

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Cheryl Jester Poteat

INTERVIEWER: Beth Ann Koelsch

DATE: June 30, 2010

[Begin Interview]

BK: Hi. Today is June 30, 2010. My name is Beth Ann Koelsch, and I'm here in Greensboro Public Library in Greensboro, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Collection at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. So, thank you, Cheryl, for talking to me. For the record, if you could give me your full name.

CT: Cheryl Jester Poteat.

BK: And that's P-o-t-e-a-t. Okay. Let's talk a little bit about early life, pre-military, life in the military, and after, in sections.

CT: Okay.

BK: So if you could tell me when and where you were born?

CT: I was born in Greensboro at Saint Leo's Hospital—

BK: It'll be—

CT: Right down—what used to be Saint Leo's. It's now Kindred Hospital. I think it's that same area. And in 1950—My sister was born a year after in the same bedroom, same room.

BK: Wow.

CT: And I spent all my life in High Point [North Carolina], [and I] lived right across from High Point University at one time. And my mom and dad were choir directors, so I grew up in the church.

BK: Which church?

CT: Conrad Memorial Baptist Church.

BK: Okay.

CT: And we lived all over High Point, pretty much.

BK: What did your parents do for work?

CT: My dad was a bricklayer, a brick mason, for thirty-five years. He helped build UNCG—

BK: Really?

CT: —and helped build some of the Curry[?] buildings in Greensboro, and the old Darrells[?].

BK: Wow.

CT: And different things like that.

BK: Did you ever get to see him work?

CT: Oh yeah. He taught me how to lay brick.

BK: That's a good skill to have.

CT: I know how to lay. I know how to mix concrete, lay cinderblock, change—I had to change a distributor in the middle of the street one day, because he taught me. Yeah.

BK: That's great.

CT: I'm pretty independent. [laughs]

BK: So you have one sister?

CT: Two sisters.

BK: Two sisters, okay. And where did you go to high school?

CT: Started out at Central [High School, now Grimsley High School] for two years, High Point Central—and they took High Point Central and William Penn [High School] and Andrews High School, the first segregated high school.

BK: Oh, wow. What was that like?

CT: Interesting. It was interesting. The '69 war moratorium [Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam] we all walked out. The whole school walked out. And our black principal said, "Come back! Come back! Come back!" But it was fun. I met a lot of nice, good people. We had some good teams, and it was a good school. [unclear] Raiders[?].

BK: That's great. Wow. What year in high school? Were you in the first year—

CT: Sixty-nine.

BK: Sixty-nine. Wow, a lot going on. How big was your graduating class?

CT: About 250, 300, something like that.

BK: Did you like school?

CT: Oh, I loved school. I worked in the guidance office.

BK: Oh, okay. What was your favorite subject?

CT: History and English. Yeah.

BK: So you graduated in '72?

CT: In '69.

BK: In '69. Okay. Oh, so that was your senior year.

CT: Yes, that was my senior year. So everything was going on in that—had to move and everything, make new friends and all that stuff, and graduate senior year. It was a little rough, but—

BK: Yeah, any stories from that time?

CT: Yeah, there's some. I dated the head of the AV department—the boy that was in charge of all the audio-visual stuff. And we had a little clique that was about four of us. We ate lunch together every day. And there were all kinds of food fights all the time. And there was a lot of times black people fighting in one corner and the white people fighting in another corner, you know. So we just stayed in the corner and stayed to ourselves.

BK: Probably wise.

CT: It's the wisest thing to do.

BK: Right. So you graduated in '69, and what did you do right after that?

CT: I went to work.

BK: Okay. Where'd you work?

CT: Indian Head Hosiery is long gone now, but it was an old hosiery mill, and I was the personnel officer.

BK: Oh.

CT: In charge of the payroll and some of the hiring, pre-interview stuff.

BK: Right out of high school.

CT: Right out of high school, yeah. I started work right out of high school, and during—you know, first it was temporary. Then soon as I found this Indian Head Hosiery, I've been working ever since. I've got four paid jobs on my resume. That's all the places I've worked. So.

BK: That's great. So you went from there. Did you go to college first, or did you go into the air force?

CT: I went to the air force, so it's '73.

BK: Okay. So you worked for four years, three years?

CT: Three or four years.

BK: And why did you decide to join the military?

CT: I was looking for a job.

BK: You didn't want to work at the hosiery—

CT: No, this was after I had been laid off. [unclear] The [unclear] had gone pfft, you know. And I was looking for a job, and I decided, "I'll just go into the post office," you know. And I saw the recruiter and I walked in and signed up, came back home, and told my parents I joined the air force.

BK: Now why'd you choose the air force over the other branches?

CT: I didn't think I was an army person, you know. I couldn't see me in the mud and the dirt, and I loved airplanes so.

BK: That makes sense. So you just happened to be in the—I mean, did you go to the post office deliberately to sign up or were you at the post office and signed up?

CT: I went to the post office to sign up. I saw a poster and signed up.

BK: And what was the poster? I mean, what about the poster?

CT: It—I think it was—had an airplane on it and it showed, you know—the newest airplane then probably was an F4 [Phantom].

BK: Okay.

CT: And it said, “Come be a—be—fly high in the Air Force.”

BK: Oh. So how did your family and friends react?

CT: My mom and dad said, “Well, that’s your decision. If that’s what you want to do.” I was twenty-two years old, I mean.

BK: Right.

CT: So they couldn’t have said very much, but she was a little scared for me because I’d never been away from home, ever, until then. And my sisters, they thought I was going to—

BK: This was ’74?

CT: Seventy-three.

BK: Seventy-three. Okay.

CT: That was while Vietnam was still going on, you know.

BK: What did your friends think?

CT: They thought it was okay. I mean, I didn’t have very many friends I kept in touch with at that time, but now I do because of Facebook. But then they said, “You’re going in the air force? Fine, write us.” You know. So I wrote a couple of them while I was there, so.

BK: So not a strong reaction one way or the other?

CT: No, not really. They knew I knew what I was doing. I was twenty-two and I knew what I was doing. I was pretty confident in what I was doing.

BK: Did you enlist for a certain duration?

CT: For—for one hitch. I was going for more, but I injured my back, and that’s another story.

BK: We'll get there.

CT: But I was going to stay in for more because that was a critical—critical career field. And I was the first woman ever to go in that career field.

BK: Did you have any—so you enrolled or signed up in High Point, and then they sent you to—

CT: [unclear] in Charlotte.

BK: Charlotte. So what do you—What do you remember about your first days in service?

CT: The very first day we were in barracks one of the girls had a heart attack.

BK: Oh my gosh.

CT: Yeah. Her squad leader was a licensed practical nurse, so she calmed her down and everything until the MPs [military police] could get there. That was really scary, everybody was crying. Everybody was scared. And when she—she started hyperventilating and stuff, everybody just went out of it, just lost it. I was over there going, "I'll just stay away from it."

And—but we had a set of twins in our basic. Two twins—Two twin girls joined at the same time.

BK: Wow.

CT: Yeah, and they were put in two separate squads so they wouldn't fight each other. [chuckles]

BK: Can you describe a typical day for you in basic?

CT: Wake up five o'clock in the morning. I had the duty of—to wipe down the showers after everybody took a shower, because they couldn't be wet. And then you got dressed and you came out onto the pad. And it was a hundred and two degrees in the shade. Phew. And you wore your PT [physical training] shorts and a T-shirt and one of those straw hat things. We had to starch our own hats and mold it to our head with starch, and you wore that and tennis shoes. You had to bring a white pair of tennis shoes to wear. And we marched until breakfast, which was like seven o'clock.

BK: Wow.

CT: Then you went to classes until about eleven. While you were in line for classes, they could ask you any question from our little blue book and you had to give it to them.

BK: And your blue book is just basic air force?

CT: The ranks.

BK: Right.

CT: The history of the air force [and] things like that. All your general orders and things like that, you know, like they used to do in the army. And we had general orders we had to know.

BK: And how did that—How were you on that?

CT: They took me up once.

BK: Do you remember the question?

CT: Yeah. It was, “Which of the generals came first?” It’s “Be My Little Generals”: brigadier, major, lieutenant, and general. The big general.

BK: That’s great.

CT: So I—and I always got—I had—My hair was long and brown, so I had to keep it up. And every time my hair would fall down to my collar I would get a demerit, so I kept getting demerits for my hair blowing down.

BK: Did you ever think of cutting it or—

CT: No, not then. I wish I had it this short then.

BK: Right. Less demerits!

CT: Yeah. But I was good at making my bed up.

BK: Okay. Did you trade off jobs, like you would make beds and other people would—

CT: No, always, always the shower. I don’t know why they picked me for the shower, but I was the shower.

BK: What was your first job assignment?

CT: You mean in basic?

BK: Or after.

CT: After I was sent to Shaw Air Force Base [South Carolina] as an imagery interpreter.

BK: Now how did you—

CT: Choose that?

BK: Yeah. You chose it or they assigned it?

CT: They gave me a battery of tests, and I scored the highest on intelligence and observation. And so they put—I had gone in with a guaranteed job as an imagery interpreter specialist, so.

BK: Oh. So now can you explain what that job is?

CT: It's—the detail is classified, but essentially I did bomb damage assessment, radar plotting—

BK: I'm sorry, radar?

CT: Radar plotting.

BK: Oh, plotting.

CT: You see the radar—had to read the radar, navigation, camouflage detection, cartography.

BK: Wow.

CT: I set up a—another story—which is another story. I set up a training scenario for the students in the air force to train air crew. Yeah, I'm proud of that.

BK: Yeah, definitely.

CT: And I did a mosaic of New York City that's hanging in the Pentagon.

BK: Oh. Let's just go back and take that one at a time.

CT: Okay.

BK: So you were—You basically were analyzing aerial photographs?

CT: Aerial photographs. You saw—during [Operation] Desert Storm, it showed the—showing the pictures of a bomb going out down into the—I would do that. I would review that film.

BK: Okay. So it was actually all film that you were in?

CT: Film, Russian equipment, Russian trucks, Samsonite[?], things like that.

BK: So you learned how to identify everything aurally?

CT: Yes.

BK: Okay, now tell me about the training? Or what you can tell me.

CT: The training was more or less learning about Russian equipment, Russian trucks, and things like that, learning how to view film, learning how to handle film with gloves. And a lot of the stuff we had to go to the top secret on-base library to view documents to read and stuff. But a lot of it was fun. I was in school with Iranian, German Air Force pilots, Marines just back from Vietnam, [U.S.] Army, [U.S.] Navy, Coast Guard. All of us were in it. I was the only girl in that class.

BK: Wow.

CT: One girl out of fifty.

BK: Wow. What was that like?

CT: Interesting. I injured my shoulder roller-skating, and they would hold me over a third-floor balcony, like this balcony, and try and drop me until the gunnery sergeant said, "Quit picking on Jester." [laughs]

BK: What was—what were they trying to—

CT: Scare the heck out of me.

BK: Just to scare—wow.

CT: It worked. It worked.

BK: Yeah.

CT: I walked—all the other girls had to march to school because they were all, you know, 702s, which is typists or something. And they all marched to school. I got to walk myself to school or ride the bus or whatever I could to get to my duty station, to class. And I went to class, and then after class I was free. I could do whatever I wanted to.

BK: Really? That was—

CT: You could go to Denver, you could—

BK: So the school was in Denver.

CT: It was in Denver, per se, right outside Denver. And we went—on the weekends, we went to things like Pike’s Peak or Frank Lloyd Wright’s house or Prini[?] Statue. And then I got involved with the USO [United Service Organizations]. The USO fed us Thanksgiving at a lady’s house, and I still talk to that lady every once in a while.

BK: Now were your friends men in your group or other women or both?

CT: Men in different groups. I met a guy from Hawaii.

BK: Wow.

CT: And he sent me stuff from Maui, and he lives in Maui.

BK: Wow.

CT: And I met some people from different kinds of squadrons. We just all ate together because—We ate with another squadron because they took condemned barracks and took off the boards and gave them to us as barracks. Yeah. In the winter! In the winter. And it was cold. I had no winter issue of uniforms. All I had was summer issue uniform, which is skirts. I had no pants, no coat, no nothing.

BK: How did you survive?

CT: I bought me a navy pea coat and wore it. I wore a navy pea coat.

BK: Wow.

CT: And the snow could be three feet deep, you know. And I made a friend of a girl who had a car, so we—We would dig out the car and go to school and come back.

BK: Wow. So for six months you lived in a condemned barracks.

CT: Condemned barracks.

BK: Wow.

CT: We had a cot and a nightstand and there was a bathroom down the hall.

BK: And how many people were in the barracks with you?

CT: Two story barracks, two people to a room—I’d say a hundred people.

BK: And these were all women?

CT: All women. It was cold.

BK: So—

CT: It was the best time of my life. I loved it. I loved it.

BK: What is it you loved about it?

CT: Oh, the camaraderie, the feeling I was serving my country. I was very proud to wear the uniform and very proud of what I was doing. And I was learning a lot. And I got to see contacts all over the world.

BK: That's big. So a typical day there is: you would get up and be cold and drive to class, and you could just go off base—

CT: I would walk in the snow to class, which is on the flight—used to be a flight line. And we'd go to class. And we'd come back and we'd have to walk to the chow hall, which is three-four blocks away to eat, and then come back. And then we'd clean up our room and order pizza or watch TV or whatever we wanted to do in the common room. We loved it. It was a lot of fun.

BK: So how did your relationship or your interaction with civilians in Denver—what was that like then?

CT: Pretty good. At that time it was really nice. They took us roller skating. They—

BK: That's where you got injured?

CT: Yes. They took us roller skating. They took us to different places around [unclear]. We went to what's called Cinderella City, which was the biggest mall at that time in Denver. And I would go with the two children. They'd pick us up and take us all kinds of places. We loved it. I met my boyfriend—one of my boyfriends there.

BK: Oh, a civilian?

CT: No, he was military. We met during Thanksgiving. We went out there. We played ping-pong at their house and—I loved the USO. That was cool.

BK: So besides being hung over the third floor balcony—so how was—What was it like taking class with all those men?

CT: With all those men? Kind of scared to answer a question because, you know, I'd be picked on. But I absorbed what I could, all I could, and I—I learned a lot. I was pretty good at my job.

BK: Any idea why there weren't—you were the only female?

CT: I was the first female to ever do that job.

BK: Right. But no other women were working with you at that time?

CT: No. When I went to my first duty station, I was the only girl that did that job at that time.

BK: Wow. So from there you went to your—

CT: Shaw Air Force Base.

BK: Tell me a little bit about that. Where—

CT: My daddy drove me up there because he was scared to leave because—I didn't have a room when I first got there because they weren't ready for me. This was like a day early, so my daddy stayed around. "I'm afraid to leave you. You don't have a room yet!"
I said, "Go ahead, Daddy. I've got a room. I've got a room."
So I got into my room, met my roommate, which was—She was a little strange. I woke her up one day, and by instinct she tried—She was a black belt in karate, and she tried to kill me. So I didn't wake her up anymore.

BK: [laughs]

CT: That's when I got a room by myself on the end. And I had—there was a lot of girls, and—from all different areas of the country and all kinds of different jobs. So I made friends with some girls from across the hall. One was a medical student, medical person; another one was aircraft—aircraft mechanic. And I had my little room, my little desk and everything. And I would go to Subway and get subs, and they would last me two or three days. [laughs] You know, that kind of thing—refrigerator.

BK: You didn't eat on the base, or just not good?

CT: Something—My first boyfriend on the base was the chef over there. And it's called the chef's house. And he was from Charlotte, North Carolina. And I got over there and I got some of the good steaks, you know, that first came out. And that's the first time I ever had Brussels sprouts and green pepper and things like that. And you could go there for breakfast and get any kind of eggs you wanted. You could go there and get steak and eat any time. It was open twenty-four hours.

BK: Wow.

CT: So you could go there and eat any time. It was the best chef's house of the entire air force.

BK: Wow.

CT: So I lucked out. It was a good place to eat.

BK: Now, anyone could do that or—?

CT: All the military people came over there to eat. That's where I met a lot of the guys I hung around with. And I met them also at the Baptist student—it was called the Baptist—like in the college, Baptist Student Union? We had a Baptist group of kids, and we all hung around together and did stuff together.

BK: Cool.

CT: I dated two of them, and two of them asked me to marry them. [laughs]

BK: Oh. Turned them down, though?

CT: Yeah.

BK: Okay. So you spent the rest of your time at Shaw?

CT: At Shaw, except for Red Flag [combat training at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada.]

BK: Okay. [unclear] So your housing—I'm hoping was better at Shaw?

CT: Oh, yeah. I had a real good room. Had solid oak furniture and a nice closet, you know, which you had to lock up because anybody could go into your room and you couldn't lock your room up. But I enjoyed it. We were right next to a water tower, and any time there were big thunderstorms, you could hear the water tower creak back and forth. And I always had dreams of the water tower coming over and hitting our room because I was right there at the water tower. I mean here's my room and here's the water tower.

BK: Wow.

CT: And I had to get used to the airplanes flying over the barracks and shaking the barracks. And during that time was also when the first streakers happened.

BK: Okay, tell me a little bit about that.

CT: We had our barracks and it was like next to four[?] barracks. And the barracks behind us was a bunch of guys, and they decided they'd streak one night.

BK: Well, it was the seventies.

CT: It was the seventies. About five or six of them going down the alleyways streaking, just trying to get our attention, they got arrested.

BK: Oh, wow. So I'm sorry, you went—You said one other place besides Shaw. You went to Red—

CT: Red Flag.

BK: And what is that?

CT: Red Flag is like the air force's TOPGUN [United States Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor Program.]

BK: Okay.

CT: TOP kind of thing, where they go through in the deserts of Nevada and pretend war, taking pictures and also doing carts, which is they come out from the aircraft and light up the sky like a flare-type thing and take pictures as they go down.

BK: So this is pretty much all imagery specialists [that] went out there.

CT: Yes. I was—I was the only girl from the unit that went? Yeah. The end, so.

BK: And how long were you there?

CT: Six to eight weeks, something like that.

BK: Any—That's very different from North Carolina or Denver or South Carolina.

CT: Yeah. They didn't serve grits. They didn't know what grits were. [laughs] I went to the officers' mess and asked for grits. "What's that? What's grits?" But we could eat—I went and ate on the [Las Vegas] Strip. Ninety-nine cents all you could eat breakfast and lunch and dinner. I'd go to Caesar's Palace, the Flamingo, Desert Inn, and eat.

BK: Was there a gambling problem that—I mean, it seems a little of risky to have something that close to—

CT: There was[sic] coin machines in the bathrooms!

BK: I know.

CT: And so I gambled, I think, once. They gave me a coin and I think I dropped it in and I didn't win anything. But you could play gambling bingo while you ate, you know, things like that. But I went there for—I saw a couple shows, and I saw Wayne Newton and I

saw Ronnie Milsap and things like that. I went for the shows and stuff. And they brought [unclear] the MGM Grand, so I met the MGM Grand Leo the Lion. I met the lion.

BK: Wow.

CT: Got to see some high line[?] and—they had high line[?] there at MGM Grand. They had big high line gymnasium in back of it.

BK: I've never seen that.

CT: It's pretty cool. High line [is] fast, wicked fast. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it.

BK: So six to eight weeks you were, you know, basically learning how to identify things at night with a—

CT: With carts and—

BK: Any other stories from that time?

CT: Yeah, I got to meet the Thunderbirds.

BK: Oh, wow.

CT: Yeah. I got to meet the Thunderbirds, and I even dated one of the crew chiefs.

BK: They ever take you up in one of their planes?

CT: No, I had a chance to go up in an [McDonnell Douglas] F-4 [Phantom]—the F-4 test pilot, he was the XO [executive officer] of my squadron at Shaw, and he was going to take me up. I didn't go. I wish I had. I wish I had because he was going to do all these loop-de-loops and, you know, he used to be a test pilot. And I said, "No. I don't think so. You guys talked me out of it." Wish I'd have gone, though.

BK: So by the time you were in Nevada, were the men accepting of you?

CT: Pretty much because I was like a [unclear] sergeant, so I was over some of them. And the air crews, I was like their good-luck charm. I was like their buddy. They would talk to me. I hung out with the air crews mostly, the lieutenants and stuff. I named—I nicknamed—two of them were Starsky and Hutch. [laughs]

BK: What do you mean by good-luck charm?

CT: When—see they want me to grade their film. When they come back with their film, it would be developed in what was called a PPIF, position photo interpretation facility.

BK: Okay.

CT: Which is a metal building on wheels.

BK: Oh!

CT: It's a little box on wheels. You unfold the sides and put it up on jacks, and that's where they develop the film, view the film, and everything.

BK: So you were in the PPIFs. But did you develop or you just interpreted?

CT: I interpreted.

BK: Okay.

CT: I couldn't develop. I tried once and it didn't work. But they would take it hot off the developer and we would view it on a long table about this long. And we'd have to hand-roll it like this and very—with a magnifying lens about this big.

BK: And then you just write reports of.

CT: And you'd—We'd write reports of what we see, like, say, "Significant movement on highway, blah-blah-blah, fabrication building two centimeters north of road," or something like that. With Russian trucks we could tell whether they were turned on or not and the motor was running.

BK: Just from the exhaust?

CT: Yes, and from the heat of the engine. And we could tell—

BK: Was it because of—I mean, how could you tell that the engine was—

CT: Through FLIR. It's called forward looking imaging radar [sic—forward looking infrared].

BK: Okay.

CT: And you could tell the heat signatures of—

BK: And that would be a separate thing from the photographs, okay. So you'd look at photographs. You'd look at FLIRs. What other—

CT: You'd look at—FLIR is a type of photograph.

BK: Right.

CT: And you could tell what was going on inside of a building. You could tell—like the tank farm down here, you could tell how much gasoline was in the tank and whether it was hot or cold.

BK: Wow.

CT: Yeah! And Russian equipment—like I had to know all the Russian planes, all the Russian trucks and all that—missiles and all that—I had to know all that stuff.

BK: Did you have to learn a lot of Russian?

CT: No.

BK: No, just the names.

CT: Thank god. [laughs]

BK: So these pilots would come fly over the Soviet Union or wherever they were flying, and then come directly back and then hand you the film?

CT: Hand me the film.

BK: And you'd write the report and then send it to—

CT: I even had to make some of their maps for them.

BK: Really?

CT: The maps would fit, like—We'd fold them like this, and you'd have to make their map for them.

BK: So—And just for the record, so they would have it taped to their upper thigh?

CT: Like you see in—

BK: Like a triptych [three-paneled piece of art].

CT: Like in—Have you seen the movie *Iron Eagle*?

BK: No, I guess I need to see that.

CT: He has—it's just like a—It's about this wide and about this long.

BK: Okay, so about three inches wide and about—

CT: Nine or ten inches long. And it's a map. And it's pieces of a map, and you fold it like—say here would be his initial point, and here would be the trail he would go. The initial point would be like a group of trees that's distinctive or something, and he'd know where to make his turns.

BK: Okay.

CT: And I would make up the map showing his turns for his route that he'd have to do.

BK: You mean you wouldn't draw it; you would just mark it up.

CT: I would mark the map.

BK: Okay. Kind of like a triptych.

CT: Sort of, yeah. Like a triptych only it was for aerial stuff like, oh, "The river—This river takes you to this point and then make like a turn at so and so many hours."

BK: Did you have to learn aeronautics a little bit?

CT: I was a qualified navigator [unclear].

BK: Oh wow. Did you ever navigate or just—

CT: No, no. Never went up. Wish I had, though, that would have been cool. That would have been super cool. But I didn't.

BK: Did you ever wish you could fly?

CT: Yeah, but I'm acrophobic. [laughs]

BK: That would be challenging.

CT: Yeah, because when they told me to crawl up on one of the PPIFs [Photo Processing & Interpretation Facility] one time and to paint it. We'd have to—rust and the paint—I couldn't go up there. I was frozen to death. I could not climb on top of the PPIF and look over.

BK: What did they do? They just said you didn't have to?

CT: I was on the ground. I did it on the ground and I didn't go up. I told the guys to go up, because I was sergeant by then. I could tell the guys what to do.

BK: How did they react to being told?

CT: Well, some were cool. They sent me stuff from Alaska. They sent me pictures of a bull moose they found, and, you know, they sent me pictures when they went to Alaska and wrote me postcards and stuff when they went up there, because I couldn't go.

BK: Now, why couldn't you go, again?

CT: I was a girl and I couldn't go. They only had stuff for guys. I couldn't go. I'd be the only girl and they'd have to have a special—

BK: Oh, wow. Okay.

CT: But most of the guys were okay with me. The head guy, tech sarge [sergeant], did not like me at all.

BK: It was a personality clash because you were a woman?

CT: No, because he had to clean up his language. He couldn't cuss around me, couldn't, you know, grab or anything like that. So he did not like me at all. Even to the end, he never liked me. But he had to accept me. He had to accept me as being there. And we'd have parties over at his house, and I'd be invited—grudgingly invited—but he wouldn't talk to me.

BK: Wow.

CT: But the rest of the guys were cool. I mean, I loved the guys.

BK: So you were telling me about the program you designed, the training module?

CT: Yeah, it was a training program that's for viewing film. And you had to train the pilots how to make their maps and do their own film just in case we were busy with somebody else or something. So I set up a training program at the 33rd TRTS, Tactical Reconnaissance Training Squadron.

BK: Okay.

CT: And I was the only girl on that unit.

BK: And this is back at Shaw?

CT: Back at Shaw. And I set up a training program where they could learn how to make their own maps. I taught them how to make the maps and taught them how to view the film with gloves, how to spot what they needed to spot, and how to navigate the map and how to use the map alongside with the film to know exactly where they were going.

BK: Okay. And you say they are still using that.

CT: Yes.

BK: And you just kind of wrote it up?

CT: I wrote it up for—when I became a sergeant, I think it was. I had the idea one day when I was walking to work, and I wrote it up and I submitted it to Colonel Mock[?]. And Colonel Mock told me to write it up, and he submitted it to the Eighth Air Force general, and he accepted it.

BK: And when did you become a sergeant?

CT: [unclear]—late '75?

BK: Okay. And you said something about a mosaic up at the Pentagon?

CT: From the film that was saved, you can make photo—make photos from it, you know. And I took those photos. And you would take one photo and it'd be like this, and you'd have to shave the back end of it and put the other one with it so it would be a straight flat.

BK: Oh, right. Right.

CT: And so I did that for an entire—Manhattan Island, every single street matches.

BK: Wow.

CT: Every single building matches up. And that's hard to do when you have one piece of film, then another piece of film, then another piece of film, and it's as big as this—as big as that wall, from the end of the wall to the clock.

BK: So what is that, fifteen feet? Ten feet?

CT: About fifteen.

BK: Fifteen feet.

CT: About fifteen feet by about twenty feet.

BK: Wow. So you glued it all.

CT: I glued it all down. But my son is still in ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. He went to a [unclear] at ROTC. He was [unclear] of the year one year.

BK: Wow. So did he serve?

CT: He hasn't served yet. He's going to wait until after he gets his paramedic license and then going into a paramedic program and be a paramedic for the air force.

BK: Okay. Just a few more questions—What did you think of the women's movement during the seventies?

CT: I thought it was a good thing. In fact, I guess you'd call me part of it, being the first women to break strides in—it was weird at first, being the first woman there, but after a while—

BK: Did you know you were going to be the first woman?

CT: No, I didn't. He didn't tell me there wasn't anybody else in there or anybody else had signed up for it. So when I went into the place and found out I was the only woman. I said, "Well, I'll deal with it." I was strong enough then that I could deal with it. So I just—I kept going and I would just be me and let it go. Being the only woman didn't faze me that much. Everybody pretty much accepted me as being there. They didn't say, "You shouldn't be here," you know, none of that. They accepted me as being there—except for T.C. T.C.'s the only one that wouldn't accept me as being in the air force.

BK: Is T.C. the guy's name or is that his—

CT: T.C. Yunick, Y-u-n-i-c-k.

BK: Okay. Let's see, you supported the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment]?

CT: Yeah, I got a—in fact, what was it I joined? It was something with women. It was—I think I did something. I can't remember what it was. It was some kind of women's suffrage thing. I can't remember what it—

BK: Was it NOW [National Organization for Women]?

CT: No, it was back in the eighties. I had joined something. Yeah, it was some kind of—something with [the History Channel?]. I put my name in—What's the word? [The] thing you solicit names [with]?

BK: A mailing list?

CT: No, you go out and get names on a list and—I can't think the name of it. A petition. I signed my name to a petition for women's—women's rights, I think it was. Yeah, back in the late seventies, early eighties. And I've also been involved in a veteran's group at the [unclear]—the Veterans Affairs. I—when I was in—When I met my husband, I was working for the [U.S.] Department of Veterans Affairs.

BK: Oh really?

CT: I helped veterans sign up for school and how they used their GI Bill and everything. I helped a bunch of veterans do that. One of them—

BK: So you would have more than one job at once. So when you met your husband you were also at school.

CT: At school.

BK: And you were working for the Veterans Affairs.

CT: I was working work-study there for the Veterans Office.

BK: Oh, okay. That school—

CT: In fact, one of them is Gil Maness of Gil Maness Plumbing and Heating [sic—Gil Maness Heating & Air Conditioning] I helped him get started in the air conditioning curriculum to learn how to do air conditioning. Him and Brock Manning[?] of Air Comfort [Company Inc.]

BK: Wow.

CT: Most people that are out doing stuff now, I helped them learn how to get into school to learn their trade.

BK: Lot of influence you've had.

CT: Yeah, and I love to talk to people, sit down and talk with the veterans about what they did and helping decide what they want to be in life.

BK: So you are still involved with veteran's groups?

CT: Some.

BK: Some. And you joined WIMSA [Women in Military Service for America]?

CT: Yeah.

BK: And have you gone to any events for—that's the Women in Memorial—

CT: Women in Military Service—

BK: Women in Military Service Memorial. Okay.

CT: And I've got a [unclear] with my picture in it.

BK: Yes, I've seen those.

CT: I haven't gone to Washington to see it yet. I want to get some money and go there and show my son everything over there. So—he's never been to Washington, D.C.

BK: A lot to do there.

CT: I know. There's a lot to do—Smithsonian and all that.

BK: Would you—what advice would you give to women who were interested in the—in joining the military?

CT: [pause] Do it. It's the best thing you could ever do. It'll help you grow. It'll help you mature. You'll get a world of memories, a world of experiences. You'll get the best training you'll ever have. You'll have contacts from all over where you get to travel. And I would do it again. If I was twenty-some years old again, I would do it again.

BK: What are your thoughts on women serving in combat positions?

CT: I know a couple of girls that are serving now that I taught at Smith High School that are now serving. One is an aircraft mechanic, another one is infantry. And they love it, and they can handle it. I know that they are safe and they can handle it. They do what they need to do.

BK: So you support that?

CT: I support them.

BK: Are they overseas now?

CT: Yes. One is in Iraq.

BK: Wow. Well, thank you. Is there anything else that you wanted to mention that I didn't ask?

CT: I don't think so.

BK: Well, thank you very much.

CT: Thank you.

BK: All right.

[recording paused]

CT: —glued it, and it's hanging in the Pentagon somewhere with my name on it.

BK: Wow. So what inspired you to do that?

CT: It was a job I had to do.

BK: Okay. You were assigned?

CT: To make—to get a higher rating. To get up to a 6-3—to a 6-5-0.

BK: So it was kind of a test? Okay.

CT: Yeah. And he didn't think I could do it.

BK: And you did.

CT: Yes.

BK: That's great. So in your off time when you were back at Shaw, you went to parties, you hung out with the Baptists—

CT: I went to the gym.

BK: Went to the gym.

CT: Went to the chapel. We had a bunch of things going on at the chapel. I would cook for some of the guys I met at the chapel. I would make chef salad. And they couldn't come into the building, so I would come out into the fire escape and serve my supper out from the fire escape. [chuckles] Chef salad or something. I would cook. I would cook. I was good at making broccoli casserole or something. At that time I would make stuff—Combined we had a kitchen that we'd all share. And I'd go in there and fix something and I'd bring it out to them, because they couldn't cook. They didn't know how to cook. So I would fix stuff for them.

And then we'd go to the pizza place on base and eat pizza and play pool or do something, walk around. There were a lot of things to do. There was a bowling alley, fifty cents a movie. You could go to movies for fifty cents. You'd go bowling for practically nothing. I spent time at the NCO [noncommissioned officers] club. Go there once a week and eat at the NCO club, because, you know, I joined the NCO club. It was a nice club that had dances. Or we had Hawaiian dancers at one time, you know, with the fire and everything.

BK: Oh really?

CT: It was really cool—Polynesian dancers and stuff. It was—I just walked and I had a little foldable bicycle. And I'd bicycle around the base and stuff.

BK: Wow. So after—in '77 your—

CT: Hitch was up.

BK: Right. And then—So you didn't reenlist?

CT: No.

BK: What were your thoughts on that?

CT: I couldn't reenlist because I'd injured my back. I was digging a ditch for a general that wanted a flowerbed at his house, so I had to go dig manure from the base dump, and I injured my back. So I went to the hospital, right. They gave me full-strength Valium, full-strength Darvon. I weighed ninety-nine pounds. I only took half of what they told me to take. I was on the phone to the pharmacist, passed out for three days.

BK: [gasps]

CT: Almost died.

BK: Oh my gosh.

CT: I didn't know it at the time, but the general of ninth—of the Eighth Air Force came to visit me every single day.

BK: Is this the guy whose flowerbed you—

CT: Yes. He came to—and he called my parents. My parents didn't know about it for two days. And then he called my parents. My parents came to see me. I was out for three days. I can't take any pills now, nothing. One aspirin will put me loopy.

BK: And is that because of that or just—

CT: Because of that.

BK: Wow.

CT: Because I couldn't take any pills. Pregnancy was a lot of fun.

BK: Oh gosh. I can imagine.

CT: Pregnancy was a lot of fun. I mean, I couldn't take hardly anything without getting—I took a blue pill last night to sleep and I've still got it in my system.

BK: Wow.

CT: It'll stay for another twelve hours in my system, one Excedrin PM.

BK: So what was your diagnosis? Just the—

CT: A disintegrated disc in my back.

BK: And are you on disability at all?

CT: I'm a disabled American vet, yes.

BK: Did you get a hundred percent or—

CT: No, five percent.

BK: Five? Wow.

CT: Because the very last disc—It's the very last disc and it's not effecting my movement or anything.

BK: Okay. So you—Did you want to reenlist?

CT: Yes.

BK: Okay.

CT: I wanted to change my AFSC [Air Force Specialty Code] to something that was less—less dangerous. [laughs] I wanted to go back to like supply or typing or something like that, because this was just—it was too much hassle trying to—to fight that tech sergeant, you know.

BK: Wow. So that was pretty much—Would you say that was the hardest thing you had to do?

CT: He's—shall we say it—not profiling—his racism. Yeah, I guess you'd call it racism against the women. His thing against the women, I don't know. That kind of—I would have re-enlisted if I could have had someone else other than him in charge of me.

BK: And there's no one you could go to. Wow. I'm sorry to hear that.

CT: My colonel loved me. He thought I was a great worker. But T.C. Yunick said, "I do not agree with this evaluation. She is not well qualified." And he fixed it so I could not reenlist.

BK: Wow. And there was absolutely—wow.

CT: Richard Burr, Howard Coble, nobody can find out why.

BK: You went to them?

CT: I went to Johnston—what was his name? [He] used to be a senator?

BK: Joneston?

CT: Johnston, Johnston—And I went through my senators. I went through my congressman. I went through the governor. And no one can find out why. They won't tell anybody why because they marked it top secret.

BK: Wow.

CT: They can't find out why. I could not reenlist. I tried to reenlist when I was like thirty-two—couldn't. [I] can't reenlist.

BK: What do they officially tell you, just—

CT: That—that if you aren't able to reenlist due to—It's called R4. And I can't find out what R4 is. [RE-4 – Individuals separated from their last period of service with a non-waiverable disqualification.]

BK: So you don't even know what the code is.

CT: I don't know what the code is. They won't even tell Richard Burr or anybody what the code is—Brad Miller, nobody.

BK: Wow. Wow. That's very frustrating.

CT: It's probably something Mr. T.C. Yunick put in. Later on, my husband met T.C. Yunick. He didn't know he was my husband and was talking about, "That blankity blank-blank-blank woman that I had in the service. Blank, blank, blank, blank, blank." And my husband almost hit him. And that's all he would do, is say I was a dirty—you know. And back then, they thought only—It was the air force. I had to go before an appearance board to join the air force—an actual appearance board. They had to take my picture and send it in to an appearance board to see if I would look good enough in the uniform to be in the air force.

BK: Wow. I didn't realize they could do that.

CT: Yeah. That's back in the seventies. We took classes on how to walk, how to stand, how to—make-up, things like that, in basic training. We took make-up classes on how to—We'd have to walk and then they'd say, "Freeze!" and you'd have to freeze that position and stay there for like two minutes without falling off in your pumps.

BK: Wow.

CT: Yeah, that was difficult. But I know how to walk.

BK: So was he trying—was he trying—

CT: He was trying to get me out. He was trying to kick me out.

BK: Was he saying you were a lesbian? What was he saying? He was just—that you were—

CT: He just didn't want me there.

BK: Did other women have to work with him?

CT: Other women came into the unit. Oh, he'd like them because they would sleep around with everybody. And I wouldn't. I was very Christian. My beliefs were very strong, and he didn't like that. He didn't like that he had to watch himself around me. That's him. That's one bad thing about the service.

BK: Wow. I'm sorry you had to—

CT: [unclear] Back in the seventies, you know—But now they can't do something like that. It'd be—they'd have EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] all over them.

BK: Exactly. They didn't have EEOC back then?

CT: No.

BK: Wow. What was your most memorable decoration or award?

CT: Presidential Unit Citation. And my National [Service] Defense [Medal]—I've got National Defense. I've got Good Conduct Medal and Presidential Unit Citation. And I'm proud of my medals. I'm proud of them.

BK: That's great.

CT: And Air Force Longevity [Service Award]. Sorry. I've got Air Force Longevity.

BK: Okay. So in—

CT: I've still got the dog tags. They're at home somewhere.

BK: Oh really?

CT: I wear them every once in a while.

BK: So were there other women that you worked with, or you were just really the only woman everywhere you went, in terms of imagery?

CT: Just about until I got to—Until Shaw, about 1976, then another girl joined the unit.

BK: What was your relationship with her?

CT: Pretty good. We'd talk together, you know, and eat outside together. But she was a—She developed the film, and I was an interpreter, so we'd see each other in passing, in going to the PPIF.

PPIFs were like a—You see the knee knockers, things in the navy. That's how you had to walk through the PPIFs, because they were joined together with a little platform thing. And you'd put two PPIF's together and make a unit. They were gosh awful hot. No air conditioning, no windows, nothing. You opened the door if you got too hot. There was hardly air conditioning so—you know, in there where they did the film. Well, we had no air conditioning. It was hot if we were ever in there because they were metal. It was completely metal. The floor was metal, the walls were metal, and we had to—had the power generators. These—big as, I guess, half this table, weighed fifty-some pounds, that I'd have to lug around.

BK: Wow.

CT: And the hoses that go along with it and everything.

BK: And you're ninety-nine pounds.

CT: Yes!

BK: Wow.

CT: And I carried one all by myself.

BK: Wow.

CT: That surprised the heck out of T.C. but, you know.

BK: So do you—So do you feel that the military treated you fairly with the pay, promotions, and so on?

CT: Oh yeah.

BK: Okay. It's just that one guy.

CT: I mean back then it was a lot of money: four hundred and some dollars a month and you didn't have to pay for your food, didn't have to pay for your lodging, didn't have to pay for none of that. Only things I had to pay for would have been my food outside of base or any transportation outside the base for any things I wanted to do, like order a pizza or something like that. But that's all I had to pay for. I saved enough to buy a car when I got out.

BK: Wow. Okay. Is—Is there anything in particular you would want a civilian to know or understand about what it's like to serve in the military that they might not know?

CT: It is a commitment. You have to be committed to working hard, but it's the best job you'll ever have as far as friendship, a sense of belonging, a sense of patriotism. I cannot—I cannot go by a flag without wanting to salute it. Every time I see someone burning a flag, I feel like killing them. I'm sorry, I do. Fourth of July is very big for me. I enjoyed my time in. If you want to grow and you want to have a job that will be fulfilling, you need to go into the service. It'll pay for college. They paid for my first degree, paid for the entire thing. They pay for college. You will learn a lot more than you will ever learn anywhere else. And the independence you will gain is priceless.

BK: Did you support the war at the time? I mean there was—

CT: Yes.

BK: Okay. So you basically were dealing with what was going on in the Soviet Union. You weren't working with—

CT: We did stuff here. We did stuff in—training stuff in South Carolina and, you know, different areas, like all around. We did—We went as far as pictures of Hoover Dam and stuff, which I got to go into the bottom of. It was so cool.

BK: Why were you going in the bottom of it?

CT: When I was in Nevada, we went down—They took a tour.

BK: Oh, so it was a tour. It wasn't—

CT: We took a tour down to the very, very bottom of Hoover Dam. It was scary. It was scary.

BK: How did you get down there?

CT: Turbines—

BK: Elevator or what?

CT: No, steps.

BK: Steps, okay.

CT: And the turbines are as big as—I'd say from here to the wall.

BK: Wow.

CT: Great big turbines. Scary. And the—

BK: So it's like fifty foot?

CT: —the tunnels are about as wide as from that post to that post. That's how big the tunnels are.

BK: That's about twenty-five—

CT: Fantastic. Because half of it's in Arizona, half of it's in Nevada.

BK: So when you were in the service, were you aware of the anti-war movement?

CT: Oh yeah.

BK: And what were your thoughts about it then, and are they different than they are now?

CT: It didn't really touch me until I came home and saw all the anti-war protests and the things against, you know, Vietnam as burning babies and that kind of thing and about My Lai [Massacre] and all that stuff. It didn't really touch me until I came home because we never really heard anything about it. We were kind of sequestered. You know, we took—more or less stayed around military people, pretty much, at Shaw. We didn't really go see anybody outside. When we did, we would wear our uniforms and they would know, "Hey, that's military." So they didn't come talk to us or nothing. We just stayed to ourselves.

BK: And so you came back to Greensboro?

CT: Came back to High Point.

BK: High Point. I'm sorry.

CT: I was living in High Point at the time. And I came back to High Point and then got back to jobs and stuff. Then I went back to school in '79 through '83. And then after '83 I went—

BK: And you got—Sorry. Just for the record, where did you get from '79 to '83? What kind of degree?

CT: It's an associate's degree in secretarial science and medical.

BK: Okay. And this is at Greensboro Technical—

CT: GTCC.

BK: —Community College.

CT: And I was in who's who among American student in colleges [Who's Who Among Students in American Universities & Colleges.]

BK: Oh. And why did you choose that field to go into?

CT: I thought I could have medical aptitude, which I found out I do. I mean I can spell big long medical words and I've got a photographic memory, so if I see something, I know how to spell it. And I was really good. I was pretty good at typing and stuff, so I enjoyed that part of it. I just went back to school for a medical office administration, which I'm—to learn computers, because I didn't know anything about computers. I asked how to turn one on, and I was teaching high school. I said—
[A student said,] "Well, can you help me transfer this disk?"
"Do what?"
So I had to go back. I had to know how to transfer a disk, how to transfer things on to USB ports, and I had to take an advanced word processing, PowerPoint presentation, Access, Excel. I learned all that stuff.

BK: So you went back to High Point, and you went back to school full-time on the GI Bill?

CT: Yes.

BK: And then after you got your associate's degree, where did you work?

CT: I—'84 where did I—oh I started—I had typed dissertations for A&T [North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University] students.

BK: Okay.

CT: Which is like pharmacology students and stuff. My medical knowledge kind of came in handy when teaching—typing up dissertations on—it was back then the IBM computers, a long time ago, and a regular typewriter, which they don't use nowadays anymore. And then I went on to look for—I've been an account executive. I've been a media person for a high school.

BK: Oh, so you worked in high school.

CT: Yes, I went to the high school for six—I worked for McDonald's eight years.

BK: Wow. You've done—so McDonald's, high school—

CT: Fastest drive-through person in Greensboro.

BK: All right.

CT: In 1992. I think it was—'93? I was fastest person in Greensboro. I did two thousand dollars an hour.

BK: Wow.

CT: That's moving.

BK: Did they give you any—

CT: I won a jacket. And I got—I was the official Hamburglar for Greensboro. [laughs]

BK: That's pretty cool

CT: I dressed up as the Hamburglar and walked around. My son didn't even know who I was one time.

BK: Oh wow.

CT: Because he was walking around and I talked to him. And later on I said, "I was the Hamburglar and I talked to you."

And he said, "No you weren't."

I said, "Yes, I was!"

But I was the official spokesman for Greensboro whenever Ronald McDonald came to town. So I would go deal with different schools with Ronald McDonald. So everybody called me Mrs. Ronald McDonald.

BK: And what was Ronald McDonald talking about in schools?

CT: He would do magic tricks and he would do things like nutrition, safety. He'd teach them—talk to them about crossing streets and public safety and like if you see something on the ground, don't pick it up.

BK: Litter?

CT: No, like needles and things like that.

BK: Oh okay.

CT: He'd teach them how to be safe and then we'd give out coloring books with, you know, the safety stuff in them. And I loved that. That was fun. That was a lot of fun.

BK: And you worked at—you said through the eighties?

CT: Through the eighties to the nineties.

BK: And then what did you do?

CT: Then I went to work at [unclear] Smith until—from 2002 to 2008.

BK: Now, Bendil Smith, what is that?

CT: Ben L. Smith High School.

BK: Oh okay. And what did you do there?

CT: Media.

BK: Media, okay.

CT: I assisted people with their senior projects. I ran the attendance office. I've still got students now that come by at school, at GTCC. "I haven't spoken to you—You remember me?"

BK: So you—After a while, you didn't want to work in the school. You wanted to go back to—

CT: I went back to—I went to school to learn more computers and more medical knowledge so I can be a medical—See, my son is an EMT [emergency medical technician.] My husband is a paramedic [unclear] and a cop, so he's going to start his own program—his own company, called CPR Solutions, [to]teach people CPR and train people for stuff like that [unclear] EMT basics. And so I was going to run the business, so I had to have the administrative part of it so I could learn how to run the business. So I've got four more

courses to get my degree. I've already got the certificate.

BK: Okay. And what do you want to do?

CT: I'd like to work in radiology, something like that. I might go on and take a radiology course and be a radiology tech. Or I'd have to run like an orthopedics office or something like that.

BK: Okay. And so where did you meet your husband? Tell me about your husband.

CT: GTCC. I was a work-study student on the GI Bill back in the eighties—'79 to '83. And he was a—He was taking law enforcement training at GTCC. And he walked by and he saw me and we talked for, like, I guess an hour. And then the next day, I had four cowl-neck sweaters, a pair of shoes, and twelve long-stemmed roses waiting in my office. And the shoes and the sweaters fit.

BK: Wow, impressive.

CT: So three months later he asked me for a date. And our first date he asked me to marry him before we got out of the car, and I said yes.

BK: That's amazing. And you have a son?

CT: I have a twenty-three year old son.

BK: And is he just recently moving back to Greensboro?

CT: I've been living in Greensboro since I've been married. Yeah.

BK: Okay, just a few more questions just about more cultural things. So you moved back to the area, and this is sort of the first time that you were face to face with the anti-war movement. What was your reaction? Did you have interactions with people, talk to them about it?

CT: Just with the veteran's club. I registered with the veteran's group here—the Employment Security Commission. And I went—I was talking with veterans there about it, and some people I went to school with came back from Vietnam and we talked about it. But I didn't—couldn't understand why they were so against it.

BK: The veterans or just—

CT: The civilians. I couldn't understand. It was a—Sure it was a war that we stuck our nose in, but we were there. People were there fighting and dying for—for freedom, for political freedom for people who were oppressed. And I don't care who you are, that—we've all got something like that. People are dying and being burned up for

something they believe in. That's—that's worthy enough cause for people—for me to serve my country.

BK: Did you meet any veterans here that were against the war?

CT: No, I don't think so. I don't remember any.

BK: Okay. So did you pay attention to national politics while you were in the service?

CT: Some. I voted. I absentee voted when I was in the service. And we'd see stuff in the news about the Vietnam War and [General William] Westmoreland and Oliver North and all that. But I didn't really pay that much attention until I got out.

BK: So you were in the service during Watergate [scandal]. So were you following that or—

CT: Yeah, I followed that. I even read the Watergate papers.

BK: Oh wow.

CT: Yeah. Long, long thing. He was wrong. He went about it the wrong way. He could have done it another way, but he—[President Richard] Nixon was not real brainy; let's put it that way. Nixon was not that smart. And I knew Nixon. I was a member of the North Carolina Christian Endeavor Union, and he was a member of the—He was our president, and he was a member of the union.

BK: So you met him when he was—

CT: Yes.

BK: Wow. What was your—I guess when he was in law school at Duke [University.]

CT: That's—I think so. And he's a card-carrying Communist.

BK: Nixon?

CT: Yes.

BK: Okay. Sorry. You just blew my mind there. [chuckles] So—

CT: Nixon was—Nixon at one time had a Communist voter card.

BK: Did that ever come up anywhere else?

CT: No, not until after he resigned.

BK: Wow. So did you get along with him? Where did you all—I mean, he was in Durham. You were here. How did you all meet?

CT: I would send him our newspaper every week, and he would send back articles to put in the newspaper.

BK: And, I'm sorry, what was the newspaper?

CT: The North Carolina Christian Endeavor Union.

BK: Endeavor Union?

CT: Yes, Christian Endeavor. It's an international interdenominational group of people who get together to promote spreading the word through the entire world.

BK: Okay. And what was your—not reaction, what's the word? When you met Nixon, what was your—what's the word I want, not—I guess reaction is the best word, or thoughts about him.

CT: It looked like he was—to me, he was a decent man. He was polite, and Pat[ricia Nixon] was really nice.

BK: Was he married to Pat then?

CT: Yes.

BK: Okay. I guess I've got to bone up on my Nixon history. So were you surprised when—

CT: Not really.

BK: Not really?

CT: I knew he was—I knew he was [unclear] because I had to put it in the paper, so.

BK: But were you surprised when Watergate—when you found out about Watergate?

CT: Yeah, a little bit, to know that something like that could happen in the White House.

BK: So you didn't have any contact with him after he left. And how did you find out he was a communist—or card carrying at the time?

CT: I read his autobiography.

BK: Oh okay.

CT: I think I read it in that.

BK: You didn't know at the time?

CT: No.

BK: Wow. That's—anyone else—any of the presidents that you know [unclear]?

CT: No, no presidents.

BK: So did you support him when he was—

CT: I think I voted for him, and I voted for [President Dwight] Ike [Eisenhower.] I supported Ike.

BK: Right.

CT: I voted for Nixon. I voted for [President Gerald] Ford. I voted for [President Jimmy] Carter.

BK: So you did follow politics. That's impressive. You read the whole Pentagon Papers [*United States—Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense.*] So who—what kind of—did you listen—Did you follow music? What kind of music did you like?

CT: Back then it was fifties and sixties rock, you know: Queen, Boston, Eagles, stuff like that. I always—I had all the Eagles. I had all the Jackson 5 stuff, Osmonds, [chuckles] things like that. My record collection—I lost it in one of my moves. I had a big collection of records from the fifties and sixties. And now it's more country, easy listening type stuff.

BK: And so—

CT: Alabama.

BK: TV shows—*Starsky & Hutch* is obviously one of them. What other shows did you watch?

CT: I used to watch—I liked cop shows like *NCIS*. We watched the Discovery Channel. We would watch operations while we were eating dinner and stuff.

BK: Wow.

CT: The Discovery Channel and stuff like knee replacements and heart valve replacements, see, because we were medical—medical.

BK: Your interest, right.

CT: And my son is—got him into medical and I got him into the military, too. He was in air force ROTC, which I taught for a year.

BK: Really?

CT: Yes.

BK: Whoa, whoa, whoa. Okay. When did you do that and what did you teach?

CT: Back when—Back in 2004, 2005, and during Ben L. Smith, the man that was teaching it had four classes. He was teaching by himself, and he couldn't handle four classes by himself.

BK: So this is Ben L. Smith. This is a high school.

CT: Ben L. Smith High School.

BK: Okay. And what was he—what did you teach [unclear]?

CT: I was teaching radio signaling, you know, things like that. I helped with the discipline, helped with marching, teaching them how to march.

BK: Oh. How did you get involved in that? You just talked to him?

CT: My son was in it. My son was in ROTC.

BK: And you just went down to the air force—

CT: Went down there and he said, "I need some help." So I helped him with his paperwork, helped him with his fundraising campaign. I was the secretary treasurer. I kept up on all the money of all the kids, you know, selling stuff. And I kept up with the uniforms, kept them—kept them issue. They had to issue them uniforms. That's what we did. My husband cleaned all the rifles that they used for their drill. We went out to drills with them and helped them with their drills. Like they'd go to an A&T drill meet or something like that; we would go with them and help them.

BK: You still involved with them?

CT: Some, not much.

BK: And so how long did you do that?

CT: About a year, year and a half.

BK: And then they had other people help or—

CT: Then he—Then he got a colonel, a retired colonel from A&T, to come over and help him.
And so we—

[End of Recording]