

Virginia Britt

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Question: I want to get one thing before I -- virginia Britt, right?

Answer: Yeah. My maiden name was McCoy.

Question: Okay, McCoy. And Britt is B-R-I-

Answer: T -- two T's.

Question: two T's. Okay. Just want to make sure I have that on tape first.

Question: I talked to one gentleman and he -- his mother really wanted to hang the flag in the window that she had somebody in the service. Well, he didn't want to go and so -- and he was an only child and the service had said, you know, keep your only child at home, he's to stay here. But his mother was like --

Answer: Oh, really she wanted him to go?

Question: Yeah, because she wanted to be like all the other mothers cause all the other mothers had that flag hanging up in the window. And she didn't want to be the only one on the block.

Answer: I guess my mother -- I don't know if my mother had one with four stars because my three brothers -- my twin brothers then enlisted but they wouldn't take them in until they graduated from Olympia High School. So soon as they graduated, they went in the Army Air Corps. But as soon as they finished basic they separated them, you know, after the Sullivan Brothers and -- were all killed, you know, on the Navy ship.

Question: Oh, yeah.

Answer: Didn't -- you didn't know that?

Question: Yes --

Answer: You remember.

Question: Yeah.

Answer: They were all in that one ship and that ship was sunk and they were all killed and then Congress passed a law that only -- that not more than one member of a family could be in, you know, in the same place. And so they separated my brothers then after basic. But they were -- the war -- see, they didn't go in till '44 and so they weren't -- one of them was out in '45, no, '46, so they -- they didn't get to fly. Well, one of them -- they didn't get to become pilots, that's what they wanted to do.

Question: A lot of people wanted to --

Answer: But one of them flew on B-29's but he was a gunner. But he didn't see any action.

Question: So there was -- you had two brothers?

Answer: Three -- three brothers --

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Question: Three brothers --

Answer: Three brothers and myself in the service.

Question: All four people.

Answer: Four of us, yeah. We all came home okay.

Question: Boy that had to be hard on your -- on your parents.

Answer: Well, my mother just thought it was great when I joined. Course, I was the first one in.

Question: Oh, really?

Answer: Yeah. And then my older brother got drafted and then the twins had to wait until '44 -- cause I enlisted in '42, as soon as the -- the Roosevelt appointed Oveta Culp Hobby to head the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, and that was in 1942 but I didn't get called into active duty until 1943. And so -- so I joined right away.

Question: Did you -- so before Oveta, were you ready to sign up prior to that or was that the --

Answer: There wasn't anything.

Question: Nothing.

Answer: Nothing. The uhm -- after -- I worked for the state. I was making \$80 a month. That was big money. (laughs) And I was working for the State Tax Commission which is now the Department of Revenue. And they sent a mimeographed sheet around one day -- this was right after Pearl Harbor. Did you -- did you live in this area? No, you weren't -- of course you weren't born yet, but your parents lived in Aberdeen? Well, you know, we had black outs. We had to -- we had to put things on our windows cause they thought the Japanese might get to the West Coast and bomb. All the way down the coast. And so they sent this memo around saying they needed volunteers up at the Olympia Armory. You know it's still -- it's still here in town. And they had people from Fort Lewis, and they were monitoring planes at night. And so a bunch of us volunteered, and we had a shift from 8 o'clock till midnight. I don't know if we went every night or whatever. And one night the recruiting sergeant was there and he told us about the WAACs. That's how I found out about it. So.

Question: So you were how old at this time when Pearl Harbor happened?

Answer: Well, let's see. Pearl Harbor was '41. I was born in '21. So I was 20 and you couldn't go in till you were 21. And you had to be a high school graduate. And so I guess I was 21 -- I was 20 then.

Question: You had finished high school and --

Answer: I had been to college one year. I didn't have any more money. I couldn't make it -- it was easier to come back and go to work. It was too hard to go to college, even though you could go to Washington State College for about \$250 a year.

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Question: But were just coming out of the depression and

Answer: But I got a job with the state, the day I graduated from high school and I got \$80 a month and I saved it and I had \$200 -- and when you got \$80 a month, you got \$80 a month. No tax, no nothing. And I saved it and I had \$240 and so I went to college on that. And then I worked part-time, too. But it was so hard and I just came home and it was easier to go to work so I just went to work then. And that was in -- I graduated in '39, that was 1940, and so then I went back to work for the state and worked until I -- until January '43 and then I went in the Army.

Question: Wow.

Answer: So. I've had a great life. (laughs)

Question: How was -- do you remember how Olympia was affected by the -- the war being on, what changes it made --

Answer: Well, we had to have these blackout curtains, I remember that. And we worked up at the Armory and then my -- when I went into the Army my mother took my place up at the Armory. She would have loved to have gone in but my twin brothers were still in school. And I don't know. You know the population of Olympia at that time was about 10,000. And Lacey -- Lacey was out in the boonies, and -- but we weren't allowed to date soldiers before the war. But as soon as Pearl Harbor, and you know Fort Lewis is, was then, too, a big fort, we started dating officers and we had a great time -- in Olympi

Answer: All the gals from the State, you know. So we met a lot of guys then. But we -- nobody would ever date a soldier before the war. And isn't that a shame, I mean -- they had a bad reputation. The Army. I don't know if the Navy did or not. I imagine.

Question: No, you know what's interesting cause -- and I think I can't speak factually on this. But the fact that we're so close to Fort Lewis we have that connotation. If you'd lived up towards Bremerton, you wouldn't have been dating any of the Navy people. And for some reason it has to do with being close to a base that they --.

Answer: Well, you know what I think it was, was too. One of the big things, during the depression, of course. A lot of people didn't finish -- didn't even go to high school. And so you had a lot of people in the ser.. -- they couldn't find jobs so they went in the service. And so they were not educated and I think that's probably part of it. But after I left home, my mother, you know, and all the people started coming into Fort Lewis, and she rented our bedrooms when my brothers left too so they had two bedrooms -- we had a three bedroom house on Adams Street, and she rented bedrooms and she had 23 couples from Fort Lewis. The girls would follow the fellows out and then they couldn't -- there was no place to live in Olympi

Answer: You asked what was Olympia -- you couldn't find a place to live. We probably didn't have any hotels. I don't remember.

Question: Maybe one.

Answer: Maybe one. And so -- and that would be too expensive anyway. And so she rented these rooms and oh, more than one time the phone would ring at midnight and my dad would run downstairs and answer the phone and it would be some fellow and he's being shipped out, right away, and so my dad would -- they had a car. They weren't very well off

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financially. He'd put the girl in the car so she could go up and see her husband and say goodbye to him for the last time. So, but other than that I don't really remember how Olympia was affected. Any more than any other city, you know. I know you couldn't get nylons and it was -- and I used to feel guilty when I'd come home on furlough, and my mother would make all this and she'd borrow sugar from everybody. And I had -- we had wonderful food in the Army -- the girls did. We did, where I was. And, but I was raised during the depression and I was raised, you eat what's put in front of you, and you don't complain. You just -- somebody tells you to do something, you do it. I wish I could say the same when I raised my kids.

Question: So where did you -- when you went into the Army, where did you go in and.

Answer: Well, they sent me up to Fort Lawton in Seattle. One time to take tests and for physical. This was before I -- before I was accepted. We were there all day and we had a snow storm. And we had about four feet of snow and I couldn't get home. And I had to call my mother long distance, that was a no-no, call my mother long distance and they put me up in a hotel and I guess they sent me home, a couple of days later. So then after I got my orders and then I was enlisted and I had a letter and I've got all those things over there. More stuff than he'll ever want a video, probably, take a picture of. Then I got orders and went to Seattle. And there were I think sixty women -- it was women from all over the state of Washington. And they took -- I've got picture of us marching down the street in Seattle, we all had hats and gloves and corsages on. You know, that's the way we dressed in those days. And we were getting on a train to go to Fort Des Moines, Iowa for our basic training.

Question: Wow.

Answer: And so when we got there they said send your clothes home. Can't wear civilian clothes anymore. And they didn't have -- and it was 20 below zero, and they didn't have any clothes for us women. They didn't have our uniforms yet. And so I have a picture over there of me in a -- they gave us an enlisted man's coat, wool coat, came down to my ankles. Felt good!. (laughs)

Question: It was warm.

Answer: Yep. And so basic training was supposed to be about six weeks and then they send you to schools to be a cook, to do, you know, to work different places. But, see, I was already a trained secretary. I had two years of shorthand and typing in high school and one year at college and I worked for the State for two years. So they gave me these tests and, you know, they were so easy, it was just like high school. So I got a hundred on my test and I did a -- I did one KP. It was awful hard. I was really, really small and we had these great big 50, 100 gallon things we had to clean up. And I only had KP once, and after three weeks, they called me in and they said pack your things, you're leaving. And I said I can't go, I'm in basic training. And I didn't know you weren't supposed to talk back to them. So anyway they sent me to Fort Washington, Maryland, which is 16 miles south of Washington D.C. and I relieved a gal who was going to England. And I relieved her. And so they immediately, because I was qualified, I guess, they gave me -- made me a Secretary II Colonel, and about two weeks later they made me a corporal. (laughs) And so I had a wonderful job. The adjutant general school, had two schools there. A school for enlisted people and a school for officers. And they taught Army Administration. And anyone who was a company clerk -- were you ever in the service? Well, if you're a company clerk, you took care of the records. You know they have to have records on everybody, even the ones in the battle. And the school taught that. And in the -- eventually I did all the scheduling for the school, for my -- in my department. And I worked for then a major and a captain then for

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most of the three years I was in. So I had a wonderful job, I loved it. It was just a wonderful experience.

Question: Wow. And you were a corporal.

Answer: I was a corporal and then I ended up as a staff sergeant. And after 18 months they moved us, the whole school, we went on troop train. They moved us to Fort Sam Houston, Texas. I have never known why they moved the school. And we were there -- we loved it in San Antonio, just loved it. It was hot though. And then we were there eight months and they moved the school to Camp Lee, Virgini

Answer: And we were there awhile and then they moved us to Fort Oglethope, Georgi

Answer:

Question: Lock, stock and barrel? Just --

Answer: The whole school. And I just kept the same job every time and just moved everything. Why they did that, I don't know. But when I got home I said I will never live in the South. Miserable weather. No air conditioning in those days. In Georgia I remember, take a shower, put our uniform on, time you got to the front door, you were sopping wet. The humidity is so bad. So I've never lived in the South. (laughs)

Question: What was your uniform? What did you have to wear for a uniform?

Answer: Well, I have it over there. And another thing, I've never worn beige or tan since then. (laughs) Shirt, a beige color shirt. Our winter uniform was a wool skirt, the girls didn't wear pants in those days, slacks. Wool skirt and the wool jacket and hat. And then eventually when we got into the South they gave us summer uniform, khaki but cotton shirt, skirt. Wrinkled, and you had to starch, you know, oh, awful. And then they finally came out with a shantung -- you don't know what shantung is. It's kind of a silky material -- dress. And we could wear this dress off duty. Like if we were going into town. And so it was wonderful cause when we were in Fort Washington I got -- I met this girl, I'm still in.. I'm still in contact with quite a few of the gals. We roomed together, we were both sergeants. And we -- we finally got out of the main barracks after sergeant, we had private rooms and we were together all the time. We went sight-seeing together. We'd go into Washington, D.C., she'd go to her church, I'd go to mine and then we'd meet and we'd spend all day long. We saw everything in Washington, D.C. We took trips to New York City. I'd never been out of -- hardly out of Olympi

Answer: Went to Boston and then we went to Texas and so we went to a dude ranch down there and then we went to Virgini

Answer: I don't know what we saw around Virginia and then we were in Georgia and then the war was over. So, (laughs).

Question: Was there -- in different branches, in the Navy there were the Armed Guards. And they were Navy, but they weren't considered quote real Navy. Was there a separation between the men and the women -- I mean did they look at you as real Army, or not?

Answer: Oh, yeah. We were -- after we took the oath of office. Did I tell you or was I telling your brother. When we went in we were WAAC. That's one thing I hope you get straight, if you use any of this because Tom Brockaw and his book The Greatest Generation --

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I bought it when it first came out. Whole thing was wrong on the women. I wrote him a letter and he answered me back. He said they would correct it. Whether they ever did, I don't know. Whoever did the research on the women did a poor job. It was Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. And when Oveta Culp Hobby -- when Roosevelt put her -- they had -- and then at that time I was telling your brother, you had to be 21 years old and a high school graduate. Well, a lot of women joined and I met some of them. They were college graduates, course I wasn't, and they were teachers. And when they -- they just got lousy jobs, and they didn't like their jobs. And so in 1943 about uhm -- it was either '43 or '44, I can't remember now. I have it in there in my books. They decided to make the women part of the Army. So they took out one of the "A"s, Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, and called us WAC, Women's Army Corps. So the Auxiliary is gone now. So they said anybody that wants to get out can get out. And a lot of women got out cause they weren't happy with their jobs. Then we took an oath of office. Thousands of us. An oath of the Army. And I remember going to Washington, D.C., either Washington D. C. or we were down in Virgini

Answer: Hundreds of us, we took the Oath of Army. So then we were part of the Army. But we're separate, not the way it is now. The men had their barracks, the girls had theirs. Black people had their own. They didn't -- they weren't, you know, they weren't together. Did you know that?

Question: I knew some of that but I -- and I've heard different pieces of it. So definitely the segregation.

Answer: Oh, segre.. oh definitely. But they segregated the women. I think that's one of the problems now with the women in the Army. They ought to -- they ought to have -- and they had women training us. And that -- they ought to have women training the women, they ought to keep them separate now. They have a lot of problems when they have them together. But that's the modern way, so.

Question: You never know, you that that pendulum swings.

Answer: Yeah. And one time in, you know, I had seen one black person in my life. He was in -- going to Olympia High School. I graduated from Olympia High School. And so we get down in Texas, and we saw them in -- but we didn't see -- run into them too much in Washington, D.C., I don't know why. But one day I got on a bus in Texas and I walked to the back of the bus and sat down. Nobody was on the bus, I was the first one on. Pretty soon the people started coming on and black people always go to the back. And the bus driver stopped the bus and he yelled at me, I was so embarrassed. He said what are you doing back there? Get up here in the front. Real segregation. I was very embarrassed. But the white people sat in front and the black people sat in the back. But I understand, you know, they did have a few black companies, men, not very many, but they were separate.

Question: The Tuskegee Airmen were --

Answer: Yeah, they were famous.

Question: And they were designed to fail. And that was a big thing. They said, well, we'll appoint them, but we're going to make it so they fail. Well, guess what, they didn't fail.

Answer: Yeah. And now after they -- after we went into the Women's Army Corps, after they -- they lost a lot of women from WAAC, they changed the requirements. You only had to be an 8th grade graduate. And I -- I'm not sure about the age. I think you could come in at 18. Well, if you're just an 8th grade graduate, you know you haven't had a very good

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education. And so then they started getting in people that -- that weren't as qualified, I guess you'd say.

Question: So what were the -- cause you had a variety of jobs you could do. What were the jobs that women ended up doing?

Answer: Oh, well I was telling him. This one girl, people from the South. I hate to say that but this one gal, and she's a friend of mine now. She's from Tennessee. And you know they just didn't get a very good education in those days. I don't think they do today. Arkansas is one of the worst states for education in the country. But anyway, the only job she'd ever had was working in a dime store. She didn't know how to type. She didn't -- I don't know if they didn't have shorthand and typing in the high schools down there. So they put -- they put them in the -- what did they call it? Driving trucks. Driving cars and driving trucks. So, and at Fort Washington, in Maryland, we had a big contingent of gals, who worked on the trucks and cars. And they trained them. And they had -- they had slacks. They had coveralls like the men. But other than that, women and girls didn't wear slacks. See, we didn't have any -- we never had any pants, any slacks for us that worked in the office. Then they had -- well, with the school of course, you know, you had all -- you had all of the branch, administration, all these different branches, like you would in state government. Different sections. And so there were a lot of office jobs. And the girls that drove trucks. Oh, one of my friends, I just visited her in Sacramento. She was a teletype operator. And she lived in Pennsylvani

Answer: And she was married. She and her husband worked in the -- what do they have, the coal mines back there? He was -- and she worked in the office. And they had been married. They were married and I don't know if he was drafted or he joined. And she said well if you go in, I'm going to go in too. So after he left she joined the WACs, and she was a teletype operator and that's what she did at the school. So if you're trained in something like that and there was a job for you. And I remember in basic training they said oh, they need cooks. And I thought oh, no, I don't want to be a cook. And some of the gals, you know. We had our own mess hall at first and so the girls, women did the cooking. And we had wonderful food. But like I say, I was raised to eat everything. Except liver. I couldn't eat liver.

Question: You and my dad. That's the one my dad can't eat. Can't stand it.

Answer: So really it was a wonderful experience for me. And then I -- my two men I worked for, you know, they were so nice. And I kept in touch with them for years afterward. They probably were not too much older than I was, but I thought they were old, you know, I was only 21 and somebody 30 was considered old. So then Congress passed the GI bill. And so the major said now Virginia, you've got to -- you've got to go back to college. He said you can do it, they'll, you know, you'll get fifty dollars or fifty-four dollars a month. He said you did it before and you didn't get any -- you can do it now. So, oh, well, I don't know. And so anyway I was discharged in January and it was too late to go back to college cause Washington State was on semester systems then. So I came back and I worked and in September I went back to college. But, I met my husband and so I never finished college -- I only did that one year and I've always regretted that. So I went one more year and he went back after he was drafted and he was a junior so he only had to do one year. So at the end of the year then we were married. And of course we didn't even have a car. We were -- we didn't have any money at all. Because we just come out of the Army, both of us. And he worked up at the Forest Service in the summer and I got a job with the State and we saved enough money and he got a job in Californi

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Answer: They had that -- and he was a forestry major and it was real still hard to get new jobs. And so this company was called American Lumber and Treating Company and they sent a man up to -- they sent him up to the colleges to interview. I don't know if they still do that or not. And so he got this job in California, in Los Angeles, in a wood treating plant. So we got married the end of August and two days later we went to California and we were down there for seven years before we moved back up here. And I -- but we didn't have anything and so of course I went right to work. I worked for the Immigration and Naturalization Service. And we saved our money, we didn't even have a car. We had nothing. So we saved our money and we bought a car and pretty soon we bought furniture and with the GI bill we were able to buy a house for \$50 down and so we bought a brand new lovely home just before our first daughter was born and I quit working. And so we had a new house, new furniture, new everything. (laughs) So we started out. But the GI bill was a wonderful, wonderful thing. Because all these -- so many of these people just like myself, my age, we came through the depression. And most, you know, if you were able to go to college, that was really something great. Even though college didn't cost very much. My folks didn't have any money at all. So when we went -- when we got over to Washington State College, and I.. it was that way all across the United States in September of 1946, thousands, hundreds of thousands of people went back to college, all over this country. On the GI bill. So they had a little teeny book store, about half the size of this room, over at Washington State. And we couldn't get our books. There were just -- I think there were 3000 veterans in 1946. So they said okay, all the veterans come on Saturday morning. We're usually not open and we'll open at 8 o'clock. So we got there at 8 o'clock and the line was about a mile long. There were three girls in the line, I was one of them, and that's where I met my husband. He was in line. And after four hours we still didn't get our books. They closed and we went to a football game. But that's where I met him, and so we got married at the end of the summer, after he finished. But I don't know why I didn't go back to college cause I always wanted to be a teacher, and I just thought I had to work and -- and buy furniture and other things so I never did go back to college. So I only had two years of college.

Question: Wasn't that kind of the way it was then? I mean, that --

Answer: Unless you wanted to be a teacher or a nurse, you didn't have to go to college. You could get all the training. But I had -- they had wonderful -- they had wonderful teachers at Washington State. They had a wonderful secretarial science course and I -- I just continued and took that. And -- and I always remembered this one teacher was the head of the secretarial science department and I was there in 1939 and then I didn't come back until seven years. And I walked in the door and she said, "Hello, Ms. McCoy, how are you." She remembered me. Then, you know, it was small then. And so I had a wonderful education from her. She used to make her own dresses. That's how the teachers in those days -- she wore these cotton dresses and she made them herself. (laughs)

Question: Wow.

Answer: And she was a typical old maid.

Question: What was your daily duty when you were dealing with the -- you worked under a colonel?

Answer: First a colonel and then he left and then a major and a captain.

Question: And so what was your daily duty? What?

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Answer: Let's see, after I became a sergeant. Well, we always had reveille, 6 o'clock, out of bed, put your coat on over your pajamas, run out and have reveille, you know, formation. Then we come back in, we'd have breakfast, then we'd go to our jobs, 8 o'clock to 5, mine was, and then on Saturday we worked half a day. Before I was a sergeant then you'd come back to the barracks and you had KP duty or you had latrine duty, or guard -- what they called, well we'd be up, you know, at night, be sure that no men got into the restrooms, but we didn't have that problem then. Really, we didn't have that problem. Then everything's OK. You still had to go to work the next day. We worked really hard. But we had lots of time off, too, like in the evenings, if we -- if we weren't on duty, KP duty or kitchen or in latrines or on duty, then you had your evenings free. But then after you became a sergeant you didn't have to have those duties, which was nice. And I remember in Fort Washington, Maryland, I've never seen -- have you ever seen a bug this big, what do they call them? And they have them in Texas, too.

Question: Like a cockroach?

Answer: Cockroaches. We don't have them out here. The first time I saw one of those in the restroom I thought I would die. Great big. And you can't step on them, they're thick and crunchy. (laughs) But then on Friday, every Friday we had a formal dress parade. So we'd leave our jobs, come back to the barracks, and we -- for the colonel, of the -- in Fort Washington. He was so proud of his WACs. That's what the girls say. I don't remember that. So we had a formal dress parade, and we marched, had a band and everything. We always had, and then retreat, and so we learned how to march. It was fun. I loved it. I remember basic training I had a terrible time, trying. Cause I only had three weeks basic training. They'd say turn left and I was going right, but I learned pretty fast, learned how to march. And it was fun.

Question: Now did they -- cause I've always heard the military doing silly things. What about shoes did they make you wear? They didn't have you wearing pumps or anything, did they? Did they give you --

Answer: Oxfords. Brown oxfords, to go with our uniform. We finally could wear a shoe, a pump like this off duty, a brown one, only brown, beige. Like my friend said, I joined the Navy because their uniforms were prettier.. They were navy blue and I've never worn anything beige since, or tan. Cause my hair was very light then and blondes didn't look good in beige. (laughs)

Question: Sounds like a good name for a movie -- blondes didn't look good in beige. World War II, a WAC story.

Answer: Yeah, right.

Question: So were you doing secretarial work or what did you do for the colonel?

Answer: Well, I scheduled these classes. Well, I started out, of course, secretary to this man who was a colonel. Then he was transferred so they put me in with the major and the captain. And rather than this shorthand and typing that I'd always done, they started letting me schedule the classes. And so we had these big sheets for our -- for our division, there were other people doing it for other divisions. And so we schedule the classes for the week and we had these big sheets of paper, and that was part of the duty. And there were other girls in the office, I was the top girl and I was staff sergeant, but of course the men were always there. They were the boss. And I don't remember ever bossing anyone around, I mean I -- I didn't know what that meant, really, in those days.

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Question: How about getting saluted and --

Answer: Oh, yes. Officers, yes. Whenever you meet an officer you always saluted. When I came home on furlough the first time, my mother and I were walking down the street in Olympia and saw an officer coming. She made me cross the street so she could see me salute him. (laughs)

Question: Well, now, what about you getting saluted?

Answer: No, no. Enlisted people don't get saluted, only officers.

Question: Oh, I didn't know that. I thought that it just was ranked up, that you saluted.

Answer: No, 2nd lieutenant, 1st lieutenant, captain, major, lieutenant colonel, colonel, on up. Enlisted personnel are not saluted.

Question: Now do you go through a lesson on titles and ranks or how do you learn all that? Cause that seems like it would be really confusing to me. Who's that -- he's got birds on, he doesn't have birds on, am I supposed to salute, who's what rank or --

Answer: You know who's an officer, they way they dress. The officer's uniform, their dress uniform, is kind of a beige pink pants, you've probably seen them in old movies and then the brown jackets and then with the rank on their shoulder. The enlisted people have their rank on their sleeve.

Question: But -- but when they -- when you enlisted, did they take you to a class and say --

Answer: Oh, well, you learn this in basic.

Question: So they say soldier, here you go. You see these, you're going to salute --

Answer: Yeah, oh, yeah.

Question: Cause there's this protocol that --

Answer: Oh, definitely. In fact we were told, you know, we could not date officers. Enlisted people don't -- and so, of course we were young, there were a lot of officers there. So I was going with a 2nd lieutenant. And the first -- the first sergeant and I were good friends. She said, "Now, McCoy", she said, "you know you're not supposed to go out with him. I said oh I know it but anyway we'd go to the movies and we'd wait till the lights were out, then we'd sneak in. Cause you know, they could have taken my rank away from me if they'd caught me. It was against the rules, and the he was shipped out and so then I thought oh, it's too much trouble. I'll just date enlisted men. And we had -- we had dances at night. Cause the people that were going to school and they were in school and studying and then at night, I don't know if we -- on the weekends they had dances so. We sure had fun.

Question: Did they have a hall there?

Answer: Yeah, probably. I can't -- probably -- I remember the one in Texas, but I know they had them -- they had them everywhere, clubs, service clubs. That's what they are, USO

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Clubs and service clubs. And that, of course, and the officer's club, only the officers. Enlisted, only the enlisted, oh, definitely separate.

Question: Live bands or canned music?

Answer: Oh, yeah, because we had a band. And I don't remember what -- if the fellows that were in the Army band, and I've got pictures of the band, cause I was in the drum and bugle corps. And whether they were the same fellows that played for the dances or not. But it was -- I think it was so different, you know, it was such a different life from what I was used to that it was just -- it was fun, for me. Some people didn't have as good a time, I guess.

Question: Well now you were -- what did you do in the drum and bugle corps?

Answer: Well, we when we got -- I don't know if we did that in Fort Washington or that was down in San -- Fort Sam Houston. Somebody got the idea we had to have a drum and bugle corps and so we signed up for it, and I had played -- I had played a trombone when I was in high school. And I didn't want to -- I didn't want to play, because you know your lips get all poofy, so I decided on the drum. (laughs) So, and we were just kind of for show. We never really learned to play too well. But they put us with the men, this band, and we marched all over. We marched in towns and cities for occasions. And that was fun, too.

Question: Competition?

Answer: No.

Question: No.

Answer: No. We weren't good enough.

Question: Oh.

Answer: They did -- the -- there were some women in the Army at that time that were accomplished musicians and they did have some Army bands, some -- I don't know where, in other places. You know, that really knew how to play. (laughs) I can't say -- I can't say -- I couldn't play a drum very well.

Question: Now when you were off duty, did you wear your uniform or did you have civies that you --

Answer: We could wear our civies around the house, around the barracks, but no, we could never wear civilian clothes when you went into town or off the base. You had to be in uniform. But they finally -- when we were in Washington, D.C. When you got in those hot climates, the wool uniform. They -- they invented this pongee, or dress. But, and you could wear it in the summer. And it had a hat, just like my hat over there. So you were in uniform, you were considered to be in uniform. No, we couldn't wear civilian clothes off the base, you always had to be in uniform.

Question: Huh.

Answer: Cause this was war time.

Question: So how were you treated when you were in uniform?

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Answer: Wonderful. (laughs) Wonderful. You know, at that -- you know, World War II, everybody was for it. Everybody was trying to help the war effort. And they had USO's. We went to -- first time we went to New York City, we went to see, we saw Frank Sinatra

Answer: He was singing with the -- what was the name of the group that was on the radio. We went to Radio City Music Hall Theatre and saw him perform when he was first popular. We went to a USO club, and we had uniform on and they welcomed us. We stayed overnight there, cost a dollar. And I think they wrote my mother a card, I think I have the card in my scrapbook there. Your daughter was here, she looked fine, she's well. And I'd go to church and the people would rush up, they'd want to take you home for a dinner. I mean it -- everywhere we went. One time, the first time we went to New York City we went up into the Empire State Building, at the top of it. Have you ever been there? Some 68 floors or something, very high. And somebody says Virginia!. And I turned around -- it was a fellow I went with in college. Can you believe that? And he was an officer in the Navy. I hadn't seen him in years. And then I went around another corner and I met a fellow that I was in high school with. And he was visiting, too. I don't -- he was stationed back there somewhere.

Question: Wow.

Answer: So they were just, you know, everybody, every young person that could was in uniform, men. The men wanted to be, and I guess they were drafted, too. But the women, of course, it was all volunteer.

Question: Now to hear your version of the war, there's this very fun aspect. Which actually it sounds like there was a lot of life in war, because I mean, there was things happening, people learning and things. But how real was the war aspect, the tragedy of war, to you?

Answer: Oh, of course, it's terrible. But you know, we were so young and we -- I don't remember spending a lot of time listening to the news. I'm ashamed to say that. But I happened to be in Boston on a pass, three-day pass, on D-day. And so -- and I have a newspaper that shows that. So we knew about the invasions and the battles and the terrible things going on. And at one time when I was in San Antonio, at Fort Sam Houston, they -- they picked me to go overseas in the South Pacific. And my boss had a good talk with me, the major, and he said now Virginia, your mother's got three sons in the Army. And he said I just don't think she'd like it if you went overseas. And he said, do you really want to go? And I said well, I don't know, I'll think about it. So I decided not to and they found somebody else to go in my place -- had to find somebody else. And I was -- I've always been glad I didn't go. The South Pacific was a terrible place to be. You know the weather and the -- and the -- everything. And every place was a terrible place to be when you're in battle, but the South Pacific was particularly bad because of the insects and all of that type of thing that the fellows had to go through. And of course the women did, too, the nurses. The nurses did wonderful jobs during the war.

Question: Did you have friends that were nurses?

Answer: Well, no, one of the girls -- one of my friends in high school, and she went to college to the University of Washington and became an RN, and she did join the Army. But I don't think she ever got overseas. But her fiancé died in the Bataan Death March. And so she never saw him again after he was captured and was in the Bataan Death March. But other than that, no, we didn't see any nurses cause I, you know, I didn't work near a hospital or anything.

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Question: See, I think it's interesting. You said, oh, I was ashamed that I just didn't listen to the news. But you were a kid, and that's what we're trying to understand, you know, what war really is. And to some people, yeah, World War II was going on, but you were a kid.

Answer: I know it, and just think of these kids that -- the kids that were there fighting the battles. You know, what a terrible thing. These young kids, over there doing -- like D-day, you know. So many were killed. And just awful.

Question: The amazing thing is, a majority of them I talked to, and I asked them, I want to know, you know, what was going on in your head, what did you think, were you afraid, whatever. And a majority of them say you, know, and they say it very honest, they say, we were just doing a job.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: You know, and there was a different feeling, I guess.

Answer: Well, we were -- we were patriotic, you know. Where we wouldn't have been there. And we loved being there. And you know, you know, I had it really easy, compared. And I had a wonderful job. Now I know I had friends that -- I knew one gal had her master's degree. She had a terrible job. She was not with the AG school but she was -- and you know, so much a waste of talent. So, you know, you always don't get the -- the job you want. Someone told me the other day that their daughter just got a degree, oh, a physical therapist, and she joined the service. And so did they put her in physical therapy, no, they put her in some, way off somewhere. So, you know, you don't always get the job you want, it just happens.

Question: Some things never change.

Answer: Well, that's right. Isn't that life? But you know, they needed a lot of clerical help. When you're -- even when you're over there fighting a battle, you've got to have the clerical help because you've got to keep track of all the records and the people and everything. And so, fortunately, I was clerical help. And it worked out fine for me.

Question: Let me -- I've got to switch tapes here.