Mary Jean Sturdevant nee Barnes

Tape 1 of 1

Question: Your first and last name and the correct spelling so I have it on tape.

Answer: Ok.

Question: So if you could give me that.

Answer: Mary B. Sturdevant. Sturdevant is S-T-U-R-D-E-V-A-N-T.

Question: And your maiden name was?

Answer: Barnes, B-A-R-N-E-S.

Question: And that's what everybody knew you as.

Answer: Yes. Mary Jean Barnes.

Question: Mary Jean Barnes, good old name. Hah.

Question: So where did you grow up?

Answer: In Medford, Phoenix, well it's southern Oregon and I went to college at ah, in Ashland, Southern Oregon College.

Question: Oh yeah.

Answer: College of Education at that time it was. It was a two year junior college and a three year um, teacher's college and I would have nothing to do with the teacher's college. What did I do, but I taught. (laughs)

Question: Funny how that...

Answer: But they said I was a good teacher because I didn't have all that educational jazz.

Question: To get in the way.

Answer: Yeah right (laughs).

Question: Exactly. All that theory and ah everything.

Answer: Makes you tongue tied.

Question: So how did you get started flying?

Answer: Well go back a ways. Lindbergh went over to, went over to -- this is before the war -- went over to Germany and he picked up a medal that Hitler gave him. He brought it back and ah, Roosevelt was highly indignant about that but Lindbergh did tell everybody who would listen to him that the Americans simply did not have any background or basis for a flying cadre, nothing. So they started, somebody listened to him and they started the civilian pilot training program and they put it in the colleges and they were to have the equivalent of a private pilot's license or they did get the private pilot's license and 35 hours and quite a lot of ground school time in the college curriculum. Well they allowed one woman in a class of ten and there were three of us in southern Oregon who were able to get into the program. I was

the last one. The Medford Flying Service furnished the airplanes and the instructors and the instructors and the ground school instructor was one that the college hired. Well this was in -- let's see 1940, '39 to '40, and I enjoyed the ground school so very much because I had had everything possible that the college could give you in the science and the math courses and I just loved it. It all fit in very nicely. So just about the time I finished the class the war broke out and they stopped taking any more women in the program and they changed the name from Civilian, CPT, Civilian Pilot Training to War Training Service. Same curriculum but just changed the name and no more women. So I went ahead and got my ground school instructors ratings and the Medford High School was pretty advanced in its thinking and they had me set up the ground school program there at the Medford High School, which I did. Then I was called to LaGrand, Eastern Oregon College, you know where that is.

Question: Yeah.

Answer: And I went up there and taught for a number of months in the War Training Service Program. Then the Army Air Corps set up college training detachments or CTD they called it, and they sent cadets there to the various large colleges, they'd send 'em by the hundreds and they were sort of a holding area for the cadets who were going to be navigators or bombardiers or pilots and I was the chief ground instructor there. They had a lot of college programs because so many of these young fellows hadn't even completed high school. A number of them, of course, had gone all the way through college, they were graduates and I had them in my classes also and I taught them the um, well it was Civil Air Regulations but I incorporated anything else that they wanted to know and we just had a wonderful time. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I was there for almost a year and then finally I was able to get into the WASP program but I couldn't get into that until they found a man to replace me at Washington State in Pullman. And that's when I went into the WASP program and I got into that program about um, let's see it was February of 1944 and two, three of the other instructors -- they were flight instructors, I was ground instructor at Pullman, went into my same class. One of the women was, had been in a terrible plane crash. Her plane caught fire, she had a student and they both bailed out but she was dragged about half a mile over plowed fields, frozen plowed fields, and it just almost, well it scalped her really and broke her jaw and she was -- she could not go into the program. But the other two and I were in the same class and the same flight by the way. So ah, we went in in February. That's how I got into the WASP program

Question: And you were what class?

Answer: 44W7.

Question: 44W7.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: And the final class was 44W...

Answer: Ten. So you see, we were near the tail end of the program so when we graduated and went out to various bases where we were assigned, none of us got the exotic aircraft like the P-51's or the P-40's or the B-25's or sixes. I was in a basic base where they had um, AT-6's and BT-13's.

Question: So now when you were teaching prior to getting into the WASP's and teaching...

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: You were teaching kids that had been drafted or enlisted?

Answer: Yes they were, and they had already been assigned as air crew ah, either pilots, navigators, or bombardiers.

Question: Wow.

Answer: But they didn't know what they were going to be until further checking I guess. So it was very interesting. I thoroughly enjoyed the classes. They were large classes. I didn't get individually acquainted too well with the men but we got along just fine. If there were any questions that came up that I couldn't answer I'd say just wait a minute and I'll go find out and I would do some research and come back and say well, give them the answer or say well I just couldn't find it either.

Question: So you were actually a lot responsible for training all the people that went overseas and stuff.

Answer: Oh yes. Oh yes ah, it was a lot of fun. After I was flying for the Army I would land at a base and somebody'd hop up on the wing, "Why aren't you Miss Barnes from Pullman?" And I'd say, "Yes." We had, they were just kind of as homesick as I was. Glad to see somebody that they knew.

Question: Was that a, was that a, um, it seems like that part of it, the teaching part would be a kind of a double edged sword. I mean the excitement of teaching and our country's at war and you're doing your part...

Answer: Oh yes, certainly.

Question: But yet, these are all these young kids that also that ah, some of 'em may not come back.

Answer: Very much that way. I always hated to see them get on the train, the troop trains and leave but they had to go back then and then they went into, they got, oh I forgot to tell you, they got ten hours of flying time. Ah it was just an indoctrination is what it amounted to and it was in Cubs, light planes, but enough to give them the feel of the -- of the plane.

Question: Boy that's not very much time.

Answer: No it wasn't. No it was just to give them a taste of it. And that's what the other two women did. They were the flight instructors.

Answer: Ah one thing I did do, West Coast Flying Training Command in Santa Anna was in charge of the program and they would send observers up to some of my classes. I'd see this person, well where did he come from? It would, and they would be observing because they just couldn't believe that a woman could possibly teach and I was the first one that they hired, that had been hired to do that sort of thing. So it was great. It kept me on my toes, too.

Question: Now did you think that at all at that time? It's interesting in perspective because kids today wouldn't realize the fact that there were a lot of things that at that time women weren't allowed to do.

Answer: Oh certainly.

Question: So were you aware of that or were you just happy go lucky and...

Answer: Well, I was -- I was aware of it but it didn't bother me. It was just there and I don't know how the other instructors felt about me, maybe I was an upstart. Thought I knew everything. But ah, we, I got along just fine with the men. Never any problem whatsoever in my classes. Well they were class of 300 men and they would be split into two groups so I would talk, lecture to the first one group in the morning and the other one in the afternoon. My voice got kind of tired by the end of the day but we did get along just fine. Never any problem and they were ah, very respectful. Of course they were under military discipline and that helped a lot. Nowadays I don't think I could do it.

Question: So when did you get your first taste of flying?

Answer: Oh that was when I went into the CPT program, Civilian Pilot Training. Did I get off on the wrong...

Question: Well we talked about doing ground school but so did you that's...

Answer: No, oh yes. I flew. I had 35 hours, about 40 hours I guess in ah, Piper, Cub, J-3, 50 horse power, supposedly 50 horse power engine (laughs). I'm not sure that it was. And they were tail draggers. The one plane, the tail had a tail wheel and the other one had a tail skid so we were primitive as it were. But we got very good training. I had a difficult time with the CPT ah, through that program it's a wonder they didn't wash me out but I, toward the end of it I got the feel of the plane, I wasn't afraid of the flying any longer and then I got along fine and I made all my big mistakes in the CPT program where when I went into the flying for the Army I had no real problem at all because I had good background. I had a fine instructor. He was very patient with me, with all the mistakes I made. I even ground looped on my first solo in the CPT program. So the Army was pretty much a piece of cake but I was afraid of it because I thought well I don't know if I can do this. Well none of us knew whether we could but Jacquelyn Cochran was so sure that we would do a good job. That she saw that we had good instructors. We were paving the way for women flying. The military, I'm sure they didn't think we could do it, but we flew everything the men did, everything but combat. It was a surprise to me that I was able to get through as easily as I did. Oh I had my moments (laughs), but the instrument flying was the thing that I enjoyed the most, the precision, the precision flying.

Question: Now the, it's interesting, because starting with the CPT what was, were they really thinking ahead that there was a war coming, do you think at that point?

Answer: Yes. Yes I'm sure they were. That was the reason for it was to have ah, partially trained cadre that they could draw on and most of the young men who were in my CPT class couldn't wait to get in the war so they went up to Canada and then went over, flew for the British. They were just as crazy as I was I guess (laughs).

Question: Now did you ever think that they would ah, as war came along, did you always know that women would have their role in the States and not being or was there a possibility...

Answer: No, no I didn't. We didn't, I didn't think that they'd ever break down and let women do it but I guess they were just forced to it because they didn't realize that there wouldn't be such a turnover of pilots, having the men losing their lives, they thought the women would have to take over and do the flying in this country and that's what we were

trained for. We WASPs did not go out of the States in spite of all of these stories and movies and whatnot. I think it was Loretta Young was supposed to have gone off to Guam or someplace. Well she didn't (laughs), we didn't. As a matter of fact, Hap Arnold ah said, "I have enough problems, things to worry about, I'm not gonna worry about the women going out of the country. They're not going." But Jacquelyn Cochran really did, she could have flown, she had so much time herself but she stayed back in Washington and ram-rodded our program.

Question: Well she sounds amazing.

Answer: Oh she was tough. Oh she was tough. But she was, she was just all out to make sure that the women did a good job and that they had top notch instructing.

Answer: The ah, we were under the Central Flying Training Command at San Antonio and they would send up batteries of tests, exams, written and hands on that we were to take. We'd take 'em... well ok, what next do you want? (laughs) It just ah, it was a testing ground and we appreciated it.

Question: I heard, I think it was Marjory said or maybe I read it somewhere that, that um, the fact that it was this testing ground, a lot of the women tried that much harder to be that much better because they felt if they made the littlest mistake they'd say hah, I told you so.

Answer: Yeah, that's exactly right. We excelled in instrument flying. For some reason or other that was our, our best bet because the men, they liked the acrobatics, they liked the slam bang, but we, I enjoyed the ah, challenge of the instrument flying and I think we were better at that than the men but they were better at other phases. Ah, the women just flew everything that, that they could get their hands on and that they were allowed to do. We had one woman who checked out in a jet fighter. She was at Wright Pat, Wright Patterson Air Base and she was a test pilot there so she got to fly that. The rest of us, so many of us just did routine flying.

Question: But even that, now you say just routine flying, to me no flying is just routine.

Answer: Right. (laughs)

Question: That must have been even though a thrill because here aviation is really developing at this time and...

Answer: That's right. It was a testing ground, a proving ground.

Answer: The whole thing was -- as a matter of fact, our class was an example. They, our base, Sweetwater or Avenger Field was the only one in the Air Force where the primary, basic and advanced were all at the same base. The others, the men, would go from one base to another. But we had all programs right at our base. So they decided that we should take primary Stearman ah, time you know the Stearman Biplane, and we had about 70 hours in that plane and then you would ordinarily go right to basic which would be the BT-13 or the equivalent. Well, ah, they pulled the PT-19's out of our base because they have a wide landing gear, that's the Fairchild PT-19, and they brought in the Stearmans with a, are biplanes, harder to fly but still and they had narrow landing gear and they just almost had a built-in ground loop (laughs). But they then took us straight from the Stearman into the AT-6. It was the first time that it had been done in the Air Force and they had the women do it and we went right into 6 transition. The only problem we had at all was we had to learn the cockpit procedure and learn about the landing gear and the constant speed prop. Um, what else, oh,

that's about it, and of course lot more power, much more power, too. Low wing plane, where we'd been in biplanes, but we did it. And then from AT-6 transition, that was about 35 hours, approximately 35 hours, we went into instruments and back into the BT-13 and that was a piece of cake. There's nothing to that. That was a sissy airplane with fixed landing gear and course the 6 had retractable landing gear. Ah, in instruments we did some buddy flying which was kind of fun. We would fly with our instructor but then under the hood we had to have an observer pilot or a first pilot in the front of the plane. And to, a couple of us WASP trainees would get to fly together and that was kind of nice. We went over to Abilene to get our instrument time because that's where the range was, the radio range. Then after that we went back to the AT-6 for cross country and that was a thrill. That was just great. We ah, had a thousand mile trip in the ah, back to the PT-17 and the Stearman where you had to do dead reckoning. You didn't have radio or anything like that; you were just strictly on the ground. And then we had the two thousand mile AT-6 flight and that was a big thrill because we knew then that, without, if we didn't goof up totally we were gonna finish, graduate.

Question: Did you realize how unique your opportunity was at that time? The WASPs --

Answer: I don't think so. No, I think you were totally focused on (I hate that word) on um, graduating. On not washing out because it was an awful jolt to see some of your good friends lose out. I don't know how I ever would have recovered had I not made the grade.

Question: How big was your class? About...

Answer: There were about 45 of us graduated and there were about 90 in the class to begin with and they washed out right and left. We lost about half of the class during, during the training program, mostly in primary. They really culled 'em down. Ah, course Jacquelyn Cochran was so determined that we would be the best possible pilots that she, she could find, and we were determined to live up to it.

Question: Was it mostly men training you or was it women training women?

Answer: Ah, well there were two or three women instructors on the base and then these two women, I have a picture of a Jenny Gower and um, one other, can't think of her name, were flight instructors but they went back through the training program so they went through ground school with my class and they were, they were nice, very intelligent girls. As a matter of fact, the whole WASP group were exceptional women I would say. They were highly intelligent, very motivated, and just fun to be with. My, or the thing that I realized afterwards was that I had such a good time because I grew up in a very poor family, exceedingly poor, in southern Oregon where the um, Depression hit so hard. So my brother and I had family responsibilities from the day we started school. And then my father passed away when I was a sophomore in high school. My grandmother who had lived with us passed away, so it's just my mother and my brother and myself left and when I went to Sweetwater, I didn't have any more family responsibilities, I was strictly on my own and I could, I just felt as if it was a whole new world.

Question: That's amazing, because that's again kind of that double image of what World War II was, there were atrocities that happened but yet there are also especially coming out of the Depression...

Answer: The freedom of being on your own and doing the things you want to do without having to worry about the rest of the family.

Question: This is interesting 'cause at first I thought the WASP were military. But you always were civilian, correct?

Answer: Yes. All the way through. But we did get the military training. We had so much drill, marching everywhere and we -- our drill instructor was -- was a first lieutenant -- Lt. LaRue. We had some songs about him.

Question: Do you remember any of those songs?

Answer: No.

Question: Are you sure?

Answer: Well, I have a song book, but --

Question: Oh, you have a whole song book that -- that's

Answer: Yeah, it's a song book.

Question: So I take it that some of these are ones that you generally might not share with the --

Answer: That's right. You're so right. (laughs) And, but it -- it was the camaraderie and the freedom. I -- most of the women, I guess, thought it was so restrictive, but to me it wasn't. I was on my own. I could do my own thing. Without having to -- to worry about the family.

Question: See, that's interesting 'cause, for a lot of people, for you it was a freedom, but you were going into this military situation, they probably told you when to get up and when to go to bed --

Answer: Sure. I loved it. I didn't have to worry about all that. It was -- it was thought out for me. And I didn't -- I just loved the whole thing. And the chance to fly -- I couldn't believe it. Back before the WASP and before the war, everybody who was in the CPT program, they were just as -- as poor as I was. And we would pool our quarters and dollars, if we had a dollar, and rent a plane and go out and fly. But you didn't think anything about it. You didn't feel deprived, because everybody else was in the same boat. And the same when -- when I went through college. I just -- I didn't mind having one pair of shoes and a skirt, but -- and a couple of blouses, 'cause all the rest of my friends were the same way. Oh, there were a few, but they were -- they didn't stay around.

Question: It was just the way it was, right?

Answer: Sure, hm-hmm.

Question: Yeah.

Answer: But the most important thing was the education. Getting your -- your hours and getting good grades so that you could maybe get a scholarship.

Question: So what's the -- being in the WASPs, was that a patriotic aspect for you or was that a --

Answer: Yes, certainly it was. There was an enormous amount of patriotism because all of us had brothers or fathers in the Service. Some had husbands, some had -- were engaged. One of the girls in my class was engaged to a young man, and he was killed in the South Pacific. And just almost ruined her. I mean she took it very hard, but she recovered and was able to graduate, but she was -- kind of nip and tuck there for awhile, for her.

Question: Boy, that had to be devastating.

Answer: Oh, it was. And then I was OD -- officer of the day one -- one time, and there was a call that came in from New York. This young -- young man called. He was just on his way overseas. And he wanted to talk to one of the trainees. Well, I ran out to the flight line and was able to locate her. And she got to say goodbye to him. So there was a lot of -- a lot of that.

Question: Hmm.

Answer: Let me see, I can't think what else you might be interested in.

Question: What was your -- so once you got through your class, what then became your duty?

Answer: Oh, I was sent to Merced, which was a basic training base, and they had AT6's and BT-13's there. And I was -- I reported in to the -- let's see, what did they call him at that time? Oh, where the pilots -- the women pilots would fly out of -- base operations, that's what it was.

Question: You had a group of women pilots that were --

Answer: Yes, there were a number of us. There were about five or six of us. There were some who flew for the engineering department. They did the test flying of the planes when the engines were changed or there was a major overhaul, and then they had to test them out before they sent them back to the flight line.

Question: Did they -- did they face any causalities? I mean, 'cause that's pretty risky --

Answer: No, no, they were -- they were pretty good. When we were at Sweetwater there were some planes that had seen too much action (laughs) and they would quit occasionally, but we just sort of took it in stride. And, oh, yeah, she -- she had a force landing but she made it.

Question: Did you face any of those force landings or --

Answer: I came close a couple of times but -- I was able to recover. I was taking off in an AT-6 one time and the engine was sputtering on takeoff and I found that the lever for heating -- overheating the oil, had been shoved out of position. And I caught it just before the engine quit. And then I was able to go on. But I haven't forgotten it.

Question: Now this seems like an interesting situation. Well, first of all, being a woman way back at Wazzu teaching 300 young men, it sounds like, if it were reverse situation, it would be the guy's -- it would be every woman's dream to have 300 potential--. But I assume there's some romances that -- 'cause there's these women and there's these pilots and --

Answer: Oh, yeah, there were couple of times. I was invited to a squadron dance, and I didn't dance, I never had learned, really properly. I could folk dance, but as far as ballroom dancing. But mostly, no. I -- I just stayed -- I had -- my mother was with me up there and we had a group of Army wives living in the building and we got together, but mostly I was working. Doing --

Question: You married a pilot, right?

Answer: Yes, hm-hmm.

Question: And when and where did you meet this pilot?

Answer: Well, he -- he was at Merced. He was in instructor pilot there. And he was in base operations. Well, we got to do quite a little bit of flying together, and then he was sent -- he was taken out of there. I didn't -- maybe I told you. I guess it was this other group I was talking to. They took these power pilots who had just finished -- he had finished instructor course. And they put them in gliders. I think they took them to Sumpter, South Carolyn

Answer: There was a base there for them. Gave him three hours of flying time in gliders and he went overseas and then spent a little co-pilot time in a C-47 and then was pulled out and sent across the Rhine, made the Rhine crossing in a glider. He had a group of British, now, well, they were like commandos. And they -- they made the Rhine -- the Rhine crossing, and that was pretty hairy. I think he picked up seven medals on that time. Then they pulled them out and were going to send them into Paris in order to fly their gliders over to Paris, but Patton had already overtaken it. So they were very happy about that. And he spent the rest of the war then as a transport pilot, C-47, which was their -- their busy airplane at that time. And then after the war was over, we were married.

Question: Not till the war was done.

Answer: Not till the war -- yeah, the war was ended. But it took a little while to get back together.

Question: So where -- it's interesting 'cause you know, the world's changed so much, and I hate to keep harping on the male/female thing. Did that became invisible after awhile? The fact -- did people always say -- did the Air Force guy -- 'cause here, not only are you a woman at the time, but you're a civilian, or did they even look at you as a civilian or did everybody just -- doing their job?

Answer: No, at the end of the war, when the WASPs were released to go home, stay in the kitchen, keep your mouth shut. People didn't really know anything about that there were women who were flying for the -- for the military. As we always laughingly said, it was the best kept secret of the Army. That there was the WASP program. Oh, I don't know. It -- it's taken a long, long time for women to establish their -- their worth in the military. Let's put it that way.

Question: 'Cause it sounds like if -- if you were up -- and I don't know if you're a drinker or not but at a bar or -- or you're at church with -- wherever -- you sit down next to this, now your husband, and he starts talking about flying and you talk about flying, and you can hold your own. You're telling about the --

Answer: Pretty much. That's right -- that's just about right.

Question: Now that at that time must have been shock for a couple -- some men.

Answer: I think -- oh, very definitely was. And even to this day you run into it. But you just kind of shrug your shoulders and say well, we've been there, done that. So we don't have to prove anything anymore.

Question: So what were some of the duties of WASPs?

Answer: Well, they did everything that was required as far as non-combat flying. Transporting, they -- they did tow target squadrons. See, this is some more of Jacquelyn Cochran. She wanted us to be in everything that was possible. There were B-25's, B-26's, did tow targeting, so the girls had to go through the transition program there. And I was -- now, the things I'm telling you now are things that I didn't know -- I found out afterwards when we went to reunions. I was sitting with a woman at the reunion that we had at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, and we were at the banquet. And she had been one of the women who was selected to be a B-26 -- go through the transition because the men were rebelling. They said the B-26 was a very dangerous airplane and they were not going to fly it. So Hap Arnold got together with Jacquelyn Cochran and I'm sure she -- she pushed it, and they picked up a squadron of women who had just graduated and sent them through B-26 transition training. And then sent them out around the country to fly B-26's into various training bases where the men were saying, no, we don't. And there was never another peep out of them. They didn't say a word.

Question: Boy, that must have just set them straight.

Answer: Well, they did -- as I understand it. Now this, as I said I have just learned within the past few years, that they did the same with the B-29. There were two women who were -- one was Dorothy Morman, I can't think of the other woman. And they were sent through B-29 training and Paul Tibbets was their instructor. You know who he was? The Enola Gay? Dropped the atom bomb. But he was teaching at this particular base and these two women went through the B-29 transition, and then they were supposed to go fly out to different bases. Well, just before they took off, word came down from Washington, send those women back to their bases. They wouldn't -- somebody caught on and threw his weight around and wouldn't let the women go. But it was the same reason that they had the women fly the B-26. However, the women who had done the transition in that went out and did tow targeting flying.

Question: Did you ever meet Ms. Cochran?

Answer: At a distance.

Question: At a distance.

Answer: At a distance. I -- she came to Sweetwater many times. She -- well, I can tell you one rather humorous story. Now can you delete it if you want to?

Question: Yeah, this will be edited, yeah.

Answer: Oh, okay. Well, we were called into the gymnasium one time. She came rushing down from Washington. She flew down in a C-47. And she'd come down for almost every graduating class. She was like a mother hen, but a very serious one. And she got us all into the gymnasium and she got up in front of us and she was -- you could tell fire was just

coming out of her ears and her eyes and she said, I will have no round heels in my organization. We thought, well, okay, that's what she wants. But we went -- after she lectured us firmly on how we were to behave, we went back to the barracks and were sitting around and some -- somebody said, anybody know what a round heel is? Well, we didn't but we kind of guessed what she was talking about. But that just -- to show you -- I tell you, Jacquelyn Cochran was a -- she was a wonderful woman. She had had an exceedingly rough life. She felt that women could fly, she, herself had, and she wanted to make sure that we got the opportunity, whether we had a lot of money or a little amount of money. There was another section, now maybe you have -- maybe Marjory didn't tell you about this. There was a Nancy Harkness Love, who was -- the debutante type, very wealthy family, I think from -- from Texas. Probably oil. And she had -- was head of the -- the women's -- the ferrying squad -- ferrying group. And they did a lot of the ferrying. Now, they picked up these women who had 500 hours at least and then they dropped to 200. And, but -- they were the original WAFs, W-A-F-S, Women's Air Force, I think it was called. Oh, no, Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, that's what it was. Well, these women, naturally, from most part, were from quite well to do, very wealthy families. Because it took that -- took the money to buy the flying time. The rest of us were struggling with $2 and $3 to get 15 minutes of time, where these women, a lot of them, owned their own planes and they were -- they were good pilots. But civilian pilots. We had the military training. We got it from the very beginning. And it's much different. The CPT program was very similar to the military. That's why it was so easy for me. I don't mean easy, but it was -- I was able to do it. Well, I think Nancy Love battled Jacquelyn Cochran all the way through. The politics was rife. They just had a feud going from the very beginning. And I think that's what killed our program at the very last. But Nancy did -- as I recall and only by reading, I knew nothing about it while we were going through training. It was years afterwards when I read it in various books. Nancy resented Jacquelyn and Jacquelyn didn't like Nancy. Nancy wanted -- didn't want to be militarized and Jacquelyn was looking ahead and she said we should be, because we needed the GI Bill and we needed the protection of the -- of the military, instead of just being sent home. That's the end of it gals, go on home. So there -- there was that bitterness between the two of them and I think it cost us the program. Had you heard that?

Question: No, I hadn't. I mean, I knew that -- I knew the program itself, the way it ended was just kind of like you said, go home and --

Answer: Yeah, well, here's your hat, what's your hurry.

Question: Hmm. You know, it's interesting, 'cause Adolph and I were talking about this and this is going to kind of sound like a sexist statement, but we looked at the pictures of the -- a lot of the WASPs, and they were these beautiful women. How did they -- did they select -- I mean, were they making a very big selection for a lot of different reasons? It sounds like there were a lot of politics going on.

Answer: There was, but the selection, no. There were quite a few college graduates, just the same as with the men. My first class that I taught at Pullman, we had Ph.D.'s in that class. And they were -- they were just wonderfully interesting men. One of the men had been at the Sorbonne and had a lot of -- of just wonderful people. The same with the women. My particular friend was a graduate of Vassar. And she graduated in botany. Where I had only two years of college, she had graduate work. But she had a harder time flying than I did. But we were good friends. Great friends.

Question: What did you -- 'cause that brings up an interesting thing 'cause you had this class of a bunch of people, this new adventure. When you sat around, and I know you were probably busy a lot of times, but

Answer: Yeah.

Question: -- chit chat, what were things that the women talked about? I've heard what the men talk about. How do you pass time?

Answer: What did we talk about? Not much about home. Mostly about what we were -- what we were flying. And in the evenings, we often would walk out sort of on the desert and go out and -- pester the tarantulas in their homes.

Question: So these were people that -- that honestly had a love. 'Cause when I hear you talk about planes, I mean, it's like -- it's the same tone you get when you start talking about your horses. It was a real love affair with planes?

Answer: Oh, certainly, certainly it was. You just ate, slept and lived them. And I did for about five years. I think about five years anyhow. I did some flying when I went home after -- after the war was over but not -- not during the war. Because in the -- the Medford District was within the 50 mile limit from the Coast -- that's the Air Defense Identification Zone -- ADIZ. And you couldn't fly a civilian -- you'd have to go over to Klamath Falls, to get away from that 50-mile restriction. So I did quite a little bit of light plane flying. Nothing -- nothing big because I couldn't afford it. Poverty struck again.

Question: Like you say you had to go to Klamath Falls, not only did you need the money for the plane but now you've got to get the money to get to Klamath Falls.

Answer: Right. Sure.

Question: So what -- you did your WASP career end then?

Answer: Well, I just kind of went home. And then I went to work at a -- in an electrical store, sort of as a secretary, but in -- in my college work, I had had quite a bit of physics and it just kind of fit in -- into the electrical. I was -- I knew how to talk about it. I knew what an ohm was. (laughs)

Question: But what -- so were you there when the program ended?

Answer: Yes.

Question: So, I mean, was that -- they just said, thank you very much, have a good life or --

Answer: Yeah, that's about what it amounted to. They had a review as I recall there at Merced. And we sort of took the -- we took the review. They -- the troops had to have an excuse anyhow to practice. And had their Saturday reviews. And we WASPs were welcomed or bid farewell, I guess you'd call it. And we just kind of disappeared from there and went home.

Question: Was that hard? I mean, or did you even think about that? I mean they just kind of -- they took you in, boy they needed you, and then --

Answer: Yeah, it was a blow, it really was. It -- we -- we just didn't -- we all tried to get into something flying but -- it just wasn't possible. And so I went back -- went to work as a -- kind of a secretarial capacity. And that wasn't bad because, 50 years afterwards, I had to go

back to school then and became a legal secretary and worked in the courts here in Tacoma for 12 years. Up until retirement, and I have pretty good retirement now.

Question: But did you miss flying?

Answer: Oh, sure, just like I miss riding now. I can't ride now. But it's -- memories are great.

Question: I mean, was there -- was there thoughts -- I mean all of a sudden they open this new world up to you. Were there thoughts that you would have an opportunity to go on and become a --

Answer: We thought so. We thought that women would -- would be accepted into the -- in the airline industry as pilots. No. There -- there really wasn't. The men were coming back and the feeling was that the men had been in combat, they'd been overseas, they get first priority on any job. There was no question that -- that the men would get the first chance at any job. And that women just -- well, there was no place for them, too much. And you know, it was a number of years after that that the women were accepted into pilot training again. So there was quite a -- quite a bit of time in between.

Question: What happened to Ms. Cochran?

Answer: She had a heart -- she didn't have very good health all the way through, as I understand it. I didn't know her, but she passed away, I think, was it in the -- in the '70's, I believe in the '70's, she -- she had a heart attack. She had moved to California, Palm Springs or Desert Springs. She was still married to Philip Audlum(?). The person who talked most about her was Chuck Yeager. He was a close friend of hers. And in his book, which I have, it tells about Jacquelyn Cochran and what a crusty old gal she was.

Question: She sounds great.

Answer: Oh, she was, but my idea was stay away from her. Then you don't make any mistakes. Keep a low profile.

Question: Now did you view yourself as a civilian or as a Service person?

Answer: Service person, I think.

Question: I mean, when Veteran's Day comes and --

Answer: Yeah. Now we got our -- our veteran's status established in about 1977. And it was through Hap Arnold's son, Col. -- I can't think of his name. But, oh, Bruce, Bruce Arnold. He felt all along that the WASPs should have been militarized. And he felt that we deserved VA privileges. See, we got no -- nothing. No GI Bill, no -- not anything. And he went to Washington with a group of WASPs and they -- they just battered their way through Congress. The Merchant Marine, on the same bill that we were militarized -- we were given honorable discharges and my boss at work said I can understand it would take that long to get an honorable discharge for you. It was just all in fun, but it was good because we have the privilege of having the VA, Veteran's Administration, and that means so much to me. I don't have to go through HMO's or anything else. They -- they have a women's program, and it depends on what area you're in, how much you get. But this one out here at American Lake is splendid. They're awfully nice to me. And I -- I really do appreciate it, and I try my best to -- again, keep a low profile and do the things they tell me to.

Question: See, that's where it's interesting, because you -- you know, the perception that a lot of people have, the end of World War II, all these parades and celebrations and ticker tape --

Answer: Hm-hmm. (shakes head)

Question: -- but yet there were all these people that were forgotten. You talk about one, the Merchant Marines were forgotten and not considered, and then the WASP who -- you were doing your duty. I mean --

Answer: Most people didn't even know us. They didn't have a clue.

Question: When you would tell people you were a pilot, I'll bet you a lot of people --

Answer: Oh, out here at -- at the VA, they -- they look at me, well, what's that old thing doing here. (laughs) And they say, well, what did you do in the Service? I say, well, I was an Army pilot. And they just look at you in amazement.

Question: That's the interesting aspect that I think the history books left out. You know, they talk about this heroic, glorified stuff. But yet for, and I've heard varying numbers, anywhere from nine to 15, but for every soldier on the front, it took somewhere between nine and 15 people to get them there.

Answer: Hm-hmm, right.

Question: And had the WASPs not been doing their part, you know, that there wouldn't be pilots being trained, they wouldn't have people towing those targets, they wouldn't have people ferrying the planes around, it wouldn't have happened.

Answer: Well, the same thing -- the very same thing happened to the Russian women pilots. Did you know there were during World War II? And they logged combat time where we didn't. During, let's see, I've forgotten. Lazarski was her name. She was president of the WASP organization in about 1990. They got through the People to People program over here at -- at -- it's in Spokane -- it was one of Eisenhower's -- his administration's -- they started it for people from different countries having cultural exchanges. So they were equipped to take care of it for us. And they set up this trip to go to Moscow and when I first heard about it I said, well, I don't want to go to Russia

Answer: Why do I want to go to Russia for? And then I got to thinking, they -- they sent out another appeal because so many of the women were the same as I. Said forget it. Bad enough. Who wants to go over and see the Russian. Well, we - there were about 45 of us through this People to People program that they set up for us. We went -- flew over to Moscow. We went over on Finn Air and very nice plane. Spent several days in Moscow and we got to go to the Red Square for the celebration of the 45th anniversary of "The Great Patriotic War". And as I said, they had a review of the troops, and Gorby and I reviewed them. Gorbachev was -- was up on -- Lenin's tomb, and I was right across on the other side of the field. But it was just marvelous. We -- we got to go places there that the ordinary civilian would never go. And we met the Russian women pilots. Those who were left. And they were wonderfully interesting women. And they had identical experience to us -- as we did. The resentment of people who were thinking only men can fly. And they got combat time. They were called the Night Witches. There's a book about the Night Witches. They were called that by the Germans who were kept awake in the trenches at night because the

women would go and bomb the trenches in their little bi-planes. But, oh, it was so interesting. Then we went to Kiev, and that's as far east as the Germans got during World War II. We went to museums, we went to the Air Force Academy. We were lectured by one of the Russian cosmonauts who had been in space for a year and a half. Oh, it was -- the only trouble was, everything had to be translated, and we weren't used to translators. So things kind of got lost. For instance, we went -- in Kiev we went to the Antinov Aviation Works where they do the engineering for the aeroflot planes. And we were in this auditorium and there was a panel of men sitting down in front of us. And it was all very kind of cut and dried. They -- they looked very ill at ease until one of them said, were any of you women pilots? And we all said yes. And they said, well, did you fly military planes? We all did. And that just broke the ice. One of the old boys said -- and he had a big handlebar mustache. And he said, if I had known I was going to be speaking in front of a group of women pilots, I would have waxed my mustache. Another one said I'm not going to go home and tell my wife that I was talking to some American women pilots. And we -- we had a good time then. Then they just let their hair down and told us lots of stories.

Question: It's that common bond and --

Answer: Oh, yes, but at first they were very ill at ease. They -- you could just tell, they thought what are we doing wasting our time with a bunch of women. (laughs)

Question: 'Cause I imagine, as I said, listen to you talk and your passion for the planes, that when you sit down next to a pilot from World War II or whatever, but we'll say World War II, that all of a sudden you mention something and you have the terminology and you can look at each other and --

Answer: Well, that's the way it was with this EAA group over here. Tuesday evening, one of them said well, I was in tow targets. He said I was a sergeant, but I'd reel in the target. And we -- we just had so much in common with -- with each other.

Answer: Oh, another thing. The -- some of those men had flown, course they were ex-pilots or maybe still were -- they had flown to Canada and the women had flown and some of our group had flown the planes up to Canada and then the Russians came down and picked them up. But they had to go up to Canada and across. Something to do with lend-lease, I'm not sure. Protocol.

Question: Exactly, protocol.

Answer: Yeah. When we were in -- in Moscow, we got to go to the Bob Hope show. He was filming it there at the American Embassy, you know for his Christmas programs.

Question: His Christmas -- yeah.

Answer: Well, that was an eye-opener. He has to know what his -- his cue cards -- be able to read them, and he was very upset because he was looking into the sun and couldn't see them. And he was getting madder by the minute. (laughs) But the -- the American ambassador was Jack Matlock at that time, and I was standing sort of behind him. I didn't know who he was but he turned around and spoke to us and shook hands. And he said are you women -- have you been invited to the Spousal House to the reception for Bob Hope? And we said no, we hadn't heard anything. And he said, well you are. And he motioned to a couple of the Marines, oh, handsome young Marines. And he said escort these ladies to the reception. And we had a wonderful time talking to -- I didn't -- I never have cared for Bob Hope. Not particularly. I guess he -- he's great, but I sat next to his wife, Dolores, and she is

a lovely person. How she's put up with him all these years, I don't know. But we -- we had a good time.