York to pick up the C-60, me and my crew chief, this guy, sergeant. So before I left Wilmington, I was into the coffee, about four cups of coffee. I get up to Mitchell Field and the plane wasn't ready. There was something wrong, just a short wait, so I went in the coffee shop and coffee'd up some more. At that time there was no such thing as a ladies' room; there was just a thing with a door on it, you know, a combination. If you had to go, somebody stood outside and would say there was a lady in there, when you had to go. So I avoided that and I thought, it's just a short flight from Mitchell Field down to Baltimore.

So about halfway there, the kidneys started acting up, and I was pushing on the rudders and pushing on the floor and moving around and strutting around, and I noticed the sergeant looking over at me, and I'm thinking to myself, "I'm never going to make it. I'm going to right here."

So I pushed the throttles on to get a little more juice out of that thing, to go a little bit faster, and I get over Patuxent and I keep calling the tower, and I hear all these crazy, "chicken in the rough, chicken in the rough." I can't get any response. Every time I'd call, I'd get

something like, "Angels 1-point-5. Fly." So I was ready to declare an emergency. I was going to get in, down one way or the other. At that time they said, "The Army airplane in traffic pattern, descend and call me on the down wind." So I went in combat descent, and that's exactly what I did. When I say "combat descent," I just kept the power on and I landed way down the runway, the closest to the base operations.

So I turned off, and I even passed up the [unclear], but I thought [unclear]. I cut the engines, jumped out of the airplane, and I ran in to operations, and the guy's on the phone. I says, "Where's the ladies' room?"

And he says, "The head's on the upper deck."

I says, "Pardon me?" I says, "I'm looking for the ladies' room."

He's muttering something about up the stairs, first door to the right. And I go flying up there, about ten stairs, and I went in to the door, the first door to the right, and I had my zipper down. There was one stall and a whole bunch of urinals on the wall. So I'm in that stall for at least five minutes, deflating the you know what. I heard the door open. I thought, well, maybe another gal wants in.

WYALL: "Another gal." Yeah.

JAMES: But I was thinking about those urinals at the same time. So I opened the door and I'm pulling up my zipper on my flight suit, and here's a guy relieving himself at the urinal. I looked in. He smiled, and I said, "I thought this was for ladies only." He said, "So's this, but I just want to run a little water through it." [General laughter]

I flew out that door and down those stairs, and I said, "Oh, my god, I forgot the memorandum receipt," which you have to have signed that you delivered the airplane. So I went out, and my crew chief was talking to one of the linemen. I asked the lineman, I says, "What's all this chit-chat I heard about angels 1-point-5 and the chicken and the rough stuff, take it around?" It was the Navy practicing carrier landings.

So I got my memorandum receipt, went back in to operations, opened the door, and who in the hell's behind the counter but the operations officer. He looked at me, said, "If it ain't the headhunter." [General laughter] There's a guy standing back there, said, "Well, change my oil. If it ain't a gal." And, you know, I was about to go through the floor with embarrassment.

WYALL: I didn't know you could do that.

JAMES: Believe me, I'm shy, really.

WYALL: Oh, yeah.

SNAPP: Back then.

JAMES: So the operations officer said, "Well, how about me taking you and your co-pilot to lunch?"

I said, "I don't have a co-pilot."

He says, "You mean you're flying a twin-engine and no co-pilot?"

I said, "No."

He says, "Who's your commanding officer?" So I told him—Colonel Bob Baker.

And the next day, the directive came out that there would be no more twin-engine flying without a co-pilot. That's what brought this story to mind. So I guess he heard about my little urinal problem. [General laughter] He didn't take kindly about that either.

WRIGHT: That had to be the most exciting part of your life as WASPs, was flying those airplanes. Let's talk about those. Did you have a favorite plane that you enjoyed more than others?

HAMAKER: I think we all loved the AT-6, which was North American, 650-horsepower, retractable landing gear, and when you'd take off and give it the gun and pull up the wheels, you really felt like you were flying.

SIZEMORE: We were.

WYALL: Made a big noise, too.

HAMAKER: Yes.

SIZEMORE: I instructed in AT-6s then, basic training in South Carolina, till we were deactivated, I guess, so probably about the best part of a year.

SNAPP: I think that's a favorite of most pilots because it's very maneuverable, and even to this day it's quite a collectable airplane.

HAMAKER: I can remember them telling us that that airplane cost $50,000, and don't wreck it. [General laughter]

SNAPP: [unclear] back then.

JAMES: I had a chance to fly practically the whole Air Force inventory, but I liked the P-47 and the P-51. Those are my two favorites of all the aircraft.

WYALL: *(To James)* but you're wearing P-38s in your ears [earrings].

JAMES: Yes, I flew 54 types of aircraft, and I tried to get a job in the airlines when I come out, because I was flying a C-47 then, and they said public opinion wouldn't permit it. I couldn't get a job in the airlines. I wrote to all the airlines. So I went back to flight instruction when the war was ending, and nobody was learning to fly then, so I went back to the florist business and designed wedding bouquets.

SNAPP: Well, Cochran contacted all of us afterwards, and she gave us a list of jobs that were open to us. As I recall, they were—

JAMES: The war-weary.

SNAPP: —airway traffic controller instructing, and a CAA inspector, I guess it was for—

JAMES: Accident.

SNAPP: —accident instructor. None of those suited me at all, so I wasn't interested. I think a lot of us just flew for fun, and I just flew for fun.

WYALL: I was contacted in January, after we got home in December, from the RFC, Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and they were asking for military pilots to come to the depots where they had all these—

JAMES: War-weary airplanes.

WYALL: —as a trainer. And you were to pick them up and take them wherever they were to be sold.

SNAPP: That was very dangerous.

WYALL: Yes.

SIZEMORE: You're telling me.

WYALL: But it was fun at the same time because they had taken all the identification off, so if you goofed up or did something real stupid, nobody could report it, because you had no number.

JAMES: I happened to get hold of an A-25. Now, this is before we were deactivated. I picked it up in South Carolina, and it was going to Maryland. I had more trouble with that airplane, and it took me about five days—

WYALL: To get it there.

JAMES: Right. On my final—I can't remember the name of the airport. However, I had to call in for an emergency landing on the final, and I flew the last fifty miles with the hatch open because the exhaust was coming up. I told them all the trouble I had with this airplane. They said, "Well, no wonder. You have a Class 26 airplane." And I says, "What's a Class 26 airplane?" And they're going to take it out—

WYALL: And dump it?

JAMES: Embalm it. What's the name of the field?

WYALL: Iwo Jima?

JAMES: No, in Baltimore. Famous, famous. Anyway, what they were doing is running bombing practice on this airport, and they'd take the airplanes that come in and the pilots come

by and drop the bombs. So that was my Class 26 airplane. So we were flying, at the end, war-weary airplanes, and we didn't know whether they were going to get us there or if you ever got to where you were supposed to be going all in one piece.

Even when we left, most of the women were flying pursuit, all the pursuit aircraft. I don't know whether you all knew that or not, but most of the—all of the pursuit aircraft was being moved by women. At Republic Aircraft, there was 57 P-47s, new ones, that they wanted to have moved. They said, "Why are you getting rid of the girls when they're the ones that was doing it?"

SNAPP: Well, they didn't even test-hop those airplanes before they left the factory. In other words, they came off the line. It was dangerous, too, and you never knew what would happen in the delivery. At the bases where we were towing targets, we had all the rejects, planes that had been used for all kinds of things, maybe sent back from overseas. They called it red-line. So when you'd get in the plane, you'd look to see what was wrong with the plane, and you could refuse to fly it if you wanted to, if it was what you considered dangerous.

JAMES: Red-cross. You could fly it on a red-line, but if it was red-crossed, you wouldn't.

SNAPP: I can remember getting in to go up on a mission many times and the oil would be coming all over the windshield so you couldn't even see out. I'd go around the field and come back and say, "I'm not flying this airplane." Staff sergeant would say, "There's nothing wrong with it, just a little bit of oil." And I'd say, "I'm not flying this airplane." So a lot of the men refused to fly, too. There were men doing the same thing there with us, but most of them were

not even commissioned. They were what you called flight officers [FO's—they were enlisted sergeants]. They never quite finished or made their—or considered officer material, I suppose, because they were made what they called flight officers. They got their commissions later.

But you always had the option to refuse an airplane that you considered unsafe. So that was fortunate, if you knew enough to do it.

SIZEMORE: But the trouble was that most of the time, looking at those forms, if they were too technical, you didn't know if it was safe or not.

JAMES: That's right.

SIZEMORE: It's like reading a car engine manual, at least to me. I mean, I can read all this stuff, but—

SNAPP: And you had the option afterwards, after you made a flight, to write up anything that you found wrong with that plane, and supposedly they were supposed to check it out before it was flown again.

JAMES: But they didn't. Well, a lot of them didn't.

SIZEMORE: But, you know, getting back to these planes that they were selling to—who was it?

WYALL: RFC.

SIZEMORE: Anyway, that they were selling to civilians, a lot of civilian—

JAMES: They were buying up these—

SIZEMORE: —operators at the airports bought them, and I was in California at the time and I ferried several of them from Arizona up to Oregon. When I look back on it now, I think, gee, how stupid can you get? You didn't know anything about them. They'd been sitting out there in the desert for who knows how long.

JAMES: The graveyard in Arizona.

SIZEMORE: I remember one flight vividly, because we were in Stearmans, you know. They're open planes. You have the goggles and the whole bit, sitting out there in the weather. Always, there was always several in a flight that would go. But, of course, always a man was the flight leader, and you're supposed to follow him. He took us right straight across the Grand Canyon, wind blowing like hell in our face, so it took us forever to get across. Then it started to snow. Anyway, we finally got to Montana, Helena, Montana, I think, and I was so mad by the time we got there, I told him about it and I told the rest of them, "I don't know what the rest of you yo-yos are going to do, but I'm going by myself if I have to." I said, "No telling where we'll end up." Which we did. Several of us then went and told him to kind of get lost, you know. But we did do those foolish, stupid things.

JAMES: You know, too, that I happened to be the flight leader on a flight—and this is March of '43, 1943—where six of us were to go up and pick up PT-26s and take them to Jackson, Tennessee, because they couldn't use them. It was too cold up there in that area. Somebody—we had trouble with them on the way to Jackson, Tennessee. We found out somebody had put sugar in the gas tanks, and we had to stop and they had to take all the gas tanks off and clean them up. That's the first and only incident I ever heard.

We almost had forced landings. Florene Miller and Nancy Batson and I and all of those, they were excellent pilots, and the engines would keep cutting in and out. They'd go down. I thought, "Somebody's going down for a forced landing," and it would catch again. So then when we got into one of the bases—I don't remember which one we landed—to find out what was happening, we knew there was something happening to the engines, and here they found sugar in the gas tanks. Can you believe that?

HAMAKER: At least one of the WASPs was killed.

SNAPP: A girl was killed at my base, at Camp Davis, North Carolina. We were training for tow targeting, and supposedly sugar was put in the gas tanks there. Now, I don't really know whether there was a rumor or whether anything—what actually happened, but they attributed that something did happen, and they didn't want to frighten either the men pilots or the women pilots when anything like that happened. They would just keep it quiet.

JAMES: There was nothing said about this at all.

SNAPP: There was sabotage everyplace during the war, at the factories, and they found incidents where brake lines were cut, and things like that, and I'm sure things did happen.

WYALL: Cables switched.

WRIGHT: Was it deliberate because of the WASP or was it—

JAMES: It had to be deliberate when you have six airplanes, all with sugar in their gas tanks. You had to have them drained. That's how they discovered the sugar content. And fortunately this was after about 300 miles of flying, where we—I know it must have been around 250 miles of flying, where one of the girls would think the engine was going to quit and then it would catch again, then somebody else. I thought, "Boy, if we make it to the first airport, that's where we're going," and that's what they found out. And fortunately that we all made it and we didn't have a forced landing and somebody didn't get killed. But I was shocked when I found that out. Of course, that report went in when we got back, but I don't know what ever came of it. There was no hearing on it or anything.

WYALL: Well, there were 38 women that were killed in flying accidents, and I've also heard there were 38 accidents where they had injuries. Some of the women were not able to ever regain their health. In fact, one girl was inverted in training and she fell out of the little open-cockpit plane, and her parachute opened, she made a good landing, but the wind was so strong—this was close to Sweetwater—that it drug her over the rocks, and she injured her back.

But she was so intent on finishing her program that she didn't want to get washed out, so she didn't really complain that her back was bothering her, but she really had a serious injury. When she got to AT-6 training in the advanced course, she could not lift the gear. She couldn't do anything with one arm because it really hurt her back. So she eventually did wash out from that injury. But that was not recorded, and she had a lot of problems after the service that was never paid for.

When the women were killed, their parents paid for their funeral.

SNAPP: And for the trip home.

WYALL: The body was sent home, but then that was the end of it.

JAMES: You never got any compensation at all. In fact, I don't know whether—who was the first—Cornelia Fort, she was the first one killed. One of the girls out of Sweetwater, they had to take up the collection to get her body back home.

WYALL: Yes, they did that a lot.

SNAPP: There were women had trouble with their ears, too, because we flew high-altitude missions. There was one girl at my base, and she had loss of hearing and they were about to wash her out. I mean, to dismiss her. But I don't know how she managed to hang on, but she managed to hang on till the very end. But to this day she had trouble, and she never was able to

get any compensation until we were militarized, which was in '79, and I was on Capitol Hill at that time.

JAMES: You got a flag.

SNAPP: So I did some of the—helped out as far as talking to congressmen and that kind of thing. So she finally was able to get some compensation, got hearing aids, but never—

JAMES: Really?

SNAPP: Yes.

JAMES: I didn't know about that.

SNAPP: A couple of women did that.

JAMES: They paid for them?

SNAPP: Yes. Actually it was for testing. They were testing some new hearing aids, and the word got out, and some of these women found out about it, so they'd get these terribly expensive hearing aids, which cost anywhere from 5 to 10,000 apiece, but I don't think that you can do that now. You might be able to get some compensation, but not—

JAMES: No way.

SNAPP: —expensive ones.

HAMAKER: I had a funny experience. I was flying a twin-engine airplane in testing, and I had another WASP as a co-pilot. We lost an engine, and we were quite close to the field, so we called in and asked for a straight-in approach to the field. Well, the tower went berserk, the only two women on the base and we had a lost engine. They called the CO and the OD and the fire trucks and ambulance, and when the air finally became quiet, we heard this little voice that said, "A woman's place is in the home." [General laughter]

WYALL: Oh, no.

SNAPP: That was your fault.

WRIGHT: How were the reactions when you were ferrying those aircraft and you popped out and all of a sudden—

[General laughter]

JAMES: I had a great time in mine, because I was the first WAF out on the coast. I delivered a PT-17 for that WAF film, "Ladies Courageous." Loretta Young played it. I never did see that movie, but they said it was a dog, so I don't know. But they went gaga over that uniform. Man,

I was wined and dined Hollywood style, and they gave me a week's leave from New Castle Army Air Base.

WYALL: Is that where you got your picture taken with Bob Hope?

JAMES: With Bob Hope, yes. He introduced me to a lot of the stars, especially I was looking at Marlene Deitrich with those—legs and shirt from a million bucks, and I'm looking at those gams and thinking to myself, what's a million dollars? [General laughter] I met a lot of stars. The Hollywood canteen, where the movie stars were entertaining all the Army and Air Force personnel, and the Navy, they were having a great time. And I'm thinking, "My husband's out there." He was going through cadet school, and he said he was going to the Hollywood canteen. I said, "Oh, boy, there you go, James. You lost 'im."

SNAPP: I think that people didn't know how to take—what to do with us, because, in the first place, they'd never seen the uniform. There were several women who were arrested for impersonating an officer. I'd fly into a base—and this is in the beginning. I don't know what kind of troubles some of the ferry pilots had. But the commanding officer, they didn't know what to do. They didn't know whether to salute you, ignore you, or what. So we were told in the beginning, if anyone salutes you, salute them back, regardless who it was. So we did that. But I can remember flying into a field and having the commander officer sending out his car to meet us, take us into town, and bring us back, and then being completely ignored at another field. There was no—

JAMES: And there were no facilities for us at all.

SNAPP: You'd go to stay at a base and there was no place to stay. If they had nurses' quarters, you were usually allowed to stay there.

HAMAKER: That's where we stayed.

SNAPP: But if you went into town, and you were on a trip and you were weathered in—I was weathered in one place, delivering an airplane to be serviced, and you were not allowed in restaurants in slacks in those days. Women were not permitted. There was no way to buy anything. We may not have even had the money to carry with you.

JAMES: There was no wash-and-wear. [General laughter]

HAMAKER: No.

WYALL: Tell them about your shirt, that you were gone how many days?

JAMES: I had orders to take a P-47 to the modification center in [Evansville], Indiana. I was supposed to come right back, and all I had was my—we didn't have no WASP uniforms at that time. I had my WAF uniform, just my slacks and a tan shirt. I didn't have any blouse, because I'm supposed to come right back. When you're flying pursuit aircraft, you don't have room for anything anyway, except your map case, and that's about it.

So when I get to modification, Evansville, Indiana, I delivered early, and they said, "We have orders for you to take a P-47 to Long Beach, California." I wouldn't dare say I didn't have any clothes with me. All I had, I think, was my lipstick and that was all. So anyway, I went over. I had to go to—there was a little store at the mod center, so I went over and bought a tiny little comb and toothbrush and toothpaste. I come back, and so instead of going out the next morning, there was something wrong with the airplane. I was there for four days. I was ready to go.

Now, in this tan shirt, Betty Gillies (WAFS Commanding Officer) said, "If you get to a place, take off your trousers." We didn't call them slacks. "Then lay them out flat and put them in between two mattresses." Well, if you could get into a place with two mattresses, you had to knock, you know.

However, after four days I rinsed out that tan shirt to hang it up, and you know what cotton looks like when you just hang it up, all the wrinkles.

SNAPP: In those days, before wash and wear.

JAMES: In those days. So, four days later the airplane's ready to go. The weather socks in. So I'm there for four more days until I finally get out of there, and when I finally get to Long Beach, California, I said, "I'm happy I'm going back to the base." They gave me a set of orders to take a P-51 to Fort Myers, Florida. I says, "I've never flown a P-51."

And they said, "Well, read the tech orders and shoot three landings." That's how I checked out in the P-47, a single-engine, you know.

Wyall: And it's a single-seat.

JAMES: And single-seat. So it was early afternoon and I went and got the tech orders. I went out and sat in the P-51, and the P-51 is a real lighter aircraft. Forty-seven is a 2800-horsepower and it's a real heavy airplane. When it sits, it sits, you know. But the P-51's lighter, with a 15- to 1800-horsepower, which is a much lighter aircraft.

So I had heard the pilots talking about how fast the fog rolls in out there on the coast. Well, this inspector from the CAA said, "If you ever want to find out how an airplane flies, take it upstairs and land it," and that means you just go up and slow the aircraft, drop the gear, drop the flaps, and pretend you're landing, and then try to stall it to see what the landing stall speed is. So I did that, and all of a sudden I look at the fog rolling in.

Before I took off in the P-51, I set the gyro compass to the heading of the runway, because it didn't precess, you know, the time I was up there, might change two or three degrees while I'm up in the air. So I got down in a hurry, and it's a good thing that I had that compass set on—so I come right down the runway as the fog was just closing in there, and I had too much flying speed. I remember I jack-rabbited right down that runway and I couldn't get it to sit down, because getting right out of a 47.

To make a long story short, the next morning I went over and I told them I was there to shoot my other two landings. He said, "Oh, you didn't need to. You got up and got down. Here's your orders," and off I went to Fort Myers, Florida. Did I get back to the base? No. They had an AT-9 going to Oklahoma.

WYALL: How many days had you been gone?

JAMES: I was gone thirty days.

SNAPP: In the same clothes.

JAMES: Thirty days and looked like—

WYALL: I bet the thing stood alone. [General laughter]

JAMES: You should have seen the knees here. It just looked like they had cantaloupes in them. The bulge, you could put a cantaloupe in each leg. And you should have seen my hair, if you want to see a scraggly-looking mess after thirty days. I said, "I hate this Army." I never believed them from that day on when they said, "You're coming right back off a trip."

When you would fly pursuit aircraft, you know, you need 26 maps because of the weather, you know. We didn't know what the weather was going to be, whether you were going to fly the northern route, the southern route, or whatever. Your map case and maybe a shirt, but you always took your blouse with you. I could have had an extra pair of trousers, but traveling—oh, man, what a mess I was when I got back. Never trust the Army.

WRIGHT: So many miles that you all flew, but then on December 20, 1944, they disbanded the WASP. Where were you at that time, and how did you find out that the organization that you were so proud to be a part of was no longer going to be?

SNAPP: Well, we knew in advance that things were not just quite right, and we knew that we were supposed to be militarized at one time, but it never happened. Then we all—I think we had mixed feelings about it. I wasn't too concerned, because I understood that if we were militarized, it didn't mean that we would continue flying, it just meant that we would be militarized.

JAMES: No.

SNAPP: So I had mixed feelings about it.

JAMES: I don't know about that. Cochran said she didn't want to be under [Oveta Culp] Hobby. That was the reason we were demilitarized, because if she wasn't the head of the WASP—

SNAPP: Of the WAC [Women's Army Corps]. She was the head of the WAC. Hobby.

JAMES: Right.

SNAPP: And we didn't want the WACs.

JAMES: And she told the press in Washington, Cochran says, "Then demilitarize them or get rid of them." That's exactly what she said. "Get rid of them."

HAMAKER: Well, I think she was angry at that point because she had so much controversy.

WYALL: Authority.

HAMAKER: Well, she had so much controversy at that point.

JAMES: Well, she didn't want to be under Hobby, and that's exactly where they wanted to put us.

SIZEMORE: I don't think very many of the women, at least the ones that I knew, were a bit interested in going into the Army under the WACs, because we wouldn't be flying, and you would be—

JAMES: But she would have been under. She would have been under Hobby, and she wouldn't take that. She had to be over the whole thing.

HAMAKER: Hobby was that way, too, and she didn't want Cochran over here.

JAMES: Two stubborn females.

HAMAKER: Oh, yes. But Cochran said something about Hobby didn't know—

JAMES: She didn't know her rudder from her [General laughter]

WYALL: One rudder from an udder?

WRIGHT: Marty, I know that in 1977 the WASP were recognized by the Congress. Could you give us a little background about how that happened?

WYALL: It really went back to about 1975. We had a reunion in Little Rock, Arkansas, and it was one of those incredible weather patterns where we couldn't even leave the hotel, it was just such terrible weather, that it worked out fine for us because we all got better acquainted. It so happened that Nancy Batson Crews was our president, and she's a WAF. Also Bruce Arnold was there, who was the son of "Hap" [Henry] Arnold, who was really the one that sponsored and took better care of us because he made sure that the women were going to be in the military, and if it hadn't been for his enthusiasm, along with Jacqueline Cochran, this never would have come about.

However, he got up at our business meeting and he said, "You know, my father really felt badly that you were never militarized. He was in Europe, and it was a bad time for the war zone at that time, and he could not be over to come back to Congress and to push the bill." He said, "I think it would have happened had he been available, but there was too much backlash on some of the instructors that were going to be drafted and they wanted the women out of there so they could get our jobs," which never did turn out, but that's what they thought.

However, he said, "I will do everything I can. I have an office in Washington, D.C., and I will be your liaison between Congress and whatever we need to do to get you militarized." So that set the wheels turning, and it went on and on. By the time 1976 and '77 came along, we had a wonderful organization and our president at that time was Bea Haydu, and she used all the women in the Washington area, and Bruce Arnold acquired the Navy Club, I think they called

it, downtown, in Washington, to use as part of their office. So all of the files, all of the phone numbers, and everything went through Bruce Arnold. He backed us all the way.

We had a big newspaper campaign where they came in, and every newspaper and large city in the country had an article about "We need to militarize the WASP. They have done so much for World War II, and they've been ignored." And this kind of woke up the public.

So it got the ball rolling, and, sure enough, [Jimmy] Carter was President, and in 1978, in October or September, I think it was, he signed the bill, so we were militarized. However, by that time we got no benefits except our burial benefits. We could be buried in the national cemeteries all over the country as veterans, and we could have the wings on our gravestone. And that's just about it. But it was worth the effort, because we were now recognized.

JAMES: That started back in the sixties with Barry Goldwater.

WYALL: Well, Barry Goldwater, he was one of the sponsors of the Senate bill, and then—

JAMES: Patsy Mink [phonetic] was the first one.

WYALL: Patsy Mink was the one that introduced it in the House, and then Cokie Roberts' mother was also in the House. Tell me, what is her name? Oh, you know. [Lindy Boggs]

?: She took over after her husband [J. Caleb Boggs] died.

WYALL: She took over after he husband was killed and became his part in the—it's terrible that our brains won't come up with it. Anyway, she was the one that also sponsored our bill in Congress, so we had both the Senate and the—

JAMES: Margaret Heckler.

WYALL: Margaret Heckler. But that was another one; that wasn't Cokie Roberts' mother.

SNAPP: Most all the women who were in Congress at that time were helpful and helped push the bill through. But actually, a lot of this started when they started talking about the first military women pilots, you know, and that upset us, because we knew we were the first women military pilots, but we were never recognized. So I think that that kind of—

WYALL: 1976, they came out and said that the first military women pilots are trained at the Air Force Academy and whatever, and we just said, "Oh, no, you're not." And that's how we got really in with the young women pilots, because they knew about us and they were very grateful that we were recognized, so they've been our best friend and we sponsored everything they wanted to do.

SNAPP: But we were always told never to talk to the press. In other words, they'd have an open house maybe at one base and take a lot of pictures, and they're the official pictures that people are using now. We were told never to talk to the press without permission. So there's so many people never even heard of us.

WYALL: Well, that's why we're here today, because Eileen Collins was one of those women that has always looked at us as being her mentors, and we just think she's great. That's why we want to come see her blast off tomorrow.

HAMAKER: One of the Air Force women pilots I've met recently, she was so delighted to meet me and I was so delighted to meet her.

WYALL: It's a mutual affection.

SNAPP: So, actually, a lot of our organizations have merged or we've made new ones where they include both the WASP old military pilots and the new ones, and it's a real thrill to see these young women be able to do what they're able to do today.

WYALL: We meet on the even years. They meet on the odd years. So they're having their convention in Las Vegas in October of '99, and I would say a good number of them will be WASP that will be attending.

HAMAKER: Back in 1947, I believe it was, when the Air Force became a separate service, we had word from Jacqueline Cochran that we could join the Air Force as officers if we wished.

WYALL: Some did.

HAMAKER: A great many did. But they could not fly. They were officers, but they could not fly. I thought it was rather amusing because my husband was flying, and I had two little children, and I told him he could take care of the children and I'd go and join the Air Force. [General laughter]

SNAPP: We were given a commission, and we were commissioned according to our experience. So most of us would go in as second lieutenant and then work our way up from there. But you couldn't go—I was offered a commission, too, but I found out I couldn't because I had a small—I had an infant, and you could not have dependents, so I was never able to. But there are some women that did go through and ended up being lieutenant colonels. I don't know if anyone ever made colonel, but they did make lieutenant colonel. And didn't you have a commission?

JAMES: Major.

BUTLER: You all mentioned earlier, you talked about how you got involved in WASP or WAF program, but what got you interested in flying? Had it been a passion or not been a passion? What prompted that?

JAMES: I never wanted to fly. I was terrified of flying. It's a crazy story how I got into flying. My brother joined a club in Pittsburgh where four guys owned an airplane. So one weekend they decided, the three of them, they were going to take the OX-5 open-cockpit airplane up to my uncle in Detroit. They were leaving Pittsburgh and were going by way of Cleveland so they wouldn't go over the lake. I didn't know it at this time what happened, but anyway, they

crashed. My brother, he was seriously injured and they thought they might have to amputate his leg.

So by the time he got out of the hospital, his leg got better, and he couldn't drive. He asked me—I didn't even have a driver's license at that time—to drive him to the airport. I said, "You must be crazy to even think about going back to flying if you almost killed yourself."

So I would take him to the airport and then he would call on the phone and tell me to come pick him up, and he'd go over there with the cronies and they'd talk about whatever they would talk about, flying and whatnot. They were discussing buying a new airplane.

So at that time the pilots and their girlfriends or wives would pack a basket on Sunday and fly someplace. They didn't even have airports then; just strips. They would either play cards or play ball or something and have their picnic, whatever they took with them, sandwiches and stuff. Then they'd fly back home again. Well, they did this all during the summer.

So the one time I took my brother over, this plane pulled up and I looked at the airplane because it was a real snazzy-looking airplane, and out jumps this guy, the best-looking thing I've ever seen. Of course, I was telling my mother about this. She said, "Well, I've put up with this all through high school. You were in love with your male teacher, this one or that one." I had all these crazy affairs everywhere. Love affairs. I mean, they didn't even know that [unclear].

So when my brother introduced him to me, he said, "You know, I heard about your picnic thing here." He said, "Would you like to go along next Sunday?"

And I said, "No, I don't think so." I could feel my heart pounding. I just went bananas over this guy.

So apparently he took some other chick with him, because my brother told me about this when he come back. So the next time he asked me, I went. I was—"terrified" is not the word.

My legs kept going up and down like this. That's how nervous I was, sitting there. I'd peek out, you know, and pull my head back real quick. I was so stressed out by the time I got to where the picnic was, and then I forgot about it and what we were doing, what activities there were. Then I started getting the sweats, knowing that I had to get back in this airplane.

I think I went on about five or six picnics with him. One day I showed up for the picnic and they said, "Bill isn't here. He took a job in Chicago. He got a flying job." And, of course, I was heartbroken. This guy didn't even know I had this terrible crush on him. He had no idea. So one of the guys who owned a brand-new airplane, he was fresh in from Clark's Air College in St. Louis with his license, and he was trying to date me, and I just ignored him. So after Bill left, he told my brother, he said, "How about bringing your sister over?" He said, "I don't think she's interested in coming over here." And he says, "Well, what I was going to ask, why doesn't she learn to fly and surprise Bill when he comes back?" See, that was the lure that he used on me.

So I started. He'd always fly early, either Saturday or Sunday mornings, when it was so still. The airplane could really fly itself. At that time there was no brakes on the airplane and there was no instrumentation except the auto gauge, and that was it. The gas gauge was a bobble stick that bubbled up and down. The lower it got, the lower you got on gasoline. So I learned to fly off a field 1,500 foot one way and it was uphill and downhill, surrounded by trees and wire. It had a tail skid, like I said, no brakes. After you landed, the skid would dig in and stop you. When I think about how I even taxied that thing, it was really something else. But however.

He showed me how to use the controls, and I knew, because I watched Bill's feet, you know, the pedals going, doing this and that. So I must have been learning something about

flying when I was flying, the short time I was flying with Bill. But Harry would holler and he would use a swear word at me. "Get the nose up, get the gear," blah, blah, you know. And, "Get the wing down and get it up, and you're not following the horizon." He's shouting into the wind, you know.

The only way you could judge your flying, see, is you listen to the wires singing. This is a biplane. When you landed, you taxied up, then take off right down the way you landed again. So I did this for about, I guess, about six weeks, but just short hops.

WYALL: What year are you talking about?

JAMES: I'm talking '34 now.

WYALL: Okay.

JAMES: You got that figured out?

WYALL: I do. [General laughter]

JAMES: Everybody knows it. No secret. And one Sunday morning we had shot two landings and he said to me—oh, after we landed, he got out and picked the tail of the aircraft and put it so it would be facing down where you just landed, and he said, "Oh, you're okay. Take it around." Well, I took off, and oh, my god, the airplane jumped in the air. On takeoff I had this spot to go around this big tree here and then I'd go around to the two corners of the highway, then come

around to the country club and come in. Well, I had to have 200 feet here at the first checkpoint, and I jumped at 400 feet. I was always 200 feet higher. I used to watch the guys slip the airplane down to get it down to lose altitude.

Well, I don't know to this day how I got that airplane down. All I know is, I couldn't control this leg going up and down. [General laughter] I got that thing down, and they told me I slipped the airplane. I don't even remember that. I just pulled up and I cut the switch. I got and I said, "Never again. I won't go near an airplane." I was scared to death.

So then the guys started needling me, and they said, "Bill's coming back, and, boy, he'd be happy," you know. What a bunch of "who shot Nellie" I was getting. "Get back in the airplane." They said, "All you need is some more instruction and flying time." So I said to heck with that. That was it.

So they said—they dropped the hint that Bill was coming back. So I did. I went back. I soloed four hours and thirty minutes. No wonder I didn't know anything. I didn't do absolutely nothing. So I took some more flight instruction, and on the second time I soloed, I was a little more comfortable, but at least I knew that I got up and down with it one time. They kept saying, "Tracy, you got it up and you got it down. All you need, you have to have more confidence, because you can really fly that airplane." And I didn't even know whether I was even flying that thing, because I thought Harry was flying.

So on my second solo flight, I guess I didn't get back for a month or so. So when they finally wheedled me into going back, it was in the spring. So there was a pilot there who was a stunt pilot. He said, "Tracy, why don't you go in one of my airplanes. I'll show you how to do stunts in this airplane." Because he was going to air shows and he was telling me how much money he made at these air shows. So I said, "Really? That kind of money?"

So we started out with hammerhead stalls and loops and wingovers and whatever you could do, and I used to love to spin an airplane. I don't know why. I think when I was dancing I used to spin around on the floor when dancing. Then he showed me how to spin and pick out the objects that you can stop on an eighth or a quarter turn. So I learned how to do all these stunts.

There was a flying circus in town, and he says, "Teresa, why don't you go over and do that." At that time I was doing twelve turns in a spin.

WYALL: Wow!

JAMES: Yes. I got up to twenty-six and a half turns, and that was my specialty. However, I made fifty bucks that weekend on that stunting exhibition. I took this home. I says, "Mother, look how much money I made." And she says, "Fifty dollars?" She was all thrilled for me, you know, but she wasn't too happy when I got into flying, on account of my brother, you know.

So I started getting booked at air shows, and then I started hauling passengers in an exaggerated trip around the field, two bucks. I'd give the guy a buck and I'd keep the dollar. And then I'd take my mother and dad. They thought this was fantastic. So I'd put them in the front seat and go to the air shows on Saturday and Sunday, and then they'd fly back with me. My mother says, "Wow! I can't believe you make that kind of money."

WYALL: How old were you?

JAMES: That's how I learned to fly.

WYALL: [Laughter] She won't tell her age.

JAMES: And do you know, it was great, when I started instructing, I remember taking students up and they would pull in from a turn or something, and it made me a better flight instructor, all the stuff that I went through, because I could pick up the fear in somebody immediately. I used to tell them, "Listen, hey, I absolutely got out of the airplane," and I told them how terrified I was of flying. I says, "It's a natural fear." And I mean, that really did something for my flight instruction. I drove to Buffalo Aeronautical and got my flight instructor's rating in 1940, then my secondary to teach aviation cadets inverted flying, and they were fascinated with that twenty-six-and-a-half-turn spin. Everybody came to the air show feeling I'm going to kill myself.

Then Walter Beech came to the big show in Pittsburgh and said to me, "Teresa, if I were you, I wouldn't do the spin anymore. You're going into a flat spin and you may never come out of it." Of course, that OX-5 just floated around. I used to just sit through and count the turns.

WYALL: It was getting flatter and flatter?

JAMES: It did, but I never went into a—I always pushed the stabilizer all the way forward, and I watched the nose, you know, how it's reacting. But I thought, "This is great," until I got into instruction, you know, and air shows, and I was making money like an old country hunkie.

At that time, all these cadets were being trained, and airplane operators—I at one time, on one weekend I got fifty telegrams offering me jobs at $300 a month, I'm thinking, and my

room and board, all over the whole United States. I had my pick of anyplace to go and instruct. But then along came the telegram from Wilmington, Delaware, and said that they were organizing the Woman Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron out in Wilmington, Delaware. So that's when I reported in. I thought that would be great to fly and look out at that star and see that big old Army star out there on that wing and say, "Oh, boy."

SNAPP: Well, what happened to your boyfriend?

JAMES: Oh, that's right. [General laughter] Oh, what happened was, he went off and married some schoolteacher, never did come back. At that time I was looking at some other guy.

WRIGHT: For whatever reasons you all chose to go into this field, we certainly appreciate the fact that you did and the sacrifices that you made. [You] have led such lives that have been role models for people like [STS-93 Commander] Eileen Collins to follow, so that she can go past the stars like you all wanted to do.

We thank you for giving up your Sunday afternoon to be with us and visit with us, and I know that we could sit here many more hours and never hear the same thing over. There are so many more things to tell us.

But we thank you and we wish you the best, and we all know that our thoughts will be good thoughts sent for Eileen and her crew and hope she has a successful mission. Thank you again.

[End of Interview]