

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Thelma Foster

INTERVIEWER: Therese Strohmer

DATE: January 16, 2009

[Begin Interview]

TS: Well, today this is Therese Strohmer, and today is January 16, 2009. We're in Colfax, North Carolina, and this is an oral history interview for the Women Veterans' Historical Project at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I have Thelma Foster here with me. Thelma, go ahead and state your name the way that you would like it to be on your collection.

TF: Thelma Houpe Foster.

TS: Okay, very good. Just a moment. Well, thank you again for letting me come to your home and interview you for this collection Thelma. Why don't you start off by telling me when and where you were born?

TF: I was born in Statesville, North Carolina, November 29, 1917.

TS: Is that where you grew up, in Statesville?

TF: No. I lived there until I was about nine years old and we moved to Virginia and lived there the rest of my years through college.

TS: Oh, well, what took you to Virginia?

TF: My father's health. He was principal of a school in Statesville. He became ill, and the doctor said that he must get out in the country. So we bought a big farm that belonged at one time to Edmund Randolph: one of the Virginia Randolphs.

TS: Now, did you come from a good size family?

TF: I have four—had four siblings: a brother and three sisters.

TS: Oh, okay. And now, did your mother work at the time?

TF: My mother died when she was in her thirties— early thirties—before we moved to Virginia.

TS: I see, okay.

TF: She had pneumonia.

TS: Oh.

TF: And—

TS: That's too bad.

TF: Not much cure back then for pneumonia.

TS: No. So your father had—was raising four kids.

TF: Five.

TS: Five kids, including you—we have to keep you in there [chuckle]. Five kids on his own, then?

TF: On his own, yes.

TS: Well how interesting, what was that like?

TF: Well, it's hard to tell you what it's like to grow up with a father who has to go out and work, and have an older sister—who's eleven—as my boss.

TS: Oh yeah, how old were you at that time?

TF: I was six when my mother died. But when we moved to Virginia, I was nine at that time. Let's see she was older than that. She was born in 1911. So she would have been probably about twelve [or] thirteen.

TS: Okay.

TF: But she raised—helped raise a family— did the cooking.

TS: Did she?

TF: And I had another sister who took care of the babies. That was my younger sister and me.

TS: Okay. So who— What were you siblings' names?

TF: Evelyn was the oldest. Lucille, Ewing—E-w-i-n-g.

TS: Oh okay.

TF: Ewing and Opal.

TS: Opal?

TF: Opal was the baby.

TS: Oh, very good. So when you went to Virginia, then, did your father continue as a principal in a school?

TF: Oh, no. Oh, no, no, because he had tuberculosis.

TS: Okay.

TF: That's why he had to get out away from [school] children and on a farm.

TS: Oh, away from children?

TF: But he did get well.

TS: Did he? Oh good.

TF: He got well out in the country in the fresh air, and he finally got well.

TS: So what kind of farm was it that you lived on?

TF: Well, it was five hundred acres. We bought it, and much of it was woodsy. It had been used as a horse farm. So, you know—And it continued to be used as a horse farm after we sold it. And it was just the greatest place in the world to run and play—haystacks to slide down, trees to climb, fences to walk.

TS: Yeah.

TF: And all that kind of thing. I had a wonderful life there.

TS: So do you remember—So those were some of the games that you would play—with the haystacks and things like that?

TF: I don't really know. I don't remember. We played softball, as well as I can remember.

TS: Right.

TF: When they let me on the team. Being one of the smaller ones, I didn't get to play very often. But what I did was climb trees.

TS: Oh, is that right?

TF: Hang from my knees upside down out of trees. My father says, "I don't believe you'll live to grow up."

TS: [Chuckles] Did you ever fall out of any of those trees?

TF: No, never fell out.

TS: Oh. I was a tree climber myself as a young girl. And I did fall out of an apple tree once.

TF: Oh.

TS: It was a long ways down.

TF: I had my favorite apple tree and I would climb up in the apple tree—take my book. I was a great reader. I'd take my book up there in that apple tree, sit there, and read for hours.

TS: Isn't that the best place to read a book?

TF: It is. Nobody bothers you.

TS: Nobody bothered you. That's right [chuckle]. That's all right. Well, Thelma, we already have a lot in common. So how did you have—Did you have people who were close in proximity who lived near the farm?

TF: Oh yes, about a half a mile down the way.

TS: Okay.

TF: And it's a nice neighborhood— all farmers, you know. But we rode a bus to school there, whereas before [in Statesville—added later] all we had to do was walk across the road to school.

TS: Oh, yeah.

TF: So we had to get used to that.

TS: Well, how was school? Did you like school then? As a reader I would imagine—

TF: I loved school—loved school. But when we moved from North Carolina to Virginia, I was so far behind. We had not had the arithmetic that they had had. So catching up was pretty difficult. But I did love school—loved foreign languages, which I finally ended up teaching.

TS: Did you?

TF: Foreign languages.

TS: Any particular foreign language?

TF: Well, I taught Latin, but I [also] taught beginners' courses in French and German.

TS: Excellent.

TF: So I enjoyed that, and that's why I went into service.

TS: Oh, okay, well we'll get to that in a minute.

TF: All right.

TS: That's really quite interesting though, we do—So you did like school?

TF: Loved it.

TS: Did you have a favorite subject then?

TF: I think languages.

TS: Did—So were you taught a language in school, or?

TF: I took Latin in school.

TS: Okay.

TF: And I took French and German through college.

TS: Oh, okay. Where was it that you graduated from?

TF: Longwood University—it's called now—then, it was called Farmville State Teachers' College.

TS: Farmville State Teachers' College, okay.

TF: It's when they wouldn't let women in the University of Virginia. So they built four women's colleges on the university level, and we had to go to one of those.

TS: In the—Where was it that you graduated from high school?

TF: In Farmville.

TS: Farmville?

TF: Virginia, yes.

TS: Now, when you were a little girl running around and climbing trees and learning languages—what did you expect—what did you think about your future? Did you have any—did you give any thoughts to that—what you wanted to do?

TF: I really didn't know. It was the Great Depression, you know. And we all didn't really know whether we were going to be able to go to school, or not, on past high school. But I was determined to go if there was any way. So one of the supervisors at school went to one of the sororities, and suggested that they pay my way for the first year—which was to be paid back—and then, after that, I would qualify for the National Youth Administration—a job that would let me work at Longwood—continue to work there—and pay my tuition, which is how it all came about.

TS: Well, how about that? So what year are we talking about?

TF: Graduating?

TS: Well, when you first went to college.

TF: That would have been 1936, I guess, or the fall of '35.

TS: Thirty-five or thirty-six, okay.

TF: Anyway, I graduated in '39.

TS: Okay—when you—between the time—Like, when you were in high school then, that's when the Depression I guess was the most severe.

TF: It was the most severe, yes.

TS: Can you talk about that a little bit for people who aren't familiar with what that was like?

TF: Well, when you lived on a farm—there was no money coming in: none at all. You lived on what you could grow. So whatever crops we had we tried to can. And we put—I remember wrapping cabbage in straw and putting it down in the ground. And then the

winter, before it got too bitter cold, we could bring that cabbage up and eat it. And we canned everything that we could possibly can. But, you know, it still would run out before spring. But I can recall in the spring we would be out with a bucket and a sharp knife, and we'd get dandelions that were coming up and creasies [creasy greens]— wild creasies— don't ask me how you spell that. I think it was actually cress, c-r-e-s-s, but we called it creasies.

TS: So what would you do with those— the dandelions?

TF: Cook them. Cook them.

TS: Okay. Like boil them, or?

TF: Well, just like you would cook turnip greens or anything like that.

TS: Oh, okay. Oh, all right. Now was there anybody coming to the farm to try and get food?

TF: No, not to ours, because nobody had anything back then. They knew we didn't have anything.

TS: Were you aware at the time— do you remember as a young girl—Were you aware about the struggles that maybe were going on at that time?

TF: I was aware that everyone was going through something, so I didn't really see where we were any worse off than anybody else.

TS: Right.

TF: In fact, I think there were people who were far worse off than we were, because my sister had been taught how to sew. So we used feed sacks to make dresses. Now, those feed sacks aren't like feed sacks today. They were pretty, colorful feed sacks—[with] flowers.

TS: Oh, is that right?

TF: It really—They turned out to be pretty dresses, and my sister made those for us. And we survived.

TS: Yeah.

TF: That doesn't mean we weren't hungry sometimes.

TS: Right.

TF: And wished that we had more than one dress all of the time. My sister used to laugh. She says, “We had to come home, wash out our dress, hang it up to dry, and wear it the next day”.

TS: How about for shoes? Do you remember shoes?

TF: Well, I remember hand-me-downs, since I was next to the bottom. I got my older sister’s shoes if they weren’t worn out. And we used a lot of cardboard in the bottom of those shoes to keep our feet from being right flat down on the ground.

TS: That’s pretty neat. I had heard some stories about the cardboard. Now with the— so with the— You got this great opportunity to go to college.

TF: Yes.

TS: Why don’t you talk about that? What was that experience like? Where was it? How far away from your home was it that you went?

TF: About three miles.

TS: Okay, pretty close.

TF: Something like that. It was pretty close by. And I had a brother that went in to work every day, I’d ride in with him. And it was a great experience, because you met people who had never felt a touch of the Depression—as well as those who were like yourself, and who were going on a scholarship of some kind— struggling to get through.

TS: So what—did you have an idea then, when you were in college—Were you on a particular plan to finish up with a particular degree?

TF: Teach. I wanted a four-year college degree. And I wanted to teach language.

TS: Oh, so you knew right then that you wanted to do it?

TF: Yes.

TS: So how did you like college?

TF: Loved it—absolutely loved every minute of it. One subject in particular was hard, because in high school you didn’t always have the best of teachers. My [high school—added later] math teacher was from up in the mountains. He’d rather tell us mountain stories than teach us math. So when I got past math in high school, I still didn’t have much of a background. And so math was pretty hard for me in college. But then as one teacher said to me, “You’re not going to teach it anyway, so let’s just go ahead and pass you.”

TS: You were probably relieved about that, then.

TF: Oh my, I really was. I think it was calculus or something like that that was pretty hard.

TS: That's true. So what kind of things did you do— Did you have any social activities that you did?

TF: In what period?

TS: Any period in there.

TF: Well of course the usual growing up. When the neighborhood kids would get together then, we'd have dances in somebody's parlor, with the boys picking guitars, and just having a great time. It was always in a home.

TS: Yeah.

TF: The school had some activities at night in the spring but not many, because people just didn't have the transportation to get there. Most of the young people rode the bus to get there. So other than what you had in the neighborhood, you didn't really have a whole lot of entertainment.

TS: And was it the same when you went to college?

TF: Just about. But in college, you know, we still had no mother at home, so we had to keep house. My older sister had married, so my next to [oldest] sister and I did the house keeping. That kept us pretty busy—cooking for a brother and a father and a younger sister, and then all of our work to do.

TS: Yeah, it sounds like you were pretty busy, then.

TF: Yeah, we were very busy.

TS: But you were able to keep up with you school work and everything?

TF: Yes. We went out to—rode the bus to a nearby country school to do practice teaching.

TS: Oh, okay.

TF: There we had to start a fire sometimes in the stove to get the classroom warmed. And I was so amused at this teacher from New York who had never seen a stove until she came there.

TS: Is that right?

TF: So I went in one morning, and she was trying to start a fire. She had three big chunks of wood in there, and she was lighting one match after another— holding it under that wood trying to get it started burning. So anyway I—

TS: Did you give her a good lesson on how—

TF: I gave her a lesson on how to start a fire.

TS: [Chuckles] That's a pretty good story. So did you— so this is during your college—you did some student teaching there?

TF: Student teaching.

TS: Okay. So you said that you graduated in—

TF: Thirty-nine.

TS: Thirty-nine, so what happened after that?

TF: Well everybody went job hunting. I was very fortunate to get position down in Waverly, Virginia, which is down in the peanut country.

TS: Waverly, okay.

TF: Yes. And I still have a student from back then who calls me every so often.

TS: Is that right? How nice.

TF: Yes, I was so shocked the first time I got a call from him.
He said, "Well, we thought that you were all dead!" So he said, "I decided I was going to see what happened to you."
So he called Longwood College, and they had never heard of me. And when he told me that, I laughed.
I said, "They hear from me every year. They want money!"
So anyway we keep in touch now.

TS: That's really nice.

TF: He's a wonderful person.

TS: So how did you like that job? Did you like it and—

TF: I loved it! Loved it. Oh, I had the best time. See, I wasn't much older than my children. In fact, I had one who was younger than I—I mean older than I.

TS: Oh, okay.

TF: She had been held back for one reason or another. They put me to coaching basketball. I didn't even know how to play basketball. I had to teach athletics, because I was the youngest faculty member. So I just taught her what I learned in college in our athletic department. And that was how to march in service. We were taught how to march "to the rear's march", and do all of that marching. So when I got into service, it wasn't hard.

TS: You had already learned it.

TF: I had already learned all that.

TS: How about that. So you're teaching and the— Now, the war hasn't come to the United States yet, but it's over in Europe. Were you aware of what was going on?

TF: Oh yes, I had senior boys that were going off to war all the time.

TS: Yeah.

TF: And I would get letters as they were going through France, in the Saint-Lô area, which was—oh it was terrible, terrible. I lost quite a few students over there. And that's what made me think more and more about getting into service, and doing something in the service.

TS: Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

TF: Oh yes, I remember Pearl Harbor. I was down at Nags Head, North Carolina—got home and heard all of that. Ugh, it sounded awful. I know we were going to be in it from then on.

TS: Yeah. So what—you said that you started to think about maybe getting into helping out for the war?

TF: Well they kept advertising in the paper, "Please come and join the service if you can speak French and German."

TS: Oh.

TF: So that's why— the picture I had over there— I was being interviewed in the Richmond recruiting department about French and German. And they said, "Oh, they need you so badly". So I went in to help translate or speak or whatever was needed in French and German. So when I got into basic training and finished that, they said that they didn't need translators any longer. So they put me in the quartermaster corps.

TS: [Chuckle] Oh my, so you were still willing to serve then?

TF: You couldn't get out.

TS: Oh, okay.

TF: You had already raised your hand.

TS: [Chuckle] And you said that you had enlisted as a private, is that right? Is that how you started out?

TF: Yes.

TS: Okay. And did you see any of the posters about, you know, "freeing a man to fight" or any of that? Do you remember any of those posters?

TF: Well I remember a lot of posters selling war bonds. And then, of course, the posters to be careful what you said.

TS: Right.

TF: Something like "a loose lip will sink a ship", or something like that. Well, anyway, I had seen all of those and knew that it was a dangerous job.

TS: Yeah. So when you decided to join the service, how did your dad feel about that?

TF: Horrified! Horrified! He said, "I thought that you would never do such a thing as that"; because in the minds of older people nothing but just the dregs of society went into service. And it took him a long time—

TS: Is that right?

TF: —to get his mind straightened out about that.

TS: How about your other sisters and your brother? How did they feel?

TF: Well, they didn't have much to say about it [chuckles]. My brother wanted to go. Oh, he wanted so much. He begged and pled the board that takes them in to let him go. He had a little vision problem, and every time that they would send him to have his eyes examined they would turn him down. He just begged and he said, "I can shoot a squirrel in a tree half a mile away". They still wouldn't let him go in.

TS: Oh.

TF: He just—oh—he was just so unhappy.

TS: What did you sisters do during the war?

TF: One sister worked for the telephone company. The other one was married. And my younger sister was still in high school, really.

TS: Okay. So do you remember—Now, you talked a little bit about the marching that you did in the service. Did you remember other aspects of your initial contact—remember like when you went to basic training?

TF: Oh yes, I loved marching. And I was guidon [military standard that identifies a unit or individual] bearer for the company. You know what a guidon is though, right? And I just loved every aspect of it. I really did.

TS: Why don't you tell us about the guidon, even though I might know what it is?

TF: Oh, it is so heavy. And I only weighed a hundred and twenty pounds, and every time that I would stretch that thing out, my arm would tremble. I would tremble as we went past the reviewing stands you know. And then I could put it back up. I was really pleased that they chose me as the guidon bearer.

TS: Yeah.

TF: It was on the basis of your grades as well as everything else.

TS: You must have had quite a good military presence to be able to do that, too.

TF: Well, I don't know about that.

TS: [Chuckles] Well, that's not an easy job I would think. So where was your basic training then? Where did you have to go for that?

TF: In Des Moines, Iowa.

TS: Oh how was that?

TF: That was the only basic training camp that was open at that time. Fort Oglethorpe [Georgia] opened, I guess, later that year. Because when I was in Chicago—and we had 150 recruits in Chicago to deliver to Oglethorpe—I was one of the ones that could escort them down there. So that was fun, because we stayed up all night on the train with our telling them about what it was like. We had the leading model from Chicago in the group. And she was showing them all how to put on lip stick, and it was just great for fun. None of us went to sleep all night.

TS: And that was on the train?

TF: Yes.

TS: Oh, how nice. Now did you—Why did you pick the service that you picked?

TF: I didn't pick it. They put me in it!

TS: You didn't have a choice between joining the WAVES [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service], or the—

TF: Oh, oh, oh that. Well I don't know. I hadn't seen the WAVES at all, but I had seen a number of women in the regular army who had visited there at Camp Lee [Virginia], where I was working in the summer. I was teaching school in the winter, and working in the summer in the quartermaster. So when they saw that on my application—I think that's why they put me in the quartermaster.

TS: So during the summer you worked in the quartermaster at—

TF: At Camp Lee

TS: And where was Camp Lee at?

TF: Petersburg [Virginia]—just outside of Petersburg.

TS: Oh, okay. So you had a connection to the military in the summer then?

TF: Yes.

TS: Oh, I see okay. So that was the WAAC [Women's Army Auxiliary Corps] that you joined initially?

TF: Yes.

TS: Okay.

TF: That was all that you could join at that time in the army.

TS: In the army, right. So what—Once you got through basic training, then what happened?

TF: Well, they knew that—Well, they sent my whole company to Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

TS: Okay.

TF: We served there as clerk-typists. Some of them were drivers for the officers—just all kinds of jobs that you would find on any company-training station. So they put me in as a clerk-typist. I was the lousiest typist in the world. But since I had already been typing

requisitions at Fort Lee as a civilian, they put me in there to type requisitions. And the captain that was in charge says “I don’t know why they ever gave you this job,” because I wasn’t much of a typist. I could type fast and really broke the speed record at my college when I was taking typing there, but those requisitions just drove me nuts—all the numbers and everything. So I didn’t do a very good job over there.

But anyway, I stayed in that and got promoted to a tech sergeant, and decided that I was never going to get overseas if I stayed in that company. Because, I decided that it was fixed right there for the duration of the war, and I wanted to go overseas. So I decided that I would go to OCS [Officer Candidate School], and maybe I would go overseas that way. So I applied and went to OCS. And I hadn’t been at OCS two months, before they picked up the whole company and sent them to England.

TS: The company that you had been in?

TF: That I had been.

TS: Oh [laughs].

TF: Well, anyway, they had, I think, a very successful time in England. Some of them came home very very nervous, because they were somewhere on the front lines as clerk-typists. And one was a driver for one of the officers, and so on.

TS: Yeah. What did you think about that? That you missed out on the—

TF: I was heartbroken, but I thought that maybe there is a chance yet. I’ll keep trying. Never another chance.

TS: No? You never made it overseas?

TF: Never made it.

TS: Oh. Well, what was the OCS like for you?

TF: I loved it. It was very hard. We had to train to be able to drill an entire unit, and I didn’t have a very good voice for that. I was very soft spoken. But I’d get out there all by myself, and I would yell. I would train them, you know, up and down. But I did make it through, and the time I had spent as a civilian in the quartermaster corps was a godsend; because I knew what the answers [were] to all the questions. And I could actually tell the teacher sometimes a better way do things—to keep the records that we had used at Fort Lee.

TS: Right.

TF: So that was—I enjoyed that.

TS: Yeah, that's pretty interesting. Now where was your OCS at? Where did you go for that?

TF: Back in Des Moines.

TS: Oh, so you went back to Des Moines. Okay. All right. So now, once you got through OCS, then what happened?

TF: Well we have to wait, because they know that we are going to be taken into service before long. Congress is pondering over the bill, you know how they are. Anyway they shifted us from here to there to somewhere else. Wherever there was an empty base, we would go spend maybe two, three weeks, or a month there. One of the bases we went to—Ruston, Louisiana. And it was a base where they were going to bring Japanese prisoners of war over, and put in that base—in that camp. So the camp had no roofs over the showers. We had guards walking all around it—up here you know. And so we had to wait until night time to take our showers when the guards couldn't see us.

Anyway, it was the hottest place I have ever been in my life. And we were always in these tin huts and they drew the heat. I remember sitting in one of them in 220 degrees. [We] came out of there and everybody was just soaking wet.

TS: I'll bet. Wow. So what was it that you were doing there for your job?

TF: Nothing, we were just taking courses. They had set up all these courses for us to take, you know, to keep us out of mischief, I guess. Although I don't know what mischief you could get in down there. I hope nobody from Ruston, Louisiana, hears this tape.

TS: Well now, so you were there a couple of months and then—What year approximately are we in here, when you were in Ruston.

TF: Oh let me see—that would be 1942, I guess.

TS: Nineteen forty—

TF: Forty three—nineteen forty three.

TS: You had talked a little bit about the difference between being in the auxiliary to being in the real army. Would you like to explain that difference a little bit?

TF: Well, I don't know that there was a whole lot of difference. As an auxiliary, of course, we were in basic training, and until we were formed into companies we didn't get a regular assignment as a tech sergeant, as I was. That was my first promotion, I guess you would call it, after auxiliary.

TS: But when you went from—you said remember how [U.S.] Congress was allowing women from going from an auxiliary unit into like the regular army—they passed that law in '42? We were talking about that before we started.

TF: I think it was '43 when that law was passed.

TS: Okay. Did that seem to make any difference to your job at all?

TF: The only difference it made—we had no jobs—we had no jobs. We were just taking courses all this time: boring, boring courses. Anyway, we finally realized we would now be assigned to a base as a regular army person. So I was assigned back at Des Moines to this colonel's office, where I worked until a request came in from Texas. They needed servicewomen down there in Fort Worth, Texas. So I went down there. That was my first assignment away from Des Moines.

TS: What did you do there, and what was your rank when you got to Texas, too?

TF: Same rank. Oh wait a minute—it was the same rank—I had been through—

TS: You went to the OCS, and now you're an officer right?

TF: I went through the OCS, and then went to Texas. And I worked there. This was the flying training and technical training headquarters. The next step up was Washington. And then the next step down was the various commands, before you got all the way down to the field. So in an office like that all you did was to read correspondence from the bases down here, put on an endorsement, send it on to Washington. And I just was bored out of my head, so I requested a transfer. And the colonel said, "Where would you like to go? You can go anywhere in the United States that you want to go out of this command."

And I thought about it. And I thought about it. And I thought, "Well, Montgomery, Alabama, is closer to home than here". So I chose Montgomery, Alabama, which is the middle echelon.

I got down to Montgomery and the colonel there said, "We don't have anything that you can work at here." He says, "I'm going to send you on down to a base."

And I said, "That's where I wanted to be in the first place".

And he got out the map of the entire area. I don't know how many bases there were. Anyway, he said, "Now you pick out the one that you want to go to."

So I picked out Tyndall Field, Florida, because it was on the ocean. And I knew I'd get to sun bathe to my heart's content. So I did. I went down there, and was put in the quartermaster office as assistant to the—I guess the—not the quartermaster, but the one that was over the supply.

TS: Okay.

TF: The quartermaster-supply. So it wasn't long until the captain who was head of that was sent overseas, and then I was it. I was quartermaster-supply from then on—

TS: Oh my.

TF: —until the end of the war.

TS: So how was that? Did you—

TF: I loved it. I had a great group in the quartermaster—GIs—there's just nothing like working with a bunch of GIs. They're so much fun. And they were all just homeboys, you know, that ended up in the war. And they loved playing jokes on me. And of course, they loved to hear me scream, because I'd scream every time—like when I found an alligator under my desk. I pulled up my chair and plopped my feet down and thought, "What in the world did I step on?" Here's this baby alligator—about this long. So I'm screaming.

TS: I would have screamed too [laughs].

TF: At Christmas time they would love to play jokes with those gifts they gave me. We just really had a lot of fun, but it was hard work. Because, I had to issue clothing to all of the companies that went out from there. And we were sending them to frigid zones. We were sending them to tropic zones. I had to have the clothing that went with each, whatever they needed. So often times, I wouldn't have it in the warehouse and would have to take a B-17 [Boeing B-17, Flying Fortress] up to Atlanta to the supply depot. Our B-17s were used for gunnery—aerial gunnery, which was what that field was—a training for aerial gunners. So we would fly up there. A lot of times I would get to fly the plane.

TS: Oh really, how did that work out?

TF: That was fun. We had done a lot of training in the link trainers that they had on the base—how to fly. So the pilot would get up and go to the back, you know, and just let me fly. And one of those—and anybody who was on the field, you know, any of the officers who had nothing to do—A lot of times they would hop aboard and go on to Atlanta. Well, this time we had a new man on the field. His office was right opposite mine. He had finished his tour of duty overseas, so he was sent back. Well he hopped aboard, and I was having fun with the plane. I would go up and down, and up and down. And I would go around on one wing like this, and around on one wing like that. And finally the pilot came back up and he says, "Would you let that new major come up here and stand? He's turning green." You couldn't see out back there.

TS: Right.

TF: Anyway.

TS: I guess you did have some fun flying that plane, huh?

TF: I had fun flying. I had fun all the way but worked like a dog—

TS: Yeah.

TF: All the way, because you stayed up all night issuing clothing when those people were going out.

TS: When you went to Atlanta to the big supply, how did that work? What did you do when you got there?

TF: I had all the orders already written up by the men in the warehouses of what they needed. And I just turned them over to the supply depot there. And they would fill up the planes, and the planes were ready to go. We'd get on and come back.

TS: So you would take all of the supplies back with you to—

TF: Right.

TS: — Tyndall. And from Tyndall, then, you'd send it out to—

TF: Send it out—

TS: Oh.

TF: —with the company that was going overseas. And we had fun with that sometimes. [On one trip—added later], I really think that those pilots took something out of the motor in that plane. When we got to Atlanta it wouldn't fly coming back. We had to go to a hotel and stay. And I had no choice but to pick one of [the men] as [a roommate—added later]—it was a double room with a bath in between.

TS: Like a suite, kind of.

TF: Yeah, you could shut off each room, you know. I didn't trust any of [the men]. So we had onboard a sergeant, a very studious, bookish sergeant, who was a violinist for the Chicago symphony. I trusted him, so I'd picked him as my roommate.

TS: How did that work out?

TF: It worked out fine, just fine. [laughs] I could have killed those men.

TS: So you think that they were messing with airplane, so they could get an extra night in Atlanta?

TF: Yeah, I think so. I really do. It was just like them to do that, you know.

TS: Yeah.

TF: How men are—Those pilots were a crazy bunch.

TS: So now you were—how long were you in Tyndall then—in the quartermaster?

TF: I finished up there.

TS: Okay. So when you—you were there—so you ordered the—it's very interesting, this kind of job the quartermaster does, because you have a lot of control, don't you?

TF: Yes, you do.

TS: Did you—What kind of clothes like would you have if they went to a frigid place?

TF: Very thick flight jackets—very thick. Heavy socks, heavy pants, things like that.

TS: Do you know where they were being made—all these clothes?

TF: I don't have any idea, but in the United States.

TS: Yeah. What did you like best about that job?

TF: The camaraderie.

TS: Yeah.

TF: It was—I ended in the hospital a couple of times because of overwork.

TS: Oh, really?

TF: But the camaraderie was wonderful.

TS: Yeah. Now did you have any—I remember you were talking about how your father kind of having some concerns about you being in the service.

TF: Horrified.

TS: Horrified. Did you yourself experience anything negative while you were in the service with other men being—

TF: No, no, no. It depended on you. They would be as fresh [with you] as you let them. And I didn't let them. I know when I first went to Tyndall Field [Florida], I was the only WAC on the field, and I had to live with the nurses. When I walked into the officers' club that night all of these officers were there, you know, looking—finally, I began to get notes. This master chef sergeant would bring notes over to me from these who had seen me walk in. And I just tore them up, you know. Because I was going to be—live by the same moral standards that I lived at home. I wasn't going to let any of that get to me.

TS: Yeah.

TF: So it took me a long time ever to start dating anybody—

TS: Is that right?

TF: —in the service, because I wanted to know all about how they behaved in public. How they behaved towards women. And also you had to finally get somebody in personnel who would go in the files and see if they were married or not.

TS: Oh, really?

TF: Because, a lot of them would take off those rings.

[End of CD 1—begin CD 2]

TS: So you would check up on them, huh? You should have been an investigator.

TF: Oh yes. But it was, you know, the service was hard, hard work, but at the same time you loved it. You enjoyed every day of it.

TS: So did you finally start dating then?

TF: Yes, the one that I made sick in the airplane.

TS: Oh, that major?

TF: Yes, his office had a little—was right next to mine—nothing in it, because they didn't have anything for him to do. But it had a little window cut in it. And I spoke to him, but I thought he was married; because he said something about coming through Statesville to get an oil ration.

TS: To get a what ration?

TF: An oil ration for his family—

TS: Okay.

TF: —for his mother. When he said Statesville, I heard—because I had always said, from a teenager on, I was going to marry a man from Statesville. I loved going back to Statesville to visit my friends. And I thought that that they were the nicest boys I had ever

been out with. So at the same time I thought, “Well, he’s married,” so I just passed the time of day—go on my desk. My back was to his window.

And one day he said, “You know, I’m just going to have to get a wife, or learn how to sew on a button”. I think he was hinting that I sew on the button, but I didn’t take the hint. But that did make me think.

Well, the laundry officer and I were good friends. He was dating a WASP. You know what a WASP was: Women’s Army [sic, Airforce] Service Pilot. And we would have those on the field as they piloted planes from one place to another—carried planes, I should say. And he was dating her, but he’d come in every morning and perch on my desk—the corner of it—and talk. He said, “Why don’t you get a date with him there?”

And I said, “I do not ask men for dates”.

He said, “Well, I can fix that”.

So he invited him to a beach party. And so my future husband thought that everybody was going to be there out of the office. Well, Joe picked up his date and then he picked up me and went by and picked up Arthur. We went on to the beach and nobody was there but us. And Arthur looked around and said, “Where is everybody?”

Joe said, “It’s just us”.

And so we had a beach party, the four of us, and began to get to know each other. And found out that since I was born in Statesville, he knew a lot of the people I knew. I had been in his parents’ store many times as a little tot about this high. And I didn’t know any of his church family, because I was Presbyterian and he was Baptist. But we did get to know each other. We both taught Sunday school before we went into service. And, you know, it wasn’t too hard after that.

He asked me one time if I played golf. Well, I really wanted to go out with him. So I said, “Yes”. I thought, “How hard can it be to hit that little ball down there with a stick?” So we went out. We got golf clubs. And I stood up next to that ball and I thought, “How do you hit that little round ball with this round golf club?”

And he looked at me funny. He said, “You’re standing on the wrong side of the ball”.

And I said, “Well I can’t hit it on that side”.

He said, “Are you left handed?”

I said, “Well, in some things”. I played softball left handed and did all kinds of things. Anyway, he knew right then that I had never played golf in my life.

TS: Because, you had a right handed club, right?

TF: Right.

TS: I see.

TF: Well, he was right handed, so he picked up a right handed club for me. So anyway, we got through that just fine.

TS: Yeah.

TF: And he never let me forget it.

TS: No, I bet he didn't.

TF: But he still was awfully, awfully shy. He said that every time that he would see me I'd be with a bunch of men. And I usually was. The fellows that I worked with in the quartermaster all saw me as a sister and they protected me—were very aware of whom I was dating, and whether they approved or not. So anyway—

TS: So he got scrutinized pretty carefully?

TF: I did. I was.

TS: You got scrutinized as well as Arthur, right?

TF: Yes, yeah. They all knew him, and thought that he was a great fellow. So it ended up all right.

TS: Yeah.

TF: I got my man from Statesville.

TS: Yeah. When did you get married?

TF: Well, I didn't believe in short engagements. So I told him. I said, "Well, let's wait at least nine months or longer". And we had set it for late October, I think.

TS: What year was that?

TF: Nineteen forty-five.

TS: Okay.

TF: Finally, one day, He says, "That is so far away. Can't we go ahead and get married now?"

I said, "You're going to have to give me a little time. I want a wedding!"

So the search was on then for the wedding gown.

TS: Oh that's right. Let's talk about that a little bit, because you were talking about—

TF: Anyway one of the girls in the office was a clerk-typist. She was a civilian. She lived in Atlanta, and she went down to Atlanta for vacation. And she found the dress down there.

TS: You were talking earlier, before the tape, about how there were no wedding dresses to be found during the war.

TF: No, no, not even a yard of satin. They just couldn't believe it when I walked into Thalheimer's [Virginia department store chain] with that dress to be altered—to be cut down two sizes. Anyway they said, "We will do it, and we will have it ready for your wedding." And they did.

TS: In two days, right?

TF: In two days.

TS: And then tell about what happened with your wedding party that was coming in.

TF: Oh. Well, part—just part of the wedding party. My former roommate and my husband-to-be's best friend were all—and some of the fellows who just wanted to come to the wedding—were all going to fly in from Atlanta—I mean from Tyndall Field. They have to get in so much flying time everyday anyway, so they were just going to use their flying time and come up there to the wedding. Lo and behold—I think it was the judge advocate general, it was, that had arrived on the field. And they called and said, "We do not dare take a plane to go to a wedding." So I had to hunt around and get some more people [to be in the wedding party—added later.] Fortunately, a sister filled in. My sister's husband filled in as best man. I don't know—it worked out.

TS: Yeah.

TF: And we had a good wedding and a good life.

TS: Yeah. So you were married in '45?

TF: Yes.

TS: Now about this time the war was winding down a little bit, I guess.

TF: Yes. VE Day occurred while we were on our honeymoon.

TS: Oh.

TF: No, no, that was the end of the war in Japan when we were on our honeymoon. VE Day was much earlier. Anyway, I remember we were down at Old Point Comfort in Virginia staying at a hotel there. And the waiter came around—tip-toed around and said, "The war is over. The war is over." Then all of a sudden the whole room just erupted.

TS: So he was just kind whispering it as he went around, huh?

TF: Yes.

TS: He just didn't shout it out? He just—

TF: Well, I guess being the type of waiter they were—they weren't allowed to shout.

TS: Yeah. How did y'all think about that at the time?

TF: Well we were delighted—really delighted. We were going up the next day on the passenger ship from—that plies the waters between Norfolk and Baltimore. His father was captain of one of the ships. And we were going up [to Baltimore—added later]. And so we went on, and just had a wonderful time up there. Everybody just so excited about the war being over. And oh, the crowds—oh the crowds were just—It seemed like everybody then had to be somewhere else. And so traveling was a little difficult coming back home.

TS: Oh yeah, I see because everyone was trying to get to somewhere I guess—interesting. Now going back to Tyndall for a little bit, you had said one of the reasons you said that you picked this off the map was to do some sunbathing, right? So did you get to do that?

TF: Oh yes. I got plenty of sunbathing. Oh my, yes.

TS: What other kind of activities did you do for your leisure time?

TF: Leisure time?

TS: Yes.

TF: Wash your clothes.

TS: Oh, yeah?

TF: Yeah, the officers—I guess they had a laundry—I don't know—but they didn't wash clothes to suit me. I washed and ironed my own clothes. And we didn't play bridge at that time. I don't know why. I played tennis—a lot of tennis.

TS: Yeah.

TF: And I had taught tennis in girls' camp earlier. So I found good tennis partners in service. So I guess that was about what it was. You know, we all went to the officers' club just about every night. You know, they would have had a band there and dancing.

TS: Do you remember the kind of music that was being played?

TF: Oh sure. All the big bands at that time. And of course, remember, names are not my best in memory.

TS: The type of bands?

TF: Yes, the big bands.

TS: I was trying to think of what some of the bands were myself.

TF: The one that was drowned in World War II.

TS: Yeah, what the heck was his name—Glenn Miller?

TF: Glenn Miller, right! Artie Shaw—

TS: That's right. I think I have a list of some them here somewhere. I don't know what I did with that.

TF: Anyway, all of the big bands came to Richmond. And we'd drive up from Waverly to Richmond at night. But on the field there—you're talking about on the field—what we would do at night.

TS: Right.

TF: It's amazing how many people came to entertain the troops.

TS: Yeah? What kind of people would come?

TF: Well, those that had any kind of entertainment to offer. And then, as I said, we danced a good part of the time. When I early, early went in, Clark Gable was on the field.

TS: Oh.

TF: And I—you don't remember Hank Greenberg. You're not old enough. He'd be your grandpa.

TS: Yeah.

TF: But Hank Greenberg was the big, big baseball player at that time.

TS: Oh, okay.

TF: There was another outstanding movie star whose name won't come to mind right now. But anyway—

TS: So they would just come and visit and do the—

TF: And we'd play—The men would play cards a lot at night. I didn't usually play bridge with them. Well they played poker anyway—not bridge.

TS: Yeah.

TF: So—and I didn't know a whole lot about poker. I played a sometimes with them and I would lose every time of course.

TS: So you—after your honeymoon, right—So the war's over and your husband, Arthur, he's still in the service too, right?

TF: Yes. He stayed in the reserves for forty years.

TS: Oh.

TF: I guess it was forty. Anyway he's still considered—He was still considered an active veteran, because he went to training every summer—

TS: Active reserve, I see.

TF: Classes every week as a reserve. So his promotions kept coming, so that when he died he was a lieutenant colonel in the service.

TS: Is that right? That's pretty nice. And so, did you ever think about staying in the service?

TF: No, I was going to come out—My plans were to come out, go to Columbia University for another degree and continue teaching.

TS: Okay, is that what happened?

TF: No. [Chuckle] I got married.

TS: So you got married and then—So the war ended in '45, but you didn't get out until about a year later, right?

TF: It was '46 when our final discharge papers came through. We had already signed them in '45. I think it was Fort Bragg that I went to, but then the papers finally came through. This was November of '45.

TS: Okay.

TF: Anyway, we made it out.

TS: Yeah, did you—before you got out—You said that you wanted after the war to go to Columbia University. Was that using your GI Bill that you—were you aware of the GI Bill at that time?

TF: Was I aware of what?

TS: The GI Bill for using your education benefit.

TF: Oh, yes. I knew about that. I hadn't thought much about it, but anyway I knew that I could get help if I went.

TS: Okay. Did you feel—at the time that you were in the service—that you were treated fairly—would you say?

TF: Not always by some of the colonels who had been in World War I, and they were crusty old men who felt like that women had no place in service. The worst case of discrimination I think that I saw though was with one of the women who went to Camp Lee's special school when I did—the quartermaster school. There were about five of us who went, or maybe six. I don't remember—just about six or seven, but one black one. And she was a lovely, lovely person. She roomed next to me, and we did a lot of sharing and talking and so on. We went to lunch one day in the officer's mess. And in that mess hall you sat at a lone table and you just filled up the table. So we sat down and this colonel and his wife came and sat down next to her. And the wife had not noticed that she was black and she—when she turned around and saw her—she began to scream—screamed at the top of her lungs, "Get her out of here!"

I grabbed [unclear] by her arm and said, "Don't you move! You belong here, she doesn't." So she screamed and finally her husband took her out. But I just thought that that was terrible in front of maybe a hundred people.

TS: How did she react—your friend?

TF: It didn't—she was used to it. In our little group the man in charge—I think he was a master sergeant who was in charge of us at that time. And he went around the group one day and he says, "Well, how far did you go school?" —He'd say to each one of us. Most of them went through high school and some of them through college.

He got around to [unclear] and she said, "I have a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago." And I taught math [unclear due to noises]. She said it very quietly. And he shut up, because you could tell his education was down probably maybe high school level.

But there was discrimination in service, but in our—among the women I never saw much of it. You know, first of all, I guess it was because in our basic training—I don't recall there being any black women in the basic training. But then when we came back for OCS there were some there. And I never saw discrimination among those. We all accepted them as equals. At least I did. I had all kinds of psychology courses through college on the colors. And we had had professors come from another university—black

ones—and talk with us about it. And to me they were as smart as anybody else. So anyway—

TS: That's interesting, because you think about at that time the—and you were in the South a lot for where you were stationed—that there was the perception that there was a lot more discrimination in the South than in the North at that time.

TF: Yes. They were talking on television [recently—added later] about the four men that sat in the restaurant.

TS: Oh, in Greensboro?

TF: Yes. I was about two feet away from them when they came in and sat down.

TS: In Greensboro?

TF: Yes.

TS: Is that right?

TF: Yes, I was buying a spool of thread right there at the counter. And I was going to go over and have a chicken salad sandwich when all that erupted. I thought, "What should I do?" I wanted to go sit down with them and tell the waitress, "Bring them whatever they want and bring me the same thing". I thought, "Am I going to get in trouble if I do this? What will my husband say?" And then when I heard the sirens, I thought, "I better get out of here." And I just have regretted ever since that I was so cowardly that I didn't go over and sit down with those young men.

TS: But your heart was in the right place.

TF: My heart was in the right place. It was for years, because there was such discrimination down in that little county where I taught school. And the women there with four year degrees didn't make nearly as much money as I made. Their classrooms were shabby.

TS: Was this in Waverly that you taught?

TF: They didn't have the textbooks that we had. And I just—I'd go down and visit them every so often. And then one day the principal came and he took me by the elbow—I was down on the playground—and he led me away from the children and he says, "What is this that I hear of you going down to visit and talking to those women and agitating them for more pay?"

I said, "I don't know that I'm agitating them for more pay."

And he said, "You're about to lose your job, you know that?"

I said, "Well, I'm sorry that I'm about to lose my job, but that's just the way I feel."

He says, "Well, hereafter let's tone it down," because he wanted to keep me as a teacher. He said, "Let's tone it down a little bit."

So I did.

TS: When was that?

TF: This was when I was teaching at Waverly.

TS: So before you went in the service?

TF: Yes.

TS: Oh, okay. Then you must have been quite an advocate then for equal treatment.

TF: Well, I feel that I have always have been. The big plantation that we bought in Virginia still had a lot of slave descendents on it. And I got to know all of those. And one in particular, she was such a dear to us. And I just thought, "Well, these people just don't have a chance. They really don't." So anyway—

TS: That's really interesting, Thelma. So when you were in Waverly and you were visiting the women and talking to them and seeing that they didn't get the same pay, you felt that there was just an unfairness about it?

TF: Well, I did. I really did. Like I felt about the man teacher we had. We had the same degree, the same amount of experience, but he made fifteen dollars a month more than I did. And yet I did twice the work that he did, because I coached the athletics on the side, for which I didn't even have a degree. So I said to the oldest teacher there one day— old Fanny Booth— I said, "Fanny, why is it he makes more money than I do?"

She said, "Because he wears his pants on the outside."

So there was discrimination between white and white—men and women—as well as between black and white.

TS: In the service though you got the same pay, didn't you?

TF: Yes, we did. Yes, because there was not discrimination in that respect in the service, and not nearly as much, in my mind, as there was out in the south at that time.

TS: In the civilian world?

TF: That's right.

TS: Oh, okay. Well, what was one of the hardest things, you think, about being in the service at the time you were in—maybe physically hard and maybe emotionally hard?

TF: I really can't think of anything that was physically too hard for me. I'd always been a lover of athletics, so when I got into service they saw that I had taught phys[ical] ed[ucation] even though I didn't have a degree or anything— but I was the youngest teacher. They sent me to a special phys ed class at night. And I took those classes at night, and they were rugged. And then I had to come back and teach them the next day. I did that both in basic and in OCS. That was hard. I was just worn out.

TS: What were you teaching?

TF: Calisthenics, so that was hard. And then staying up all night worrying about whether I had all the clothing I need[ed] and everything. That was hard for me.

TS: That was more of an emotional type hard for you?

TF: When I'd meet grumpy, old, discriminating World War I officers, I paid no attention to them.

TS: How would they—What kind of perception did you get from them? I mean, how was it that you felt that they were grumpy, old—What kind of things would they do—or say?

TF: Well, it's just the way that they addressed you, and the fact that you could see plainly that they didn't want you around. That women should not be in the service—that just killed them when they took women into service.

TS: Yeah. So there was just a way that they handled themselves, you would say?

TF: Yes, their attitude toward a person. And one of them never would pronounce my name correctly. He wouldn't call me by my title or my rank. He'd call me Miss Hump the whole time.

TS: Is that right? Did that get under your skin a little?

TF: Yes, it did. But since he outranked me, I didn't let it show.

TS: You had no problem with other men, like, saluting you?

TF: Like doing what?

TS: Saluting your rank on the base?

TF: Only twice did I stop a young man for not saluting me. And one of them was black—a tall black guy. And I said, "Do you not salute officers?" He didn't say anything. And I said, "I am an officer, and I expect to be saluted." And he mumbled something and went off— never did salute. And I wasn't going to challenge it. So—But that was the only thing that I would run into once and a while—is a male—not a female.

TS: No, they would be right Johnny on the spot.

TF: Yeah.

TS: Well, did you—would you say, Thelma, that you are an independent type person?

TF: Oh, very, very.

TS: Even before you went in the military?

TF: Even before, because I made all my decisions and my father could not understand why I would do the things that I did. And even going to college—I just went home and I said, “Well I’ve decided to enroll at” —STC is what we called it.
 “How are you going to do that?”
 And I said, “Well, I’ve made arrangements.”
 I told him about all what I was going to do. And just shook his head and couldn’t imagine. He was a wonderful father—now, don’t get me wrong on that. There was never one better—never. And we had many, many heart to heart talks. And I was a great Bible reader. When I was little— I was, I guess, nine when I finished reading it for the first time. I just started at Genesis and couldn’t understand any of it, but I was determined that I was going to read that Bible from the front to the back. So I would ask him all of these questions about what this meant and what that meant. And he was so patient and would work with me on it, you know. He was just a great father—he really was.

TS: That’s terrific.

TF: I have nothing but admiration for him, even though he couldn’t understand his headstrong daughter once in a while.

TS: Well, do you think being in the military maybe reinforced some of that independence in you?

TF: No, I think I’ve always been just totally independent.

TS: Did you feel—having served during World War II—that you were a pioneer in any way for women in the military?

TF: If I had what in the—?

TS: Since you were in service during World War II—

TF: Yes.

TS: So you were in a field where women normally weren’t normally serving.

TF: That's right.

TS: Did you feel like you were, like, a pioneer—that you led the way for other women?

TF: I'm not sure that I felt that way, because I remember the women that served in World War I and admired them so much. And of course in the Revolutionary War, we had women serving at that time. So women have always come through and helped in times of trouble.

TS: So it wasn't—you didn't see it as a unique.

TF: No, I didn't. I really didn't.

TS: Even the quartermaster position, huh?

TF: No. I had worked in the quartermaster already as a civilian.

TS: That's right.

TS: So it was a natural thing for me to do.

TS: If your daughter had come to you and said, "Mom, I want to join the service!" How would you have felt about that?

TF: I would say, "Martha, whatever you decide to do, you are a level-headed person, and it's all right with me."

TS: Yeah.

TF: So—but it's the farthest thing from her thoughts.

TS: Women today can do a lot of jobs that weren't available—although, as you spoke about, the WASPS who were ferrying planes.

TF: Yes.

TS: Now women can be pilots.

TF: Yes, they can.

TS: What do you think about the changes that have been made in the services?

TF: I think it's wonderful. But I do think that in combat units women might be a distraction with the men trying to protect them rather than doing the job that is ahead of them. Of

course, I haven't talked with any of these people, so I don't know if it's like that or not with them.

TS: Maybe a different generation thinks differently, you think?

TF: Right. That's right.

TS: Well, do you think that your life is different because of your time that you were in the military?

TF: Maybe. I couldn't say specifically what is different about it, but I think that it reinforced my independence and my initiative. It was a great addition to my teaching. I came back and went to UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro] and got a master's degree and had started on a doctorate. My husband didn't want me to teach. He said, "I want a wife that stays at home."

So I said, "Well, I'm just going to go down and take some courses at UNCG." My daughter had gotten at an age—where—in school. And so I went down and took one course after another. And my advisor there said, "Now don't work—just take courses. Work towards something". So the first thing I did was to transfer my certificate from Virginia to North Carolina, and had to take a lot of extra hours to get that done. So he says, "Why don't you just go on for a master's degree?"

So I said, "Sounds good to me." So I just kept going on to school and going on to school—finished the master's degree and signed up to go back. My husband said, "For crying out loud, go back and teach one year. Get it out of your system." He says, "You'll be glad to stay home after that."

Well, I loved it. Oh, I just adored teaching.

And he says, "Well, I can see how much good it's doing you—just keep on."

TS: So how long did you end up teaching then?

TF: Well, only about, I guess, thirteen years. Desegregation came along and the principal leaned hard on me to solve all the problems, because most of his teachers were young—just out of college—and I was trying to meet all the parents who were there so angry about everything. I was trying to deal with a classroom full of kids—forty in a classroom—half of them couldn't read first grade level. The other half were brilliant, because I was in a wealthy area of Greensboro and it just—the problems were just tremendous. And the stress finally did me in. I ruptured a blood vein in my head.

TS: Oh my.

TF: And we had three teachers die that year on our faculty—one of them only thirty-eight years old. We had two in the history department—I think one was at Jackson [Jackson Middle School] if I'm not mistaken—but anyway, at other schools—teachers that I knew well that died or had a stroke.

TS: What year was this Thelma?

TF: The year that desegregation took place—what year was that—sixty-three or sixty-four—[1975—corrected later] somewhere in there. Anyway, I had to go in and have brain surgery and that took me out for good.

TS: Now you said that you taught language, you said?

TF: I taught history too.

TS: Oh you did? Okay.

TF: Loved it. Oh, we had the best time. One of the young men came in one day and he said, “I just love coming in this class because we learn so much. And we have a good time doing it.” So—

TS: That’s terrific.

TF: We did all kinds of projects. And you know they just could let themselves go in this project, and they learned so much. And Latin—oh, I did love Latin. And those youngsters were great too, because they would write plays in Latin and then act them out.

TS: Oh my.

TF: And I know one class-full that went on over to Page [Page High School] after they left our school. And over at Page they really stirred up that Latin teacher there. They said, “We’re going to do this, that and the other”.
 And she said, “You are?”
 They wrote a newspaper in Latin and brought it back over for me to see.

TS: How terrific!

TF: The baseball game was the Christians versus the Lions.

TS: [Chuckles] Of course, of course. Well, that’s really good. Well, I forgot to ask you when we were back talking about the war, how you felt about FDR [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt].

TF: We thought he was a great man. I did—thought he was a great man. My husband felt like Winston Churchill was a greater man than he was. But right after the war in talking with some people who came over here [from Europe—added later] —Burlington Industries, [where my husband worked—added later], brought them up over here as experts in the field of dyeing and finishing cloth. And we got to know them quite well. And they said that they always felt like FDR was greater than Winston Churchill.

TS: Were they English?

TF: They were English—or Scottish.

TS: Why did they feel—

TF: Well I don't know. They just felt like he was—they had known Churchill, I guess, when Churchill had made some bad errors over there. And they hadn't known any with FDR.

TS: Yeah.

TF: So they just thought that he was just a marvelous person.

TS: Do you remember when he died?

TF: Yes, I do. Sad, sad time. Yes, the whole country was in mourning—everybody, black and white.

TS: What did you think about [Vice President Harry] Truman, then, taking over?

TF: Well, I was worried to death. When FDR picked him everybody said, "Well, why did they want that tie salesman as a vice president?" And the only reason he wanted him was to carry Missouri. He didn't want him for any of his expertise, because they didn't think that he had any. And of course when he was sworn in they didn't give him much to do. Everybody else just sort of talked over his head. So when FDR died, everybody thought that this country is going to go to the dogs. But that old man really turned out to be great, in my mind. He really did. So it was a good time.

TS: Well, we sure have covered quite a lot.

TF: All of my past history—everything.

TS: Well, I don't know if we have gotten everything, but we sure—is there anything that we haven't covered that you might want to add to your interview?

TF: I can't really think of anything. We've covered so much. The only way I could—might think of something if we went through those scrapbooks.

TS: Okay.

TF: But you don't have time to do that.

TS: We have some time. We can look at some of those.

TF: Well, I don't know. There's so much in there. One scrapbook is enlisting—pictures of the recruiting station in Richmond and all of our basic training and everything—all the way through to going to Des Moines. And the other is as an officer.

TS: As an officer? Well we'll have to flip through some of them here. But thank you so much, Thelma.

TF: Oh, you're so welcome.

TS: It has been lovely to talk to you.

TF: I have enjoyed it.

TS: I have too. I'm going to go ahead and turn it off.

[End of Interview]