

## Barbara Jane London nee "BJ" Erickson

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**Question:** These may seem as kind of non-sequiturs because I've been just writing as you've been talking.

**Answer:** Uh huh.

**Question:** Would you rather I sit over here so that. You can come right up into my chair... Early on, you mentioned that after your CPT-1 course it looked like you were going to go on and you got into that because you had some connections with the CAA and some other people, so your advancement was because at that point the bug had bit you. You wanted to...

**Answer:** Women were only allowed, technically, in the first class and that was done as an accommodation to get, we, we've done it for women so we've done our duty type of thing now. We did, wrote some letters and communicated with the CAA and asked that if there was a possibility of letting certain girls go on who looked like they might be able to progress in the profession, and I had some people in the CAA here in Seattle that wrote them and said that I think she's one of the ones that you ought to consider to maybe let go on as an example to the further classes. And they let me do it.

**Question:** Did you know any of those people before you started flying?

**Answer:** The CAA?

**Question:** Yeah.

**Answer:** Oh sure, I knew them from the day I started because we all, they gave us all of our flight checks when I got my private, when I got my commercial and so forth, so we knew them all. And there were several other girls in the United States that did the same thing. Once they, there were three or four of us that got into secondary.

**Question:** Now in terms of the CPT, in terms of the structure of that the Civilian Pilot Training program, but it's not the way we teach civilian pilots today. It wasn't at the pilot's pace; it was a military schedule?

**Answer:** I can't quite hear you.

**Question:** It was a military program of teaching?

**Answer:** It was completely outlined; every day lesson was exactly the same for everybody and every school in the United States. It was a completely written program.

**Question:** Just as though you were in the military?

**Answer:** Just exactly like, just..

**Question:** Not at your pace; it's at their pace.

**Answer:** And we had to fly so many hours and at hour No. 4 we were doing this and at hour No. 10 we doing this. And the grading system and the little log book that we had was identical with every student in the whole United States in every

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college that was taking this program. It was a very programmed program, if you laid out, and everybody in the program did exactly the same thing.

**Question:** And you weren't paying for that then?

**Answer:** The government; it was a government paid program.

**Question:** Okay. Now going back a little bit before that when you talked about being in college and the choices that you had available to you, it almost sounds as though you were in college because at that point, just to be a woman and be in college itself was kind of a challenge.

**Answer:** Well, when you got through high school, you went to college. I mean, everybody, all of us, all my girlfriends, when we graduated from high school, we all walked across the street and went to college. It was just the logical thing to do and everybody did it. But nobody particularly knew why they were there, you know.

**Question:** Okay. Once you were in the ferry service, as they wanted you to fly different aircraft how much time did they spend transitioning you to the various aircraft?

**Answer:** Well, first of all, you had to have a certain amount of time in the previous airplane; and once you had a certain number of hours in an AT-6 you went on to a different, another airplane, and you probably, there was no particular amount of time and it also depended on what was needed to be ferried. You went into the twin engine Cessna as a preliminary to the DC-3. It was a little bit smaller and you got checked out in that and then you worked up to the DC-3. After the DC-3 you went into the C-46, which is a little bit bigger, a little bit bigger engines. From that you might go into the B-25, which were still bigger engines. So you worked up not only by size, by seating, by horsepower and worked up the, and you ferried several of those airplanes before you worked up into the next one. And also, it depended upon what the need was. If there was a big push on B-25's, a lot of the C-47' pilots would get checked out in a B-25 because they were the ones that had to be ferried. So you'd move up into the B-25 class faster than you would if they're weren't any sitting out there to be ferried. And if you were at a base where they had them. Now Long Beach was the only base that ferried B-25's, so if you were at Wilmington you wouldn't get that airplane. And at Romulus they didn't have anything except the P-39.

**Question:** Now while you were not flying a ferry run, then you were actually continuing to train and to get qualified in these other airplanes?

**Answer:** No, we took instrument training every day. We had to go fly the link trainer. We didn't really start transition until we were ready to transition into another airplane. It was fairly gradual. We went from the, like in Long Beach, we went from the BT into the UC-78 which was the small little twin into C-47's, eventually into B-25's and we did it as the need arose and as we accumulated time in the previous airplane. Then we would upgrade and if the airplane was available we'd upgrade into the next airplane. Then the ruling came down from headquarters that every girl in the ferry command had to be qualified in single seat fighters because they were going to try and segregate that particular group of airplanes for the women to fly. In other words, we were going to fly P-51's, P-47's, P-40's, and so forth. And every girl had to be qualified. Well I had about eighty girls in my

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squadron at the time and that one program weeded out till I was down to about forty or fifty because either they didn't want to fly it or they were not qualified or they didn't check out, or so forth. So eventually, then every girl stationed in the ferry command was single seat fighter qualified or she didn't stay in; she was transferred someplace else. Because that was the big push. They were building one and two a day of every one of those airplanes and they were just, they were piling up. Everyone of us had to be qualified in that one kind of airplane.

**Question:** And you mentioned before about the altitudes that you flew at. Now a lot of these single seat fighters are designed to fly between twenty and thirty thousand feet but...

**Answer:** Well, we had oxygen. We could go up there but we probably didn't. I didn't use oxygen very often. We did if we had to go over something but we were not, we could not fly night; we could not fly instruments so we had to avoid the weather. But most weather if you start to go over it, you're going to get way up and most of us did not; and a lot of times the oxygen wasn't even hooked up in the airplane.

**Question:** Now when you're flying over the weather though you're pretty much flying by compass and clock because you can't see the ground; you can't see the water towers, right?

**Answer:** Timing, yeah.

**Question:** Okay.

**Answer:** But we couldn't do that where we couldn't see the ground cause that's IFR flying and we couldn't fly IFR We had to be in visual contact with the ground. We could fly over scattered clouds but not over solids.. deck in a fighter.

**Question:** Now in terms of aerobatics you mentioned the UPF-7 and the Stearman so you did learn aerobatic maneuvers?

**Answer:** Yes, secondary was almost all aerobatics.

**Question:** Was it frustrating to be in a P-51 and not be able to take it through its paces?

**Answer:** Well, you kind of wanted to flip around through a cloud once in a while but you were very careful.

**Question:** Did you ever kind of try that on the sly?

**Answer:** No, we rolled around the clouds a bit but I didn't do aerobatics. There was too much stuff loose in the airplane.

**Question:** Especially in the open cockpit, you didn't need...

**Answer:** Well, we didn't fly open cockpits other than that one time.

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**Question:** Once the women were recognized as veterans and you started to get some of the benefits and the recognitions for the girls who were injured or deceased during service did they get posthumous awards or any of those..?

**Answer:** The ones who were killed?

**Question:** Yeah.

**Answer:** There were no awards, no.

**Question:** There were no purple hearts or anything like that that came out once they were, they were recognized as veterans?

**Answer:** Uh uh (No)

**Question:** And when you got your Air Medal, that's a military decoration? So does that make you the only civilian to win that particular decoration during the war, the only, certainly the only woman, but it would also be..

**Answer:** I never thought about it but it probably could be the only civilian.

**Question:** Cause it is a military decoration. So it's interesting that you're considered technically a civilian.

**Answer:** I never really thought about it, but I probably was the only – I knew I was one of the only women but probably the only, you're right, probably it is the only civilian. Never really thought about that.

**Question:** If the war had gone a different direction and instead of coming to you they said okay, you're done, go home. If they came to you and said, things are really bad, you're going to go over there and fly in combat, what your response be?

**Answer:** We'd have gone in a minute.

**Question:** Even though you didn't know that the other women were doing that from other countries?

**Answer:** Of course, of course we would have. We'd just said when do I leave?

**Question:** Would that, in your mind, would that just have been a natural progression to what you were already doing?

**Answer:** We never, as I say, the idea of combat was never considered because combat was so far away from us that we read about. And I had a brother in law who was over in England flying P-47's in the Eighth Air Force, but I never had any contact with him during the war. I just knew he was, he came back a hero. But we were so far divorced from that. The very thought of going overseas into combat never came up cause there were hundreds of ferry pilots, men, I mean, in Long Beach we were only a squadron of forty but there were 3,000 men ferry pilots sitting on the same base, doing the same thing. We were so badly needed for what we were doing, the fact of going into combat never occurred to anybody. Those airplanes had to get over there first.

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**Question:** What if it had been presented, it wouldn't have been obstacle, you would've just..?

**Answer:** Oh, heck no, we'd have done, we'd have gone any place.

**Question:** You talk about they schedule your trips and they tell you to take and airplane and go. Who is that?

**Answer:** That's base operations – in other words, the factories notify the base operations officer what airplanes are coming off the line and ready to go. Operations sits there with a file; they have every pilot on a file with all the airplanes they're qualified in. Then each morning or each day they get a list of all the airplanes that are going to be, have to be delivered that day. And as you come in from a trip your name goes on the list and is, and that morning if a B-25 comes up and the first name on the list is B-25 qualified, that's a trip. If the B-25 comes up and they have to go down this far till they find a B-25 pilot, then this one takes the trip. And so it's first in, first out if you're qualified with what has to go and they match those up; and they call the squadron headquarters that morning and say we got this, this and this ready to go. These people are on orders and you pack your bag and go down and pick up a piece of paper which are your orders and tell you where to go and your airplane's parked out in the middle of the field some place. They drive you out to it and you're on your way. But operations matches those up every day all day long.

**Question:** And that's part of the military?

**Answer:** Oh yeah. All military.

**Question:** Are you briefed by them the way a pilot would be briefed for a mission or was it up to you to do your own..?

**Answer:** Well, you're briefed when you join the group. Every flight is done the same; they give you a piece of paper and they give you an airplane and they say this is where you go. How you get it there is up to you. You sign for it in essence. You own it and then you give it to somebody at the other end and they sign for it. And then you delivered the airplane. In the meantime it belongs to you in between. It's your responsibility and how you get it there is your decision. It's up to you..

**Question:** You gather weather information, planning your route...?

**Answer:** You have do it all yourself. We did, you check your own weather; you check your own notices to airmen and make your own decisions which way you're gonna go.

**Question:** Now pilots were assigned, say you had a number of P-51's and they were all going to the same base on the East coast and they all come up on the same day, did you ever get together and kind of pool that flight plan at all?

**Answer:** We, well I'd check and say hey Joe where you gonna go? I'm off to Albuquerque and I'm gonna say, well I'm gonna go via El Paso. So when you get to Albuquerque you look around and see who's there and head for the hotel but you never know..

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**Question:** If you had friends in these little towns along the way, did you kind of plan your trip so you could stop and spend the night?

**Answer:** If you had friends, I don't, I didn't know anybody in the United States.

**Question:** You mentioned that there was an article in the Boeing News about your flying the P-17 the first time. Do you remember what year or what month that might have been?

**Answer:** No but I've got a copy of it at home. It's just a little article. On the bottom it says, former Boeing woman flies her first fortress, something like that.

**Question:** You've been knocking around for a long time as a pilot and as a person.

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** And you, you've mentioned several times that there's, you notice that there's kind of things that, that they're not teaching kids today, things that, kind of holes in people's background. Based on your experiences, both in airplanes and just in general, what would you like to say to the school age kids today that, what message would you like to leave with them?

**Answer:** You mean about careers, life?

**Question:** About anything, I mean, there's people got to a certain point in they're life and they've kind of come to a focus on things that are important and things that really don't make a big difference and a lot of people spend their whole life struggling over these things that don't seem to make a big difference and miss some of the important things and like it or not you're a role model for a lot of people.

**Answer:** Well, I think it's important that they follow their dream but that that they also be a little realistic. I think it's terribly important that they prepare themselves for life. I think education is absolutely a must. I don't care what you're going to do; you have to be educated in order to meet your competition and everything in life is competition. No matter where they're gonna go. But they also have to believe that there's nothing that they can't do if they try. They can't believe that somebody can say, you can't do that. Or particularly, if you're a girl and you can't do that or you're not qualified for that because they can do it if they put their mind to it and persevere but they have to really – they really have to be single minded at what they want to do and prepare themselves for it. And preparation is terribly important. Girls have opportunities, particularly now, being in areas that they never could be before because they never were going to be scientists or engineers or astronauts; but now they can be anything and don't let anybody tell them that they can't because they can. I mean, all of us have been told some place along in their life that, well girls don't do that. But they do and once you fundamentally realize then we jokingly say, have always said, the only difference between you and me is our plumbing and basically we can do the same job. So I think it's important that they find a goal if they can and prepare themselves for it. But mainly, their preparation has got to be education is one of their basic things they have to remember. And then, don't let anybody tell them they can't do it. At least try... always try.

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**Question:** Okay. (I have about two questions I think. Yeah, I hate to change interviewers here all the time on you but...) Now the first flight was off of Lake Union. Was that the first flight you ever had?

**Answer:** Uhuh.

**Question:** Do you remember that real well?

**Answer:** Oh, I remember.. yeah. I remember it because Kurtzer was so big, you know. I don't know if any of you remember him back then but he was a big man; he must have made, weighed 250 pounds. He was.. and I was a pretty good-sized 140-pound athletic junior, sophomore in college and that little T-Craft only had 65 horsepower on it; and it took some doing getting that thing off the ground. But it was kind of, it was kind of exciting. I do remember my first trip. We went up and went down around the big oil tank which may not even be there anymore, the big storage tank at the end of Lake Union, out over Lake Washington and back in again and it was sensational. But, you know, I couldn't believe I was there. It was a whole new world.

**Question:** Yeah, you had never been up in an airplane. You'd just had seeing them flying and...

**Answer:** Well I hadn't even seen much of those because I, you know, I lived fairly near Sand Point but just going out and standing at the airport and watching airplanes, it never, it never occurred to me. I never.. so I wasn't one of those ones that had looked over the fence all their life and said oh gee I'm gonna go fly, you know, which is strange. And it wasn't one of those things that I had wanted to do all my life. I just, I fell into it. I just fell into it.

**Question:** And Mr. Kurtzer, he was a big guy, huh?

**Answer:** Oh, he was huge. He was a great big guy – he was 6'6" or something and he weighed.. When we both got in the front seat of that little T-Craft, you know, we were jammed in.

**Question:** So you were side by side?

**Answer:** That was a, it was a side-by-side airplane, yeah.

**Question:** Huh. So was that a mono wing or was it a biplane?

**Answer:** Oh no, it was a little mono-wing, it was 64 horsepower, high wing airplane.

**Question:** On floats?

**Answer:** On floats, down here, just down below the Needle, at the end of Lake, this end of Lake Union. In fact I think the ramp is still there.

**Question:** The only other question I have is that when, with everything going on today, with what happened two years ago or a year ago on September 11 and all the controversy of the day. Once again, our country is sort of in hot water around the world where if you go to Europe right now and they know you're American, you could

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get spit on or yelled at, when you'd go to a ball game and they have the national anthem and you see the American flag, is that special to you?

**Answer:** Oh heavens yeah, you bet, you bet. I'd stand up and salute. Absolutely. I think I was born with a uniform on. No absolutely. Oh of course. And the very fact that the Europeans spit on us is their problem, you know. I think we made a lot of mistakes as Americans I think we've done a lot of things that and I don't say what we do is right but by the same token we are what we are and we are America and we are the best country in the world so we have our faults and I get very mad and I'm very politically minded I watch every political show on TV and every commentator there is and argue with all of them but we're still the best there is. We need to clean up our act a little but of course, I stand every time I see the flag. Absolutely.

**Question:** Do you have lots of grandchildren?

**Answer:** Humm?

**Question:** Do you have a lot, a lot of grandchildren?

**Answer:** I have five grandchildren and one great grandchild.

**Question:** Did, when they were young children, did they know all about your experience in World War II?

**Answer:** No but they're learning because the two girls, my daughter has twin daughters who are nineteen. They're sophomores at the University of Santa Barbara. Both of them are learning how to fly. One of the twin girls just took her cross-country last week. All by herself she flew from Santa Barbara to San Jose and back to Santa Barbara all by herself at nineteen. She's the same age exactly I was when I learned how to fly and both girls are learning, the boy who is two years older already has all of his ratings. He's going up next weekend for his instructor's rating and they may all three end up being airline pilots. Their Mother and Dad both are, you know, and they're beginning to think it's not a bad career. They travel all over the world and fly beautiful airplanes so they're all three flying.

**Question:** Did you marry a pilot?

**Answer:** Yes. We were both stationed together at Long Beach during the war.

**Question:** Is that how - where you met?

**Answer:** Um huh, and he was a native of Long Beach and so when we got, we didn't get married until after the war cause I wasn't about to get married and give up my airplanes until the war was over. So we got married after the war and lived in Long Beach and he died in 1973.

**Question:** If you had become married, would that have ended your career with the..?

**Answer:** No, no. No you, we could be married. In fact that, a lot of the girls had children. That's why it was hard for us to integrate with any of the other services because our eligibility requirements were so different. We could be up to 35



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years old; we could have children; we could be married and so forth which none of the other services could be.

**Question:** One last question and that's it. Is, Karl sort of asked this but, when you look at an airplane, like you walk around this Flight Museum and you see these airplanes and you watch them and you can touch the skin of one, is an airplane just an animate, is it a physical object to you or does an airplane sort of have a soul?

**Answer:** Well, it's a physical object but it also means a lot. I mean, every one of those airplanes, 90% of them, I've run across some place in my sixty years, either somebody's had one or it's flown or it's been connected somehow so it brings back other relative memories. It's an inanimate object as far as being a piece of wood and glue and metal; but it represents people, it represents our country, it represents all the things I've done and the people I've met and places I've been. Each one of those airplanes are integrated into that part of life. So it becomes part of you life even though it is an object. But they all relate to it somehow.

**Question:** Now I promised that was the last one but I have another question. Did you ever meet Eleanor Roosevelt?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** She never came to your base or anything?

**Answer:** No, but she was influential because, you see, she's the first woman, wife of a President, who was politically... she started the women's lib movement. She wrote a, on a column every day for the newspaper called "My Day," and which she proffered forth women's ability to accomplish things. That's why Jackie was so intriguing to her because Jackie was on the brink of new accomplishments for women and that appealed to Eleanor greatly. So they had a great rapport and Jackie was able to get a lot of her ideas out to the public through Eleanor. In fact there's a gal that's writing a history of the women pilots; and she has gone through the Freedom of Information Act and has got a lot of the correspondence between Eleanor and Franklin and Jackie and her husband Floyd, General Arnold and so forth, and how it shows how influential Jackie was through Eleanor Roosevelt. And because her husband was the biggest backer of Roosevelt; he was the, supposedly the second richest man in the United States and a very fluid backer of Roosevelt. And Jackie had this very good rapport with Eleanor being able to get her feelings about women out in Eleanor's columns, so it was, it had a terrific impact.

**Question:** Did you read that column every day?

**Answer:** No, I was too young to understand what was going on really, and I was..

**Question:** Did, now, is it Nancy Harkness Love?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Did.. she really is someone that there was sort of different motivations for Jackie Cochran and Nancy Harkness Love why they did things is there?

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**Answer:** Well, see Jackie, both Jackie and Nancy knew that the potential of using women was there. They both had gone – Nancy had gone to the Air Transport Command; Jackie had gone to Arnold. And both had said as early as 1940 that when this war comes there is a group of women out there who are already trained that could be used. And so both of them kind of had this idea. Jackie finally came to Arnold about 1941 and said we need to get these girls organized and Arnold said it's not the time right now. Why don't you just take your girls and go to England and work with the ATA. When it's right the program is yours, you can have it. But in the same time Nancy was working for the Air Transport Command in the office job, but she commuted each day in her airplane to work and that kind of caught their eye and they said you know that's kind of interesting and she said well I have an idea and so she presented to the Air Transport Command the idea of using already trained women that would take no money, no expense, to just bring them in and put them right into the small airplanes and let them go to work, to relieve those men for other duty. So that's when the WAF organization was formed.

In the meantime Jackie was over in England, but the minute she heard about it. It took 24 hours before she was back in Arnold's office beating on the desk and saying this was to be my program. And he says okay Jackie, okay. So what they did is then they set up the Training Command and gave it to Jackie to train all these new girls who would eventually become ferry pilots for Nancy Love. And that's how the whole program got started. But the training school grew much bigger, much faster than the resulting active duty group and Jackie's ability to... with political control was able to be the stronger of the two as far as gaining control of the whole program.

**Question:** Was she sort of intimidating, was she or was she?

**Answer:** Oh she's very intimidating.

**Question:** Jackie Cochran is?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Huh.

**Answer:** She was, she ruled, she ruled.

**Question:** So did, I was in the Navy and I, and I had four Captains when I was in the Navy and there's two Captains, one after another, in fact one man took over for the other Captain and I always said about the second Captain, I said, he, he commanded my respect. And the Captain before him demanded my respect.

**Answer:** There's a lot of difference.

**Question:** Is that?

**Answer:** Very true, very true. You can give orders in a lot of different ways and you can make your people fight for you or work for you or work with you, depending on how you lead. A leadership is terribly important.

**Question:** So..

**Answer:** But see Jackie didn't, wasn't in a position of leadership; she didn't have any contact with any of these people. She sat back in Washington in an office

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and her school ran in Sweetwater. So she wasn't, she didn't, Nancy was in the field; she was, she was flying the same airplanes we were flying. And she was out with us where Jackie was sitting in an office administrating a large program and it had to get larger and larger to make her bigger and bigger. But it got to the point where the people that were supposedly eligible for it, we ran out of those people.

**Question:** So Nancy Harkness Love was someone that you respected?

**Answer:** Oh much more so. Yeah, well, she was very well educated; she was a very talented administrator as far as working with people. We would've done anything in the world she said because we knew her decisions were right. Plus the fact she asked our opinion. We had staff meetings; as a Squadron Commander I went back to Cincinnati at least two or three times a year for staff meetings so that we knew what we were supposed to be doing within the squadron cause I had eighty girls in Long Beach that I was responsible for to make sure they did their job and they acted the way they were supposed to and we did, we did what we were supposed to be doing.

**Question:** So how did you get picked to be the head of the eighty people; how did you, why did you get picked to be the Commander?

**Answer:** I don't know but I've, I've always been, I'm, I'm always better at giving orders than taking orders I guess. But now I got along with Nancy very well; I was only in Wilmington three months when, before they split us up. The original 25 went in there in September and in January we were split and five were sent to Romulus, five to Dallas and five to Long Beach and set up these other squadrons in anticipation of all these graduating kids that were coming out that would have to have places to go. And she selected me to run the Long Beach squadron mainly because I'm, I'm, I'm pretty much business oriented and I do things with a list, my, a check list. But she knew I could do it, even though I was young, but we were all...

**Question:** So you commanded; but you also, you participated, you gave, the things you gave orders for people to do were things you were doing.

**Answer:** I always had to do them first.

**Question:** Yeah.

**Answer:** Always did, no I didn't.. nobody did anything that I hadn't already done.

**Question:** Did you meet, were you friends with Ms. Love after this time?

**Answer:** Oh, we kept track of each other for a while; I got better friends with her Deputy, which was the girl that was head of the squadron in Delaware, Betty Gillies, who moved to San Diego. Nancy moved to Florida; and I corresponded with her but I wasn't that close but I became much closer to Betty who moved to San Diego who was her second in command who was actually, ended up being Commander of the squadron in Wilmington, Delaware. But see, we never saw each other very much and so we, it sounds like the original 25. Once I left Wilmington and was transferred to Long Beach I never saw those girls again. We.. our paths never crossed.

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**Question:** Did you just all spread out?

**Answer:** Well, we just, we just – we were ferrying out of Long Beach. Once in a while two or three of them came to Long Beach because we only had, we were the ones that had certain airplanes that they could get checked out in but other than that we never saw.. That's why we were never able to bond closely with very many girls, a very few, because we never saw them.

**Question:** Did the eighty (Inaudible) people under your charge. That must have been quite something to have eighty people that looked to you for, if they had personal problems or if they had needs or discipline.

**Answer:** Well, it was, it was, it was interesting because as I say they were all I remember I had one little gal from Arkansas who smoked a corncob pipe and I can remember one day her coming and asking if she could talk to me. She sat on the end of the bed and she said you know I've got to have leave she said my mummies a fretting for me. And I said well, so we got her leave. What I'm saying is there's all different kinds of people. I learned a lot, I grew up pretty fast.

**Question:** You learned a lot about people.

**Answer:** A lot about people.

**Question:** Did this girl who smoked corncob pipe was she, her family wasn't affluent?

**Answer:** No, she was from the hills of Arkansas.

**Question:** It's sort of interesting; it's sort of a great equalizer.

**Answer:** But she was a great pilot. She eventually ended up marrying a really neat guy and they had a huge flight school up in Michigan – did a very good job. She was an excellent pilot; she just came from the hills.

**Question:** So that's one thing I learned about people in the Navy. I was from a middle class family and it was a real education about people getting along with people in all different strata in our country but it's also a great equalizer World War II was, wasn't it? And it brought a lot of people gave them opportunity for education and advancement?

**Answer:** Oh, oh heavens yeah. In fact even today I would suggest to anybody, the kid that's fourteen, fifteen, that if they really don't know what they want to do they should go into the military because they can get an education they can get on the job training and they can come out at the age 24, 25 equipped to do something. I would tell my own grandchildren if you really don't know what you really want to do then go into the military and try and get, even if you can get into the academy or someplace. Yeah, absolutely. The military is fantastic.

**Question:** Did the, the women that passed away.. they weren't just in your command, was that all, how many, there was thirty-some women in the WASP that died during the performance of duties, wasn't there?

**Answer:** How many died?

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**Question:** There was quite a few.

**Answer:** Thirty-six or something like that.

**Question:** Yeah, but there were six from your command?

**Answer:** Yeah, six that were stationed at Long Beach at the time they were killed.. they weren't killed in Long Beach but they were killed on flights while they were stationed there.

**Question:** So did, would you have had personal relationship with them so you would know who they were when you saw their name or?

**Answer:** Oh sure, I knew all of them very personally. They all lived in the same barracks.

**Question:** Does that, I ask this question of everybody, when you.. can you picture these people when you think about them or is it...

**Answer:** Now, today?

**Question:** Yeah.

**Answer:** Of course. The girl that got killed in the P-38 at Harrisburg, Virginia was my very, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania was my very best friend, probably the closest one I had in the WASP and one of the better pilots we ever had. And she got killed in a P-38 at Harrisburg.

**Question:** So how did you find out?

**Answer:** I was at a meeting in Cincinnati with Nancy when it came in over the teletype that the P-38 has crashed at Harrisburg and it was a WAF pilot and there were only three or four of us flying 38's at that particular point so it had to be, I knew almost who it had to be. And she was probably one of the best pilots we had. She lost an engine on take-off on a runway that was short going towards a hill and she controlled it as best she could but she pancaked into the hill and killed instantly.

**Question:** Was it the first real close loss for you or?

**Answer:** Huh?

**Question:** Was that the first time you had a real close friend that was lost in the war?

**Answer:** Well, the first girl that was killed was a friend of mine; but she wasn't as close as Evelyn Sharp was, that was killed in the P-38. Evelyn was, of the six that were killed, Evelyn was my closest friend. I knew all of them; they were all in my squadron. I knew them, you know, well but Evelyn was probably my closest friend because she was an original with me in Wilmington.

**Question:** Does, could you describe Evelyn for me?

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**Answer:** Huh?

**Question:** Could you describe Evelyn, the picture in your mind you have?

**Answer:** Of Evelyn?

**Question:** Yeah.

**Answer:** She was about my age; she was, she'd got her flying time in Lone Pine, California, instructing. She was very outgoing, very gregarious; she loved to date – was very attractive and didn't have an enemy in the world. She was everybody's friend, got along with everybody and she was an excellent pilot. She was very quick, very quick to learn and a very nice gal - just very upbeat and very capable.

**Question:** So did you have to, did you write the letter home about her or how did..?

**Answer:** I wrote a letter home to my folks, yeah.

**Question:** But her parents you didn't..

**Answer:** I just told my folks not to worry, you know, that I was gonna miss her but not to worry that it was gonna happen to me, that I couldn't think about that and I didn't want them to either, not to worry about that, that I..

**Question:** Was that a worry of your Mother?

**Answer:** No, she never, she never mentioned it.

**Question:** She believed that you were gonna come back?

**Answer:** She believed that I was gonna come back and I did. I didn't have, I didn't have a problem.

**Question:** Did they see you fly?

**Answer:** No. With gas rationing during the war they only made it to Long Beach once during the war. They drove down and they spent one day I think, but my Dad traveled for Macmillan Publishing Company and whatever gas they had he had to use. So they couldn't really get enough gas coupons, so they came down just once during the war and met me in Long Beach and met Evelyn and a few of my friends, but otherwise I didn't see them.

**Question:** So that's quite the, you know, I research on the internet and the Air Force has an article on you, of course, you know, and your name is seen around and you are, you're always one of the original 20...is it 25 or 28?

**Answer:** 25.

**Question:** Yeah, you're always is, you're always one of the original 25 WAF's; it's a very exclusive club where you said how you, everybody thinks we knew each other

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but it is, you're very famous for having been one of those original 25, you having been a WAF.

**Answer:** Yeah, well the thing is that, I think it's overdone though because the girls in the next classes were just as competent as we were. We were the test case but a lot of those girls that came later could have been in that original group but I know two of them, which were very good friends of mine were instructing and their boss wouldn't let them out. Fortunately I was instructing too but I went to my boss and said, Look I got this opportunity.. he says, Great, go. He could have said, No you're under contract. Now one of the girls that was the most qualified was the gal that flew for Piper for years and she was working for Piper when this all opened up. She went down to Wilmington, went and saw Nancy, applied for it, was accepted, went back up to the Piper factory and said, Guess what, Mr. Piper I'm going to work for Nancy Love and he says, No you're not; your contract lasts until January. So she didn't get in the first group but she should have. She had over 2,000 hours, had been flying for Piper for five years, but she was one of those ones that ended up in Class 4 instead of being an original but she was just as qualified.

**Question:** Now Nancy Harkness Love was really an accomplished pilot wasn't she?

**Answer:** Very accomplished, yeah.

**Question:** She had a lot of hours.

**Answer:** She owned her own airplane and she commuted to work every morning.

**Question:** Now was she from an affluent family?

**Answer:** Yeah, quite affluent.

**Question:** So she could afford the air-time?

**Answer:** Uhuh.

**Question:** Cause that was a consideration too because a lot of people, you were just coming out of depression.

**Answer:** Well you see we actually broke down into about three different groups. There were the affluent girls and there were about five in the original group that were really well off, Nancy and Betty and Cornelia and a couple of others that learned to fly by going to Embry Riddle or buying their own airplane or belonging to the Aviation Country Club, and so forth. Then there was another group that made, got their time by being.. working at it, by being in air shows and flying passenger hops and doing that kind of stuff. There were, before my time, there were probably five or so years before I started to fly, several girls were in air shows and things like that. Then the third group were those that I was in that were CPT graduates, they were 21-year-old college kids that got their flying from the government. And I never would have flown if the government hadn't paid for it and that small group of four or five of us all were 21 years old and all the government kids. So there was about those three different groups but we ranged in age from 21 to 35. There were two

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girls that were 35 years old which was the very limit and both of those had two or three kids so it was a very, very different group.

**Question:** So you had older women under your command?

**Answer:** Yeah, oh yeah. A lot of my girls were ten years older than I was.

**Question:** Was that ever a, when you were giving orders, did you ever think oh you're..?

**Answer:** No, I don't, there really wasn't – a lot of girls didn't want the responsibility. You know, there's people who want to lead and those who want to follow. Now Evelyn was a follower. She would do anything you wanted her to do, but she didn't really want to sit in an office and do paperwork and I was good at that so..

**Question:** So you, you also, did you make it a point to know your pilots?

**Answer:** Oh, I knew all of them, absolutely.

**Question:** So you knew, if someone said I need someone for a job, you would be able go well I know the right person for that, I mean, as far as personality wise.

**Answer:** Well you knew them all pretty well. As I say you knew, I knew one gal that was a buyer for Bonwit Teller Sp. and the day after we were disbanded she was back at work Monday morning at Bonwit Teller as a buyer again. So that part in her life was – she did it, she did an excellent job - was a good pilot; but it never affected her entire life because Monday morning she was back at her old job again - never flew again after that. So, then there were those of us that airplanes have been our whole life so it affected different people differently. Some people stayed with it; other people went completely back to what their original life was as if the whole war had never happened.

**Question:** Huh.

**Answer:** It's amazing how they could do that but they did.

**Question:** Now the woman who smoked the corncob pipe what was her name?

**Answer:** Audrey something..

**Question:** Do you know if she went on to aviation or..?

**Answer:** Oh yeah. She and her – they're married – she had a very influential, large flight school. She's dead now. In Michigan, did very well, married a really neat guy and together they ran one of the biggest flight schools in the country.. and a charter service. She was – she had an excellent company.

**Question:** It changed aviation drastically, World War II, didn't it, I mean it really... aviation really, all of a sudden air flight became popular after the war?

**Answer:** But it didn't, you see that's what happened. Everybody thought after World War II everybody would have a cub in their garage, and that was the dream



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we all had but it didn't happen. We didn't have the money and there wasn't anything to do with them. There was certainly no place for women. Aviation went completely flat after World War II; there were no flight schools cause you weren't preparing for anything. The airlines were just beginning to boom and that was going to be a limited career for men. So it didn't do what we all thought it was gonna do. We thought we were gonna be building cubs and say everybody was gonna have a cub in their garage. It was gonna be one of those mass growths of the industry but it didn't really happen. It took years for it to really gradually build up itself up to where in the late seventies and early eighties I'd been, I was selling airplanes for the next forty years of my life. We were building about 20,000 new airplanes a year - Cessna, Piper, Beach, Gulf Stream, then from the jets all the way down to the cubs, the industry was selling about 20,000 new airplanes a year, '79, '80, '81. This last year we finally hit, we're now selling 500 new airplanes a year; so that's how different the industry is and that was a big year. It took us three years to get to 500 and that's Citations, Leers, Falcons, Gulf Streams as well as Cubs and Cessna's.... total. So that how's the industry's changed.

**Question:** Have you, you know, you didn't know about the foreign pilots during the war but since that time have you ever gone to functions where there were women pilots from other countries?

**Answer:** The only time I did is when I went with my daughter to the Women Airline Pilots Convention and I met women from all over the world that are flying for the airlines. I met the girls from Germany and South America - Brazil, every foreign country in the world had a woman airline pilot there and I met all those women.

**Question:** Do you speak with your hands when you talk?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** We find... we've interviewed a lot of veterans in the past five years and pilots especially are prone to speak with their hands and they go like this... Is that something when you talk to pilots are they..?

**Answer:** No I just think you just, I think you just get with it, you know. It's just a matter of animation and your enthusiasm gets out into your extremities.

**Question:** I think I'm getting the signal I'm supposed to stop talking. *OCV I'm just saying - we got - it's ten till eleven.* Okay. You got ten minutes left. Okay, I think Karl wants me to give you a break. I was just curious, do you, when you talk to pilots do you talk about pilot issues or do you just talk about everyday issues?

**Answer:** Well it depends on what the situation is. If you're at a pilot function you're probably talking about what you're there for. Other than that you talk about your kids and what you had for dinner. You're just like everybody else does. Because piloting's just part of your daily life and it's your job in most cases so you don't go over fine points of flying an airplane anymore. You're well past that. It might be where you went or what you did but no, you're talking about the same things you talk about - where the kids went to school and what the new recipes are, what's new on TV just like anybody else because flying does a lot most of those people that do it all the time it's just their job you know.

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**Question:** Did Ms. Harkness Love, did she go on after the war to have an aviation career?

**Answer:** No, she and her husband got into the boat building business; they were from Martha's Vineyard, up in that area. They moved to Florida and he bought a boat building business. He was in the airline business; he started what eventually became Northeast Airlines and was in the airline business for a while and then they went into the boat business.

**Question:** Jackie Cochran.. what about.. what happened to her after the war?

**Answer:** She ran for Senate or something like that in Riverside, California. She didn't win but she was in politics, tried to get into politics for awhile and she was on several boards and commissions from the government, still politically active.

**Question:** So for a period of time she was a powerful woman then?

**Answer:** After the war of course she went out and set all the records, you know, the speed records between she and Jacqueline Auriol kept she'd pass one and then Jackie Oriole would take it away and then she'd go up to Muroc and do it and then Jackie Oriole would take it... it went back and forth. But she had the advantage of having Chuck Yaeger... be given to her for six months on temporary duty to help her set those records and, you know, I've called my, a Senator was a real good friend of my husband's and I called and asked, why can't I do that - I got just as much flying time as she had and he said, honey M-O-N-E-Y. And I said I guess you're probably right because after the war she went up there and set a lot of records but I see Jackie Oriole kept taking it away; they went back and forth for quite a while.

**Question:** So were they both affluent women?

**Answer:** Huh?

**Question:** Jackie Oriole, was she, did she have money, her family or..??

**Answer:** Oh, well, her husband, her Father was the Prime Minister of France.

**Question:** Oh well..

**Answer:** So I think they probably were pretty well off, yeah.

**Question:** (Inaudible)

**Answer:** But she was a formidable foe of Jackie Cochran's because she was capable.. money wise and experience wise and capable flying wise to take those same records away from her.

**Question:** So they battled against each other?

**Answer:** So what, what Jackie did, she eventually went to the organization that sanctioned all those and got a ruling put through that there would be no more competition for women alone, it would just be a record, period. So now all those women's records stand and nobody can ever erase them because nobody, there's no longer women's records.

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**Question:** So no one could ever top...?

**Answer:** So she's got them all forever.

**Question:** She was a smart woman, huh?

**Answer:** She did it while she was on top. Interesting...

**Question:** Right, thank you very much. (I'm gonna get you unmiked.)