Margaret Goldhahn: I’m Margaret Goldhahn, Margaret Roberts Goldhahn, and I’m being recorded here in Sapphire Village, which is our home now. My husband John is here and Eloise is here taping this. Is this the first group of Montana women military pilots that you’ve done? I’m the first one?

Eloise Sagmiller: Yes, you are. I hope to find more through you. I have several names now that I can check, but you’ve been a real quiet group. [Laughter] Hard to find.

MG: It’s through a mutual friend that she got interested and got my name as far as a military pilot. Now I’ve given her the names of six Montana pilots. I go to the bi-annual meetings of the Women’s Air Force Service Pilots, but I don’t believe you other women do, which I think you should start doing. [Laughter]

She’s asked how I first got into this. I was teaching school at Glasgow in 1942 and went back to Washington State and came back the fall of ’42. I was teaching school in Glasgow 1941 and ’42, ’42 and ’43. My sisters both went into the military. My twin sister went into the Navy Nurse Corps. My older sister went into the Marine Corps. My boyfriend was a B-17 [inaudible] and everyone was doing things in the military. In the spring of 1943, I read an article in a magazine about the Women’s Air Force Pilot Program in Texas. It told me who to get in contact with, gave me the name, and it was a lady in Los Angeles who was a friend of Jackie Cochran’s. I made contact there and made arrangements for an interview in Los Angeles. When school was out in the spring of 1943, I went to Los Angeles. I had a cousin living in Long Beach and I stayed with her and she took me into L.A. I don’t remember the lady that I interviewed with, but she had a little flying service out of Blythe, California, and to get into the [inaudible] you had to have thirty-five hours flying time. I didn’t have any at all. I picked up thirty-five hours in about three weeks. By doing this, then, I went back into Los Angeles and had the interview and was accepted.

I was put in the class of 1940...I went in December 3, 1943, and that put me in 44-W-5, the seven month training program. One of the main things I remember about Blythe was that it was very hot. It was during the month of July and I remember soaring in the little fifty horsepower Taylorcraft. I couldn’t believe it was a fifty horsepower, but I checked the log book and it was a fifty horsepower Taylorcraft. It didn’t seem to take very long to get the thirty-five hours. There were other girls flying there but I don’t believe any of them...There was another girl that interviewed, too, with me, a little girl, but I don’t know that she was ever accepted. I never saw
her again. I don’t remember her name. But I was accepted and put in that class and I went back to Seattle to wait to go into the training program. I had to take a physical. I got a job working out at the naval base at Lake Washington. There was a U.S. naval base there. I remember working in a cylinder shop, thinking I could learn something about aircraft engines. I stayed there until I took a bus to Sweetwater.

At that time we all arrived together, as I recall. Ours was one of the largest classes, the second largest class that was in the military at the time. I believe we were the second largest class that was accepted. I remember as I got to doing research for this, I remember being in Sweetwater and we were all together in the hotel waiting for a bus that they called the meat wagon to take us out to Sweetwater. Now Sweetwater was about 15 miles, maybe—how many miles out from Avenger Field? Eight miles out. And we all seemed to ride by train or bus and then they came in and picked us all up and took us up to Avenger Field. Avenger Field had been a training base for men and then when Jackie Cochran received permission to start a women’s training program...At first she was assigned that base later.

When they first started the program, which was...Some of the girls went in in 1943. I’ll have to check my annual to see when the first classes were. Some of the first classes went in...Maybe I can give you that date later. There were about four or five classes in 1943 and there were ten classes in 1944. The program lasted just two years, I think, to date. The reason they had started this training program is that they had made a survey in 1941, when the war was just getting really going in Europe, and they had discovered that there were only about a hundred women that could fly for the military, women civilian pilots. Jackie Cochran was kind of a barn-storming pilot and she was a friend of quite a few people. She was married to William Oldham, who was a wealthy man. So she had access to some of these more important people. She was asked, I guess, by Hap Arnold, and they made a survey. At that time, too, she got together and organized a group of women. They went to Canada, took flying tests, and were flown to England, 25 of them were, to fly and they did fly there. Jackie Cochran, I guess, was a co-pilot [inaudible]. Now some of those, some of them stayed. One or two were married there. I don’t know how many were killed, but they came back and joined the Women’s Air Force Pilot Program that was started in the United States.

They first were in Dallas, Fort Worth area, at an air base because there was no place for them and they didn’t have aircrafts. They lived at different places, but they flew [inaudible]. I don’t recall whether it was Dallas or Fort Worth. Anyway, their earliest classes graduated from there. Why don’t you check and see when that earliest class graduated? It’ll be in there someplace, the earliest graduating classes. About the third class...It was interesting because they were given the base and then as each graduating class graduated, if it was going to be the last class at the Dallas/Fort Worth area, they would fly that aircraft to Avenger Field. The first planes, I think, that arrived at Avenger were the AT-6’s, advanced trainers. The girls had graduated so they flew them to Avenger Field and then the next class that would graduate...And the last planes to come in, I think, was Stearman, the bi-wing, and they flew [inaudible] class and then flew them to Avenger Field, and that’s how some of those crafts arrived at Avenger Field,
delivered there. That was quite interesting when I read that history. I had to go back and do that research. Anyway, then they started graduating from Avenger Field. One of the classes in 1943 was a large class.

John MG: January 1942 was when [inaudible].

MG: January 1942, when she first recruited. When did they arrive at Fort Worth? Anyway, by the time I got there in December 1943, it was a well-organized, well-functioning base. They had a class every month. A class graduated every month and every month a class came in and if they had seven months of training, you can imagine the number of girls they had and the number of aircraft they had. So they were training. Now there were over 100 girls in my class—135, I believe. Maybe more than that. They were—we called it wash out or something like that—and I don’t recall exactly how...I really don’t remember...132 was in the class of 44-W-5 and 72 graduated, so that’s a little more than half that graduated. That’s about the average of all classes. It was interesting. I know you’d have a full bay and pretty soon they would thin out and you wouldn’t have the girls there. I know I have a picture in my scrapbook of two girls who took their flight test in AT-6’s and washed out and went home. As I did research on that, I had forgotten that we had 70 hours in the Stearman Primary Trainer. I had thought we had more time in basic, but we didn’t.

From there, from the training, we went to the advanced training, which was a low-wing, not a—Stearman was a 222 horsepower. The AT-6 is a 650 horsepower. And evidently, some people couldn’t handle that. I remember soloing in it and I remember the instructors were sitting on the sideline as we were soloing in these AT-6’s and some of them ground-looped and some of them...They didn’t really crash, but the wing dropped out. I remember I almost did, but I don’t ever recall being in a critical situation where I would have washed out. I might have been a little bit older than some of them, but some of them were older than I was. I had gone to the University of Montana—not University of Montana, the University of Washington—and had four years teaching experience before I went into the service. So that would have made me about 24 years old, I guess. I don’t ever remember being afraid, ever.

ES: I think that would count for something too.

MG: I suppose it would. For some reason...And you know I don’t even remember soloing in that Stearman. The log book shows we soloed in seven hours. I don’t remember. I have it also in the log book when I soloed in a Taylorcraft. It was less than eight hours. It was about six hours. I think a lot of women did that. We had to have that 35 hours, and that helped going into the training. A lot of women had a lot of flying time. The earlier ones that went in all had more hours of training than I had ever had. They had flown more. The earlier ones that graduated in 1943 were all, I think, experienced pilots. A lot more flying time than I had.

But then, going back to the beginning, we were assigned a barracks and according to the history of it that we were treated just like men pilots, same as men going into primary. A lot of the men
pilots flew a low wing trainer and then went into the advanced trainer AT-6’s. But we’ve all had this [inaudible], which is a very wonderful plane to fly, but it had a very narrow landing gear, which ended up with ground loops a lot of the time and then it was difficult. But I don’t remember ever having [inaudible] at all. And the seventy hours I had in my log book said that I could do Chandelles. I was reading in my little book about that, in my record. Of course everyone had it, a little...I was in 44-W-5, flight two, because of my name. The G’s came in the last part. I have a record of the whole thing. I was asked to talk at an Americanism program this last spring, and going back...You know, that’s when I went back. It really impressed me what I had done. I had forgotten all of this. How few hours we had soloing.

ES: Oh yes, it’s amazing.

MG: It really surprises. I went, and I imagine the women who survived and went through the whole program did the same thing. I remember we went on cross-countries together, and I’m sure at the base together. And I’m sure the same thing happened. I don’t remember, I really don’t recall when these girls left. I know it was traumatic, I suppose, but I don’t remember that it ever affected me, that I was ever afraid. Nowhere did I ever seem to ever have any problem with it, and I think a lot of the girls were that way. They never had any problem.

And also in my class, I think I should mention, is that I had...Women would come out of the Army—I don’t remember any Navy women coming out, because I’m not sure you could get out of the Navy as easy as you could out of the Army—but we had a couple of captains of a Women’s Army Corps that resigned and came into the WASP. One was a Karla Mogensen and another was a Dorothy—I can’t remember her last name. Dorothy didn’t...When she was in advanced training, I thought she was getting along fine, but she resigned. I think she resigned more than being [inaudible] not failing. We had a couple others that had come in from other parts of the service, but not the Navy, I don’t think, or the Marine Corps. They came just from the Army, came out of the WACs into this.

ES: The Women’s Air Force was separate.

MG: The Women’s Air Force Service Pilot training, WASP.

ES: I thought surely I would remember that, and I associated WASP with the British Air Force, for some reason. I don’t know why, [inaudible] can’t be that.

MG: I suppose I should intercede here. We were brought in under the civil service program. I suppose there was no money or no...It was just as if they had kind of slipped us in here as an experimental program. Jackie just talked Hap Arnold into doing this, and Jackie had friends who I think were former pilots. It was a Mrs. Deaton who was the one who piloted the first women in 1943 and took care of them and then got them into Avenger Field. Some of the people that worked there were very precious to all of us, weren’t necessarily pilots.
We had seventy hours of training in the Stearman, which was a very good airplane to ride. And then we soloed in the AT-6 and had about...Well, I don’t think we had more than eight to fifteen hours in the AT-6. And then I thought we’d had the basic trainer before then, but not. After soloing in the AT-6, we went to the basic trainer, which was a low wing and that’s where we took our instrument time. In instrument time, we had 30 hours of Link, which is an enclosed, simulated instrument flight. And then we had 30 hours of instrument time under the hood of instrument timing (?). So that came after we soloed in the AT-6’s. And we had night flying and did cross-country at that time.

Now the AT-6 was a [inaudible] 650 horsepower and the Stearman was a continental. It was an Army PT-17 with a Continental engine, 220 horsepower. I notice here in my log book it shows me that in seven hours dual and then having twenty minutes of solo time. That was on the 9th of March, 3/9. It was in an AT-6. 20 minutes. It might have been too much for some of the women, I don’t know. And some of them may have taken longer, I don’t know. But those instructors were sitting there. And it was in Sweetwater and it was a hot day. I remember it being warm, plenty warm. They were sitting there betting who would ground loop. And also [inaudible] would land and just keep right on going and take off, and they were betting who would get the flaps up the quickest. Found that out later. We would land and just go straight on and raise the flaps and take off and they were having bets on who would get their flaps up. [laughter] They had a big time I guess. Found out afterwards that they were having a big ball.

And then on...Here I have an hour and forty-one minutes on the 16th of March, so you see I was soloing, flying, on the 16th of March. And then instrument time. We checked out in a basic trainer called 1350 approximately 440-450 horsepower instrument flight time. We had Link time before we went into instrument time. Then I soloed in that, in that basic trainer, on the 23rd of March. But that was easy, transferring from the AT-6 to that. It was a 440 horsepower. I had about...It shows here about...As a student three, about five hours of flying time. I had 42 hours—42 minutes—of instrument time and an hour and thirty-two minutes of solo time. So they didn’t mess around and we did do a lot of flying, evidently, even though it was just a few hours a day.

I think that the base must have been well-organized. You had primary people, you had instrument people, and you had advanced people all flying those three types of aircrafts. They must have had, supposing there was a 100 in every class flying at different times, that’s 700 women, 700 pilots. So you see you had a very efficiently-run program, evidently. Overall, we had 11 accidents, 11 deaths. One was in the summertime. I graduated in June but it was hot down there. Jackie Cochran, in her histories, she talks about it, that we had a mid-air collision. An advanced trainer was coming in and a primary trainer was flying. We could all see it, but they didn’t see each other, evidently. One of them was a Beverly Moses. I believe she was in our class. I think that she might have been, I’m not sure of that. But anyway, that’s the only one I recall there, that mid-air collision. But there were other accidents. I don’t recall a great deal. Some of this you forget after 45, 46 years. It helps to go back to your log book.

Margaret Goldhahn Interview, OH 262-005, 006, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana–Missoula.
Then after the instrument time of training, why, we went back to the AT-6, which, once in a while I see I’m flying a PT-17 for a little while. I don’t know why I did that. We’re on our PT-17 cross-country training and then we were on AT-6 cross-countries. Then, going to my log book, I have June 16th and we went on cross-country, which was a 2,000 mile cross country. We went west, 2,000 miles cross-country. We went to El Paso, Texas, Tucson, and Yuma, Arizona. When we took off...And it took us about three days. Six, well, I’ve got six 1920 from the sixth of June—I beg your pardon—it would be June 19th of 1920. That gives me two days. I have 13-13 cross country, 13 hours and 13 minutes cross-country. I know that when I got to Yuma, I broke ranks and I probably shouldn’t have but I went up to...[inaudible] in California where I’d first flown(?) [laughter]. We were each flying solo, you know, and I slipped around there and evidently went as far west as...Seems to me we stayed overnight in Tucson, and then went on and we turned. It was kind of a close call at El Paso, I remember. I was out on the runway to take off and a plane just came over top of me and landed right where I was going to take off. I don’t recall at this time if it was my fault or if it was her. Really, the landing aircraft has right-of-way. I don’t know if they stopped me. They must have stopped me or something, because she came in and landed right over top of me and I wasn’t aware that she was there.

ES: The air traffic control [inaudible] headache about that time.

MG: And there were a whole bunch of us at the same time, I suppose maybe our whole flight. I don’t know how many of us went at a time, but there was quite a few of us that were flying. People were pretty well used to women in that area in the south, especially in the area of Texas where we were training. We landed at a lot of air bases that they were used to women pilots.

We graduated in June and I was assigned...I want to stress here that we had wonderful friendships, camaraderie, at Avenger Field. At one time I was a flight officer, I guess you would call it, or a drill sergeant. The only thing I remember about that I didn’t like is that you’re the one that was responsible to get everybody up in the morning, which meant that I had to get up, or we had to get up, earlier than anybody else. And another difficulty [inaudible] with it. We were [inaudible] being trained as Army, and yet there wasn’t the authority there. Like I was a flight leader, but you really didn’t have the authority—no one really did—but yet we were treated just like military. They set the same training program, and evidently we had a very good training program to [inaudible] that many women at that consistent time.

ES: Did you have uniforms?

MG: We had uniforms. Sometimes they were just left...As the class graduated, they left their uniform and went on and they didn’t arrive at the uniform that we had until about the second or third class. Most of the time, we wore the zoot suit, the coveralls that everybody wore. I remember one of the girls in our class, she had a horribly big...She was a tiny little girl and they had nothing left but a great big pair of coveralls and they said well, just until the one that’s your size graduates and then you can have hers. Evidently, they didn’t have all that many uniforms at the beginning. I think later on they did. Here are those girls.

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ES: Oh, wow. What a terrific...

MG: Here’s the girl [inaudible]. We’re looking at pictures from the scrapbook. These girls right here, what I’ve written underneath.

ES: Oh, yeah, the day they washed out.

MG: They soloed and washed out.

ES: I suppose they came from all over the United States.

MG: I think so. At the beginning, well, we must have had some from Montana, even, that were there, because all these girls that graduated in ’43 were ahead of me. This goes back to training time. Here are the instructors.

ES: These are the instructors who bet on whether you’d...

MG: Who got their flaps up the quickest. [Laughter] We’re looking at a picture of the group of us with our jackets and slacks.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]
ES: ...your turban, and then you had your leather flight jacket and beige slacks.

MG: Beige slacks. Evidently they issued us all that. I don’t recall if we had to pay. When we were finally assigned and were flying, we were in civil service and we got $3,000 a year. But I don’t recall what happened when they were training, if we had to pay to do that. I didn’t have any money, so it must be that the Army did it.

ES: Oh, the winter flying...

MG: And winter flying. Oh, it was cold in December and January and February. It was cold down there in Texas and the winter flying suits were all issued.

ES: Did you have any trainers that were open-cockpit?

MG: The Stearman is all open, and cold. No heat or anything. I know one time we went out and they made us warm up the plane before we flew. One time, we sat there for a couple hours, I suppose, it seemed like, trying to get them hot enough to fly and they never did fly. I’ve never been so cold in all my life. A lot of times, later on, we were out at the auxiliary fields. You see, as soon as we soloed—well, even before we soloed—we would go out to auxiliary fields and that’s where a lot of our flying was done. As soon as we had soloed, we went out there in the meat-wagon and then fly the planes out, wait for everyone to take a turn. The instructors, I guess, would fly somebody out in the planes and we’d stay out there, I guess—I don’t know, maybe all day. I think all the girls will have scrapbooks like this. See this [inaudible]? Course, this is Sweetwater, TX, and it’s south of Abilene. No—it’s right west of Abilene and south of Amarillo. We had our radio was out of Abilene. But Amarillo was way north in the panhandle of Texas and we used to land there often on cross-countries.

ES: Oh, look at this [inaudible]. Now this is what I think a [inaudible] looks like, is this right?

MG: Yes, a little bi-wing. Oh, yes, two seats. We never, to my knowledge, ever took another, when we were solo flying, ever took anybody with us. I think we were always solo. They had a tower and we had to check out our airplanes we were assigned. I think most of the flying was done during the week. I think we had our weekends off. Is this Mr. Yates? Mr. Yates was primary and also instrument instructor.

ES: Here’s a Mr. Hall, primary flight instructor.

MG: I see he’s on my...He might have been with somebody else, another group.

ES: So they would assign certain ones...
MG: To different instructors. I don’t think we had more than about six at a time to an
instructor.

ES: Mr. Pool.

MG: Lots of time was spent waiting for your turn to fly.

ES: Oh, I bet, yeah.

MG: But not all that much, it didn’t seem. We still got in, you know, a lot of time.

ES: That’s the PT-17. My goodness.

MG: It was a good aircraft. There are still those around, Stearmans. You go to these, you
know—where they have shows—and they’ll have them.

ES: Yes, Martha told me that, that someone in California had bought her plane and it was an air
show and the [inaudible] had taken her to the air show to see this plane. She said, “And there it
was, painted just the same way I had it. I had to go up and pet it.” [laughter]

MG: Yes, some of these women had 1,000 hours, even, flying time. They had lots of experience.

ES: I understand they were very maneuverable.

MG: Oh yes, they’re acrobatic aircraft. See here’s the flight line. And they were big flight lines,
as I recall. The pictures show it. There were lots of aircraft there. There would have had to be
for training that many girls, because I don’t think they washed out that fast. They had to have
that 35 hours.

ES: Perhaps something like instrument training [inaudible] difficult.

MG: I don’t think so, not flying aircraft. And it was night classes. Everybody went to night
classes for navigation and all of that. They would drown the engines. You know, it could be just
living together with a group of women and being disciplined like that might not have suited
some of them too. It seemed like it was more emotional problems rather than actual flying
problems. Maybe they were immature or something. One of the younger girls is Lorraine Bain. I
think she was a young kid out of high school. Where she picked up her flying time, I don’t know.
She’s from the Glasgow area, south of Glasgow, so I don’t know where she picked up her 35
hours, but maybe back then...I never did ask her where she got her 35 hours. I taught school in
Glasgow. I was teaching school but I never knew anything about flying. I hadn’t even thought
about.

ES: Did they have air bases there?
MG: They moved it in...It was there when I came back the fall of ’42. They had B-17s up there. They brought in [inaudible]. As I recall, the first airport in Glasgow was south of town, but the air base was north of town, the big one, where they brought in 17s. It was a full swing 17 base when I came back that fall. I remember being aware of when the whole flight left to go to Europe. They went to Africa, that group did.

ES: [inaudible] various jobs before they went into flight training, but for the most part had they worked before or did they just, you know, like you said, had some teaching [inaudible] working as a teacher?

MG: I don’t re-...Well, Karla Mogensen was a teacher, had been a teacher, I believe. I can’t say. I don’t want to say too much because I can’t remember about it. Some of them are married and their husbands went into the service. Wanda Robedee, I think her husband was in the service. I don’t know. They came from all over. There was some of them from California, all over.

ES: I don’t know how they all managed to look alike in 1940, but they did. [laughter]

MG: See now this is a flight. We marched everywhere together [inaudible] go to eat. And we would assemble to go to the flight line and assemble before class. That’s the way they handled it. Not too far away from there I think was a military base. I know at Blythe, California, there was a primary, a men’s primary base not too far away. I don’t think there was one too far away from Avenger Field. I’m not sure of that, though.

ES: When you graduated, were you treated as military then and assigned to a military base?

MG: Yes, we were, and that was a little bit of an education of itself, too, to get on a military base. I’ll have to talk about that. I didn’t go back...They had reunions right away for two or three or four years. Then they quit having reunions. And then they started them again. I know I was teaching. I never did attend. I started going...I think I retired from teaching and I went to Cleveland, Ohio, for the first time. Then I went to another time. They had one in Sweetwater that I went to. Sometimes they’re so far east that I don’t go to the reunions. They have reunions every two years. They’ve had one in Denver, in Colorado Springs, and I really didn’t know about it until afterwards. I hadn’t kept in contact the way a lot of the women haven’t. More of them are renewing their contacts. I myself have been responsible for getting some of them...letting them know. But that hasn’t brought them back in. It’s just recently that I’ve been more active in attending the meeting, but I live kind of isolated up here in Montana. The women in Montana, we haven’t gotten together. I contacted them once and they never responded. I should do it again.

ES: I wish you would. [Laughter]
MG: Maybe after they talk to you, maybe then we can. There’s a Byrd Granger who comes from Arizona and she’s from one of the earlier classes. She comes up to Montana and I have visited with her. I see her at the reunions. She said we’ve got to get together in Montana. Maybe they will.

We had a...There was another period of my flying time because I was assigned. I graduated in June and most of us were assigned to a military base and I was assigned to Spence Field. Maybe I should go on there instead of going into what has come afterward. I graduated in June and I have here...Our cross-country was the 19th to the 20th of June and graduation followed. Then I was assigned to Spence Field. Cross-country was 13 hours and 13 minutes and it was signed by Ronald D. Cuthbert. June 22nd, 1944 to June 26th, 1944—I signed my log book and that was the end of my flying at Sweetwater. And then I was assigned to Spence Field. We had—I think I totaled it out once—around 200, over 200 hours of flying time at graduation time. I have 232 hours here. So it was close to that that we had graduated flying (?).

ES: Where is Spence Field located?

MG: Spence Field is in Georgia. That’s where I was assigned. I took a train in my uniform and when we graduated we had blue and white uniforms. This was our uniform. [inaudible] We weren’t military. So I didn’t keep my uniform. I wore it out. [inaudible] And then I have a large picture of that too. This is a uniform picture too.

ES: You know, skirt length and all, it would be right in style today.

MG: It would be right in style today. But you know, I think a lot of women did that. I didn’t have...We brought home slacks and skirts, jackets, battle jackets. I didn’t bring my pants. I hated that tan. It wasn’t until 1978 that we were given military status. So we were just ordinary people.

ES: Is that right? It took them until 1978.

MG: It took a long battle to get. I’m not sure every single [inaudible] that they got military status. I think there are some women they haven’t even got into contact with. [inaudible] I resigned in November so we could be married before he was shipped to the Pacific. He was on a B-29 at that time.

ES: So he was in the Air Force?

MG: He was a crew chief on B-17s in England and they brought them back when they were putting the B-29s together to go over to the Pacific. The crew chief saw that some of the B-17s were brought back. He was at Walker Air Field, which is between Hays and Russell, Kansas. So we were married in November then and then in March he was sent to go out on the 29s. But that’s another part.
ES: Yeah, that’s another part.

MG: Now, after we graduated...

ES: Was this a wool suit?

MG: It was kind of a... I suppose. It wasn’t synthetic then. It was a twill, a blue twill suit. And this is what we graduated in, this blue twill suit with [inaudible]. I think there’s pictures in there of being on the field where we graduated. We always graduated out on the air strip. It should be at the beginning. These are the women who were... That’s Mrs. Deaton, a picture of Mrs. Deaton and the other women that were in the office and took care of us. This is a picture of the wings. I have my wings.

ES: I can’t imagine. It’s almost hard to realize that after all of that effort, all of that time that you put in, and then they didn’t consider you military. It’s unreal.

MG: It is, and until now... Now the women, when they go into the military, are regular. They go into regular military. All of them are officers. They all go in as an officer. There are not regular officer rank that do fly helicopters. I don’t know if women are at that rating or not. I just read in the paper, and I talked to one of my friends in Seattle. This girl was in the Coast Guard and so she was applying to be a marine—this is recently—applying to be a Marine pilot and has been accepted. She’s going to go into the regular training program in the Air Force. They’re primarily helicopter pilots because of the jet fire. To my knowledge, they aren’t letting women fly a lot of jet aircraft, fixed-wing aircraft. But as you see the news in Africa, there were some helicopter pilots. I had read in the news where a woman pilot... They were in maneuvers off in the Gulf before going to Africa and mechanical failure and she went down, she and her—whoever that was with her went down. It told about that in the newspaper. So now they’re flying, but I don’t think they’re flying jets. Jet helicopters, but not jet fixed-wing. I shouldn’t be firm on that because from what I read in the newspapers that’s what’s happening.

ES: I would imagine you pay pretty close attention when you see it in the news.

MG: And I read about them. This is the parade grounds, so this is where we would be marching. All the other classes were also marching whenever there was graduation. Whenever anybody important came along, they always had a parade for them. Once in a while there would be a military... And Hap Arnold came in 1944 and spoke at the graduation, the class of ’44. Then I was reading where he was there at the termination of the program, which was class of 1944-10. He was there, and Jackie Cochran.

ES: Did you ever meet her?
MG: Oh yes, she was there quite often, Jackie Cochran was. She’s a beautiful one. And her history...I was a librarian at my school there, Geraldine, for a long time, seventeen years. I put her biography—her autobiography, because she wrote it when she was alive—in the library. I checked it out and read it again. She had a very fascinating life. We’re dressed up. See, this is the uniform right there.

ES: My goodness, like I said, you could wear it today.

MG: Yes, it’s very much in style. There was a battle jacket that was very popular. This is my other family. This is my sister and my mother and father. My sister was in the Marine Corps. I was probably there after...I think this was taken before I went in. And then Nancy, evidently, was in the Marine Corps.

ES: Oh, they lived on Whidbey Island.

MG: Yes, my parents, when they sold the ranch here in Montana, they went to Washington. That’s when we went to school. I went to see my sister at Cherry Point, North Carolina, and this is the picture. We’d been on a boat all day. This is my twin sister in the Navy.

ES: Your family must have really [inaudible] stars in the window.

MG: Well everybody did that. I graduated from Big Sandy High School and they wrote and asked mother for pictures, so they put this one where I have my goggles on in there. Oh, I still have class members...When they put this one in, she said that, as well as with the other girl. My brother was in the Army, he was drafted in the Army. Nancy came out a captain in the Marine Corps. My twin sister stayed in the Navy and she came out a commander. Once you’re in the Navy, you know...And she was recalled during Korea. These are some pictures when we were in Hays, Kansas—Russell, Kansas, I mean. Is that Johnny? Who is that? This is the battle jacket and skirt. These are the slacks, but I don’t know that I had a battle jacket.

ES: I remember, and that became a fashion for other women. Of course that’s Jacqueline Cochran. She’s such a [inaudible].

MG: That’s my husband’s brother and my husband’s parents in some of these pictures. He comes from a family of eight children—six boys and two girls—and one boy was killed in...his brother, Robert, was killed in Africa. All but the two younger boys were drafted. Some of his pictures that he sent [inaudible].

ES: This is a great album. It’s just really like a time lock.

MG: Alright, we’re at Spence Field. I was flying to Spence Field. I was asked to talk at Americanism Program, that’s why I went back. I was really surprised at how much flying time I did at Spence. There were two girls who graduated in 1943. One was a Margot and one was
Jackie Lake. Margot, I don’t have your last name. Anyway, they were there and they had been there in 1943. They had been assigned there [inaudible] graduated in the eighth class in 1943 and I don’t know when they were assigned to Spence. When I came in June, they said we don’t have enough to do as it is. At that time, they first started the program because they didn’t know how long the war would last and how many pilots they would need and how many pilots they would lose over in Europe. They had lost a great many British pilots from the German fighters, so they really didn’t know. So they were training quite a few girls. They probably had more to do, the ones that graduated in ’43 and early in ’44. By the time I was graduating in the fifth class of 1944, a lot of the jobs...The pilots were returning from Europe, the fighter pilots. See, they could put in 25 missions and if they survived, they could come home. They were returning and they were becoming a little upset that the women were taking some of the jobs that they would do.

So Spence Field, as I recall, was out of Moultrie, Georgia. Not too far from there was a P-40 training base. As I recall—we had AT-6s at Spence, nothing from then on but AT-6s. The advanced [inaudible]. Anyway, they [inaudible] for a long time. I’ve talked to men who are retired from the Air Force that did their primary training in what they called T-6s at that time. That’s before they put in the jets as trainers now that they have for the Air Force. Anyway, as I recall they brought in planes that were being repaired. Most of our flights were cross country where we either picked up aircraft and brought them back or returned them.

But I have in my log book for one day...I flew about 30 hours a month, which was pretty good if you want to fly five days a week. I don’t think we flew on weekends. I know I have one time...I have local, which was Spence Field, and I have a cross-country here. I have Cochran and return. Bainbridge, Van de Graaff, Clarksdale—that was in a PT-17—Ocala, which was in Florida. I remember we flew down to Florida and brought some planes back. So you see, we were doing cross-country. I have Spence to Moody, Spence Field to Gunter, Gunter Field. It’s a ferry I had. I have a local major overhaul, and that was 45 minutes. This Gunter to Spence field was an hour ten. I’ve got a QV. I don’t know what that was. Cross country to Eglin, three hours and twenty seconds. It seemed that we would fly to Eglin once in a while on a mail flight. I don’t know why, but it was three hours and twenty minutes. Eglin Field is where I flew, finally ended up. And then I have a compass check, a test for stabilizer check, another radio compass check. Spence to Craig. Sometimes it’s in the P-17s. I have a UC-78 army, a Jacobs Aircraft, 225 horsepower from Moody to Spence. I don’t know what that was. [Laughter]

ES: But you flew it.

MG: I flew it, yeah. And here, on the 8th...I don’t know what month. The twenty-fourth...On the eighth I have a wing change, and that was an hour and fifty minutes that I flew. Evidently this was...We had to fly these aircraft they called a [inaudible] or whatever it was. I don’t know what time they had to be in, and we did that. Radio compass, tail stabilizer, local test—I don’t remember where Moody was. Ours was Spence. I see I had Moody down and I have Eglin and Bainbridge and another on the ninth, an hour and five minutes, I have a stabilizer check, a local
test. Then I was moved to Eglin Field. I don’t know why. Returned to Spence, army check. I have a ferry locally.

Now, I was moved to Eglin Field the last couple of months and ended up with some of the girls I graduated with. It was nice. I don’t remember why. They didn’t move Margot or Jackie, but they moved me, any why I went to Eglin Field [inaudible] was stationed at Eglin. I have here Eglin, Augusta. We could take a plane on the weekend and go cross-country, and I went to Cherry Point, where my sister was, and flew cross-country. I think I was at Eglin then. Then I have a local. I’m at Eglin and on the tenth of...That would be what month? That would be October. I have a local and I have a compass check. Then I have a 220 from Eglin cross-country to De Land, Florida, and at 210 a cross-country from De Land. I remember going down there. And then I have a lot of solo time at Eglin. I don’t remember what we did.

ES: Were you changing planes all the time?

MG: No, moving planes.

ES: Just moving them, but mostly the same kind of plane?

MG: I flew nothing more than the AT-6.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
MG: Have you started?

ES: Yes.

MG: We were stationed in Eglin Field, and that’s where I ran into the military. Spence was very lax. A lot of civilian people at Spence because it was [inaudible]. Spence was kind of interesting for me because, coming from Montana and the northwest, all of our costuming was by a black gal. The blacks were there. There were no black military or anything but all of the housekeeping and the cooks...We ate at the officer’s club and were treated as military officers. And there were a few...There were...I miss [inaudible] barracks that we always went to the officer’s club. We lived in a little house and she came in and did all our laundry and ironed it.

ES: Oh wow, that’s great.

MG: Yeah, it was really nice. So I would have been at Spence from—what?—July, August, and September—three months, four months. Then went to Eglin Field. But I notice in my log book—and I don’t quite remember this—that I have a lot of local ferry from Eglin. Wherever you went then I have like two hours and twenty-five minutes, an hour and thirty-five, two hours and fifteen minutes. I don’t recall why that was there. I don’t know.

And then I’m coming to the end of the time in my service [inaudible] and we had decided to marry. I was civil service and we knew that the program was going to end I think by the tenth of December there would be a termination of the program and we would all be separated or discharged or fired, whatever they do when you end civil service. I had my paper where I applied to resign about a month early. It wasn’t a full month, though. But anyway, I resigned on November 20th from civil service. I had to have a formal resignation. It was from Army Airforce as proving ground, gunnery school [inaudible] [laughter]. That was Eglin Field, evidently there’s a gunnery at Eglin Field. Sixteenth of November, Army Airforce as proving ground. Command gunnery school. But I don’t remember what this cross-country and this ferrying was. I really don’t. It was quite a bit of flying time.

Alright, here’s my total time. The way I have it, when I retired...You could take an airplane...You could get permission to take an aircraft and go cross-country and so at the very end of the time I knew I was going to be going home I took an AT-6 and flew to Tread Point, North Carolina. I was gone...Let’s see, I have the 18th, 19th and 20th that I was gone. I returned on the 20th and I came back to Spence Field. I stopped at Spence and then came back to Eglin Field and I had here end of service [inaudible]. That was an hour ten minutes on that last flight. I have at that time my total time in training and at Spence, I have 424 hours and thirty-six minutes. Now, there are going to be other girls that have as much time, if not more, time than that.
Some of the girls ended up flying AT-6’s [inaudible]. Some flew some B-26s, twin engines, and did [inaudible]. Now I don’t really know how much flying time they had, but when I look back I really did have quite a bit of flying time. I have to look here to realize that. I have all of this signed by an instructor or an official, so you see, it is correct time. It stacked up, evidently. That was in an AT-6. So I did have quite a bit of flying time in the military. [laughter] And then I have a discharge.

It was kind of interesting. We could take our log books, which I did, and all my time. I had official papers from the office. We could take that and turn it in and get a commercial license. Our instrument training gave us an Army instrument card. After I was separated I got a C-47 to Dayton, Ohio, to Wright-Patterson Field. That’s east of Kansas City. I went to Kansas City and took the train to Russell, Kansas, where my husband had gotten an apartment for us. But I flew in a C-47 [inaudible]. There’s no women’s restroom, I found, on that. And then Dayton is where I first saw my first helicopter. That would be 1944. That was in November, 1944. I was just there, just landed, and then caught a ride into town to get the train. We were married on the 24th, so you see I went straight to Russell, Kansas. But that’s where I saw my first helicopter. We were waiting in one of the rooms there and saw this little helicopter come in and land for the first time.

ES: They’ve changed a lot, too, haven’t they?

MG: Haven’t they? Oh, yes. It was real fragile. At Eglin Field, they call it a gunnery school, but at Eglin Field they had a lot of experiment aircraft. Eglin’s right on the Gulf, right near Pensacola. I had a cousin there, but he wasn’t there at the time. But he did go to Pensacola one time so I went back on a weekend. Eglin was right next to that field. It was a big air base. When they’d get ready to take off, lots of times you wouldn’t know what kind of an aircraft would be around because it was an experimental base at that time. There were a lot of auxiliary fields around there and I think probably that was where a lot of our flying time was to the auxiliary fields. What we did, I don’t...except ferry. I suppose we took aircraft.

ES: Moving them around.

MG: Moving them around. Ferrying, I guess that’s what you call it. So I was separated in November 20, 1944 and then I [inaudible] Wright-Patterson Field and we went to Kansas and we were married. I went back to Kansas City [inaudible] and turned in my books and took a written test for a flight instructor and passed that. I didn’t have the time, I didn’t take the flight test. But I do show flying time in Kansas City in a small aircraft. Anyway, [inaudible] license there and he was looking for a discharge. And then we got to thinking I was civil service and I just had this whole separation from the fact that I was available for employment and that was [inaudible]. That’s what you got was just a separation from the civil service.

ES: Statement of availability.
MG: That was your discharge. Then you had all your papers, you know, showing your flight time and everything. I don’t have [inaudible] but I have all [inaudible] papers from all these to show my time and my rating, which was a six, was a hundred thirty-five or forty-five horsepower Taylorcraft 650. [inaudible]

ES: Trained to fly combat-type planes.

MG: Yes, it was a paying program for women to fly military combat aircraft.

ES: Well, would they have hired you at that time, say, like [inaudible] or a big commercial thing.

MG: No, no. I had no twin-engine time. But some of the girls did have it and some of the girls have a lot more flying time than I have. Some of those older girls were fifty, fifty-one pilots, B-45s, and did the twin engines.

One time—I forgot to tell you—on this cross-country that I took to see my sister. Coming back we landed some place. I landed for gas. Some little town. Landed in there and there were three of us there. So I went to the room to file a flight plan and to check in and here were two women. When I landed I didn’t know who was in the other aircraft. It was a P-40, no P-38 and a P-51. There were two women there and they had come in and filed a flight plan and gone on up and I didn’t [inaudible] and here there were three of us [inaudible]. I wanted to take off first with the P-51. It was Sunday afternoon, too, I remember that. A lot of people around, you know. A little tiny airport and here we were, three of us. One was in a P-51, one in a P-38, and me in my AT-6. I don’t recall them waving because they were ahead of me and taxiing out, but I waved and everybody waved. It would be exciting for them to think, here were three women flying military aircraft, especially the first two and [inaudible].

There are still those people, women who flew those planes, that get together as a group now. And some flew P-47s and then B-26s. I guess some flew B-25s. But these were women who had hours more than I had. So it was kind of exciting, to see them like that. Anyway, it was kind of fun. But a lot of my flying took place after I was separated—I call it separated. I don’t know how...discharged or separated. Because we went military. But when I was in Spence Field I acted like a civilian and I really got told off. They said you’re in the military and you follow military protocol. I didn’t show up when I was supposed to and stuff like that because at Spence you were more or less on your own and it was quite loose. Even at Avenger you had free time, you know. You had to be where you had to be, but other than that. But at Eglin Field, the man in charge, whoever he was, he wanted to show his authority. I came in kind of early and didn’t report when I should have. I showed up but I didn’t report officially. I almost got kicked out. [inaudible]

ES: Where is he now that you need him? [laughter]
MG: Anyway, being as old as I was and had done all the things I had done, I didn’t think it was...Anyway, he told me what I was supposed to do after that. And it was quite a strict military base, Eglin Field was. It was completely all military. Nothing non-military at all. We didn’t have to salute. I shouldn’t say that. Maybe we did salute. I don’t recall. Maybe we did. But they didn’t salute us because [inaudible]. But I don’t recall if we saluted them or not, I really don’t recall. I think maybe we did. That’s why I got called down for it. I’ll have to ask somebody.

ES: Were the WASP’s ever converted into like the Women’s Airforce?

MG: No, they were never converted. They were never put into a military group. They were separated and that’s the way we were. Two years of training and flying and that was the end. In that little history that I read, for a while they gathered together and then I think because we were so involved in our families and stuff for about fifteen or twenty years they didn’t do anything. And then they began to organize reunions. I think people got to where they retired, the older ones. In the groups where there were quite a few of them, you know, there’s a lot of...The southern states seem to have most of them, like California has a group now. People retire there. And Texas has quite a few. This nation is divided into three areas now. Like the Seattle area had quite a group, California is quite active, and the Midwest, like Kansas City. The larger cities have more women and they would get together and that’s when it started.

ES: But you never joined the 99s.

MG: No, I never did. I probably never had the aircraft to go in the first place. I could have joined. I could have joined them anytime, but I couldn’t afford to really [inaudible]. When I first came home, my husband was...When my husband was stationed at Walker Field in Kansas, we lived in Russell and there was an air base, a municipal air base, at Hayes. I went out there and got the idea that I was going home to Geraldine, his home town, and would fly. I said I’ll get an instructor’s rating and we’ll have an air service or something. I hadn’t taken my flight test yet for instructor’s rating. I have in my log book some air time, or some flying time I took there at Hayes. And then they were overhauling a flight for [inaudible] at Hayes. They had a place to overhaul. My husband and his brother bought a Piper [inaudible], sixty-five horsepower Piper [inaudible]. It was overhauled and recovered, brand new. I don’t know if I did the test flight, but I took some flying time there in the small aircraft.

He was sent over to the Pacific some time in...This is April. It might have been the middle of March. The B-29s in Walker Field. The B-29s were built by Boeing in Seattle and they were an experimental aircraft, actually, because they would come onto these bases and they still had to change engines, they still had to change [inaudible]. I don’t recall. There were about ten, maybe more than that, that were in this group. And so there was a lot of work to be done. And then they took a bunch of them down to Cuba so they would have...They didn’t know where they were going to go. They assumed they were going to the Pacific, and they flew them down to Cuba for over a month for warm-weather flying. Then they took off at the end of March. He was assigned to an aircraft with this pilot and he was able to fly to [inaudible] California in the nose.
of his aircraft. He was able to go to the Pacific and [inaudible] aircraft and he was there until after the bomb in Japan and was able to fly home in the same aircraft. Flew into the same airfield in California and so he was there from March [inaudible] back in September, I suppose it was, and caught an airplane right into Great Falls, Montana. Directly, yeah. At first he thought he would be coming by boat and that he wouldn’t come with his aircraft. He got a call to get his airplane ready to fly home.

Anyway, while he was doing that, I was...They bought this little airplane in Hayes, Kansas, on the stipulation that I would fly it to Geraldine. I have in my log book that I took off from Hayes, Kansas, on the seventh of April [inaudible] Alliance, Nebraska [inaudible] flew from Alliance to Wheatland, Wyoming, where I was snowed in for seven days. I didn’t realize I was there that long. I remember thinking if I could fly from this place—I don’t know where it was I got gas—but I could go right across to Billings, Montana. It was across South Dakota and Wyoming. I thought, oh, so I decided to go around airports and the towns and at Wheatland I landed. It was just beginning to snow and I didn’t get off until...I landed there the 12th and didn’t get off until the 19th, so I was snowed in. I remember trying to get off and I couldn’t. They didn’t have a snow plow or anything that would melt it. I tried one time and I couldn’t get off. Then I went to Sheridan. I was there from the 12th to the 19th and then I flew from Wheatland to Sheridan and stayed all night at Sheridan and went from Sheridan to Geraldine on the 20th of April. Arrived in Geraldine, out as his sister’s place. His brother-in-law had built a hanger and had an airplane. A man was coming down from Great Falls teaching a bunch of these guys how to fly. And so there was quite a flying interest there. So I arrived home with no fanfare or anything else. My sister-in-law didn’t even know that I had landed. [inaudible]

**ES:** Returned from the wars—nothing. [laughter]

**MG:** Nothing, nothing. And then I went back to Billings, I have it here, on the 5th and took some flying time and got my instructor’s rating. I have a little check flight here on the sixth of...[inaudible] flight test. I have the 5th I took a flight to [inaudible] to get my instructor’s rating the flight test. And then from then on this is all instructor time. Then I flew quite a bit— instructor, cross-country. See, the war was still on, so there were still young guys around. I would go to Fort Benton to fly and I have it in my log book. And then my husband returned and sold one little airplane and picked up a little yellow Piper Cub and then we had a Luscombe for a while and sold that.

And then I had a child. I was substitute teaching, but I was flying all the time and having a family. We have a J-3 Cub still on the 8th, 1947. And then we had a Luscombe. We sold the Cub and bought a Luscombe. My husband’s uncle lived out in the Bear Paws, where I was raised, and I had a little cross-country one over there. Had to fly around and visit people. And my sister came, my twin sister came one time, and we went out across the Bear Paws and landed in some fields. I was trying to see what my total time was. And then we had the Luscombe and we sold the Luscombe to a man [inaudible] and I checked him out. I was pregnant at the time. I checked
him out on the 4th of September, 1949. That’s about the last time I flew as an instructor. About the last time that I flew [inaudible].

The doctor that I had in Great Falls, the doctor [inaudible], he knew I was a pilot. He said, “Don’t you ever fly when you’re pregnant.” And so then we had four children about two years apart. It wasn’t long after that that my husband, he bought another aircraft, a Super Cub, and he had his private license. He never did get a commercial pilot’s license. I don’t know how much flying time he had. He sprayed his brother’s place [inaudible] but he never was a commercial spray pilot. And with him spraying and family...With the sale of the Luscombe, I didn’t fly as an instructor anymore or as the first pilot. I would go flying with him off and on, but I never did fly.

ES: Did you take your children up?

MG: Yes, with Anne, we kept a little log book for Anne, our oldest girl. She has I don’t know how much time—ten or twelve hours with me. But the Luscombe was a little bit different kind of an aircraft. Very narrow landing gear. It was a metal airplane, pretty little aircraft, but it was kind of poor plane to fly. I don’t recall all my instructor time over at Fort Benton. [inaudible] instructor time, but not a great deal. We had one child and then when I became pregnant—they were two years apart—so I was pregnant by that time, nine months of that two years. And so I didn’t do much [inaudible] instructing.

ES: [inaudible] Always is the way, you know. [laughter]

MG: But then he sold the airplane. We had an airplane for a long time in a hanger there on the farm. I went back to teaching full time in 1963 and all the kids were in school and in activities. I talked to my nephew, Glen Anderson, and I said, “Oh, I just can’t hardly stand to see that hangar empty.” He said, “Margaret, if you really put that first priority, you would have flown, and the other things were a higher priority.” I said, “Well, the family and other things.” [inaudible] that sort of thing. And other people were flying and I didn’t get into the instructor part like the other people. The pilots came in that had instructor ratings and they were spray pilots. I was teaching [inaudible]. Right now, having to go back and find out all this, it would be kind of fun to fly again I think. My husband even talks about that. But the airstrip that we had at our farm home in Geraldine is all filled up now with other things. But they have a nice airstrip in the town of Geraldine. [inaudible] airport for years. They built a nice little airport there. It’s [inaudible] as a county airport, supported with a tax on aviation. That’s the way Montana supports the airports and Geraldine gets their share all the time.

Now it’s interesting because I taught for seventeen years and I was hired as a reading teacher because of overcrowded classrooms. I became a reading specialist and librarian in the little town of Geraldine. Some of my students that I had—even the ones with severe reading disabilities—one of them now, Florence Gardner, is a tremendous pilot. Commercial instructor’s rating. One of the other boys that was in my 6th grade reading class, he is a spray pilot and also has a commercial license. My kids that I had in school are pilots and flying, which
is an extension of my flying days. When you teach for seventeen years, you teach a lot of kids. Many are flying, doing wonderful things.

I’m surprised that the person, whoever it was, that was doing the research on retired Montanan teachers, didn’t record you as a retired teacher. I’m surprised at how many of the women are also teachers, retired teachers.

MG: You mean pilots?

ES: Yeah.

MG: Now Mary Criswald (?), was she doing that?

ES: I didn’t record Mary. That’s funny because she’s my fellow historian, you know, and she’s the one that gave me the names, yet I didn’t do a recording of her.

MG: Well who was doing the retired teachers? I was going to get into that.

ES: I don’t really know. I can find out for you very easily.

MG: It could be that...We have a Florence Crestwald (?) [inaudible] that is very strong [inaudible], but no one I think has ever done much about...We’ve had several of the older teachers interviewed [inaudible] newspaper. Whether that has gone into retired teachers, I don’t know. But you see, my early teaching was before I went into the service. [inaudible] quite recently.

ES: When did you retire?


ES: Oh my goodness, that’s not very long ago.

MG: No. I was twenty years between when I left Glasgow in 1943 and went back to teaching in Geraldine in 1963.

ES: And in Glasgow you taught the lower grades?

MG: No, I had a degree from the University of Washington and I taught junior high and high school, social studies and history. I have a history major.

ES: Oh, well you should be doing this. [laughter]
MG: I’ve gone to the Montana History Convention, and I did do some writing in a local paper. I did more in the photography area, maintained their photographs and their pictures and things like that. A girl that went with me [inaudible], she went and took the oral history part. I’ve gone to the meetings they have in Lewistown, Montana history meetings, but I haven’t [inaudible].

ES: You really should. It’s really interesting.

MG: I know it is. Also, about two years ago, there was a little article...I got the announcement because I belong to the Montana History Society about the woman who was going to speak at Helena on women pilots, women military pilots. She spoke primarily about...on women pilots, I believe, because she started way back when the French were [inaudible]. I notified [inaudible] and I didn’t notify the women in Helena, but I know it was well-advertised, so I picked up my niece that I told you about and she drove me. We went to Helena. The talk ended up entirely on women’s air force service pilots.

ES: Do you remember who it was?

[End of Tape 2, Side A]
MG: She had done her research. See, it was a national program, the Women’s Air Force Pilot Program was. She had a lot on Jackie Cochran, as well as other women pilots. As I said, she started with the European...I know that women pilots [inaudible] France. The first military pilots she’d talk about, the first women pilots [inaudible] German. One of the most famous ones, I remember, crashed and burned, one of the German pilots, women pilots. Anyway, so then when she got into it it was all Women’s Air force Service Pilots. I don’t know how much [inaudible] but she had good slides. She had a slide program. I was so disappointed because I know that all these women who stayed in Montana could have been there. About twenty people were there is all. [inaudible] just came because it was [inaudible] so I went and talked to her afterwards [inaudible]. And then Malmstrom Air Base has had military women, has honored military women for quite a while now. I’ve been to two of those. The last one I went just last fall, and there probably will be one this fall. Last fall they asked everyone to identify who they were. It was quite a large number of women there. It was nice. I was the only pilot, I guess, because these were before the women now, before the women pilots, current military pilots. I don’t know if there was a date.

ES: You were the only one [inaudible].

MG: The only pilot in the program. I’ve been there twice now and the only pilot. Now I do know that there are women pilots who are coming in, airforce pilots, who are coming in flying the K-135. At one time there was something in the paper about the women pilots being in, but they haven’t been any lately at all [inaudible].

ES: I wonder if Malmstrom has any historic records that would have to do with women pilots here in Montana.

MG: I don’t know. There was a lady at that time—whether she’s still there or not—she may not have even been a military. She might have been a civilian. I don’t recall her name, but I think I have it somewhere. But you could contact Malmstrom. They’re very, very courteous when you say that you want information. This last time, she wrote a letter to all of us and she said she wanted to start a scrapbook of the people who were attending. These pictures I have, I copied off some pictures and information and she wanted us to leave it and she would make up a scrapbook. It’ll be nice. So Malmstrom is trying to [inaudible] oriented and state oriented. There were a couple of nurses [inaudible] that went up and the wife of another one of our teachers at Geraldine was there, Mary Mavis Dorant(?). She had been in England. It was kind of interesting to listen to these women and where they’ve been and what they’ve done. She gave us all the time we wanted. This is twice now I’ve been there, and I kind of think it’s going to be an annual affair. And at Geraldine, where we are, we organized [inaudible]. At that time we had a girl from [inaudible], a girl from [inaudible], two girls from [inaudible]—Brenda Wax and myself—three girls from [inaudible], come to think of it. One’s passed away and then the one that was a WAC. The ones that are surviving while the [inaudible] retired in the fall. Then we have one
from [inaudible] Fort Benton and [inaudible] Geraldine. Now I’m military now, finally. So we have the centennial, you know, the bicentennial for Montana. It was Geraldine’s 75th anniversary in 1989. We had a parade and I went in my uniform and marched in the parade.

ES: Oh, that’s great.

MG: And we have videos of it. We don’t have them here, but anyway, I saw it and at that time some of the younger men I’d had in school went into the service and back home and they led the parade. Johnny [inaudible] brother. And then a man who’d been in Vietnam, flown helicopters. I think his wife had just joined the reserves and his daughter was in the Marines. And so here we all marched and then there was a couple behind us and then that was all. It was sickening, when there were so many veterans that could have marched but they chose not to. Anyway, I told Johnny this is supposed to be a celebration [inaudible] also the fourth of July and kind of organized. Some of those kids aren’t home yet, you know, they’re still over there. I said I guess this time I’ll stay on the sidelines. It’s kind of a chore to get a uniform.

ES: Where did you have to go to rent uniforms?

MG: Well, there is a historian. They have a WASP historian and she has one that was her own that she managed to keep. There was a time when we could have afforded them, but they don’t even make the material. They don’t do that anymore. I could make a pair of slacks and a battle jacket, but I don’t [inaudible]. At the Americanism Program that they had [inaudible] and that’s all. But you know they didn’t give us any indication at all for years and years [inaudible] military [inaudible].

ES: Was Jackie Cochran still alive when they finally got recognition?

MG: Yes, she was. Is it just recently that she passed away?

ES: I thought so.

MG: 1978, I’m sure she was. I’m sure she would have been alive. She still holds some world records. Of course, who was the man that flew with her. He broke the sound barrier—Chuck Yeager. Because of her financial standing...Gee, and her book. Have you read her book? You haven’t read it. She took a tour not too long ago, just toured the whole world. They gave her a first-rate welcome because of her experiences and her contacts during the war. But because of financial [inaudible] and because of her contacts through her husband, she was able to fly jets. She still has a high altitude record [inaudible].

ES: That’s really terrific, isn’t it?

MG: He was a—what do you call it?—[inaudible] and only because of the fact that she had the contacts was she able to do that. I imagine there are women now...I don’t know if there are
women now who...I hope they are flying jets. They all would have to be military and they would have to have access to some of that, and whether they would or not...

ES: I wonder what it would be like to be in one of those [inaudible].

MG: You really have to be a pretty sharp individual. You really have to be [inaudible]. I think that women are plenty capable. Whether the military wants to put...You see, there’s still that feeling about women. They still have a hard time going through Colorado Springs. They have to be in the organization and apply and be accepted.

ES: You have to really start pretty young just to make it through all the...

MG: All the training programs. And you have to be a very bright [inaudible] and a very healthy individual. This little girl that went into the Marines that was in this parade, she was a tall girl, very bright, and her brother had gotten accepted into the Marines and she got a scholarship to the University of Washington through the Marines and she couldn’t stand the physical. A lot of women fall down there because of their physical. Physically they cannot...When you think of the aircraft they’re flying, they have to be a very bright individual and I would say a very athletic individual and healthy and young.

ES: That’s a lot of criteria.

MG: This niece that we have, Pat Rasmussen, she...Our youngest son is thirty-five. She a year older, thirty-six, and I taught her dad to fly and that was where she got the bug, I suppose. She and her husband first learned to fly over at [inaudible]. Then she separated from him and married a man who was a pilot in Great Falls, John Rasmussen. She continued to fly. She’s a tiny little thing, about five foot two, something like that. She went to the University of Montana, was a very bright girl. She continued to fly. She picked up her commercial license and her instructor’s rating.

She’s the one who’s flying DC-3’s for the smoke-jumpers. She came home this spring. She had always co-piloted before, and she came home now and has a first pilot rating on DC-3s. But this is about her fourth or fifth year she’s been flying for the Forest Service, for smokejumpers. She and her husband both now have moved to Missoula. They had a flying service in Great Falls and let that go. Maybe someone else has it. It’s so expensive to fly and to be on an airport and they couldn’t make it. And they had this opportunity. I don’t know who went first, Pat or her...But they had this opportunity and tried it out. [inaudible] into Missoula. She has a son and daughter that are living with their step-mother in [inaudible], Montana. One boy is about a junior and the other girl is about a freshman. But she’s flying.

Her DC-3 is being over-hauled and refurbished [inaudible] just two of them left now, the DC-3s. They’re just the right...They’re short, light wings, wide wheel-base, and enough power to carry twenty men, twenty smokejumpers with all their supplies [inaudible]. One is stationed in Idaho.
[inaudible] for fire. And he has applied for a FFA flight inspector. Whether he has become one or not, I don’t know. He has helicopter [inaudible]. When I think of this little Pat, you know, a little tiny girl. But going to these WASP meetings, down like at...We had a reunion in Sweetwater, Texas. Well here were two little gals and they were both [inaudible] pounds, real tiny women. I think there was a size, you know, when they could first go in, but some of the women...I don’t know how tall you had to be, but you couldn’t be so short.

ES: That’s right. I remember that. I think my friend [inaudible]. She said you have to be tall and strong in order to get those controls, reach the controls, especially [inaudible] hang on. She puts her hand up like this. I had visions of these little roll bars up here to hang on to. [laughter] I agree with you. Of course it’s the same thing, I think, with big equipment. You see a lot of little, tiny women with these enormous ditch-digging things. [inaudible] it’s all electronic.

MG: Electronic now. At those times, they weren’t all...Later, I think the 51s and the [inaudible], I think they had...Anyway, they went direct, like the AT-6s and [inaudible] PT-17s. And then flying the [inaudible]. Much of my time was in the Piper Cub now, but it was a wonderful little aircraft to fly, the Piper Cub was. I landed all over the country. Not very far [inaudible]. One time I was flying out in the Bear Paws and my twin sister...We landed and walked up to this house, our neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. [inaudible]. They hadn’t seen us for years, you know, we were twins. Had dinner with them and went back out, took off and came back to Geraldine. And then his uncle lived on what was called [inaudible]. Wheat fields make excellent landing strips. I flew all around Big Sandy, Havre. We went to Havre for our flight tests for [inaudible] and people who got their first license, whatever, I can’t remember what that was—student pilot’s license. As soon as they soloed and took a written test, they could get [inaudible] and that’s where you went, to Havre. There was a flight inspector there. [inaudible] Airport is still there. You can still go there and do the same thing, but now they have a beautiful little airport. I never did get to fly off that, as an instructor, off that airstrip. I quit flying [inaudible].

ES: I’m surprised at the good airports they have here in eastern Montana.

MG: Well they do have...See, everybody gets a part of that aviation tax and it accumulates. A lot of flying in Montana, especially spray pilots. There’s a lot of flying in Montana and every bit of aviation [inaudible] that’s sold, part of that goes to that fund to maintain those airports. We had [inaudible] airport only half a mile and we had gravel and we sold the gravel a couple time and ended up getting our...We didn’t have an airstrip, but we had the [inaudible] our house. Took that instead of money for the gravel. They always come in and resurface the airports. Now we have pavement in town and they resurface that every so often. [inaudible] quite a few people have that now. All the airports are in very good condition.

At Fort Benton, the problem there was in the golf course right on the airport, more or less. At that time, when I flew over there, they had an east-west runway, north-south, and then northwest-southeast. The golf course took it all except the east-west runway. The golfers don’t mind but it’s [inaudible] the airport. Now they’re trying to move that airport across the road.
where they have more access to expand. It’s going to take a lot of money for this pasture [inaudible]. It does limit it there. And then the golfers planted trees. It’s a beautiful golf course, one of the better ones. But there’s trees where you used to be able to stand like this. But it’s a good airport. But then on the west is Cutbank down to Fort Benton on the Missouri River and on the east is a cemetery, so it’s limited as far as [inaudible]. There’s some aircraft that [inaudible].

Geraldine now is unlimited. You can take a twin-engine [inaudible]. There’s no limit on the length at Geraldine. When I first landed at Geraldine it was a little pasture. It later turned out they bought some more land and that’s where they put...First it was just grass and then it went from grass to gravel. [inaudible] some of my reading students are spray pilots.

ES: And they fly [inaudible] spray.

MG: Yes. It’s right at the edge of town, very nice location. We had our hangar right there, later on. I did instruct off of there, but not off of [inaudible]. Our nephew flies, his mother and father. His mother soloed and then his father had a plane a long time and finally sold it. Then Glen has a...He soloed, I taught...He soloed with me and went on to [inaudible] and he had the little—I don’t know the name—but it’s a [inaudible] aircraft [inaudible] five or seven miles west of town on Geraldine [inaudible].

Then there’s the Scribner family. I didn’t teach them how to fly. I guess they were too young by the time I was an instructor. J.R. and [inaudible] Scribner. They flew a long time and then he and his wife were with him and his son Dirk would fly. And then came out of Great Falls at night one time and crashed. J.R. still flies [inaudible]. But I think they only fly for their pleasure. They have their aircraft [inaudible] Geraldine. But their...Then his daughter, Pam, was a pilot and she married [inaudible] and they have a spray service right there in Geraldine. Pam had learned to fly before her dad was killed. There were two girls survived, Pam and then [inaudible] little girl. Pam has become a midwife, and so she’s a flying midwife. They have a Cessna that she flies. She came into a [inaudible] meeting one night [inaudible] Havre. She landed in Havre and gone out and checked her ladies. She won’t deliver the baby, but she was checking them out before, some way working with the doctor. But she has lots of flying time too.

ES: That’s interesting and I’m really glad to see women getting...I mean, opening up midwifery because I think it’s really very...A lot of times—especially if you’re from remote areas—[inaudible] spend that much time in the hospital.

MG: Yes, and the expense. One thing they’re trying to do in the areas in Montana, and we have one at Geraldine now, we have two docs. We have one doc for always in Fort Benton [inaudible] big hospital and a nursing home. They just expanded the nursing home. They always had another doctor and then now they have two and then he has an intern with him, the second doctor does, who comes to Geraldine once a week and examines a baby, which I think is
nice, and then he goes to other small towns. That will help also. And then they do not deliver babies in Fort Benton anymore. They have to go into Great Falls because of the insurance.

ES: I wonder if the people in the east that make those regulations know how far it is. It would be like driving from Maine to Virginia to have your baby.

MG: But the hospital also has to carry the insurance. When they built the new hospital in Fort Benton, a lot of babies were born there before this new insurance came in. I think they had a nursery for six babies. It was so nice. And now they go, where, to Great Falls or Havre and Lewistown is another baby doctor. There aren’t many baby doctors around.

ES: Right, well, between the hospital carrying the insurance...I think they help [inaudible]

MG: Now in Great Falls they have...You know, it’s a long way to Great Falls. I went there. I went to the [inaudible]. Anyway, that’s about it. [TAPE STOPS] I want to say something about the celebrations at Avenger Field. About 1986 we went to Avenger Field and they had a dedication and memorial for WASPs. It might have been ’88. Our reunions are on even years. Sweetwater has been very good to the memory of the WASPs. This [inaudible] that you see was drawn by Walt Disney. That was the little mascot. And what they had done...Sweetwater, during the oil years, was a very wealthy little town and they had a beautiful courthouse in the center of town, like a town square. They also have a museum there for the WASPs, a whole are separate for the WASPs from the regular town. The county museum—I don’t remember the name of the county. But in the courthouse they have a quite large [inaudible] and they dedicated that [inaudible] over there to the WASPs and the dedication [inaudible]. I have the dedication ceremony in one of my [inaudible] catalog. Anyway, now they want to have out at Avenger Field...We went out to Avenger Field for the dinner and the banquet. Out on Avenger Field, which is still used as a commercial county airport, they have a flight spray service out there but they also have a college, a vo-tech college out there. A beautiful building and a beautiful vo-tech school. They have an aeronautical training program through [inaudible] airport. And they have the same old tower and the same old wishing well is out there. They’re going to have a reunion in San Antonio in 1992, September, because they had one just in 1990 out in Seattle. And then they want to come back to Sweetwater and dedicate a wall...

ES: Oh, get your names...

MG: ...On that wall. Of course they want donations.

ES: Oh, sure.

MG: I remember I have a picture of it. We’ll be out at Avenger Field and they will use...Harriet Train (?) has done the, and will do, the bronze of a wasp [inaudible] so it will be quite an affair. People are kind of upset that it’s coming so...We have it in ’92, then in ’93, see, that would be fifty years—1943 to 1993. And so they’re not sure that...We went to Sweetwater when they
had a reunion there and they didn’t have really good [inaudible]. I hope they can and I hope maybe I can go to that. But they would have a wall and all of our names would be on there. This Harriet Train has designed a picture of a wasp, the bronze of a wasp, which is quite a well-known artist. Anyway, that would be kind of interesting. Also, we get a request for some more donations from Colorado Springs. They want to have a memorial there for the WASPs. That’s unusual, now that we’re in the military. Now that we’re military...

ES: [laughter] Now everyone wants you.

MG: Yeah, and they always want the donations. Also, you see, there’s that big women’s military memorial in Washington, D.C. They want everybody to give twenty-five dollars to have your name there. So that’s quite a few donations they want. But this wall that they’re going to have at Sweetwater isn’t terribly high. It’s quite low and wouldn’t be all that expensive. I don’t know how much that’s going to cost. I think my first choice would be there, and then I don’t know about Colorado Springs or Washington, D.C.

ES: I would think Washington, D.C. would be more expensive than Colorado Springs.

MG: Yeah, and Washington, D.C. would be for all military personnel. Colorado Springs, I don’t know what that will be yet, but they want to have something there and I suppose we’ll hear more about that at the next reunion, which is going to be in the fall of 1992. It won’t be this fall but next fall. We were down there just last fall for one of Johnny’s reunions and Johnny didn’t think he wanted to go but maybe he will if I pay his way. So that should put us into the Sweetwater gathering. I hope the other ladies will go to some of these reunions.

ES: I’ll give them the word.

MG: Yeah, I hope they go because I’m sure that they’ve gotten the word. I know that Lorraine will be there. She lives not far from San Antone. But I hope more of these that are from Montana will go. And I hope I get to fly again.

ES: I hope you do too.

MG: I think that about finishes it.

ES: Thank you so much, Margaret. I really have enjoyed listening to your stories. I wish we could continue this longer.

[End of Interview]