

OH 535

Interview with
Caroline Cahoone Baker

on
April 26, 1989

By
James Leyerzapf
Dwight D. Eisenhower Oral History Program

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MRS. CAROLINE CAHOONE BAKER

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Caroline Cahoone Baker
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The following interview took place April 26, 1989 at the home of Caroline Cahoone Baker, Cottonwood Falls, Kansas. The interviewee is Mrs. Caroline Cahoone Baker. The interviewer is James Leyerzapf.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Would you tell us of your place of birth, and some information about your childhood--some basic facts?

MRS. BAKER: I was born in Oklahoma in 1910 and we moved to Bazaar, Kansas, when I was four-years old. Chase County has always been my home.

DR. LEYERZAPF: What kinds of work were your parents involved in?

MRS. BAKER: They were farmers, and I lived on a farm until I got married to Emmett Cahoone, a World War I veteran who is now deceased. Thus, my name while in the service was Caroline M. Cahoone, as you will note on my Army orders.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you're familiar with farm life?

MRS. BAKER: Oh yes.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You've lived it and you remember it.

MRS. BAKER: Yes. My second marriage was to a farmer, to Glenn Baker in 1958. All my cattle pictures are up there on the wall.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you had cattle at that time?

MRS. BAKER: Oh yes. Registered charolais.

DR. LEYERZAPF: When I think of Chase County, I think of cattle.

MRS. BAKER: Yes. We had the registered charolais and we were
very proud of them.

DR. LEYERZAPF: What did you do, then, after you left home? Did you work outside the home when you were first married?

MRS. BAKER: Not at first, but years later we moved into town and we started--my husband and I started--working by the month for farmers. That wasn't quite agreeable so he came to town and we ran the Chase County Hatchery. Then later, we ran the locker plant for T. Jensen and Sons of Emporia which was an ice plant and locker. The Jensens had a powdered egg plant in Southeastern Kansas. They had truckers up here picking up the farmer's eggs and sending them down to the powdered egg plant.

DR. LEYERZAPF: I didn't realize powdered eggs were . . .

MRS. BAKER: Oh, that's what we got! That's what we got in the Army!

DR. LEYERZAPF: I think of powdered eggs for the Army, but I had never thought before that it really started that long ago.

MRS. BAKER: Yes, it started here during the first of the war.

DR. LEYERZAPF: At the first of the war.

MRS. BAKER: And it continued all through the war.

DR. LEYERZAPF: In what year, then, did you enter the WACs?

MRS. BAKER: May the third, 1944.

DR. LEYERZAPF: What was it that interested you? Why did you want to go?

MRS. BAKER: Well, because they were taking so many men out of our territory, and I felt that I could do a man's job. And besides, it was a great experience because my husband was an Army guy in World War I and he was proud of it, and I thought I'd be proud.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You must have gone to a recruiting office somewhere; where was that?

MRS. BAKER: Oh yes, Des Moines, Iowa.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You had to travel all the way to Des Moines?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, and we left during a flood. The water was even getting into our house, and I had to leave to catch the train in Emporia. We had to detour, and we got up early in the morning at Des Moines, Iowa when we should've gotten up there in the evening. [We were held up] by stopping the train during the big floods on the way going [up].

DR. LEYERZAPF: You arrived in Des Moines--was that what was then called old Fort Des Moines?

MRS. BAKER: Yes. They had turned the stables into barracks; two-story barracks.

DR. LEYERZAPF: As I understand, this was the main recruiting center for the whole country--for the WACs?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, it was. We shipped all over the United States.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Were there any male service personnel there--that were recruited to be there--or just in command jobs?

MRS. BAKER: No, all we got was just WACs, everywhere. Maybe on the reviewing stand there would be officers, men officers, but otherwise . . .

DR. LEYERZAPF: No male recruits at that place? All women.

MRS. BAKER: Oh no. All women.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Do you remember who the commander of the base was at the time?

MRS. BAKER: No. I sure don't.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you started with basic training?

MRS. BAKER: Oh yes, six weeks.

DR. LEYERZAPF: When I think of basic training, I think of the male side of that. Did you have a hard time, was it rough? What sorts of things did you do?

MRS. BAKER: Well, I think we did about all of what the men did because we got up, and we watched guard at night. I can remember, I was scared to death of lightning and thunder and I was guard that night. We had to march around and around and it was lightning and thundering and raining and . . .

DR. LEYERZAPF: You wouldn't forget something like that.

MRS. BAKER: No, because I was scared of storms. Finally, they did take us in. That was kind of silly--for us to be out there marching. But we had a lot of marching to do, and also PT every morning--physical training.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Did you get a lot of that, and what kinds of things did you do?

MRS. BAKER: In the morning, most generally. We had to have a gas mask on, because we had to go through the gas chamber, or gas building, anyhow. We had to go in, and we had to put those masks on and then go out the other door. I can remember that.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So that was one of the drills?

MRS. BAKER: That was one of the training drills we got. We were supposed to have gotten training the same as men.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you did calisthenics probably, and PT, and did you run? Did they have you running distances?

MRS. BAKER: No, no. I can't remember that but we marched a heck of a lot to see which was the best company. I remember [that] Old Number Ten won that prize, you know.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Right, you had told us that.

MRS. BAKER: Our CO took the little short ones and the fat ones out and had them assigned to KP or to keep the home fires burning at the barracks. And we won. Our prize was three miles marching on Memorial Day down in Des Moines, Iowa.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you were part of the Memorial Day ceremonies because you had won the parade contest?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, because we won that. I think if we had known it, we wouldn't have tried to win.

DR. LEYERZAPF: It was more like a punishment than a prize.

MRS. BAKER: Yes, it was.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Do you have any impressions of the other women there--as a group: educational level, personalities? Were there types of people that you thought were attracted to this type of service?

MRS. BAKER: All kinds. As you know, the age limit was 18 to 50. A lot went in, the same as I did, to help, to take the place of men. And some of them were in for a good time which they did not have in basic training because there was a lot of fainting. We had to stand at attention so long when they had a review of something; I even thought I was going to faint. I didn't, but I was a pretty strong old gal, I guess, because there was a lot of that.

DR. LEYERZAPF: It was the physical thing of just standing still, and the blood all goes to your legs and your feet, and you just pass out?

MRS. BAKER: And at attention, you stood at attention. But they wanted to get the strong from the weak.

DR. LEYERZAPF: I had heard at one point, or read at one point, that the percentage of women who had some college education was much higher in the WACs than it was in the population at large. Did you remember that? Were there a number of college girls there?

MRS. BAKER: I don't think anybody ever discussed that. We all had to learn to be what they called "sergeants." They would give each one of us a group of girls that you had to tell what to do in the evenings--cleaning up and all. You had to be an "acting sergeant."

DR. LEYERZAPF: Someone had to give directions.

MRS. BAKER: Yes, you had to be the boss, and it was your fault if everything wasn't in tip-top shape.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You got the heat.

MRS. BAKER: Yes, we got the heat. But basic was not fun because they kept us on the go.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Did you have any off-duty time?

MRS. BAKER: Yes.

DR. LEYERZAPF: What did you do off-duty in Des Moines, Iowa in 1944?

MRS. BAKER: I think once or twice I got to go in while I was in basic. I went to see about my watch--my watch quit--and I took it to the jewelers and went and got it. We looked through some stores. I didn't like the reception in Des Moines that we got.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You mean the civilians in Des Moines?

MRS. BAKER: The civilians.

DR. LEYERZAPF: What did they do?

MRS. BAKER: They just "high-hatted" us. We would go in the stores and they were real backward about coming to help us and . . .

DR. LEYERZAPF: They didn't respect you.

MRS. BAKER: They didn't respect us. We would get home--I mean to our barracks--and we would talk about it. In fact, I never wanted to go back to Des Moines, ever, and I said I wouldn't. Because we were in there trying to help. It sure got funny--from Fort Dix in New York [New Jersey] I was sent back to Des Moines to get my discharge.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you ended up in Des Moines in spite of how you felt about it?

MRS. BAKER: In spite of how I felt.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So the civilians didn't give you the respect they gave the men in uniform?

MRS. BAKER: I don't think so at all. No, I don't.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Do you have any sense of what was bothering them, of what the problem was?

MRS. BAKER: Oh, there was a bad apple, maybe, in the barrel. Yes, I know we had some girls that were flirty, but we sure did have some wonderful women in there. Mothers would go in to try to take the place of a man, to help their sons out, like, when we got out and got on the base in Rosecrans, Missouri. A mother had two sons. She was a housewife, had raised her sons, and she was an artist--she had done paintings of pictures and things--but she had never done clerical work. Where do they put her? Up in the hospital scrubbing floors, carrying bed pans. We had inspection; every Saturday morning we had to have our barracks clean. On Friday night we offered to help her. She said, "No, I came in this Army to help, to help do anything they put me at. Now, you girls have office jobs, and I can't do office work, so those floors have to be cleaned and I might as well do them as anybody."

DR. LEYERZAPF: It was genuine patriotism.

MRS. BAKER: Yes, and most of the women that were in there, I think, went in on account of being patriotic. And I do believe it, because they were educated and had good jobs but they wanted to help because the country was at war.

DR. LEYERZAPF: What did you think of the military issue clothing they gave you as WACs?

MRS. BAKER: Good. Good clothing.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You didn't have any complaints then?

MRS. BAKER: No.

DR. LEYERZAPF: They must have corrected some problems they had at the beginning, because it seems to me there were some real complaints when they started up in '42.

MRS. BAKER: Well, maybe when they first started. Now civilian girls working with the Army girls--that caused a little [conflict] because we had to wear khaki shirts, our khaki skirts, and in the heat our office was very hot--no air conditioning in those days--and the [civilian] girls would come in dressed with frilly little clothes and say, "I don't know how you girls can stand it in that khaki outfit." Well, we knew we had to stand it!

DR. LEYERZAPF: You didn't have a choice.

MRS. BAKER: But I think as long as civilians worked with Army personnel it was kind of a chore. There was a little friction. I know there was in London, because they got off for tea every afternoon and we didn't; we had to keep on working. And another thing, the London gals, if a non-com would tell them what to do in the office, they didn't want to; they wanted an officer to tell them. Because the classes in England were terrible when I was over.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Classes?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, class people. They called them classes. Like, we could hire char-women to clean our rooms, do our work, for a little of nothing. They called them char-women--that was the lower class.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Probably surprising after growing up in the United States where it's not such a big thing.

MRS. BAKER: Oh, yes. Surprising is right. As soon as the minister came back from London I asked him, "Do they still have classes?" I said, "When I was over there we could hire those char-women for hardly nothing to clean our rooms." And he said, "Well, yes, I'll have to say yes, there is yet, but it isn't as bad as it was when you were over there."

DR. LEYERZAPF: Let's go back to Des Moines. What was your first assignment after Des Moines?

MRS. BAKER: Rosecrans Field.

DR. LEYERZAPF: That's in Missouri?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, close to St. Joseph, Missouri. Rosecrans Field, they called it. It was a distribution place. I think most of all WACs went there. I know a gob of them did, because they would be in our barracks for maybe a few days and then they would get sent somewhere and they would be there two or three weeks or more.

DR. LEYERZAPF: How long were you there?

MRS. BAKER: All summer.

DR. LEYERZAPF: All summer? So you had a regular job.

MRS. BAKER: Yes. It was in personnel, in service records. That's the job I had.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You did filing and retrieval of records?

MRS. BAKER: No, not there. Only as you finished or went and got your service card, then you would go to the files, but not there.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You were being trained for this kind of work at Rosecrans?

MRS. BAKER: They just put me at it, and told me to go at it, and told me what to do and do it.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Not much training, then?

MRS. BAKER: No.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You taught yourself.

MRS. BAKER: Well, I think they taught us and they told us what they expected. We wanted to help. But you learned as you went, and they knew that we had discipline--we got that in basic; when we had orders, we took them.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So they trusted you to do the job? They knew they could count on you.

MRS. BAKER: Yes.

DR. LEYERZAPF: After that summer at Rosecrans, where did you go?

MRS. BAKER: Africa.

DR. LEYERZAPF: OK, that's when you left for Africa?

MRS. BAKER: Left for Africa. We didn't know where we were going or anything else. You see, the WACs were the only branch of the Women's Army Corps that could go overseas, and that is why I joined. At Rosecrans I kept signing up for England--that's where I wanted to go. There were orders, my master sergeant told us, that came through with my name on the list to go to Australia. But he said they didn't want to give me up. So, I told him that I wanted to go overseas and if you didn't be careful they would be minus a master sergeant! He was a "good Joe."

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you really wanted to go abroad--that was important to you.

MRS. BAKER: I wanted to go abroad; that's why I joined the WACs.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You didn't want state-side service at all, you wanted to go abroad.

MRS. BAKER: Well, I wanted to get over where it was.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Where the action was.

MRS. BAKER: Yes, and I thought maybe I could. But I found out you could never be on the lines. Women could not be sent there; you had to be behind the lines.

DR. LEYERZAPF: How did you feel about it, when you first heard that?

MRS. BAKER: Well, I wanted to go over and see the world. And another thing, I wanted to go where there was action because that's where I thought they needed help. Besides, you got more money overseas, and they weren't as strict on you, and most places overseas you got a little maid to do your work.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Some ulterior motives, too, to go overseas!

MRS. BAKER: I found those out later!

DR. LEYERZAPF: Right.

MRS. BAKER: When we went to Africa we had little black maids to do our work who could understand English--because it was English territory--and they understood it. We had to do only our job--where we were working.

DR. LEYERZAPF: No worry about spotless barracks.

MRS. BAKER: No, no worry about spotless barracks and, really, no inspection.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Now, where was it that you went to Africa?

MRS. BAKER: Accra, which was the capital of the Gold Coast, then. They got their freedom and it's Ghana, now.

DR. LEYERZAPF: And then your assignment in Accra was also personnel work, records work?

MRS. BAKER: No, out of our company headquarters they wanted fifty of the girls. We didn't know what they wanted us for, but out of the 159 in our company I got chosen as one of the fifty to go to headquarters.

DR. LEYERZAPF: I see.

MRS. BAKER: We were taught by our own work, and somebody working with us for a little while--not very long, only a few days. We had to learn the Dewey Decimal System, and every number meant something, like planes were number 700 in the 700's. Personnel was in the 200's--or was it planes in the 500's? I've forgotten, but it was all numbers.

DR. LEYERZAPF: And you used the numbers on what?

MRS. BAKER: On all filing, and also when they wanted something out of the file they would tell you what the letter pertained to and you knew by the letter it meant so-and-so.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Corresponded to some number, decimal number.

MRS. BAKER: Some number. And you went and looked it up.

DR. LEYERZAPF: I see. So they used these numbers, then, even on documents, records, . . .

MRS. BAKER: Oh, yes. You only meant a number, that was all. You were a number.

DR. LEYERZAPF: What was the main mission of the base where you were stationed?

MRS. BAKER: It was a supply line to Burma. They were fighting in Burma. After they crossed the ocean, it was their first stop. Then, they would go on over to Burma.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So they would load the materials from the ships onto trains?

MRS. BAKER: Planes.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Planes?

MRS. BAKER: All airplanes. See I was in ATC.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Air Transport Corps. Now I understand.

MRS. BAKER: It was all planes.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So from Accra all the way to Burma there were plane flights, planes all the way.

MRS. BAKER: All the way.

DR. LEYERZAPF: There was something about the Burma Hump; it had something to do with flying the supplies in.

MRS. BAKER: There was one boy, a young man, from here that was in Burma. He was a tailgunner--Clifford Bell, now deceased. He came back through there when I was there, right up at headquarters building where the landing field was. He didn't know until he got home that I was there!

DR. LEYERZAPF: From Cottonwood Falls?

MRS. BAKER: Yes. Until he came and saw the home folks, and then he knew. But we weren't allowed to tell the folks back home where I was. I said, "Every letter that I write I will put the initial of the place that I am at." And they found out, Accra.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you had a code.

MRS. BAKER: Well, you couldn't tell them where you were. We didn't know until we got there. We loaded out of Miami. The one thing I would like to know is, why they sent a whole movie crew down to take pictures of us. When the first plane of girls went over--we went over in four planes--they were taking pictures of them as they landed in Accra. I was on the second shipment that went out. They took pictures of us before we went, like us having "Mae Wests" on.

DR. LEYERZAPF: The life vest.

MRS. BAKER: And looking in a life boat, and all this stuff. As we loaded into the plane--I never will forget because they hollered at me as I was right ready to go in--they said, "Hey, you

up on top! Turn around and smile!" I turned around and was walking and hit my head because I went through the door and didn't stoop!

DR. LEYERZAPF: Did they get your picture?

MRS. BAKER: I'd like to see that movie, I'd love to. They said they were doing that for advertisement of the WACs because we were the only company going to the tropics.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So there was a full company of you at Accra?

MRS. BAKER: There was 159 that went over. But we were supposed to have been the only company that had an age limit on it. We had to be from 24 to 36 years old.

DR. LEYERZAPF: As you said, the Gold Coast was a British colony at that time. Did you ever have chances to go off-base?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, and also, on our days off, we could either go into town, to Accra, or we could go down to the beach. We had a lovely beach to go to.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Right there on the ocean.

MRS. BAKER: Right by the ocean. We had a lovely beach. Also, we had our little black maids to take care of us, and we paid them almost nothing.

DR. LEYERZAPF: It was out of your pocket?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, but very little; it didn't amount to nothing. I've forgotten how much. But, we began to give them a little more because most of the merchants in Accra were Syrian and they had nothing marked. And you go to say how much this is and it would be a high price pulled out of thin air. Those little maids--they told us.

DR. LEYERZAPF: The black maids would help you shop by helping you with the Syrian traders?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, we would tell them what we wanted, and where, and they would go in and buy it about a third as cheap as they'd priced it to us. Oh, they took us for a ride, if they could. They had nice stuff; I've got stuff that I bought in town. But we got a day off a week. Now, we could either do that, or go sign up on the day off--if we wanted to go up in the mountains we'd sign up at "special service." If they had a bus load they'd take us up, and we'd take our lunch along. Oh, it was beautiful--a short distance from Accra--where it rained almost every day, and the flowers, the timber, were pretty. But down at Accra--oh, my goodness, it was hot, dry, dusty! As I said, we had to sleep under mosquito nets. Every morning we had to take an Atabrine tablet.

DR. LEYERZAPF: What would that be for?

MRS. BAKER: Malaria. We lined up as we went into the mess hall and got our pill and so we wouldn't get malaria. And it turned us just as yellow as could be!

DR. LEYERZAPF: The medication?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, it was the medication; it turns you yellow.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So how long were you in Accra?

MRS. BAKER: Eight months.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Eight months, and from Accra you . . .

MRS. BAKER: We went to London. We had the choice of going some other place, we didn't know where--overseas, or coming back to the States and being in the Army. About half of the company signed up to go somewhere, and about half signed to come home. We didn't know where we were going, but we really thought we were going to get sent over to India. But we didn't--we didn't know it until we left. Then, we found out we were going to London. All the girls who were coming home were very disappointed because they didn't sign up to go. But they'd signed up already, and they had to come home. We started to London and, my name being Cahoone--they took you alphabetically--I was on the second load of girls that left. We started in a 47, and I know I flew over the Sahara Desert in a 46--those planes exploded in mid-air. I worked in central files and you got all the dope on those things.

DR. LEYERZAPF: The reports on the accidents?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, I was afraid. As I looked down I saw the camel trains . . .

DR. LEYERZAPF: On the desert below you.

MRS. BAKER: . . . four or five camels going across the desert, and it was a beautiful view. I know one place we stopped--at Tindouf, I think they called it--and it was what you called the Sahara Desert. There were only GI's to run a filling station. We almost froze to pieces that morning when we had to get out of the plane; it was so cold in the morning. They said that every night it would get so cold at night, and every day it would burn you up.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Quite a big difference.

MRS. BAKER: That's the Sahara Desert.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You've seen a lot of the world this way, through the WACs.

MRS. BAKER: Yes, we stopped at several stops because those planes didn't hold much gas.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Before you even got to London you stopped in Paris, didn't you?

MRS. BAKER: Yes. We stopped at Casablanca, and we had two days there, but before that we got to Dakar, and we had, I think, a four-hour layover. A plane backed into ours and bent it, somehow. At Casablanca we had two days, and as we went into town, off the base, there was a little Jewish boy. He came up to us and said, "You're Americans, you're strange, and I'll show you about town." Which he did. And he said, "Do you want to go out to the sultan's palace?" We said, "Sure." Well, we found out that the little

fellow couldn't get inside, but we could. He stayed out there, at first. He said, "I'll get you a taxi." Well, we thought it would be a car. Instead of that, why, he was gone a little while and we stayed put and here he came with a kind of surrey with a team of horses. He was sitting up on the driver's seat with the driver. There were six of us girls, and we went out to the sultan's palace. We got to see the sultan's palace and also the glass house where Roosevelt, Stalin, and . . .

DR. LEYERZAPF: Churchill?

MRS. BAKER: . . . Churchill went and had their little [meeting?]. This glass house had the pillows they sat on--beautiful pillows. We got to see that in the palace. This was funny--we saw a gate open and there were some Arabs working in there, in the yard. We just start going through this gate, and this old guy came up, pushing his hands at us, and yelling at us. The guide finally caught up with us and said, "You're not allowed in there because that's the sultan's wife's place--the garden." It had all kinds of beautiful women sitting in there, but we got to peek anyhow.

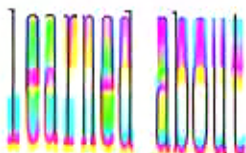
DR. LEYERZAPF: Not something many people have seen.

MRS. BAKER: But this poor little boy, when we asked for a good place to eat our dinner, he told us where and showed us kind of a restaurant. We went in and ate, and that poor little kid, we didn't know it, but he wasn't allowed to go in that restaurant. He didn't have anything to eat, but he showed us different places all over town. He told us, "Don't get those old Arabs; they'll

steal you." (Because there were other little kids wanting to show us around.) We asked him, "What do you want us to get for you, what can we give you, money or something?" He said, "Well, my sister, she'd like to have a new toothbrush." And he said, "You can go into your PX and buy her a toothbrush." We went in, we got three big [packages?] that we could buy off of our card and gave it to him. He said, "I'll get some friends to help me pack this home because those old Arabs will take it away from me." I hope he got home okay. We all did.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Some local color there.

MRS. BAKER: But as we got ready to leave Casablanca, there were planes lined up. We were third in this line of planes preparing to take off. We were waiting for the planes coming in to land, and as they came in to land it happened to be that one of the planes had the fourth load of girls from our company. They just passed, going into the terminal, and we waved at them. But we were ready to go; our line was ready to go. The first plane out of our line fell and caught fire, and here came all the fire trucks out on the field. Our captain told us, "Get out, go in the terminal and wait because there will be a while before they get that cleaned up where we can take off." We did, and we met these girls, fourth load, that came up. That's where we got told that the third plane that left Accra, with eighteen girls and the three crew members, went down in the ocean. They couldn't find anything of them, and they were never heard of again. That's where we



their accident. Then, in just a short while we had to get on the plane, and off we went to Oran.

DR. LEYERZAPF: I want to go on to London and your job there. Was it again filing work?

MRS. BAKER: It was filing for a while.

DR. LEYERZAPF: For a while.

MRS. BAKER: It was for a while. I thought I was in files long enough, and I asked for another job. I got it, and it was in mail and records.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Mail and records, I see.

MRS. BAKER: That was sorting all mail, and putting a buck slip on them, and putting them in the baskets for the messenger. But I asked for a transfer out of central files.

DR. LEYERZAPF: I see, and this was in . . .

MRS. BAKER: I didn't like the girl I was working with, to tell you the truth.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Was that your last assignment before discharge, in London? Or did you go somewhere else?

MRS. BAKER: No, Paris. We moved over to Paris, moved headquarters over to Paris.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Oh, after London?

MRS. BAKER: After London.

DR. LEYERZAPF: I had it backwards. I see.

MRS. BAKER: After London we moved headquarters over on V-J Day. London just went wild. They were celebrating, their streets were so full we thought we couldn't get out to the airport, which we finally did. That evening we landed in Paris, which is such a short trip--an hour or two--and Paris was quiet--no celebration. We noticed it.

DR. LEYERZAPF: You were there for how long--in Paris?

MRS. BAKER: Over three months in Paris.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Then you came back to the States?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, until I came home.

DR. LEYERZAPF: That takes us back to your earlier comment that, ironically, you were mustered out at Des Moines.

MRS. BAKER: Well, yes!

DR. LEYERZAPF: Wound up back in Des Moines!

MRS. BAKER: Yes, but when we started back, we started out on a French ship--Athos II was the name of it. We got about half way home and hit--what do you call it?

DR. LEYERZAPF: A storm, hurricane?

MRS. BAKER: Hurricane. For two days, that thing was really going! For two days we were really afraid!

DR. LEYERZAPF: But the ship was disabled, became disabled?

MRS. BAKER: Oh, my goodness yes! They used us as ballast. It's true! It's the captain of the ship who finally gave this report. You see, we were up on "A Deck," they took us down to "D Deck." All of our portholes were broken out, and that old thing was [listing] forty to forty-five degrees--it says on that pamphlet.

DR. LEYERAPF: The list was that bad.

MRS. BAKER: The list was that bad.

DR. LEYERZAPF: That's pretty bad.

MRS. BAKER: And it had torn out the stoves, torn out a lot of stuff in that big old ship. Every time it would roll over, boy, you'd hear it coming back! That was a wonderful sound! It got quite a ways over. We stood in slush for over seven hours down on "D Deck," where we were used as ballast.

DR. LEYERZAPF: To keep it from going down, to keep the center of gravity low so it didn't go all the way over.

MRS. BAKER: Yes. It broke things. They couldn't turn the ship

like they needed to. Our life rafts were hanging on the boat, knocking against it. Some of them were gone. That captain's report, which I have here, can tell you about it. Anyhow, we limped back on Christmas Eve to the Azore Islands. We spent Christmas Day aboard the Athos in the Azores harbor. The injured were taken off and sent home by plane. And then it was sometime in January--I forgot exactly what date--that the "Big E" came back. But I know I spent thirty-one days on two ships getting home.

DR. LEYERZAPF: The "Big E?" The carrier, Enterprise? So the carrier rescued all the people on that disabled boat?

MRS. BAKER: Yes. Now, there was another little ship of 500-- something went wrong--and they came in to the Azores. They brought those home, also.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Were you ever concerned that you were never going to make it? When this ship was damaged as it was and not able to propel itself?

MRS. BAKER: Oh yes! Oh boy! There were four Kansas girls in our company that went to Africa--two of them were lost in the plane that went down leaving Africa on its way to London. Coming home, I thought, "Here is the third Kansas girl who is going to be lost!"

DR. LEYERZAPF: I can imagine.

MRS. BAKER: But anyhow, the old captain said, "Whatever your army [service] will be, you'll never forget that hurricane; those two days will be a nightmare you won't forget."

DR. LEYERZAPF: And I bet they were.

MRS. BAKER: The attorney down here who was doing my work--he's a colonel in the reserves--I took this down for him to read, this hurricane business, and I told him that was my highlight in the Army.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Well, you wanted action when you left the States; I guess you got some!

MRS. BAKER: I got it! I got it!

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you returned all the way from the Azores on the Enterprise--it brought you all the way in to the east coast?

MRS. BAKER: Yes. And then they went way south to miss another hurricane when we got on the Enterprise. They had to tie down their stuff aboard ship. The sea was so rough when we came home, even. And they had to go south to miss it.

DR. LEYERZAPF: To miss the second hurricane? So, then, you landed at New York?

MRS. BAKER: Yes, I think it was Pier 13. Small ships came out

and met us, playing bands.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you had a reception?

MRS. BAKER: Oh, we had a good reception when we came up to the pier. Then they sent us up to Fort Dix, and from Fort Dix they sent us back to Des Moines, Iowa.

DR. LEYERZAPF: This would have been in January of '46?

MRS. BAKER: Yes. January of '46.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Your story was very interesting and you are a very effective interviewee. I want to thank you. I should ask, was there anything else you wanted to say that stands out in your mind that you wanted to add?

MRS. BAKER: Well, I do want to say that there were so many women in the Army Corps during the war that needed praise--more than they ever got. I thought so many of us did such a wonderful job--some didn't, some did--but it's no different than if you were to take a whole town and put us together.

DR. LEYERZAPF: So you deserved more credit, and got more criticism than you deserve?

MRS. BAKER: I thought the women got a lot of criticism because [there were] some who didn't understand why women did go. But I say that a few spoiled it for the rest, like a bad apple in the barrel.

DR. LEYERZAPF: Yes, it would. Well, it's good to have a story like that, and to have you reflect on those kinds of things. I don't know if that's a problem anymore. I believe women in the service are respected fairly well.

MRS. BAKER: I don't think [it is a problem].