

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
VALERIE CLARKSON

Air Force

2008

OH
1226

**OH
1226**

Clarkson, Valerie. Oral History Interview, 2008.

Approximate length: 50 minutes.

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Valerie Clarkson, a native of New York who later relocated to Wisconsin, discusses her administrative career in the Air Force in Wiesbaden, Germany from 1969 to 1973.

Clarkson chose to enter the military after graduating high school as a way to start a career. She went through basic training at Lackland Air Force Base (Texas) before being sent temporarily to Keesler Air Force Base (Mississippi) to receive her orders. Clarkson explains her decision to work in an administrative role and describes her duties while working at Plattsburgh Air Force Base (New York).

Clarkson describes her career and personal life after being stationed in Wiesbaden, Germany, including her studying air traffic control and meteorology and meeting her future husband. Clarkson discusses the changing role of women in the military and how the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s affected her and other women's careers and their treatment by male colleagues. Clarkson was discharged in 1973 but continued to work for the Air Force as a civilian at Hancock Air Force Base (New York). Clarkson relates her experiences as a military spouse following her discharge and her travels to Europe with her husband.

Biographical Sketch:

Clarkson served in the Air Force from 1969 to 1973 and was stationed at Plattsburgh Air Force Base (New York) and Wiesbaden, Germany.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript, if possible.

Interviewed by Catherine Plane, 2008.

Transcribed by Victoria Paige, 2018.

Reviewed by Caitlin Downey, 2018.

Abstracted by Caitlin Downey, 2018.

Interview Transcript

[Beginning of WVM.OH.1226.Clarkson_tape1_A_access]

- Plane: This is an interview with Valerie Clarkson, who served with the Air Force during Vietnam. This interview is being conducted at Valerie's home at the following address, [REDACTED] Madison, WI, on the following date, August 13, 2008. The interviewer is Catherine Plane. Okay, tell me about your background and life circumstances before you entered the military.
- Clarkson: I lived in eastern Houston, New York. I was born there--no I was born in Syracuse, and then we moved to California when I was four and a half, and then we moved back to New York--Syracuse, New York--when I was eight and a half. And then I went to school there, and I went to high school, East Syracuse Minoa, and then, when after I graduated, I worked in accounting office, and then, I just happened to think about what am I going to do with my life because I wasn't earning enough of money to go out and earn enough money to live on my own, and I didn't want to stay with my parents. And so, an Air Force recruiter happened to call, and I thought, Oh okay, well. So, I listened to him, and I ended up joining the Air Force, and I went to basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, and then, um.
- Plane: Well, what was the reaction of your family? When you joined?
- Clarkson: Um, my mother was happy that I did, you know, that I did that. Of course, she missed me, she was going to miss me, but I was twenty years old, you know. It's not that I was just some kid; I was twenty years old at the time. And I worked for two years before I thought about going in the Air Force. And I thought about taking a computer class or something like that, but at the time that, that didn't pan out. I couldn't afford that so, this was a good opportunity for me, to get out of the house, and get away, and--I wasn't running away or anything like that, it was just an opportunity for me to get a profession and be able to--when I get out, then I can earn my own money.
- Plane: Did the recruiter really have to convince you, or were you pretty eager to kind of join up yourself?
- Clarkson: Uh, I was very open. I was listening, and I went in with an open mind, whether I, you know, if I decide-- if I decided no then I would say no, but I thought it was a pretty good idea for me to do that, so, for me to get a profession. So I went into basic training and then I went into casual--what they call casual--is right after basic training and between your orders, and--
- Plane: Well let's talk about--let's talk about basic training a little bit before that.
- Clarkson: I had kind of a hard time, but then I was able to do fine, and I--it was six weeks, of basic training. And then, I did pretty good in basic training. And um--
- Plane: What were the, did you have any memorable people that you met there? Or--?
- Clarkson: Yeah I met a girl, she was--it was, a bunch of girls were--it was on a Sunday, and we had Sundays off. We didn't have to do anything on Sunday, except we had to march to--

this is during basic training--we had to march to eat and march back, that's the only thing we had to do. Um, and a bunch of girls were sitting on the steps, and that--this one black girl, she was-- we were all joking around, and I was very naïve [laughs] and I said, I just look up at her and I said, "Do black peoples tan?" [laughs] Are-- you know--and so, she lifted up her shirt and she says, "See?" [laughs] It was a definite line, they do tan [both laugh]. Anyway, because of--I guess the way I asked--we hit it off, we became very good friends. And well, we were in casual together, and when we were in casual that's when Hurricane Camille hit, and so we were in casual a lot longer, and it took a longer time for us to get our orders because of the hurricane.

Plane: So what is casual?

Clarkson: It's the place between basic training and when you're off, you're waiting for your orders. And most people--a lot of girls got their orders before they got out of basic. Those that didn't get their orders took a little longer, they went in for maybe a week, maybe a couple days, and no more than two weeks. Well, it happened that we were in there a month because we had a two week time there where ab-absolutely everything was stopped because of Hurricane Camille. And all the guys had to go and help, and clean up, and they helped to clean up and they helped to find bodies, and all this stuff. And a lot of the ladies took a lot of the jobs the guys were doing and went into the offices or, whatever they were doing that we were allowed to go into at the time, 'cause there were a lot of things that we could not do, that ladies can do now. Um, and I went into, I went into the, I opted to go into the chow--what they call chow hall--the mess hall, where you eat, and so we helped in the kitchen. I wanted to go there because I-- there was a lot of guys there so that's why we volunteered for that [both laugh]. I had ulterior motives. Anyway, so Vivian--that black girl--and I decided that's what we were gonna do, we were gonna go in there and-- so we had a lot of fun in there and talking with guys and, we had to serve the food, to shove their food behind the counter, and all of that, clean the tables and the floors, and things like that, that the guys would do. And uh--

Plane: So that was normally a guy's, the guy's job you were doing?

[00:06:40]

Clarkson: Yeah, and so we didn't usually have to do the floor though. We cleaned off the tables and we cleaned off around where the food was, and the whole dish stuff, and all of that stuff, and walked home, after we were done. And we did that morning and evening, all lunch and dinner, so that was fun. We really enjoyed that. But, it took longer for us to get our orders because of Hurricane Camille, because it was really, it really, we--Biloxi was, it was right next to the gulf port--the gulf port was the eye of the hurricane--and about two weeks after when we were finally allowed to leave the base we got on the bus to go shopping, and we went to the gulf port and it was a mess, even after two weeks of cleaning up. It was really a mess, and we were just surprised because my first impression--when I first was coming into Biloxi--there's beautiful houses; a big long, big deep, front yard, a road, sand, and then you see the Gulf of Mexico. It was just a little short beach before the road, and, but when the hurricane hit, there was big, I don't know, I guess they call them tsunamis, but anyway--a tidal wave--that came. And they had beautiful old Victorian homes, original homes, from way back, that were there and were just gorgeous homes, and after the hurricane they were gone.

Plane: Wow.

Clarkson: When that tidal wave came in, it wiped out all the houses and everything that was on the beach and luckily the road stayed. But, and so during that time while we were there, we'd see them starting houses, build their houses back up and everything. But they could never replace those old Victorian homes that were just gorgeous, you know.

Plane: So when the hurricane hit, did it hit the base where you were staying?

Clarkson: Hmm?

Plane: So--

Clarkson: Yeah, we had to go into a shelter, and we heard the wind blowing, and the walls were uh--we knew we were safe because the walls were about over two feet thick. There were, they had certain buildings that were designated hurricane shelters, and so we were marched into one of them, and I don't remember which one it was, but yeah, we had to sleep there, and then when we came out there were branches all over, there were windows out of the cars just missing. It was just a really big mess. And uh, we were just shocked at what we saw. And uh, so--

Plane: What year was this?

Clarkson: This was 1971.

Plane: Okay.

Clarkson: No, '69. 1969. And it hit in, let's see, I left there, I left to go on leave, before my, let's see. It hit in July. And yeah, it hit in July, July of '69. And Katrina was--they compared it to Camille, and hurricane, was it Andrew, or I don't know, there was one other hurricane, they compared to Katrina. Katrina was a lot worse than Camille. Up until Katrina, Camille was one of the worst hurricanes that ever hit.

[00:10:41]

Plane: Yeah, I remember hearing about it when Katrina hit, that they were comparing it to Camille.

Clarkson: Yeah. Yeah, Camille was really, it was really a bad hurricane. So, yeah I was right in the middle of it.

Plane: Was that pretty scary?

Clarkson: No, we knew we were safe at the shelter. And, and--

Plane: Yeah

Clarkson: One girl, I don't know if we were supposed to keep our windows open or closed. But she did the opposite, and she forgot to do whatever it was that we were supposed to do, and her room was devastated: her mattress soaked, her window was broken. Um, everything in her room was just totally destroyed. It was so--they had to repair the window. They had to get rid of the bed, all of the stuff was--everything. She lost everything in that room, so. I think she was able, I think she was able to salvage some of the clothes, stuff

like that. Because they were in the dressers, but, like the mattress, anything that was open was totally destroyed.

Plane: Woah. So when you were in casual, did, you were just waiting for your orders--?

Clarkson: Mmhmm.

Plane: Or did they train you more while you were there?

Clarkson: Right I was waiting for my orders, and then because it took so long, I was one of--I was the last one to go. Um, Vivian was next to the last one to go. And then I was the last one to go. And they first had orders for me to become an inventory management specialist, and I was afraid of that. And so I had either to go into base ops or just administration for typing and just office work, and I chose office work. My regret is that I didn't go into inventory management, because that would have been--when I got out I would have really, really would have gotten a really good job, in that training.

Plane: What is inventory management exactly?

Clarkson: Uh, they inventory like at the end of year. They inventory things that companies have. It has to do with taxes and all of that stuff.

Plane: Right. How much everything, of everything they have.

Clarkson: Yeah, yeah.

Plane: So what did you end up going into?

Clarkson: Uh, just regular office work.

Plane: Okay.

Clarkson: A seven, what they called a seven-oh-two. Uh, it was just office work and then I ended up going to Plattsburgh Air Force Base, and stayed there for about two years, and then I got orders to go to Germany.

Plane: Just well, tell me about the air force base that you were, like, what were the facilities like and--?

Clarkson: Plattsburgh was really a nice space, and it was really a nice space. I worked with really good people, and really enjoyed it there. I had a really good supervisor, and that really helped a lot. And I had the--all the important phone numbers that everybody needed, I had memorized in my head. So instead of people looking up phone numbers, they would come to me and say, Well, what is the number of so-and-so, and I just would rattle off the numbers, 'cause I had all, I had them all in my head. And so I didn't have to look at the, oh I forgot what they called the book with the phone numbers.

Plane: The Rolodex?

Clarkson: Uh, no. Oh, I forgot what they called it. Uh, the roster, the telephone roster. And the First Sergeant that-- instead of looking it up, he would come out of his office, come into the orderly room, and come in and ask for the number and then go back in-- instead of looking it up, he always asked me what the number was. So that, I thought that was kind

of interesting. And my husband does the same thing; he'll ask me, "What is the number of so-and-so?" 'cause I have all the numbers memorized, so he doesn't have to look them up [both laugh]. That's why he does that now. So, I'm really good at numbers. Other things I can't remember, but numbers I can remember.

Plane: So, did you do office work while you were at the Air Force base?

Clarkson: Mmhhh, yeah I took care of the typing, the filing, updating the regulations, taking out the things that were obsolete, and putting in the new, the new regs, the changes to the regulations, and well, all of that. I took care of that. All the books on that.

Plane: Did you like being stationed there?

Clarkson: Yeah, yeah I really did. And then I got to Germany. And I ended up in--I don't know what the office was, head--oh, it was supply. Uh, it was- they handled supplies. And I didn't like it there because the two guys that I worked for were really, really not very nice men. And so, I went to the main office and I said I needed to go somewhere else. And I told them the situation, and I said, Well, that's not a good situation. So, they put me in personnel. So, I worked in personnel the rest of the time.

Plane: So, where in Germany was this?

Clarkson: Lindsey Air Station. It was right in the middle of downtown Wiesbaden. That's W-I-E-S-B-A-D-E-N, Wiesbaden. The W is pronounced like a V. Like, you'll see like Wilhelm--the name Wilhelm is Wilhelm. You know, and the and the V is, is, is pronounced like an F, which is really funny. But an F is pronounced as a F. I don't understand that, but anyway, there's a difference and I don't know what the difference is. But uh, so I was stationed at Lindsey Air Station. It was a really good place. And that, and that was headquarters of USAFE. That was the whole, you know, the whole Europe. They were the headquarters of all of Europe.

Plane: What is USAFE?

Clarkson: Uh, United States Air For--uh, United States Air Force--I forgot what the E stood for--in Europe. United States Air Force in Europe, or something to that effect. And, you know, when the general was there, that was headquarters. And they took care of all the bases in Europe.

Plane: So, do you have any memorable experiences from being stationed there?

Clarkson: Yeah, I met my husband there [both laugh]. But I decided that I wasn't going to get married until after I was out of the Air Force. I decided I wasn't going to marry an Air Force man. I was going to marry a civilian. But I ended up marrying an Air Force man [Plane laughs]. So that was a lot of fun. You know, looking around and seeing beautiful things there and the castles, and the Rhine River, because we were right near the river. Um, and seeing all of the great vineyards along the hills by the river. And so that was really nice, and I enjoyed that.

Plane: So, how did you meet your husband, was he on the base with you?

Clarkson: I met him at church. So, that's a great place to meet a guy is a church [both laugh]. So, I, so I was dating another guy at the time, and I was dating his best friend. And then, and

then that fizzled out. We decided just to part as friends, we were good friends and everything. It wasn't a bad separation or anything like that. And then Jim stated asking me out and, and then we ended up. After I got out of the service--I got out in May of '73, and he went and, he was leaving Germany six weeks after me to be stationed at Robins Air Force Base in Georgia. So, during that six months, from May to November, we were planning our marriage by mail, which was horrible. Bad way, terrible way to plan a wedding. But we did have the telephone too, so that helped a little bit. But we wrote letters a lot and planned our marriage by mail, basically. And so, I end up getting married in November of '73. So--

Plane: So, was it different being a woman on the base in Germany? Were you treated differently?

[00:19:18]

Clarkson: At that time, with the Equal Rights Amendment, a lot of guys expect, expected us to do things--they, we, what we were, some guys didn't treat us very well. You know, and some girls there had a bad reputation, and I just thought I was going to have the opposite reputation. So, one really needed experience that I had as--I took the, there was a phone in the hallway, and so all the guys would call on that phone, and then we'd call for the girl and then they'd come out their room and would take their phone call and stuff. So, we'd have to wait for--to use the--for the phone to be available for us to use it if we needed to use the phone. And uh, so this one guy called for this one girl, and she said, you know, and he--and I said, "I'm sorry she's not here", you know, 'cause I checked twice the door, and she wasn't there. And he said, "Okay, will you go out with me?" And I said, "I'm sorry, I don't go out with guys I don't know." So, he says, "Well if I go over there and I meet you, will you go out with me?" And I said, "Well I don't know, it depends if I like you or not." You know, so he came, and I met him, and I was on the second floor. My room is on the second floor. And so I looked down the window and I saw him, and we talked for a while, and asked questions, and things like this, and so finally I said, "I'll go out with you." You know, and so, I went out with him, and uh [laughs], it was, it was a bad date, it was really a bad date. He ended up being like about five inches shorter than me [both laugh]. You know, I mean, maybe not that much, but I mean it was a drastic difference. And he was so embarrassed to go out with me because I was taller than him, and I was embarrassed about him because he was shorter than me. Really, that doesn't make any difference, but at that time, it did to me at the--so anyway and he says--and at that time, guys stopped asking me out a lot. I didn't get very many dates anymore. And he says, "Do you--"after he found out what my name was, he says, "Do you find that you're not getting very many dates?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Do you know why?" And I said, "No, why?" And he says, "Because you're known all over the base, because," he says, "you're known as the girl that won't give," [Laughs]. And so, the guys that--I end up going out with really nice guys, and so, it weeded out a lot of that guys. So--and I ended up marrying my husband, so, that was really nice. And the base, you could walk around the base in around forty minutes. That's how small Lindsey Air Station was.

Plane: Even though it was the headquarters in Germany?

Clarkson: Mmhhh. It was really a small little base right in the middle of town.

Plane: And you were telling me a little bit before we started the recording about like expectations that some of the male officers had of you. Before--that were--

Clarkson: Oh, the NCOs, [non-commissioned officers] they expected me to do a lot of things that the men would do, and at that time the women didn't do those things. Oh, I got to back up. Um, when I went to tech school before I became before I went into administration--I got to back up to that. Um, I left casual and I went into, going into air traffic control. And that's--another name for them was the scope dopes, that was their nicknames because they would look at this radar thing, and see the little bleeps as that little line went around. And then there was a plotter over there and then we would give coordinates of all these planes that were on this, I forgot what they call them, anyway, this little scope, and so they, you had to go behind the plotters--we had to take turns being a plotter--and you had to go behind and you had to write backwards. So, like if you were writing an L, instead of making the L go to the right, you had to make it go to the left. So the other person [audio cuts out] can read it on, on the--the one looking at the radar scope. That's what that's called. The radar scope, they had to be able to read it, so you had to write backwards, 'cause you were behind it. And they took all the WAF out of that, they said you cannot go into that. Except for one girl they left in there, 'cause her grades were really high. She was getting like 95s and 100s on her tests, and all of this stuff. And the girls weren't doing very well on that field. But now, they--girls can go anywhere now. But at that time they took all the WAF out of there because a lot of them were not doing very well, and I was one of them.

Plane: What is WAF?

Clarkson: Uh, Women in the Air Force, is what it stands for.

Plane: Okay.

Clarkson: And then right after that is when I went in administration. I had my choice of base ops or administration.

Plane: So, did they train you in administration or did they just kind of give you the orders and tell you to--?

Clarkson: You mean after I was out of ask that, ask that again, I'm sorry.

Plane: Did you get like advanced training in what you were supposed to do for the administrative stuff?

Clarkson: No. No, I just went in and I already knew how to type. And so I didn't have to, they didn't have to send anybody to learn how to type. I already knew how to type. I learned that in high school.

Plane: Okay.

Clarkson: And so I knew how to file and all that stuff so, 'cause I took office classes in high school. So I had that all ready. So I didn't have to do training, except basically on-the-job training is what it was.

Plane: Yeah.

Clarkson: OJT is what they called it.

[00:25:44]

Plane: [Laughs] Got an abbreviation for everything [laughs].

Clarkson: Mmhmm. Yeah, and so, and that's when I ended up in Plattsburgh, after, they--that's why I had to wait for my orders. So that was, that was interesting. The only thing that I really liked when I was in the air tra-, air traffic control was the weather. Learning about the weather, that was really interesting, and my grades were really high in that, in that block. They called it blocks; there were certain blocks of different things that you had to learn. And one of them was weather. And I did really good in the weather. And that was really interesting. I wish now that I would have gone into uh, meter- uh, m- uh.

Plane: Metera- I can't say it either [laughs].

Clarkson: Meteorology.

Plane: Yeah, meteorology.

Clarkson: Yeah, and learning about the weather, you know, become a meteorologist.

Plane: So is it just how the weather affects the airplanes? Is that what they were teaching you?

Clarkson: Yeah, yeah, that was one of the things we had to look at on a scope. We had, we had to look at all of those kind of, have all of those things in play. When we look on the scope, as far as the degrees, all those, on this, the radar scope they were, and they had to plot it out on the plotter. You know the big board. I don't know how they do it now, if they do it the same way or not. But, at that time it was really interesting, but I didn't like that kind of job.

Plane: Is it too high pressure?

Clarkson: Well, you look eight hours at this, this scope all day long, for eight hours a day. It's kind of--

Plane: Yeah.

Clarkson: It gets kind of hard on your eyes after a while.

Plane: Yeah.

Clarkson: So, I'm glad I didn't stay in it.

Plane: So, what were your duties in Germany while you were on the base there?

Clarkson: It was basically you go to work and then you have the rest of the time, it's just like a regular day. You know, you, I lived in the barracks, and got up early in morning, got dressed and went to work, and then I had the rest of the day, went on dates or I want to do. You know, and we had to eat in the chow halls, and the chow halls are mess halls, and so that's where we had our breakfast, lunch and dinner. And I usually didn't go in for breakfast. I usually just had something in my room. And then I just went for lunch and dinner.

Plane: So are there any memorable people from that, from Germany that you can think of?

Clarkson: No, unh-uh. No, I just got to see the general one time. I forgot his name, that was all over USAFE. You know, so I got to see him, he was a four star general. So that was really nice. You know, I got to see him. I never got to talk to him, but I got to see him.

Plane: So, did the war in Vietnam affect you at all? Like, that that was going on?

Clarkson: No, I was what were they called? Vietnam-era veteran. So, I wasn't in--I was in the air force during the Vietnam War, but I wasn't in a combat area. So, I was a Vietnam-era vet, is what they call-- called us, because we were not in Vietnam, or have anything to do with going that remotes, or anything like that. That's another thing that at that time, the women were not allowed to go on remote tours.

Plane: What is a remote tour?

Clarkson: Um, it's a base where-- it's way out in the boonies and there's really nothing there other than just being on that little base and usually those bases are just for a year, or fifteen months, sometimes fifteen months. At that time, any women weren't allowed to go on any of those. And during the fifteen months, those can be accompanied or unaccompanied, which means you can have your wife or children there, on the fifteen month ones. The one year ones, they were not allowed to go. And also at that time, women if they got pregnant, they had to automatically be discharged, from the Air Force if they got pregnant, at that time. So, I wish it was still that way now.

Plane: Yeah.

Clarkson: That's my own opinion. I am not a woman that's lived, looking at living this, and so. There was one, there was one gentleman that I heard talk and he said, "If you treat a woman with respect and love, there's no, no need for the Equal Rights Amendment because she'll, you know, if you treat her like a queen, she won't need it." And it's true, my husband does that. He treats me like a queen.

[00:30:55]

[End of WVM.OH.1226.Clarkson_tape1_A_access]

[Beginning of WVM.OH.1226.Clarkson_tape1_B_access]

Plane: Okay.

Clarkson: I forgot what we were about to talk about.

Plane: We were going to talk about women's lib, like treating women like a--

Clarkson: Oh yeah, and that one, that one gentleman, he said that, "If you treat a woman like a queen, there's no need for, you know, the women's lib movement, and you know, if men treat women dec--uh, decent." And, my--that's the way my husband treats me, and it's really wonderful. You know, and so I do not believe in women's lib, so. So, that's just my own opinion. But, and so, during, while and, that's one of the things that was very difficult in the Air Force for me was because I was not a women's lib-ist and, and so that was really hard.

Plane: You mean, relating to other women?

Clarkson: No. No, having the, well, sometimes the women and then sometimes the men's attitude at the time, you know. And at the time, the men--with the women's lib--they didn't know how to act. You know, what they should do, should they treat you like lady, or not? Because some women were offended because they were treating them like a lady, and, and so, it was kind of a really big adjustment even at that time, for the guys. You know, and so, and even to this day, really it's still hard for them to really know where they stand, so, anyway. That's my own opinion.

Plane: Well, um.

Clarkson: And, oh, and then I left Germany, on March or May seventeenth. And then I was, that's when I was discharged was May twentieth. I was discharged on that day

Plane: What year was this?

Clarkson: Uh, 1973

Plane: Okay.

Clarkson: I don't know exactly where I--

Plane: We were talking about how you just were leaving Germany.

Clarkson: Yeah, I left May seventeenth. I got on a plane, and then I got to McClellan Air Force Base and went through a discharge. And then I got on a bus and I went home.

Plane: Back to New York?

Clarkson: Mhm. Yeah, back to Syracuse, New York.

Plane: Were--was your family really happy to see you?

Clarkson: Yeah.

Plane: Yeah. So were you gone for four years, or had you been able to go home and visit?

Clarkson: Um, when I was in Plattsburgh I was only like 200 miles away and so I would go on three day weekends. I would go and visit my parents all the time. So, I was visiting them when I, during that two--during that first two years. Because I, because I was only 200 about--somewhere around 200 miles away from my home so I got to see my family more.

Plane: Yeah, well that was nice.

Clarkson: Yeah.

Plane: So, do you stay in touch with anybody from the military, like I think you mentioned Vivian and--

Clarkson: I lost track of her, I'm trying to find her. I don't know how to go about doing that, but I want to see how she's doing and she's the main one that I want to find. And then I [laughs]--last month his best friend, my ex-boyfriend called and so, anyway well, his

wife and us are going to get together sometime in the next couple of months, and we're, he--they live in Kansas and we live here in Wisconsin, so we're going to meet halfway--somewhere halfway and just do something fun.

Plane: Well, that's cool.

Clarkson: So, yeah.

Plane: Was there anything especially challenging about your military service?

Clarkson: Just having to deal with the Equal Rights Amendment when I was, when I lived as--that was the hard thing for me. That was the main thing. That's where I had a lot of problems. And the last job that I had, and the guys that were expecting me to carry that huge box downstairs.

Plane: You're talking about the trash you couldn't, you couldn't lift?

Clarkson: Mhm, right. I mean it was--the baskets themselves were heavy because they would have several cards in these baskets, and these baskets--and those cards, when you get a big basket full of those things, those are really heavy. I mean they are heavy baskets. And I had to empty, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight--eight baskets into that big box, 'cause I--not only the other, let's see, one, two, three, four--five guys that I worked with, that's not counting, in that same office, the first sergeant and my OIC, the officer in charge. So, really there were one, two, three, four, five--six guys in there, plus me. But I didn't count them the first time, the first sergeant and the officer in charge. And, that, that was hard dealing with these men because they were really hard on me. Because they knew that I was not a women's lib-ist, and they were making life difficult for me.

[00:05:34]

Plane: Giving you things that they knew you couldn't do?

Clarkson: Yeah, and they would, they would say things to me, and in fact one time they were saying something to me and I--the phone rang and it happened to be my husband calling me about, you know, just really quick, and I had, and he heard them in the background talking horribly. And he called my first--the first sergeant or the officer in charge I don't know which one he called, and told him what was going on.

Plane: Did it stop them?

Clarkson: So-so, for a while. Then it picked up again. That was hard. But it did get a little bit better, but it still wasn't, you know--it went down, but it kind of went about maybe three quarters of the way up. So, it was hard. That was my main challenge that I had.

Plane: Did it get in the way of you doing your job, do you feel like?

Clarkson: Oh no, uh no, I left because it, my discharge was due. You know, I didn't reenlist.

Plane: Mmhmm.

Clarkson: So, I knew I was going to get out around May twentieth, or May twenty-second.

Plane: Is that--would you have re-enlisted, or were you planning on--?

Clarkson: I was planning on getting out.

Plane: Yeah.

Clarkson: Yeah, I did not want to stay in the Air Force. So I was planning on getting out. And seeing that I had office experience, I figured I could get a good job then, because I had the experience--four years of office work and so I knew that I would be able to get a good job.

Plane: So, what did you do when you got home? Did you get a good job?

Clarkson: Yeah. Yeah, I ended up working in Hancock, they come---they called it Hancock Field, at the time. They changed it to Hancock Air Force Base, and that was, just, it was in between Syracuse and, and the town of North Syracuse. And so, it wasn't very far from my home, and I worked there on days.

Plane: Oh, so you worked on a military base?

Clarkson: Yeah.

Plane: You just weren't enlisted.

Clarkson: Mmhmm, right. Uh, yeah I was working as a civilian.

Plane: So, how long did you do that for?

Clarkson: I did that for the six months that I was--before I got married. And I was---well, I guess it was about five months. They were trying to talk me into reenlisting, during all that whole time, they wanted me to reenlist, you know. It would have been nice, you know, because I wouldn't have gotten all this, and all this stuff, but I, honestly I wasn't really that interested. I wanted to be married, we were planning on getting married, so. And then I was, and so I was going to be going to another Air Force base. I was going to be living in Robins Air Force Base, working where he was stationed.

Plane: Oh, 'cause he was still in the service--?

Clarkson: Mhm.

Plane: When you got married?

Clarkson: Yes, so I became a dependent. That's what they called it then.

Plane: So did you move around a lot then as--?

Clarkson: Yeah, from Robins then we went to—he was in the band, and he went--he auditioned for the USAFE band, the United, the United States Air Force Academy Band. It was a special band and he auditioned and he got--and we ended up going to Colorado Springs for two years. He--then he decided to cross train in computers. So, we were going to be stationed at Langley. But while he was in tech school [laughs] there was a guy that wanted to go Langley, 'cause his family was there. We didn't want to leave Colorado Springs, 'cause all our stuff was still there, and they said, Wouldn't it be really funny if we, you know, if I got Peterson and you got Langley? And, so anyway, it, that's exactly what happened, so then they decided that they were gonna swap. And they had a swap

program, and then you would have to pay the--they would take you as far as where they were going to send you but then you have to pay the rest of the way. But it turned out the Air Force saved money because our stuff was still in Colorado Springs. He wanted to go to Langley, wh-where his wife was and everything like that, so everything worked out. So, he was going home, we were going back where--so we spent another two years in Colorado Springs. So, we spent a total of four years there. And but we didn't have to pay a cent because the Air Force saved money [laughs]. So, we just had our stuff delivered into another--he was stationed in, then he got stationed at Peterson Air Force Base, which is twenty miles away from the academy in Colorado Springs. And he worked at Peterson, but we lived on the academy because there wasn't enough base housing on Peterson. So, any--and they had an overage of housing on the academy so anybody who worked at Peterson lived on the academy also.

Plane: Did you like living military life like that?

[00:10:55]

Clarkson: Yeah, I was a dependent, yeah. I didn't mind it at all. Yeah.

Plane: Um, have you joined any veteran organizations or gone to any reunions?

Clarkson: No, unh-uh. I haven't done anything like that.

Plane: So, looking back how do you feel about your service? Your--?

Clarkson: It was a good experience, you know, it was, it was an eye-opener. I learned a lot. You know, I learned a lot of good things, and some of the bad things, like where--the last place that I worked was kind of off, but other than that it was a really good experience. Especially the time that I was in Europe, and I got to travel around and see all the things there and it was really nice.

Plane: Was there a specific place that you went, that was, that really stands out in your mind?

Clarkson: I really was, well the main--the only place that I really wanted to go, I didn't really want to go travel that much, but the only place that I wanted to go to--I wanted to go to Switzerland and I wanted to go to Amster--er to Holland. Those were the two places that I really wanted to go and I got to go there, and I was happy. But a lot of times they had tours. You know, you take a vacation, you can go on a tour, they had tour--tours set up and you could sign up for these tours, and go to Great Britain or go to Italy, or wherever, and I did go on a tour to see Switzerland. And then I got other times I got to go to Switzerland too. And when Jim and I were dating, another girl and I, we went and we just drove around there and--just because I want, just because I love Switzerland [both laugh]. And so we got to stay there. I got to stay in this one house, and, they--this lady rented rooms out and it was really neat because this, I got to sleep under this big, huge, thick down comforter and I--it was a cold night I remember that, and I went with another couple. This is a different time. I went with another couple and I was babysitting and so while they were doing some things, I was taking care of their kids. And so, while I was in there and I got into this one room--this one lady was renting this room--and I got under this comforter, and I just remember it was so high I couldn't even see the window it was so thick. And it was--I remember it was white and it was thick, it was just so warm and cuddly, just really-- I loved it. So someday I want to really get a

really good down comforter. That's one of my goals, but they're expensive, the kind that I want to get.

Plane: Yeah.

Clarkson: I want to get a thick one like I saw there [laughs]. Because I mean, it was really thick. Not the things ones that you see here. It was really thick.

Plane: So, you really got to see quite a bit of Europe then.

Clarkson: Yeah.

Plane: Traveled quite a bit.

Clarkson: Yeah.

Plane: That's cool.

Clarkson: Oh, another thing I liked to do is just go on what they called folks marches. The Germans, they would go and they would have these places that--it was either ten kilometers, twenty kilometers, or thirty kilometer walks. And 'cause Germans love to walk, and they, and so you would go and you would pay to walk a certain course. And that money would go to a charity.

[00:14:54]

Plane: Huh, well that's cool.

Clarkson: And so, instead of some places here, someone will come say, Well you know for so many miles I walk, will you pay such, you know, so much money, if I walk or do--you know, swim so many laps, or whatever? But you went and you did your own walking and that money went to charity. And so, I went on one of those and I loved doing that. So, that was fun. And every so often they would have water stops; we could stop and get a drink of water. And then you would go on until the very end. And you usually ended up where you started from so, you'd get to your car. It was like a little, big circle. It was fun.

Plane: So, did you get to see some of the landscape of Germany then?

Clarkson: Mmhmm.

Plane: While doing that?

Clarkson: A lot. Yeah, the woodsy areas and things like that. Some of it was in woods, and then some of it was down in town, and you'd just follow the path that they had laid out. And it was a lot of fun. And you had a map so you knew exactly where to go. You know, so you knew what the stop; you knew you'd turn here and you'd turn there, and you always knew exactly where you were.

Plane: Did you go on those by yourself, or did you go with someone?

Clarkson: I usually went with somebody else, 'cause it was more fun to go with somebody else and talk while you were walking.

Plane: Yeah.

Clarkson: Yeah, so I went on a lot of those.

Plane: Okay, well is there anything else that you can think of that I haven't asked you about, that you want to share with us?

Clarkson: I--that's about, that's about it. I got a, I guess a very uneventful time I guess. I know.

Plane: No, but it was interesting.

Clarkson: But, it was fun. It was fun.

Plane: Yeah.

Clarkson: Most of the time, except that one job I had.

Plane: Yeah, well I think the women's lib aspect is the most interesting thing, like how that was played out at that time, and history, and how you were affected by it.

Clarkson: Mmhmm. Because I was not a women's lib-ist and I figured--I remember Sophia Loren, she's an actress. You--I don't know if you know who she is. She--someone asked her one time, they asked her, What do you think about the women's uh, rights movement? And she said, "I don't believe it," she says, "why should I lower myself to their level?" You know the men's level. And so, yeah, and so, that's kind of the attitude that I have. You know, I had some mantucci (??), you know. Why would I lower myself, you know.

Plane: Did you feel like, did you make a lot of other women friends--?

Clarkson: Mmhmm.

Plane: Or was that kind of at odds with with what they believed in?

Clarkson: No, luck--luckily of the girls that I, that I knew felt the same way that I did. So, there were a lot of girls in the air force that did not believe in the women's lib movement either. So, those were the usually the ones that--you know, and I got along with the other girls too, the ones that believed in it too. We got along alright in the barracks and everything. So, there was no problem there.

Plane: Alright, well I think that's about it.

Clarkson: Okay.

Plane: Thank you for your time.

Clarkson: Why, you're welcome.

Plane: I want to make a slight correction.

Clarkson: Right, after I got out of basic training I went into casual, waited for my orders and that's when I went into air traffic control, and that's when I went to Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi. And then when I, when they took all the WAF out of the air traffic control, or the radar part of it, they--I went back into something like casual, similar, like that, and

then I had to wait for my orders to go--I had my choice of base ops or administration and I picked to go into administration.

[00:18:53]

Plane: And where were you when the hurricane hit?

Clarkson: In Keesler Air Force Base--

Plane: Okay

Clarkson: --in Biloxi.

Plane: Okay.

Clarkson: Which is really close to Gulf Port, which were the eye of the hurricane was, so we were just--Gulf Port and Biloxi, they border each other.

Plane: Okay, thank you.

Clarkson: Okay.

[End of WVM.OH.1226.Clarkson_tape1_B_access] [End of Interview]