

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
RENATA A. LUCHT
Clerk-Typist, Women's Army Corps, WWII
1995

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Lucht, Renata A., (1924-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 90 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Recordings: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 90 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Lucht, a LaValle, Wis. native, discusses her military service as a clerk-typist with the Women's Army Corps serving in Europe during World War II and her later experiences with veterans groups in Wisconsin. She talks about finding work in Milwaukee during the war, decision to enlist because raises and promotions were rare in the private sector, the need to work since she was the oldest of 8 children, and her parents' fears about her joining the service. Lucht describes basic training at Fort Oglethorp (Georgia) including tough discipline, her difficulty marching, feelings of loneliness before becoming friends with other WACs, and her sadness when she was transferred to Romulus Air Force Base (Michigan) and had to leave behind friends. She touches upon measures taken to care for and protect WACs such as allowing parents to forbid their daughters from serving overseas, close weekend supervision, and guarding women on the troop ship overseas. Stationed at Air Transport Command in Wales, she mentions work as a clerk-typist, the VE-Day celebration, learning to ride a bike, visiting with Welsh people, leave passes, and becoming close friends with a family. Briefly stationed in Germany, Lucht comments of working with German civilians because she spoke the language. Transferred to Orley (France) she tells of working in the personnel office. Returning to Wisconsin, Lucht talks about using the GI Bill to attend Valparaiso University, the large number of veterans on campus, joining a group called "Gal Vets Club" a social organization of women veterans, and being unable to join the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) because she was female.

Biographical Sketch

Lucht (1924-) served in the Women's Army Corps for two years during World War II. After the war, she briefly joined the Reserves. After attending college on the GI Bill, she eventually settled in Monona, Wis.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by Abigail Miller and Jackie Mulhurn, 2004.

Mark: --And then we'll be ready to go. Okay. Today's date is April 6, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Renata Lucht, a veteran of World War II. Good afternoon. Thanks for coming in.

Lucht: Thank you.

Mark: I suppose we should start the interview by starting with what you were doing before the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. So if you could tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what it was like growing up. And do you recall the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Lucht: Well, yes, I do. I was born in 1924, on January 4, in LaValle, outside of LaValle because I was brought up on a farm, and it was during the Depression so we had very little money. In 1941 I was in my senior, December, I was in my senior year of high school and we had been visiting, my parents and us children had been visiting my mother's sister and when we came home my grandpa said, "We're at war." and it was such a shock. It really was. So that was kind of, well, I graduated in May and then I went to Milwaukee to work as a clerk-typist. After two years, you know, at that time they, you couldn't get raises. It was such a hassle to get a raise so I thought I wasn't getting anywhere and I really wanted to go to school and, of course, I really thought that I could just work and go but it wasn't that easy at that time. So after two years I decided to try for the service. This friend of mine, where I was living, had suggested it. I hadn't really thought too much -- well, I had too. I had seen articles in the paper saying why don't you join up and all that sort of stuff. So I decided, well, I would. I didn't try for the Navy because my eyes weren't, I didn't think were that good. Well, I tried out for the Army and then I did have to have a waiver because I was only 4 11 1/4 inches tall. With a waiver you could be 4 10. So afterwards I was very glad I had joined the Army rather than any other military unit because only the Army women were allowed to go overseas.

Mark: Uh hum. That's true.

Lucht: Nurses, true, they could go. But as for the enlisted people we could, only the Army would send you outside of territorial U.S.

Mark: Did you know that at the time?

Lucht: No, I didn't. So that's why, later on, I was glad that I had joined the Army. And then we went, well, I took my basic in Fort Oglethorp, Georgia during July and August.

Mark: That's the best time to be in Georgia.

- Lucht: Oh, goodness. We had to wear, every day, our cotton smocks which I don't have because I wore them out, and cotton stockings and woolen socks with our "Little Abners." Have you heard of the term "Little Abners?"
- Mark: I do but I'm not quite sure what they are.
- Lucht: Well, they're the, I gave--if I didn't give them to you I'll have to bring--
- Mark: You probably did. I don't deal with the 3-dimensional things too much.
- Lucht: Yeah, I did give my shoes to Bill.
- Mark: Bill?
- Lucht: Yeah. And those shoes would come over your ankles and so we called them "Little Abners" because--
- Mark: [Unintelligible] thought they are.
- Lucht: Yeah. Actually if we perspired very much going right up our legs. And, of course, we had to march in them all that time. But I must tell you that they did not appreciate my marching. I couldn't keep in step.
- Mark: Is that right?
- Lucht: So whenever they had any parade reviews they kindly asked me not to march. To tell you the truth, I was very happy with that decision 'cause I didn't like the marching anyway.
- Mark: Now, I remember basic training and if you didn't march correctly, you got yelled at.
- Lucht: Oh, yes.
- Mark: Abused and that sort of thing.
- Lucht: Well, they weren't probably quite as hard on women as they are on men.
- Mark: That's the kind of thing I was going to get at. I remember a lot of four-letter expletives, for example. Were you subjected to these kinds of things?
- Lucht: No, we were not. In fact, I rarely heard any. Of course, I must tell you that I was one of the youngest. I was 20 when I went in and at that time in order for a woman to go in at 20 you had to have your parents' signature. So my father

said, "Okay, just promise you won't go overseas." I said, "Okay." Of course, I didn't obey that promise. The funniest thing in basic though was we had a fire drill. And we all casually got dressed. We didn't rush out. And that corporal, her name was Sergeant Lawrence, she was our platoon sergeant, she was so mad at us she ripped -- that's a time when I really, she did not swear, she did not use bad language, but boy she let us have it. And she really gave us "h-e-l-l" because we didn't fall-out the way we were supposed. We were just supposed to come with a blanket around and all that stuff and we didn't do that.

Mark: So it was tough. I mean, there was discipline.

Lucht: Oh, yes. There was discipline. In fact, we were in what they called "reception" for a week before we were organized into a basic company. Well, it didn't bother me too much but then when we got into the basic company and you were, it was during the weekend and you didn't know anyone, that's when I cried. I really cried. But finally when we were organized it was all right. But it was not the easiest either.

Mark: To be leaving home like that.

Lucht: No. And I was the oldest of eight children. Wasn't used to being on my own at that time. And afterwards it was an advantage to be younger, for me. In the service, after basic, I was sent to Romulus Air Force Base in Michigan which is now Wayne County Airport. And I didn't always do too well there. For one thing, evidently, I never realized it but they must have thought I was kind of, you know, I was told to, that these pilots had to call in every night and if they didn't I would ball them out. Well, I was just a private and they were mostly captains and lieutenants. Well, it never occurred to me that I shouldn't do that because that was supposed to be what they were supposed to do. But the sergeant was a fuss-budget and he always balled me out for that. But then I got transferred to an orderly room. But there, to a men's orderly room, and I was a clerk there. And I was all right. Got along better there.

Mark: So, you did basic training. Did you do any sort of additional training after that?

Lucht: No they didn't. I was hoping that I'd get some but I didn't. I guess they thought I'd worked enough as a clerk-typist and so they just assigned me that job, MOS, so I just kept on going.

Mark: I see.

Lucht: But then, you see, one of the girls was pulled off of the shipment going overseas because her parents didn't want her to. See, parents could do that for

girls. Well, I didn't let my parents know. [Laughs] So I got on and we had to leave December 17, 1944 for Grenier Field, New Hampshire where we were supposed to get overseas training, which was a farce [chuckles].

Mark: Why was that?

Lucht: We didn't do anything.

Mark: There was none?

Lucht: No, there was none. Well, we did do some hiking and stuff like that but it was bitterly cold. I've never been so cold in my life as out there.

Mark: And you grew up in Wisconsin.

Lucht: Yeah. New Hampshire was much, much colder. But after two months we got to, they sent us to Camp Shanks and we were there two weeks -- Camp Shanks, New York -- we were there two weeks before they took us by boat -- Ameriposa -- it was a liner -- to, we landed in Liverpool. But while we were at Grenier Field it was dull sitting around. And by the way, one of our ladies in our, girls in our group, was Suzy Sommervell and her father was a general. And that's the reason why we didn't go out right away because there was a lot of submarine activity at that time. So they held us over until February. Well, then we were supposed to go through, we had to go through Boston in order to change trains for Camp Shanks and we were not supposed to tell anyone that we were going overseas so we marched through the station with our helmets on, our musette bags on our backs so it was really funny because everybody could tell that you were headed elsewhere. So at Camp Shanks the only funny thing that happened there was we had to march in review, all of us, even me, and I could see that there was something funny going on ahead of us but I didn't know what. Later on I found out that one of these girls could never get her clothes into her duffel bag so instead of packing everything in she put on her pajamas underneath her uniform and as she was marching along the pajama legs fell down. [Laughs]

Mark: Oh, geez.

Lucht: And everybody was laughing. But that was the only thing. Then of course when we got on board the ship we were in a stateroom meant for two and there were twelve of us. Four sets of bunks with three in each.

Mark: I assume this was a larger ship and that there men going over as well.

Lucht: Oh, yes. There were only 200 women going over and I don't know how many men. I had heard around 4,000 to 7,000. And we were guarded like prize cattle.

Mark: That's what I was going ask.

Lucht: They wouldn't let you go anywhere without supervision. So we were very confined. We went to chapel every day though because that was the only activity here was. We got to Liverpool in eight days but there was no transportation for us so we had to stay overnight one more night.

Mark: On the ship you mean?

Lucht: On the boat, yeah. On the ship.

Mark: On the trip over, was there seasickness and that kind of thing? Did a lot of people not take to the water terribly well.

Lucht: Yes. Right. In my, there were twelve in my room, and I was the only one who did not get seasick. We had boat drills. And also, evidently some men had carried on our duffel bags. We were told we had to do it ourselves but it didn't turn out that way. So they had written notes on some of them. So we exchanged letters from, with our group to this other cabin. The one I was writing to was not in that stateroom but he did write some notes and when we were on boat drill I heard this man saying, "Lucky, Lucky" -- that was my name. I didn't stir because you were supposed to stand at attention but the first time he said, "Lucky, go over there." so I went over there and he gave me a whole bag of oranges which was wonderful because we had lousy food on the boat. You know, we had two meals -- 7:30 and 3:30 -- and it was very tippy, you know, going back and forth, and when you're tray went down there you just better hope you got the right one on the way back. And then the way they washed it was just emptying it in the garbage and rinsing it. Of course, we didn't have hot water either. That's another thing. Somebody bribed someone and we did get like two pails of hot water sometimes and then we were able to bath a little bit with that.

Mark: Which was kind of a luxury, I take it.

Lucht: Yeah, it was a luxury.

Mark: Let's go back to a couple of things.

Lucht: Okay.

- Mark: This job that you had before you enlisted in the WACs, was it in some way war related?
- Lucht: Well, in the only respect was that they supplied small parts of engines to war, to factories.
- Mark: Yeah. Was it difficult for you to find work in, during the war? It had been the Depression and then this war came along and a lot of jobs opened up.
- Lucht: No. Yeah, then a lot of jobs opened up. So it really wasn't too bad. I got the first job I applied for and I didn't even try anything else. But we were very poor and I was supposedly supposed to be going to secretarial school, which did not pan out. I just didn't have the money to do it. And that was the roughest part in my time, in my life, was when I started in Milwaukee but after awhile it was fine. After I got an apartment and a steady job it was all right. But we paid like \$7 a week for sharing an apartment and then we paid \$5 a week for groceries and that was it. But I didn't get much more either. Seven dollars a month it was, not a week.
- Mark: Did your family have any consternation about your going to work and then joining the WACs. Because some people didn't want women doing either one of those kinds of things.
- Lucht: Well, going to work, I had to. Being the oldest of eight children there was absolutely not enough income on the farm.
- Mark: So that wasn't a problem.
- Lucht: No, that wasn't a problem. I left home and I had, my grandpa cashed a \$25 bond that I had that was from my great-grandpa. When he died he left us some money but most of it disappeared because of the closing of the banks. And my mother gave me \$10 and my dad bought my train ticket and he gave me the change. And that's the money I had.
- Mark: I see. But joining the WACs was a little different I take it.
- Lucht: Oh, yeah. My dad was, my parents were a little bit afraid of that.
- Mark: What were they afraid of?
- Lucht: Well, they didn't want me to go. I guess they were afraid I might get hurt or something. And then of course, see there were all those terrible rumors about all the women in service were so terrible and went in there just for sexual reasons I guess, they thought. But I was the oldest of eight and see I was the

only one that was really eligible at that time. A sister was, could have been but she went in those cadet nurses corps so she got her training that way.

Mark: I see.

Lucht: And I went in the Army. And shortly after I enlisted they passed the GI Bill so I knew what I was going to do when I came home.

Mark: This is something that comes up later in the interview, but the subject is here so let's talk about it now. About the GI Bill and your eligibility for it, some women complained that they were never informed of their benefits properly. That wasn't a problem for you I take it?

Lucht: Well, I don't know how they could not have known -- if they would read the newspapers. It was, it didn't say "Men only." It said "veterans." And after all we were all veterans. And I don't know why, how come that would have happened. So I got my college degree afterwards.

Mark: Yeah. Okay. I'll come back to that. I'm curious about the GI Bill and that sort of thing. The other thing I want to talk about before we go overseas, are the, the people who were in the WAC -- what sort of backgrounds did they come from? Were they midwestern farm girls, such as yourself? They come from other parts of the country?

Lucht: No, they came from all over. The ones that I was stationed with in Romulus I never got to know too well. They were mostly from the midwest. But then when I got overseas, well, one of the girls who was with me had been working in California but then she came back to, her parents lived in Milwaukee, so she came back and joined from there. And we had a lot of southern girls in our WAC unit, basic unit. And there I think they were from all over. The ones I stayed closest with in that group were two girls from Michigan and I still correspond with them. But those are the only ones that I stayed in touch with. Well, no, I did stay in touch with the one from California. And actually she was a lesbian but at the time I didn't know the difference so it didn't bother me anyway and she never tried anything. She was very good to me. I did go to see her in California one time when I was there, stopped in to see her. But she has passed away.

Mark: So, all these people from different parts of the country got along fairly well?

Lucht: As far as I know they did.

Mark: There was no, you know, some of the southern weren't carrying on the Civil War or some of the east coast people weren't a little too snooty or anything like that?

- Lucht: Well, they weren't -- in my basic I don't really remember much. But when I got overseas, that's a different matter.
- Mark: Okay. We'll come back to that then. Did you get off the post much while you were in the States?
- Lucht: Yeah.
- Mark: Did you go to town?
- Lucht: Yeah. I got into Detroit very easily. All we did was stand at the gate and thumbed rides. I never had any, it never bothered me. Sometimes I was alone, sometimes I was with other girls but it just didn't bother me. One time a fellow at the USO where I went, or I went to, there was one put out by the Lutherans, too, which I was a Lutheran so I went to that one. It was like a USO. And one young man asked me to come home with him. And I did. And all I did was go out for dinner. I mean, dinner at his house. I never thought a thing of it but when I told it back at the barracks this one lady who was older got very upset with me and she said, "Oh, you have to be more careful." There they called me "Ronnie" not "Lucky." I didn't get "Lucky" until I went overseas. I didn't get that name.
- Mark: This brings up some of the concerns your parents had. Did the Army make an effort to keep you separated from some, the men soldiers or any of that sort thing? 'Cause I get the impression you were able to go to town and meet the young men and just do what young people do I guess. Without much hassle from the Army or--
- Lucht: Yeah. And I just was so, you have no idea how naive I was and it just didn't occur to me that anything bad was going to happen; and it didn't. And I think because of the fact that I had that outlook and I think that's really why it didn't. I know that one girl who was stationed near, I mean who lived near Michigan, took me home one time 'cause I was very upset when this girl I told you about who later on I found out was a lesbian. Well, she was transferred to another post and when she was leaving I just cried and cried. That was the two times I cried in the service. That's all. After that I never cried again.
- Mark: Okay. So we can go overseas now. You were first stationed in Wales?
- Lucht: Yeah, in Wales. See we docked in Liverpool and then the next day they sent a bus for us and when we got to our place, we got there in the evening, all the beds were made up, the fires were going -- they were the kind of fires, they were little bitty stoves with coal but you had to make sure when you took out the ashes underneath the coals that you didn't get the coals, you got the ashes.

And what I remember most about that is there were so many daffodils blooming. This was the end of February. It was just beautiful. And we had sunshine for two weeks. So we always told them--

Mark: Unusual there I would guess.

Lucht: Yes. So we told them we brought that. And later one we found out that -- the men were very good to us -- but later on we found out that they did, they really spruced up our barracks under duress. But [laughs] we got along fine.

Mark: And this was an Air Force station?

Lucht: Yeah. It was Air Transport Command, it was called. And we were, the people, the planes from United States stopped there and then they went on to the fighting. Then at the end of the war it was reverse.

Mark: And your duties were what?

Lucht: I was just a clerk-typist again. The captain of the WACs asked me to work in an orderly room there. She had, because I had volunteered to work when I was at Grenier Field she knew that I wasn't afraid of work so she asked me to work there. And I did for quite awhile. And then I asked for a transfer and I worked in the Director of, what the heck was he director of? General services, all the services. He was over all of them. Like the mess hall and any kind of service he was over. So I worked for him.

Mark: And was it just WACs in your work place? Or were there men there?

Lucht: Oh, no. Oh, yeah. There were men. See by the time we got, it ended, we ended up with only 100 women at our base plus two officers. And then later on some did leave. We did get some back I guess. I can't quite remember all that. So then we were there six and a half months, I was.

Mark: And working with the men was not a problem? Now you read the headlines and, you know, sexual harassment, this kind of thing -- there were no--

Lucht: If I was harassed, I was too naive to know it.

Mark: I see.

Lucht: I got along fine. Actually the funny part of it is because I was so small and so young I was babied by both men and women. And they really looked out after me. The only time in my life.

- Mark: You were there six and a half months, you said. I'm doing the calculations. So the war in Europe had been over by the time--
- Lucht: Yes.
- Mark: And so VE Day, you were in Wales.
- Lucht: Yes. And of course we had a big celebration. And then VJ Day we also had a big celebration. And of course we were also there when President Roosevelt died. And before May we couldn't go anywhere. Even in England.
- Mark: You mean on leave or anything?
- Lucht: Yeah. We weren't -- but after that we got like passes to London or you could take a leave. I took a leave going to Manchester, England and Scotland.
- Mark: Did you enjoy that?
- Lucht: Well, yes. 'Cause, see, when we were in, we would get days off and then we went into Bangor [??] Wales -- and there were four of us girls -- and this English lady, very hesitantly came up to us and asked us if we wouldn't have lunch with her the next day. 'Cause she had taken male soldiers up but never females and she was kind of anxious to meet us. Well, that lady was Mrs. Hampson (sp??) and she had her two daughters with her, Irene, who was nine at the time, and Anne was 17, and Anne's friend, Gwyneth, who was also 17. So when I went on -- and they were from Manchester. So I went with them, I visited them in Manchester. I was the only who took them up on it. And I stayed with Gwyneth and her parents because they had more room. And Gwyneth and Anne took time off and we went to Blackpool and we did things all the while I was there, the few days I was there. And then later on, the Hampson family came to Wales and they picked me up and we went to a farm house on the Isle of Angeles (sp??) -- that's where we were stationed -- on the Isle of Angeles -- and they rented cottages, what they said was cottages but it was a farm house. It was just two rooms. Very primitive. No inside toilets. And, so, anyway I spent time with them, especially Anne because she was closer to me in age. I was 21 by that time. And then, as an aside, I could tell you that in 1952 my sister Louise went overseas--
- Mark: In the Army or Air Force?
- Lucht: Air Force. And she was a lieutenant because she was in a nurse's corps. And she looked up my friends. And my sister Trudy was stationed in Germany at the time and she came over to London to visit Louise and Anne came from Manchester to visit a friend of hers so while her friend and Louise were working, Trudy and Anne explored London. Then later on my brother Bill

was stationed in Germany, this is after Trudy had gone, or left there -- she later went to Paris -- he decided he wanted to have a leave away from all military personnel. So he and a friend wrote Gwyneth and they stayed with Gwyneth. Well, at that time Bill had become the father of a little girl and so had Gwyneth and they had things in common so they enjoyed their vacation. I was so surprised when he told me that he wrote them and asked if he could come.

Mark: It sounds like a nice long family relationship.

Lucht: Well, we still are. I went over in '66 and I saw them again. I also stay in touch with a lady I worked with in Germany. I visited her. And my sister went over with her two daughters in '72. I went back, no, I didn't go back until '89. But they went back in '83, Louise and her husband, just the two of them. So they visited, too. And Irena has come over and visited with her family twice already. You see, it has been a long-standing relationship.

Mark: Yeah, I would say.

Lucht: Yeah, we still keep in touch.

Mark: In Wales you worked awhile, you weren't allowed to take leave.

Lucht: Not until after VE Day.

Mark: I'm sure you're working 9:00 to 5:00 or something like that.

Lucht: Yeah.

Mark: What did you do for fun? Did you get out--

Lucht: Well, we got day passes. We used to take the -- I learned how to ride a bike there -- it's the only time in my life I ever rode one. We would ride bikes to a little town, a little bitty town called Bodedon (sp??) and we would go into somebody's home and they would fix us breakfast. They had chickens. So we had like a breakfast at any time of the day. That's about all they could give us. They were very poor people, the Welsh there. But they were very friendly and very nice.

Mark: It sounds like the Americans got along well with the natives.

Lucht: As far as I know they did. I mean I did and so I assume they did, the rest of them.

Mark: Did you write home much? How did you stay in contact with your folks?

Lucht: Oh, I wrote home quite a bit. And this sister of mine I told you was in the nurse's cadet corps, well she kept saying she was going to quit and I kept writing her and I said don't you dare quit. And now she told me that that's the reason why she wrote so that I would write back. But I kept in touch quite well. And my family did too.

Mark: And then you sent to Hanau.

Lucht: Yeah, Hanau. We were transported by plane. But the first, when we went, we were transported two times. I mean, one group went the first part of September and we went the last part. When we flew over we couldn't get into Frankfurt because it was weathered in so we landed in Brussels and spent the evening in Brussels. That was kind of nice. I've never gone back there. We just walked around; didn't do much.

Mark: So this was the same unit. You just moved operations into Germany after the war.

Lucht: Yes, yes, right. Just the ladies, the women. But we were the same air transport command.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Lucht: But we did run into some of the same men later on. They didn't come to Germany though. That was a different group that we were stationed with there.

Mark: In Hanau, did your operations change at all? Was it the same basic work? How was occupation duty as compared to wartime duty in your own perspective?

Lucht: Well, it was a little bit different for me. Because I knew some German they put me in the office with the German people that worked there so that I had to do a little bit of interpreting and so forth. And then, of course, I met Edith. She could speak several languages. One of them was English so she and I got quite well acquainted. And my sister Trudy, when she was stationed in Germany, met her too.

Mark: I see. So you're of German--

Lucht: Background, yeah.

Mark: And you knew some German when you left? How close were you to your German roots? I've got Dutch roots but they're like no one remembers any

Dutch or anything. But in your family the language had apparently hung around.

Lucht: Well, the reason it did -- my great-grandpa came over in 1868. He was the first one and then the other ones came later. But they were all over here before 1890 -- all my close relatives that I knew. They didn't all come over. We were in a very German community and everyone talked German there. None of us could speak English until we went to school and we had to learn English. But we went to a Lutheran school so we also learned German at the same time. So we had lessons in both. Our relatives came from Pomerania which is now Poland. And this summer I'm hoping to get back there, to take a trip to there.

Mark: That would be interesting.

Lucht: Yeah, it will be. But it's Poland now.

Mark: So being of German heritage then, was that an advantage for you when you got there?

Lucht: Not really.

Mark: You said you knew some of the language.

Lucht: Well, I knew the language. But, you see, I spoke Plot-Deutsch (sp??) -- or the low German primarily although I also knew high German -- but those people speak entirely different dialects and if they would speak the German that they learned in school, there's no problem. You can understand them. But if they speak the dialects, forget it. The same way is true in Switzerland or Austria. 'Cause they all learn the basic German but they don't keep it up; they speak their own language.

Mark: As someone of German heritage in the American military, did this pose any sort of problems or anything with your family or for you?

Lucht: No, uh uh, because we had been there for so long. We were Americans. Not at that time but they did have problems in the first World War, our families did.

Mark: I understand that.

Lucht: But not in the second.

Mark: Your experience in World War II was considerably different.

Lucht: Yes. The only thing that was kind of funny was I tried to take some German lessons from Herr Schneider, you know, a German. And the GIs, you know, they fraternized with the frauleins but they didn't like to see the women fraternizing with the men so they would say, call out at me, "Lucky, you're fraternizing" or something like that. I just let it go in one ear and out the other. But this Herr Schneider had told me something that I had known. My dad had told us that we were actually of Dutch extraction. The name "Lucht" is Dutch. It means the same as "luft" in German and it means "air" in English. So somewhere along the line the Luchts had come from Holland, or from the Netherlands. It made it kind of interesting. And Herr Schneider said that, you know, told me that too.

Mark: So it was in April of '46 then that you got out?

Lucht: Yeah, but before I got out -- I was only in Germany two months.

Mark: Oh, really?

Lucht: Yeah. And then we were transferred to Orly, France.

Mark: That's right.

Lucht: Yeah, to Orly. And that was more interesting experience as far work because I worked in personnel there, which I liked much better than I did the other ones, the other jobs.

Mark: How was it different?

Lucht: Well, you got to know people a little bit better. It's working more with people. And it was like, it wasn't the orderly room because it was the personnel altogether for the whole base. And we had, unfortunately, I suppose I could say that we did have a lot of fun there. And we would go to the PX every morning and have coffee and doughnuts. You had to pay for it and you could have gone, we could have gone to the Red Cross Center and not paid for it but we didn't, I don't know why not. But a whole bunch of us except Margie. She was one of my good friends. And finally the major would send her off after us to come back to, and get to work.

Mark: I take it it was a little more relaxed at that time.

Lucht: Yeah. See that was after the war was over. It was much more relaxed. But I still keep in touch with her, Margie. Let's see who else. And I kept in touch with Dorothy but she died last year. And I did with Hannah for quite awhile but I haven't heard from her so she may not be living, I don't know.

- Mark: And so from Orly then you went back?
- Lucht: We went to Ro -- Le Havre and took the boat from there.
- Mark: Took a boat back?
- Lucht: Yeah, we took a converted liberty ship. That was a little bit different.
- Mark: Was it a rougher ride than the other one?
- Lucht: Uh, just as rough. Because it was, but we had better food and we sat down to eat instead of standing up. And we had three meals a day instead of two. But the same girls, some of the same girls got seasick. I never did.
- Mark: And landed in New York. So all of your discharge and everything happened at Fort Sheridan then?
- Lucht: Well, first we were sent to New Brunswick and we had to stay there.
- Mark: In Canada.
- Lucht: No, New Brunswick, New Jersey. And then from there they sent us to where we had enlisted or close to enlistment, I guess. So I was sent to Fort Sheridan.
- Mark: And you stayed in the reserves.
- Lucht: No, I didn't. I was out. And then I went to school and after I came out of school I worked in Chicago and then, I think it was 1950, I decided that I would join the reserves. So I joined the reserves.
- Mark: For what reason?
- Lucht: I guess I just wanted to go back in for that time. I joined the Air Force Reserve unit. And we did not, I never met, because they were called, the men that were in that unit were called up. I never knew who they were. But they were called up to serve in the Korean Conflict and the women in the other unit were called up, but not the men. And later on when I got here to Madison I found out there was one man that I knew and he had been in that same outfit. But he had of course was called back. So that was kind of a funny thing to happen too. And then, you see, I got my discharge from there.
- Mark: Fort Sheridan?
- Lucht: No, I mean from the reserves.

- Mark: Oh, your final discharge.
- Lucht: Well, that was from the reserves. And then I joined the Army Reserves and that was in '54. Then I was active. Then I was in the active reserves until I left Chicago.
- Mark: So, when did your military career finally end?
- Lucht: Well, it basically ended in 1946. Because, you know, I wasn't in the reserves long enough to make it count.
- Mark: I see. So, after you got discharged in '46, you went back to LaValle initially. Now, when it came to getting your postwar life planned or straightened out or whatever, what were your priorities and what did you do immediately after the war?
- Lucht: Well, immediately I first stopped in Milwaukee to see my sisters. They were living there then; two of them. And that's Louise and Trudy who later joined the service, both of them. And then I went home. And my mother was waiting for me to come home because she had to have an operation and she wanted me to do the work. She taught me how to bake bread before she went in so I had to bake bread because my grandpa did not like to eat bread that was bought in the store so I had to learn that. So I stayed home for the summer and then I kept writing Valparaiso University trying to get in. The only way I could get in was if I could find my own room. So my brother went with me, we went to Valparaiso and I found a room and we went home again and so when it was time to go to school I went to that place.
- Mark: Why did you pick that school in particular? Was there a program you wanted?
- Lucht: No, it was Lutheran. And I got my degree in Business and Economics but I didn't stay in that. Later on I got certified for elementary teaching and I've gotten my masters in Library Science.
- Mark: I see. So on campus, then, you used GI Bill to finance your education.
- Lucht: Yes. Right.
- Mark: Did it cover all your expenses?
- Lucht: Pretty much. I did work. One time I held three different jobs but they were all part-time. I did work practically all the way through besides getting the money.
- Mark: Then you went for four years? Did you get some credits for military?

Lucht: Yeah. We got eight hours for military; that was for physical education. So I didn't have to take that when I got to Valparaiso. But then I went to summer school two summers and I also took overloads every year so that I graduated -- I started school in September of '46 and I graduated in June of '49.

Mark: On that campus were there a lot of vets such as yourself?

Lucht: Yes. In fact, we were mostly veterans by the time I started.

Mark: What about women veterans.

Lucht: There were quite a few. They're the ones, when we formed a club called the Gal Vets Club, this was from every branch of the service and I am still, and Betty was in the same service as I was, she was even in the ATC, she was stationed at Whitehorse, Canada, Yukon. And her sister Lucy had been in the Marines. I'm just going to tell you first the ones I stay in touch with. Millie, Mil Holmen, she was Harther (sp??) to begin with and then she was married; she had been in the Marines. And Lorraine had been in the Navy. I think that's the only ones that I stay in touch with. And there were others that were, there was one that was in the Coast Guard. Her name was Dorothy; I can't remember last name. And there were others that were in the Army, Navy, Marines, and so forth. Helen Welch; I think she was, I don't know if she was Navy or Marine, another girl.

Mark: And your club existed for what reason?

Lucht: Social. We just got together once in a while. Nothing particular.

Mark: I see. No sort of political activity.

Lucht: No.

Mark: Veterans benefits lobbying.

Lucht: No.

Mark: Or any of that type of thing.

Lucht: No. We never did that. I guess we just felt that we were getting pretty good benefits, I mean it seems to me like the men felt the same way. The ones I knew.

Mark: Now, there were other parts to the GI Bill. There was a home loan provision. Did you use other sorts of benefits?

- Lucht: Yeah. When I bought my house, from the State of Wisconsin, you know they didn't give bonuses like some of the other states did, but I did get my down-payment for my house from the State of Wisconsin. That was in 1971. Well, this year I'm getting a Home Improvement Loan and that's where I'm going to go and sign it.
- Mark: I see.
- Lucht: Because I'm having little alterations done in my house.
- Mark: I see.
- Lucht: I think that's the only -- oh, and then I was so stupid -- I dropped by GI insurance. That was a thing that I should not have done. And when my mother kept, my mother never even got through sixth grade probably, she said, "Why don't you keep that up. Get it again." Because they said you could re-apply and so forth. Well I only got \$2,000; I should have gotten the full \$10,000 but I thought I was too poor. And now my payments, my dividend is more than what I paid in every year. It's really done well for me. I also borrowed on that. So that's another thing I did.
- Mark: Did you try to join groups like the Legion, VFW, and sort of the big groups?
- Lucht: Okay, I did join the Legion, the American Legion in Paris because that was Post Number 1, but I never went to it. Then when I, my dad bought me a Legion membership in LaValle but, you see, I didn't stay around so I never went. Well, I didn't, I thought of joining the VFW but then they weren't accepting women. And this one man said to me, "Well, why don't you join the auxiliary?" I said, "Forget it. I'm not joining any auxiliary." So I decided I'm never going to join it anyway. But I joined a group in Chicago called the WAC Vets. Well, Women's Army Corps Veterans Association, that's the name. Chicago was a Chapter 1. It's the nationwide. I still belong to that. And when I went to Cleveland I joined the Cleveland chapter but then I came back and joined the members at large. I didn't like that so I rejoined the Chicago chapter and I usually try to go there for the luncheon which is in May.
- Mark: Still, to this day?
- Lucht: Yeah.
- Mark: Now, this VFW experience you had seems to be fairly common.
- Lucht: Is it? I don't know.

- Mark: Did you find that some of the men didn't accept you as a veteran necessarily after the war?
- Lucht: There again I was probably too naive to even bother about because it didn't matter to me whether they did or not. I knew who I was. But I also belonged to the United Women's Veterans.
- Mark: In town here?
- Lucht: Yeah. You know some of them. Phyllis Perk probably.
- Mark: In fact, I sat Phyllis in the hot seat here just last week I think it was.
- Lucht: Oh, did you? So, I belong to that unit. But sometimes I can't always go to the meetings 'cause I have other things going on.
- Mark: I see. I think you've exhausted all my questions. Can I take a look at this just one second? We talked about your training, overseas, you weren't in combat--
- Lucht: No.
- Mark: --so you can't answer those questions. Uhm, free time, benefits. What about reunions?
- Lucht: Our unit? The did have a reunion of the women that were stationed with the **[End of Tape 1 Side A]** ATC in Europe but I wasn't free to go because I was teaching then and I couldn't go. And then they had one planned for '86 -- that's the year I retired -- and it fell through. Too many of them got sick so I didn't get to go. But I was going, you know there, we had women from all over. Not just the midwest. See now like Hannah, with whom I was close, was from California. Margie was from Iowa so that was close. And Dorothy was originally from Indiana but she later lived in New York and Ohio then when they retired they moved to Florida. Then there was these, there were quite a few from Ohio, and then there were some from New York like this Suzy Sommervell; I think she was from New York. Oh, what was her name? Pat, her last name started with "L", I can't remember what because she was right near me. Then there was Beanie and Florence and they were from the east. I think they thought they were a little bit better than the rest of us. I remember I was, when we were stationed in Paris, in Orly, we could go into Paris. We went in at least once a week. I remember one time when I went in I stayed at the hotel that the women of the ATC had. If somebody was gone, you could just go and stay in their bed. So I did that. Then the next day I met Margie and two fellows from our base and we explored Paris. It was really nice. And Hannah and Margie and I also explored quite a bit and that was fun. I had bought a teapot on the flee market in Paris -- they had that every

Saturday I suppose -- and when I got it home, I bought it because it was unique, well, this Florence who was from New York said, "Oh, I'd like to have that." Well, I didn't know it but it was Limoges china, you know. I didn't know it was important. But I liked it because I liked it. I still have it, too.

Mark: I was going to say, did you give it up?

Lucht: No, I didn't give it up.

Mark: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Lucht: Let's see. I can't really think of anything. Coming home. Could tell you that my sister was stationed in London, my brother Bill was coming over from the states and she found out that he was on this, that they were docking at South Hampton so she went down there and pulled him off KP and took him into London for awhile. Because she was a captain by then you know.

Mark: They can do that.

Lucht: Yeah, they can do that. And then, see Trudy was stationed at the headquarters, the SHAEF headquarters in Europe where the--

Mark: Which is in Paris probably at the time.

Lucht: Well, it started out in Frankfort. And they were in the IG Farben building and you know that's about the only building that wasn't bombed. When we were in Hanau we went to Frankfort and that was really just in smithereens practically. By the time I went back in '66 it was pretty well fixed up.

Mark: I'll tell you when I was there in the '80s it was completely fixed up.

Lucht: I bet it was. They really got on their feet in a hurry. I was surprised at how well they did. I'm kind of anxious to go to Poland now. You know, Pomerania and see how that is. See, we go to Berlin, so we spent a couple of days in Berlin. I've never gone back there because it was in the east most of it and I'd have to go through the east to get there. So I never wanted to.

Mark: Okay. Well, I thank you for your time.

Lucht: Okay.

Mark: I know you have an appointment. And we're going to make it.

Lucht: Yeah. Okay.

[End of Interview]