

2-20-1994

## Interview no. 814

Betty Seabrooke

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Interview with Betty Seabrooke by Rebecca Craver, 1994, "Interview no. 814," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact [lweber@utep.edu](mailto:lweber@utep.edu).

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE:	<u>Betty Seabrooke</u>
INTERVIEWER:	<u>Rebecca Craver</u>
PROJECT:	<u>World War II</u>
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	<u>February 22, 1994</u>
TERMS OF USE:	<u>Unrestricted</u>
TAPE NO:	<u>814</u>
TRANSCRIPT NO:	<u>814</u>
TRANSCRIBER:	<u>Becky Craver</u>

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born August 22, 1922 in Hillside, Illinois; moved to El Paso, Texas, during teenage years; graduated from Austin High School in 1940; attended Drake University and Texas College of Mines; serviced aircraft in El Paso during World War II.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Discusses experience as one of a group of El Paso women sent to San Antonio to learn how to service aircraft during World War II; tells about her work at Biggs Field and El Paso Municipal Airport refueling planes; discusses social life during the war years especially dances held for servicemen at the service clubs at Ft. Bliss; describes personal encounter with Charles Lindburgh when he flew through El Paso.

Length of Interview: 55 minutes Length of Transcript 30 pages

Betty Seabrooke  
Interviewed by Rebecca Craver  
February 22, 1994  
World War II Project

C: Before we get into the World War II years, I'd like to get some biographical information. I'd like to know where you were born in El Paso?

S: No. I was born in Hillside, Illinois, August 22, 1922.

C: And what brought your family to El Paso?

S: My father was a civil engineer for the government and he was sent out here to build buildings up at La Tuna Prison, and so that's what brought us out here. And I was a junior in high school at the time. My sister Dorothy was a senior and my two younger sisters went to Crockett School. I graduated from Austin in 1940 and then I went to Drake University and I was there a year and a half, and Pearl Harbor happened when I was up there and my mother was all nervous, wanted all her chicks under her wing so I came back and finished out that year at what was College of Mines then.

C: How did you hear about this job that you took during the war?

S: I don't know if it was in the paper or what. I had several: the first, a bunch of us went down to San Antonio to Kelly Field to take what was called Aero-repair and that's where I

learned how to splice cable and stuff like that.

C: Well, let me back up a little bit. Did you interview for the job?

S: No, it was through civil service, I believe. That might be how I heard about it because my mother was working for civil service out at Logan Heights. But I just can't remember how I got that. That's over 50 years ago, you know. (chuckles)

C: Where was your mother living then?

S: We were living here in El Paso. We were renting at first, but then, you know, it was wartime and they'd have all these people coming in, so we finally had to buy a house, which the folks did over there on Hawthorne Street. That's 1428 Hawthorne.

C: So that's where you lived during the war?

S: Most of the time. And this was when I was down there in San Antonio. (showing photographs)

C: Who else went with you from El Paso? What other girls? What were their names?

S: Well, there was Effie and her sister that lived over on Mundy. That girl was Phyllis. I can't remember their last names. That's just terrible.

C: That's all right.

S: And there was one girl that was a cheerleader at El Paso High. It was mostly girls; there were two teenage boys, poor things

with all these . . .(chuckles) women.

C: How many women went from El Paso to San Antonio?

S: I think there were about 20 of us, and some were married women, quite a varied group: teenagers on up into 30s. I don't think any were as old as the 40s, but I wouldn't swear to it.

C: And how did you get down there? Did they transport you?

S: We went by train, and it wasn't too bad going down because the government had made reservations for us and when we got there, though, they whisked us off to the field to take all these tests. We had to take IQ tests and mechanical aptitude tests and here none of us had a place to stay yet. We had to take all the tests first. (chuckles)

C: Was this at Randolph?

S: I believe it was Kelly Field. I got a little piece of paper upstairs showing I passed the courses. (laughter) But mechanics wasn't really my thing. I think it was all Bs.

C: Did they put all the girls from El Paso in the same classes?

S: No, we weren't all taking the same classes. I know I was in the section called aerorepair, but I don't remember what the other things were 'cause I didn't take that.

C: Well, describe a class.

S: Well, one class we had to be able to identify all the different kind of nuts and bolts and screws and stuff like that and also we had to learn the names of all the tools that you might need to use repairing an airplane. (laughter)

C: So they taught you that in the classroom. Was there any actual

working on planes in San Antonio?

S: Not down there, no. It wasn't until we got back to El Paso that we were actually working on them. I think we had a course on hydraulics, but I'm not going to swear on that one either.

C: Did you go to school all day long?

S: Yeah.

C: How long were you all in San Antonio?

S: Only three months and then we were sent back home.

C: What time of year did you go down there?

S: Well, we were there for a hurricane. It was in the summer, and I had my twentieth birthday down there. My birthday's in August.

C: So it was in the summer. Was it in 1942?

S: Yes, because I was born in '22, so '42.

C: When you got back to El Paso, you lived at home but you worked where?

S: Well, first it was out at Biggs Field, and then they transferred a whole bunch of us over to the municipal airport to service airplanes for the "Ferry Command."

C: Tell me about the "Ferry Command."

S: Oh, that was a lot more fun, really, except the hours were terrible. We worked six days a week and we would change shifts, I think it was every two weeks, but we would be on eight hours, off eight hours, and then on eight hours. Except for the third time. Then you'd be off not quite 24 hours, I

guess. But when you changed shifts, usually it wasn't very nice because you were working well 16 hours in the same 24. Uh, huh. What the crews did was they serviced training planes, like the A6s and the B13s, the little ones, some from out in Phoenix. They would come in here on their training flights and get gasoline and then there were also planes that were being ferried from the factory to wherever they were going to need them, whether it was going to be in the East coast or what before they went on overseas.

C: How many were on a crew?

S: Oh, dear, let's see. We'd have two gasoline trucks, two for guage?, and the oil truck - about six to eight people, and then this is hilarious. On night we had to be on guard duty (laughter)

C: Well, now tell me about that.

S: Well, they gave us a shotgun to hold but we did not have any bullets in it. I think they gave us one bullet that we put in our pockets, and I didn't know how to load the thing anyway, so (chuckles) I wasn't going to do any good guarding the plane.

C: So you would just stand out there on the runway or ...?

S: No, beside a plane. And when they parked them at night, they were scattered all over the field because they didn't want an accident like happened at Pearl Harbor when they went right down the field taking out planes. And we had to know how to tie the plane down, too. One of the men, who was huskier,

would drive stakes in the ground and there are loops near the wheels where you put a rope through and tie a bowline - you know, that's a knot good for that sort of thing - and then another one over where the stake was and usually there'd be two or three points where you'd have a rope, and a day like this [windy], it was really something to make sure you had the planes tied down well.

C: If the wind were blowing.

S: Yes, uh huh. I know one time - they went back practically to World War I for training planes - and here were all these ancient bi-planes that were being used for training, and (laughter) the fellows got out and they [the planes] started moving across the field with people chasing these planes to try to tie them down.

C: Well, what was your job exactly?

S: Well, I drove the Biederman Prime Mover which was a big truck, cab.

C: How do you spell that?

S: It's a brand name. I think it's B-I-E-D-E-R-M-A-N. And I even learned to double clutch while driving it. Well, when you're driving a big truck and it's stick shift, you, uh, put the clutch in, go half way with the stick shift, bring your foot up, and then down again before you finish the shift for each gear. That's called double clutching.

C: Well, it sounds like the job was rather physical.

S: Yes, it was, but it wasn't as bad as that aerorepair where you



had to lift very heavy parts of airplanes. That's was over at Biggs Field. I did that only a short while, and then they sent us over there to municipal. And that was fun because there were a lot of famous aviators that came through. Charles Lindbergh was there once.

C: Oh, well, tell me, did you get to meet him?

S: At that time, we'd take turns having the pilots sign for their gasoline, and I was signing them up for gasoline that day, so he signed the paper and I had him sign two and I lost the paper somewhere over the years where I had his signature.

C: So they had to sign for the gas to be refueled?

S: Uh, huh. Another truck, a smaller truck has the oil if they needed oil, too. Lindbergh was in a, I'm pretty sure it was a B26, a two engine plane, and one of the crew, either the foreman or assistant foreman would spot the plane, make the gestures, tell them where to come and I was standing beside him to have them sign for gas and he says, "I bet that's Lindy." And sure 'nuf, when he came down the ladder he was wearing the high shoes like my father used to wear, (chuckles) that came up over the ankle. And he was not in a uniform; he was in civilian clothes. And he was so much bigger than I expected, must have been 6'3" or more, shoulders a yard wide. Just a tremendous physical presence. And I once stood by Buddy Rogers when he took off. He was ferrying a training plane; I think it was an AT6. I've forgotten so many of the numbers, but they had two levels, you know, of the training planes. I

think the top one was the AT and when they were a real beginner I think it was a BT or something like that.

C: I suppose part of your training was learning all the different kinds of numbers?

S: Well, we got to where we knew which plane was which just because we serviced so many of them. We serviced P38s, that's the one with the twin fuselage, and let's see, bombers and some Navy planes, too. They were harder to fill up with gas because the openings to the gas tanks were very small because they were designed for the aircraft carriers, and the nozzles were real small. And of course, we had these great big hoses, so you had to just drip the gasoline in or it would come all out at you. Uh huh. I'm trying to remember if they ever put in the paper some the famous airplanes that were in there: there was Pzero once and I think one of the planes that had flown over Tokyo, you know when they bombed Japan. But it's hard to remember.

C: So you drove a truck, you refueled, did you do any repair work?

S: No, not at municipal because that was just so they could get their gas and oil and then, of course, if they came in kind of late, they would spend the night in El Paso, usually over at the Officers' Quarters.

C: What would you wear to work? Did they give you uniforms?

S: Oh, no. You provided your own. Coveralls. You know, long-sleeved, long-legged coveralls, and then in the winter

anything you could find to keep warm (chuckles) 'cause if you were on the night shift . . . cold night, that was bad.

C: Well, how many planes would come in every day?

S: Well, it would vary, but, uh, heavens, sometimes several hundred, I'm sure.

C: So how many of these women would be out there refueling?

S: Well, uh, there was the gas truck and then there was a klee track, which was something like a tractor, and it pulled a big gas tank also and the oil trucks. They'd just have to kind of wait their turn.

C; Did you have any accidents?

S: Uh, there were a couple of crashes but I wasn't there. It wasn't on my shift. One was a plane from Biggs Field, a B24. He took off and he couldn't get the altitude and he tried to land at Municipal, and he set down. But the only injury was a broken thumb nail, so (chuckles) that didn't hurt him. And they wanted to get him back in the air, you know, as soon as possible, on the theory...he crashed a second plane! Yes. And then there a Navy TBF. The fellow was trying to land in one of our terrible dust storms and he thought he was on the ground and he was still quite a ways up, and fortunately he wasn't seriously hurt either but the plane just went down and the wings fell off. And for safety we had an ancient fire truck that the El Paso Fire Department had ... (laughs)

C: 'Cause I would imagine it was flammable material and they were...

S: I know some of the young pilots were just fascinated with that old fire truck and they would beg for a ride on it. (laughs)

C: Did any of the servicemen that were pilots flirt with the girls?

S: Oh, of course. And there were some older men, really old enough to be our fathers, some of them, but they were well known aviators and they were doing this ferrying work so that... Well, you know, we were hurting for trained pilots at the time, and there was one who used to chase us around the airplane. (laughter)

C: Well, let's talk about social life during the war.

S: Well, my sisters and I went out to the service club dances a lot. My mother and grandmother would chaperone, and they would send a big army truck to pick us up in our formals. (laughter)

C: Come to everyone's home?

S: Yes. It was like taxi service. And Mother, of course, was not the only chaperone. There were some others, too, and they all had their list of girls that they would go around and pick up and try to have it be on the way from our house out to the service club. They had a dance every week at Service Club No. 3 and sometimes a tea dance on Sunday. Then there were a couple of other service clubs and they would have dances also. We didn't go to all of them, but we did go to Service Club No. 3 because they depended on us.

C: Well, it looks like from the pictures that it was a big group,

maybe 100 people would show up every week?

S: Oh, yes. From the invitations you can see some of the outfits that were giving the dance. And sometimes it was just an open dance where anybody could attend, any of the boys stationed out there. They were really more fun 'cause you could see your friends every week and the good dancers.

C: Who was the best dancer?

S: Oh, Wally Ryan was very good. Now he danced Chicago style. I got where I could tell where they were from by the way they danced. We were all jitterbugging, of course. Yes. And the New York boys were very good at that. They also did a dance called the Peabody, some of them knew how. It's a lot like a Paso Doble. Real fast music and you half-time, and you are out to the side of your partner. I could tell if they were from Boston or California, New York or Chicago, when it came to jitterbugging. They were doing the same steps, but it was something about the body language you could tell where they were from.

C: Can you distinguish by telling me or is it just something you have to [feel]?

S: Just something in the way they would swing you out and back in...that sort of thing. (laughter)

C: What were you telling me about this "Free A Man For Action" slogan?

S: Oh, yes, of course, that was great during the war urging women to get a war job and "free a man for action," but then after

we had been over there at Municipal [airport], not even a year, they sent soldiers to take our place. And what was funny was in the paper, later, a group of women took these boys under their wing and they'd be out there with coffee and donuts for them, and of course nobody ever brought us coffee or donuts when we were doing that work. No way.

C: So you were replaced?

S: By soldiers for that job. Uh huh. And I'm not sure if they sent us back to Biggs for a while or what. I know I was at Fort Bliss for a short while in an office job, but I think the Office of Censorship was where I ended up before I went back to college.

C: Where did you work? Where was the Office of Censorship?

S: Across the street from the downtown Hilton Hotel and I don't know what they call that now. It's on the second or third floor of that building.

C: And were they all women that worked up there?

S: No, there were some men.

C: And what did you do?

S: Well, my department would check every envelope coming in or going out and there were certain names that were suspicious and if we got one of those we would flag it, you know, clip a little paper to it and put it to one side. And then in other parts they had people who could read the French, German, Spanish, the whole bit to do the actual censoring of letters.

C: Did they provide you with a list of names that were

suspicious?

S: Well, we had these things, I don't know how to describe it, they had strips with names and addresses fitted in. There were pages of them, and there were sorters who would sort of alphabetize so that one person might be doing the "s"es, another the "m"s, and then...like when you look in the telephone book you know which letter has the most people. And these things were similar to what they used to have for checking people's credit way back when, before... . They were metal pages and they had these sort of heavy cardboard strips with names and addresses on both sides of this thing. And I can't remember how many pages of it we had.

C: But you didn't do the actual censoring.

S: No.

C: And how long did you work that job?

S: My memory has just gone. I should have called up Lenore Jenness who still lives in town I believe.

C: She worked there with you?

S: Yeah. She's one of those in that picture.

C: (Looking at a photo) This looks like it was taken at the plaza.

S: Yes, uh huh, because we were very close to it. And of course that was before the underground trainway was put in and if we went too far on our lunch hour to get something and got on the other side of the tracks, we might be late getting back to work! (laughter)

C: Do you remember parades during the war?

S: Well, I don't think we had parades much. Fact, I don't even remember if they kept up the Sun Carnival parade, which always used to be on New Year's Day. It probably would have been my luck to be working that day anyway. (chuckles) I know before the war Ft. Bliss had terrific parades because they had so many horses, and they would have several thousand horses in a parade, pulling the caissons and so forth.

When I was out there at Municipal [Airport] we were right across the street from Ft. Bliss, and we used to see this cloud of dust going by with the cow bell going and all these curses coming out of this cloud of dust and we learned later that they were training the mules that were used over in Asia for that famous highway they built, you know, the Burma Road. Yes, they trained the mules out at Ft. Bliss.

C: Well, you saw the build-up of Ft. Bliss at the time of the war.

S: Yes, but of course it's really filled up a lot more since then, too. They've got all that housing along Fred Wilson Road.

C: When Germany surrendered, V-E Day, what do you...?

S: That was '45. My sister Barbara and I had spent a semester down at Texas State College for Women, and while we were down there, I think that's when I heard that Roosevelt died, and, let's see, which surrender was first? Germany was before Japan.



C: Uh huh, Germany.

S: So we were back home, I think.

C: Were you still working that job at that time?

S: No. I was, I think that I was working out at SWIG, you know, Southwestern Cotton Growers' Association.

C: Oh, so you don't ... what about when you heard about the atomic bomb. What was your reaction?

S: That if it had been sooner a lot of the boys we had known would not have died. Like the 200th from New Mexico.

C: And you knew some of those?

S: Yes, Angelo Sacaleras, and crazy young friend of his, Hank somebody, and I never met 'em, but Angelo told me about this Apache Indian who was in the outfit and he was in his 40's and he survived the death march and so did Hank and also being in the Japanese prison.

C: How did you keep up with the servicemen that you knew during the war?

S: Well, V-Mail, you know, and just writing. Uh, I did keep up with all of them, naturally, 'cause you can see in that picture, there were hundreds that we met.

C: Yes, was it sort of the feeling in town that it was a young girl's responsibility to help entertain the troops?

S: Well, yes and no because before the war, uh, you weren't supposed to go with a soldier unless it was an officer. (laughs) But when they started drafting our finest young men and those that were in the National Guard outfits, the

attitude changed a lot.

C: Did you or any of your sisters marry servicemen?

S: Yes, my sister Dorothy did. She married Buford Humphries and they are still up there in their house.

C: How do you splice a cable?

S: It will wreck your fingers, believe me. You have this little loop thing, and you put the cable around through that and kind of clamp it and then you have to take pliers and you undo the wire at the end. There are fine wires and they are wrapped around a heavier wire. So then you have something like a heavy ice pick and you dig into the cable and pull some of these fine wires through and keep doing that all the way down. You take it off and pound it so it's smooth. (laughs) I don't know that I could really do one anymore. All I know is that it just wrecks your fingers. You have to have terrible calluses so that it isn't tearing your fingers up.

C: You couldn't use gloves and do it properly?

S: No, you couldn't do it that way. (laughter)

C: Did you see any women pilots?

S: No, they didn't come through while I was working at municipal.

(some unrelated conversation)

C: Tell me the funny story you told me over the phone, for the purpose of recording, the faux pas your mother made.

S: Oh, my goodness, yes. Well, I told you that a lot of the planes were Navy planes and it was called the Navy Ferry Command. Uh, a couple of the girls that lived with us were

taking courses at El Paso Tech, so we stopped to pick them up and these two pilots were in the car. So when the girls came out, Mother said, "I want you to meet a couple of Navy fairies." And they said, "Mrs. Slack!" And my sister said, "Well, she doesn't know what it means." So uh, we brushed that off and we got Mother home and took her to one side and told her what a fairy was. She said, "Oh, well, I knew the word 'queer' but I never heard of 'fairy'."

C: Your mother sounds like a character.

S: She was always trying to tell jokes and getting them wrong, you know.

C: Your maiden name was?

S: Slack.

C: Betty Slack.

S: Uh, huh.

C: And why did they call you "Legs?"

S: Well, they thought I had nice legs. (laughter) I should bring down a picture from upstairs. It really shows that.

C: (looking at photographs) My question is about the dances.

S: Downtown, it was in the old Elks building. It had this marvelous dance floor that was kind of on ball bearings and it would go up and down. Yes. And I forgot what day of the week their dances were, but if we were low on gas, we could just walk down there because back then it was safe to do that.

End of Side A

### Beginning of Side B

Once in a while one of the big bands would come to town and that's back when Liberty Hall had that big dance floor on the stage. Harry James was here twice and Lawrence Welk. I'll never forget Harry James. The first time he was here, of course, this was a dance with civilians and GIs went to, and there got to be a big fight down on the dance floor and I was so embarrassed to think that they were going to act that way. What would Harry James and his band think of it. Well, they loved it! They were all out at the edge of the stage, and I'm sure they were making bets as to who was going to win.

C: Was there a lot of drinking at these dances?

S: There could be, yes. It wasn't like the service club dances where there was no drinking. But, of course, back then you had to take your own bottle because you couldn't order drinks "by the drink." You could order a set-up and then put your own liquor in it.

C: Texas was dry.

S: Yes. Well, not exactly dry, but you couldn't order 'by the drink." And of course that made Juarez very attractive. And during the war most of the fellows could go across to Juarez but they had to be back across the bridge by eleven o'clock. Well, so many hundreds of them were over there that they all couldn't get back in time but as long as they were in line to come back, they were safe. And so there we'd be in line, popping into bars all down the street, get another drink, then

go back in line. And I know a couple of times there were some big fights, but I wasn't there. A fellow I knew said the fight was going from the bridge for blocks back up ... What is the street you walk across?

C: Is it Juarez Avenue?

S: I don't know which one it is, but of course, that was before the bridge had the big hump. It was level and these little kids, no matter what the weather, would be standing down there in the river with a cone of paper and a long stick, so you'd throw money and they'd try to catch it.

C: So did you all walk across, always walk across?

S: Uh, huh. Yes. We'd park on our side and walk across.

C: What were the favorite places in Juarez?

S: Oh, the Lobby and the Tivoli. Those were the two big ones.

C: And they were nightclubs, had acts, shows?

S: Oh, yes. And they also had dinner. You'd go over early. And one place I liked, 'though I didn't really go there much until after the war, was the Manhattan Bar because it had the five-man marimba. And three generations were playing it. Yes, the grandfather, his son, and then his grandsons.

C: When we moved to town the Manhattan was still there, the original one. It burned not too many years after we moved here. Well, what about rationing?

S: Oh, heavens yes, we were talking about that just the other day. Coffee was rationed, and sugar, and shoes. In fact my sister Elaine was very bitter about not having enough sugar

during the war so she could make fudge. She could have gone across the river to get it, and we used to go across and get sandals because you got two pairs of shoes a year, and we were wearing shoes out right and left, dancing, you know. We had no problems about coffee, because at that time Mother was the only one in our house who liked coffee, and you could get the coffee stamp for anyone sixteen and over, so she had plenty of coffee.

C: How did you get the rationing stamps?

S: I never did it. Mother got it. She probably had to go down to the federal building to get it.

C: Was there a shortage of gas?

S: Oh, yes, gas was rationed also. You had to watch that. I think back in those days I don't think many people went across to Juarez for gasoline, because Juarez was only 60,000 and El Paso was 100,000. El Paso was much bigger than Juarez back then. And of course at that time at that time we would never have thought of getting meat over in Juarez, not that we didn't go over and eat dinner. But we didn't buy any meat over there. But we did make out pretty well on sugar.

C: When we first moved here, we'd go buy Cokes in Juarez because they were so much cheaper, but now we don't. Do you recall, Betty, any security scares here on the border?

S: My mother was sure that the Germans were going to land down in Mexico and march up through Mexico to El Paso.

C: And she was not alone in that thought, was she?

S: I guess not, but we somehow didn't think that was not going to happen 'cause there were so many thousand soldiers stationed here. One group would get shipped off, but then another would be training, and some would be coming back to train the next batch.

C: Did they ever close the border?

S: Only, it might be off limits if there had been a big fight, and then they wouldn't let the GIs go over for a while. And they did have prisoners of war stationed here 'cause when I was working out at Ft. Bliss, and I don't know if Mary's mother was working out there then or not, but we could go over to the Officer's Club to get lunch and some of the German prisoners were being the cooks there. And up in the Upper Valley they had some Italian prisoners and they were working out in the fields for the farmers. I think there was a riot; it made the papers back then. Some of the people were complaining because some of the local girls were lying out in the fields with the Italian soldiers (chuckles) and the Italians couldn't understand it, the girls were willing and they couldn't go and grab a girl, you know. They had to be willing and they were. And Italian was quite similar to Spanish, so they could communicate with the girls who spoke Spanish.

C: Somebody told me some story about \$2 bills.

S: Oh, yes, we had for a long time you could only take change and the only folding money was \$2.

C: Into Juarez?

S: Uh, huh, because they were afraid that the Germans would try to flood our country with counterfeit bills and they would get them into the country at the borders, so we had the \$2 bills. Last year I saw a couple of them over at McFrugal's! The girls had some in the register so I got two of them. You have seen a \$2 bill?

C: Yeah, I've seen 'em.

S: That's what we had to take across. We could have taken other money across, but when it came time to come back, your folding money had to be a \$2 bill. You could have change, of course. So you had to be pretty careful when you got something across the river, so that you had the right kind of money to bring back. And they would check on that. They'd ask you about your money when you were coming back home, not when you went over.

C: Your family had a car?

S: Yes. A '41 Oldsmobile, best car we ever had. And did it see the service! It could hold more people.

C: There was a lot more car-pooling then because of the gas shortage, I would imagine?

S: Yeah, uh, 'though most of the time we didn't have too much problem because I can't remember just how we worked it. My sister Dorothy worked down on Texas St. for [?]; Mother worked out at Logan Heights. I don't remember who drove who where.

C: What did your mother do at Logan Heights?

S: She was a secretary.



C: So all of you were working?

S: Well, not my two younger sisters 'cause they didn't get out of high school 'til '45.

C: Well, the war ended and uh, what did you do after the end of the war?

S: Well, I finished college.

C: At Texas Western?

S: It was College of Mines and Metallurgy. I finished in the summer of '47, just three years behind because I graduated from high school in 1940.

C: Do you remember how much you got paid when you worked out at Municipal?

S: Well, I know when we went down to San Antonio that we got \$125 a month, and I think we got a little more than that when we came back.

C: You were paid once a month?

S: Oh, yes, I've never had a job where I got paid oftener than once a month. Teachers only get paid once a month, and I always envied people who got paid...even twice a month was better than once a month because toward the end of the month, you know, you have to start using your charge cards.

C: You got a degree in what?

S: Business Administration to be an accountant, and that was not the time 'cause there was no place for women in that. All they wanted was some little high school who'd had book-keeping and typing. Now, I believe, there are quite a few women

accountants. Not back then.

C: Well, you mentioned teaching.

S: So I went and applied for a teaching job, thinking the upper grades. Instead, they put me into first grade down at Roosevelt. I had one class of 30 kids in the morning and another class in the afternoon. And I had quick taken a few courses in how to make charts and stuff like that up at college. That's how I got into teaching.

C: And how long did you teach?

S: I think I had taught for 28 years when I retired...no steady because I took some time off when I had my children. But I retired in '82, and I rewarded myself with a trip to the U.K. I felt I deserved it.

C: I think so. I think so. Well, anything else. The radio.

S: Yes and record players. It was so hard to get those during the war. Anything like that. And we had had a goofy little record player, and it was not doing well, and I remember I was downtown and here was a record player, combination record player-radio, that I could afford, but I had to have somebody co-sign, and my mother was out at Logan Heights, so my sister Elaine forged my mother's name, with her permission. And we were so triumphant, walking out with that record player. And of course we spent a lot of our money buying records, too, and unfortunately wartime records were extremely fragile, so I got boxes of pieces of records.

C: Did you follow FDR's fireside chats?

S: No, because I'm a staunch Republican.

C: O.K. (laughs) What about going to the movies?

S: Well, of course, we went down to the Plaza Theater a lot, but I didn't go everytime the bill changed because I was working or going to dances, but we lived within walking distance, least it was considered that back then, from Hawthorne Street downtown. Nowadays it wouldn't be safe to walk that far. Then it was o.k.

C: Did they ever have stage productions at the Plaza?

S: Oh, yes, I saw Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys down there once. (laughs) That's the only one I remember seeing. Of course, Liberty Hall with the big bands was more the thing that I would like. Oh, one time when we were coming back from a dance at Service Club Number Three in Logan Heights, this plane I noticed was going quite low. It hit the mountain. Yes. They knew they were going to crash, but there wasn't any good place to set down that there wouldn't have been where people lived and they couldn't get up enough lift to get over the mountain. They were kind of high up, but that was a terrible thing to see. Of course, they stopped the truck and everybody got out to see, but there wasn't a thing anyone could do.

C: That's sad.

S: Yes. Another time one of those trucks caught on fire when we were going home. Fortunately a car full of GIs noticed it. They were behind us. We were close to where William Beaumont

is, on that road that heads to McKelligon Canyon, and so they cut the driver off and yelled at him that the truck was on fire. Yes. There were all these girls in their formals, and they got out and were helping us out, but instead of taking that band down, they were helping the girls get over it or under it. But we were all o.k. Just had to wait for a safer truck to come get us. (picking up newspaper clipping) Is that the one that tells about me teaching jitterbugging out there at Service Club Number One for a while?

C: (reading newspaper clipping) I think so. It says, "Last week saw the initiation of two new activities on the Fun Program of Club Number One. The beginners' dancing class on Friday evening was a great success in its opening session, according to the club hostess. Miss Betty Slack of El Paso is instructor, and any military personnel interested in learning to dance is invited to attend. The class is held in the Club's new music room." So tell me about that. You mean some of these servicemen didn't know how to dance?

S: (Laughs) Oh, yes. Every now and then I'd get a couple of the girls to go with me to practice the dancing. But they'd sent a car for me, and this GI - his nickname was Mississippi, he had an accent you wouldn't believe, and he had never been twenty miles away from home before he got in the service, and it was really harrowing to ride out there with him because he drove over as close to the curb as he could get. And of course every now and then there was a car parked there, and

he'd have to make a turn out! And he said back where he was from that was kept for the cars to go through and in the middle was where the horses and wagons went.

C: So Mississippi would pick you up?

S: Yes, and I'd pray all the way out to Ft. Bliss and give the dancing lessons and then have to ride home with him! (laughs)

C: What kind of dances did you teach, jitterbug?

S: Oh yes, because that was what they all wanted to learn. I taught 'em a basic foxtrot step, too, but the main thing they did want to learn was how to jitterbug. Course, we didn't do just jitterbugging; we also did foxtrot, waltzes, rhumba, cha-cha-cha, and the conga.

C: How do you dance the conga?

S: Oh, you get in a line, holding the waist of the person in front of you, and some show-off is the leader and is going around (singing) "Dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum." (laughter) I did not favor the conga after some clumsy oaf kicked the heel off my best pair of high heeled shoes when he was behind me in the conga line.

C: Wearing out those shoes! You must have danced two or three times a week, all evening.

S: Well, on a good week, yes! Toward the end of the war, though, as the draftees got younger and I got older, we kind of switched to going with officers more than the enlisted men 'cause heavens, here these children were being sent off to war! Like these doctors nowadays: children!

C: The jitterbug. Now, like were you one of these that they flip around?

S: Well, one fellow tried it. I protested violently. After all we were wearing formals. Who wants to get slung around when you're wearing formals.

C: But you would do this jitterbug in high-heeled spike shoes?

S: Sometimes. But most of the time I learned my lesson not to wear my good high heels out there, so I would wear a sandal, heel about an inch maybe.

C: Did you help with decorating?

S: No, the hostesses took care of that and if the dance was being given by a certain outfit, I guess they would decorate it.

C: So different organizations in town would sort of take [turns]?

S: No. You saw the invitations. If it was a specific outfit, they might decorate.

C: Okay. So here's one: the 409th Coast Artillery would have a dance.

S: Toward the end of the war, they stopped having these nice invitations, but we knew what days which service club had a dance.

C: There were three service clubs at Ft. Bliss?

S: Uh, huh. I can't remember . . . Oh, Number One was near the old part of Ft. Bliss, near the old stables, and Two was off on the southside, and Three was Logan Heights. I might still be able to go to where Service Club Number TWO was, but I don't remember the name of the street.

C: Most of these were formal?

S: In the evening, yes. It got so where they were Thursday evenings. Oh, here's my daughter back with the kitty cat.

C: But the girls in El Paso had a great time.

S: Yes, my gosh, I don't know what the ratio of girls to boys was, but it was definitely in favor of the girls.

C: And you felt guilty because you were having so much fun?

S: Yes.

(some unrelated conversation. tape turned off momentarily)

C: What was your job title when you went to San Antonio?

S: Oh, we were just going to school. The course I was in was Aerorepair, supposedly to learn how to repair an airplane.

C: But you really didn't.

S: No, because they transferred us over to Municipal before I had time to really get into it, and I was just as glad too.

C: When was the first time you heard the term "Rosie the Riveter?"

S: Oh, gee, probably the song, but I don't know when it came out. But we didn't have any Rosie the Riveters there, and that movie "The Stage Door Canteen"...all that was was to puff up the actors and actresses who went there, 'cause I don't think they did any more than anyone did who was living near some sort of training facility, whether it was Army, Air Force, or Navy.

C: Did you ever go to a USO dance?

S: Uh, USO, I can't remember if that was what the downtown ones

were or not, but we really didn't go for USO so much because they had the service clubs that the Army. Why didn't I check with Mary? I kind of think the USO was the downtown dance hall. It's not there anymore. There was a church right next door to it.

End of Interview