

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
ANGELINE C. (FRANK) NABIELSKI  
Army Air Corps, World War II.

2007

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**Nabielski, Angeline C., née Frank, (1919?- ).** Oral History Interview, 2007.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 40 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Angeline C. "Frankie" Nabielski, née Frank, an Antigo, Wisconsin native, discusses her service with the 8th Army Air Corps in England during World War II. After graduating high school, Nabielski talks about working in a factory sewing shoes for the Army. She comments on passing her physical even though she didn't quite weigh enough, being issued the best-fitting shoes she'd ever worn, and basic training at Fort Oglethorpe (Georgia). She recalls a blizzard at Peterson Field (Colorado) and working on parachutes at Mountain Home (Idaho). Nabielski discusses assignment to the 70<sup>th</sup> Air Force Replacement Depot in Yarnfield (England), being adopted by an English family, and continuing to keep in touch with the family. After the war ended, she states she worked at the base camp hospital. Nabielski relates giving cognac-spiked eggnog to a strep throat patient. She states that the soldiers protected the women like kid sisters, and she relates once throwing a naked man out of the women's barracks and testifying at his court-martial. Sent to Wiesbaden (Germany), she describes carrying gum to hand out to German children and comforting a waitress at her hotel who broke down crying because she was so happy to be able to display angels during Advent. Sent home in a troop ship, Nabielski tells of hitting a storm, being stalled in the Atlantic after the engines flooded, and almost having to abandon ship. Nabielski comments that back home in Antigo, people looked down on her for being in the service because they assumed she was only after the men. She touches on using the GI Bill to attend beauty school in Green Bay, joining the men's post of the American Legion, and eventually forming a women's post.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Nabielski served in the Women's Army Corps from 1943 to 1946. She eventually settled in Green Bay (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2007.

Transcription by Cathy Cox, Aug 2007.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011.

**Interview Transcript:**

Terry: Interview with Angeline Nabelski, who served with the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Air Corps in Europe during World War II. The interview is being conducted at approximately 11:30 a.m. at the address of 2543 Hazelwood Lane, Green Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of February 15, 2007, and the interviewer is Terry MacDonald.

Nabelski: I was called Frankie in the Army.

Terry: Frankie? [chuckles] Angie, can you give us a little bit of background as to where you were born, where you grew up at, and your family?

Nabelski: Up in Antigo, Wisconsin. I've got it all written down here. [reads from her prepared notes] I grew up in a small town in northern Wisconsin. And if you weren't married by the time you were 25 years old, you were looked down on. I wanted to leave there, but I was doing Defense work, sewing Army shoes.

Terry: Angie, could you tell us a little bit about—did you graduate from high school?

Nabelski: Yes. In Antigo.

Terry: And what was your maiden name?

Nabelski: Frank. So I was called Frankie in the Army.

Terry: And did you have any brothers and sisters?

Nabelski: Yeah, I had two brothers and two sisters.

Terry: Were they older than you, or younger?

Nabelski: I had a younger brother, and the rest were older.

Terry: Did any of them serve in the military?

Nabelski: My younger brother did. He was in Africa--Italy and Africa--World War II. And, uh, after I was in service he wrote to me, and he says, "Angie, I get so scared sometimes I just bawl. But don't tell Ma." He was a Radio-Gunner on a B-52 bomber over Italy and Africa.

Terry: Now when you were growing up, did you finish high school?

Nabelski: Yeah.

Terry: And you said—what did you do right after high school?

Nabielski: I worked at a shoe factory. In Antigo.

Terry: I know they made shoes, but did they make shoes for the military?

Nabielski: Yeah, they made Army shoes.

Terry: And how long were you working there?

Nabielski: I don't remember.

Terry: Before you went into the service?

Nabielski: Yeah.

Terry: Now, what made you join the military?

Nabielski: Well--like I said, I wasn't anything 'cause I wasn't married yet. And I was 24. So, uh—

Terry: But what did your parents think about you joining the service?

Nabielski: Well, my father was dead. But my mother says, “Oh, you won't pass the physical.”

Terry: Why is that?

Nabielski: “‘Cause you had rheumatic fever when you were a kid, and your heart was damaged.” So I went to the doctor and he checked my heart and said, “Oh, that'll last you fifty years.” [Terry chuckles] That was 1943.

Terry: So they let you in the Army then, huh?

Nabielski: I went to the Army—went—there was five other women and I went for the first, you know—

Terry: All friends?

Nabielski: --questionnaires.

Terry: You were all friends that went together?

Nabielski: Friends, we went--but then when it came time to go to Milwaukee to be sworn in, they backed out.

- Terry: Everybody but you.
- Nabielski: Yeah. I went alone. And, uh—the only thing that would have kept me out was my weight. I weighed ninety-eight, and you had to weigh one hundred. And uh--I passed everything else, so they told me to go out in the hall and drink all the water I could drink. And come back and be weighed again. I still weighed eighty-nine [probably meant ninety-eight], but I passed everything else, so they put down one hundred. Says, “Well you can always lose 2 pounds on the way to camp.” [Terry chuckles] And, uh, and I went, and uh—
- Terry: Where did they send you? What camp did they send you to?
- Nabielski: Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. [coughing]
- Terry: Is that where they took your basic training in?
- Nabielski: Yeah, I took basic training in Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. And uh—
- Terry: Now, at 24 were you one of the older ladies in the Army at that time, or not? What was the age group going through basic training?
- Nabielski: Well, different ages.
- Terry: They were all mixed—
- Nabielski: Some were older, some were younger. And uh, we went to—then when we were in Georgia, we had to go for--to get clothes. And uh—
- Terry: You were still pretty small, huh? Did they fit you all right?
- Nabielski: And then um--yeah, and the best shoes I ever had was Army shoes. The best-fitting shoes. Going—we had to walk about a mile from where we lived to where we got our clothing, and I could have cried almost all the way, my feet hurt so. And uh--and then, we had to put the shoes on first, and then get the rest of our clothes. And when I came back, they says, “Well, we’ll take your shoes off and put your other shoes on to walk back to camp.” I says, “No.” I said, “I’d like to leave these on.” I never had such good-fitting shoes. The further I walked the better my feet felt.
- Terry: That’s interesting. Most people, nothing fits them when they get into the service. That was good.
- Nabielski: Well, my mother told me, she says, “You won’t have shoes that fit.” They had a hard time getting shoes to fit. And uh—

- Terry: What was it like at basic training for you?
- Nabielski: Well, it wasn't too bad. I had to eat every two and a half, three hours, and we'd be out, you know, exercising or walking, when they'd take a cigarette break, I'd have a cookie break. I didn't smoke. And, um--so it was something. And then from basic training, we went to Peterson Field in Colorado Springs. On Easter Sunday, 1944, we looked—woke up to a blizzard. And before word came down that we weren't supposed to go to work, a couple of our ladies went, and they had to send out search parties for 'em. And the mess hall was about 20 feet from our barracks. There was a clothesline in between, which we held on to, to get to the mess hall and back.
- Terry: Was that because it was blowing so hard, or the snow was so deep?
- Nabielski: Snow was deep, and hard. And um--two days later the sand was blowing. From there, went to Mountain Home, Idaho.
- Terry: When you were at Oklahoma, what were you training for there?
- Nabielski: What Oklahoma?
- Terry: Did they give you some sort of training?
- Nabielski: It was an Air Corps—
- [voice in the background whispering, "It's Colorado."]
- Nabielski: Air—air--air place. Mountain Home. And then, ah-- [voice in background "Colorado Springs"] --Peterson Field—in uh—
- Terry: How did you get picked for the Air Corps? Or did they just move you into—
- Nabielski: They just put you in it. And um--then we, um--worked on--in the parachute place. Then we went to Mountain Home, Idaho. And um--and then on the way, when we got off the train, and on a bus, to go to camp at Mountain Home, Idaho, the officer that came with, you know, to take us out there, said, "See how many trees you can count on the way to camp." We couldn't count any trees 'til we got to camp--the sagebrush--one of the ladies had a dog, and the dog sat in the bus with his tail between his legs, didn't have any tree to go by. [both chuckle] And um--and there we worked on—you know the um—parachutes and stuff there, too.

- Terry: Now, working on parachutes, were you—you rigged them up for the Air Corps guys?
- Nabielski: Uh huh. And put 'em in the airplanes. And then, uh—
- Terry: Can you tell us a little bit about that, because that's kind of a critical thing, that the chute has to really work, so, there's a specific way you had to do everything?
- Nabielski: Gee, I don't remember just what we did. And then we'd put 'em in the planes. And um--and they weren't there very long. We went to—then we were ordered back to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, for overseas training.
- Terry: And what kind of training did that consist of?
- Nabielski: Well, I—
- Terry: Or just preparing to get overseas—
- Nabielski: For overseas, yeah. And um--then we went to, um—we left New York on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 1944, on an English ship, for England, station, at the 70<sup>th</sup> Air Force Replacement Depot in Yarnfield, England.
- Terry: How many of the women went with you at this time? Was there a whole lot of them?
- Nabielski: There was quite a few, yeah. And um--we were at the 70<sup>th</sup> Air Force Replacement Depot in Yarnfield. Every morning I rode the--in the back of an Army truck, 7 miles to Nelson Hall, where I did bookkeeping and tailoring. That's a camp tailor shop. Shortly after arriving in England, I was adopted by an English family.
- Terry: And how did you meet that family?
- Nabielski: Mabel and Jack Jordan. See it was[??] a English priest that came to our camp. Said there was a camp that wanted—a family that would like a American lady—and um--nearby town of Stone, England. The names are Jack--Mabel and Jack Jordan, and their daughters Margaret and Gillian. And uh, one evening when I came to their house, Mrs. Jordan handed me a nice vase with a beautiful picture of a country cottage scene on it, and said, “Angie, your mother must be very worried about you, being so far away in this war torn country. Maybe if you send her this vase that belonged to my mother, she will feel better knowing you have family to be with.” I went back to visit in 1973, and made the front page of the local paper, and the Queen made the second page. I was glad I went back when I did. The mother died the next year. In 1990 the older daughter visited

me, and I sent the vase along back with her. In May I still got a phone call on my birthday. I still get a phone call on my birthday, and I make two phone calls to England on their girls' birthdays. And uh, we still exchange Christmas gifts. They sent me Christmas gifts, but I couldn't get all that stuff done this year, so I sent 'em a card from St. Norbert's College, that they would be in England on St. Patrick's Day, and be praying for them over there. And uh--

Terry: Now did you go and stay with this family when you had some time off maybe?

Nabielski: Sometimes. I went with them—they called it their holidays--and I took a furlough and went with them to Rill, that's on the Irish sea coast.

Terry: What Angie's showing is a picture of the family that she stayed with over in England that kind of adopted her.

Nabielski: Yeah, I'm on it—I'm here. And that's them. And uh—then, when the war was over, and the camp that I worked at closed, I went to work at the base camp hospital. One morning, when I was in the kitchen mixing up powdered egg and milk eggnog for a Sergeant who had strep throat, a doctor on his way home from France--see that was a camp where they went from our—stopped at our camp to go to another camp, and going home the same way—and um, this doctor on his way home from France stopped in. He said, "That looks good. What is it?" I told him, and he said, "Hold up on that a minute. I'll be right back." He was back with a bottle of cognac. [Terry chuckles] He said, "Now, put some of this in hers, and make one for me." When I checked on the Sergeant later, she had perked up, and said, "Frankie,"—my maiden name was Frank—"what did you put in that drink? I'm so nice and warm now, and my throat feels so much better." [Terry chuckles]

I was short one discharge point to come home from England, so I—and others—had to go to Germany for a month. My first, very first plane ride, and the co-pilot let us take turns sitting in his seat. I was there when--over the English Channel. What a thrill that was. We were to land at Wiesbaden, Germany, when word came over the radio, "You can't land here. We have a bad storm. Go back to England." The pilot said, "We can't. We don't have enough fuel." "Then, go to Orly in Paris." "We don't have enough fuel." We landed in Frankfurt, Germany, and were taken in Army ambulances to Wiesbaden. We were stationed in a hotel. We always carried sticks of gum when we walked to work, because German school kids on their way to school would say, "Any gum, chum?" [Terry chuckles] They sure liked our gum. On the first Sunday in Advent, when we went down for breakfast, there was a large vase of cedar boughs and four wooden angels in the center of the table. When we remarked to



the head waitress about the beautiful angels, she cried and said, “And to think all those years I had to keep them hidden, and now that you Americans are here, I can bring them out.” Later in the day when we gathered in the lobby waiting for transportation home, she came to say goodbye, and we asked her why she was crying, wasn’t she happy that we would be home with our families for Christmas? [papers rattling] And she says--she said, “Yes. Always a good leave in the bad stay.” They really liked us over there.

Terry: Um hmm. I just got a couple questions for you, Angie. When you’re over there, did you have a lot of time off, or was it mostly work, steady working?

Nabielski: Well, we worked a lot, but we had quite a bit of time off.

Terry: What kind of entertainment did you have, if any?

Nabielski: Well, we had movies and dances and—

Terry: Were there any USO shows that came over?

Nabielski: No.

Terry: How were you treated by the airmen and regular soldiers? Were you treated pretty good?

Nabielski: We were treated good. Nobody dared hurt us.

Terry: And it sounded like the civilians accepted you quite well over there?

Nabielski: Yes. And uh, in fact one time, I was standing in my barracks by the window, and I saw an airplane coming. Looked like it was coming right at me. I froze. But then that come and [it went] up.

Terry: It made it across the top of your barracks, huh? [chuckles]

Nabielski: Yeah. And um—I’ll tell ya something else. When um—V-J Day—they had come home from—got off the train and came back to the barracks, and I couldn’t leave. I wanted to go back into town by the English family, but I couldn’t because nobody dared leave the camp. And um—so that evening, we’re all gathered together talking and stuff, and then we decided to go to bed. And I was up in my bed already--my bunk had an upper bunk, and my roommate was in Paris, she wasn’t there then--and um, all of a sudden we heard one of the ladies scream, “There’s a man by my window!” And I jumped up, grabbed a English bread slicing knife, started out the door. Changed my mind and put it back. [Terry chuckles] And

got out in the hall, and we were looking around, we didn't find anybody, and then we started back to our barracks, to our rooms, and I got by my door, and I heard the lady across the hall scream, "What are you doing on my feet?" And then I waited a minute, and then the door opened, a naked person run down the hall toward the bathroom. Thought it was one of our ladies. [coughing in the background] I says, "Hey," I says, "you'd better put some clothes on." At that the person turned around and came back toward me. It wasn't one of our ladies. When he got by me, I grabbed him like this, and shook my finger at him—pushed him against the wall and shook my finger at him—and then he didn't do anything—he got away and run down the hall, and I tight behind him. And he got to the blackout curtains, and I *kicked*. He went to the blackout curtains--the door had been nailed shut—that wouldn't open. And he landed in the arms of a Ranger. But the Rangers were—the Ranger had been bringing his date home, and the guard at the entrance of the place said he couldn't leave his post, but there was talk that there was a man by our barracks. And uh, the Ranger says, "Well give me your gun, I'll go." Just as he came by, that's when I kicked that person out. And I says, "What'd you catch him for? Why didn't you let him fall on those cinders? They'd have felt darn good on his bare skin." [Terry laughs] And then later the Ranger says, well he says, "His feet didn't touch ground till I got him to the guardhouse." He kept saying to him all the way over, "Put me down. I'm an officer. Put me down. I'm an officer." He said, "His feet didn't touch ground till I got him into the guardhouse and put him in a cell." And then uh—the next day, the uh--our Captain had a meeting with us. And she said, "We don't know who the person was. He might be a prisoner from the prisoner of war camp down the road. We don't know." And our Charge of Quarters that night, says, "Oh no, ma'am," she says. "I went over to the guardhouse. He's my boss. Captain so and so." And boy, when she told that, they put him—moved him out of our camp into another camp right away. 'Cause they were afraid what the men we worked with would do. 'Cause they looked after us like we were their kid sisters. Nobody dared hurt us. And um, brought him back for court-martial. And I was one of the main witnesses at the court-martial. And they um, fined him, and uh, what do you call it?

Terry: Demoted him?

Nabielski: No, he wasn't demoted but uh—they talked to him, you know, and um, and then—well we got caught in that storm.

Terry: You're on board a ship coming back to the United States.

Nabielski: Yes. And the 8<sup>th</sup> was the second[?]?--that was a French hospital ship that saw service in World War I. We were supposed to be on the *Enterprise* but they wouldn't take us. They didn't have accommodations for women.

And uh, that was the only ship that made it through the storm was the *Enterprise*. Our engines flooded.

Terry: Oh, ok. So you were disabled out in the Atlantic Ocean?

Nabielski: And uh—yes—and uh, then they told us to put our life jackets on, prepare to abandon ship. We got out on deck, there wasn't anything left to abandon ship in.

Terry: All the lifeboats were—

Nabielski: Everything was—

Terry: --ripped off.

Nabielski: --everything was torn off the ship. Then we had to go below decks for [the] wait—sat below decks for [the] wait.

Terry: Now, was it extremely rough--seas?

Nabielski: Well, one lady one time--she came in from Arizona--came into our room and she says, "Quick, where's my camera? I got to get a picture of that mountain." Somebody handed her a camera. She opened a porthole to take the picture, the mountain came in. [both laugh] Then she had to run for a mop to wipe up the mountain! [both chuckle] And um—so then, uh, well--then after they got an engine going, that we could back out of the storm. They only got one engine going, that we could back out of the storm. Went to the North Atlantic—from icebergs in the North Atlantic to fresh pineapple at the Azores, Christmas Day, 1944. 1945. And uh, so uh, oh it was a big mess.

Terry: So you made it back to the States then. Were you ready for discharge time, or—

Nabielski: Yeah. And then, we um—that was Christmas Day that we got to the Azores. New Year's morning, the captain woke us up. "Now hear this. Now hear this. Just got word that the Big E is leaving New York tonight to take us home." That was the aircraft carrier. And uh, and we got on that aircraft carrier, and um—here's a picture of it. And um—we um—

Terry: Took you into New York City, then?

Nabielski: Took us to New York. We left there and we got to New York—Pier 13 in New York on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January. Left Lahar, France the 13<sup>th</sup> of December. Got to New York on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January. Pier 13. We couldn't disembark because there was another ship ahead of us. So we

had to stay out there for another day. And um, we had to change trains in Chicago. And I was down by the—um—oh, the lockers at the train station, getting some stuff out, and I saw a pair of officer's shoes and pants standing next to me, and I looked up—here was that Captain that I had kicked.

Terry: Oh ho ho!

Nabielski: When he saw for sure it was me, he took off! He wasn't going to get kicked again. [Terry chuckles]

Terry: For all that time you—[rest unintelligible].

Nabielski: I forgot his name. I don't remember his name. But uh--

Terry: So did you end up going back to Antigo then when you got out?

Nabielski: Yeah.

Terry: And what did you do after you got out of the service, then? What was it like—how was your reception at home when you got home?

Nabielski: Walked down the street and people looked the other way.

Terry: Is that right?

Nabielski: I wasn't any good 'cause I was in service. I was after the men.

Terry: Hmmm.

Nabielski: The men looked after us like we were their kid sisters. Nobody dared hurt us. I could get off the train at midnight, in England, and walk two and a half miles to camp. And not be bothered. If somebody else was walking, too, they walked with you but they didn't touch you. 'Cause they knew what they'd get. From the other men at camp.

Terry: Hmm. So when you got out of the service, did you use any of your GI Bill—

Nabielski: Yeah, I went to beauty school, in Green Bay. See I left Antigo because the people looked the other way, I wasn't any good, and uh, I moved to Green Bay. Went to beauty school under the GI Bill.

Terry: And when did you join the American Legion Post?

Nabielski: My gosh, I don't remember. Got it in my purse, but—

Terry: Was it quite a while after—

Nabielski: Yeah. I wanted to join the VFW. But they didn't have women in the VFW Post. They had—yeah, I could join the Auxiliary. But I says, "I'm not an Auxiliary." And the American Women's Post started—the men's Post in Green Bay accepted us. And then the Women's Post—they helped us get to that we'd have our own Post.

Terry: What was your experience of serving? What did you—after serving in the war area, what did you think of that? What did it mean to you?

Nabielski: Well, I still had those friends in England, family in England. And then I thought about the Germans and how they welcomed us so much, and they were sorry that we left. And I still get phone calls from England on my birthday, and I make phone calls to them on their birthdays.

**[End of Tape One Side A]**

Terry: [Tape] One Side B, an interview with Angie Nabielski, who served in the Women's Army Corps in World War II. And Angie was friends with a family in England, and she remained friends with them for a lifetime, and phone calls back and forth—and Angie, you went to visit your family in England again. What year was that?

Nabielski: 1973.

Terry: Did you go by yourself, or—

Nabielski: Yeah. I went by myself.

Terry: And was the family still intact?

Nabielski: Well, the father was gone. But the mother was still there, and the two girls.

Terry: Did they recognize you right away?

Nabielski: Yeah, they recogmeezed [recognized me] when I got off the plane.

Terry: Is that right? And you kept in contact with them, so I mean it was--talking back and forth on the telephone and things and sending cards, so—

Nabielski: Yeah. "Yarnfield Yank is Back." This was in their paper, in England.

Terry: She's showing a clipping of the newspaper article of when the reunion of her and the family that she had visited and became real good friends with back in England. And Angie's got quite a scrapbook that she put together--she kept over the years. And a lot of it shows—on her trip back from England to the United States the storm that they were in and the ship that was disabled, and then how they came back on the *Enterprise*. 212 WACs came back aboard the *Enterprise* along with wounded soldiers and things. And she's got quite a scrapbook. She also has--in her scrapbook is a list of enlisted personnel--a directory listing all the names and addresses of people that served at the Army/Airforce's Reinforcement Depot, Air Force Station 594, Yarnfield, Stone, England, September 1945--and lists every person's name and their home address, where they were from. That's a very interesting article there. And she's got other articles that she kept for her scrapbook, and pictures of the friends that she made during the war, and of herself in uniform in 1945 and '46. Angie, you've got quite a scrapbook there.

So Angie, can you just tell us a little bit about what you thought of serving in the war, during World War II?

Nabielski: Well, I thought it was nice because I never met such fine women that I met in service. Never.

Terry: And you kept friendships with them, because you have the pictures of them that you sent back and forth. So that's terrific.

Nabielski: And uh, nobody dared hurt us. The men looked after us like we were their kid sisters.

Terry: And your reception at home was a little bit different than what you anticipated.

Nabielski: Yeah, I wasn't any good 'cause I was in service. People looked the other way. And I wasn't welcomed. My mother heard on the radio that I was--I was supposed to be home for Christmas. But my mother heard on the radio that our ship went down with everybody on board, in the North Atlantic storm.

Terry: And she thought that was *your* ship.

Nabielski: Well, she wasn't sure. But I had written and said that I'd be home for Christmas. And I *had* written that I would be on that ship, but the last minute I tore it up. And then just wrote that I expected to be home for Christmas. It's a good thing I did. [slight laugh] Christmas day, we had two Christmas presents—two phone calls—not phone calls, cable grams—

sent one home to my mother and the other one to England. To let them know that I was ok.

Terry: You made it through.

Nabielski: Yeah.

Terry: That had to be a tremendous scare for her, to think that you were lost at sea, then.

Nabielski: Well *sure*. Yeah.

Terry: Ok, Angie, anything else that you'd like to mention regarding your service time?

Nabielski: Well, I don't know how many of the ladies that I knew are still living. 'Cause I'm 88 ½ now. So—

Terry: Ok.

**[End of Interview]**