MAXINE ECK

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Today is March 16th, 1994. My name is Jim WILL. I'm a volunteer with the Rockford Museum Center participating in a state wide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in events surrounding World War II. We are in the home of Maxine **ECK** who lives at 1944 Wisteria Road in Rockford, Illinois. Maxine participated in the war effort as a civilian on the home front during World War II. We are going to interview her now about her experiences.

WILL: Maxine, could we start off by giving your full name, date and place birth.

ECK: My name was Maxine Kittinger and I was from Warsaw, Indiana, in the heart of the lake region, northeastern section.

WILL: You were born there?

ECK: Born there on the 6th month, 12th day, 1919.

WILL: Can you give your parents full names?

ECK: Yes. My father was Jud H. Kittinger and my mother was Maud.

WILL: Her maiden name?

ECK: Her name was Maud Young from Watseka, Illinois, originally.

WILL: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

ECK: Yes. I had one brother. He came out of World War II as a Major in the Air Force.

WILL: What was his name?

ECK: His name was William M. Kittinger. He was in charge of all the aircraft from the Rocky Mountains to the Smokey Mountains in the southern half of the United States in air traffic control.

WILL: Is there any special things about your family that you care to mention? I mean did your like for instance did your parents did they immigrate over here or were they born here?

ECK: No. On both sides of our family we are from the original 13 states and have been able to trace our histories to their involvement with the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Indian War, the Civil War, fighting on both sides, World War I and World War II. We've been involved in all of those.

WILL: Okay. Thinking back in the ′30s before World War II, what was life like back then?

ECK: Well, in our little town, Midway Village here in Rockford, Illinois, reminds me somewhat of it. This is on a much smaller scale. Life was very simple. No one locked their doors. We had a general trust in one another. I grew up in a very happy go lucky atmosphere, I would say.

WILL: This was in Indiana?

ECK: In Indiana, uh huh. And no one was privileged with a lot of luxuries and yet we didn't miss anything because we had never had to give up anything.

WILL: When did you graduate from high school?

ECK: In 1937.

WILL: Did you have a job after graduation from high school?

ECK: Well, right after I graduated, before I went away to school, I wrote for a newspaper part time. I was the society reporter there and in Warsaw a fill in and sort of a helper.

WILL: Do you remember the beginning of the war? Say, for instance, before the war, do you remember anything reading about what Hitler was doing over in Europe? What are your opinions of that?

ECK: Yes. We always took the Indianapolis Star and the Chicago Tribune at my house so we were pretty much aware. I remember before that all came up, we were reading about the Great Wall in China. The fighting of China—the Japanese and the Chinese always fighting and quarreling and then the wall was going up but as the war was coming on, I was involved from 1938 to ′41 in nurses' training in Chicago. I went right on to Chicago to school.

WILL: Okay. So you had your high school—you knew what you wanted to do.

ECK: Yes.

WILL: Now for nurses' training in Chicago, was that two years?

ECK: No. It was three years with a month off each. Once a year you could have one month off so actually it was more than a four year college course St. Luke's Hospital was affiliated with Northwestern University. A lot of our professors were from Northwestern.

WILL: All right. When you graduated in nursing, what happened after that?

ECK: Well, I was hired—I did private duty nursing and for a little while, while I waited to hear from American Airlines, because I had been interviewed by them, they told me—I graduated in May 1941 and they told me that I would have a letter by July 8th as to whether I would be hired or not on American. So I did private duty nursing and that was very interesting in Chicago.

WILL: So in July of '41 you heard from them?

ECK: Yes. I called my hotel where I was living and asked if there was a letter in my mail box from American Airlines and they said, "Yes, there is." I said, "Would you open it and read it to me?" And they told me I was hired and I was going to start school at LaGuardia Field in New York. Very shortly after that—I think in August maybe.

WILL: So in August …

ECK: I went to school and flew over to New York to study.

WILL: How did they train you?

ECK: Well, we were taught quite a few things. As it mentioned here in this paper we had flight, routing people, miscellaneous types of conveyance to put the air traffic control. We had food service, aeronautics meteorology, ticketing, company procedure and helpful hints to make passengers comfortable and happy. Then we went on some preview flights to observe and I went to Boston and to Memphis, Tennessee and different place as an observer on the flight to begin with. I had quite a remarkable experience on my first flight that I was to take alone as a stewardess. Would you like to hear about that?

WILL: Sure.

ECK: Well, it was always necessary to be in the operations department for an hour before any flight that you were assigned to fly. The flight plan was being drawn up by the pilots with the meteorologist. I knew that I was going to be flying non-stop from New York to Chicago on my first flight so I told my parents in Indiana when I'd be coming over approximately on my first flight which was a night flight. In New York we waited our full hour and at the last moment I was put on the second section which was to leave five minutes after the flight that I was to be on. So we took off and the first flight went out and then my crew and I left five minutes later and when we got into Chicago, we learned that my flight that I would have had went down over Niagara Falls. A flock of wild geese went through the fuselage of the plane and brought it down over Niagara Falls. So my father was standing at his friends in the newspaper office in Warsaw, Indiana, by the ticker tape and he saw, as they were standing there, that American Airlines flight such and such has just gone down over Niagara Falls. Our plane came on into Chicago and we waited 2 ½ hours for that flight to come in and it never did. I called my parents and told them that we had made it.

WILL: That was probably—what—in August, September, maybe?

ECK: August, I think. Maybe September of 1941. By then it was interesting to me in the flights that I was starting to take that there was the talk of the war in Europe and of Hitler and all of England being very apprehensive as to what was going to be happening next. France and all of the European countries were very much alerted to Hitler's activities. I was really alarmed to see that we were cautioned to already start rationing sugar in August and September of 1941 where President Roosevelt was saying in his "fireside" talks that he was having that the American sons would never have to go on foreign soil. Now this was all before Pearl Harbor and I have a feeling they knew.

WILL: Gee. This rationing-- what type of rationing was it?

ECK: For one thing we carried little packets of sugar that were placed on each tray that was passed out to each of the passengers. If they didn't use the sugar then I was to retrieve those little packets and they were returned for further use on other flights. That was one of the things.

WILL: Do you remember any other rationing? Did rationing have a big effect on your way of life?

ECK: Rationing did——although I didn't have a car, one of my roommates had a car and as we got involved in the war then, of course, we had to have the stamps to get gasoline so that we all tried to help her to find some tickets because she drove back and forth.

WILL: So it did cut back on people's activities.

ECK: Oh, yes, it did. I had an uncle who was so honest that when I went home on a visit once during the war, he had a few extra gasoline tickets, stamps they were called, and so he was so honest that he passed them to me under a book in the living room so God wouldn't see.

WILL: Now these planes you were trained in. You had class, I guess you called them. What kind were they?

ECK: They were DC3s. That was the best and only plane well not the only but it was the best commercial plane in flight. We heard of some DC2s that had been used prior to when I came on the line. I'm not sure how many they had but those were all disposed of by the Ferry Command. The Ferry Command took them over and they were flying those DC2s and some DC3s to across what they called the "hump" to China, going across Africa and these were pilots and people who were flying the Ferry Command. We had quite a few friends. They wore uniforms, too, and they were mostly made up—the pilots were made up of those who had been rejected by the commercial airlines. They had adequate number of hours but for some reason they were rejected by the commercial airlines so …

WILL: You remember Pearl Harbor Day.

ECK: Yes.

WILL: Where were you? What were your thoughts on that?

ECK: Well I was—at that time I was based in Detroit. That was my first base for the airline and we had gone out to Birmingham, a little suburb north of Detroit, to spend that Sunday afternoon and evening with a friend. There were four of us there playing bridge and just listening to the radio. By evening time it was started to come across the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and that a great part of our fleet had been destroyed and it was in flames, it was on fire. We couldn't believe it. We knew we had been attacked by the Japanese.

WILL: What were your thoughts?

ECK: Well, we very alarmed because to be drawn into another was with the Japanese as well as trying to anticipate what would happen to us with the European War, it seemed like it was a tremendous thing to face.

WILL: Scared.

ECK: Mm. Hm. We couldn't believe it.

WILL: Where you were stationed at at any time were there military camps or anything nearby that you had any association with.

ECK: Yes. The blackouts began and soon after …

WILL: How soon did the blackouts begin? Right after Pearl Harbor?

ECK: I'm not quite sure any more except that I flew on the first blackout flight over Chicago. It was a test flight to see how successfully they could blackout Chicago, a city of that size, you know. The flight was chartered by city officials and Jack Brickhouse did the reporting from the airplane to the ground as to how it was going and at the signal the whole city became black below us as we circled around it. The air traffic had kept the planes away so that we could circle the city and it was a total success except for one filling station on the south side of Chicago for some reason forgot and it spoiled the whole black out because on the top of the building it had printing indicating what city it was. Every city that we landed in—Buffalo, Newark, Boston, New York City, of course, Washington, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, all had to be blacked out. Our curtains were drawn on the plane before we came into a field and no one was to even look out those curtains. They stayed closed until the "all clear" came when we took off again and was far enough from the city, the captain announced that the curtains could be opened.

WILL: This was just at night.

ECK: Uh. Huh. No all fields.

WILL: Daytime, too.

ECK: Mm. Hm. Then we went over—we were carrying a lot of passengers who had—I've forgotten

what they called it—very high priorities to fly. It was all military almost and then, well, people working with the government officials and those working with planes and everything that was being sent overseas. Those people were the only ones. The higher priority they held, they could bump people below them. So it was very difficult to deal with people. You had to be very cordial and nice and tell them that we're extremely sorry but they had to be removed at the next landing because had a higher priority passenger coming on board.

WILL: Did most people understand, or not?

ECK: Well, I remember one perfume salesman who was very belligerent and he fastened his seat belt and said he refused to get off when he was to be removed.

WILL: High priority.

ECK: So he did. He leaned back in this seat and strapped himself in and put his brief case and everything on top of him and the __?__ agents had to carry him off.

WILL: Oh, my gosh.

ECK: That was in Buffalo, New York.

WILL: Generally, most people understood, I suppose.

ECK: Mm. Hm. It really made it very difficult for them to go on but they had to get off. There wasn't any choice. The captain usually told me how many I'd have to remove at the next stop.

WILL: Was American Airlines converted over, more or less, towards helping military and the government, outside of people bumping other people?

ECK: Well, no. Actually, all of our— we remained a commercial enterprise. However, if the government calls for the number on the underside of the wing,—if they call it and we were in flight, wherever we were in the United States—if the government called that plane serial number, then we had to land at the first place on our route and we had to evacuate all the passengers and turn it over to the government. They took it from that point.

WILL: Oh, I see. They took the plane.

ECK: So whenever they commandeered one, I had to take passengers to the hotel, feed them and then get other transportation for them to get to their destination.

WILL: This happened to you then.

ECK: Oh, many times.

WILL: What did the government do with the plane?

ECK: Well, they needed them for…

WILL: Just for a temporary amount of time and then they returned them, I suppose

ECK: Well, as far as I remember, we didn't see them again. Maybe after the war they were returned. See a lot of them were …

WILL: Maybe you just never flew in the same ones.

ECK: Well, see they were almost all painted, to camouflage so they had to—and they were …

WILL: What colors?

ECK: They were usually painted a dark green or camouflage like the colors of the country that they were being sent to transport troops—different colors.

WILL: I didn't realize the commercial planes …

ECK: Once when we were flying down over Tulsa, Oklahoma—see, the Air Force was training a lot of their pilots very quickly. They hardly had very many hours at all and they were turned over to fighter planes and two Air Force planes collided right at the tip of our wing right just over Tulsa, head-on and burst into flame. Of course, we had to go down to the field down there in Tulsa and the Federal Aeronautics people came immediately to the area. You had to stay at the field and it had to be closed until the investigation was over.

WILL: That took quite a while?

ECK: It could take a day or two.

WILL: How about any memories of War Bond drives.

ECK: I know we were all buying them every time we got a chance and enough money saved up.

WILL: Did most people you know support these fundraisers?

ECK: Yes. We'd always go to the bank every time we had enough money, like $18.50 I think was the cheapest one, whenever we had saved up that much money. See, salaries were much lower then.

WILL: Can I ask you how much you made?

ECK: Yes. As a stewardess and an RN I made $125 a month and when we were out on a flight, they bought whatever meals were required away. We were allowed, I think, .35 for breakfast, .50 for lunch and $1.00, I believe, for dinner. Now this was going to New York City, and all over. Some girls even …

WILL: Probably was a lot of that, too.

ECK: Yes. And $125 a month and that gradually raised a little bit.

WILL: Do you remember any victory gardens? Any people have victory gardens that you knew of?

ECK: Yes. They had those in my hometown.

WILL: Did they seem to benefit people?

ECK: Well, I really wasn't around enough to know how they benefited.

WILL: You weren't on the ground long enough. As far as your friends and family, how did they react to all these restrictions of rationing, victory gardens, to fun raisers and so forth?

ECK: Sugar was very short and food stamps were required for everything so there was not nearly as much meat as we'd had heretofore for families. Meat was short—very severely short—in shortage and sugar I remember and canning had become rather hard. We always had a lot of fruit canned at our house and with the limited amount…

WILL: You did more of that then.

ECK: Mm. Hm. Butter was very difficult and I know I went at least a year or so without getting any fresh fruit and I know in a lot of the hotels where I ate, I was sure we were eating horse meat. It just didn't taste like steak. It had a sweet taste to it, you know. The Sherman Hotel—I lived in the Allerton Hotel on the near north side in Chicago and my rent for the whole month at the Allerton which was a lovely hotel out near the Water Tower Place, $40 a month.

WILL: Talking about the stamps, I can remember the stamps and the coupon books but I remember these little round cardboard tokens. What were they for?

ECK: I've forgotten.

WILL: Little red cardboard …

ECK: I don't believe I remember what we had those for.

WILL: I'll have to ask my mother sometime.

ECK: Yes.

WILL: During the war—After the war started in ′41, did your interest increase or decrease in what was going on? Were you …

ECK: Well, we were very involved. I was very involved with all of the areas of the army, navy, air force, Marines, C-Bees and all of them. A lot of the underground, French underground people, traveled with us. Colonels, generals, their aides and we were picking them up mostly at the coast line of Washington D. C. or New York. I have flew to Fort Worth and Dallas and taking them to all these different fields, you know, as they were coming in from being abroad and coming back or being shipped out. The paratroopers, as I looked at my notes, were a wild bunch of young men who felt that they had to live for the moment, actually, because they weren't sure where they'd be landing and they really were a bunch of kids who just thought there was no tomorrow and they really lived it up.

WILL: When things weren't going so well for the United States in the early part of the war, especially in the Pacific, did you ever fear the Japanese would bomb the U. S. mainland?

ECK: Well, I think we were always aware of that and we heard about the Japanese who had come to California to live who were being put in the private camps, you know, rather a concentration type of camp. You know one thing I remember that Eleanor Roosevelt traveled with me twice on my flights and her son, James, had just married a nurse, too, and although I heard that she didn't approve of the marriage, they were on my flight, too, a very beautiful girl. And Eleanor—I also sat on a flight between Chicago, a night flight, and Washington D.

C., with Steven Early who was the Secretary of State and visited with him quite a bit.

WILL: Did you talk with Eleanor?

ECK: Oh, yes. And Mayor LaGuardia traveled with me, too, and everybody was pretty much concerned with—There were lots of people who were involved in the war scene then and Eleanor was making speeches here and there and she was writing a column in the newspaper, too. Another colorful person who was flying was—of course, there were lots of senators, ambassadors and Congress people and Frank Lloyd Wright who had designed a lot of homes especially up here in Wisconsin and had done building homes all over. He and I visited on one flight to Washington D. C. Sat with him. Saw Jimmy Doolittle several times down in the airport in Indianapolis as we came in, Jimmy was out to greet the flight.

WILL: Didn't have to borrow a plane for his raid on Tokyo, did he?

ECK: I've kind of got away from your question you asked at that time.

WILL: Let's see. Where were we? Oh, when things weren't going well for the United States. You mentioned the Japanese out on the west coast. What were your thoughts on that? Do you think they deserved it?

ECK: Well, actually, we just knew that there were so many things happening in the country and then with everyone telling these stories as they came back or when they were going. I was particularly interested in a couple of people—fellows—young men who were involved with the French Underground and who managed to survive and there were others from other parts of the world who managed to survive and they would tell me these tales that just were unbelievable.

WILL: These friends, did you keep contact with them?

ECK: No. I didn't. All this was happening in a very; short period of time. You just see them, you'd meet them, you'd talk and they were gone forever. There were a lot of fellows, you know, when girls are young, the fellows are interested and there were a lot of Air Force people and people in the—officers, young lieutenants and captains would leave me presents at the different airports. I think they—one lieutenant left me six pairs of hose at the Washington airport and they __?__ service gave them to me.

WILL: These were nylons?

ECK: Uh. Huh. They had a way of getting things. Now one wanted to send me a yellow monkey and I said, "I have no place in the hotel to keep it" but they just wanted to do things.

WILL: Was it real?

ECK: Uh, huh. A real one. I don't know. Everyone was sort of living like you must do it today, you may not have tomorrow. And then I, of course, was interested in the big jazz bands that came and went and got to know a lot of them in Chicago. The singers—Billie Holiday was singing in there and Frankie Trumbauer was with Bing Crosby's brother at the Blackhawk. I've forgotten what that Crosby's name was.

WILL: Bob?

ECK: Bob Crosby. Yeah. He was at the Blackhawk and we'd go to hear the bands all over town and everyone was in uniform, you know.

WILL: Now you mentioned all the east coast towns. Did you fly much out on the west coast?

ECK: No. I flew—see since I had requested Chicago as my home base so I could get to Indiana once in a while, I flew to Washington, D. C., quite a lot by way of Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Elkins, Huntington. Elkins was one of our stops on some of the flights and then some of them were non-stop to Washington and that's where I met a lot—I got to visit—I was invited to visit the National Press Club. Senator Kefauver invited me to the House for breakfast several different times but I never got there. I never went.

WILL: Getting back to these black outs—air raid drills. Can you explain more on these aside the one over Chicago—the first one?

ECK: We had—we came in for a—to land on a night flight in New York City and as we were coming in—due to weather—we were stacked up 18 deep and we were on the top and then you could descend 1000 feet to come into the city, when each one made their approach to the field, then we'd all lower 1000 feet. When we finally got in—we had come from Chicago and you had enough gas to return to your point of origin so we circled for a long time over New York City. Finally had our chance to come in and it was the black out then and we had to sit on the

run way there in New York City at the end of the run way for over two hours until …

WILL: Were they nerve wracking coming in without lights?

ECK: We did come down with our lights. That reminds me. We lost our lights over Cincinnati one night. All of that electrical unit went out and we were circling up over Cincinnati for quite a while and TWA sent a plane up to find us. It was like hunting in a bowl of vegetable soup and we came following on its landing lights. The blackouts—Henry Cabot—Henry Luce and his wife were on a flight with me one night and—Henry Luce was the editor of the Time Magazine at that time.

WILL: Yah. His wife was the …

ECK: What was she?

WILL: I forgot, too.

ECK: We'll think of it. Henry kept peeking through the curtains and we had to caution him not to do that. He wanted to see what was going on outside on all the fields with the planes.

WILL: I suppose you had a lot of people want to do that.

ECK: Another thing that we had to do was—every landing during the war, we had to—people had to get off during the time that we were on the ground and I had to search the whole plane up and down for bombs.

WILL: You had to or a member of the crew …

ECK: I had to. Of course, the crew had to search the cabin or I mean the cockpit and check it out but I had to go through the whole cabin and look underneath the seats. They told us they would be probably in the form of a fountain pen. So that's mostly what we were looking for.

WILL: You never did find it.

ECK: I never did.

WILL: Gladly.

ECK: There are so many things, you know, after 50 years, that I've forgotten but I do remember that.

WILL: How about—you mentioned Eleanor Roosevelt. How about Franklin Roosevelt? What were your opinions of the President and some of the other, your friends and family members. Did you think he was doing a good job?

ECK: No. His fireside talks or chats, I'm not sure which he called them the he had, I think every Sunday night it was through the fall preceding Pearl Harbor and on through a good part of the war, he was reassuring people all the time, you know, and he would quote that he was in constant touch with the world leaders, Winston Churchill and he __?__ but we were also hearing the rumors that was disillusioning to young people, such as I was. I was an idealist, that Franklin had his mistress, you know, and when Eleanor came on board, I felt very kindly toward her and had compassion toward her because she was a very refined lovely educated woman, you know. Once Eleanor was coming up the ramp and she slipped and fell. She had all her books she was carrying. She always had six or eight books with her, you know, and she tried to read them all at once. Franklin Roosevelt—I think we had hopes that he was a good leader through all of this because our country was in such a dangerous position. Being from Indiana, we were all members of the GOP and having always been a Republican, you know, I had my qualms.

WILL: In general, I guess most people supported him.

ECK: I think we had no choice. We depended on him to see us through.

WILL: You didn't change presidents in the middle of …

ECK: And he wasn't well as you know. Later on some of the things he signed our country …

WILL: He must have kept that kind of quiet, too.

ECK: He was, of course, in a wheel chair and he was bundled up and wheeled around every place he went, you know. He was, of course, before the war, you know, he was doing much more than they are doing today with the CCC Camps and his getting the people who had nothing to do at least occupied, you know. The WPA—I feel that I admired him for at least putting them to some kind of work making them feel useful.

WILL: Finding jobs for them

ECK: Mm. Hm.

WILL: Did you follow the progress of the war through newspapers, movies, or magazines.

ECK: Yes, we did.

WILL: What were your sources—radio …

ECK: Lots of people involved with putting out the news, you know. Many people who wrote. I had an opportunity to have a Cardinal come on aboard one day. That was quite a thrill. Right in the middle of the war. I'm not sure where he was bound for but he, a Cardinal as I learned, you may probably know, wore red entirely, a red cap, a red cape and we had to learn how to adjust that. We had to know all of the titles for nobility. Your Royal Highness. My roommate had the Duke and Duchess of Windsor who was the king who had abdicated and married Wally Simpson. And then, you know, another interesting thing, too, was if a seeing eye dog was to come on board, this reservation was made ahead of time and food was prepared especially for him and a special seat for his master and you never went near the dog. I would then take his food to his master.

WILL: That's interesting. You never think about things like that.

ECK: I know. We just had such a variety.

WILL: You mentioned your brother was in the Air Force. Did you have any other close acquaintances that were in the service?

ECK: Many. All my friends were involved with the …

WILL: Do you keep in contact with them today?

ECK: Many got killed during the war. One of my best friends went down in the Coral Sea. It was an Air Force bomber. The whole crew was lost. Another of my very best friends was flying as a navigator out of England bombing Europe and came home with a Purple Heart and many medals. My husband was involved with the Navy in the South Pacific. He was based in the Admiralty Islands in the New Hebrides. There was so little action down in the New Hebrides Islands that they just prayed for something to happen, you know.

WILL: Getting bored down there.

ECK: Mm. Hm. Many of them got those fungus infections in their ears, you know.

WILL: Did you meet your husband during the war—after the war?

ECK: Mm. Hm. During the war.

WILL: Was he a passenger?

ECK: Yes. He got on in Cincinnati. He was stationed at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. We got married during the war and my father told me that I should wait but we got married thinking there's no tomorrow and he was gone within two to three weeks. I was sent out on a flight and I only saw him twice before he was shipped to the South Pacific. Never saw him again for another year. He was the only one at that particular time to be flown home from Guam to go to midshipmen's school at RPI in Troy, New York, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He went to become a midshipman at that school and that's how he looked when I first met him.

WILL: What were his duties?

ECK: He was in the medical corps. He was a pharmacist.

WILL: He was a pharmacist. That's what I am.

ECK: Really.

WILL: Yes.

ECK: Well, that's interesting.

WILL: I'm a pharmacist at the hospital. So after the war, how long did you… Your husband was away for a year. You hadn't seen him for a year, you said. Did he come home after the war or before the war ended?

ECK: Well, I know I was coming home on May 5th I think it was. Well, anyway D-Day came along. He had enough points for a discharge but there was some technicality, they thought he might have to go out again It turned out that he didn't so he was finally discharged late in 1945, I believe, after the war was over but I didn't see much of him.

WILL: To back up a little bit now, when were you married?

ECK: I was not married until 1943. I was one of three stewardesses in the whole United States, all

airlines, who could be married and still fly providing our husband was overseas.

WILL: They allowed that?

ECK: Yes. So then I signed up to fly with American Airlines overseas based in the Azores. I was fitted for uniforms to start that work and I got word that my husband was being flown home from Guam to RPI so Troy, New York, where his f0ather was born. That happened to be where they were sending him to RPI to school so I quit and went up to Albany, New York, and became a nurse in the Albany General Hospital in the men's surgery.

WILL: You quit the airlines?

ECK: Uh. Huh.

WILL: Oh. Okay. In ′44?

ECK: ′45. I decided not to go on with American overseas.

WILL: So you never did leave the country as far as American airplanes.

ECK: No. We just flew into Windsor just a hop across from Detroit, landed there. Up until a half a year before I quit flying, I'd been around the worlds 45 times in mileage.

WILL: All in the United States.

ECK: All in the United States.

WILL: Did you ever wish you'd gone along with you husband, if possible, as a nurse?

ECK: No. I really liked what I was doing. We flew 80 hours a month and they're still flying 80 hours a month, today, with the larger and faster equipment. Then with the flights being slower, they took longer. We had—on the longer flights, we were out two days. Like Fort Worth—one day, and back one day and then we had two days off between trips. We could still fly our 80 hours a month.

WILL: Now the planes. It was always a DC3 or did they—

ECK: Well, yes. All of the commercial airlines were using DC3s then. However, in the hangars, at many of the fields we went aboard the bombers, the B25s, B52 bombers.

WILL: You never flew in one.

ECK: Since I have flown in a lot of big equipment. And they always take me around and show me the equipment when I fly. And the crews are very nice to me as an old lady. They always present me with a bottle of champagne. The girls come up and give me a bottle with a big pink bow on it or something on the flights.

WILL: Do you remember any of your old friends that worked with you?

ECK: Yes.

WILL: Do you keep in contact with any of them?

ECK: The girls that fly—no, I think I've lost all of them now. We were all too scattered but I have kept in touch with all of my original campfire sisters and there are 17 of us left. We were organized when we were 11 years old and all scattered. We had our 62nd anniversary last summer. We've been friends since we were 10 and 11 years old and they're all over the United States so we all went to the whole thing together.

WILL: Does American Airlines ever have reunions for …

ECK: They have an organization called the Kiwi Club for the stewardesses and the Kiwis, you know, have had their wings clipped so they don't fly.

WILL: Oh, that's why …

ECK: I don't belong to the Kiwi Club but I have had correspondence from them. Some of the pilots …

WILL: How fast did they fly?

ECK: We flew between 160 and 210 miles an hour, I estimated. Of course, they're much faster now. They turn the planes around and return to their starting point. They may go much much further in the same day but we knew quite a few of the crews who were flying with the Ferry Command and they'd bring us souvenirs back from Africa and they would bring back a lot of tales from China, too. The people were so anxious to get out of China that they would hang on to the plane when it was taking off even. They overloaded those DC2s. They crowded as many as they could on and there's just a threat that they'd be coming down, you know. They'd even hang onto the plane to try to go with them, so badly they wanted to

get away from China. One branch of the service that I always admired were the Seabees. You've heard of those.

WILL: Engineering?

ECK: Yes. Who always went in ahead of the other branches of the service and prepared the way and I felt those were really brave people. Then the Green Berets, we had them on board quite a bit. We had a lot of officers from other countries flew with us, too, so there were—I had a charm bracelet, a silver charm bracelet at the time and there were many people who—generals, colonels would take the insignia off their shoulder and leave it at the airport for me for my bracelet.

WILL: Oh, my gosh.

ECK: So I have that locked up in the bank. I have a lot of memories from flying.

WILL: Along with these notables, did they ever fly any enemy prisoners? They probably sent them by ship, I suppose.

ECK: I don't remember that. I do remember FBI people being with us and I remember a flight that was way laid in the air. We were unable to land at a field for some reason—I've forgotten—we had to circle a long time. A fellow who was an inspector of gambling joints all across the United States, the big casinos, he got up in the front of the cabin and entertained people with his sleight of hand card tricks. His fingers were so fast and one of them that really intrigued me was he would just point to a passenger and have him call out a card and he could just raise that up out of a deck so quickly. I mean he'd just have them pick a card and he could raise it up and I do not know how he did that to this day. He could shuffle cards with one hand and he was just so quick. One day I was flying going through St. Louis down to Texas and Dizzy Dean was on board which would interest people, maybe.

WILL: Boy, you met a lot of nifty people.

ECK: Dizzy Dean was very outgoing and flamboyant and he'd sit on the arm of the passengers' chairs and

visit with them, you know, up and down. Then King's Ranch, Mr. King, the original King Ranch of the big land spread, you know, in Texas, he would fly with us quite often and stand in the middle of the aisle and read all the way. He was a very small man and he'd stand there and read his paper or magazine all the way to Texas. We carried so many young boys and so many people. One interesting thing, I was down in Elkins, Virginia, and it's set down in the midst of a lot of high mountains all around it and one day this big B25 bomber kept circling around that field and slowly came in. It was a small short runway to bring a B25 bomber in but it came down and descended and we were all out watching. The mechanics were out there, all passengers were out there, everybody from the airport and air traffic was watching from the control tower, you know. Out of this big plane stepped this beautiful woman with gray hair and real trim in her WACs uniform and she was a colonel in the Air Force, herself. She proceeded to climb up on that engine and started taking it down. The mechanics were just impressed with a woman who could take this engine down and repair it herself and take off again.

WILL: The plane was in trouble?

ECK: Uh. Huh. And she brought it in.

WILL: How about propaganda during the war. Ever hear anything about what you might have thought was propaganda? Maybe printed or on the radio or anything like that.

ECK: I'm sure—I remember Tokyo Rose. We were very much aware of what she was doing. I think they thought she was an American college graduate. We would hear re-broadcasts of what she was feeding out to the …

WILL: It said that the—some people say that the war years were 'fun time' years for the Americans on the home front. Have you got an opinion on that?

ECK: Being a young person, myself, I had some enjoyable times. After I married and my husband was over seas, my activities were confined mostly to the hotel where I lived and activities there but we did—I would say—go to hear all the big bands and then, of course, we were terribly disappointed when Glen Miller was killed in the service. You just sort of had the feeling life was sort of put on hold, it was sort of temporary, you know.

WILL: I had one vet tell me that after it was all over, it was one of the saddest days of his life. He had a purpose then and all of a sudden there was none.

ECK: I guess it depends on what you went on to do.

WILL: Now you were out of the flying on VE Day in May of ′44?

ECK: Yes. I was out flying then and I had the …

WILL: You were still flying then.

ECK: When VE Day came along, I was on my way to Indiana. I resigned from the hospital and was going home to Indiana for awhile and my husband still didn't know whether he was going to be sent back overseas or what he was going to do so we were sort of up in the air about that. As far as flying was concerned, I had been flying since I was a little girl of four. Whenever any aircraft came to our little town of Warsaw, my father let my brother and me go up on any kind of aircraft so I've been in big open cockpit planes, old biplanes, monoplanes, seaplanes, every kind of plane there was and I knew that I was going to fly. I knew when I was a little girl I was going to fly when I got big enough and my brother, apparently, too, because we'd run out whenever we'd hear a plane over head.

WILL: So the only reason you went into nursing was to get into flying.

ECK: Yes.

WILL: And after flying, you had a career in nursing.

ECK: Well, then I raised my family. Then I've had a couple more careers after I raised my family. I've retired twice and I've got my third job.

WILL: Do you remember VE Day? What happened VE Day? Where were you coming into Indiana?

ECK: I think I have the feeling it was sort of like the 4th of July. It was just so unbelievable that it had finally come to an end. We really were still hearing of many places in Europe and all over where they didn't know the war was over. There was still fighting occurring here and there. My doctor from St. Luke's, a man we were all so proud of, was a fine plastic surgeon. He volunteered to go to San Francisco or San Diego, I'm not sure, I think it was San Francisco, and to meet the troops coming back and do all of the plastic repair work he could do. He quit his big practice there in Chicago and went to give his time to these fellows who had been so badly disfigured. I was really thrilled about that. There were about two thousand of them, we heard, who refused to come home. They just couldn't have their families see them. They stayed out there on the islands.

WILL: Yes, I've heard that.

ECK: It was so sad but I admired Dr. Greeley.

WILL: How about the atom bomb, when they dropped that? What was you opinion on that? What did you think?

ECK: We knew how devastating that was. That was a tremendous thing. All I could think of was the plane that carried the fellow who let the bomb go. What a terrible responsibility and how badly he'd feel afterward forever all his life. I had a Japanese student living here with me year before last who was telling me all of how it was from their angle. I still—that was a terrible thing to have happen.

WILL: Did you feel that way at that time or do you feel that way now?

ECK: I felt that it was a necessary thing that they had to do, that they wouldn't have done it. I heard a lot of criticism from people in the Navy. Admiral McArthur. There was a lot of criticism. There was quite a lot of criticism of the Red Cross during the war, too, from the service people. Some of the things you ask me just sort of come back.

WILL: After the atom bomb came VJ Day. Do you remember where you were then?

ECK: Well that was in August, I think. We were out in Indiana, Warsaw, Indiana. My husband had come there expecting—he had received his orders to go out again. He was just waiting for the assignment. Then somehow they contacted him or he contacted some headquarters and found he had enough points to be discharged so we went to Chicago to celebrate with another couple who'd been—this fellow, a friend of ours, had been in, where was this last war fought?

WILL: The Gulf War?

ECK: Yah, the Gulf War.

WILL: Iran?

ECK: He'd been in Iran for five years, Iraq or Iran for five years. He was in charge of the entertainment there and he was stationed there all that time and so they went to Chicago with us.

WILL: Did you do any celebrating?

ECK: Yah, we did that. We celebrated with them, went to Chicago and then my husband went back to Cincinnati to his original job in the pharmacy there. I stayed in Indiana until we could find some place to live. It was very hard to find a place to live and rent was so hard to come by so we moved in with his brother who had an apartment and then he moved away and let us have his apartment. I think that's how we got it. My brother was discharged from the Air Force, too, and he came home as a major in the Air Force.

WILL: What was your job after the war? Did you stay in nursing?

ECK: No. Then I became a housewife and raised my family.

WILL: Okay. That's one of the toughest jobs. Looking back over the past fifty years, do you feel that social changes that had begin developing during the war years, in general, was it good for the people, good for the nation, good for you and your families—over the fifty years, the changes.

ECK: You mean do we feel the 2nd World War was worth it?

WILL: Well, no. Different changes as far as women working …

ECK: Well, I knew quite a few people during the war who were working in the war plants and felt they were doing their part. I think that women have asserted themselves more as they did have an opportunity to serve in World War II and were proven to be useful in their jobs. I think women have made progress through the years to prove to themselves that they can do more things and I think men are gradually becoming more acceptive [sic: receptive] for the fact that they are capable people holding jobs. I have seen jobs that were held by men now being taken over by women, particularly in broadcasting.

WILL: I think the major social change most women, getting out from the house, out in the work field and so forth.

ECK: Now they're almost doing it too much. I think they have been liberated to the point where they have become irresponsible, in a way, to their families. Although, to me, the most important assignment a woman can ever have is to raise her children properly and supervise them and to be there when she's needed and then do what she is capable of doing.

WILL: Well, I think that about winds it up. Is there any last thought you might want to add.

ECK: No. I do think that that was one of the highlights in my life to be able to be a part of the …

(The tape ended here.)