

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Helen Shoobridge

INTERVIEWER: Chris Shoobridge (her son)

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[Begin Interview]

[Static and Tape Noise]

CS: When and where were you born?

HS: I was born in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1919.

CS: And where did you grow up?

HS: In Greensboro.

CS: Talk just a little bit about your family, about your home life, and what did your parents do—your brothers and sisters.

HS: My father was a lawyer. My mother just stayed home and kept house. She always had a colored cook—not a maid, but a cook. Mother did the house cleaning and the keeping up. The cook did the cooking, except on Thursday nights, every cook in Greensboro had the night off. We used to go up to a place and get some chicken soup and club sandwiches for Thursday night off. What else do you want me to tell you?

CS: And your brothers and sisters?

HS: Virginia was the oldest. Nick was the next. Then Steve, and then I. That was our family.

CS: How did you like school? Where did you go to high school? What was your favorite subject?

HS: I went to high school in Greensboro—to Greensboro High School [now Grimsley High School]. My favorite subject was English.

CS: Any particular special recollections about school—about Greensboro High School?

HS: I wasn't all that set on Greensboro High School, but I got through it all right. And then when it came time to go to college, my mother wanted me to go to Women's College

[Women's College of the University of North Carolina, now, University of North Carolina at Greensboro], because that was her college. I didn't want to. So as a special concession, she let me go to Guilford College—a Quaker college.

And I liked Guilford. I liked every bit of it. I thought it was the end of the world when I finished at Guilford and had to stop.

Now what did I do?

I went down to the University of Kentucky for a short while, and did a course in animal diseases and beef production. No credits for it, I just went because I wanted to. That's where I met Doctor Dimmok[?]. He was specializing in the sleeping sickness of horses. He said—working with it, he said, “Some time I know I will get it and I will die of it.”

After that short session at the University of Kentucky, I never went to any school or college again. Oh yes I did, I had to go to a business course. And I got on fairly well with that, but I was not really struck on working in an office.

I actually got a job with [unclear] company's adjustment bureau. Mr. Clark Little was my boss there. And I liked it very much. I really got on well there.

CS: Where was that office?

HS: In Greensboro. The C-A-B was—I think it was the old Guilford Building—I think it was called the Guilford Building—on North Elm Street. There were three of us in the office there, Emma Stewart and Betty Crawford and me.

Now, where am I up to now?

CS: Where were you when you heard about [the bombing of] Pearl Harbor?

HS: I was at home in our house in the woods. I remember Mother came in and she said, “They bombed Pearl Harbor.”

That's when I decided that I would have to go into the army. I thought, “Well, England was doing so much, and America wasn't doing all that much about it.” So, I enlisted in the army.

I thought, “Well,” I told them that I could speak French, and I was studying Italian.

I thought, “Well, they'll send me to Europe”—which is where I wanted to go. But that didn't happen. The army is not all that reasonable. So they sent me to—well, let me manage to get all this all straightened out.

I'm just missing out things here.

CS: Yes. Let's just back up a minute. Do you remember the—do you have a specific recollection of when you heard about Pearl Harbor? I know you said your mother came in and announced—that was the house in the woods. Do you remember the day or anything about the specific—

HS: I can't tell you the date, but I remember very well. Mother was so upset. I thought, “Well, I'll have to go and put in my bit.”

CS: So you were working at the insurance office at that time?

HS: Yes, I was. I went and told them all I was going. Mr. Little gave me a fountain pen to take with me; which, I used for a long, long time when I was writing my letters and writing home again.

CS: So how long do you think it was after Pearl Harbor before you actually enlisted? I mean, was it days or weeks or months?

HS: I don't know. As soon as I could get everything worked out and go, I was away.

CS: Now, at that time did you have any thoughts about what branch of the military, or anything that—posters—or anything that influenced you?

HS: No, I didn't look at the posters. I just decided that it was the thing to do. I would have rather have stayed home, but this seemed like an obligation to enlist in the army.
 Then I went to basic training at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, which was a very beautiful place. I used to go for long walks in the woods there at Oglethorpe, which had been a cavalry base. There were still some horses there at Oglethorpe.
 Uncle Glen—I used to ride there. Uncle Glen, my mother's brother, had a horse called Woody. So I used to ride Woody and some of the other horses as well. I had a good time there, really because I had all sorts of horses to ride.

CS: So Woody and Uncle Glen were there at the base?

HS: Yes. Uncle Glen and Aunt May were there. Virginia and I both stayed with them for a while, and then she went home. And I stayed on.

CS: Just briefly, tell us a little bit about Uncle Glen and what you remember of any of his adventures. He was a professional, right? He was career army?

HS: Yes, he was in the regular army. One thing I remember about Uncle Glen—he didn't like dogs. When he would hear a dog barking far away he would ring up and complain there was a dog barking. Yet, there was a good friend of his right across the road that had a dog. But as soon as the dog would bark, Uncle Glen was just so annoyed.
 Now, what are we up to?

CS: Oh. What did the rest of the family think about you joining the army? Kind of go through them: your dad, your mother, your bother, your sister.

HS: Oh. My mother was—she thought it was very thrilling and very romantic. She thought it was a good idea. She was all for it. Nick, he wasn't at home then. Well, anyway, Dad and Mother thought it was a real good thing to do.

CS: Any other reactions that you remember from other family or friends?

HS: No, except for Mr. Little. He said, “Well, there will always be a job here for you when you come back”—if you want to come back and work his place again. But I never got back there again, because I just kept on going.

CS: Was this the first time you had been away from home for an extended period? I guess you had—
[tape interruption]
All right well, we are rolling again. This says record. Okay.
Where did you actually join the army? Where did you go to sign up? What was the process of actually enlisting? Did you go to somewhere in Greensboro; was there an army office in Greensboro that you went to?

HS: No. I can’t remember going to—I think I wrote and said I wanted to, and—let me get this straight.
Anyway, I ended up doing basic training at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. From there I was sent to Fort Washington, Maryland.

CS: About how long do you think you were in Georgia? I mean, was it days or weeks or months?

HS: Probably two months. That was enough to get through the basic training.

CS: And that’s where Uncle Glen was?

HS: No. Yes, he was too. Yes, that’s right. He was there, though I didn’t see him anymore after that.

CS: Then you went from there to Washington—Fort Washington?

HS: Well, Fort Washington, Maryland. It’s about sixteen miles outside Washington city. There was a bus we could go in on—the bus from the army post to the city. Dick and Gladys were there. He was in the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] by that time, I suppose. I used to go and see them occasionally, and then go back and catch that last bus back to the army again.
Now what?

CS: Can you talk a little bit about the base there? What it was—how it was set up?

HS: Well—as I said—it was a very beautiful place. It was right along the sides of the Potomac River. I used to walk all around the place. I never found anyone else much who did.
Once there was an excursion down the Potomac—or up—which every way it is—to Mount Vernon. We got up to Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon was a bit of a surprise. I thought it was going to be a much bigger and finer house than it was. It was very pretty, but it was really more or less like an ordinary house.

CS: When you went to Georgia and up to Fort Washington, were there other women there, or were they mostly men? How many women were at either of those bases?

HS: Well, there must've been some more women about, but I didn't seem to come across them in the office where I was. I was typing examination papers, which was the most absolutely boring job on earth. I was just copying them.

There was a Captain Ives[?] there that I particularly admired. I used to correct the grammar sometimes. [unclear] "Well, this has got to be perfect, and this isn't just right." So I could tell them the way it should have been said. I kept in the know.

Sergeant Hardgrave[?], she was who it was. She said, "Do you think this is right?"

Then Captain Ives said, "Well, if Douglas said it is, then I think it is."

That job went on. As I said, it was pretty boring. I wanted to get into a chance of going overseas.

CS: Just to back up a minute, what kinds of things did you cover in basic training?

HS: Oh, just drilling—drilling in big groups, which was really quite fun. Although they used to keep saying, "Douglas, get in step!" I didn't seem to be able to stay in step. [chuckle]

CS: When you were drilling, were you drilling with other women, or were you drilling with men at the same time?

HS: Yes.

No. Just the other WACs [Women's Army Corps]—the women.

CS: So if you had to guess how many other WACs there were in—what was the fort in Georgia?

HS: Fort Washington.

CS: No, in Georgia, where you did the basic training.

HS: Oh, Oglethorpe—Oglethorpe.

CS: If you had to guess, were there fifty other women there or a hundred or two hundred?

HS: Oh, probably a hundred, I reckon.

CS: And they put you up in some kind of barracks?

HS: Yes, we had reasonably comfortable barracks. They were cold there. Someone used to get up in the night to try and keep the fire going to keep it a little bit warm. Every time that they'd get up to get the fire going I'd think, "Oh, let the fire alone. Let's just get to sleep." We waked up all night just trying to keep that fire going. We were—we had cots. We were all sleeping in cots there.

CS: Was that just one big huge dorm there, where everyone was sleeping together? Or—

HS: Yes. There were quite a lot of us all together in one big dormitory.
What do you want to know?

CS: So you did your basic training there. And then when you went to Fort Washington, you were pretty much staying on your own up there in a base that was mostly men with just a few women?

HS: Yeah, at Fort Washington.

CS: At Fort Washington did you have a dormitory type living area there?

HS: Yes. Yeah. I went into Washington for the day, and make sure you caught the last bus back or else you were out of luck. I think the last bus left about ten o'clock. Everyone would rush to get on that last bus.

CS: So you were there at Fort Washington for a time, and then you said that you wanted to go overseas? Or, did they come and ask you?

HS: No. I said—I had some option there. I said, “I would like to go overseas.” Thinking, “oh well, they’ll send me to Europe”. But they didn’t. They sent me to—well, that’s when I went to the Philippines. Yeah.

CS: How did you get to the Philippines?

HS: On a very large and very, very, hot troop ship, with nine of us sleeping in a three berth cabin. The water was strictly rationed. We could only have a certain amount of water. Well, drinking water wasn’t rationed, but for washing and bathing I had only that little bit of water.

CS: Was that ship—what was the name of the ship?

HS: The *Monterrey*.

CS: That was originally an ocean liner?

HS: Yeah. There are three of them. There was the *Monterrey*, the *Mariposa*, and I can’t remember the name of the other [There were four ships in the “white fleet.” The remaining ships were the SS *Malolo* and the SS *Lurline*. These ships were all converted luxury lines owned by Matson Lines] They were all—anyway, ours was the *Monterrey*. As I said, we didn’t have any escort, because we were supposed to be fast enough to outrun a Jap submarine if it came along; but nothing ever happened.

CS: So it was hot on that ship. How was the food?

HS: The food was all right, but it was—We only ate twice a day. It was so hot that you'd go down there, and it'd be so hot that I'd just put something on a tray and carry it upstairs and eat it. I think we lived mainly on bread and butter with sugar on it. I don't remember what else we had to eat. We were fed reasonably well.

CS: Roughly how long did that trip take?

HS: Twenty-six days, yes. It was twenty-six days it took, because we didn't go straight. We were zigzagging to try to keep away from the submarines.

CS: So you were completely without escort? There weren't other ships around?

HS: No. It was just our one ship.

CS: Did you ever see any other ships at sea? Did you ever look out and wonder if that was an unfriendly ship?

HS: No. I never even saw another ship.

CS: Did you ever see any planes?

HS: I can't remember seeing any planes. I don't want to say that there weren't, but I can't remember seeing any planes.

CS: Any special anecdotes or good things that you remember about that trip—seabirds, or funny things that happened?

HS: Well, I told you about the one living in our cabin that decided she wasn't going to wash her clothes. She was going to wear the same old things until we got there. [chuckle]

CS: So that was one of the nine of you that decided that she wasn't going to wash anything for twenty-six days?

HS: Yeah. It wasn't easy to wash, but you had enough rationed water that you could do a little bit of washing. Then when we were nearly across, and suddenly they opened up the water rations. We could have a lot more water. I will never forget the first time I was able to wash my hair, because there was enough water. It was such a good feeling to have a hair wash.

CS: Where did you land on the other end after that trip? Did you actually land in the Philippines?

HS: Well, we went to New Guinea first. After a little while in New Guinea then we went to Manila [Philippines], and that's where I stayed for quite a while.

CS: How long were you in New Guinea, was it days or weeks or months?

HS: Oh, probably weeks. Because I remember thinking that New Guinea is hot, but the Philippines are even hotter. I never did get used to the heat of it all.

CS: What did you do in New Guinea while you were there?

HS: The same thing as anywhere else. I was still working for—I was still only a typist wherever I went.

CS: So you were working in an office there with other people? Was it like a pool?

HS: Yeah. A great big screened-in sort of a porch. We were all in there for the various—who we were working for. I remember going up on top of the buildings at night, it got a bit cool, and to look out. In New Guinea, I remember especially what a treat it was to go to the swimming pool.

You see, I had this one particular friend, Kathy Coffee, who I was in with so much of the time. We stayed together as long as ever we could. When I went to Manila, Kathy didn't go.

CS: Was she from Greensboro?

HS: No. She was just someone I met and we liked each other. Actually, she was raised in a Catholic orphanage. She had a brother that she saw sometimes. She had a father, whom she never seemed to see—she had been helping look after the babies in the orphanage. She was a most attractive girl. She had blue eyes and yellow hair. We used to say that all the men just swarmed around Kathy like a honey pot. [chuckle] We did things together as much as we could.

Now, where was I? Manila—she didn't go when I went to New Guinea.

CS: Just a minute. In New Guinea, there, you were in some kind of a typing pool?

HS: Yes.

CS: That was obviously before the days of tape recorders. How did you receive the material that you needed to type?

HS: It was simply dictated—a pad and pencil.

CS: So you would go to the military person—whoever it was—and they'd call you to their office.

HS: They'd say, "Come. Bring your pad." And I would put it all down in shorthand.

CS: What kinds of things were you typing at that point? Was it—

HS: A lot of it was—it was all in personnel. They would ask for specific people for a while, and then it got to be where they couldn't mention a specific person they wanted. So they got around it by saying "we would like someone with these particular qualifications." They would send—

[End of CD 1—Begin CD 2]

CS: Okay, we've got another tape going here now. So you're in New Guinea and then you went down to the Philippines?

HS: Yeah. I was about to say, in the office we were always called by our last names. I was Douglas—no rank, no first name. In the office you were Douglas.

CS: And what rank were you at that point?

HS: Corporal. Corporal. And when my family said, "why don't you sign up and try to get into officers' school."

I said, "I don't want to be an officer."

So, I never did. I just stayed the rank of corporal the whole time.

CS: Then when you went to the Philippines you did the same thing there—in the Philippines?

HS: Well, when I got there I was waiting for some kind of security clearance from Washington [D.C.], which never did come through. So I worked for the post engineer, Captain Baker, who was—had taken on himself to treat these little Filipino children quite unofficially [unclear]. They would come up and he'd put sulfanilamide in and make them peroxide first, and then sulfanilamide. It seemed to work.

When I—that's when Colonel Burns[?] said, "I'm going to take you up top. I'm going to take you away from here, and you're going to work for me."

I said to him, "You'll have to let me come back and look after these children." So I used to go back at a certain time, and these little children would come up—very sweet little children.

They would always say, "Thank you, sister. Thank you, sister." I didn't bother saying I wasn't a sister. I just happened to be there.

CS: Now that work—first of all, what was yours?

HS: That's something that I have never been able to find out. It was a great enormous hole in the leg. I have never been able to find out what it could be. It was a horrible looking thing to start with. I can't imagine now what it really was.

CS: Was that like a single hole? They would come with a single wound, or multiple wounds?

HS: Just one great big hole. It could be as big around as that—a horrible looking thing.

CS: Oh. The medication helped?

HS: It did. Yes, indeed it did. Most of them seemed to get better.

CS: Now that was outside your official function there, right? You worked in the office part of the time and then go out and do that after hours?

HS: That was unofficial, because the post engineer was doing it unofficially. That was when I—when Colonel Burns[?] said, “Why don’t you come up and work for me.”
I said, “I’ll come if you’ll let me come back each day and treat these children.”
You see, ordinarily, a corporal doesn’t tell the colonel what he’s going to do, but I told him I wouldn’t come unless I could come back and look after them.
Well, I suppose I was doing that when—and trying to get—what was it—it wasn’t—I’m just trying to think now where we were at.

CS: This is while you were in the Philippines. Now, in the—

HS: I know what—I was in Manila—living in Manila. It was such a noisy, awful, smelly place that I thought that I’d like to get away from there. So I found out about Tarlac. And somehow I managed to get a transfer to Tarlac, which was also in the Philippines—which was a lovely place to be. That’s where we were stationed up above Lake Sentani [misremembered, Lake Sentani is in New Guinea] which was so lovely. And a beautiful swimming pool, although there was a swimming pool on the post.

CS: You liked to swim in the damned up stream?

HS: Yeah. It was the most beautiful swimming pool. I used to thumb a ride down there—Kathy and I—with our bathing suits under our clothes. We would go and have marvelously cool swims there in the river.

CS: And at this point how far were you from combat operations? Did you ever see combat, or was there combat going on in the Philippines at that point?

HS: Well, we heard the guns going off in the distance. And there was still, as I said, we were there after the main bombing. There were walled cities. There was a lot of dead Japs all over the place. They were—we would come on to the burial squad. They would dig him out and take him away.

CS: You mean they were digging them out of ruined buildings and things?

HS: Yeah, the ruins of the buildings there.

CS: And how far was that from where you were working from the office and where you were living?

HS: Oh, not very far at all. Perhaps half an hour, but not very far. So when I decided I would like to get out of Manila—there was a Colonel McIver that I had met. He said, “I want you to come and type a letter for me. I don’t want you to tell anybody what this is about.” So I promised faithfully that I wouldn’t. He wrote this—I wrote this letter for him saying that his health and his mind were failing, so he wanted to get released from the army—which he did. And then he went home, and within a couple of months he was dead. That was the Colonel McIver.

Now, where are we?

CS: So that—maybe you don’t want to talk too much about it, but that must have been a real eye-opening experience when you first got into the areas where the bombing had been and seeing dead Japanese. Was that a traumatic experience?

HS: Well, it was. Yes, to see these hands sticking up out of the ruins with gloves still on them. For some reason all of the Japanese soldiers always had on white gloves.

CS: And any other particular recollections about the Philippines—people you saw? Or, did you have much contact with the Filipino people?

HS: [chuckles] Oh yes, there was this little girl named Natasha. I used to go for a walk, and Natasha had gotten to the place where she knew when I was going for my walk and she would wait outside the barracks. And she and I would walk along together, and talk together as much as she could—not being very good at English. But we still enjoyed each other’s company.

I will try to think where—I know—I bet this is not very important, but I just met this Filipino woman and I said, “What is your little boy’s name?”

She said, “Edgar.” Like Edgar Allen Poe—Edgar Allen Poe. That is something I remember.

I liked the Filipino people. And going—I don’t know if I told you or not, but when we went for our meals there were always little children waiting outside with buckets—little tin buckets. In case we left some of our food, they would want all that food scraped into their buckets. We got into the way of leaving a little bit, so there would always be something for them.

Now, where are we up to?

CS: Do you have any particular recollections of how the Americans were received in the Philippines? The Japanese obviously had just been run out of the Philippines. Were they glad to see the Americans?

HS: Oh. The Americans were entirely welcomed. Yes, they were so glad to see us there. I didn’t find anybody who was in any way opposed to the Americans.

Our barracks was in an old—it had been a college.

See, I’m trying hard to think of all this.

CS: I seem to recall some comment you made before about seeing water buffalo in the Philippines.

- HS: Oh. Well, I'd be walking along by myself, and the children would have their water buffalos. They were riding on top of them. I said, "Let me ride the water buffalo." So they pushed me. They managed to get up just by grabbing the tail, and scrambling up the hindquarters. That was their way, but I couldn't do that. So they helped me on somehow on to their water buffalo, and let me ride them. They thought it was the funniest thing—they had a great sense of humor. Well, anyway, they thought it was funny—me sitting up there on the water buffalo. How they directed them, I don't quite know. A ring in the nose, I think.
- CS: Getting back to the work you were doing. Was that kind of a regular five—regular eight to five, five day a week sort of job, or did you do shifts?
- HS: Well, we worked on Saturday. It was a six day. We didn't work on Sundays as I remember. I don't think we worked on Sundays. We used to go to church in the old bombed out churches. We would have a service in a beautiful old church with no roof on it.
- CS: And what was a typical day of work for you? Did you start at eight and have lunch in the middle of the day and then knock-off [leave work]? Or, was it just as needed?
- HS: It was a whole—a whole day. We started at about half past eight I think, and stopped for lunch. And then probably work until half past four or five.
- CS: And you're still doing the same kind of work? Somebody would summon you to come and take a letter or a something?
- HS: Yeah. And always so hot that the papers would just stick to your arms if you put your arm down on a paper.
- CS: Did you have to be in full uniform?
- HS: Yes, yes. We were supposed to. We had our summer uniforms on, and what we called our fatigues. No, I know, we had these HBTs as they called them—Herringbone twill—which went down to the wrist and down to the ankles—that was to keep the mosquitoes out.
- CS: That must have been hot.
- HS: It was hot. [chuckle] Yes, it was hot.
- CS: Overall, did you enjoy the work that you were doing?
- HS: I did. Yes, I did. I met a lot of nice people, and I enjoyed the work.
- CS: And were you well treated by the people that you worked with?

HS: Oh yes. I was always called Douglas.

CS: It was always professional behavior? Did you ever see anything that was verging on unprofessional conduct, or things that were untoward?

HS: No. [chuckle] No, I didn't.

CS: And were there any men at all working in those office pools, or was it entirely women?

HS: No, there were no men working there.

CS: What were some of the most difficult things or emotionally difficult things that you did while you were in the service?

HS: Well, emotionally, I say I didn't have any worries. I liked it. I'm going out of my way trying to think of anything. Oh well, what else have you got?

CS: Were you ever—did you ever feel like you were in personal danger from the action going on?

HS: No, no, never. I could hear the bombs or the guns in the distance, but never in any personal danger.

CS: Did you ever see planes fly over that you were concerned with?

HS: No, I didn't.

CS: So then—roughly how long were you in the Philippines?

HS: Two years, I think. Yes, two years. When I was able to leave Manila and go up to Tarlac, that's where it was so beautiful—up at Lake Sentani. I liked it up there.
 And then when I asked for an overseas discharge, they had plenty of men that wanted to stay over, but they didn't have any WACs that wanted to stayed over. So they hardly knew what to do with me. I was back in the camp of little screened cabins, and everybody else had gone. I was there by myself, because I was waiting. There was a guard that used to walk around my cabin all night long. I would hear him, I told you this before, I would hear him walking around. And I would think, "Is that my guard or is that a Japanese?" I would just go back to sleep again. [chuckle]

CS: I think that you claim that you were the last WAC in the Philippines?

HS: Yes, that was because I was waiting for an overseas discharge. The others had all gone home. And there I was up there.

CS: You didn't have any temptation to stay in the army and make it a lifelong career?

HS: No, not at all. I didn't really want to be in the army.

CS: You saw General [Douglas] MacArthur somewhere along the line?

HS: In Manila. Kathy Coffee, my great friend, and I, she had found out that General MacArthur was coming along with Lord Louis Mountbatten. We waited outside to see them come. They came up the steps and went into that building there. That was my encounter with MacArthur.

I think MacArthur came around to the offices where we were all working to tell us that Roosevelt had died. He came into each of the offices, and just announced the death of President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt.

Now where does that take us?

CS: So you were still in the Philippines when the war ended?

HS: Yes.

CS: Right. How did you find out? How was that announced? Talk a little bit about finding that World War II had ended.

HS: Oh, there was a great celebration that the war had ended. But I happened to be up there by myself at the time. We used to—there was always something in the kitchens to eat. We could do really very well there. We could make coffee or tea—coffee. We could have something there—often have these midnight feasts. The food was good.

All right, now where were we?

CS: So how did you actually learn that the war had ended? You said that there were celebrations, but did they come around to the camp telling people that it ended?

HS: I'm just trying to think of how did we know that the war had ended. I don't remember how. I just don't remember.

CS: Any particular thoughts about Roosevelt or [President Harry S.] Truman—the war presidents—any particular impression of them from your standpoint?

HS: Well, we thought that Roosevelt was good. Yes, we admired him. I found out that somewhere along that line that Uncle Glen had been offered a job as a personal attendant for Roosevelt. But he didn't want to do it, because it was too much work. Roosevelt had to be helped everywhere he went. He had had infantile paralysis when he was young. So he was—he couldn't really stand up straight and walk about by himself. He had to be supported all the time. [Roosevelt was in fact relatively healthy until falling ill at age thirty-nine when he was diagnosed with polio (also called infantile paralysis) which left him permanently paralyzed from the waist down.]

CS: And people in the services, did they generally support him and have a favorable impression? Or, was there mumbling about whether the president should have done this, or should have done that? Or, was he a hero?

HS: Well, to tell the truth, we just thought, “This is our war, and it’s not up to us to stop and think about it.” We just never thought about the angle of it. Our job was to get on with the war, and not think about the politics of it.

CS: And then when the war ended—and you were waiting for your discharge—your overseas discharge papers—when did they finally come through?

HS: It seemed to have taken them a terrible time. I went back to Brisbane [Australia] then. I was in Brisbane, really, waiting for the final discharge from the army. It was when I was in Brisbane that I decided that I was over there, and I might as well see some of the world over there. So I just stayed on. I ended up as a hop picker.

CS: Where did you go from Brisbane? You spent some time in Canberra, didn’t you?

HS: Yes. I was in Sydney for a while too. In Sydney, I was still waiting for my discharge to come through. I seemed to be the only WAC that was doing that. I was floating around for a long time, but getting paid for it.

CS: And then you went—How did you wind up in Canberra?

HS: How did I?

CS: You spent some time in Canberra. What department did you work for in Canberra? Weren’t you working for the Foreign Service?

HS: I was working for Mr. Raymond. Now, what did he do? I didn’t know exactly. He was my boss.

CS: I seem to recall some recollection of your typing top secret Australian papers.

HS: Oh yeah, yes. [chuckles] I thought that that was rather funny. It was all top secret until it suddenly occurred to somebody that I really shouldn’t be there typing top secret things. So I stayed on, but presumably not getting into the top secret things.

CS: What kind of papers and things were you typing that were top secret? Was it letters, or records, or—

HS: It was all letters. That was—all the time I was working for the personnel department. I was trying to get hold of people. That’s where they’d say—they couldn’t ask for specific people. So they would say “someone with qualifications like this,” and knowing whom they were going to get.

CS: And then about how long were in Canberra? Were you there for weeks or months?

HS: Oh, a few weeks. Yes, I can remember having a good time in Canberra. I was completely on my own by the end. I was at my own expense.

[Tape interruption]

CS: Okay. Okay. I think we're up and running again. After we talked before, you said something about a bubble pipe. If you want to reflect on your experience about the bubble pipe in the military.

HS: Oh! I used to blow bubbles with a spoon—with a spool—and soap. I used to sit on my cot blowing bubbles for entertainment. I told my father about that, and he sent me a real bubble pipe. So I used to get a bit of soap and a bit of water and blow bubbles, which entertained all the other WACs around the place. And when we got ready to make a move from one place to another someone said to me, "Oh, you've forgotten a vital piece of equipment." She handed me the bubble pipe.

So I packed that in with my other stuff in the duffel bag. The duffel bag, as I explained to you—we found that in the end, rather than pack carefully, you got more stuff in just by wrinkling it up and stuffing it down as hard as you could. And that's the story of the bubble pipe.

CS: And where did the bubble pipe come from?

HS: My father sent it to me. When I told him how I had been blowing bubbles with a spool, and he sent that bubble pipe. Two things he sent me: one was a bubble pipe, and one was a spoon. Because I had found the big old spoons that came from the canteen were too big—a spoon and a bubble pipe.

CS: [chuckles] Talk, if you would, about any experience you had about adjustment to civilian life after you were in the military.

HS: It wasn't any trouble to me. I was—I enjoyed my days in the army, but I was glad to get out. I was just discharged—overseas discharge—instead of going home. And that's when I came—

[End of CD 2—Begin CD3]

CS: Okay, I'm showing Mother a picture of—well, the title of the photo is "grandmother as a little girl".

HS: Yes.

CS: Well, what can you tell us about that photograph?

HS: Well, I just remember being taken to a professional photographer. He posed me like this, and took the pictures.

CS: 'Round about how old were you at the time?

HS: I should think four or five. I hadn't gone to school, I know that. Probably four or five years old.

CS: And were other members of the family photographed at the same time, or was it just you?

HS: Well, this was my own picture. This was just me—this particular one.

CS: Was it sort of a family sitting or—

HS: For some reason they decided that they wanted a picture of me. We went up to this professional photographer, and he set me on this bench and posed me like this.

CS: Now the dress you're wearing there, is there any significance in that?

HS: I don't remember the dress. I suppose at the time that was my best dress, so I wore that. [chuckle] Goodness knows that I don't remember the dress.

CS: Where were you living at that time?

HS: Fisher Park Circle in Greensboro. I spent most of my time there until I was about thirteen or fourteen. That was when we went to the other house in the country.

CS: Have you seen that photograph since those days?

HS: Only with you. I don't know how you got a hold of it. I guess it was up with Mother's things.

CS: Well, Christopher sent it to me yesterday. You haven't seen it prior to that, that you can recall?

HS: No, no. I hadn't.

CS: It's a nice photo, it really is.

HS: It is—it's very nice. Yes, it is. I don't remember a lot about it being taken, but I remember a little bit about it. I sat up there like that.

CS: The rest of the family at that age—you had brothers and sisters. You were the youngest at the time?

HS: Yes, I had an older sister and two brothers older than I was.

CS: And they'd already had photos taken probably, do you recall?

HS: Oh, I don't remember them having pictures. I don't remember. I reckon they did.

CS: Okay, let's have a look at another one. Just bear with me a moment while I change to the next picture in the set. And—this time I'm showing Mother a picture that is entitled "Mary Eloise Dick of Virginia. Wife of Robert Pain Dick. Called Grandmother Dick."

HS: Yeah. I never saw Granny Dick—only just must have seen pictures of her. I never saw her in my life.

CS: And how does she fit in with the family?

HS: Well, I think she's our great, great, grandmother.

CS: So, she was your mother's—

HS: On Mother's side. Yeah. Now wait a minute—no, that's on Dad's side, because he was Robert Dick Douglas.

CS: Yeah.

HS: This would have been Grandmother Dick.

CS: This would have been your father's mother?

HS: Yeah.

CS: That doesn't work. That would have been a Douglas.

HS: Yes.

CS: [chuckle] I'm getting confused.

HS: That's right. No, my father's mother was a generation closer—a generation younger. That was Granny Douglas. This is Granny Dick. I saw quite a bit of Granny Douglas. I saw quite a lot of her.

CS: Have any comments on the photo or the family involvements at all?

HS: Well, not with this picture—not with Granny Dick. I don't remember seeing her. I'm sure I never did see her.

CS: Okay. I'll just find the third one in the set. We'll see if this one rings any other bells.
[pause] This photograph is called, "Helen Brown."

HS: [chuckle] Oh yes. I know this picture well, because Grandfather Brown—this is Grandmother Brown. I remember her, but I do not remember him. I don't remember ever seeing him. I probably did, but I don't remember.

CS: So she was Helen—

HS: Helen Gray Brown.

CS: So your name then was a family name?

HS: The Helen Gray part was, yes.

CS: Oh.

HS: And she was Helen Gray Brown.

CS: What do you remember about her?

HS: That she lived right in the middle of Greensboro town in a two story house. Her favorite pastime was sitting on the front porch and watching people go by. And she had a bit of land there right in the middle of the shops. She had some hens. And it was good to go out to the hen house, and see whether I could find any eggs. That's about all I remember about being at her place.

CS: Now, about how old would you have been at the time?

HS: Oh, five or six I guess.

CS: About the same age as that other photograph.

HS: Yeah. That's a funny picture of Grandmother—Grandfather Brown. It's quite different from the way I remember him, when he used to walk three miles out to see us in the country. [inaudible] anything right here—

CS: Oh, I see, we made it just a little bit big. We're looking at a large picture of their hands.
[pause] There we go. Now the clothing that she's wearing there. That looks very much like a multilayered skirt.

HS: It certainly is a fancy outfit and so is his. Old-fashioned-looking both of them—dressed in their best for having a photograph taken. I can't remember a thing of theirs having looked like that.

CS: It's probably pretty close to when they got married—pretty young—certainly from the looks of it.
Okay, there's one other photograph that's not part of that set. Okay, for the camera, I'm showing Mother a photograph of the Fisher Park house as it was a year ago.

HS: It's exactly the same as when we lived there. It hasn't changed at all.

CS: So you were basically born there.

HS: Yeah.

CS: Would that literally have been born there, or would you have been born in a hospital or medical center or something? What was the—

HS: I think that I was born there with the old family doctor—Doctor Harrison. As far as I know, I was simply born there.

CS: You grew up there until you—what—early teens?

HS: Thirteen.

CS: Can you describe the house inside?

HS: Well, it was a grand big house. It was a big dining room, here. There was a parlor, here. And back here was what we called the sitting room, and that's where we actually spent most of our time. Except on grand occasions, we didn't use the parlor. The dining room there is where we had the great brass candelabra in the ceiling—which is still there, I think. I think it held about eight lights. We could then turn on as many as we wanted to.

CS: So was that electric, or was that gas, or—

HS: [chuckle] It was electric. I can't remember—no—it was electric. There wasn't gas about in those days. That was electric lighting.

CS: Were the floors carpeted or polished wood?

HS: Mainly wood with some rugs on them. Certainly, the whole thing wasn't carpeted at any stage.

CS: And the walls—wallpaper?

[Stopped at 12:40 due to family history]