

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcription of an
Oral History Interview with
JUANITA S. GOOLD WILKE
Women's Army Corps, WWII
1995

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Wilke, Juanita S. Goold, (1908-1995). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 113 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 113 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Juanita Goold Wilke, a native of Baraboo, Wis., discusses her World War II service as a cryptographer with the Women's Army Corps (WAC) at the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) and her post war experiences with veterans groups. Wilke talks about her pre-war work as a teacher in Bloomington (Wis.), working for the Unemployment Compensation agency in Madison (Wis.), joining the Women's Army Corps, and receiving a military leave from her job. She comments on her reasons for joining the WACs, training at Fort Ogelthorp (Georgia), officer training at Des Moines (Iowa), and the different types of women in the WACs. Wilke touches upon military life at stateside bases, including recreation activities, treatment of WACs by civilians, and her many transfers throughout the United States prior to serving in Europe. She tells of the trip overseas, including interactions with male soldiers aboard the ship, arrival in Scotland, cryptography training in England, and assignment to work at the Parklane Hotel in England. Staying in England, she comments on living in homes with civilians, American opinion of English cooking, bombing raids, and the differences she observed between American and English customs. She touches upon different types of code machines and the D-Day invasion. Transferred to SHAEF, Wilke talks about doing code work for the Air Force, working alongside men, and disbandment of the cryptography unit once the war ended. Stationed in Germany, she describes her post-war role as being that of a "glorified office girl" and following to no fraternization rule with Germans. Stationed in the same building with General Dwight Eisenhower, she mentions that while in the service she never heard any rumors about his alleged affair with his English driver. Returning to the U. S. in 1945, Wilke touches upon marrying a former GI and her husband's post war depression. She comments on attempting to join the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and joining the United Women Veterans. Wilke also compares the homecoming experiences of male and female veterans.

Biographical Sketch

Wilke (1908-1995) served as a cryptographer with the Women Army Corps at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces. After the war she returned to Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark D. Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by Karen Emery, WDVA Staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by Jackie Mulhurn, 2003.

Interview Transcript

Mark: --and then we'll be ready to go. Okay. Today's date is April 4, 1995. This is Mark VanElls, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Juanita Goold Wilke, a veteran of the Women's Army Corps in World War II. Good morning. How are you doing?

Wilke: Good morning.

Mark: Thank you for coming in on this extremely cold, for April, day. I suppose we should start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born, where you were raised, about your upbringing, and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Wilke: Well, I was born in Baraboo, Wisconsin and went to grade school, high school there. Then, my father had died when I was quite young, so after I finished high school my mother moved us to Madison so that I could go to the university.

Mark: And this was in the '30s sometime?

Wilke: No. It was earlier. [Laughs] I was born in 1908. And I graduated from high school in 1926.

Mark: Yeah, math was never my thing. I wasn't calculating correctly.

Wilke: That's all right. 1926. So I graduated from the university in 1930.

Mark: And what did you major in?

Wilke: History and French and Letters and Science in school. And then I became a school teacher and I taught school for seven years in a little town down in Grant County.

Mark: Which one?

Wilke: Bloomington. Close to Prairie du Chien. And then I decided I kind of wanted to get back to Madison. And I took an exam with the state and got a job down at the Unemployment Compensation Department, which was just starting.

Mark: And this was --

Wilke: And this was in '37. Got a job down there and worked there until '43 when I enlisted in the WAC.

Mark: Do you recall the attack on Pearl Harbor and what you thought and what you felt at the time.

Wilke: Oh, sure. Of course like shock and horror and amazement. We were walking along the street, coming from a movie, going home when we heard all the noise and specials and everything. That was it. But I think, like with most of us, that had a great influence on our decision to do something. Because we just wanted to do something.

Mark: As the war started, did your work and the Unemployment Compensation agency, did it change? Did the war affect the work you were doing at the time?

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Wilke: The WAC was not started until 1942.

Mark: No, I mean at the Unemployment --

Wilke: No, but I mean, and so I was working there then and that's when we first heard about the WAC and then I joined in March of '43.

Mark: Yeah. Right away.

Wilke: So you see, I was sort of at the beginning.

Mark: And so you joined as soon as you could.

Wilke: As soon as we could. There was no one else from the Unemployment Compensation that joined but there were other girls from Madison.

Mark: I was kind of wondering, if at the Unemployment Compensation bureau, as the war went on and people found jobs, did you have less work to do?

Wilke: Yes. That's why there was no trouble. I could get a leave of absence, military leave.

Mark: Oh, you took a leave of absence to join? You didn't have to quit.

Wilke: No, no. They were very cooperative about that. Because there were lots of the men, you see, that had to go and they all had military leaves so they were very willing to give me a military leave.

Mark: I see.

- Wilke: And so I was gone from the UC department from March of '43 until January of '46.
- Mark: Would you describe a little bit about why you wanted to join the WACs? After all, you had a secure job. I assume it was civil service. It was a secure, professional position. And yet you decided to leave that and serve in the military. It's quite a --
- Wilke: Well, it's kind of -- I think we had -- well, it's a big step. But there was a big surge of patriotism at that time, you know. You were inspired to do something. And I think that's, when I talk to most of these gals now, they just wanted to do something helpful. And maybe we could by joining women's organization and going out and doing whatever they wanted us to do.
- Mark: I would assume that you had to take a pay cut from what you were making to join the WACs.
- Wilke: Well, not necessarily because back in those days the pay was not too great.
[Laughs]
- Mark: I see.
- Wilke: No, everything was, see that was right after the Depression. Everything was pretty much rock bottom.
- Mark: I see.
- Wilke: For example, as a school teacher I got \$90, \$90 a month for nine months.
- Mark: And that didn't go all that far?
- Wilke: That's it. So by coming back, even starting out in a new deal we were getting, I think we got, I think it was, started out at \$75 I think but for a 12 month period.
- Mark: After the war.
- Wilke: No, that was when I first started there at Unemployment Compensation. So you see, wages were way down. A quarter an hour was your wage in stores. Kresge's dime store put me through the university on 25 cents an hour.
- Mark: Now, as for joining the military, there were some, as I'm sure you know, who didn't like the idea of women serving in the military. There was resistance within the military and in general society. Did you encounter any sort of

resistance from your parents, perhaps, or that sort of thing as to your decision to join the military?

Wilke: No. My father, remember, died when I was a child. And so, no my mother, I had a place for my, my mother had lived with me, and I had a place for her to stay while I was gone. So she moved in with a brother whose wife was ill and they welcomed her. So I didn't have that to worry about. Had a brother of hers who was married with a family and he was not really in a position where he could, you know, volunteer. He did get in at the tail end but not at the beginning. So I just think, I just felt that, I just wanted to do something. I just wanted to prove that I could go out and do it.

Mark: I see. So, when it came to actually signing up, where did you go? And who did you talk to?

Wilke: Milwaukee. Oh, I think I've got folders full here where I all of the real -- oh, here -- oh, there. February 23, 1943. I went to Milwaukee for my first interview and tests. And I actually was inducted into service and went to Fort Ogelthorp for training on March 7.

Mark: And what sort of training did you do? As WACs I assume it wasn't the rifle training --

Wilke: Oh, there you're wrong.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Wilke: Sure, I had to learn to shoot a carbine. We did all of the exercises, drill, march, the whole works. They didn't treat us with kid gloves.

Mark: I see.

Wilke: We did the whole works.

Mark: I see. Now, I went to basic training and I remember a lot of four-letter expletives. Were you subject to those sorts of things as well in your training?

Wilke: I don't -- we had a couple of women down in Fort Ogelthorp that were real tough but nothing like that.

Mark: How about the drill instructors?

Wilke: Well, that's what these women did. They were the ones that did the drilling. But, no, they were tough but they didn't, they never used any rough language or anything like that but you definitely knew when you were displeasing them

if you didn't do it properly. For example, when I was to go out, as I went into officer's training, I was supposed to go out and work, drilling. Now, my voice was not right and I found that out. My footwork was okay, but I was not, evidently, going at it properly as far as my voice was concerned. So I had to practice at that.

Mark: Now at Fort Ogelthorp, was this for the WAC officers or was this just general --

Wilke: No, this was just by, when I went in as an enlisted person. And that had been a men's cavalry camp. They did not convert it to a woman's camp if you know what I mean.

Mark: Why don't you explain that a little. I'm not quite sure I do.

Wilke: Bathroom facilities, particularly. Yes. It had been a men's' cavalry camp. It remained the same condition. Now, after I left and after the WAC went there in larger groups they may have modified some of the things. But, no.

Mark: Was this a problem at some of the other posts that you were at? Or as time went on did they make accommodations for women soldiers?

Wilke: Well, it wasn't, by the time that we got to, that I got to Des Moines for officer's training, why then we were in buildings. I mean I've got -- I think there's someplace in here, in one of these things, I've got a picture of one of our buildings. A friend of mine dug out these pictures so that I could have something of -- see, my truck, I had to learn.

Mark: This is all in Des Moines here?

Wilke: That was in, I think it was in, or was that in, I was down in Rockford for a little while. This was in Rockford. The barracks, we scrubbed, we cleaned, we scrubbed the floors every night and every morning and that. Here, now this was the, they were divided into companies and that was the company that I was in. You see it was --

Mark: It looks like fairly nice accommodations for training anyway. Now, when you went in you went into the regular Women's Auxiliary Corps.

Wilke: Here. Now, see.

Mark: I see. Putting you to work.

Wilke: That's for sure.

- Mark: That's the basic training I remember.
- Wilke: Basic training, yeah.
- Mark: And so when did you get selected to go into the Officer Corps, or were you volunteered for it?
- Wilke: No, no. They took tests.
- Mark: At Fort Ogelthorp?
- Wilke: At Fort Ogelthorp. And they actually had started taking our tests in, for our mental capabilities, when we were in Milwaukee. So, no it was down there. I was called in and told that I had the qualifications. If I wanted to apply for officer training why then they would put my name through. And so I was in Ogelthorp from March 7 until April 10 and at that time I was sent to Des Moines for officer's training school.
- Mark: I see. And you were in Des Moines for how long?
- Wilke: And then we graduated from officer's training on May 23 of 1943. As a third officer, WAAC.
- Mark: What sort of training did you do at Des Moines? Was it more of the same kind of drilling and classroom type of thing?
- Wilke: Oh, a lot of it but more classroom type things to get you prepared to be an officer and be able to take over a group. See I had some advantage in that because I had been a school teacher. There see, that was in Des Moines.
- Mark: I see.
- Wilke: There are marching. And these pictures were mostly, this was, all this stuff was in Des Moines. All this scrubbing and cleaning, oh, everything had to be done. But then we did lots of classroom work.
- Mark: And what sort of classes? Military courtesy? Leadership school?
- Wilke: Yeah, everything like that. So that we would be ready to take over if necessary, a unit of women or whatever assignment you got. Because we had no idea what we were going to do.
- Mark: And who was doing this training?
- Wilke: WAAC officers.

- Mark: Men officers?
- Wilke: No, WAAC officers. That first group of officers that started out in '42 I think had been a fairly select group and they were all good officers and as far as setting up units and training and all that. They were just, they were really good.
- Mark: I see. What sort of women joined the WAC from your experience and your perspective? What sort of backgrounds did they come from? Was there, perhaps, any regional distinctions as to where they came from? I'm interested in who joined and why.
- Wilke: I think a lot of them just like me. Just like Phyllis Perk, you know. We're out to do something.
- Mark: Was there a lot of --
- Wilke: But there were gals just out of high school. Yeah. There were some of them just out of high school and did not have any profession. The gal that went with me from Madison here, I had never met her before but we were traveling companions on the way down there to Ogelthorp, and she ended up as a cook, going to cooking, into that. And then some of them went into, lots of them went into typing, office work. But there were --
- Mark: Did they do that before the war, do you know?
- Wilke: Some of them.
- Mark: Were there many women like you who were established in work and over the age of 30 and that sort of thing?
- Wilke: Oh, yes. A lot of them, of the bunch that I ended up with, I had a, my roommate for most of the time overseas, was a little French gal from Louisiana. And she had been, she had been going to nursing school. But she was about the youngest of the bunch that went, that ended up with my unit overseas.
- Mark: I see.
- Wilke: They were older. I had one woman that even was of Russian extraction and she had silver teeth. That was the way they fixed the teeth. And she was from Montana or someplace out in there. And then I had another one that was a good friend who had been doing office work and she was older than I was.

- Mark: It sounds like a good mix of different people.
- Wilke: It was a big mixture. And another one was from, had been doing office work and she was from Arizona, from Taos -- Taos, New Mexico. Her father had been one of the first artists to arrive in Taos. I mean it was, you know, it was a big mixture.
- Mark: Did you get off the post much either in Des Moines or in Fort Ogelthorp. And if so, what did you do for fun?
- Wilke: What did we do when, well, if it was in Ogelthorp, we were just outside Chattanooga so we got into Chattanooga and went out, oh, we did a lot of sight seeing in Chattanooga because it was plenty to do because of the Civil War. But a lot of times we just stayed on the post and walked around because we were so close to the cemeteries and the battleground.
- Mark: I see. And of course having taught history I'm sure you were interested in that sort of thing.
- Wilke: We were amazed. Trying to figure out. We were standing so close, the lines were so close together they could almost see each other's faces. It was just. And then we met down there, there was one elderly man -- he was a Black man who had lived in that area for oh, all of his life I think -- and he was very kind about telling us all sorts of anecdotes and things about that area. So we spent a lot of our time down there just walking around in that area.
- Mark: Now if you went to Chattanooga and there were, I assume you had to be in uniform when you went into town --
- Wilke: Oh, yes.
- Mark: Did people look at you strangely?
- Wilke: Not necessarily because they were getting used to us. You see, that was that close to the camp. I tried to find it again. We went down through there but it is, it's all been changed. It's sort of a park arrangement now and they've got everything sort of designated where it was but it is no longer a camp.
- Mark: And did you have much contact with any of the male soldiers when you were there?
- Wilke: Not down there we didn't. No, we were just a unit in training and it was all women and that was it.
- Mark: I see. But there were men on the base somewhere else, or the post?

- Wilke: Not that I ever saw. It was just, because that was no longer a men's post. They had given it up. As I said the cavalry had given it up.
- Mark: Oh, I thought maybe some of the cavalry were still there.
- Wilke: No, no, no. No, we didn't see anything.
- Mark: And what about Des Moines?
- Wilke: No, that was a post just for women.
- Mark: Did you get into town?
- Wilke: Then we had transportation. See it was outside of town. They took us into town and we could go in to eat, we could go in to movies, and that. Like, when my mother came out there why then I was able to go in and get a room in a hotel and that. That was no problem.
- Mark: Now, I've spoken to a lot of men who served. And when they get a pass and went into town they very often go out drinking and that kind of thing. Did young WACs do that?
- Wilke: No. We went in to eat and go to movies and that. No, there wasn't a drinking problem.
- Mark: Much more well behaved, I take it.
- Wilke: Well, everything was so new for women and a lot of them were almost at the point where they were kind of scared to do anything, you know. You didn't want to get sent home in disgrace. You were starting out to do something and you were going to do it.
- Mark: Okay. After Des Moines you went to where?
- Wilke: Now that becomes sort of a --
- Mark: This is always the messy part. The part in between.
- Wilke: In between, because we did not know. They were sort of sorting us out. And some people were assigned to units. And then some of us weren't.
- Mark: And you weren't.

Wilke: And I wasn't. So I went down to Camp Grant in Rockford. And I was down there at Camp Grant for about a month. Oh, I can see how long it was. In June, yeah, in June. Now this is the type of thing. Now there were men down there at Camp Grant and we were, there was a WAC detachment that was in connection with it. And we participated -- now this is all women in this, we didn't get into the same group with the men; we had our own. There, so I was, where the "X" is down there, I was leading that group there. And, you know, it was, I thought that I was tall. I was 5 5 1/2, I thought I was tall. Here I am back here. I was leading this group. And these gals were all, they were all like 5 8, 5 9, you know. And I never dreamed that girls at that age back at that time were that tall. Well, now it's nothing. But when I was put according to size, here I was back there.

Mark: So at Camp Grant, what did you do? Sit around? Write letters?

Wilke: No. This is when we went on bivouac. Oh, we did all sorts of things down there. And then, we had to take, now see this was all women that were stationed, non-coms, that were stationed in Rockford. And this was their leader, the high mucky-muck; I think she was a captain. And see they just turned over, when we were sent down there, they just turned over a lot of the training to us. And they sort of just watched. It was just like advanced training of sorts. But, you see, they hadn't made up their mind yet what they were going to do with me.

Mark: And so by this time --

Wilke: This time we just began to think, now, what are they going to do with us? Why aren't they assigning us to something permanent?

Mark: And you had no technical training, as they called it when I was in service anyway. No specific job function?

Wilke: No, no. So then I'm down there and along in June they said, well, now you go back to Des Moines. So then I went back to Des Moines and we went what they call an intermediate school. But we did the same thing that we had been doing before. You know, going to classes and drilling and all of this. And you say to yourself again, what are they doing? Okay. So, then I went, of all things, went back to Fort Ogelthorp for more training.

Mark: Now, were you an officer by this time? Were you commissioned?

Wilke: Yes. Now this time I was now a second lieutenant. Now they had, in July of '43, they changed the WAAC to WAC, took out the "auxiliary" and now I was a second lieutenant, WAC.

Mark: U.S. Army.

Wilke: That's right. So now, of all things, they return me to Fort Ogelthorp, Georgia for more training. And so I went through more training. And it was more of the same stuff.

Mark: More of the same then?

Wilke: More of the same stuff. I had some notes that I read and I thought, you now, really I wouldn't have thought that I'd have been pretty bored about the whole thing by that time. What did they have in mind for me anyway? Well, now, so that takes care of August. Now, all of a sudden, in October I get a notice that we were, this group, and see I'm beginning to find a few more people like me that are coming together with me, and I get a notice that we were going to be stationed outside the United States. We'd be notified when and where. Well, you see, that was partly why they were doing this juggling around because they wanted to get, I think they were picking out a group and they were going to get them together. Well, now in the end of October they gathered us together again and we find a different, more people being added to us, and we went down to Daytona Beach. And we stayed in a hotel down there and they were going to teach us how to swim in the ocean -- we asked. That was the time when those fish that are poisonous, the --

Mark: Jellyfish?

Wilke: Something on that order, that was when they were all coming in to toward the beaches. And so we couldn't swim anyway. Well, that was that. But they took us out in bivouacs again and this time, now, we had gas masks. And we had to learn how to use gas masks. Then they took us on marches that ended up out in the swamps down in there and we had to learn how to react and what, if you were bitten by a snake or something. Well, then we began to wonder now where are we going?

Mark: I was going to ask. What are you thinking by this time?

Wilke: By this time where are we going? And then for awhile I had to take equipment, I was the one chosen to carry the equipment in case somebody had a snake bite and then we'd be marching along -- and this was sand and all this -- and we're loaded with gas masks and all this stuff and all of a sudden they blow a whistle, wham, down you go.

Mark: And that whistle is supposed to mean what?

- Wilke: That was drop, just drop dead right there. And here you were with your face down in the sand and that's where some of those snakes just loved to hide. Oh, land, that was not something that we enjoyed. But anyway.
- Mark: But no one got bit?
- Wilke: No, no, nobody did but we were all equipped. And that's what we were doing then in October. Now in November they decided to sent us up to Fort Hamilton and then they changed it to Camp Shanks (sp??), New York which is sort of across the river there. And then they assigned us our clothing. I did all this finally because I couldn't remember all this exactly so I --
- Mark: That's very helpful.
- Wilke: -- assigned us our clothing for extended overseas field service.
- Mark: And still no hint even as to where you're going. What you're doing?
- Wilke: No, no. And on November 30, well, besides that we knew that we were going overseas because we got a notice that we had to send all of our unnecessary clothes home and we had to make a will. And had to have everything prepared for, just taking emergency things with us, things that we would be needing and everything else had to go home. And you were warned not to talk about anything, not to tell anything. When you wrote home, nothing, nothing.
- Mark: And so at this point --
- Wilke: At this point then we were beginning to realize we're going overseas.
- Mark: And are you excited? Were you scared?
- Wilke: Well, yes. We're all pretty much excited about that. And then we went into New York I remember on, I think it was Thanksgiving of --
- Mark: 43.
- Wilke: In 43 and had ourselves a nice, a good dinner and sat there and trying to just figure out, you know, where we actually are going. There were about 7 or 8 of us that had been pretty much together most of the time. Well, on November 30, in the dark, they take us from Camp Shanks over into New York Harbor by ferry and they pulled us up along side a pier where there was a great big ship and it was battleship gray, you know, and everybody is, oh, I wonder if that's what we're going to get on. Well, I thought probably, yes. And so, and you looked up, you know, here we were on this ferry and we're looking up and up and up. And it was just enormous. And so then they took

us around onto the pier and then onto the ship. And we go in and here is this great big, beautiful ship being converted into a troop ship and everybody's saying "I wonder what it is, I wonder what it is." And finally I looked up and here on the top of the stairway there was this great big beautiful picture of Queen Mary.

Mark: And you figured out what ship it was right away.

Wilke: I said I know what ship we're on because I had been in New York and had been on it when it was there on a trip, on a side trip. I said, "We're on the Queen Mary." We were. We had a quarters. There were 8 of us in a room that was, well, it would have been a fancy state room for two, you know. But there were 8 of us in there. Double-decker bunks, you know.

Mark: And this was in fact the ship that carried you overseas.

Wilke: That is the ship we were going on. All alone out on the Atlantic.

Mark: You mean no escort.

Wilke: No escort.

Mark: And this trip took how long?

Wilke: Six days.

Mark: That's fairly quick I suppose.

Wilke: Uh huh. And we zigged and we zagged. Six days to Scotland.

Mark: Was there much seasickness and that kind of thing?

Wilke: Oh, yes. And it was, now see we were just a small part of this huge number on the ship. All the men were on there, too. And there was a big, among the officers, we met many, many English officers who had been over here for some reason or other and were going back. But the soldiers themselves, they were sleeping on the deck even. Because when we went up, we had gave it up going to, trying to go up on the deck and walk around because we were stepping over them and that. Everybody I think, nobody was being too smart-alecky because I think everybody was a little scared. Men, too.

Mark: What do you mean smart-alecky? You mean just joking around?

Wilke: Joking around and making remarks. Because they didn't think any, nobody made any remarks about us. And we had --

- Mark: You mean about the women on the ship and that sort of thing?
- Wilke: Uh huh. Because we had some enlisted people with us too then I found out. But of course I didn't know that when we first got on. But then I was supposed to go down there and take part in doing exercises. On the ship with people sick.
- Mark: It didn't go too well I take it.
- Wilke: No, it didn't. No, it didn't.
- Mark: Did the young enlisted men respect you and your colleagues as officers?
- Wilke: Oh, sure. Yes.
- Mark: Was there saluting on the ship and the whole kind of thing?
- Wilke: Oh sure. They did it, yeah. But as I said we didn't, we never really, once we found out that, you know, that we would be practically stepping over their bodies out there we just didn't, we didn't annoy them either. Because sometimes, well we were into training mode back in the States and we were in the area of a men's group where they were doing the shots and that stuff you know, for the girls and the guys. We sort of razzed them a bit because it was the men that fainted.
- Mark: It's always the biggest one, too.
- Wilke: Always the biggest one. Yeah, so as I say, we liked to tease them about that -- they we were stronger than they were. We didn't get sick.
- Mark: It was much more somber on the ship going overseas.
- Wilke: It was -- because we were out there alone. But it zigged and it zagged every six minutes or such so that, what they said was, that if a submarine were going to hit the Queen Mary they had to know exactly where she was going to be at any given moment because of the fact that she was fast and constantly maneuvering so that sometimes we were warmer, sometimes we'd be colder. We still didn't know where we were going. One day we'd think we were going to Africa. There had been some talk of that. And then the next day we thought we were going to England. Well we ended up, of course, in Scotland and then went down to Oxford.
- Mark: I see. So you landed in Scotland. And what happened after that?

- Wilke: Then we, well they were waiting for us there. I mean they had the arrangements all made for us. And they had us billeted in a little town there the first day and then the people there wanted to entertain us. That was, they were very nice. They wanted to have a party for us.
- Mark: In the little town?
- Wilke: In this little town where these WAC, the women, the officers -- so they had us for dinner and a dance. Then they wanted to dance with us. Oh, this was quite a deal.
- Mark: What happened?
- Wilke: The one man that I danced with wanted to know where I was from. Well now I didn't think, my train of thought was, he wouldn't have a vague idea where Madison, Wisconsin was so I was going to be sort of general and say that I was from Chicago -- the Chicago area. And he went [SOUND OF DISGUST MADE] -- that's what he thought of Chicago.
- Mark: You mean the gangsters, didn't like it?
- Wilke: Gangsters, yeah. Cut your throat. Do you know I never did that after that. I always said Madison, Wisconsin. I never said Chicago again. But anyway, that was. But they, then they took us down to Oxford.
- Mark: By train.
- Wilke: No, we went by -- it wasn't that far. It wasn't that far. I don't remember if it was a convoy or what.
- Mark: So by this time you still did not have a specific MOS, I don't know if that's the term you used.
- Wilke: When we went to Oxford then we were told that we were going to go to Oxford, to school, to learn cryptography.
- Mark: I see. And went overseas not even knowing what you were going to do.
- Wilke: No, that's right.
- Mark: Your training at Oxford lasted how long?
- Wilke: Well, it lasted, let's see, well, we were there almost about a month, about a month. Because we were there in Oxford for over Christmas and we took a, we were billeted with English families there. By this time there were ten of us

that were assigned to the, what they called the Allied Expeditionary Air Force and the others -- and when we left there had been 30 of us on the ship and then when we finished our training in Oxford ten of us were assigned to this Allied Expeditionary Air Force and then we went down to London. And some of the gals that we had been with, you know, were sent up into northern England, in one of the Air Force units up there. And that was the way were distributed around. But we were all doing cryptography.

Mark: Explain, briefly, what cryptography is and what you were trained to do specifically.

Wilke: Well, everything, it was top secret. You could not mention, did not dare mention the names of any of the machines that you were using or what you were doing. You couldn't write a clue. It was taught to you. You were taking messages. Well, as an example, the instructions came from supreme headquarters that an Air Force, a particular Air Force unit, was supposed to bomb a certain area, at a target, and we received the message, we put it into code and sent it over the wire to that unit, they decoded it, they did what they were supposed to do, put it back into code what they had done, send it back to us, we decoded it, and sent it into supreme headquarters. Now that took quite awhile.

Mark: I'm sure it did.

Wilke: Things are not like that now as you know from that Gulf War.

Mark: I worked in a hospital. They didn't trust me with top secret things.

Wilke: No, but I mean, but you know from that how everything was out in the open. Everybody knew, in the Gulf War, you were looking right down the guns, over the shoulders of the guys.

Mark: On television.

Wilke: On television. Yeah, sure. You could keep track of it. And here we were, this was all secret in code, you know, and nobody knew what we were doing. We were going to an office but, you know, but nobody knew what we were doing. And we didn't dare tell what we were doing. Writing home we couldn't say where we were or what we were doing. So that letters during those years really didn't mean very much to the family except you were telling on a daily basis, you were talking about your friends and maybe that you went over to the canteen and you went to dinner and then maybe afterwards the officers had a dance and we danced, you know. But they were sort of dull and boring letters. At least, but people would know you were alive.

Mark: And could they know that you were in England? Or was that too specific?

Wilke: Well, that wasn't even specific at first. Yes. Because everything went through that APO post office box, you see.

Mark: Yeah. So it was overseas somewhere.

Wilke: Somewhere. That's what we were saying -- somewhere overseas. So it was, but we lived in Oxford, in Oxford we lived with individual families. And this little French gal and I were assigned to a family where the father was in the British Army but he was in India.

Mark: He was gone.

Wilke: And she had these two girls. If she would take two American girls and keep them she would get rations from the government, from our government. So that's what they did. And it was just like being in a home.

Mark: I see. And this arrangement worked well, generally?

Wilke: Ooh, wonderful.

Mark: Was it an interesting cultural exchange? Did you --

Wilke: The only thing that got a little bit boring was all of the Brussels sprouts that we had to eat.

Mark: I suppose those are wartime conditions more than anything.

Wilke: Well, they could raise them. They had a little garden in the back and Brussels sprouts were their favorite vegetable -- not mine. And they had Christmas for us and they went out in the dark 'cause you see everything was black-out -- in the dark one of the gals went down to the little pub and came back with fish and chips, you know and they had a piano and we used to play and sing and spend the evenings with them. And I kept in touch with that woman until about ten years ago when she died.

[End Tape 1 Side A]

Mark: As for the training, were the Oxford professors giving you this training? Or Army officers?

Wilke: It was British people, it was British. Now, there's, I've got a book on codes and ciphers that a friend of mine gave me and now it was naming the machines but they weren't the same machines that we were using.

- Mark: And so London was your first duty station then.
- Wilke: And that's where we were in 19, I was in London from January 12 until September 5. I was in London.
- Mark: When you went to France then.
- Wilke: In '44.
- Mark: I s -- I'm sorry. You were going to say something.
- Wilke: I was going to say, part of the time we were in London proper, in the Parklane (sp??) Hotel which was a little close to Buckingham Palace. And the rest of the time we were out at the end of one of the subway lines at a place called Stanmore which was one of the headquarters for the British girls. We had our meals out there with the British.
- Mark: I see.
- Wilke: We lived, again, in private homes but had our meals with the British. We furnished the food - as we used to laugh and say we furnish the food and they did the cooking. We would have liked to have helped with the cooking.
- Mark: They weren't terribly good at it?
- Wilke: The British are noted --
- Mark: For their cuisine.
- Wilke: But we got along all right. But you have to have a little, few jokes.
- Mark: Sure. I was going to ask how you got along with the British -- aside from the cooking which I assume was good natured ribbing.
- Wilke: I think the only thing, I think we had more freedom as far as going over to the officers clubs and that than they did. They thought we had a better deal about that. Because it was, the place in an old castle they called Stanmore Hall that was out there and the men took that over as sort of a headquarters out there and, that's the American men, and the British came there too, the British officers. And we went there. But the British girls had a little more trouble getting in there.
- Mark: I'm sure it was very exciting to be stationed in London.

Wilke: Yes. We were there during all of the bombing.

Mark: Buzz bombs.

Wilke: Buzz bombs, the doodle-bugs, the whole works, yeah. In fact, I even, I do silly things, I even counted the number of air raids in London from January 13 of '44 until I left in September. And from January 13 of 1944, when we first went, there was a period there when there were 30 air raids and then it stopped and there were seven weeks when there weren't any. And then came, as of June 15 came, the doodle-bugs, the buzz-bombs and the pilotless planes. And from June, June 15 they started. From 11:00 PM until 9:30 AM it was one continuous alert. Then there were perpetual alerts, meaning all the time. From June 16 to the 30th and July 1 to the 31st of July and from August 1 to the 21st, when I was in London, and the 22nd to the 31st out in Stanmore. Stanmore was out at the end of the run for the bombers, when they came. Or wherever, however those, they were guided in some, those missiles, and they made the turn at Stanmore to go back if there were any that were to go back to the continent. And if the bombers had any bombs left they dropped them out in the Stanmore area. That's where we were out there.

Mark: Yeah. With any effect? I mean, did they hit anything?

Wilke: Well, they dropped in fields and that. And the reason that we stayed in this particular home was because the home belonged to a man who was the Dutch Minister of Agriculture to Great Britain. And, of course, he couldn't go back home so he was staying there and he had a housekeeper who had been a gal from Scotland. Margaret. And Margaret was scared to death of the bombings. It was just too frightening for her and so he asked if he could have two American girls come and stay and that were on different shifts so that somebody would be home with Margaret all the time. And that was Rabin and me. We were it. And Margaret did, she did everything for us. She took us in to London and she would entertain us and she gave us presents, she called me the "left tenant." She called Rab "topsy" because she had such curly hair and was kind of a little more dark complected. She was French. And Mr. Garritson was very good to us. He'd let us do anything. But he was horrified at one thing.

Mark: What's that?

Wilke: And that was we washed out our underclothes and hung them in his back yard and it was his rose garden and English women did not do such things. They did not hang clothes in the back yard. But he put up with it.

Mark: I was going to say, he apparently got used to it.

Wilke: He got used to it. Because I took him back, I took Jerry to see him, after the war he went back home and I took my, my husband and I went on a trip and we went to see Mr. Garrison and all he just kept saying was, "Oh, do you remember this piece of furniture? And this is the first time that I have spoken English in so many years. Oh, I'm so happy that you stopped." and we had such a wonderful time with him. And we stopped in England to see the family that I had lived with there and had a nice visit with them. Met her husband, who had been in India.

Mark: Sounds so nice.

Wilke: Oh, yes. Yeah, uh huh. So that was, you see all the time that we were there really we were, except for seven weeks there when there was nothing, there was constantly bombing. The people living down in the subways, you know, the underground. And we got so that we didn't even go down to a shelter anymore. We just figured we had these great big thick quilts, you know, and we figured if we were in bed and we had one of those big thick quilts on over us, well, if it was a direct hit, you were gone anyway and if it was just something that fell outside, you'd be protected from the glass. The closest that one came to the hotel was across in the part that was about a block away. Because they did not bomb the area too much around Buckingham Palace. You know, there were agreements.

Mark: Uh hum.

Wilke: As far as this bombing was concerned. There were, certain things were designated as --

Mark: Off limits.

Wilke: Don't touch.

Mark: And Buckingham Palace was one of them.

Wilke: Buckingham Palace was one. Yup.

Mark: Now these machines that you referred to. I'm sure they're not classified anymore. I was wondering if you could describe what sort of machines they were. What did they do?

Wilke: They looked like a big typewriter. You had cylinders that you put into them. So you typed the message but the cylinder transposed all of that and it came out --

Mark: Into code.

Wilke: -- into code.

Mark: And so the cylinders had the code on them. And you would type in --

Wilke: And they changed it.

Mark: -- you would type in one end the regular English message and it would come out in code.

Wilke: Uh hum.

Mark: I see.

Wilke: And then you sent that on. And then when it came back, you see, you had to type in that and then it came out in the correct message.

Mark: I'm sure you couldn't help resist reading a couple of them.

Wilke: Well, most of them were sort of just, you know, they were so routine. They were just giving them instructions and there were so many of them that you -- I don't remember any of them except I remember that it was telling them what to do and when and where. And it was getting where most of our work was done after we got over there, were closer to the actual, over in France. Why it was so constant that you didn't pay much attention to what it was.

Mark: Did you get a sense of what the targets were and the sorts of things that they were after? Did you pay much attention to that?

Wilke: No, uh uh. And remember, we weren't supposed to remember anything anyway.

Mark: Oh, I understand that. I, for one though, would be curious so I'm just wondering.

Wilke: Yeah. Well, some of the names I remember when I look at pictures and things. I remember the names that I saw.

Mark: Like the cities, the people.

Wilke: Cities, people, bridges.

Mark: Schweinfurt --

Wilke: Romagen (SP??) Bridge and things like that.

Mark: I see.

Wilke: But at the time we were so busy that we were just, you were just doing your work and you weren't talking about it. We didn't even talk between ourselves for fear that somebody might be, well, you didn't know who was --

Mark: Walls have ears.

Wilke: Yeah. You didn't know. It was all very serious business.

Mark: The invasion, D-Day in 1944. Do you remember that?

Wilke: Oh, I've got in my little book that I had, it said that, what I wrote in it was that we were so busy and so preoccupied with what we were doing that we didn't, there was nothing necessarily, we were just busy. And we knew what was happening but that was it.

Mark: And so before the invasion, did you know it was coming, specifically?

Wilke: We knew that it was being planned, yeah. But we didn't, as I said, there was nobody talking about it.

Mark: And you went to France then, when?

Wilke: Yeah, I went to France in September, September 5. It was just before, just before that I, of the bunch -- you see, we were in sort of small groups, these units -- and there were about 8 or 9 of us that were together.

Wilke: -- and took off. And they had to go across on the ferry. That was in September, the first part of September. And I didn't get any orders and there I was sitting there again. What's the matter with me, you know. They go and I stay. But then I had the enlisted girls that were left. They didn't go. Well, then on the 5th they said, "Pack your stuff. You're off." And by plane. We were taking -- these four gals and me and the equipment -- and we were taken by plane and landed on a field that was real close to Mont Saint Michel, that famous monastery out there, and the driver said, the pilot said he was very sorry that he couldn't stay. There was nobody there. Somebody was supposed to be there to pick us up. But he said, there was nobody there and he had to leave. And we sat there for half a day before somebody came and picked us up. Now, remember, this was not too long, this was September 5 then, and they were still doing a lot of fighting up along the coast. And this is, if you know on a map France, where Cherbourg is -- see it was down along that little, along the coast down in there. And some French woman that lived on a little, they had a little farm there, came over and knew enough English that she

could ask us, you know, why we were there and we told her we were waiting for somebody to pick us up and they didn't come, and they didn't come, so finally she brought us something to eat. She brought us some eggs and some bread which was real nice.

Mark: I suppose after having been in England it was real nice.

Wilke: Yes. And then a truck came and picked us up. Now, we were sitting there with all of that secret equipment and I was the only one that had a gun. I had a carbine. But there was no guarantee that somebody wasn't going to come and if they found out what I was sitting there with. Well, anyway, they came after us. And then they took us up to a little town that was just a little further north. It wasn't clear up to Cherbourg but it was along the coast called Granville and that was where General Eisenhower had his headquarters at that time. And then we set up our equipment there.

Mark: Did you get to see Ike, out of curiosity?

Wilke: Oh, yeah. Because after, in Frankfurt, I was just on the floor below him, when I got up to Frankfurt.

Mark: I'm going to take a note of that. I want to come back to that. So, when you went to France, did you do the same sort of duties?

Wilke: Uh hum. See we --

Mark: More Air Force related?

Wilke: Uh hum. Same thing. Uh hum, uh hum. So now we're, we're sort of now in what they called the Signal Division of Supreme Headquarters. And they called, supreme headquarters, they called SHAEF. Well, anyway, we were up there for only a week or so, up at Granville, and then they took us by convoy over to Paris. See Paris had fallen by that time. And instead of taking us into Paris they took us out to Versailles. And they set us up in a little, what would be like what we call it now, a camper, out in the gardens of Versailles.

Mark: The actual palace?

Wilke: Yup.

Mark: Exciting stuff.

Wilke: I could look out the window and see the little cottage where Marie Antionette used to go and play house which was for me, a history teacher, --

- Mark: Quite interesting.
- Wilke: -- You can imagine. Uh hum. And then we stayed in a house that had been taken over by the Americans. It had belonged to the Duke and Duchess of Poliniak (sp??) and their stuff was all in there. All of there furniture, their pictures, their clothes, everything. They had just been ousted --
- Mark: It hadn't been looted by the Germans?
- Wilke: Because they had been participants in taking over, you see. They were --
- Mark: Oh, collaborators. I see.
- Wilke: Collaborators. Yes.
- Mark: I've been watching the news and have been seeing about all this artwork the Germans would steal from the Russians and the Russians would steal from the Germans.
- Wilke: So when the Americans took over, that was a good place to pick so they just portioned them out and then we went there and lived.
- Mark: I see.
- Wilke: That was very nice.
- Mark: Quite an exciting place to be. And you stayed in Versailles how long?
- Wilke: Well, we were there about a month, up there.
- Mark: And again, this is the same sort of Air Force cryptology that you were doing before.
- Wilke: Right, same thing. And then they moved us down to Vittel, France.
- Mark: I'm not sure where that is.
- Wilke: That was October 29. Well, it's a little south and a little east of Paris. It's down closer to Nancy, which was a fairly sizable town and had really got bombed and battered. So we're getting closer to the action. We stayed there until April. I was down there --
- Mark: April '45.
- Wilke: April '45. We were there the whole winter.

- Mark: And so you spent a good six months or whatever --
- Wilke: It was the Sixth Army I think that was down there. Not right where we were, in the town, but right out of town.
- Mark: Now, France is different than England. It's a place where they don't speak English. Did you get off the post much? Did you get into meet the French people?
- Wilke: Well, see this was a town and we were in a house first and we liked it in the house but the guy who owned the place didn't like Americans and he was not being very cooperative so then they found us a different place that was, that we didn't have any, it was, we didn't have any hot water. We didn't have, there was no heat except a coal stove. Oh, gosh. There were some of the guys that were officers in our unit, 'cause see now we're a unit, and it was called the First Tactical Air Force, and so we had the same guys all the time around. And a couple of them were real, we appreciated them very much because they used to come over and keep our fire going for us 'cause a coal stove was not exactly something that we were very proficient at. But we spent the winter there.
- Mark: And did you meet many French people?
- Wilke: No, no.
- Mark: Was this by your design? Or their design?
- Wilke: Well, there, it was a sad situation because Vittel had been a resort town. And it had been taken over, they had hotels, old, one of the hotels we used for an office building and these hotels, as I said, it was a resort town. And they had taken it over and had made it into a concentration camp.
- Mark: The Germans had.
- Wilke: Uh hum. And they had, it was, people that they had in the concentration camps were mostly artists and writers from all different countries. And they had them all locked up in these hotels. So the whole atmosphere was not a happy one. So we didn't get to meet very many of the people there. We were pretty much a unit by ourselves and we stayed as such.
- Mark: Now, by this time, as you mentioned, you were working with men as well. Did this work well?

- Wilke: Well, they were not cryptographers. They were the other guys that were with our unit. They were doctors and dentists and such. They had a detachment with them. But we were all called, we were called the First Tactical Air Force. And the officers, we got to know all of them pretty well because we were with them a whole winter. They were quartered in houses and things around. Some of them fancier than others. Most of them were just pretty ordinary houses and there'd be three or four officers in a house. In ours, all eight of us lived in the same building. We had a roommate, two bunks to a room. But as I said all cold water and that coal stove. Those things we didn't forget right away.
- Mark: I'm sure. A little more spartan than it had been in England.
- Wilke: Yeah.
- Mark: And so by April you'd moved into Germany.
- Wilke: And then in April, by that time, VE Day had arrived and the war, not VE Day hadn't arrived, 'cause that was in June wasn't it?
- Mark: That's in May.
- Wilke: May, yeah. But the Germans had been pushed back and had been pushed back further than Heidelberg. So they broke up our unit and I took the girls and then the officer that was over them and we went to Heidelberg.
- Mark: And what did you do there?
- Wilke: The same thing at that time. See, the war wasn't over yet. So we sat up a unit in Heidelberg in one of the hotels. And they said it was just to be a temporary basis. That I would come back.
- Mark: To France.
- Wilke: To Vittel. But when we got there everything went so well that they decided not to. They just decided to add men to the unit. So then I had men.
- Mark: Under your command.
- Wilke: Uh huh. In cryptography, yeah. And then gradually a few more of the other gals came over but not all of them. My friend was sent to Paris so I lost her. She went to work for a general in Paris. I think they were beginning to realize that the war was ending and they were beginning to divide us up a little bit. So then, when the war, when VE Day came --

- Mark: You were in Heidelberg.
- Wilke: I was in Heidelberg. And then I was sent over to, for a day, I was, got an order to go over to Reims where the signing of the peace treaty and meet the general over there, General Thatcher.
- Mark: American general?
- Wilke: Uh hum. If he approved of me then I was to be transferred to work for him in Frankfort. Because we didn't need cryptography anymore so then they divided us up. And so he said okay. So then I went up to, then I was moved up to Frankfort and I stayed up there until I came home. I came home in October.
- Mark: So, in Frankfort then, you were the general's -- what did you do for him?
- Wilke: Just a glorified office girl. You know, you did all of his telephoning, you made all of his appointments. And that's when Eisenhower was on the floor up above us.
- Mark: I've got a note about that and I'll come back to it. But I'm interested in after having been a cryptologist and doing something vital to the war effort, during the occupation you were a glorified office person, as you said. How did you feel about that?
- Wilke: No, no. Nobody paid any attention to us. We were just ordinary people working with a general and we did, you know, and nobody paid any attention to the fact that we'd been cryptographers. Nobody.
- Mark: Did that bother you? Did you resent that?
- Wilke: No, uh uh. There was no need for them anymore so there was no point. No, uh uh. We just had, and we made new, you made new friends, you started, you know, sort of started over again. And then I had a roommate that was sent out there to Wiesbaden and she, she had been from Wisconsin too so we had things, you know, to talk about in common and that. First they had us in houses that again had been evacuated. It had been houses that surrounded the IG Farben (sp??) building. That IG Farben building was just absolutely -- yeah -- this was just part of it. And they have, all the way around it had been this housing -- apartments and actual houses. First they put us in houses and they had, they knocked on the doors and said you've got three hours to pack what you can carry out. That bothered us; it really did. Going in and living in there. All that beautiful crystal and they had like, as though they had, everybody seemed to have a grand piano and beautiful furnishings. And then say to ourselves if this had happened to us what would you take; you've got

three hours what you can carry. Well, we were in the dining area there one day, one of the waitresses -- they were all German girls, and they'd do anything for you --for cigarettes and candy they did our washing, cleaning, you know, everything -- she came up to one of the officers and said, "Is it true that you live in such and such a house on such a such little street out there?" And he said, yes. And she said, "Would you go into the one room," and she designated which one, "and if the desk is still in there would you look in the desk and bring me a scrap book that's in there?" And it was there. He brought it back to her and she was the happiest person you know in the world for just some little thing like that which she hadn't been able to take with her.

Mark: Now, after the war, we had been fighting the Germans for four years and now we're occupying the country -- was there any sort of tension, resentment. Did people get along fairly well? Can you describe the atmosphere?

Wilke: Well, you see, we didn't get to meet the average German except those people who worked for us and they were so happy to get anything, you know, candy, cigarettes, anything that you do for them. We never got any, had no trouble with them. But as far as actually getting out and talking to the average German -- and Frankfurt was bombed so badly -- that there was really, I was going to say, there wasn't much you could do outside of your own area. We did walk down through the town once. But the most resentment that we ever, that I ever found, this person was, after when we went back in '59 and that was when the French saw that we had a German Volkswagon with a German license plate on it and boy there was plenty of dirty looks and screaming and pointing to those German, say "Deutsche, deutsche" 'cause those French people in that Alsace-Lorraine area, they were bounced around so much that they -- so we heard more than I ever heard.

Mark: While you were in occupation Germany.

Wilke: Yeah, while you were there. But the Germans are sort of a proud, stubborn bunch of people and they -- when we went back in '59 we found that, like in Italy, they took everything that was bombed and put it back piece by piece. In Germany the Germans were much more apt to put a front on a building and it looked okay. When walking on the street you get up in the hotel and you look down and there was nothing behind it. It was just all rubble behind it. But they're so proud they wouldn't want to admit that you see, so they put up a false front.

Mark: That's interesting.

Wilke: I'm speaking -- my husband is from a German family and my mother was German. They're stubborn people.

- Mark: Two things -- Wiesbaden -- just out of my own personal curiosity 'cause I was stationed there -- you went to Wiesbaden a couple of times.
- Wilke: Oh, yeah. As I said we'd go over there and they'd, see all these fancy boats that were tied up there in the harbor, and they use them.
- Mark: The Americans.
- Wilke: The Americans, sure. They just took them over and used them. They'd give us rides around in that little -- we didn't go out into the river but in that little bay kind of thing. And then we'd like to go, she was living in a hotel that had, this friend of mine got into a hotel that had some of the baths, you know, oh, that was fun. And then she'd come back over and come into Frankfort when we were having something going on.
- Mark: As I understand it, Wiesbaden wasn't so badly bombed.
- Wilke: No. Uh uh.
- Mark: Not as bad Frankfort or Lyons or someplace like that. Or Heidelberg for that matter either. Now, it was my understanding that Heidelberg was --
- Wilke: There again, you've got the castle there. That's an antique piece.
- Mark: And the other thing I want to talk about is Eisenhower. You got to meet the general?
- Wilke: No, I didn't get, no, I didn't get to meet him. I just saw him.
- Mark: Oh, I see.
- Wilke: I just saw him as we were going around. But the thing that was strange to us was we never heard any of the comments about him and that supposedly that British driver that he had --
- Mark: Oh.
- Wilke: -- that woman. We didn't know anything about that.
- Mark: You never heard a word.
- Wilke: Never heard a word.
- Mark: No hints.

Wilke: No hints, no nothing. She was just his driver and that was the whole thing. So we were all just astonished when people at home were asking us about that.

Mark: That was news to you.

Wilke: News to us, right.

Mark: And so you left Germany in '46?

Wilke: Forty-five.

Mark: And you were discharged in '46.

Wilke: In '46. I came home on the 20th of October and I've got on, the book I had, we sailed from La Havre on October 20 through a mine field. 'Cause at La Havre there were plenty of mines.

Mark: I'm sure it took a long time to clean them up.

Wilke: Yup.

Mark: Did you leave voluntarily? Or was your tour up?

Wilke: Yes. I had plenty of points and General Thatcher came home. Came home about a week ahead of me.

Mark: I just wanted to ask briefly before I forget -- General Thatcher -- I'm not familiar with him.

Wilke: He was an Air Force general. He was just a one-star.

Mark: No big deal?

Wilke: Oh.

Mark: Was he okay to work for?

Wilke: Oh, yes. Yes, he was very nice. It was a joint office. Like there were two offices together and there was a General Pahl (sp??) that was over in that one and General Thatcher was in that one. And then the two of us, the girls, were out in that outer office together out there and we made all their arrangements and did all of that.

Mark: And what does a general on occupation duty do? What sort of daily activities --

- Wilke: It was just book work and these telephone calls to people. I don't know, actually, of anything that was of great importance at that time because everybody was just, you know, the war was over. And all of the things that you were doing ceased. So he would go, he wanted to get more points flying so he and this other general would take a plane and go flying. And some of the other guys wanted to get some more points and that too. So one day they took us on a plane trip and we went down the Rhine looking at the castles and all that stuff so that they could get more flying time. But that was all. And then, you see, he came home. He came home about a week ahead of me and I think he flew home. I came home on a --
- Mark: On a boat?
- Wilke: -- I came home on a boat right through a mine field.
- Mark: So when you were discharged as a WAC were you given the option of going into any sort of Army reserve?
- Wilke: I could have. But I didn't 'cause everybody kept writing and saying, "Oh, you better come home, you better come home. You're mother isn't feeling well. And she's getting older and you better come home."
- Mark: I see.
- Wilke: So it kind of bothered me a little bit. So I just decided 'cause I had a job to go back to. The difference was when I went back to work and low and behold I had left as a lowly, just an employee of the UC department and I come back after leaving the Army and I can go up there in my uniform and looking pretty snappy and with captain's bars on my shoulders and everybody took a second look. Including the boss.
- Mark: And so when you got back, did you assume your old position or did you move up or did you move down?
- Wilke: I went up rather fast.
- Mark: And on what basis do you think? War experience, managerial skills?
- Wilke: Well, I think, well, I don't know. I think it had a lot to do with it. I think they found that maybe I was able to do something, because I, you had, in Unemployment Compensation you had offices around the state that were called local offices. And instead of being just an ordinary clerk I ended up with what they called the interstate unit. And then I was on a par with the men that were in the _____ units.

- Mark: And it was after the war that you got married?
- Wilke: Yeah.
- Mark: To a GI?
- Wilke: Yeah.
- Mark: A former GI.
- Wilke: A former GI who had been in Africa and Sicily and Italy. Because sometimes I forget to mention he had been in Sicily. I had assumed that put Sicily in with Italy and I learned you just do not say that. It's North Africa, Sicily and Italy.
- Mark: Did he go all the way through the war?
- Wilke: He was in earlier than I was. We came home the same time.
- Mark: I see. I don't want to pry, of course. I'm interested in where you met and how you met and if there was some sort of GI connection.
- Wilke: Oh, yes.
- Mark: I'm interested in the broad military experience.
- Wilke: Well, when I actually got back and Mr. Rochebusch (sp??) called me in, he says, "Tell me where you've been and what did you do." and all this and that. And then he says, "You better go and take another exam. Take some more exams." Well, in the meantime what to do with me. Again here I am sitting wondering what are you going to do with me. And so he said, "The war is over. Now you'll be getting the GI Bill," 5220 Club, you know, was coming into shape and there were going to be a lot of people again that would be out of work. Everybody's been working during the war. So he said, a lot of the guys will be coming back. A lot of lawyers that were doing the judicial work in Unemployment Compensation would be coming back. He said, "Why don't you read over the law to see what changes have been made. And then as these people come back then you can tell them all the changes that have been made to bring them up-to-date. And we'll be hiring new people. So why don't you teach the new people that." And who do you suppose was the first pupil I had under the new pupils.
- Mark: Mr. Wilke?

Wilke: Mr. Wilke. He had been working at Kipp before the war but he was a college grad but then it was Depression and so he wanted to get something different to do so he took the exam for an analyst and came down here to work. And I came to work this one morning with a friend of mine and we got down to the bottom of the stairs and I look up and here, leaning on a file up there at the top of the stairs, was this great big guy and I said, "Who do you suppose that is. I never saw him before." And she says, "Oh, that's that Jerry Wilke from out at Plymouth Church." Well, I said I'd never seen him before or anything. And it turned out that he had been a Sunday school teacher to her kids before the war and so that's how she knew who he was.

Mark: I see.

Wilke: So that's what, he was my first pupil. The saddest looking individual that ever, and you should see him now.

Mark: What do you mean "saddest looking individual?"

Wilke: Oh, everything was wrong.

Mark: After the war?

Wilke: Oh, yeah. He came home, all his friends weren't home or had died and everything and everything was different and he was just -- nobody understood anything about the servicemen. Somewhat the same as these guys from Vietnam.

Mark: I was going to ask about that sort thing.

Wilke: Yeah. And his mother upset because she didn't have enough sugar to bake all the cookies she wanted, you know, all that sort of stuff. And he was just plain unhappy. Then he, he wanted to know about me. Well, here I'd been in service, too. Only I'd been in northern Europe; he was in southern Europe, in north Africa. And so we got to talking and he decided that maybe we should go to a dance and, you know, that's just the way -- he felt comfortable. Because he was talking, I guess we were talking on the same level you know, with somebody. And I can understand that.

Mark: And did he come out of this sort of funk after awhile?

Wilke: Oh, sure. Then he did.

Mark: About how long after?

Wilke: It didn't take -- well, that was in January and we were married in December so it didn't take him too long to --

Mark: And what about yourself. Did you have similar feelings when you came back?

Wilke: No. I came back to friends and they were all just excited to, I should tell them where I'd been and what I'd been doing and everything. But the only thing was that some of the gals that had been there for a long time felt that, how come that I was told to take another exam and go up a grade or something and nobody had said anything to them and that. But they could have done, my answer to that was, you could have done the same thing. Nobody was stopping them.

[End Tape 1 Side B]

Mark: About the sort of post-war benefits and problems with the GIs integrating themselves back into society, at the Unemployment bureau there, did you have a lot of GIs coming through?

Wilke: Well, yeah, with that 5220.

Mark: Yeah.

Wilke: And of course we had just lots of fellows that were, in the law, the only part dealing with law and unemployment compensation like when people were fired and all that stuff. They had to make a ruling on them. There were, I'll bet you there must have been 20 of those guys that came back.

Mark: And they had lost the jobs they had before the war?

Wilke: No, I mean they had been on leave and so they had to come back and go through the same process, you see, that Jerry did. So they all had something finally in common to talk about. And I had all of those guys too -- that go through the law. So, got to know -- in fact, one of the guys that was working here at that time was Fred Miller from the *Capital Times* and the *State Journal*. You know he was Evju's (sp??) son-in-law I think -- nephew. He married, Fred Miller, had married Evju's niece and he was, now he's retired.

Mark: Did many GIs have the same sort of feelings that your husband did when they came back?

Wilke: Oh, I suppose if you have a family to come back to.

Mark: From what you could tell.

Wilke: From what I could tell. And of the girls that were in with me when I came home, none of them ever seemed to have any. If you had something to do when you got back, you see, and could just fall back into the picture. I didn't have any trouble. I just went back to work and as I said everybody was all questions.

Mark: And you were full of answers, apparently.

Wilke: Yeah. I was full of answers.

Mark: Now, as for other benefits. There was more than 5220. There were all kinds of other benefits. There was the education and those sorts of things. Were there some that you used yourself?

Wilke: Uh uh. He did. He started going on the GI Bill to school. But I never did. And going out to VA --

Mark: Was that on purpose? Did you know that you were eligible for these kinds of things?

Wilke: Yeah. We were all told. We didn't need them. In fact, we have never used the VA Hospital. He goes out there and sings at the VA Hospital for their --

Mark: He sings?

Wilke: He sings, like this coming Sunday he's going to sing out there again for church. So we do things. And I have gone out there to help as a volunteer like with the VFW and that. But we have never used the facilities.

Mark: I see. I've just got one last area I want to cover and that involves veterans' organizations. On the sheet I had you fill out it says you joined the VFW?

Wilke: Yeah. That was the auxiliary. At the time the men wouldn't let you join the VFW post.

Mark: Did you try?

Wilke: I asked about it because I wanted to arouse them and they said no. And the older men blamed the young and the young men blamed the older men for not wanting women.

Mark: Is that right?

Wilke: Oh, yes.

- Mark: And so you were getting the run-around I take it.
- Wilke: Oh, sure. I want to say his name. I can't say who was up in the VFW post, in statewide, and oh he was just full of excuses and blaming this one and that one and the other one. He didn't even want to see me coming because he knew I was going to ask him again when they were going to let women in. So then, they finally did let women in.
- Mark: And when was this?
- Wilke: Well, that has been --
- Mark: Was it long after the war?
- Wilke: Yes, oh, yes. And so then they wanted me to join and be a representative, you know, and active go-between between the men and the women. And I said, "No thank you."
- Mark: No thank you.
- Wilke: Said, "You wouldn't let me in when I wanted to so now I'll just stay with the auxiliary."
- Mark: Yeah. Did --
- Wilke: In fact I told them as far as their VFW was concerned I had more points and had seen more foreign service than half of the guys that were in there.
- Mark: And still they wouldn't let you in? Did you feel resentful at the time?
- Wilke: Well, I was just mad. I mean, it was, I thought it was ridiculous.
- Mark: And in the auxiliary, where there a lot of other veterans?
- Wilke: No.
- Mark: You were the only one?
- Wilke: At that time I was the only one.
- Mark: I see.
- Wilke: The rest of them were just the wives of the guys, you know, were housewives or worked at jobs.

- Mark: Now, as time went on, did you join other groups? Like Phyllis Perk --
- Wilke: Oh I belong _____ with Phyllis. Sure. That United Women Veterans, yeah. And I belong, now she's, I didn't join the regular WAC organization because Milwaukee is the only place that has a regular WAC association.
- Mark: That's kind of a long ways to go.
- Wilke: Yeah. But she goes all the time so she said if I would join, I could ride with her. So she and I have been going down. That meets once a month in Milwaukee.
- Mark: So what draws you to these groups? What is the reason for joining. 'Cause not all veterans join the VFW or whatever.
- Wilke: No, no. Oh, there's a lot of camaraderie. They are particularly if you've got a few of them that were in, like in World War II and that. But other than that, even so, there are some that, now Phyllis herself I think was in Korea. She was in the Korean War.
- Mark: She was in during that period.
- Wilke: Yeah. And that. But she and I have no problems getting along. It's just a nice group. There is something about it that you just somehow you feel closer to them because, I think that, we've done something that some other women haven't done I suppose.
- Mark: So it's a social thing?
- Wilke: Well, no, not really. Because we try to, with this Women's Veterans' Group, we've been working with the Vietnam fellows on this stand down for homeless people. We've been working with them on that. And we try to keep track of the women that are in, like up at King which is the Veterans Home, and go up there and take them out, you know, and treats and just try and keep track of anybody that might need some help. And then Phyllis is a, she's a real go-getter.
- Mark: Oh, I know.
- Wilke: And she's been with them and believe me she can go to any of these veterans' groups and she can stand right up to any of the men and talk on an equal basis with anything, on any subject, anything that deals with veterans. Believe me. Don't tangle with her.

- Mark: No. I'm very impressed with Phyllis. Well, those are all the questions I had. Do you have anything you'd like to add? Anything you think I missed?
- Wilke: Golly, no. I don't know. Oh, I don't think necessarily. I could show you, I think, I've got a couple of things here on, that I think are from Ogelthorp. This is, those were copied for me. It's just showing what they're doing down there now, see, and that.
- Mark: How about these clippings you gave me here. These are local.
- Wilke: Oh, yeah. Those are the ones I sent you. That's the one from the *State Journal* and this is the one from the *Milwaukee Journal*.
- Mark: And your discharge. Good.
- Wilke: Now, I don't know --
- Mark: I don't want to mix these up with things you already gave me.
- Wilke: That's all right. This is something. I don't know whether there is a uniform down here that belongs to this woman or not.
- Mark: What's her name?
- Wilke: Allender (sp??).
- Mark: Yeah.
- Wilke: Is there?
- Mark: Yeah. In fact, there are several uniforms of hers that we have.
- Wilke: Okay. How I got connected with this was my husband worked for the Public Service Commission after, he changed from UC over to Public Service Commission, and one day, it must have been about three or four years ago now, they called me up and said that they had received this from some man who said that his wife had been the first WAC to whom an oath was given in the WAC --
- Mark: From Wisconsin.
- Wilke: -- uh huh, Wisconsin. And her husband was so proud that he was sending this information to the Public Service Commission and their wasn't a sole out there that had ever heard of her or anything. Well, then they said well that Jerry had a wife that had been in the WAC. And so they gave it to me. So I

wrote to the guy and told him this and told him that there was no longer anyone there that knew her so it had been given to me and that I would have like to have met her, that I'm sure we would have had a lot of things to talk about. Then he wrote to me and oh, he wanted me to come down to Milwaukee and then so we could talk some more about his wife and that he wished that I would, he'd even take me out to lunch, you know, and all this stuff. Well, I think now that he is dead. I think he is.

Mark: I think he is too.

Wilke: Then he told me what bad shape he was in. So I didn't know whether you guys had, I thought that all that stuff, I was in here one day when it first opened up, and I thought maybe that might be the first one, so I didn't know if you guys had this stuff or not, that he sent. There's a picture of her.

Mark: We discovered some letters that she wrote and things like that. I'm not sure if we have this particular, these particular materials or not. I'd like to --

Wilke: You could take it.

Mark: Oh, I can keep this? I was going to say can I copy this? I'll put it in her file. I've got her papers all separate and everything.

Wilke: Actually, you probably don't need any more uniforms. You've probably gotten so many uniforms that you're --

Mark: Well, some of the WAC one are unusual. So I don't, I'm not sure, I could talk to the curator to see what we need and that sort of thing.

Wilke: 'Cause I've got mine. I lost the cap. I gave some, I was talking someplace and I think I must have lost the cap at that. But I've got my uniform -- that's my pinks -- the green jacket and the skirt. And I've got, it's got the bars, all the stuff on it.

Mark: I'll ask about it. I'll ask about it. I shuffle the old papers. I'll talk to the guy who takes care of the things. Well, if we're done here, I'll shut this off then. I want to thank you for coming in.

Wilke: That's okay.

Mark: It's not the nicest of days to be outside.