

 **NATIONAL MUSEUM**
OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE®
Wings & Things Guest Lecture Series

Early Women Pilots in World War II in the Ferrying Division

One of only 25 women who qualified as pilots for the original Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, Florene Miller Watson discusses her experiences before, during and after World War II.

So I am delighted to be here. And it certainly is an honor to get to participate and to be a speaker and to take your time and for me to be up here uh taking from you. And I hope that, what we have the little information to cover will be of some degree of, interest to you. So, before I get started. Uh, you know that I, as what she had said, I am a World II “has-been”. And, you know, if – I’m going to tell you how old I am before I get started, because if I don’t, you’re going to spend half of the time with your fuzzy math trying to figure it out.

[Laughter]

And I know how we think, you know. And so, I’ll tell you that on, Pearl Harbor Day, which is just a few days away, December 7th, I will be 85 years old. So –

[Applause]

So, you might live that long yourself, who knows. So, be careful. You might be there too. But, while I’m thinking, uh I have no, uh agenda you might say exactly how to go. I’ve got to fill it in as, as I go. As far as that goes, I usually have an information overload, so it’s a matter of my picking out which way to go, when I want to go. The first thing that usually people will ask about: Is my, first impression about wanting to fly an airplane. Which back in the World War II time was a little more than usual for a girl to be doing any flying at all on their own.

Now the first time that I flew in an airplane I was eight years old. All right, as, at my age of eight years old, that was like in 1928 and I had never, seen an airplane before then. But I lived in a small oil town in, in Texas in Lincoln County area, close to San Angelo and, the airplane came around. I’m sure it must have been a World War I pilot with his bi-plane airplane open cockpit, of course. And it comes around a little town and he buzzes around, and bumps on his throttle, you know, “Burb, burb, burb.” And everybody thought: “Wow! What’s that? Something in the air.” In those days there was nothing in the air around. You never saw an airplane, never heard an airplane. And at eight years old, now keep in mind we didn’t have television, and we – and I didn’t have any, National Geographic magazines or anything to show me anything really about an airplane. And I never thought about an airplane back in, as my girls say, “Back in the olden days, Mother.”

It’s true. I didn’t know anything about airplanes. So the, plane would fly around and wiggle its wings when it got through and take off in a direction. Now, that was supposed to tell the observer that he’s going to land out there somewhere. If he finds a little pea patch where he

thinks he can land and you're supposed to come out and buy a ticket and help him pay for his gas. So my father came after me. My father was a jeweler. Had several jewelry stores in towns around us in Reagan County, in Big Lake and, he came after me and said, "Let's go find the airplane." "Oh, yes of course."

So we go, sure enough, we find the airplane. And my father buys me a ticket. And I crawl in. A little eight year old, crawling up in this airplane. Get in the cockpit. And we take off. And I remember taking off and looking up. I had never seen anything – I knew what it was supposed to look like up from the ground. And I saw all the horizon around here. Ooh, the world just looked so big from up here. I was so impressed and a little kid hanging hair blowing and everything. And next thing, it occurred to me, "What am I doing up here in this element? God made this for birds. He didn't make it for me. What am I doing up here?" And, as I looked around, "What kind of a contraption am I in anyway." I didn't know what an airplane was. But you can see how, revealing all of this was to me and how excited I was about it.

Now to think about it: Children today, they see everything way down here and nothing is anything that would be exhilarating. I don't think any of them would ever get the thrill that I got never having seen anything like that or even know what it was about. And so, my father, not being a pilot himself, he'd buy himself a ticket and, came down and he thought it was great too. And we'd go leave the area hand-in-hand giggling, and just thinking: "Oh, wasn't that the greatest thing!"

So I had two brothers, two years older, two years younger. And my father would go get the boys. Back through the years it's happened a few time where I got out of high school and, my father after me by myself. And that was oh, such a special time for me. And, and made a real excitement out of airplanes and getting to go in airplanes. Now, as old as I am, keep in mind – I doubt that there very many of you are as old, and certainly not much older than I. The new things that I have seen, and you have seen, as long as you have lived. All of the technology and everything as this has gone up.

And it's really appalling to me the things that God has revealed to us in today's time. Say from 1900 on up to where we are right now. God has revealed all kinds of things to mankind that he never revealed in thousands of years back here. We are a privileged group to have seen the technology and everything that has been revealed to us. One of the manger, major things was the airplane with the Wright Brothers and a whole new concept. Look where we've come from there. Look at the technology. Here we have, have television. Whoever heard of anything like the television? And there are some scriptures in the bible that you – without knowing about television, you can't figure it out. But now that we got television, "I know what that means. We have television for that."

Now we've got satellites. And I'm sure that God has given us a lot of this to get his message out to the world. And, then, we have from the satellites and everything, we have a lot of other, we can't go into all the many things that we do have. Now, children today, seeing television and, this aspect of, you know, like no big deal, we expect it. And so, they, they hear say, you know, a cell phone now can take pictures. Well, no big deal to them. But look, that is a big deal.

And, and look at other things that we've had. Look at all – we've had Kleenex and wax paper and, foil, and everything else. All these little things that we have had that we wouldn't have had before with the technology that we have.

Now, from the time that I flew the airplane, that many years ago. Not even have any idea that there was anything like that existed. I have come through the flying years and all the other years that I have lived. And guess what the end that – has? I got to get in a real space shuttle. Uh, two weeks ago when the Discovery went up, I got to sit in the pilot's seat of the Atlantis Space Shuttle before real space shuttle. Now, think how far that was from way back from here and getting into the space. Look how far we have come that God has revealed and let man know and have all of this kind of thing.

So, we now are going to think about going back now to, the time frame by World War II. Get back to this. So I have been asked why, how do we, how'd you ever start to fly in an airplane. Why did you want to do that? Well, being, knowing what I did about, flight, in my second year of Baylor University, my father called me and said, "Guess what? I have bought our family a Silver Luscum airplane." I said, "No! A silver – a, an airplane and all!" Is certainly one of the shiny silver ones in that day. That was a real, shiny little egg to have. And so, I, I thought: I want to go home. I was about in the middle of the spring semester, I want to go home and fly the airplane. But I got things – this is an airplane I just know. And I'd always made straight A's. I thought I was probably going to flunk out then. But sure – sure enough I didn't. I graduated with honors eventually. But, I got, the summer came up and I got to go home and start flying the airplane.

So then my two brothers and I, my father and I, all four of us learned to fly that airplane at the same time. Now, we had a little schedule. Like in the ball – who's on first, who's on second, and who gets it now? And everything? And so I thought, Well, there, the arrow on the engine I know never did get closed – because we had the thing up all the time. And so one day, the, uh local newspaper came out and here was my father's picture on it. And my brothers and I were looking at the paper. They had interviewed my father. And they had asked him, "Whatever possessed you, Mr. Moore, to buy an airplane?" Which was unusual. This was, was 1939 and 40 era there. Unusual for a family to have an airplane.

And, they said, "Why did you buy it?" And my brothers and I thought, "Oh! Wonder why he did buy it?" We never thought why he bought it. We didn't care, we had it. Who cares why he bought it. You know. So it never crossed our mind why. And guess what his answer was? Because we were reading like crazy. His answer was: "I think America is going to get in the war." Now, he'd been watching Hitler. This is 1940, and, he said, "I think America is going to get in the war and I want my children to be able to contribute to the war effort." And we said, "Thanks a lot Dad!" He's going to get his three military aged kids prepared to be able to contribute. And we thought, "Wow! Whoever thought of a war."

Now I've had two years of college. Nobody told me a war was going to come up. After all, I'd learned in high school that, there was a World War I. And we were the winners, by golly! And, we weren't going to mess around with that world bit anymore. And so, I had the idea, you know, we were through, so I go to college. Nobody told me we were getting ready for a war. So this was big news, uh, I guess. So we continued going on outside, and so, we all get our private

pilot's license. We get our, our commercial license. And then I go on and get licenses in all the ground school subjects. Uh, Teaching in the ground school of science. Then I work on my instructor rating in the air. So I get my instructor rating in the air.

So then I started teaching some classes. Now in case that you didn't even know that our taxpayer was paying for different aviation classes in those days, we were as taxpayers paying for it. We as a nation were not really ready for the war, now we knew that. But ahead of time, as far back as 1940 and '41, someone in D.C. was thinking. And knowing particularly the ferrying division was behind this idea. That they wanted, it takes too long to train a pilot. America didn't have enough pilots. So they gave this class idea to the general public of civilian men. And they told all civilian men in the area with a wide range, probably 19 year, maybe to even 35 – a long range here: Any man, no matter what profession he was in, that he could get free ground school classes. Just come out to the airport and you'll get ground school classes. And if you are one of 10 men in a class of 50 students, and you are in the top ten of the paper grade that you make in the classroom, you will get a private pilot license paid for by the taxpayer.

So the, the civilian man that could get a private pilot license and not have to pay anything for it, he got one of the scholarships. And so, as I look back on it, in the meantime we had moved to Odessa, Texas. So this flying takes place in Odessa, Texas, where my father moved and he had jewelry stores in several towns around Odessa. Uh, so, we all got into that and, uh got our license and everything. And going back to the class now, I had three classes: One morning, one afternoon and one night. And as I look back on it, where were all these men came from. But there were gobs of them there. But, guess what I got out of one of those classes? A husband!

[Laughter.]

I tell you what, he had already had six years of college. Couple of engineering degrees before I ever met him, working for Phillips Petroleum. And so I taught him how to fly. But it took me three years to land him.

[Laughter.]

Then the war came along and he did his thing and I did mine and we got together three years later. And so not only three years later we got together, but guess how long we've been together? 61 years. [Applause.] You think he'd be tired by this time and leave home, wouldn't you? But I told him the other day, I said, "Honey, I'll never leave you, I'll just never leave you. Just keep paying the bills, paying the bills." And no girls are going to leave you then. And so, he is at home now. He's like 89 years old. So I'm so happy – I always tell him, "I'm so glad I know someone older than I am." And so he said, "Yeah, you would." So, anyway, uh he – neither of us have been sick in bed that length of time. We've never taken a prescription yet either. So, anyway, we've been – I've been working on him, keeping him healthy. So he, he's still hanging in there just fine.

So, let's go, back now and think about what my father said about the war. And, we said, "Daddy! This just can't be a war, don't tell us that." Anytime he predicted anything he was always right. And we said, "Oh, no don't be right here at this time." He said, "No, I think so." Do you know, he never did get to know that the Japanese jumped on us on Pearl Harbor. 'Cause

he and my older brother were killed in our family airplane in the mountains of New Mexico. And I was there at the scene of the crash with my father when he died a few hours later and my brother killed instantly.

Now, for the war effort, the government had already started drafting people. And my older brother who was killed, although he was a pilot he was drafted, but in the medical corps. Now that suited his personality just fine. He was home on leave, killed in his uniform. So my father did get one into the military. So this left my younger brother and me, and we as a family had said four kids, had a sister too young to fly. So the parents and the four kids, we sat around the dinner table many times saying, "What are we going to think about if one of us gets killed?" Because it wasn't that safe in those days really and we decided that we thought we knew enough about scripture to know that God deals with each one of us individually and not corporately. So what would happen to one of us would not necessarily increase the chances of that same thing happening to another member of the family.

And, so when this happened my brother and I got together and we said, "Do we really believe that or don't we?" "Put up or shut up." So we were both in the air in about a week's time. Scared out of our wits of course, but he went on to volunteer for the military and he taught cadet pilots how to fly for the military. And then I came along and did my thing for the military. And guess what? My mother, mind you, my father had never tagged her for anything, but when I was stationed at Love Field in Dallas, I went there as the commanding officer of the girls that were in the ferrying division, transferred there first. Mother came to Dallas, went to Love Field and learned how to teach instrument training in the simulator, the link trainer, on the ground. And when I had instrument training in the air, she was my teacher on the ground.

And of course, there weren't as many girls there, so she had more men. All the men were her students more than the girls – but I'm telling you: Uh, she and I fought like cats and dogs. She had been in my classes before, but, stayed up nights dreaming up problems for me to solve. She was determined to crash and burn me and I was determined she wasn't going to do it.

And so we, we fought like everything. But sure enough, I no doubt got better link training than anybody got because she worked so hard trying to mess me up. So, my father then did get his three kids into the military, and his wife into the military. Now, my younger sister was very expert in secretarial stuff and all of that. And she worked for lawyers who worked for the government. So that's the closest she got, but she was too young to get into the uh flying part.

Well, let's think now what the situation was about that time. I, we needed talent in the ferrying division particularly was hard up for pilots and needed more than they had. And so they sent out an edict to all of the civilians in the nation for the men and say, "Uh, if you have as many hours as 250 and the commercial license and the horsepower rating, march yourself up here to Wilmington, Delaware and take a bunch of military tests and if you pass it, and if you want to volunteer, we'll let you be a pilot for us." 250 hours. So the nation got desperate enough that guess what? They started looking for girls, anybody who could fly an airplane, even a girl. So, we were almost unheard of "Those girls." So they sent out an edict, the ferrying division did and said, "Girls, you've twice the qualifications that a man does. We might look at you." So you can see what they thought about girls at this time.

The men needed 250 hours of flying time. The girls they wanted us to have 500. So, and a commercial license and a horse power rating. So, I qualified. And so, I went to Wilmington, Delaware, my – at my own expense, of course, to take the test and see if I could pass and to volunteer. And, I was girl number 12. And we finally got 25 uh girls. And I think we had maybe three more that dropped out or didn't quite get in. But 25 is the units that we usually worked with. And, we uh came to Wilmington, Delaware and took our test and everything.

Now, you could see when we girls got to, it took us about three months to find the 25 of us. When we average our time, we average 1,100 hours each. And so this, as I look back on it even then, it was really good that they got our qualifications up high because that gave us enough experience that we had already pulled off our dumb stunts at home. And so we weren't pulling dumb stunts when we got in front of the men. So, since all of us had just been flying in a man's world, I had, it was a very easy transition to go to the military, it's just more of the same thing, more guys. And I was quite comfortable with it and didn't feel, as I say, too much of a transition. But interestingly enough, they let the men take all their exams and everything on the big runways at the Wilmington, at the airport. But when they wanted to test the girls, and we had to do a fair amount of flying, they sent us about 10 miles out of town and gave us a grass field that from the air looked just like a postage stamp. All grass, no runway. Just grass field, but surrounded with trees. You know up there they've got trees everywhere.

And so the trees were all the way around it. And so you had to come in whatever the wind direction was. It didn't really matter because you had to come over the high trees, I say, to get down and it was so short that, not to hit the trees on the end, you had to do a little bit, quite a bit of maneuvering. And to try to stop, and if you couldn't really see that you were not going to be able to stop, we'd purposely ground loop it. You slam on one brake and jerk around like this. And if you get too wild with it, you'll drag a wing and crash the plane. None of us, we did, we did our uh ground loops over and over and none of us drug a wing. But we didn't hit any trees either. And, when you'd come over the trees, those of you who are pilots, especially in a small airplane, you can slit an airplane. Come over the trees and if you do your normal descent, you're way down here in the middle of that field before you can ever touch down and you're going to hit the tree.

So you come back up here and some of us knew how to slip an airplane and you -- would show the others how to do it. But you could get over the trees and then you cross controls and throw the wing up like your nose up, and the – you sink down real fast on a wing. But then you straighten out right before you hit the ground. And so that gets you – lose your altitude real fast over the trees so that you can stop down at the other end. Now the worst thing that happened to us, there was one girl, thought that she was going to stop and didn't have to ground loop and sure enough, she stopped a little too fast and the airplane went up on its nose. And she broke a propeller. That's the worst thing that we did. Now, as I look back, if we hadn't been as experienced as we were, we would have turn up everything in sight nearly. And, the men accepted us just fine.

Another thing, you – we had all been flying with men and I say, I was comfortable. And you know how the – we girls had learned how to handle ourselves around men. And this one thing that, I learned early on, as a little kid: I had a number of uncles and of course, my two brothers and, and uh father, and I learned very early that you men have a very sensitive ego.

[Laughter.]

And if we girls are smart, we don't mess with it. [Laughter.] And I learned how not to mess with a guy's ego. Uh, but if you know, that's never a negative as far as I was concerned that you guys have an ego. God made you that way. And I think you're a lot more productive because you do have that. So, uh keep, keep your ego and, and put your standards up high that you know you can do something. And, you'll be blessed for it as long as you don't put your foot down on some of us see, at the same time. So, and I, I am not a militant feminist at all. But I think it's great that girls have had opportunities that we have had that we could show, that we could do something. And so, that part of it, uh has been really to our advantage.

Now, let's think about, how it was to, uh be flying in the ferrying division. Maybe before I get into this. The 25 of us were divided in four groups and, as I said, I was sent to Dallas to be the commanding officer of the group that started there. We had one in Delaware that stayed and one in Detroit, Romulus, right there. Uh, by Detroit, and one in Long Beach, California, so we had four places in the ferrying division. In the meantime while we were flying for oh, 10 months or 12, I don't remember how long, but pushing a year's time, not quite a year. While we were flying just the 25 of us, there, there was a training school that was training girls who were training to be a military pilot. And they had to have at least 35 hours to start into the training school. I don't think that was the very end maybe they didn't have to have that.

But anyway, the, training school when the men graduated they had 210 hours when they graduated. And when the girls graduated, they had 210 hours. So there was very good equal, education that they go, gave both the girls and the men. The ferrying division would pick out, girls, they probably took maybe 20% of all the graduates and the rest of them went to the training command which had training bases all over the nation and a few girls would go to each base and whatever flying activities they had at that base they would utilize the girls to the best advantage what they had there. And so the girls in the ferrying division, our job was to take airplanes after they were built to places in the United states where they were needed. Mostly to probably training schools where they were, were needed. And so sometimes we went to the factory to pick up the airplane and sometimes the factory pilot would bring it to the base, We'd pick it up there and take it wherever it was needed. So as time went on, in the ferrying division was the, best division, I guess you'd say, to see different kinds of airplanes.

It was the only, branch of the service that was has, was obligated to move all different kinds of airplanes that the Army Air Corps, as it's called at that time, had. And so, I got to see every kind of different airplane. Wherever I happened to be, right place, right time and before I got through and they sent us all home, at the end, I had gotten to fly every kind of training airplane and every kind of fighter airplane and bomber: Twin engine, four engine and cargo. So there was really nothing in there that I, that I missed, primarily because I was in the ferrying division and I was sometimes at different places in it so I got exposed to the different airplanes.

Now, I never asked to fly anything. But they would come to me and say, "We think you're ready to fly to so-and-so." And, and my reaction would be: "Uh-uh. I bet that's going to eat my lunch. Ooh." So, I'd, I'd kind of half get scared. But I would thrilled with it. "Yes, sir. Yes, sir." Glad to do it. And I really was thrilled to do it. But at the same time, you kind of get a start, "Oh, my gosh am I going to have to handle that one?" And – then on our flights, many

times you would leave the base and, deliver an airplane and they'd say, "Well, can you fly so-and-so?" "Well, yeah. Checked out in that." "Well, that so-and-so needs to go over here." So you would get assigned another kind, get out of one kind, get in another kind and take it over here. If they had something that needed to be moved and you were qualified to fly it, they may give that to you and you'd go over here with it sometimes.

When you ran out of places that they had assigned to you, the first thing you were supposed to do is to get the first, means of transportation home. Most of the time it was airliners. And other times you could if there was a military plane going where you were going. I tried that a few times and I did not like that. Why? I wanted to kill me. I didn't want some of those pilots out killing me. They had less times and they scared the daylights out of me. I rode to Florida at one time from Clear to New York in a B25 with a wild pilot who decided he was going to fly treetop all the way, you know. And I thought I was up in the cockpit area and I thought, "If he's going to kill me. I might as well enjoy this flight. Cause there's not a thing I can do to help him from killing me." So I went down in the nose and I'm telling you, I got the best view you ever saw. I sat down in the nose. "Aaah." You know, I was scared. I thought, I'd be just as dead down here as I would up in the cockpit, so. And so, there was dumb times like that that I hooked a ride with the military and I decided, uh-uh that's not smart. So, we'll go with the airliner. But the airliners we had a card that said that we could dump anybody on the airliner, and we did. In other words we had priority.

Uh, I think, I don't think we could not, we could not bump, everybody was a priority in those days. That we couldn't bump a senator. I think that was our, our, our legal thing. And you couldn't do that, but you could bump anybody else. And I remember bumping some, you know, with birds up here, bird colonels and stuff. And so I learned very fast like when the airplane came in that I was going to bump somebody. I'd go hide behind the door until they got off and rant and raved and then I would sneak out right fast while they weren't looking and jump on the airplane. They didn't know that I was the one who was doing that. And I don't blame them. 3:30 in the morning? I, I, dumped a bird colonel in Phoenix one time. I thought, "That's not too smart for him to know who I am." So, anyway, those were kind of the, uh wild times.

Now, let's think how different that was then than it is now and why. So when, when I took off with the others, what I had to get, you had to go from A to B. So, what kind of good help did I have for navigating. I had an outdated map and we weren't ready for the war until all of our maps were not where you could identify on paper what you saw here on, on the ground. I have an outdated map sometimes is scary because you'd know your off course because so-and-so was on the map wasn't there, it was there, it wasn't on the map, you know. And so, anyway the map and I had a giggly compass up here. And you know every time the airplane would go, the old compass would wriggle around. You couldn't make that thing stay still like it ought to. Gosh! The first time I ever got a gyro I was oh, hallelujah. So, anyway, the old giggly compass and my wristwatch. Now, those were my great navigation aids.

Now, what do they have now? All kinds of good stuff. We didn't have radar. We didn't have satellites. We didn't have anything to help us like you have now. Now the pilots today, the lest of their worries is whether or not they can find B when they take off from A if they decide that's where they want to go. They're not worried about finding it. And that was a big deal that walked that walked that you were worrying about to try to find where you were going. Weather

come up and the engines act up and you didn't know where you were. Next thing you know you'd have to go to the bathroom and you couldn't. And so, there were a lot of things to worry about, especially mostly to find where you were going.

Now today we've got everything like, you know what a GPS is. You've got them in the cars you've got them in your hand. And tells you exactly where you are. You can find your girlfriend's house in Chicago in the residential area and go right to it. It's how accurate it is from satellite and everything. The GPS. I'm telling you, I'd have killed for one of those. If I'd have any opportunities, I'd never heard of such a thing. So finding where you were going was one big issue. Now, another thing that's, what is the aspects of this. One thing to think about in, in doing, doing the navigating was the – sometimes I didn't even have a radio. Well, what difference does that make? Well, it makes a little difference when you get to a traffic area around where you want to land. But, other than, than that, when you're out, out on the road, it didn't really do you any good. Why? Because the ground didn't know where you were any more than you knew where you were. Nobody could help you.

And so, what you didn't have, and another thing, we didn't have oxygen. These, these airplanes were not pressurized and rarely did you ever have anything like an oxygen mask or something to use because, when you did not have oxygen, you'd have to stand at 10,000 feet and below. Well, that meant that you couldn't get up and go over weather and see a little cracker hole here and everything, you couldn't do that. Sometimes you decided you were in such a bad shape, we didn't have good weather reports either; that you'd get in bad shape and you'd already gone past your point of no return and couldn't go back and it was just as bad weather behind you as it was in front of you anyway. And you'd see a hole or a crack and think, "Well, I believe I can go up through here." And so you'd take up and go up like I did one time. Stayed up longer. I knew better, but you get in a bind you can't do any differently up there no, with no oxygen. Pretty soon you go to sleep. And so I woke up and I was er, down like this. Ya! I mean I woke up in a hurry. See, soon as I got enough oxygen to see where I was. So, the things that would be so important to us at that time frame is not of concern to anybody now particularly. They can find where they're going and have the security and not have to even think about it. Say, "This is where I want to go," and you've got all the equipment and everything to tell you exactly where you want to go. And you worry with other things: Engines and that kind of thing.

So, flying was, just a little bit different in those days. Now one time I was going along and, heard a guy call in to the radio and he says, "I don't know where I am. I just don't know where I am." And the ground station: "Oh. We wish we could help you." And so, and I'm hearing this of course. And so I look around everywhere and I'm the only bug in the sky. And I don't see him anywhere. And so I – time goes on, and he calls in again. And he says, "I'm running out of gas. I'm just running out of gas. And I still don't know where I am." "Oh, we do wish we could help you." And I keep looking and looking. I never see the guy. No telling where or what direction he was going. But, I thought, well, I'll hear from him again, just wait. Why do you think I was so certain I'd hear from him again. Who always wins the little tete a tete, Mr. Gravity always wins. So I knew he'd be coming down. He said he was out of gas almost. So I thought, "I'll hear from him again." So I was very anxiously waiting.

And sure enough, he calls in and he says, "I'm going down. I'm going down. I'm just going down." So I ner did know what happened to that guy. I don't know if he was going the opposite

direction I was going or what. And I never, I never heard from him, I never saw. Because you don't know. He'd be way over here. They might have said that, "We didn't have as good communication." We didn't have television and all that kind of thing to give you the latest of the afternoon for the day. You see, there wasn't any such thing as that. So there was no way I could really keep up with him or anybody to know where he was.

So you can see the kind of uncertainty you might say that we had at that time. Now, we, did not, uh as you can see how we were trying to go, and we was watching everything. And when you're flying the fast airplanes, as I was, pretty soon only the fast, you go through all the others and pretty soon they keep building more fast ones and, they need, like your fighters need to be sent overseas and, and, and no fighters were flown over. They don't have the gas for that. So we took 'em to the ships. Uh, at, mostly at Newark area where they, put them on the ships.

Now, we girls did not fly overseas. There were very few, handfuls of girls that would be qualified for that in the first place. And secondly, we were not allowed, because we were girls. I didn't take offense to that at all. I would have been one of them who neither been able to go. Uh, but, I, was not offended at all. I thought, "What's the big deal?" Ground's just as hard over here. I'm going to get lost just as fast over here. The engine's going quit me and I'm going to crash and burn over here just as fast as I would if I went over there. So what are they keeping me from doing? Not anything. As big a risk one place or another. And so, as I say, I'm not a militant feminist. They didn't have to do that for me and I didn't think the men wanted to go over there anyway. They didn't have accommodations and all that kind of thing for us. So, I didn't feel I had to prove anything as anybody.

But now in the States, if you're flying the fast airplanes as one of those days, we did not have alternative airports. So there were very few airports. And the alternative ones were usually short, short runways. So, if you had a plane that needed a longer runway, there were very few of those in the direction you wanted to be going. But most of them are in the city. And so the cities though were the ones that had the nicest hotels and they had live music and dining and dancing downstairs. And so being, uh at the airport at the end of the day, a day that had transportation. You know if you come, land in the, usually they'd come out in a jeep or something and pick you up. You didn't have to walk into the building and all.

Now, we'd go to the big hotels and the dining and dancing. There was only, I never did see another girl out on the road. I think one other time I did when she was in trouble and I happened to go to El Paso and helped her with her troubles. But, where do you think her trouble was? She had to go to the bathroom. She ruined her clothes, sat in the airplane. Waited in a hot summer day for me to show up and so help me, I had a clean pair of, of the uniform slacks I gave to her. Now, they take care of that kind of thing today. But you can see the worries, that, if we weren't worried about crashing an airplane, we were worried about having to go to the bathroom, you know, on a long flight.

But, anyway, when we would go out in the evenings, I'd always be with four, five, six men and I'd be the only, only female in the hotels and with the dining and dancing. And I always wanted to turn into a girl. Now, I wore a uniform, not this one. We 25 had a different uniform and, incidentally there are some pictures up here of some of my, uh photographs that, all the military ones were sneaked out the photography room by, the guys that stole them for me. We were not

allowed to have cameras. So I never took a picture. These are all military pictures the ones that are of World War II up here. But they're up here. There is a, a, uh biographical piece of paper over here that you're free to, to pick up if you want it. But, anyway, I was with these guys and, of course, we were in uniform. The original group of us had the, the same uniform, and so when some of the girls came out of the training school, the first ones that came into the ferrying division, our name was WAFS and we're WASP today. We were Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron. Now, notice we were auxiliary group. We were in the ferrying division only and we were a squadron, a small group.

So you see that name didn't fit everybody when they started coming out of the training school to us. That's when they changed the name to Women's Air Force Service Pilots. So, that the first group of us had a uniform. We wanted to get that same uniform for some of the girls that came out to us first. We'd go back to the tailor in Delaware and say, "We want some more uniforms like this." And he just laughed at us. He said I used a remnant piece of fabric for y'all. I don't have anymore." And so we never did get another – no one but the original ones ever got a uniform like some of those that you'll see. And then what we have on now is representative of what all of us, when we became WASPS together, it's the, more of the look that, that we had at that time.

Back to the hotels now. Uh, I wanted to turn into a girl when night time came. I wanted to get out of uniform. I wanted to be with the guys in this nice setting in the hotel. But how're you going to do, if you are in a fighter? Now, we learned early on if you leave in, in a twin engine, airplane, leave the base. You can take any kind of worldly goods that you want in there. But you go deliver that over here and they say, "Can you fly this fighter" – "Yes." "Well, take this fighter some other place." What do you do with your worldly goods that you can't get in your fighter? Pretty soon, take you a month or more to get that thing back home to your base. So you learn not to leave home with anything that you can't get inside a fighter. So, I had, if I wanted to turn into a girl, I thought, how am I going to do that? Uh, I had a little canvas bag about that tall and about this wide and about 4" cardboard on the bottom. Zipper on the top. Now, I could get that and squeeze it down on the floor in a little crack in between the metal seat and the metal wall on the right hand inside. Now, over here, had too much stuff you had to use. I could scoot that down on the floor. And that's my worldly goods. If that room wasn't enough for me, if I wanted to turn into a girl. So in a P51, which I flew probably more than the rest of them, I got the right kind of screwdriver. Crawled out on the wing. Opened the ammunition box – [laughter] – and I could get a pair of high heels in there.

[Laughter.]

Lock that thing down. Crawl out over here, and I had a dress that's been all over this nation. In all the hotels. It was black, white, black, with lightweight wool short sleeves. Then it had a silver nail head pattern all up here. We gussied up in those days too. All these little nail heads up here. And down on the bottom, had all the little pattern of nail heads. And then all over the fabric, just sprinkled all over were little shiny nail heads. And so I could roll that thing up. Stick it out here in the ammunition box and when I got to the hotel, hang it up in the bathroom, turn the hot water on, shut the door and steam press that little bugger.

[Laughter.]

Then I could march downstairs with all of the guys and turn into a girl for a few hours. Then, then, the next morning I'd be back in uniform and sailing off again somewhere. Now, as we would sit around, that night, ironically from the very first, when we were in Delaware, even I got tagged to always be the navigator. And the reputation got, out through all of the men and everything else, as time went on, that I was a good navigator. Well, since that was the skill that you really wanted and it got more scared in not having, I said, I, I told the guys, "The only reason that if I am a decent navigator, the only reason is that I am a big chicken. And I take [Indiscernible 00:50:21]. Scared not to." And so the guys, as we'd sit around at night, would ask each other, "Now, we'll, which way are you going?" "Which way you're going?" "Well, I'm going this way." "Ah! I am too. I am too. I'm going that way. "We're going to follow you. We're going to follow you." And I said, "I don't care if you guys follow me." But I said, but don't be a dodo and sit on your map. When I get in trouble, I need your help." One guy who kind of knew me really well, said, "Oh, guys. Don't believe a thing she has to say. But you just watch her. When she gets out her comb and her lipstick, we're getting close to base."

[Laughter.]

And that's the truth. I would say they'd be following me and I'd say, "Okay. Guys, back off. Back off. Give me a little room." And I'd be getting down in here and trying to find my lipstick and my comb and everything. Flying it with my knees. And I'd be all over the sky, you know. They'd be backing off over here. Pretty soon I'd say, "Okay guys." And they'd go flying back in again. We'd take off and go. So, if you're the leader, you have all the, the blame and also all the authority also, you have. And, I'll have to, I tell you, I don't know how my time is going. Somebody, somebody tell me if I'm supposed to quit. Here, now see, I don't have a leader. Nobody's telling me anything. I don't – I don't know what time it is 'cause I've got information overload. We could go on and on here. And I forgot just exactly what part I was thinking about telling you.

Oh, let's see. Let's go back. I was thinking of that navigating. When the guys would get out of the training crew, like they had 210 hours and they'd get in the ferrying division, took a certain small percentage of them and they really didn't like to get the graduates because why? Because you had to fly all over the country and they weren't quite ready for it. So, I got assigned many times to take four or five men on their first flights across the nation when they got out of school and from the ferrying division. That the operations officer would always call me ahead of time and say, "We're on orders now to take some men on their first flight." He said, "I'm going to leave them over here first before I call them in." So I'd go over to the operations first, get behind the counter and behind the door and, and peek. He'd call the men in. And this was purposely. The guys would start looking at their, their orders, and they'd say, "Oh, golly look, we get to go to Florida" or wherever it was. "Oh, yeah, you know". On some of their first flights and, "Oh! Look. We get to fly so and so." Oh, you know, it was really getting good. They were getting so excited. And pretty soon, one of they'd say, "Well, who's going to be the flight leader?" And they'd look up at the top of their orders and there would be my name.

"That's a girl!" They'd say to the operations officer. And the officer would say, "Yes, sir. That is a girl." "Well, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And I'd be watching. And the guy who mouthed off the hardest, I'd have him picked out. And the other guy who mouthed off the next hardest

about a crazy girl had to go with and everything and why did they, was that done to them to have to go with a girl first time and all that stuff. So I'd have him picked out.

So if you're the flight leaders, I say you have a responsibility but you also have the authority. And so I'd say, "Well, oh, Bill," the loud mouth. "Would you like to lead the first leg of the flight out?" "Oh, yes, yes, surely would." And so I'd say, "Okay. You go ahead and take off. I'll bring up the rear." And I'd name, "Bill, you go first, and Joe next, so-and-so." So we'd all go off and I'd bring up the rear. So we'd get out on the flight. And I'm telling you by the first hour or hour and 15 minutes, I'm telling you, it's getting off course. Supposed to go here and here we're edging out over here.

Well, after about an hour and 15 minutes, or something like that. I would let him go just as far as I thought I had sense enough to recover. Now, keep in mind, I'm out here too, you know. I gotta take care of me. So I can't let him go so far that I don't, I figure that I can chart a course back over here somewhere and find him. And so by the time that I think it's time for me to take over, by this time he knows he's lost and he's all over the sky and he's looking and he's – you know, he's just around, his airplane's going like this. And I'd call and I'd say, "Uh, Bill, would – are you getting tired? I'd be glad to take over if you like." "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah that'd be fine, that's fine." So I'd say, "Okay."

And so I would pull up in front of him and I would purposely keep his wrong heading for at least 10, 15 minutes or so. And we're already off course. And I'd just keep going off course that much longer on his, his heading. And then, just as dramatically as I knew how to do it, I'd lay that thing over and 'rum,' go right back over and take a whole another course. And by that time we're a long way off. And always hoped I had sense enough to find it myself. And so we'd get, get to the next station and in the office, all the guys would be walking around and looking. Waiting for me just to absolutely chew his ears off. And I was just la ti da you know, and not do a thing. And the guys would get nervous and pretty soon one of them would come up to me, not old Bill, but the others would come and say, "We were off course a lot, weren't we?" And I'd say, "Oh, no big deal guys, no big deal we got here didn't we? This is the destination. So let's don't sweat it lets don't sweat it you know, let it go."

Well, the next time we took off, I'd say, "Oh, Joe," the next bad mouth. "How about – Would you like to lead the next leg of the flight out?" "Well, okay." He wasn't too interested in it. But he had to do it if I nailed him. So he'd take off and so help me, he'd get off course too. I'd pull that same stunt on him. And when we'd get to the town and everybody's waiting for me to you know, tell him how what they didn't do and you know, blah, blah, blah. And I was just oh, la ti da, and then talk about the weather or something. No big deal, "Guys, well this is destination. We're all right. And do you know, by the time we finally got to where we were going to deliver, I had a bunch of friends and they started learning more how to navigate also. So we accomplished a lot and I never had to chew out a guy.

Now, keep in mind, where – I would never want to put down a guy in front of his peers. I never did do that as a college, teaching for 30 years. I would not intimidate anybody in front of his peers, that's not the way to get something done, I don't think. And so, the guys never did mind word get around that I wasn't such a bad one to follow. And, but that was a big responsibility.

Now, another thing that impressed me a great deal was the fact that, I got tagged to be the, the, the radar guy, the guy that did testing on radar. We'll put it that way. Radar was not used here, we didn't know what in the world it was. And they came to me and they said, "We want you to be the radar test pilot." And this was off – south of Los Angeles, out by the Pacific, out in the boonies where you couldn't see anything. They had some trucks out there in a little hut, and, so I was to, do some radar testing. But what I tested went overseas, not here in America. We didn't use it here at all, but I was sworn to secrecy of what they told me. And I could not use the word radar to another pilot even. They said not to talk about anything. Now they had, me in a twin engine airplane. Had two engineers sitting behind me with their clipboards and their headsets to bird dog what I was doing if it, if it matched to what I was told by the ground.

Now they had me blocked out – which you call flying under the hood. I could not see. So then the only thing I could see was the instruments. And I was told to do this and this and this, and so forth, and then they had a road grader to scrape out some uh weeds down the way, to play like that's a runway and to come in and have this to line up on. And as I was coming, would be coming down, they'd tell me, "Just keep on coming down and at a certain speed or angle or whatever, and I thought, "You idiots are going to kill me. I knew the ground down there and it's hard, I don't trust you. I've never heard of radar before. Now, how do I know that you know exactly where I am and exactly what altitude I am. And how fast I'm going? How can you tell?"

Now, today, we don't think anything about that, do we? We'd expect that kind of stuff. And you can do anything you want to. Look at all the – look at all the airliners for one thing. Going in your high altitude and they say, "Well, we're going to get – we're 45 miles out and we're going to land." And what do they do? Radar sets it for them and they do a certain descent at a certain level like that and they come right in and hit the ground without error getting blurrp, blurrp, blurrp on the throttle, like we had to. Just lie straight down in here and it works just fine.

I never saw or thought of anything like that. And so the, engineers now, sometimes I'd do this and it wouldn't come out right. See, I'd be over here, instead of here where I'm supposed to be. And they would, validate that I did everything I was told to do and accurately. Because they were bird dogging all my instruments and what they're telling. And then if that happened, they took the equipment and adjusted the equipment. And then I flew it again, come right up where I was supposed to. Then they sent that overseas. So, one day I was out over Los Angeles over the city, under the hood, couldn't see it. They called me and said, "Get out from under the hood and look at 2:00 o'clock; a thousand feet above you is an airplane." I thought, "Wow!" I looked. There it was. And that really opened a big, envelope for me.

I thought, "How do they – I mean, here we are way out in the boonies, miles away from here. I know where they are. How do they know I'm me? How do they know I'm over Los Angeles and that that's who they're talking to? How do they know they're talking to me? And how do they know this airplane is up here in relationship to me? How do they know he's he and I'm me?" Well, that opened up a whole realm of understanding to me. That way off from nowhere they could identify me and knew that I was the guy that was next to that guy.

We don't think anything about that now. To me that was a big revelation and that gave me a degree of confidence now when they keep telling me to come in to the ground. I thought, well

maybe you won't kill me. Maybe you can tell that's me and where I am. And, then one day we were out a bit, flying for oh, an hour or more out. And of course, I can't see out or anything. And no two pilots who had ever sat in that airplane with me. They knew disaster when it was on or not. And those engineers didn't know what danger they were in. They didn't have sense enough to know it. And so, they're not pilots. So one day, one of the engineers said "Oh, man this fog really comes in in a hurry. Doesn't it?" And I'd been flying under the hood and I was in the fog. Now when the fog comes off the Pacific, pilots seeing it with this big banking and coming off, they have sense enough to run tail and get out of there, do you know it. I must have been flying in it an hour just la ti da. Those idiots, that didn't mean anything to them. And they said, "This fog really comes in in a hurry." And I said, "Dog." Opened that thing and then sure enough. We're all in the soup. So that really ticked me off. And I called, I said to the [Indiscernible 01:03:26] and I said, "If this stuff" – couldn't use radar – "If this stuff is anything at all, give me a heading to the Long Beach Airport." They gave me a heading to the Long Beach Airport and I was familiar with the Long Beach Airport. Has hills like this and hundreds of oil derricks. All over the thing hundreds of them. And sure enough, they gave me a heading to that airport that I was familiar with and so help me, that heading led me right straight to it. I was familiar with it. Made my approach and everything and landed. And the guys at the base said, "How did you do that? How did you do that?"

And I said, "Oh, I just lucked out guys." Biggest lie in the world. If I hadn't had a heading, I never would have found it. So you can see what – how great what we have today that we didn't have then. And, uh one other little tale. Well, it's time to go no one is stopping me. I'm late for somebody. Give me the whatever sign and I don't see it anywhere. So, anyway, they – we had airliners in those days flown by civilian men, of course, pilots. No girls even considered a thought of being an airline pilot at that time. Only girls that were started or anything in the group that I was in. And incidentally out of the 25 that I was in, it was girl number 12 that signed up. Well there are six of us alive and only two of us on our feet today. So we are almost a has-been, a, a goner, you might say.

But I keep up with them. I happen to be the chaplain of the national organization of all the WASPS and when, they, people die, they call me and the things that I do. Then I do all the prayers at our national meetings and board meetings and so forth. Okay. So I keep good records of all of this. And so I'm happy that six of us are alive. But I surely knew the others left and some that are alive are not in vigorous a shape.

But, in any event, there were no girl airline pilots of course at that time. So the military wanted to see if girls could be airline pilots. So they sent the girl who's on her feet today, happened to be – sent us both from our bases to, uh Detroit, or Romulus, the base there at Detroit. To be guinea pigs for a uh airline kind of a research problem. To see if girls could be airline pilots.

So we flew an airline from Detroit to Chicago full of military men and uh priority kind of equipment and everything. A whole bunch of stuff packed up in the back of it. Now we, flew a DC3 or C47. Now that's the same airplane that the civilian men were using for airliner. And so we used that same airplane, so they could prove what they wanted to know. And we, you know that airliner is a, is a tail dragger. Twin-engine with a tail dragger and with a door right back here by the tail. And so they would load all the equipment, load the men and then call us. Say,

“Okay, we’re ready to go.” So she and I’d come and get on in the back and walk through the passengers, mind you. Up to the cockpit and start cranking that thing up.

Well, of course the men were scared out of their wits. Whoever heard of a girl pilot. Now, had these men been civilians, they’d all jumped off that airplane. They would have. But military? They couldn’t get off. They were assigned to the plane and they had to go. So we had the edge on them then. They had to go. So part of the route that we were on, we flew over part of Lake Michigan. We didn’t have any flotation devices or anything. And the first thing we flew over it we were in the soup. And we knew the water was there, but we couldn’t see it so it didn’t bother us that much. But one day the sun came out and we could see all that water and we said, “Ah! Can you swim that far?” “Um-um. Can you?” “No, I can’t swim that far.” So then -- but wait, didn’t feel so hot about it. So we’d get in the office after we got into Chicago and they’d say, “Uh, were we ever scared,” they knew that we were flying that airplane, you know. And they hadn’t seen girls in uniform. Certainly with wings on and all that kind of thing and so they said, “Boy, were we ever scared.” And they looked it too. And we said, “Oh, really? Sure enough? You were scared? Well, that’s nothing. We were scared too.” And of course, then they’d really get, oh. Now, I’m rather compassionate anyway. I said, “That’s just too bad, that’s horrible. To have that men to know that we’re up here for two or three ours or something to have to be scared all that time.” I said, “Let’s go ahead and get in the cockpit and give them 30 minutes of airplane time and, and, then when they’re loaded they won’t know that we’re up here. But we decided when we got up to Chicago and we started taxiing up to the hangar, that we started getting unstrapped to our parachute and all of our harnesses and this and gotten all the little buttons where they were supposed to be. And whenever we stopped that airplane and turned off the second engine, we’d jump out of our seats as fast as we could, march up to the doorway. “Um-hmm, hello guys.” You know. And they were “Huh? Oh. Girls” And you could watch as we did this, to watch their faces. It was just hilarious. How shocked they were and all the green would come out of their whole face, you know.

And when we’d get on the ground they’d say, “Oh, my gosh. We’re glad we didn’t know you were up there.” We were so glad. We’d say, “We sacrificed so you would not know that we were up there so you would have a calm flight.” And so there were all kinds of different things like that for being the first girls into different areas that the men were so surprised that girls could do it. But I think, again, it was good that we were experienced pilots to start with and girl pilots were being accepted and by the time the graduates came out, they were accepted also. In other words, like, “I guess those dumb girls can really do something.” Whoever heard of dumb girls pulling it off. And, then it was nice to be accepted. But we were not in the beginning accepted even in Delaware when we were flying little airplanes around in Pennsylvania and everything and going to the hotels at night; people sitting around, see girls in uniforms. And they’d look and look and look. And, who ever heard of a girl in uniform in the first place. And in 1942 and, oh, they’d see wings. What does, what does that mean? And so they’d ask us and we’d tell them the truth, you know. No one believed it. You know what we started doing ? We told them we were elevator operators. And they believed us and they left us alone and we could go upstairs to the hotel room and go to bed and not have to mess with them.

No one believed us to start with. But now, I think anybody would believe anything that a girl has been or can be where they, where they are. So you see where we’ve come from my beginning as an eight year old in a rickety airplane. Probably was safer than most of the stuff I

flew. But anyway, it had that, you know, [**Indiscernible 01:11:28**] look to it, from that to being able to get in the pilot seat of a space shuttle. Now, see the difference that we've had here and how much all of technology that God has opened us to us that he didn't give 'em two thousand years ago. And God gave them as good a brain as he's given us. He gave Adam a perfect one and he messed up. But we have Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that had as good and all their offspring as good a brain as we have. God kept all that to himself from, for our use. And about the time that really the airplane, he let man learn to fly, you could see the big transition we have with satellites and going up to the moon and going to the south. Just look at what we've done here in my lifetime even.

So I wonder what's coming in the next 85 years. Who knows? Maybe the Lord come. So maybe we won't go 85 years. I don't know. So, anyway, we have great things to hope for and all. So, I'm going to quit. And surely I was waiting for someone with a hook, you know. Come hook me up. I don't know and I haven't watched – have no idea what time it is. But if you wanted me off of here and you didn't jerk me off, it's your fault, not mine. Not mine. Anyway –